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San Lazzaro celebrates Mekhitar: a Divine Liturgy for the 350th anniversary of the Abbot's birth, on the day of his arrival on the island



The Divine Liturgy in the church on the Island of San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Venice — 8 September 2026

Venice, 8 September 2026 — On the Island of San Lazzaro degli Armeni, in Venice, a **Divine Liturgy** was held dedicated to the 350th anniversary of the birth of **Abbot Mekhitar of Sebaste**, founder of the Mekhitarist Congregation. The celebration fell on a date of deep symbolic value: it was precisely on **8 September 1717** that Mekhitar and his brethren made their official entrance onto the island, granted by the Serenissima Republic of Venice. Since then, for over three centuries, San Lazzaro has preserved one of the deepest spiritual and cultural bonds between Europe and the Armenian people.

The celebration was enriched by the performances of the **Saghmosergu** and **Geghard** choirs, among the most distinguished ensembles of the Armenian sacred choral tradition, whose participation was supported by the **Karapetyan Foundation**. Attending the Liturgy were **H.E. the Prefect of Venice, Darco Pellos**, and **Gagik Sarucanian**, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Venice, together with other authorities and representatives of the Armenian community.

Who was Abbot Mekhitar

Born in Sebaste (present-day Sivas, in Anatolia) on 7 February 1676, Mekhitar — whose name in Armenian means "consoler" — founded in 1700 the Congregation that would later bear his name. Settling on San Lazzaro, he made it one of the cornerstones of the Armenian cultural revival: he launched intense publishing activity, compiled the first Dictionary of the Armenian language — thanks to which Armenian became the sixth language in the world to have a modern dictionary — and preserved an extraordinary collection of manuscripts. It was on this very island that the first flag of the independent Armenian State would later be designed.

CCIAM's support — The Center for Cooperation and Development between Italy and Armenia (CCIAM) supported and accompanied the initiative, in the conviction that one cannot truly understand Armenia — nor build solid and lasting relations with it — without knowing its history and culture.

*«To know Armenia means first of all to know its soul. San Lazzaro is the place where this soul has found a home in Venice for over three hundred years: here the language, the books and the memory of an entire people were preserved and handed down when elsewhere they risked being lost. For CCIAM, supporting a celebration like this is a natural and dutiful gesture: we are convinced that culture is the foundation on which every authentic collaboration between two peoples rests. There are no solid economic bridges without a deep and respectful knowledge of the other, of its history and its identity», said **Ferdinando Pelazzo**, President of CCIAM.*

*«The sacred music of our choirs tells of a millennia-old identity that has crossed the centuries. It is deeply moving to hear it resound in Venice, the city that welcomed and valued our culture, offering it a home», commented **Gohar Ghumashyan**, Armenian Businessmen Association.*

*«The two days in Venice ideally united economy and spirituality. After the business forum on 7 September, this Divine Liturgy at San Lazzaro reminds us that relations between Italy and Armenia are founded on a shared history spanning centuries: a common heritage of values, culture and friendship that we wish to continue to cultivate», underlined **Stefano Maggi**, Secretary General of CCIAM.*

The Divine Liturgy ideally concluded the two days in Venice dedicated to Italy-Armenia relations, following the **«Discover Armenia»** economic forum held the previous day at the Venice Rovigo Chamber of Commerce. In the coming days the Armenian delegation continues its institutional tour towards **Rome**. CCIAM is also planning a **business mission to Armenia** for a group of Italian companies, with the aim of turning the contacts made in Venice into concrete opportunities for collaboration.

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ABOUT CCIAM

The **Center for Cooperation and Development between Italy and Armenia (CCIAM)** is the organisation dedicated to promoting and facilitating economic, commercial and cultural relations between Italy and Armenia, through events, business missions, B2B meetings and networking activities.

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