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Protesters led by Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan march to Yerevan from Tavush province, May 4, 2024.

## Border Protesters March from Tavush to Yerevan

By Karine Simonian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — An outspoken archbishop and his supporters began marching on Saturday, May 4, to Yerevan from a border village in the northern Tavush province that has been the epicenter of two-week protests against the Armenian government's territorial concessions to Azerbaijan.

Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, who has emerged as the top leader of the protests, said they are taking their campaign to the streets of the capital to try to scuttle the handover of border areas adjacent

to the village of Kirants and nearby Tavush communities. Many local residents have been up in arms against it, citing grave security concerns.

"The Tavush for the Homeland movement has decided that the people must just go to Yerevan ... to demand that this process be stopped here and elsewhere," Galstanyan said in Kirants before starting at the 160-kilometer journey to Yerevan.

The decision was announced two days after police cracked down on Kirants protesters who tried to stop authorities from clearing an adjacent area of land-

mines and make other preparations for its handover to Azerbaijan. The police presence in and around the village remained strong after the crackdown.

Galstanyan, who heads the Tavush diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, said the protesters led by him planned to reach Yerevan on May 9. He gave no details of their actions planned there. His announcement drew statements of support from Yerevan-based opposition politicians and public figures who pledged to join the campaign.

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## UN Assistant Secretary-General Visits Armenia

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Ivana Živković, UN Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) on May 5 arrived in Armenia for a four-day visit.

The objective of Živković's visit is to review UNDP's partnership with the Government of Armenia, familiarize herself on the ground with UNDP key interventions, including the response to refugee crisis, as well as discuss the UNDP development agenda and key priorities with international and national counterparts.

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Ivana Živković



Ararat Mirzoyan and Dmytro Kuleba meet in Brussels, Dec. 11, 2023.

## Armenian, Ukrainian FMs Talk Again

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba by phone on Thursday, May 2, ahead of a Western-backed conference on the conflict in Ukraine that will be hosted by Switzerland.

The conference initiated by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy is due to take place from June 15-16 near the Swiss city of Lucerne. The leaders of many nations have been invited to the summit. No such invitation has been extended to Russia.

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## Charges Against a Congressman Lay Bare Foreign Government Influence Attempts

By Kenneth P. Vogel

WASHINGTON (*New York Times*) — As tensions flared over disputed territory in the Caucasus region in the summer of 2020, Azerbaijan's squadron of high-priced Washington lobbyists scrambled to pin the blame on neighboring Armenia and highlight its connections to Russia.

Unbeknown to members of Congress, Azerbaijan had an inside man who was working closely with the Azerbaijani ambassador to Washington at the time on a parallel line of attack, according to text messages released by federal prosecutors.

Rep. Henry Cuellar, a Texas Democrat now charged with accepting bribes and acting as a foreign agent in a yearslong scheme, indicated in a text that he

planned a legislative maneuver to try to strip funding from Armenia because it hosted Russian military bases.

Azerbaijan's ambassador responded enthusiastically.

"Your amendment is more timely than ever,"

the ambassador, Elin Suleymanov, wrote to Cuellar. "It is all about Russian presence there," added Suleymanov, who referred to the congressman as "Boss."

Cuellar's legislative gambit did not go far. But by the time of the text exchange, his family had accepted at least \$360,000 from Azerbaijani government-controlled companies since December 2014, according to a federal indictment unsealed in Houston on Friday, May 3.

The 54-page indictment highlights the importance of US policymaking to foreign interests, and the lengths to which they go to try to shape it to their advantage, notwithstanding high risks and sometimes questionable results.

The indictment accuses Cuellar, 68, and his wife, Imelda, 67, of accepting bribes, money laundering and conspiring to violate foreign lobbying laws in connection with efforts on behalf of the Azerbaijani government and a Mexico City bank that paid them at least \$238,390.

The Cuellars pleaded not guilty on Friday, and were released after each paid a bond of \$100,000. In a statement before the indictment, Cuellar declared his innocence and suggested that the House Ethics Committee had cleared his financial activity. The Azerbaijani Embassy did not respond to a request for comment.

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Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas)

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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Armenia Offers to Temporarily Host, Preserve Gaza Manuscripts

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said on May 1 Yerevan is ready to host and preserve manuscripts from the conflict zone in Gaza and return the heritage once the situation is stable again.

“We are strongly against targeting civilians, we have faced a similar situation in Nagorno-Karabakh when more than 100,000 Armenians had to flee their ancestral homeland to save the lives of their family members, so we stand strongly against targeting the civilian population,” Mirzoyan said in an interview with Al Jazeera when asked whether Yerevan is following the war.

“Just recently we sent some humanitarian assistance to help ease the situation and the suffering of the people who found themselves in the similar situation. But in general, we have always supported a peaceful resolution of the conflict, but also the two-state solution for the long-standing conflict and the Palestinian issue.

Mirzoyan added that Yerevan is also ready to preserve the cultural and spiritual heritage.

“We have a famous and world-known depository for the manuscripts so we can temporarily host the manuscripts, if there is a need, from the conflict zone, preserve them and then return when everything is settled,” the top Armenian diplomat said.

### Agreement on EU Monitoring Mission Goes into Effect

YEREVAN (news.am) — The agreement on the status of the European Union civilian monitoring mission in Armenia (EUMA) went into effect on May 7.

“Important development and great news for EUMA! Following the completion of the final steps of ratification, the Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Armenia on the status of EUMA has now entered into force,” EUMA wrote on the platform X, formerly Twitter.

### Catholicos Aram I Supports Catholicos Karekin II's ‘Patriotic Position’

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia Aram I has expressed support for the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin for its “patriotic position and activities,” he noted on April 30.

In a phone conversation between Aram I, and Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, support for the territorial integrity and security of Armenia was expressed.

Both emphasized the Church’s unwavering commitment to these fundamental principles.

The patriarchs also focused on the need to strengthen the internal unity of the Armenian people, especially in the current conditions.

# Pashinyan Slams Protest Leaders

By Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on May 7 accused the organizers of continuing protests against his territorial concessions to Azerbaijan of trying to provoke another Armenian-Azerbaijani war with the aim of toppling him.

Pashinyan claimed that Azerbaijan will invade Armenia if he bows to their demands to halt the handover of key border areas to Baku.

“If the process is stopped, a war will break out,” he told a news conference. “I believe that this is [the protest leaders’] goal.”

“The forces that are demanding a halt to the border delimitation will do, with the help of some external forces, everything

so that more territories of Armenia are occupied and use that for causing political changes in Armenia,” he said, adding they want to install a “puppet government.”

Pashinyan spoke as hundreds of protesters led by Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan continued to march to Yerevan from the northern Tavush province that has included the border areas in question since the early 1990s. Many residents of adjacent Tavush residents are also strongly opposed to the unilateral land handover, citing serious security risks.

Galstanyan brushed aside Pashinyan’s “unserious” claims as he and the other marching protesters approached Charentsavan, a town 35 kilometers north of Yerevan. “Shame on him,” the outspoken clergyman told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

So far the protest leaders have not listed

Pashinyan’s resignation among their demands. They have attracted strong support from the Armenian opposition as well as other groups and individuals critical of the government.

Pashinyan on May 7 described Robert Kocharyan, a former president heading the main opposition Hayastan Alliance, as a “beneficiary” of the ongoing protests which he said are led by Catholicos Garegin II, the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Speaking one day before his planned visit to Moscow, he also implicitly accused them of collaborating with Russia.

Pashinyan similarly accused Moscow of fomenting last September’s anti-government protests in Yerevan sparked by an Azerbaijani military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh.

## Border Protesters March from Tavush to Yerevan

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The marching protesters, among them at least two opposition parliamentarians, spent their first night in Tavush’s medieval Haghartsin monastery. They resumed their march to the capital after attending a Sunday mass there in the morning.

“This march is going to give us one thing: honor and a homeland,” Galstanyan told the crowd of more than 100 people right after the liturgy. He urged Armenia’s leaders to “behave well,” “repent” and “stay away from all kinds of sins.”

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s political allies and other supporters have verbally attacked and even insulted Galstanyan during the protests led by him. The latter was highly critical of Pashinyan and especially his handling of the conflict with Azerbaijan even before the protests.

During an April 30 session of the Armenian parliament, pro-government lawmakers branded Galstanyan a Russian spy, accused him of provoking another war with Azerbaijan and even called on Armenian border guards to forcibly draft the 52-year-old archbishop.

Opposition leaders have condemned what they see as a smear campaign orchestrated by Pashinyan. The Echmiadzin-based Mother See of the Armenian Apostolic Church has also stood by Galstanyan and denounced the planned land handover to Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan has said that the unilateral concessions are necessary for preventing Azerbaijani military aggression against Armenia. The Armenian opposition maintains that he is on the contrary encouraging Baku to demand more territory from Armenia and use force for that purpose.



Protesters led by Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan march to Yerevan from Tavush province, May 4, 2024.



Police stand guard in Kirants village, May 4, 2024.

## Armenian, Ukrainian FMs Talk, Again

TALKS, from page 1

The official readouts of Mirzoyan’s call with Kuleba made no mention of the summit. Kuleba said they discussed “the dynamics of the security situation in Ukraine and the South Caucasus.”

“We agreed to hold political consultations between foreign ministries on a wide range of topics of mutual interest,” the top Ukrainian diplomat said in a short statement.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry reported, for its part, that the two ministers, who met in Brussels in December, touched upon bilateral relations and ongoing efforts to resolve Armenia’s conflict with Azerbaijan. It said Mirzoyan praised Ukrainian for supporting the conflict’s resolution based on mutual recognition of each other’s borders.

Armenian leaders were until recently careful not to openly criticize Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan voiced such criticism during a February visit to Germany, underscoring Yerevan’s deepening rift with Moscow.

Parliament speaker Alen Simonian likewise said Armenia “firmly supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine” when

he attended a meeting of his European Union counterparts in Spain last week. Russia condemned Simonian’s speech at the meeting, demanding an explanation from the Armenian parliament.

Moscow also reacted angrily after Pashinyan’s wife visited Kyiv last September to attend the annual Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen held there and deliver Armenia’s first humanitarian aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian invasion.

In October, the secretary of Armenia’s Security Council, Armen Grigoryan, participated in a multilateral peace forum in Malta also initiated by Ukraine. The Russian Foreign Ministry denounced the “demonstrative anti-Russian gesture of official Yerevan.”



## ARMENIA

# Holy Trinity's Helping Hands for Armenia

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — In November 2023, Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge began collecting clothing in response to the grave humanitarian crisis in Armenia. After the nine-month blockade that cut off basic necessities, people of Artsakh had to flee their homes by Azeri force for fear of their health and safety. Given the dire circumstances, families swiftly packed what they could and took to the congested, winding road out of the mountainous region, escaping towards the safety of their Armenian homeland.

Those who fled their homes funneled into regions of southern Armenia and were facing the impending dropping temperatures of winter. Upon returning from a parish pilgrimage to Armenia in October, Holy Trinity Church's pastor Fr. Vasken Kouzouian shared with his parishioners, "In the southern part of Armenia we saw the people who had been removed from their homes. Most of them left with only the shirt on their back and the sneakers on their feet. We have to do better; we can't let that happen. We have to take care of our people." Taking quick action in response to the dire situation, the church community came together to organize a clothing drive, collecting warm clothing for the displaced men, women, and children of Artsakh.

Through an outpouring of support from the greater Boston community, within days the collection bins overflowed with more than 2,500 bags of donations. Thanks to the help of more than 75 volunteers of all ages, the mountains of donated clothing were sorted, inventoried, boxed, and prepared for shipment to Armenia.

In late December, the 117 packed boxes containing nearly 3,500 pounds of aid arrived in Armenia. In January 2024, 94 days after announcing the desire for the Holy Trinity community to help the displaced families of Artsakh, with the full support of the parish, Holy Trinity Church's pastor, accompanied by his wife, Yeretzgin Arpi, made the trip to Armenia to distribute the clothing.

Throughout their journey, Fr. Vasken and Yn. Arpi worked together with the Paros Foundation team, led by Peter Abajian and Shaké Derderian from the US, and local members Marina Khachatryan, Armen Simonyan, Kegham Minasyan and Yura Sargsyan, along with Houry Abajian and Boghos Derderian. The team made their way to villages around Armenia where many of the displaced families from Artsakh have settled.

During their visits in the homes of the displaced families, they heard emotional stories sharing of the devastation encountered during their displacement. In the first home they visited, with quivering jaws, the families shared, "none of the few pieces of furniture you see here are ours. All we have are the clothes on our backs...we have no appropriate winter clothing...we had to leave it

all behind." In another, "one of my sons died in the gas explosion as we were leaving Artsakh...he is buried here, and I will never leave him..." In yet another, "This is my 94-year-old mother, she has been bed-bound for 15 years for spinal issues...and she had to be carried across the border when we were forced to leave..." all stories of suffering yet held an underlying of resilience to survive as Armenians. With each word from the displaced people, it was very clear why the Holy Trinity community came together to collect warm clothing, and why so many volunteers gave their time to contribute to this worthy cause.

The team traveled nearly 7 hours to the southern-most cities and villages of Armenia to meet with some of the 400 relocated families of Artsakh living in that region. In addition to offering warm clothing, they brought words and prayers of hope to those who were feeling lost in this new place far from where they called home.

At the local City Municipal Building of Geti Village



Volunteers helping sort and pack clothing at Holy Trinity Armenian Church

they met with seven displaced families. It was a room full of wide-eyed and hopeful people listening to every word. During the distribution of clothes, Fr. Vasken saw a man standing in the back of the hall and asked him what size coat he usually wears. Although he was wearing a very thin spring jacket, the man responded saying "no, no, I have a coat, please give my coat to someone who doesn't have one. I'm good...really, I'm fine" and he walked away...only to return a few moments later with a friend who had no coat.

The mayor and City Council of Kajaran invited the group to dinner to show appreciation for their efforts. While there, the mayor said to them "We swore that we won't write the last page of the Armenian story... so everyone you see here in the hall today, including our Der Shirak, dedicated themselves to defending the borders of Syunik and all of the southern border of Armenia."

Looking around the hall, Kouzouian recalled, "All I saw were heroes, fellow Armenians dedicated to preserving their faith, heritage and borders. The people trying on the coats looked at us as heroes, but we looked at those soldiers, young and old, and saw what it means to be a hero..."

They visited the Municipality Community Center of Kajaran and the Women's Center in the City of Goris where they unloaded the van filled with coats, boots and other necessities that would help defend against the cold of winter. They met with the deputy mayor of Goris, Irina Yolyan, who explained the ongoing needs of the families who have decided to make Goris their new permanent home. Housing, schooling, and the need for social services, remain ongoing concerns for the mayor's office there.

They visited the Armenian Church's diocesan center in the heart of Goris and met with the Primate of the Diocese of Syunik, Hayr Magar Hakobyan. Hayr Magar explained the role of the diocese since the arrival of the displaced families. He is clearly loved by his people,



Grade 1 student Alex Mikaelian brings in his donation for the Lenten Drive. Every penny counts!

and they are blessed to have someone of his dedication and personality leading them spiritually.

Further down the road, they stopped by a school that is being renovated to serve the local children including newly arrived children from Artsakh. Unfortunately, this school is located near the Nakhichevan mountains, so in addition to renovating the classrooms, an underground bunker was being added as well to protect the children from unseen snipers, a tragic reality of the times.

The group then made their way north to Gyumri, Vanadzor and Berd (800 meters from the Azeri border). They continued to distribute age and gender appropriate bags of winter clothes to the families. The hours passed by as family after family, mothers and fathers, grandparents and grandchildren came to get warm clothing for the



Shake Derderian fitting a pair of boots for a young girl displaced from Artsakh Clothing Drive

cold months ahead, something that might make their already devastated and challenging lives just a little bit easier. One couple came seeking clothing for the 11 members of their family.

In addition to distributing winter clothes, through the generosity of donations from parishioners, Fr. Vasken and Yn. Arpi were able to purchase firewood for 10 families in Gyumri, enough to keep their homes heated for one month. Given how cold it is in northern Armenia, purchasing firewood was as important as the clothing distribution.

Upon their return Fr. Vasken and Yn. Arpi announced that the parish's Lenten drive this year would be benefiting the purchase of firewood to heat the homes of the displaced families. Through the collective efforts of the students, parishioners and the greater Armenian community, Holy Trinity Armenian Church was able to raise over \$26,500 that will be used to heat homes which is needed through the month of May.

Holy Trinity Armenian Church remains committed to helping these displaced families through physical support and spiritual solidarity.



Fr. Vasken and Ara Dermovsessian helping to pack the truck with the boxes of humanitarian aid to be shipped to Armenia

## INTERNATIONAL

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## Pashinyan Goes to Moscow for Economic Group Meeting

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan will leave for Moscow on May 8 to chair the sitting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council. The Prime Minister will also meet with the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin, Pashinyan said during a press conference held on Tuesday in response to Armenpress question.

“The agenda with Russia is very diverse. You know that during this period many problems have accumulated, and some of these problems have been raised.

“We have never held the opinion that issues are raised solely for being raised. We believe that these issues are raised with the aim of eliminating negative nuances from the context of the friendly relations between Armenia and Russia.

“Indeed, during the meeting we will discuss the whole spectrum of relations, both bilateral and multi-lateral,” said the PM.

## Peacekeepers Leave Stepanakert Airport

YEREVAN (news.am) — Russian peacekeepers have left the airport in Ivanyan village near Nagorno-Karabakh capital Stepanakert on May 7.

According to Azerbaijani media, the vehicles of Russian peacekeepers were being loaded into train cars at the railway station in order to be transported to Russia.

## Eight Armenians among FIDE Top 100

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The International Chess Federation, FIDE, has published the ranking table for the month of May; Armenia has 4 representatives among the men's ranks. Hayk Martirosyan ranks 55th, Gabriel Sargsyan ranks 64th, Samvel Ter-Sahakyan ranks 84th and Hrant Melkumyan ranks 95th.

Levon Aronian, the former leader of the Armenian men's chess team and now representing the US, is 22nd in the ranking table.

In the women's ranking table, Elina Danielyan ranks 48th, Anna Sargsyan ranks 73rd, Lilit Mkrtchyan ranks 84th and Mariam Mkrtchyan ranks 98th.

## Armenia, Hungary Sign Economic Pact

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary Péter Szijjártó signed several documents following their meeting in Budapest on May 6.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, the two ministers signed an agreement between the governments of Armenia and Hungary on economic cooperation, as well as a cooperation program between the two foreign ministries for the years 2024-2025.

# German Commemoration Event Hosts Dr. Luis Moreno Ocampo

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — Every year on April 24, Armenians and Germans gather in the historic St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt and the French Cathedral in Berlin to pay homage to those who perished. Representatives of the government, the Armenian ambassador and other diplomats, local political leaders, and leaders of the religious communities speak, and a special guest holds a keynote address.

This year was different. Not only in the political and business capital cities were there events, but also in numerous other locations, during the entire week of April 21 to 28, from a gathering at the Ecumenical Monuments in Berlin, to other cities and towns.

And the commemorations were not only solemn, but eminently political. On April 25-26, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev was expected in Berlin, for talks with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The timing was probably not coincidental, but what awaited him in the German capital was perhaps a surprise.

### Moreno Ocampo Calls It Genocide

The ceremony in Frankfurt's St. Paul's church, where the first popularly elected German National Assembly convened in 1848, was organized by the Central Council of Armenians in Germany (ZAD), the Diocese of the Armenian Church and the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia. ZAD Chairman of the Board Jonathan Spangenberg opened the event and Armenian Ambassador Viktor Yengibaryan delivered an address. Greetings came from City Treasurer Dr. Bastian Bergerhoff, Vice President of the Hessen State Parliament Angela Dorn-Rancke, and Martin Rössler, State Secretary of the Hessen Interior Ministry. Corinna Kulenkamp provided a literary contribution and Primate of the Diocese Bishop Seropév Isakhanyan concluded the event with a prayer.

The guest speaker was Dr. Luis Moreno Ocampo, former prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), who issued an expert report last August on the threat of genocide in Artsakh. Moreno Ocampo's speech was a denunciation of Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policy, a charge he would repeat days later in Berlin. Remembering the genocide, Moreno Ocampo posed the question of how it started on April 24. “Destroying the leadership was the strategy in 1915,” he stated, “and destroying the leadership is the strategy in 2024.” He said that last September, “all the Armenians living in Artsakh were victims of genocide; they were removed by force and starvation from their ancestral land. In addition, twenty-three of them, including three former Artsakh presidents and five other community leaders, were incarcerated by Azerbaijan.” They remain in Baku, in prison, up to the present.

Moreno Ocampo then turned to the responsibility of Germany's political class, saying that “this historic place,” St. Paul's, “should be an informal parliament to represent the Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh,” who otherwise have no such representation or “judges to protect their rights.” He offered his assistance to Scholz “by providing detailed information” on Aliyev's intentions. He referred to American Judge Gassia Apkarian, of the Center for Truth and Justice, who a week earlier had called on the ICC to investigate Aliyev for genocide. Moreno Ocampo said that Apkarian had succeeded in making her case, by providing

proof in statements made by the Azerbaijani president over the last decade. These included a statement in April 15, in which Aliyev warned, “If you do not want to die, then get out of Azerbaijani lands.” Then he quoted Aliyev's declaration last September, that if the Armenians failed to do so “of their own free will, we will chase them away like dogs, and we are doing that.”

He continued by citing a resolution adopted by the Azerbaijani Parliament as evidence of the intention to assert sovereignty over Armenia, “a genocide approved by Parliament.”

Moreno Ocampo stressed that genocide



Group photo at press conference, with Tessa Hofmann, left, and Dr. Luis Moreno Ocampo (Nora Erdmann photo)

occurs not only by killing but by “starvation and mental harm,” according to the Genocide Convention, and that both were evident in Artsakh. Nor, he said, was it a matter of opinion; even German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock had denounced the hardship caused by the blockade of the Lachin corridor, which led to lack of food, medicine and fuel. Baerbock had said that thousands had been forced to leave their homes, and she denounced the military aggression.

As for the juridical aspect, he clarified that prevention of genocide, as per the convention, requires no conclusive proof; “it is enough to show that there is a ‘serious risk’ that genocide will be committed.”

To solve the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, negotiations are necessary, he agreed, “but genocide is a limit impossible to ignore in a ‘constructive dialogue.’” Acknowledging that his speech would lead to personal attacks against him by Azerbaijan, he said he would simply ignore them.

### Aliyev's Welcome in Berlin

Days before the arrival of the Azerbaijani president, Armenian and German civil society organizations joined to protest the visit, issuing a petition to Scholz. In their appeal to Scholz, the Society for Threatened Peoples (GfBV), the ZAD, Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA) and the International Society for Human Rights announced that Moreno Ocampo was in Germany and urged Scholz, who had not responded to earlier warnings of genocide, to open his eyes now and deal with the issue. Furthermore, he should announce sanctions in case of repeated aggression, demand the liberation of all political prisoners from Artsakh, the right of return for the expelled Armenians, with guarantees for security, liberty, and the right to self-determination, as well as the end to anti-Armenian education and culture policy.

Aliyev met first with Steinmeier on April 26, then with Scholz. In a joint press conference on April 26, Scholz had warm words of welcome for his guest. Germany, he said, had a standing offer to “support a lasting and viable solution.”

Steinmeier praised Azerbaijan as “an im-

portant partner for Europe's security of supply, including in energy matters” and thanked his guest “for the cooperation, which has been and continues to be an important contribution to stabilizing our energy supply.”

Aliyev thanked his host for supporting his country's role, and offered to supply Germany not only with natural gas but also green energy. On regional security issues, Aliyev said he held “the peace negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan in high regard,” and thanked Scholz as well as Baerbock for their contributions. On Artsakh, he said his country had “liberated a large part of its sovereign territory from occupation in 2023” and in September “restored its full sovereignty,” secured its territorial integrity, a “historic achievement,” all “on the basis of international law,” and “by military and political means.” He boasted of progress in negotiating border demarcations, and in the recovery of four villages, etc. He thanked Germany for its support.

At the same time, the group of civil society organizers held a press conference with Moreno Ocampo, who reiterated the points he had made in his major address in Frankfurt. “The German Chancellor has a chance to halt the situation,” he said. He stressed that Germany, as signatory to the Genocide Convention, has the responsibility to prevent genocide. He added, “I cannot believe that the German Chancellor would talk about energy and at the same time ignore the facts described by his foreign ministry and the evaluation presented by the UN special advisor regarding the danger of genocide.”

“The German government remained silent about the starvation of Karabakh Armenians as well as their expulsion,” said Sarah Reinke, director of Human Rights at the GfBV.

Tessa Hofmann of the AGA added, “In the course of a century, Armenia was not only subjected to repeated genocide, but also to the traumatic experience of a so-called international community that looked on passively. The German government in World War I as well as in 2023 looked on without taking action. As signatory to the UN Convention as well as the Rome Statute, Germany has failed to assume responsibility to prevent genocide and thus contributed to the fact that the wounds suffered in genocide have not healed. The expelled people's right to return to their homeland was and is ignored. Now the legal consequences of this behavior must be dealt with, to avert further future damage,” said Tessa Hofmann.

### The Prosecutor and the Accused

This year's commemoration in Germany of the 1915 genocide was a dramatic confrontation between Moreno Ocampo and the accused Aliyev. The German political representatives appeared almost as witnesses for the defendant. And the jury? In 2016 the Bundestag (Parliament) passed a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide, a political move long awaited, which embodied the hope that Germany would shape its foreign policy accordingly. Perhaps with this idea in mind, he also addressed the political body that passed the resolution. On April 25, he delivered a report on the international legal aspects of Azerbaijan's deportation of Armenians from Karabakh to the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid of the German Bundestag. Followed his presentation, Moreno Ocampo engaged in discussion with members of the human rights, foreign relations, legal affairs, and economic cooperation and development committees of the Bundestag.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Azerbaijan Rejects Detained Toplum Co-Founder's Request for Urgent Biopsy

By Aytan Farhadova

Azerbaijani authorities are reportedly barring Alasgar Mammadli, a detained media lawyer and co-founder of Toplum TV, from getting an urgent biopsy for a growth in his throat.

Mammadli was detained by the Azerbaijani authorities during their raid on Toplum TV, an independent online TV, in March as part of their ongoing crackdown on media in Azerbaijan.

His lawyer, Zibeyda Sadigova, warned on Wednesday that Mammadli was experiencing pain due to a 23mm swelling in his thyroid gland. "This means an urgent biopsy should be taken and immediate treatment should be started. But for some reason, there's been no serious action for over a month now," Sadigova wrote on Facebook.

Mammadli's brother, Nasimi Mammadli, has said that his brother's doctors instructed him in late April to get a biopsy of the growth if it grows larger than 15mm, to determine whether it was cancerous.

Nasimi Mammadli told OC Media that his brother's health has been deteriorating since, with him experiencing hand tremors and difficulty breathing while sleeping.

"The colour has bled out of his face," he said. "We are afraid that if this situation affects his organs we can't do anything in the future."

Nasimi Mammadli added that his brother was arrested on 8 March outside the clinic where he was scheduled to get a thyroid biopsy.

Alasgar Mammadli's doctor, Aydin Aliyev, told OC Media that Mammadli was experiencing neck pain and nausea and that upon examination, they found signs that his pancreas could also be at risk after overproducing amylase enzymes.

Aliyev added that the Penitentiary Service's clinic said that Mammadli was healthy after only giving him an ultrasound scan.

However, he said that the scan still showed that his thyroid gland had grown significantly.

Nasimi Mammadli told OC Media that the prosecutors investigating the Toplum TV case had promised to allow the media lawyer to get the necessary medical examinations for his enlarged thyroid gland, but had so far failed to follow through with a biopsy.

Azerbaijani legislation guarantees the right of prisoners to seek medical assis-



Alasgar Mammadli

tance and examinations.

Mammadli's family has appealed to the Public Defender's Office for assistance but received a letter from the office stating that they required more information. They re-

plied with details about Mammadli's health condition but did not receive an answer.

(This story originally appeared on OC-media on May 4.)

## Charges Against a Congressman Lay Bare Foreign Government Influence Attempts

CORRUPTION, from page 1

The charges against the couple suggest that the Justice Department is expanding its efforts to clamp down on foreign influence campaigns, despite recent high-profile setbacks. Juries and judges have rejected cases related to unregistered foreign lobbying by political figures with close ties to former Presidents Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump.

The indictment is the second in recent months to charge a sitting member of Congress with violating a prohibition on lawmakers serving as foreign agents. Sen. Robert Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey, and his wife received a series of charges starting in October accusing them of accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes, including gold bars, to help the governments of Egypt and Qatar. Menendez and his wife have pleaded not guilty.

Beyond the payments Menendez and Cuellar are accused of receiving, Azerbaijan, Egypt and Qatar have been heavy spenders on traditional Washington lobbying to maintain the flow of United States aid and to win support in disputes with neighbors.

From 2015 to the end of last year, Egypt spent \$14.3 million on lobbying and Qatar spent nearly \$85.9 million, according to analyses by the nonpartisan website OpenSecrets of disclosures to the Justice Department under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA. The disclosures do not include donations to think tanks and other expenditures that wealthy foreign governments use to try to generate good will.

Azerbaijan spent nearly \$9.2 million on lobbying in that time, according to FARA filings. Arms of the government retained about 20 firms during that time, including ones led by former Gov. Haley Barbour, Republican of Mississippi, and former Representative Bob Livingston, a Louisiana Republican who served as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. The lobbying efforts also involved firms run by Democrats, such as the former Biden adviser Larry Rasky, who died in 2020, and the fund-raiser Vincent A. Roberti.

Azerbaijan's goals included winning

support for the reintegration of the Nagorno-Karabakh territory in the Lesser Caucasus, which has been under dispute with Armenia for decades. (Azerbaijan seized full control of the territory in September.) Azerbaijan also wanted Congress to repeal a ban on U.S. aid imposed in 1992 during the first Nagorno-Karabakh war.

While the United States has continually issued waivers to the ban since 2001, the Azerbaijanis consider the durability of the underlying ban "kind of an insult and injustice," said Richard Kauzlarich, who served as ambassador to Azerbaijan during the Clinton administration.

"I haven't seen signs of the return on the investment as far as issues that are important to Azerbaijan in terms of their lobbying



Azerbaijani Ambassador to the US Elin Suleymavo

efforts," Kauzlarich said. He attributed that partly to continued concerns about human rights abuses by the Azerbaijani government and partly to the lack of an organized, activated diaspora like that which has lobbied for Armenian causes.

"No amount of money is going to be able to counter the number of voters in California and Massachusetts and elsewhere where Armenian Americans live, are active and vote," he said.

While politicians in Europe have been accused of accepting gifts and bribes from Azerbaijani and Qatari officials, the pros-

ecutors' claims of payments to Menendez and Cuellar add a new wrinkle in the world of subterranean influence campaigns in Washington.

The lawmakers were in prime positions to help foreign governments. Menendez was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, while Cuellar served on the House Appropriations subcommittee that oversees the budget of the State Department.

After their respective indictments, Menendez stepped down from his chairmanship, and Cuellar from his position as the top Democrat on the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee. Menendez's trial is scheduled to begin this month. Both have vowed to remain in office as they contest the charges, and Cuellar has said he intends to continue his re-election campaign.

The Azerbaijanis' courtship of Mr. Cuellar came as oil interests in the country, including the state-owned company that prosecutors say funded the payments to the Cuellars, maintained a presence in Texas.

Cuellar and his wife, along with other Texas lawmakers, were treated to trips to Azerbaijan in 2013. He received briefings from high-level government officials and attended a dinner with executives from the state-owned oil company, according to prosecutors. After Cuellar returned, he was recruited by Azerbaijani officials, who began funneling payments to a pair of consulting firms his wife created called IRC Business Solutions and Global Gold Group, according to prosecutors and Texas corporations filings.

The Cuellars used the money to pay off debts, fund living expenses and make purchases including a \$12,000 custom gown and a \$7,000 down payment for a new car, prosecutors say.

The indictment claims that Imelda Cuellar "performed little or no legitimate work in exchange for the payments." Instead, "in exchange for the bribe payments, Henry Cuellar agreed to perform official acts and acts in violation of his official duties benefiting Azerbaijan and to be and act as an agent of the government of Azerbaijan."

Among the services prosecutors say

Cuellar performed at the behest of the Azerbaijanis was pressing the Obama administration to take a harder line against Armenia, trying to insert language favorable to Azerbaijan into legislation and committee reports and having members of his staff urge the State Department to renew a passport for the daughter of Suleymanov.

Cuellar's efforts on behalf of Azerbaijan mostly seem to have had minimal impact. He withdrew the amendment to strip funding from Armenia after objections from an Armenian diaspora group.

"It was going to be ruled out of order so I withdrew but they are taking credit ha ha," Cuellar texted Suleymanov.

The ambassador responded "they take credit for everything!"

After the indictment of Cuellar was unsealed, the group, Armenian Assembly of America, called for "a broader investigation in relation to these charges and who else may be tied to Azerbaijan's corrupt modes of operation."

### UN Assistant Secretary-General Visits Armenia

VISIT, from page 1

Together with UNDP Resident Representative in Armenia, Natia Natsvlshvili, she will meet with the President of the National Assembly to launch a new project on parliamentary democracy in Armenia, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Deputy Foreign Minister. She will also hold discussions with the UN Country Team, members of the diplomatic corps and development partners, and civil society. Živković will visit UNDP project sites and meet with beneficiaries in Gegharkunik, Tavush, Ararat, Vayots Dzor and Syunik regions.

Živković assumed her duties in September 2022. Prior to her appointment, she served as Director-General for Economic Affairs and Development Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia.

# Community News

## Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Welcomes Raffi Gregorian to Its Board of Directors

BOSTON — The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative on May 2 announced that Raffi Gregorian, a former diplomat and Navy veteran known for his work for the U.S. State Department, NATO, and the UN, has joined the Board of Directors of the Initiative, which was co-founded by his late father, Dr. Vartan Gregorian.

Raffi Gregorian was the leading force in the creation of the UN's Office of Counter-Terrorism and in 2019, became its first director and deputy under-secretary-general serving on the Secretary-General's Deputies Committee.

After serving nearly 25 years in a variety of domestic and overseas assignments related to conflict and post-conflict challenges, Gregorian



Raffi Gregorian

retired and now joins Aurora's board members, whose collective experience in creating positive change is crucial to helping the Initiative achieve its

far-reaching objectives.

Gregorian holds a doctorate in strategic studies and international relations from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

"I have known Raffi for many years, and his commitment to peace and justice is truly remarkable," said Noubar Afeyan, co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and chair of the Board. "After selflessly serving his country, he now brings his invaluable expertise to Aurora to help the organization achieve its bold mission. Moreover, he will play a pivotal role in preserving and advancing his father's esteemed legacy."

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative was launched in 2015 by philanthropists Vartan Gregorian, Noubar Afeyan and Ruben Vardanyan. Aurora seeks to address on-the-ground humanitarian challenges around the world and has already benefited more than 3.2 million people in greatest need. The Initiative's flagship program, the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity, is uniquely dedicated to supporting the world's unsung humanitarian heroes bringing tangible positive change to communities that need it most. To date, Aurora has initiated and supported more than 427 projects in 56 countries and territories.

"I am deeply honored to join Aurora's Board of Directors. Being part of this Initiative is special for me, because it was one of my father's most cherished projects, so it really feels like coming home," said Raffi Gregorian. "Aurora empowers people who put themselves at risk to lift up the downtrodden, the voiceless, and the defenseless, and I am grateful for an opportunity to assist these efforts in any way possible."



Students at Armenian Language Immersion Class

## USC's First-Ever Armenian History Month Celebrates Diversity of Armenian Experiences

LOS ANGELES — As April comes to a close, the University of Southern California (USC) Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies and USC Armenian Students' Association conclude the first-ever Armenian History Month celebration at USC. Over the course of the month, the Institute and USC's ASA hosted a diverse set of events that not only raised awareness about the history and culture of Armenians but also brought communities together to celebrate Armenian heritage.

In honor of the institute's achievements in uplifting Armenian voices, the Los Angeles City Council formally recognized the institute during its Armenian American Heritage Month celebration "for its invaluable research exploring social, cultural and political challenges facing the Armenian people in their historic homelands and throughout the Diaspora." President of the City Council Paul Krekorian presented the Institute with this recognition alongside the UCLA Promise Armenian Institute.

Armenian History Month launched with an opening ceremony at USC Hahn's Central Plaza, where hundreds gathered to mark this monumental moment in the university's history. President of USC Dr. Carol Folt, alongside Director of the Institute of Armenian Studies Dr. Shushan Karapetian and Vice-President of USC's ASA Mane Berikyan, spoke at the opening, commenting upon the strength of the Armenian community and the importance of this inaugural event. The celebration



From left, Margarita Baghdasaryan, Manuk Avedikyan, Shushan Karapetian, Paul Krekorian, Gegham Mughnetsyan, Lilit Keshisyan

ended with a captivating performance and display of Armenian culture by Lernazang, a cultural collective and performance ensemble.

The artistic and cultural celebrations continued at the Trojan Grand Ballroom, where USC ASA welcomed the Trojan community and the public for an evening of dance, music, art, and poetry. Performers included students, alumni, and community members who showcased their talents and highlighted their Armenian culture and identity to a crowd of over 150 people.

The following week, the Institute hosted two events centered around the Armenian Genocide. On April 15, Institute Project Manager Manuk Avedikyan led an academic lecture on the political and social developments in Ottoman Turkey that led to the Armenian Genocide, co-sponsored by USC Armenian Student Association, the USC Shoah Foundation and the USC Center for Advanced Genocide Research.

see USC, page 7

## LA County Supervisor Honors Three Armenian Americans

LOS ANGELES — On April 30, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisor Member Kathryn Barger honored three individuals of Armenian heritage on the final day of Armenian History Month in Los Angeles County.

The honors were bestowed in the Board of Supervisors' hearing room before the Board delved into public policy discussions. "Just as we commemorated the 109th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide this month, we must also take time to recognize the vibrant culture and contributions of our fellow Armenian neighbors, community members and leaders," said Supervisor Kathryn Barger. "We are fortunate to have the Armenian spirit alive and thriving in Los Angeles County."

Those honored included a diverse range of individuals in background and achievements.

Nyree Derderian, a native of Pasadena, for nearly 30 years has fulfilled pivotal roles on the Central Executive Board of the Armenian Relief Society. She has served as Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, overseeing humanitarian efforts during critical times. In April 2022, she visited Artsakh to provide aid to victims of the 44-day war and initiated a sustainable project for the residents of Artsakh. In November 2022, she traveled to Lebanon to deliver aid to those affected by the Lebanon blast of August 2020 and the ensuing economic crisis.

"Supervisor Barger's recognition holds immense significance for me," said Derderian. "It signifies the acknowledgment and appreciation of the contributions made by American Armenians in Los Angeles. This recognition validates our efforts and achievements being recognized beyond our community. It serves as a pivotal moment that reaffirms the value of work and motivates volunteers to continue our commitment to advancing the Armenian cause with hope and resilience within the Armenian community."

Dr. Vartan Tachdjian is founder of the Byblos Babies Center and co-founder of the Armenian Medical World Congress. His life is a testament to compassion and dedication to serving the needy globally. Born to Armenian genocide survivors in a Beirut refugee camp, Tachdjian eventually relocated to Los Angeles amidst a civil war. He learned new languages and re-licensed in medicine to continue his mission of caring for the homeless. As medical director of homeless programs and a consultant for Doctors Without Borders, Vartan exemplifies a lifelong commitment to humanitarian work. Now 90, Tachdjian is also a poet and writer, sharing his experiences and insights to inspire others.

see HONORS, page 8



COMMUNITY NEWS

# Paros Foundation Hosts Fundraiser for Polyclinic in Armenia

ATWATER VILLAGE, CA. — On April 28, the second Med-Aid Armenia Annual Fundraiser was held in support of purchasing new medical equipment for the Nor Hachen Polyclinic.

More than 75 attendees gathered at the restaurateur Alex Sarkissian's restaurant, Momed, in support of the polyclinic. Currently, the polyclinic lacks basic equipment that prevents it from successfully serving its patients. As a result of the event's success, several new pieces of equipment will be purchased and delivered in the coming weeks. The new equipment will help bring the polyclinic up to Western standards.

"Dr. Krikor Deramerian worked hands-on with the polyclinic's staff to better un-



Attendees enjoying dinner at Momed



Dr. Krikor Deramerian and Peter Abajian, Director of The Paros Foundation at the Med-Aid Armenia 2nd Annual Fundraiser Benefitting the Nor Hachen Polyclinic

derstand their situation and where we can engage to make a real difference," said Peter Abajian, director of the Paros Foundation. "At the same time, the Armenian government has agreed to renovate the physical space later this year. The work we are doing collectively to equip the Nor Hachen Polyclinic and provide them with additional necessary training, will have a long-term positive impact."

The reach of the polyclinic is expansive, serving almost 13,000 people in the Nor Hachen community. It provides primary care, ambulance services and some specialty services. Deramerian said, "By bringing new equipment and implementing staff training we are helping improve care delivery for patients. My goal is to create a sustainable and efficient process that is going to improve the health care of Nor Hachen.

As we move forward, I hope that the Nor Hachen Polyclinic will serve as an example for other polyclinics in Armenia."

During last year's Med-Aid Armenia Annual Fundraiser, enough funds were raised to purchase a new x-ray machine for the Nor Hachen Polyclinic. The medical equipment purchased with funds raised from this year's event will greatly improve the services offered at the polyclinic and leave a lasting impact. Thank you to everyone who

attended the event and made it a success.

The Paros Foundation created the Med-Aid Armenia program to administer medical missions as well as to improve the conditions of clinics around the country, and this summer the 5th medical mission will occur providing medical services to those in need. Through the Paros Foundation Med-Aid Armenia has made improvements to seven clinics in Armenia, including ongoing efforts made at the Nor Hachen Polyclinic.

## USC's First-Ever Armenian History Month

USC, from page 6

On April 17, the Institute and USC ASA organized a special theatrical screening and panel discussion of the animated documentary film "Aurora's Sunrise."

"We are so grateful for the support of the Armenian Film Society, the USC School of Cinematic Arts, Bars Media, and the Zoryan Institute for giving us the opportunity to host a screening of this groundbreaking film, shedding light on the forgotten story of Armenian Genocide survivor Aurora Mardiganian," said Institute Associate Director Margarita Baghdasaryan.

The event began with a video message from award-winning writer, director, and producer of Aurora's Sunrise, Inna Sahakyan, thanking audiences for their support and discussing the importance of this film. The screening was followed by an insightful panel discussion with Karapetian, Ted Braun, USC Joseph Campell Endowed

Chair in Cinematic Ethics, Armen Karaghlanian, co-founder of Armenian Film Society, and Dr. Myrna Douzjian, Lecturer of Armenian Studies, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at UC Berkeley.

In the final week of Armenian History Month, Karapetian hosted an Armenian Language Immersion class for the Trojan community at the Institute of Armenian Studies.

Speakers, including students, faculty, and staff, participated in this interactive beginners' lesson in Armenian, which sparked their curiosity to learn more about the Armenian language.

The month ended with an Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day Candlelight Vigil, hosted jointly by the Armenian Students' Associations at USC and UCLA on April 24. Institute Chitjian Researcher Archivist Gegham Mughnetsyan provided remarks at the vigil.

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Lernazang Performing at USC



COMMUNITY NEWS

# Koutoujian, Minneapolis Police Chief Discuss Cultivating Reform at Harvard Summit

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Middlesex (MA) Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian and Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O’Hara recently served as featured presenters at the 2024 Public Safety Summit at Harvard University.

The leadership and education program for senior level law enforcement leaders including police chiefs, commissioners and sheriffs from across the country was held April 5-7 in Cambridge.

As nationally-recognized leaders, Koutoujian and O’Hara discussed cultivating change and implementing reforms through engagement with both internal and external audiences. They also focused on efforts to increase morale and build buy-in from staff, while simultaneously balancing community expectations and priorities.

“Cultivating change and implementing comprehensive reforms within large organizations requires both effective leadership and the ability to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders,” said Sheriff Koutoujian. “I’ve known Chief O’Hara for several years and have tremendous respect for how he has accomplished this in not one, but two major

cities. I truly appreciated the opportunity to present alongside him and share our experiences with colleagues from across the country.”

“It was an honor to present alongside Sheriff Koutoujian at the 2024 Public Safety Summit at Harvard,” O’Hara said. “Sheriff Koutoujian has a wealth of



Middlesex County Sheriff Peter Koutoujian, left, with Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O’Hara (Photo courtesy of Harvard University)

experience leading and rebuilding trust in law enforcement, and it was great to reflect on ways we can continue to move our agencies and our communities forward together.”

# LA County Supervisor Honors Three Armenian Americans

HONORS, from page 6

“I am honored to receive this award from Supervisor Kathryn Barger, who has been a champion for the rights and well-being of underserved individuals in our community,” Tachdjian stated. “It’s also a delight to be recognized by the County of Los Angeles where many of my hours have been spent on the streets treating the homeless and refugees. As a child of Armenian Genocide orphans, life has come full circle with my contributions to the Armenian as well as the general population. We can all improve our society’s well-being with some work and simple kindness.”

Talin Yacoubian holds key positions on the boards of the Armenian Assembly of America, the Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center as well as Armenia Fund. Her leadership roles include serving as former Chair of the AGBU Western District Committee and co-chair of the Armenian Genocide Centennial Commemorative Committee in 2015, where she organized the historic peaceful march of 160,000 people in Los Angeles on the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. With a background in law and economics, She also teaches Legal Writing and Advocacy at USC Gould School of Law, demonstrating her commitment to education and community empowerment. Her efforts focus on advancing Armenian advocacy, strengthening Armenia-U.S. relations, and promoting cultural appreciation and diversity.

“I strive to advocate for our community and improve circumstances to the best of my ability,” said Yacoubian. “I am driven by a sense of duty not an expectation of thanks or accolades. However, when recognition is so generously and sincerely given, it truly warms my heart and motivates me even more. This recognition has certainly raised the bar and reinforced my commitment to serving our community with dedication and sincerity.”



# Tekeyan Cultural Association Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

Since its inception in 2001, the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Sponsor a Teacher Program has raised 838,700 dollars and reached out to 7,386 teachers and school staff in Armenia and Artsakh. This year the program continues to support school teachers in Tekeyan Schools in Armenia, as well as teachers who had to flee Artsakh but continue teaching in Armenia’s schools, as they educate new generations of children, our future leaders.



YES, I would like to sponsor TCA school teacher(s) in Armenia, as well as teachers who fled Artsakh and continue teaching in Armenia schools, in order to continue helping them work and educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the sponsored teacher/s’ name(s) and address(es).

\$240  \$480  \$700  other \_\_\_\_\_

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: Tekeyan Cultural Association  
Memo: Sponsor a Teacher  
Mail your check to:  
TCA Sponsor a Teacher  
5326 Val Verde, Houston, TX 77056

Your donation is tax deductible.





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# St. Hagop Armenian Church Annual Madagh Picnic Is Scheduled for Sunday, June 30 in Racine

RACINE, WI — On Sunday, June 30, 2024, St. Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church will hold its annual Madagh Picnic at Johnson Park, located at 6200 Northwestern Avenue in Racine. The church has held this traditional picnic since 1938. The word “Madagh” means offering and goes back to the time of Abraham who was will-

ing to offer his only son, Isaac, to God to prove his love, faith and obedience to the Lord. “When God witnessed this testimony, He asked Abraham to spare his son and offer a ram instead. Today, this event is an expression of that same love, faith and gratitude to the Lord for all that He has bestowed on us. Armenians throughout the

world have designated places of pilgrimage where they go to worship and offer a meal of Madagh to the community,” says Zohrab Khaligian.

The blessing of St. Hagop’s Madagh will be at 11:15 a.m. and served at 12 noon. From 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., the public is invited to attend the picnic featuring seasoned ground sirloin luleh kebab dinners, hot dogs, sarma (stuffed grape leaves), penerlee (cheese puffs), khurabia (butter cookies), and other Armenian delicacies and pastries. From 1 to 5 p.m., live Armenian music will be performed by the Mideast Beat. Tickets are available for a cash raffle with the raffle drawing at 4 pm. There is no admission charge to this event.

“St. Hagop’s annual Madagh picnic is the most important fundraiser for our church. It attracts visitors from as



St. Hagop Armenian Church welcomes all to the “Madaghorhnek” - the Blessing of the Offering - a special tradition in the Armenian Church, where the meal will then be distributed.



Pictured in this 1940's photo are two church members, one of which has been identified as Mr. Margos Shahinian (right) serving the traditional “Madagh” stew and bulgur pilaf to Mrs. Armenouhi Bagdasarian

far away as California to New England and even Europe, especially those whose roots are in our community. After three years of virus restrictions, we are excited to have returned to Johnson Park in Racine once again.” For information, go to: [https://www.facebook.com/people/Armenian-Madagh-Picnic-St-Hagop-Church-Racine-Wisconsin/100082328348415/?tn-str=k\\*F](https://www.facebook.com/people/Armenian-Madagh-Picnic-St-Hagop-Church-Racine-Wisconsin/100082328348415/?tn-str=k*F)

Donations may be made by cash or check and brought to St. Hagop Church on any Sunday, or by check (made payable to St. Hagop Armenian Church) mailed to the church at 4100 N. Newman Road, Racine, WI 53406.

If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, contact Zohrab Khaligian at [khaligian@netzero.net](mailto:khaligian@netzero.net).

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# Armenian Genocide Commemoration Takes Place in Providence, R.I. With Alin K. Gregorian

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — On Sunday, April 28, the Armenian Martyrs' Memorial Committee of Rhode Island commemorated the 109th Anniversary of the 1915 Armenian Genocide at the Martyrs' Monument, North Burial Ground.

A service in Remembrance of the Holy Martyrs was held where a large procession commenced with flag bearers, clergy, invited guests and wreath presenters surrounded by able-bodied honor guards from the Armenian Masonic Degree Team, Home-netmen Scouts, and Knights of Vartan Arax Tahlij.

A beautiful hymn was sung by choir members from the three local Armenian churches under the capable direction of

anne Mouradjian sang a beautiful rendition of *Hrashatsan Bagootsmamp* to the Holy Martyrs.

Providence Mayor Brett Smiley welcomed the community to the city, where the Martyrs' Monument standing 29-foot-tall is located.

Keynote speaker Alin K. Gregorian delivered a strong and convincing message linking the 1915 Genocide with the 2023 ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Artsakh. She said the images of the recent forced depopulation of Artsakh, within full view of the world, made the Armenian nation live through a second genocide, almost a déjà vu. She called for the training of more academics as well as cultivating better



From left to right are the following Committee members: Susie Chakmakian, Arthur Ventrone, Steven Zaroogian, Malcolm Varadian, and Terry Martiesian.

Konstantin Petrossian. Officiating clergy Archpriest Rev. Gomidas Baghdarian, Rev. Kapriel Nazarian, Rev. Shnork Souin, Rev. Dr. Ara Heghinian, and Rev. Hagop Man-

contacts with major media players so that Armenians could successfully present their position to the world.

Gregorian has been the editor of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* since 1998. She received a Massachusetts State House Resolution for Contribution to the Armenian-American Community in 2018. She has a bachelor's degree in international relations from Tufts University and a master's degree in print journalism from Boston University.

Following the guest speaker and much to the delight of the audience of approximately 250, the Armenian School children of



Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse

jelikian conducted a service for the Holy Martyrs with the assistance of deacons and service participants from Armenian Evangelical Church, Saints Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church and Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church.

It began with "The Lord's Prayer" ("Hayr Mer") being recited by the clergy and all those present; readings from St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews and the Holy Gospel according to St. John; the Litany of The Saints and concluding with the singing of "The Lord's Prayer" by the choir and congregation. In addition, soloist Jo-



Keynote speaker Alin K. Gregorian after the address



Gov. Brett McKee



Sen. Jack Reed



Providence Mayor Brett Smiley

Saints Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church and Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church performed where they sang a melody of *Ov Hayots Kacher and Hayer Miatsek* under

the able direction of Director Raffi Rachdouni accompanied by Petrossian. Armenians continue to live through their faith, culture, and long-standing traditions but in



Members of the clergy

this case the talented voices of our precious youth shined!

There were a few elected officials invited to speak at the Commemoration to say a few words including Rhode Island Governor Dan McKee, and the states US Senators, Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse. There were several other political leaders in the audience who were recognized individually.

Both senators voiced their support for Armenia, and expressed the need for continued recognition of the Genocide.

Although many changes have occurred over the years, the Armenian Martyrs' Memorial Committee of Rhode Island for the past 47 years remember our departed martyrs who were canonized in 2015. We must never forget!



# GENOCIDE STUDIES INTERNATIONAL

## Issue 15.2 Features:

**From War Crimes to Crimes against Humanity and Genocide: Turkish Responsibility after World War I**

Edita G. Gzoyan

**Armenian Genocide Studies: Development as a Field, Historiographic Appraisal, and the Road Ahead**

Stephan H. Astourian

**Legal Violence and the Gendered Necropolitics of Coloniality: Femicide, Socioeconomic Marginalization, and Housing Rights Violations against Indigenous Women in Guatemala and Canada**

Lauren E. Grant

**Pennal Battalions and Genocidal Warfare: History's Warnings, Wagner's Global Footprint, and Ukraine**

Christopher Harrison

### *High School Essays*

**Quality Genocide Education in American Schools: An Armenian Lens for Hope**

Zepure Merdinian

**What Obligation Does the Global Community Have to Prevent Genocide, and What Form(s) Should these Prevention Efforts Take?**

Soline Fisher





# Arts & Culture

## 2024 Armenian Night at the Pops to Feature Pianist Marta Aznavoorian

BOSTON — The Friends of Armenian Culture Society (FACS) will present the 71st annual Armenian Night at the Pops on Wednesday, June 5, at 7:30 p.m. at Boston's Symphony Hall.

Pianist Marta Aznavoorian will be the guest soloist appearing with the Boston Pops Orchestra. She will join the orchestra and conductor Keith Lockhart in a performance of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, marking the 100th anniversary of the iconic American masterpiece.

The orchestra and Lockhart will also perform the *Hayr-Mer* (Lord's Prayer) by Magar Yegmalian, arranged by Rouben Gregorian. As a special guest for the evening, 109-year-old Mary Vartanian, a genocide survivor who was recently honored at the State House Genocide Commemoration Ceremony, will be in attendance with her family.

Two-time Tony Award-winner and Broadway sensation Sutton Foster will also grace the stage of Symphony Hall for an evening that explores the Great American Songbook and beyond.

Praised as "a pianist of exceptionally finished technique and purity of musical impulse" (Boston Globe), Armenian-American pianist Aznavoorian is known for her inspiringly spirited playing and vast emotional reach. The multi-Gram-



Pianist Marta Aznavoorian

my-nominated artist has performed to critical acclaim throughout the world as an orchestral soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician. She made her professional debut at the age of 13, performing Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 24* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the invitation of Sir George Solti. She then went on to perform with orchestras throughout the United States and abroad, including the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, San Diego Symphony, Chicago Symphony and many others, including an engagement with the New World Symphony at the invitation of Michael Tilson Thomas.

Aznavoorian has many awards and accolades, including first prize in the Stravinsky International Competition and the special prize for best see POPS, page 16



Maral Matig in front of her work, "Bloodlines"

## Creative Action Coalition Issues Global Call for Armenian Artists

By Alysse Stepanian

"Language, Symbolism, and Unsettling Acts of De-Erasure" is the title of a new global-scale, year-long arts initiative by the Creative Action Coalition (CAC) artist group. Phase I of this project, "Ayb-Ben Այբ-Բեն" is addressed to the Armenian artists around the world. Other manifestations that may happen simultaneously, will include artists from other Indigenous communities.

Over a year ago, CAC was launched in response to the destruction of Armenian heritage and the violence that Armenians continue to face since the 2020 invasion of Artsakh. Realizing that the Armenian predicament is not unique, CAC has expanded its mission to include non-Armenian indigenous communities, those who have been struggling with social invisibility, and cultures whose identities have suffered the consequences of imperialism, invasions, settler societies, and colonization. Our goal is to help build international solidarities for global resistance to systemic oppressions through art.

"Armenia, situated in the crossroads of East and West, has survived centuries of invasions and massacres. Yet an uncanny absence of Armenian ancient cultural heritage permeates world art history textbooks, which serves the devaluation, destruction, recontextualization, appropriation, and negative stereotyping of Armenian culture." The mainstream arts communities must understand that Armenian heritage is part of world heritage.

Dreams are shaped by language, the essence of every culture. Recently, I completed "Ayb-Ben Այբ-Բեն", a surreal video art piece in which a defiant woman loudly and vigorously recites the Armenian alphabet in an insistent pulse. Intermingled are cultural symbols, symbolic flowers, and letters from the Persian and English alphabets denoting her diasporic identity. The recognition of the interconnectedness of oppressions and the necessity of solidarities is symbolized by the fusion of Armenian forget-me-not flowers and Palestinian poppies. The process and research that led to this work has inspired me to reach out to other artists to manifest a new global project. I am calling on Armenian artists to join me to present our culture to the world and help put an end to the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage by making it part of mainstream consciousness.

This initiative will have multiple iterations, enriched by individual voices and collective concerns that defy cultural erasure throughout centuries of colonization, tragedies, and violence.

Possible manifestations of this project include one or more of the following:

- pop-ups and impromptu performances, street actions, and performative exhibitions that incorporate recitations of the Armenian alphabet and live or recorded music

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## New Canton Adult Chorus launches at The Senior Center

By Mary Ann Price

CANTON, Mass. (*Canton Citizen*) — The Canton Department of Elder and Human Services (DEHS) has added to its many program offerings at the Senior Center with the creation of the new Canton Adult Chorus. The director of the chorus, Crosby Goshgarian, led the group in a welcome session and first practice, accompanied by Nune Hakobyan, last Friday afternoon, April 5.

Goshgarian is the president and owner of Premium Plus Concierge Services in Canton and a passionate music lover. Music is his avocation and has long been a part of his life.

In high school Goshgarian played the clarinet and alto saxophone. He went on to join the Armenian Church choir, ultimately becoming its chairman. During his experience with the choir, he found out that he was a true bass singer. The church sent him to the Boston Conservatory; in return he served the church every Sunday in whatever capacity was needed.

"Basically, that was a great foundation for me," he said of the many things he learned.

Goshgarian has a degree in business management from the University of Massachusetts and minored in music through the Boston Conservatory. He has completed additional studies through continuing education at the New England Conservatory.

His parents were very supportive of his musical pursuits, and after he graduated from UMass, he started singing at a Protestant church in Melrose. He started his long business career, but always continued with music. "It never leaves you and it's just such a wonderful outlet," he said. He is also an ordained deacon and can serve on the altar of Christian churches.

Goshgarian is the founder and artistic director of the Canton Choral Society, and when he approached DEHS Director Diane Tynan about holding CCS rehearsals at the Senior Center, they began to discuss the idea for an adult chorus. "She was very interested in creating something new for the residents of Canton and surrounding towns in the area of music," Goshgarian said.

During that conversation, Tynan mentioned that the piano at the Senior Center was in very poor condition. Goshgarian offered to look for a good used piano to replace the one at the center. He looked online and came across a woman in Cambridge who was moving to a smaller space that would not accommodate her piano, an upright made by Boston manufacturer Chickering.

Hakobyan visited the woman and played the piano, realizing it was a good fit for the Senior Center. Goshgarian not only negotiated a good price for the piano; he also negotiated with the woman's moving company, requesting that the piano be the first item loaded on to the moving truck on the day of the move. The truck went to the woman's new residence to unload her furniture and then came

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE



Serouj Kradjian and his band during the performance

## Serouj Kradjian and His Band Take Audience on a Musical Odyssey

By Nanor Hartounian

PARAMUS, N.J. — On Saturday, April 20, spectators from near and far gathered at Bergen Community College's Ciccone Theatre for "Piano Fantasy," an eclectic musical journey by Grammy-nominated and two-time Juno-award-winning Canadian-Armenian pianist, composer and arranger, Serouj Kradjian and his band.

Kradjian, along with guitarist Haig Ashod Beylerian, violinist Ani Sinanyan, and percussionist Artashes Sinanyan, delighted the crowd with a unique fusion of musical genres.

The concert, organized by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Greater New York (TCA-GNY) chapter, was well received by its attendees, both Armenian and non-Armenian, who enjoyed music ranging from musical legend Charles Aznavour and composer Sergei Rachmaninoff, to Franz Liszt, Lebanese singer Fayrouz, Argentinian tango and Joni Mitchell, to name a few. Saturday's performance of "Piano Fantasy" featured a seamless blend of original compositions that took inspiration from and paid homage to these artists, each song eliciting great delight from the crowd.

"It was our pleasure to organize this fantastic concert. The various music styles played so effortlessly by Serouj and his band transported the audience through history," said Hilda Hartounian, chair of the TCA-GNY chapter.

Beylerian was struck by the good nature of the audience, stating he "felt like they were with us through every measure," adding, "the professionalism and generosity of Tekeyan are second to none." Sinanyan also reflected on his experience performing for such an engaged crowd. "[I felt] that they were briefing every single note with us. Feeling whole emotional ups and downs with each member of the band. For me as a musician is a blessing to have such audiences."

"The community of New Jersey gave us such a heartwarming welcome, I didn't want to leave," said Sinanyan. "Thank you to the wonderful [TCA-GNY chapter] for the immense kindness and care we were given. Spending time and sharing our music with such lovely people, these moments will be cherished in my heart forever."

Kradjian also ruminated on his positive experience working with the TCA-GNY chapter. "It's rare that I work with a cultural organization, and I feel that me and



Serouj Kradjian and his band

my band are being welcomed like family members, he said, adding, "Beyond the high professionalism, the organizational prowess and attention to every single detail, [TCA-GNY] made us feel at home from the first minute we arrived in New

Jersey. And the result was the memorable concert we gave at the Ciccone Theater...A big thanks to the Tekeyan committee, and a personal thank you to Hilda Hartounian who was so passionate in making this concert a huge success."

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to Canton to deliver the piano to the Senior Center.

Hakobyan, who is originally from Armenia, is both an accompanist and a concert pianist who has worked with Goshgarian for many years. She studied at the world-renowned Komitas Conservatory and is also the organist at the Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston in Cambridge.

"We welcome everyone to come and enjoy and do some singing and do some listening," Goshgarian said of those who are interested in the Canton Adult Chorus. He added that the chorus is open to those who appreciate music and is not limited to seniors.

He is planning to meet with the chorus at least once a month.

"It's just something to bring people together through music," Goshgarian said, "which in my opinion is one of the most wondrous therapies in the whole world."

Those who participate in the Canton Adult Chorus will learn melodies and how to harmonize, as well as basic music theory, including tempo and beats.

Goshgarian is planning for a group of people who will bring all kinds of singing experiences to the cho-

rus, and he intends to use a variety of pieces that are familiar and very singable, including *Dona Nobis Pacem*, patriotic songs such as *America the Beautiful*, and choral pieces like *Let There Be Peace on Earth*. He has plenty of music from his choral library to use for the new chorus.

"I'm starting somewhat basic so that people can come and enjoy, get used to it, and then we'll go from there," he said.

Goshgarian said that people who join the chorus will experience a very beautiful and natural therapy through singing, especially beneficial for anyone with a physical ailment or with something on their mind. "When they come and start singing, it seems to put them in a wonderful place emotionally and psychologically, which is indeed very therapeutic," he said.

The chorus will give people a chance to enjoy music, have fun, rediscover music that they have always loved from the past, make new friends, and find inward gratification.

"My mission is to bring people together through music," Goshgarian said. "If you can speak, you can sing!"



Crosby Goshgarian leads the Canton Adult Chorus with accompaniment by Nune Hakobyan. (Photo courtesy of Crosby Goshgarian)



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Lara Arabian

*Finding Her Place in the Great Canadian Mosaic*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN/TORONTO — Lara Arabian is a trilingual artist by way of Beirut, upstate New York and Paris. She completed her acting training at the Banff/Citadel Professional Theatre Program and has worked with companies across Canada including Canadian Stage, Cahoots, Nightswimming, Pandemic Theatre, Neptune Theatre and Studio 180. Her favorite theatre credits include: “Rubble,” “The House of Bernarda Alba,” “The Solitudes,” “The Silver Arrow,” “Blood Wedding” (Dora nomination Best Ensemble), “Upon the Fragile Shore” and “The Container.”

She participated in 18 film and TV projects; the recent credits include “The Handmaid’s Tale,” “Kim’s Convenience,” “Ghostwriter,” “Rabbit Hole,” “Murdoch Mysteries,” “Taken” and “Dark Matter.”

As a writer, she has been a member of the Banff Playwrights Unit and Nightwood Theatre’s Write from the Hip program. Her latest play, “Convictions” received its world premiere at the Festival Les Zébrures in France last fall before kicking off the season for Théâtre français de Toronto. She’s been twice nominated for a Dora Award for Outstanding New Play (Youth Division) as part of the writing team for Les Zinspiré.e.s 8 and 10 (Théâtre français de Toronto) AND was recently named the inaugural recipient of the Joël Beddows Playwriting Prize.

Highlights of her directorial work include “Welcome to Naxos” (Alumnae Theatre), “In Search of Our Humanity” (Holocaust Education week, co-director), “Huit Femmes” (Les Indisciplinés de Toronto) and “Sparta” (Theatre Passe Muraille, Assistant Director).

Lara is also a passionate arts educator and is on the faculty at both George Brown and Sheridan Colleges.

**Dear Lara, what difficulties an Armenian girl from Lebanon has overcome in order to find her place in Canada’s cultural mosaic?**

It is definitely been a bit of a road to get here! When I first started out (or even as a child) there were no examples of Armenian women in the movies that I could point to, except, of course Cher, but she just seemed like she was from a completely different world. In the Armenian communities I grew up in, mainly Toronto and Ottawa,



To find my place in the greater Canadian mosaic, that too has been an evolution. For a very long time, I was only seen as the ‘exotic ethnic’ (those words were literally said to me by people in the industry) and so I would be considered for a narrow range of parts, particularly in the film and TV world. Over the years I had to learn to be a very stubborn actor in order to create a space where my voice could be heard and counted. And of course, my experience as a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) actor was by no means unique. Things have improved changed in the last few years, but we still have a way to go.

I am always happy to “represent” my people and my wider community and culture but for a long time it was the only thing I was “allowed” to represent, and in a country like Canada, that just does not make any sense. It was very frustrating to always have to do the character with

ing people without accents or who are specifically Armenian/Arab. Finally!

I also want to say though how important it is for people to see themselves represented in a three-dimensional way. When I did “Siranoush” I had people from our community, particularly women, who came up to me after the show to tell me how they felt. Strangers would be crying and asking to hug me or speak to me about their own struggles because they saw an Armenian woman on stage they could identify with. It was an intensely moving and cathartic experience for both them and me.

**You are trilingual – except of writing in English and French can you also write plays in Armenian? It would be great as there are so few authors producing plays in Western Armenian.**

That is a wonderful challenge and I do have some ideas simmering on the back burner at the moment.

“Siranoush” has large sections in Armenian but those are mainly drawn from famous plays. I would like to write a play in the Armenian that’s often spoken in Toronto, which is a mix of the Armenian I grew up with (which is already a mix of Armenian, Arabic, Turkish and French) but with English thrown in, too. The concept of where language lives in our bodies and how we are different with each language we speak is something that has fascinated me for years. I know that I am a different person when I speak in Armenian then when I speak another language. Armenian sits in the deepest part of myself; it was the first language I learned.

**At Sheridan College you are the chairperson of their “Expanding the Lens” series, dedicated to centering historically marginalized voices. Have you included Armenian voices too? Our voices have been marginalized as well, isn’t it?**

“Expanding the Lens” is about centering historically marginalized voices from all angles: ethnic, racial, LGBTQ+, feminist, neurodivergent... I have worked hard to make sure that all communities are represented. I really believe that when we lift each other up, we get lifted up as well, so while this is not a specific Armenian initiative, it has absolutely benefited our community. There is a bonus though: because I am the chair and I speak of my own experiences; the students learn about our history as well!

**Lara, we met in 2008 when you came to participate in Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival. Was it a way to embrace your roots?**

It was definitely a trip that was about discovering my roots, even if the branches of my own family are not from what is now territorial Armenia. It was an incredibly transformative trip, and one whose ripples keep affecting me.

I went from being in a place where Armenian is basically unknown to a place where it was everywhere. It was surreal. I speak about this in “Siranoush,” about how the first couple of days felt like a strange Disneyland version of a country set up just for me. It was so strange to be in a place where I did not have to work so hard to ‘be’ my ethnicity, I just was. And I was like everyone else!

And of course, Armenia was where I discovered Siranoush and her story. It may sound corny, but her tenacity and artistry continue to inspire me every single day.

**In what stage is “Siranoush” now?**

I am thrilled to announce that after an initial sold-out run, “Siranoush” will be back on stage at the Next Stage Festival here in Toronto in October of next year. I am also actively looking at touring the show as there was a lot of interest expressed in that. Although the show is not only for Armenian audiences, many members of our community have been asking when I am taking the show to Los Angeles (aka mini-Armenia!).

I also really want to bring it to Armenia. That would be a truly full circle moment.

**Do you have other Armenia-related projects?**

Although I am not writing anything with Armenia in mind specifically at the moment, I feel my identity as a diasporan artist always shows up in my work; it is the lens I see everything through. I recently wrote and performed in a play in French about a family from the Middle East, which is another layer to my make-up as a multi-lingual Armenian artist. There are so many doors Armenian artists can enter through to explore the various facets of our ever-evolving identity/ies!



the idea of being an actor or an artist was a completely foreign one. The Armenian arts we were exposed to were always of the past: traditional dances or musical concerts. As well, there also seemed to be a stigma attached to being an actor - particularly a female one, as if it was a dishonorable, disreputable way to live.

I am so happy to say things have really changed. Speaking for the community in Toronto, there is now an active engagement and even encouragement of delving into the arts, and using them as a tool to explore and affirm our identity. It is thrilling to see and I am so proud and humbled to be a part of that. I am starting to be a point of contact for young Armenian artists starting out and I love that. I am happy to say I feel a lot of love and support from the community now.

**Your filmography shows you acted mainly Arabic and Armenian characters – do you feel comfortable with it?**

an accent or a headscarf just to be able to work. I speak about this in my one-woman show, “Siranoush” about the eminent Armenian stage actress from the end of the 19th-first quarter of the 20th centuries. The running joke in my household is: “Is this an audition with or without the headscarf?” I am proud to represent where I come from, but when you are limited to showing only one part of yourself, it gets frustrating. Not to mention that often those types of roles are as the “terrorist” or the traumatized refugee. Of course, these people exist in real life, but if these are the only representations we see, then we miss out on the humanity of so many. It is so reductionist. This often happens with BIPOC roles.

I have been fortunate in my last few roles as an Arab to be playing funny, complicated, loving people who are just like everyone else; by that I mean that it is not their “otherness” that defines them. That truly is a joy and a privilege.

I am also happy to report that more and more I am play-



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine  
Vartanian Datian



Shirdov Sini Sarma served with plain Armenian or Greek yogurt dusted with ground sumac and Armenian lavash

## Robyn Kalajian's Shirdov Sini Sarma - Baked Grape Leaves and Rice

Recipe and photos are courtesy of Robyn Kalajian at her indispensable Armenian blog: [thearmeniankitchen.com](http://thearmeniankitchen.com).

"My entire family loves stuffed grape leaves (also known as sarma or yalanchi), but the process of stuffing the rice filling into finicky leaves can be tedious. The same goes for [kufteh](https://thearmeniankitchen.com/heart-healthy-kufteh-with-video/), Armenian meat and bulgur stuffed meatballs – a traditional but time-consuming recipe that requires the careful shaping of the outer shell and stuffing it with filling. Luckily, there is a short-cut version for kufteh called [sini kufteh](https://thearmeniankitchen.com/sini-kufteh-oven-baked-kufteh/). It is prepared by alternating layers of the shell and filling ingredients in a pan or 'sini,' then baking it. No shaping or stuffing involved," says Robyn Kalajian.

"This layering technique isn't new so I thought, why not apply it to the grape leaves and rice recipe," she adds. "If you're wondering how the name, Shirdov Sini Sarma came about, I was looking for a name that depicted the preparation process for layering the grape leaves and rice so I contacted our friend, Charles Kasbarian for his expert advice regarding terminology and language.\* He suggested, "One Armenian word for layer is shird. Thus, Shird-Sini-Sarma would capture all three concepts of this recipe: 'Shird' for layer, 'Sini' for pan, and 'Sarma' for leaves and the filling."

"If you've made stuffed grape leaves, you know that prepping the grape leaves is time-consuming. It's the same for this recipe. The difference is once the grape leaves are ready to use, you simply layer the grape leaves and filling ingredients into a baking pan, thus eliminating the stuffing and rolling steps. Then you pop the pan into the oven – it's that easy. The best part is you get the taste of your wonderful stuffed grape leaves, without the extra work," she adds. Here's Robyn's simplified baked-in-the-pan version of stuffed grape leaves that is the perfect crowd-pleaser for any lunch, dinner or upcoming celebration:

PREP TIME: 50 mins  
COOK TIME: 1 hr. 5 mins  
TOTAL TIME: 1 hr. 55 mins  
SERVINGS: 8 servings

### INGREDIENTS:

30-40 grape leaves, jarred or fresh (the number of leaves needed depends on the size of the leaves; save the best-looking leaves for the top)  
2 tablespoons olive oil (plus more oil for brushing the top of grape leaves before baking, and for greasing the baking pan)  
1 large sweet onion, finely diced  
1 cup long-grain rice  
2 1/2 cups water  
1 (15 oz.) can no salt added tomato sauce, divided (for tender top-layer leaves, reserve about 1/2 cup of the sauce to spread on the top leaves before baking)  
1 cup fresh Italian flat-leaf parsley, chopped  
1/2 cup fresh mint, chopped (1 tablespoon crushed dried mint may be substituted)  
1 cup pine nuts (walnuts or unsalted pistachios, coarsely chopped, may be substituted, if desired)  
1/2 cup dried currants (or raisins)  
1 teaspoon salt, to taste

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper, to taste  
1/4 teaspoon ground Aleppo pepper  
1/2 teaspoon paprika, to taste  
1/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice, to taste

### Garnish:

Armenian or Greek yogurt  
1 large lemon, cut into 8 wedges or circles  
Ground sumac to garnish the yogurt

### PREPARING THE GRAPE LEAVES:

Use 30-40 leaves (jarred or fresh) for the recipe. If using jarred grape leaves, carefully remove leaf bundles and unroll them. Give grape leaves a quick rinse in a colander under cold running water.

Fill a large pot half-way with water, and bring to a gentle boil. Carefully dip grape leaves, a few at a time, into the pot of water – one minute for jarred leaves; 2-3 minutes if using fresh leaves. Using a slotted spoon, transfer leaves into one or two colanders in order to drain the excess water. (This process helps to tenderize the jarred grape leaves and removes some of the saltiness from the brine.)

Using kitchen shears or a sharp paring knife snip off each leaf's thick stem and discard. Set leaves on a paper towel-lined plate and set aside until ready to assemble.

### PREPARING THE FILLING:

In large saucepan add the oil and heat over medium heat; add onions. Sauté for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until they begin to turn light brown.

Add the rice and water; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook for about 20 minutes, or until liquid is absorbed.

Remove from heat, and stir in tomato sauce, nuts, parsley, mint, currants, seasonings, and lemon juice. At this point, mixture will be very moist. (For a heartier main dish, add 1/2 lb. of cooked, lean ground turkey, lamb or beef in the final step in preparing the filling.)

### ASSEMBLING, BAKING, AND SERVING:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Brush the bottom and sides of an 8" x 12" rectangular pan or a 2-quart baking dish with olive oil. Wipe any moisture off grape leaves. Line the bottom and sides of the baking pan with grape leaves – overlapping them, and allowing leaves to hang over sides.

Spread half of rice mixture evenly over grape leaves. Place a layer of grape leaves on top of the rice, then top with remaining rice. Finally, cover the casserole with the remaining grape leaves, making sure rice is completely covered. Seal the sides by folding over grape leaves which hang over the edges. Generously brush olive oil on the top layer of grape leaves, and then spread the top with the reserved 1/2 cup of tomato sauce, if you prefer softer leaves.

Cover pan with foil. Bake 35 to 40 minutes; remove foil the last 10 minutes of baking. Baked sarma should look firm and set.

Remove pan from oven and allow to rest about 15 minutes before cutting.

Dip a sharp knife into a glass of cold water. Using the tip of the knife, carefully cut straight down to create 8 serving pieces for an entree. Cut into smaller pieces for a side dish or appetizer.

Serve with Armenian or Greek yogurt dusted with ground sumac and Armenian lavash. Discover this recipe and more Armenian and Middle Eastern recipes at: <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/shirdov-sini-sarma-baked-grape-leaves-and-rice-recipe/>.

Robyn Kalajian is a retired culinary teacher whose passion for cooking and knowledge of Armenian and Middle Eastern cuisine has earned her an international following as creator and chief cook of the site. Her husband and sous-chef Douglas is an author and retired journalist who has written extensively about Armenian food and culture. Their daughter Mandy, is the site's creative director, content producer and partnerships manager. She is committed to supporting the growth and evolution of this site to inspire future generations to cook and experience traditional Armenian food.

"Our website aims to capture and preserve the recipes our Armenian grandmothers never had the time to write down. It is a big job that's getting bigger as Armenian cuisine evolves around the world. We celebrate the many talented people who prepare and enjoy this remarkable food by sharing stories told around the Armenian dinner table. We hope you enjoy our instructive videos and visit our website soon," says Robyn. She says their ultimate Armenian dinner would start with "cheese beoregs and a hefty plate of mezza (or meze), including basterma and yalanchi. The main course would include bulgur pilaf, any type of kebab, kufteh, vegetable geragoor, and chopped salad. Finally, dessert would be paklava with strong Armenian coffee."

"None of that is particularly fancy or exotic," adds Doug. "But it's the Armenian food we know and love, and that makes us happy."

\*Sadly, a few weeks after Robyn and Charles Kasbarian collaborated on this post, he passed away, "One of Charles Kasbarian's many projects on Armeniapedia.org is his Dikranagerdtsi Cookbook, which is a work in progress," says Robyn. "He's been sharing some of his recipes with me for many years for our food blog. We compare notes and bounce recipe thoughts, suggestions, and ideas off one another. It's a lot of fun and a learning experience for both of us. Charles was born in Jersey City, NJ, on May 5, 1927, to Hagop Der Kasbarian and Lusya Kazanjian, Armenian Genocide survivors from Dikranagerd, Western Armenia. The second of four brothers, he was raised in Union City, NJ, also known as 'Little Dikranagerd.'"

By profession, Charles was a financial management officer for the U.S. Department of Defense. His wry sense of humor, for which he was known among his family and friends, found an outlet in his column for the *Armenian Weekly*, called "Uncle Garabed's Notebook," which featured a potpourri of facts, trivia, proverbs and deconstructions of Armenian surnames. He produced his column for 33 years and right up until the end. "Uncle Garabed," as he was known to many, spent a great portion of his life to preserving and perpetuating this regional culture's essence through its distinct dialect, cuisine, music and humor.

# Komitas and Debussy: The Wartime Music of Debussy And Komitas, Still Resonating Today

By Hugh Morris

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — Kirill Gerstein, a Soviet-born pianist whose parents sold their only proper asset — a garage — so that they could afford plane tickets to the United States for their son's education, approaches music in a way that recalls something his countryman, the conductor Kirill Petrenko, once told him: "I sacrificed so much in my life to not do things by default."

The career of Gerstein, 44, is filled with moments that defy a belief in doing things "by default." There was the time when he devoted a significant portion of his \$300,000 Gilmore Artist Award to commissioning new piano music from composers across jazz and classical music, placing Chick Corea and Brad Mehldau alongside Oliver Knussen and Alexander Goehr. Or there was the time, in 2017, when Gerstein championed a new, shockingly modest critical edition of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1* rather than the grandiose, more recognizable version. Or when, as many streamed performances during the pandemic, he instead organized a series of free, online seminars that featured musicians alongside luminaries from the wider arts scene.

Now comes Gerstein's latest project, "Music in Time of War," a recording that is expansive in its program and packaging: a 141-minute double album of works by Claude Debussy and the Armenian composer and ethnomusicologist Komitas Vardapet, accompanied by a 174-page book of conversations, essays and photographs that situate the music deep in its historical context.

The album — which beyond solo piano pieces also includes works for piano and soprano (with Ruzan Mantashyan), and piano duo (with Katia Skanavi and Thomas Adès) — was released in mid-April. Its timing came at a poignant midpoint for both composers: March 25, the anniversary of Debussy's death, and April 24, the date Armenia commemorates as the beginning of the 1915 genocide in which up to 1.5 million Armenians were killed by the Ottoman Empire. That led to post-traumatic stress disorder for Komitas, who while living in Constantinople (now Istanbul) was deported to Anatolia and brutalized by a guard before being released, then eventually suffered a nervous breakdown.

What began as a goal in Gerstein's "self-development program" — to record Debussy's *Études* (1915) — quickly accu-

mulated connections owing to the collection's composition during one of history's darkest moments. "Our understanding of a piece of music cannot be divorced from the historical and cultural setting in which it was created and received," Gerstein, who lives in Berlin, writes in the foreword for his new album's book.

During the early days of the pandemic, as Gerstein thought more about Debussy's final years, he also revisited a pile of scanned piano music by Komitas (1869-1935) that he had received from an enthusiastic member of the French-Armenian diaspora 20 years earlier. A pairing of late Debussy and late Komitas made for an intriguing fit: They



Soprano Ruzan Mantashyan

were two composers who, for a brief time before World War I, existed in the same Parisian orbit and channel the darkened spirit of the age in their art.

It's not as simple, though, as "in dark times, we write dark music," said Gerstein, alluding to a Bertolt Brecht quote. The *Armenian Dances*, Komitas's final work before composing became unbearable, have plenty of Baroque-like pep, and Gerstein's album also includes *Les Soirs Illuminés par l'Ardeur du Charbon*, Debussy's final piano solo, which contains a bit of irony. (Translated as "Evenings Lit by Glowing Coals," the piece was a gift to Debussy's coal merchant after a cherished delivery during the war.)

"Music in Time of War" also recalls contemporary gestures of artistic solidarity during conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. On April 9, 1916, a benefit concert for Armenia was organized in the Grand Am-

phithéâtre at the Sorbonne in Paris. The program, which is reprinted in the album's book, included Debussy's *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maison* before Komitas's *Antuni*. Both works are tethered firmly to their moment yet concern the physical and mental devastation of homelessness, and the innocence of youth amid conflict. History has shown how timeless those subjects remain.

Komitas, born Soghomon Soghomonian, was brought up in a seminary near Yerevan after losing his mother and father at an early age. He emerged as a talented composer for voice, choir and piano despite protestations from the clergy. But, as he later spent time

in Berlin and Paris, his most important contribution to Armenian music was as an avid collector of his country's folk music.

He was more concerned with capturing and preserving an imagined spirit of folklore than in recording it with strict discipline, though he also pioneered modern-day approaches to ethnomusicology by working to understand the essential cultural context behind the music's production. "In his research papers, he described not only the songs per se, but also the conditions of their performance — landscape, time of day, weather," the musicologist Artur Avanesov writes in one of the album book's essays. "Decades later, the same was done by Olivier Messiaen."

Gerstein described Komitas's music as "gestural" and "stark," and as having "a feeling of immense space and spaciousness." This is most keenly felt in his set of Armenian songs like *Tsirani Tsar*, in which single, unadorned lines are spread far apart at the piano, with a gaping chasm in between.

"I haven't been able to perform these songs for a long time," Mantashyan, the soprano, said in an interview. Her grandfather's cousin, Alexander Mantashyan, was a patron of Komitas, and sent a grand piano to Berlin to help the composer work. She has known his songs since she was a student at the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan. But it has taken 15 years for her to feel like she's ready to record them. As Avanesov says, "Writing on Komitas while living in Armenia is a task tantamount to rethinking the Scriptures."

When Mantashyan collaborate with Gerstein on Komitas's songs, *Antuni* ("Homeless"), a piece with deep resonance among the Armenian diaspora, was recorded in a single take then left unedited. "It's not about perfection," she said of the music. "It's about pain."

Ferruccio Busoni, a favorite composer of

Gerstein's, and whose *Piano Concerto* he recently toured in Europe, said that music is like "sonorous air." Komitas, Gerstein said, "manages to capture the 'sonorous air' of the Armenian people. This is quite close to magical."

In an interview with *Van Magazine* in 2018, Gerstein was asked about the responsibility of artists to make political statements. "I'm rather careful with that," he replied. "There are political figures, commentators and activists that are so committed to their field; just to dabble in political commentary would be as irresponsible as their making a suggestion of a speed of a transition in a Brahms sonata."

He stands by that belief today. Gerstein is skeptical of "the self-congratulatory political activism of some figures" in classical music, he said, who make "loud and bland pronouncements about things that real activists, real journalists and really courageous people are truly putting themselves on the line for."

Music can, though, comment on a moment in time, even if indirectly. Debussy's contribution to the war effort, for example, was to assert his belief in the primacy of French music. (An extraordinarily productive period in 1915 resulted in the *Cello Sonata* and the *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp*, as well as many of the works heard on "Music in Time of War.")

And Gerstein's new album, while recorded in 2021, has the power to speak to wars today: in Ukraine and Sudan, in Yemen and Gaza. "It's rather clear that World War I and its repercussions — the demise of the Ottoman Empire — is what has shaped the modern conflict in the Middle East," Gerstein said. "These reverberations and connections are not to be overlooked. The reverberations of history create today's earthquakes."

The history of the Armenian Genocide remains unsettled. Gerstein, despite cautioning against general political statements by artists, didn't hesitate to note that "the Armenian Genocide is something that's still not universally recognized, you know, 109 years after the fact." Progress has been made — President Biden's recognition of the genocide in 2021 was seen as a major breakthrough — but a unified understanding of this history still faces major opposition, not least from Turkey, whose role in the atrocities has long been denied by the government.

Gerstein's project asks an important question about the place and purpose of art and artists in times of humanitarian crisis. One of the roles of culture, he said, is to provoke a conversation, "not in the context of a political news item, and not in the context of a historical lecture," but through the lens of culture itself. "People are confronted," he said, "to think about Komitas, about music, about preserving the sound of a disappearing people, of genocide, and of the effects of war on society — on both artists and culture."

On Komitas's birthday, in October, Gerstein and Mantashyan released a recording on YouTube of *Antuni*, they said, "in solidarity with the Armenian nation." A ground assault by Azerbaijani troops had driven about 120,000 Armenians out of their homes in the ethnic Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh of Azerbaijan. "There is an existential threat that Armenia continues to experience," Gerstein said. "It's not only something that happened 109 years ago, and we should recognize it more."

(This article was originally published in the *New York Times* on April 30.)

## 2024 Armenian Night at the Pops to Feature Pianist Marta Aznavoorian

POPS, from page 12  
interpretation of the commissioned contemporary work. As a recipient of the Level 1 award in the National Foundation of the Arts talent search, Aznavoorian became a Presidential Scholar. She was invited to the White House, where she met former President George H.W. Bush and performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. With expressive energy and originality, she has recorded extensively for Naxos, Warner Classics, and Erato and has just released her 7th album under the record label Cedille Records.

A champion and lover of contemporary music, she has recorded music and premieres by the world's leading composers

of our time including William Bolcom, Osvaldo Golijov, Augusta Read Thomas, Shulamit Ran, Stacy Garrop, Joan Tower and Jennifer Higdon, among others.

A student of the renowned teacher Menahem Pressler, Aznavoorian received her Bachelor of Music degree and Artist Diploma from Indiana University and a Master of Music degree from New England Conservatory. As a dedicated educator and philanthropist, she gives lessons and masterclasses across the United States and abroad. She is on faculty at DePaul University and the Music Institute of Chicago, where she is also an artist in residence.

Tickets for this concert are available from [www.FACSBoston.org](http://www.FACSBoston.org).



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Creative Action Coalition Issues Global Call for Armenian Artists

ARTISTS, from page 12

•ritualistic performances symbolizing de-erasure of cultural heritage  
•videos and other work highlighting Armenian ancient symbols, mythical animals, fruits and flowers such as grapes, pomegranates, apricots and forget-me-nots  
•informational brochures and educational workshops regarding Armenian heritage and interconnected struggles of Indigenous Peoples

Participating artists and project leaders for regional actions will be chosen from the responses to this call. Artists will be encouraged to propose their own ideas. Each regional iteration of “Ayb-Ben Այբ-Բեն” will have its own secondary title.

Armenians and other Indigenous Peoples have suffered from the tragic erasure of identity. While we hope to harness the

Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink, the renowned American scholar and civil rights activist, Angela Davis stated, “Ongoing efforts to create a popular intellectual environment within which to explore the contemporary impact of the Armenian genocide are central, I think, to global resistance to racism, genocide, and settler colonialism.”

Follow Creative Action Coalition on Instagram (@creativeactioncoalition) to help build the international solidarity needed to put an end to the continued Armenian Genocide by bringing the plight of Armenians to the center of popular intellectual discourses.

To support our project, send a note to: <https://creativeactioncoalition.com/contact/>

To participate in this project, send the following information using the link above. In the subject box write: “Ayb-Ben: Your



The Cogs in the Machine” catalog

power of collective action, the identity of each artist and the creative voice and input of the individual will be respected and acknowledged. All participating artists will be promoted to the press and will be given visibility on our website and in any other documentation.

Phase I of this initiative is open to Armenian artists from all disciplines, of all genders and sexual identities and orientations, over the age of 18. Prior performance experience is not required.

At the 2015 memorial lectures for the

full name.” Respond to the questions in the message box.

Please check the website for updates. The following dates are subject to change: May 31, 2024: proposal deadline and June 14, 2024: notification of selected artists and project leaders

(Alysse Stepanian is a cross-media artist, independent curator, and Creative Action Coalition’s Organizer. Find out more about her at <https://alyssestepanian.com>. To find out more about the project, visit <https://creativeactioncoalition.com>)

# CALENDAR

## OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

### MASSACHUSETTS

**MAY 12** — Mother’s Day celebration at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, Nishan and Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont. 10.30 a.m., celebrating a Holy Mass for our beloved Mothers, which will be followed by a celebration and the annual Mother’s Day raffle Draw, with a special appearance by Meghedi Children’s Vocal Ensemble.

**MAY 17-18** — Armenian Memorial Church Annual Fair, dine-in or take-out. Beef, chicken, losh kabob or vegetarian meals Friday 5-8 p.m.-Saturday 12 p.m.-7 p.m.: Sale of Armenian desserts and delicacies. The Armenian Memorial Church will donate 10% of the fair proceeds to the Armenian Evangelical Boarding School in Anjar, Lebanon, which serves 82 needy students. 32 Bigelow Avenue Watertown, MA 02472

**JUNE 5** — Armenian Night at the Pops with pianist Marta Aznavoorian and the Boston Pops Orchestra, Keith Lockhart, conductor, Wednesday, 7.30 p.m., Symphony Hall, Boston. Presented by Friends of Armenian Culture Society (FACSBoston.org).

**JUNE 9** — Armenian Cultural Foundation: Mirak Chamber Music Series Presents Alan Hovhanness Tribute Concert, 3 p.m., Arlington Town Hall, 730 Mass. Ave., Arlington. Works by Hindemith, Hovhanness, Khachaturian, Tassone. Performers: Wei Zhao, Yelena Beriyeva, Knarik Nerkararian, Jing-Huey Wei, Sylvie Zakarian, Aaron Larget-Caplan, Michael Peipman, Arlington-Belmont Chamber Chorus, The Menotomy Chamber Orchestra. More details to follow.

**JUNE 13** — Under the Strawberry Moon. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston at 8:15 p.m. Meet & Greet. Chocolate Dipped Strawberries hosted by Ovenbird Cafe. RSVP [hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

Armenian Heritage Park ongoing Programs:

**MOVEMENT & WALKING MEDITATION. LABYRINTH WELLNESS WALKS TOGETHER** through October. Tuesdays at 5:30 p.m. Series is offered in collaboration with the Boston Health Commission and The Greenway Conservancy Fitness program. For details, [ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar)

**CELEBRATING WHAT UNITES US!** Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston Each month highlights the country of origin of many living and working in the City of Boston and beyond. Series is offered in collaboration with Age-Friendly Boston. For dates and details, [ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar)

**JUNE 16** — Boston Tekeyan Cultural Association is hosting a Father’s Day Bar-B-Q. Sunday, 2 p.m. at the Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown (Use Norseman Street side door). \$40 per person. Khorovadz, pilaf, salad and more. Special raffle. RSVP [bostontca@gmail.com](mailto:bostontca@gmail.com) or call Sossy at 617-281-1647.

**OCTOBER 25-27** — Save the date! Sanctuary consecration of the Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe. Presided over by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern). 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. Details to follow.

**NOVEMBER 16** — St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School will celebrate with a 40th Anniversary Gala. Saturday, 6.30 p.m., Hyatt Regency Cambridge. Details to follow.

**Send Calendar Items to the Mirror-Spectator:** To send calendar items to the Mirror-Spectator, email [alin@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [alin.gregorian@gmail.com](mailto:alin.gregorian@gmail.com). You can also visit our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://www.mirrorspectator.com), and find the “calendar” section under the heading “More.” You can also 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. There is no fee for calendar entries.

## Historical Documents Reproduced in Facsimile in Armenia Aeterna Volume

**BUENOS AIRES** — On Wednesday, May 8, within the celebration of the 48th International Book Fair in Buenos Aires, at the Predio Ferial La Rural, the presentation of an artistic reproduction of documents in one volume, *Armenia Aeterna*, took place.

*Armenia Aeterna* is a compilation of forty-one documents, in facsimile edition that traces the course of the origins and historical evolution of the Armenian people through archives of more than twenty countries of the world, including Armenia, France, Italy, Vatican State, United Kingdom, Russian Federation, United States of America and Poland, among others, in a work that has required several years of research.

Centuries of history are presented in forty-one essential documents that show the tireless struggle of Armenians for survival, in a country whose culture is wonderful despite the constant attacks and tragic events it has suffered, accompanied by a corresponding study book in which all the documents are explained one by one and the historical account is based on these fundamental documents.

This work is limited to a unique and unrepeatable edition of 991 numbered and notarized copies.

The original documents were recovered from different archives and reproduced with innovative technologies in conjunction with artisanal processes dating back to

the Middle Ages. The result of this process was the creation of facsimiles, with an accuracy virtually indistinguishable from the original documents.

The presentation of *Armenia Aeterna*, a work that toured Europe, both coasts of the United States of America and Armenia, took place at the Carlos Gorostiza Hall, Yellow Pavilion, and was sponsored by the Embassy of Armenia in Argentina, the Armenian Center of the Argentina and the Tekeyan Cultural Center.

For more information about the project please contact us by e-mail at [anahabetian@encyclopaediamundi.com](mailto:anahabetian@encyclopaediamundi.com), Instagram at ArmeniaAeterna, and on the Internet at [www.encyclopaediamundi.com](http://www.encyclopaediamundi.com).



## COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN  
**MIRROR  
SPECTATOR**  
SINCE 1932



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# A Tribute to Prof. Marjorie Housepian Dobkin

By Gary A. Kulhanjian

I was motivated to write this tribute and remembrance of my friend and professional colleague on the 70th anniversary of her blockbuster novel, *A Houseful of Love*. It was in the dawn of her career and profession in higher education that led to her rightful acclaim.

She was widely published as a writer of fiction and non-fiction.

Born in New York City, she lived in Manhattan. Later she resided in Maine, Virginia, southern France, the Near East and Russia. She had three sons. She died in 2013, at age 90.

Returning to her celebrated novel, it included and described the temperament of many Armenian immigrants who settled in New York City by the 1920s and up to the 1950s. The author reminds

her readers that the characters

and their names were all fictitious;

however, their personalities reflected

many newcomers from different lands.

The businesses of newcomers represented the

multiplicity of ethnic groups of diverse origins also.

The Armenian enclave moved up from

14th to 88th Streets in Manhattan.

In later years, the Armenians moved

uptown to Washington Heights, where they

purchased a church which became the oldest

Armenian institution in Manhattan.

Some Armenians resided in Brooklyn and the other

boroughs of New York City. When they

congregated, they always reflected the names of the towns and

villages they originated from in their ancestral land of Armenia

occupied by the Turkish Empire.

For example, Marashetsi, Smyrnatsi,

Kesariatsi, Dikranagerdtsi and many other places in ancient

Armenia under Turkish hegemony. These names were often

misspelled in English. The Turkish government has changed many of

these names in the locations after the 1915 Genocide with the

deracination of the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian populations.

In the novel, the Armenians who lived in a cosmopolitan area like

New York and elsewhere, referred to non-Armenians as outsiders

or "odars" in the Armenian language. These outsiders found the

Armenians as a warm group who demonstrated emotions with their

speech and manners. Sometimes an Armenian would take time to

explain the culture and heritage to a non-Armenian. Many Americans

had less contact with Armenians than a member of a larger ethnic or racial group.

Her book was in a genre of its own creating scenes and episodes of the

interaction of ordinary people. The book created a universal appeal to

readers and the author's style in manifesting the likenesses and differences of people from various

corners of the world. The book should be read by future generations. Its appeal will grow more

important in not only unifying human relations but the diversities that bring people together in a

changing society and world.

Looking back in time, I remember my meeting Professor Housepian Dobkin in New York City at a conference on the 65th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The conference was sponsored by interfaith groups of Christians and Jewish congregational members. The first presenters were Housepian Dobkin and Prof. R. Hrair Dekmekjian. Their presentations dealt with "Reports by historians on the massacres; the background, and the events, and the results." A group of survivors and psychiatrists and psychologists discussed the "survivor syndrome." The two notable authors discussed a summary of the presentations. At the end program, I was able to walk through the gathering of people and introduce myself to Housepian Dobkin. She was quite pleasant and remarked about our future communication regarding the Armenian Genocide.

and Christine Simone. A group of erudite scholars took part by contributing noteworthy articles in April 1990, on the 75th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Marjorie Housepian Dobkin made a most impressive impact as a leader at Barnard College, Columbia University, as associate dean, professor of English and outstanding scholar. She will always be remembered for her activism in Armenian studies as well as feminism.

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Over the years of our friendship, she always gave me good advice. Her most important advice and on a personal point was in one of her earliest correspondents. Her research and input into the modern history of the Armenian people, and the 1915 Genocide should never be forgotten. She said, "I can understand how overwhelming this all is – and also grateful that YOU understand how important it is not to feel all alone." She was a pioneer for others to emulate and follow her example.

(Gary A. Kulhanjian, Social historian, former member of the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education Holocaust and appointed by three governors representing the Armenian constituency for ten years. He now resides in California with his family.)

From my meeting with her at the conference, we corresponded and met over several decades.

In 1972, her outstanding publication, *The Smyrna Affair*, was released by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. The book was about the destruction of the city of Smyrna (now Izmir) a coastal port city in Turkey during the reign of Mustapha Kemal (Ataturk). The city had been left unscathed until Kemal decided to pillage it. The primary non-Turkic population, composed of Armenians and Greeks, were killed, imprisoned or put on a death march. The book was also published in Greece. It was also retitled and published as *Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City* in Great Britain by Faber and Faber. Kent State University Press in Ohio published a paperback of the historical account in 1988.

Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, NJ, developed a Holocaust Center under Dr. Seymour Siegler and Prof. Jack Needle. Dean Norma Klein of Brookdale appointed these two professors to develop courses and programs for the county and state. It was the first Holocaust Center created in New Jersey. A colleague of mine encouraged me to meet with Dr. Siegler and to tell him about the Armenian Genocide. Shortly after, I became an associate of the Center, and we planned on having lectures by noted Armenian scholars. I had an opportunity to invite Marjorie as the first presenter to the Armenian colloquium. She was followed by other scholars on the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide on April

24. Other Armenian community leaders followed the tradition of the program. The college has made many noteworthy contributions since its creation in both Holocaust and genocide studies.

As the years passed, I became active in teaching and lecturing about the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust and about other genocides worldwide. Professor Housepian Dobkin and I kept in touch about our lectures and news about the deniers of the Holocaust and Armenian Genocide. By 1982, she was invited to attend an International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide. Her lecture was titled "What Genocide? What Holocaust? News from Turkey, 1915-1923: Case Study."

Her dedication for the inclusion of the Armenian Genocide was observed by her lectures, activism and articles with the inclusion of the Greek tragedy during the first quarter of the 20th century. Around 1986, I received a call from a friend who asked me to present a lecture on the Armenian Genocide at Middlesex County College (now Middlesex College), in New Jersey. After informing him that I had the flu, I suggested calling Housepian Dobkin. She accepted the invitation on short notice. She made a remarkable impression on the students and faculty who attended her lecture.

By 1993, The Armenian Center at Columbia University published *Denial Of The Armenian Genocide: Compounding The Crime* by Housepian Dobkin as editor, with the assistance of Leon Hamalian

and Christine Simone. A group of erudite scholars took part by contributing noteworthy articles in April 1990, on the 75th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Marjorie Housepian Dobkin made a most impressive impact as a leader at Barnard College, Columbia University, as associate dean, professor of English and outstanding scholar. She will always be remembered for her activism in Armenian studies as well as feminism. Her portrayal of Armenians in *A Houseful of Love* remains as relevant as when it was published.

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ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED FOR HER  
ACTIVISM IN ARMENIAN STUDIES AS  
WELL AS FEMINISM.



## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Pashinyan Will Have Blood on His Hands If French-Armenian Dies at Yerevan Airport

French-Armenian journalist Leo Nicolian has been on a hunger strike at the Yerevan airport for 16 days,

after being banned from entering Armenia.

Nicolian, 57, is an aggressive investigative journalist who has generated plenty of controversy due to his revelations about important figures. He has been on the frontlines of the conflict in Artsakh and the recent clashes on the Israel-Lebanon border. He was wounded during both conflicts.

In the past 30 years, Nicolian has visited Armenia and Artsakh dozens of times and interviewed key leaders. However, what he encountered at the Yerevan airport during his latest visit two weeks ago was completely unexpected and shocking.

In early April, Nicolian had gone to the village of Voskepar in the Tavush province of Armenia and interviewed Primate of the Tavush Diocese Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan who has been leading the popular movement in opposition to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's recent decision to turn over four Armenian border villages to Azerbaijan.

Later in April, when Nicolian tried to return to Armenia, he was told by immigration officials at the Yerevan airport that he was not allowed to enter the country. When he asked why, he was told that he "presented a danger to Armenia's security." This is a ridiculous accusation because Nicolian is a professional journalist who has not violated any Armenian laws and committed no crimes.

Regrettably, Nicolian is not the only diasporan Armenian who is banned from entering Armenia. There have been several others who were told after landing at the Yerevan airport that they are not allowed to visit the country. None of them has done anything illegal or criminal to warrant such a harsh measure. Besides, if they had violated any laws or presented a danger to Armenia's security, they should have been arrested at the airport and turned over to the courts to decide their fate. No official, regardless of his rank or position, has the right to make arbitrary decisions on behalf of the judiciary.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Pashinyan has no right to decide who can enter the country. Armenia is not his private residence. He can't decide whom to allow or not allow in. Armenia is the homeland of all 10 million Armenians worldwide and no official has the right to ban any one of them to enter the country in the absence of a legal reason.

Nicolian and several other diasporan Armenians are banned from entering Armenia simply because they dared to criticize Pashinyan's defeatist policies. The prime minister has repeatedly claimed to be a democrat. However, freedom of expression is one of the basic principles of democracy which is frequently violated by the authorities in Armenia who have turned the country into a one-man rule — a dictatorship.

To make matters worse, after Mourad Papazian, a prominent French-Armenian critic of Pashinyan, was not allowed to enter Armenia, he filed a lawsuit in an Armenian court which found the government's ban illegal. Since Armenian officials had 30 days to file an appeal to reverse the lower court's decision, no one knew if they would file such an appeal. Fortunately, when Pashinyan visited Paris in the midst of those 30 days, President Emmanuel Macron met privately with Papazian and Pashinyan and urged the prime minister to abandon his pursuit of Papazian. Pashinyan reluctantly agreed to drop the appeal, but it was shameful that the head of a foreign country had to intervene in an Armenian domestic matter.

Meanwhile, Nicolian has been languishing at the Yerevan airport for the past 16 days. During our multiple phone conversations, he told me that he will continue his hunger strike even if it leads to his death. His life is at risk because he has several serious ailments. From time to time, local medical staff comes to measure his blood pressure and gives him some injections. He is not allowed to leave the airport for any medical treatment. In recent days, an ambulance was sent to the airport to check his blood pressure, his heart, and give him another injection.

Nicolian's status is in limbo. He tells me that because he is in the airport's internationally protected "neutral zone," Armenian officials cannot take any action against him. They have tried to convince him to board a flight to Paris which he has refused. They have also offered him sandwiches and water which he has turned down.

Nicolian told me that he is committed to starve himself to death at the Yerevan airport. He thinks that his death will bring shame to the prime minister. I am not sure he is correct. I think that it will bring shame to the reputation of the Republic of Armenia.

The French Embassy in Yerevan, contrary to its diplomatic obligations, has refused to visit its own citizen to inquire about his condition. This is the vindictive position of the local French Ambassador because Nicolian had exposed the ambassador's scandals in the media. The French Foreign Ministry has also not shown any interest in the welfare of Nicolian, since he has publicly criticized the French president in the past.

Even though Nicolian has antagonized many individuals and organizations due to his harsh criticisms and abrasive personality, Armenians have an obligation to do whatever they can to publicize his critical situation and save the life of a fellow Armenian before he starves to death.

I urge the citizens of Armenia to hold protests in front of the prime minister's building in Yerevan, demanding that Nicolian be allowed to enter Armenia. Protests should also be held in front of the French Embassy in Yerevan.

French-Armenians should also hold protests in Paris in front of the Foreign Ministry and the Presidential Palace seeking their intervention with the government of Armenia.

Should Nicolian die in the Yerevan airport due to his prolonged hunger strike, Prime Minister Pashinyan will have blood on his hands, so will French President Macron.

# Zoryan Institute Commemorates April 24 Through Reaffirming the Importance of Genocide Education

April being a month dedicated to genocide awareness, is a critical time to emphasize the relevance of genocide education and the critical need to combat prejudice and violence in today's world.

Recently, a question was raised in the Turkish Media:

".....Question: Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan recently refrained from using the term "genocide" when talking about the events of 1915. He just said "big disaster". This was interpreted as a reflection of the voters who brought him to power, a demand for normalization in the region. The same Pashinyan also criticized Mount Ararat's inclusion in the state coat of arms, saying that it was within the borders of Türkiye. What do you think about this attitude that seems to be in favor of peace?....."

The Zoryan Institute would like to take a moment to reply to that question.

On March 7, 2000, a statement by 126 Holocaust Scholars, Holders of Academic Chairs, and Directors of Holocaust Research and Studies Centers was made and their petition appeared in the New York Times, on June 9, 2000.

"126 Holocaust Scholars Affirm the Incontestable Fact of the Armenian Genocide and Urge Western Democracies to Officially Recognize It.

At the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Scholar's Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches Convening at St. Joseph University, Philadelphia, March 3-7, 2000, 126 Holocaust Scholars, holders of Academic Chairs and Directors of Holocaust Research and Studies Centers, participants of the Conference, signed a statement affirming that the World War I Armenian Genocide is an incontestable historical fact and accordingly urge the governments of Western democracies to likewise recognize it as such.

The petitioners, among whom was Nobel Laureate for Peace Elie Wiesel, the keynote speaker at the conference, also asked the Western democracies to urge the government and Parliament of Turkey to finally come to terms with a dark chapter of Ottoman-Turkish history and to recognize the Armenian Genocide. This would provide an invaluable impetus to the process of the democratization of Turkey."

With the current state of crisis around the globe, including in Ukraine, Israel-Gaza, and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) among others, in mind, Dr. Jennifer Rich, Zoryan Academic Board member and editor of the academic journal, *Genocide Studies International*, reflects on the latest issue, 15.2 and the overlapping experiences that people share.

"[At the time of this publication], the intractable conflict between Israel and Hamas is playing out in real-time on my television, ethnic Armenians continue their forced displacement from Artsakh, and the war in Ukraine rages on. To begin to make sense of the violence, it is imperative to draw connections between now and then, present and past. Genocide scholars—as well as activists, policymakers, and politicians—need to think outside the disciplinary boxes we so often inhabit. We tend to think about the field of Genocide Studies as one rooted in the past, as a field dominated by historians. This general issue of *Genocide Studies International*, however, shines a bright light on the path, sometimes hidden or overlooked, that connects events across vast spans of time.

The articles by Edita Gzoyan and Stephan Astourian, both about the Armenian Genocide, illustrate the long afterlife of violence as a force that shapes the present. Gzoy-

an's article highlights the long-overdue need to move from a culture of impunity to one of accountability. After articulating the process through which the concept of crimes against humanity was developed in the wake of the Armenian Genocide, she exposes the unacceptable truth that there were no legal, or other, consequences for perpetrators of the atrocities. Astourian, in a historiographic appraisal of Armenian Genocide studies, clearly demonstrates that additional research in the field will help fight against the culture of impunity and finally hold the guilty to account. He argues that "we have not yet thoroughly exploited many relevant archival fonds, and efforts should be made in this regard," and that until this happens, we are unable to accurately determine whether the intent to "exterminate the Armenians already existed before World War I."

The articles written by Lauren Grant and Christopher Harrison each spotlight current atrocities that have long and violent pasts. Grant's fieldwork in Canada and Guatemala informs her contribution, which argues that "femicidal and sexual gender-based violence faced by Indigenous women ... is a cause and consequence of these states' failures to effectively guarantee Indigenous women's intersecting socioeconomic rights, namely their right to adequate housing." She exposes the intertwined economic and political interests of these two nation-states that have led to a system of "legal violence," as well as the complicity of international human rights organizations in allowing the rights of Indigenous women to remain violated.

Harrison's timely article uses the recent atrocities committed by the Wagner Group in Bucha, Ukraine to argue that "the expendability of penal battalions has provided

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## Zoryan Institute Commemorates April 24 Through Reaffirming the Importance of Genocide Education

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genocidal regimes with ample fodder for conventional wars, genocidal warfare, and cases in which such conscripts may become either perpetrators or victims.” His article traces the history of penal battalions, demonstrates “the evolution of Wagner as a significant force in global politics and conflict,” and — ultimately — suggests that “prosecution, prevention, or intervention will become even more difficult than it already is for institutions of international law.

April 24th, is the day that the entire world, Armenians, and those who stand for humanity, reflect on the memories of those who perished in the 1915 Armenian Genocide.

We urge the Armenian government to remember the “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.”

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

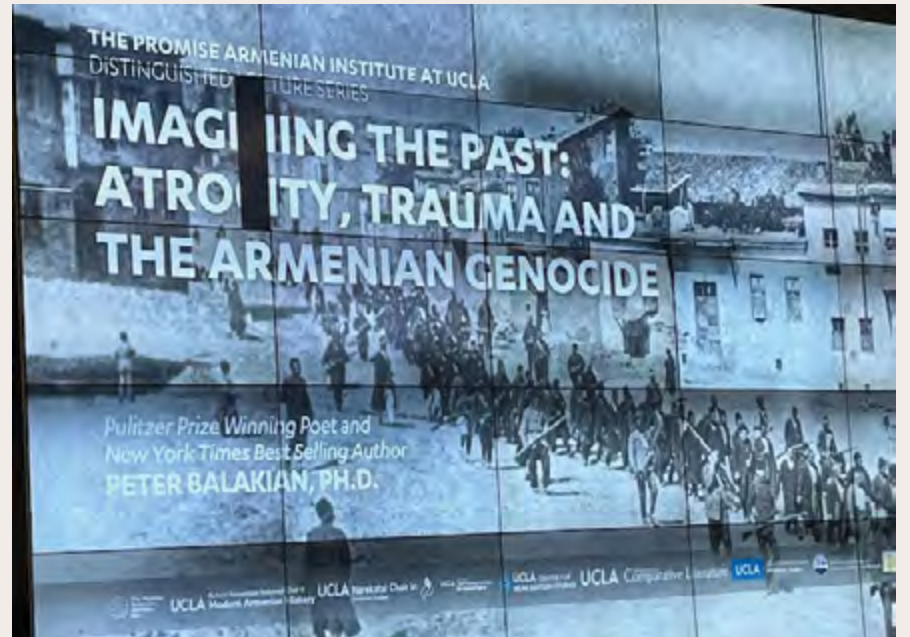
Clause number two of the convention above emphasizes the intent to destroy in part. Numbers killed, do not make a mass atrocity into a genocide

## Balakian Gives West Coast Readings, Discusses Impact of Genocide on His Work

WESTWOOD, Calif. — On April 16, 18, and 23, Pulitzer Prize winning poet Peter Balakian read at Claremont McKenna College, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and Fresno State respectively.

His reading and autobiographical talk “Imagining the Past: Atrocity, Trauma, and the Armenian Genocide” — given in conjunction with the commemorative events for April 24 — focused on the impact of the Armenian past on his work.

Balakian discussed how he has worked through filaments of Armenian history to create his particular language and modes of representation. He emphasized that he writes about all the things poets write about: daily life, love, the body, nature, culture, war, politics, but that he has also been affected by the pull of history. His



Prof. Barlow Der Mgrdechian, left, and Peter Balakian in Fresno

lecture and reading explored how his work has moved across generations in writing both poetry and memoir.

He reflected on how a past historical event can be transformed by the literary imagination in the American literary tradition and cultural present. He also discussed how various family figures and ancestors have provided a grounding for his work. He discussed the impact of his great-great uncle Krikoris Balakian (a bishop in the Armenian Church), who was one of the 250 cultural leaders arrested on April 24, 1915 at the onset of the Genocide, and his grandmother Nafina Aroosian who was a survivor along

with her two young daughters, enduring a harrowing death march into the Syrian desert.

At Claremont McKenna College Balakian was hosted by Professor of History and Holocaust Studies Wendy Lower and Director of the Mgrublian Center For Human Rights. At UCLA he was hosted by Prof. Ann Karagosian, director of the Armenian Promise Institute and at Fresno State University he was hosted by Prof. Barlow Der Mgrdechian, and Dean of the College of Education, Professor Sergio LaPorta. The lectures were followed by robust question and answer sessions and book signings.