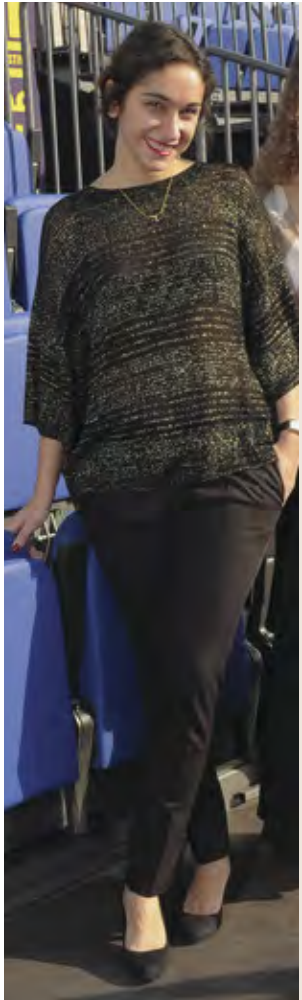


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Exile and Waiting Transformed into Film Through the Work of Tamara Stepanyan

PARIS - Filmmaker Tamara Stepanyan is a true representative of the new generation of diasporan Armenians. Born in Soviet Armenia, and speaking Eastern Armenian and Russian, she moved with her family to Beirut, Lebanon when 11 years old after the breakup of the Soviet Union. She grew up and lived there for 20 years, learning Arabic, Western Armenian, and English. Then she moved to France and learned French. Naturally her experiences shaped her worldview and films.

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

Stepanyan said, "I think exile takes a lot from us, but at the same time it gives a lot. It is a richness. I think I am very rich for having lived all this pain of living in exile." She left her grandparents, school and friends in Armenia to adapt to a very different environment. She went to an Armenian school called the Yeghishe Manougian College, in Dbayyeh (Metn district) to the east of Beirut.

see STEPANYAN, page 16

Turkey Summons Dutch Chargé D'Affaires Over Genocide Motions

AMSTERDAM and ANKARA (Combined Sources) - Turkey summoned the Dutch chargé d'affaires to Ankara on Saturday, February 17, to express its unhappiness with a pair of proposed bills that would see the Netherlands recognize as genocide the 1915 killing of as many as 1.5 million Armenians.

The four Dutch governing parties have expressed support for two proposals in the lower house of parliament by the conservative Christian Union party which are due to be debated in the upper house in the coming weeks. One recognizes the deaths as genocide and a second calls for a Dutch official to attend the country's formal genocide remembrance day on April 24.



MP Joël Voordewind

A majority of MPs backed a campaign by Christian Union MP Joël Voordewind.

The bills risk further souring relations between Turkey and the Netherlands.

The relationship between the Netherlands and Turkey is already tense, since the Netherlands refused Turkish ministers access to the country to campaign for a 2017 referendum that gave President Tayyip Erdogan more power.

Talks to repair relations between the two countries have broken down and the Netherlands on February 5 officially recalled its ambassador to the country.

Nearly a dozen other EU countries have passed similar resolutions to that proposed in the Netherlands. French lawmakers officially recognized the Armenian deaths as genocide in 2001.

Voordewind said the Netherlands should take a stand as the home of the institutions of international law in The Hague. "We are acknowledging history," he said. "That is not the same thing as casting aspersions as Turkey has done towards the Netherlands."

see SUMMONS, page 5

'The Last Inhabitant' Comes to New Jersey

By Taleen Babayan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

FAIR LAWN, N.J. - The East Coast premiere of filmmaker Jivan Avetisyan's "The Last Inhabitant," based on a true story set in a Nagorno-Karabakh village, was screened on Friday, February 16, at St. Leon Armenian Church.

With original music by Serj Tankian, the film, which explores the friendship between an Armenian and Azeri man who deal with their own family problems during the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, won the Best Feature award at the Scandinavian International Film Festival



Director Jivan Avetisyan and Nareg Hartounian

and was screened at the Venice International Film Festival.

Ara Araz, who organized the event see SCREENING, page 10

War of Words Over Karabakh

MUNICH, Germany (RFE/RL) - A minor kerfuffle broke out between Armenia's president and an Azerbaijani diplomat during a panel discussion at a high-profile security conference in Germany on February 17 as the two men traded accusations over Azerbaijan's breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The sharp words came during a Munich Security Conference event focusing on nations "in-between Russia and Europe" that featured Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip, EU enlargement commissioner Johannes Hahn, and Russian lawmaker Konstantin Kosachyov.

When the panel moved to questions from the audience, a first secretary at the Azerbaijani Embassy in Berlin suggested to Sargsyan that Armenia could have played a role in regional energy and transport projects if not for the standoff

"IF THERE WAS NO POLICY OF ETHNIC CLEANSING OF ARMENIA AGAINST AZERBAIJAN, THEN PROBABLY TODAY, ARMENIA COULD HAVE BENEFITTED FROM THOSE [ENERGY] PROJECTS"

SADI JAFAROV

FIRST SECRETARY, AZERBAIJANI EMBASSY, BERLIN

Karabakh by Armenia. As Jafarov packed both commentary and questions into his turn at the mic, the host of the panel - Ian Bremmer, founder of the Eurasia Group political risk consultancy - intervened in an effort to let Sargsyan reply. "We don't have time," Bremmer said, though Jafarov managed to finish his question.

see BERLIN, page 5

over Nagorno-Karabakh.

"If there was no policy of ethnic cleansing of Armenia against Azerbaijan, then probably today, Armenia could have benefitted from those projects," said the diplomat, Sadi Jafarov, invoking an accusation that Baku frequently levels at Yerevan.

Jafarov also denounced what he called the "occupation" of Nagorno-

NEWS IN BRIEF

Sargsyan Marks 30th Anniversary of Karabakh Movement

YEREVAN (Armenpress) - President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan issued a message on Artsakh Revival Day and the 30th anniversary of the Karabakh Movement, on February 20.

In his speech, Sargsyan congratulated the peoples of Armenia and Karabakh.

"On February 20, 1988 the extraordinary sitting of the regional council of Nagorno Karabakh adopted a decision which expressed the will of the Artsakh people to free self-determination. Three decades ago all Armenians joined Artsakh's fair demand and fight. Today we celebrate the 30th anniversary of this historic turning event which was declared by the Republic of Artsakh as the Artsakh Revival Day."

"February 20, 1988 was the moment of unity, determination and national awakening of the Armenian people. Azerbaijan responded to the peaceful and legal steps of our people by massacres organized in Sumgait and other places. ... We were forced to wage war. The war initiators were confident that they have a great advantage, by eliminating Armenians and depopulating Artsakh, they will close the Karabakh issue quickly and permanently. From the distance of three decades today we can confidently state that the Karabakh Movement saved hundreds of thousands of lives. The Armenians of Artsakh, having the support of all Armenians, managed to overcome this difficult experience with honor."

He continued, "We unconditionally respect the fundamental human rights because for the Armenian people freedom and human dignity are absolute values. Long live the Republic of Armenia! Long live the Republic of Artsakh!"

Macron, Trudeau to Participate at Francophonie Summit

YEREVAN (Armenpress) - The final list of participants of the La Francophonie Summit in Yerevan is not complete yet, Deputy Foreign Minister Shavarsh Kocharyan told reporters on February 20. But, he added, "The participation of the leaders of two very important Francophone countries - France and Canada - is certain."

In a January 24 interview with *L'Express*, President Serzh Sargsyan said that as a result of the summit "we will be able to present Armenia to the whole world. We will do our best for it to have great success. Take into consideration that almost half of the world's states will be in Yerevan, mainly at the level of heads of state and heads of government," the president said when asked what significance the summit will have for Armenia.

The summit is scheduled to take place in October in Yerevan.

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ARMENIA

News From Armenia

Armenian Military Delegation Departs for Moscow

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Major General Tiran Khachatryan, deputy Chief of Staff of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Armenia, head of the tactical department of the general staff, departed to Moscow last week, the defense ministry said.

During the visit the Armenian delegation will participate in the negotiations on preparations for the upcoming Search, Partnership and Indestructible Brotherhood military exercises within the framework of the February 19-22 Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Combat Brotherhood 2018 tactical strategic joint drills. The delegation will also participate in the discussions on the 2019 joint readiness plan of CSTO bodies and the list of 2025 joint actions.

Sargsyan Hosts Members Of Supreme Spiritual Council

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan on February 20 at the Presidential Palace hosted the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, the highest governing body of the Armenian Apostolic Church, whose members are taking part in the session of the Supreme Spiritual Council in the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin February 20 to 23.

The President of the Council is Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and the chairmen are the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Istanbul.

Sargsyan welcomed the members and highlighted the importance of the decisions of the council.

“I always remember that the Armenian Apostolic Church is the oldest ever-existing and constantly operating structure in the Armenian reality and during this period the Armenian Apostolic Church just had an irreplaceable contribution in all spheres of our people’s life. Having such an experience, of course, I am convinced that you always take steps that are perceivable and acceptable for our people. I am confident you see that the world is rapidly developing, and during this period there are also opportunities in line with challenges. Of course, in order to be able to use these opportunities for the benefit of our state and people, we need to counter those challenges. I am sure the steps taken by you are directed for this purpose.”

The catholicos presented the issues that will be discussed at the first session of the Supreme Spiritual Council this year.

French-Armenian Filmmaker Working on Artsakh Project

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – French-Armenian filmmaker Arnaud Khayadjanian, whose film, “Stony Paths,” was named as the best documentary in the Armenian Panorama competition of the 13th Gold Apricot International Film Festival, is going to shoot a movie about Artsakh.

In an interview, Khayadjanian said he hopes to present the film to the public until the end of 2019.

“Artsakh’ is a feature film about love, war and freedom. At the moment I’m looking for funding in Armenia and France. Last year, I had the honor to make a documentary about people of Artsakh. I was so fascinated by the bravery and the cheerfulness of people. Despite their unstable situation and the trauma of the past they are standing proudly. I was also very impressed by the dynamism and modern mind of people from all generations,” he said.

The film will tell the stories of several characters, and by this choice, the filmmaker says he can talk about several topics solidarity, humanism, patriotism, friendship, mourning and cultural heritage.

Khayadjanian was born in 1987 in Valence, France. In 2014, Khayadjanian adapted a French play by Laura Desprein into a short film entitled “Bad Girl,” which has been viewed 1.3 million times. The film was shown in 23 international festivals. Last summer, he directed “We Are Our Mountains.”

Armenia, Russia Hail Soaring Bilateral Trade

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan and a visiting Russian government member praised on Tuesday, February 20, a further sizable increase in Russian-Armenian trade which reached a new high last year, according to official statistics.

Armenian government data show bilateral trade rising by just over 26 percent to \$1.7 billion in 2017 on the back of an almost 45 percent surge in Armenian exports to Russia. The latter thus remained the South Caucasus state’s leading trading partner.

Karapetyan cited these figures at the start of a regular session in Yerevan of a Russian-Armenian intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation. He chaired it together with Russian Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov.

Sokolov also noted the record-high amount of Russian-Armenian trade recorded in 2017. “We are happy that the volume of shipments of Armenian

products to the Russian is rapidly growing,” he said in his opening remarks publicized by Karapetyan’s press office.

Russian-Armenian trade plummeted in 2015 following a sharp depreciation of the Russian ruble which hit Armenian exporters hard. But with the Russian currency subsequently rallying against the U.S. dollar and the euro, Armenian exports to Russia soared by 51.5 percent in 2016.

Sokolov said that Armenia’s membership in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is a key reason for the sharp gains recorded in 2016 and 2017. Tariff-free access to the markets in Russia and other ex-Soviet states making up the trade bloc is also making Armenia more attractive to foreign investors, he said.

Karapetyan stressed in that regard that Armenia also enjoys preferential trade regimes with the European Union and the United States and that

Russian investors should capitalize on that. He also called for Russian investments in a free economic zone which was set up on the Armenian-Iranian border in December.

“We are ready to create comfortable conditions for Russian capital in Armenia,” added the prime minister.

Karapetyan visited Moscow as recently as on February 16-17. The Armenian government said ahead of his visit said he will meet with “Armenian and Russian business circles” to discuss with them “ongoing and prospective projects.” The government has issued no further statements on the trip.

The Armenian premier has been strongly backed by Russia’s wealthiest ethnic Armenian businessman, Samvel Karapetyan (no relation), ever since he took office in September 2016. The billionaire tycoon has pledged to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in Armenia’s energy sector.

UWC Students Will Propose New Humanitarian Projects

DILIJAN, Armenia – Applications for the 2018 Aurora Humanitarian Project for UWC Schools and Colleges are now being accepted. The project, a partnership between the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and UWC (United World Colleges), encourages UWC students to design projects aimed at creating positive change in communities surrounding UWC schools and colleges. It is open to all 17 UWC schools and colleges worldwide. The winning group will be awarded a \$4,000-grant toward their project’s implementation.

“We are committed to motivating students to care about the communities in which they live and try to bring positive change around them,” said Veronika Zonabend, founder of UWC in Dilijan, Armenia. “Our aim is not only to alert UWC students and alumni to the urgency of specific humanitarian issues but to motivate them to go deeper, take responsibility, and propose solutions through innovative and economically, socially and environmentally sustainable approaches.”

This is the second year of the Aurora Humanitarian Project for UWC Schools and Colleges (AHP). Fifteen of the then 16 UWC schools and colleges participated in the first year. The project proposals addressed a broad and diverse range of humanitarian issues identified near their schools and colleges and often proposed close collaborations with local communities.

“The Aurora Humanitarian Project for UWC Schools and Colleges challenges UWC’s diverse student body to think about concrete ways to make positive, meaningful and sustainable change in the world,” said UWC International’s Executive Director Jens Waltermann. “It encourages our students to put the UWC mission for peace and sustainability into concrete action through selfless leadership, initiative and teamwork - and gives them the chance to learn from some of the most well-regarded humanitarians.”

After a highly competitive selection process, three teams were chosen as finalists and UWC Robert Bosch College was announced as the winning team in 2017 with their DoGood project addressing the refugee crisis. Thanks to donations from anonymous

donors, the two other finalists, Waterford Kamhlaba UWC (BraveGirl project) and UWC Mahindra College (Kriya Iron project), also received \$4,000 each towards the further devel-

opment of their respective projects. “Being AHP finalists was a truly incredible experience - very few young people can say that they discussed humanitarian issues such as the refugee crisis and education with some of the most successful business owners in the world. The Aurora Prize itself is far more than the normal humanitarian award,” said Ravindra, a team member from UWC Robert Bosch College.



Finalists and Selection Committee members of 2017 Aurora Humanitarian Project for UWC at the Aurora Dialogues. May 27, 2017, UWC Dilijan, Armenia.

opment of their respective projects.

“I think the most important thing I could say is that AHP encouraged us to put more thought into BraveGirl, to create a structure and a timeline, and most importantly to visualize the impact it could have. It’s the vision of what BraveGirl could become that inspired all our efforts, and I think - I hope - that through AHP more people will realize it’s possible to turn their visions into reality,” said Ike, a member of the BraveGirl team from Waterford Kamhlaba UWC SA.

“I would like to encourage students to apply for AHP as the chance for learning through the entire process are incredible. I can honestly say that as an

educator with over 20 years of working experience in various fields, the AHP is probably the best project that I have ever had the privilege of being a part of. It made a massive impact on me and

it is something that I will always cherish,” said Kate Doyle, faculty advisor to the BraveGirl from Waterford Kamhlaba UWC SA. Proposed projects must address a concrete humanitarian concern identified by the project team which is relevant to the UWC school or college’s geographic location and propose concrete steps to reduce it in or eliminate it. Projects must be student-initiated and student-led. Each UWC school or college can only nominate one project to the AHP.

The three short-listed finalists will be selected based on their creativity, sustainability, quality of research, impact, commitment, self-reflection and format. The finalist teams will have a chance to present their projects during the Aurora Prize Weekend on June 8-10 in Armenia. The winning project will be announced after the presentations and will be awarded USD \$4000 towards the further development and funding of the project.

Further information is available at www.auroraprize.com or UWC.org.



ARMENIA

Youth Center in Gyumri First of its Kind in Caucasus

GYUMRI, Armenia – The Youth House: Open Youth Center in Gyumri will be the newly established youth Center in Gyumri. Being the first of its kind in the Caucasus region, it will serve the young Gyumri community with the integrated, empowering and innovative framework of Open Youth Work. At the “Youth House”, young people between the age of 13-18 years old will enjoy tailor made activities that are free of charge. It will offer for example, English language classes, courses on media and computer literacy, guidance in study choice and specialization, and many more activities. Above all, the young people will be empowered to design their own initiatives and activities, and possibly even their own businesses. In the presence of professional youth workers, local and international volunteers, the young people will learn to enhance their self-esteem, to develop social skills and to promote further civic engagement.

The Gyumri Youth Initiative Center NGO (YIC), the author of the idea and concept of the Center, has secured the premises of the “Youth House” as the in-kind contribution of Gyumri municipality for 10 years. It is situated in one of the most deprived districts of Gyumri, in the middle of neighborhoods where many families still live in “domics,” metallic or wooden container homes without basic access to utilities and decent life conditions. In this neighborhood, and other neighborhoods in Gyumri, the legacy of the earthquake of 1988 is still very visible. Almost 30 years after this devastating event, young people with their families are still living in “temporary shelters”. Most of the “domic” districts are situated in the remote neighborhoods of Gyumri, far away from social services or social or recreational facilities.

Facing poverty and social exclusion on a daily basis, the young people have no hopes or aspirations about their future. The low quality of education, which an average Gyumri family can afford, curtails their chances even further. Consequently, it is inevitable that young people end up unemployed or in low-paid jobs, falling into a pattern of poverty.

There is a need to improve the quality of life of socially marginalised Gyumri youth. Therefore the YIC has undertaken the opening of the “Youth House”, to bridge the gap between the lack of a stable, supportive environment and personal development and non-formal learning possibilities. Once established, the center will target those young people of the remote neighborhoods who have weakened or severed family and social ties, spend most of their time on the streets and are inclined to show deviant behaviors.

Currently the project is supported by the Gyumri municipality (the premises, estimated worth \$25,000) and through the Strong Civil Society Organizations for Stronger Armenia program of the European Union (\$53,000). But the young people of Gyumri need even more support. The center needs an additional \$9,000 for co-financing the reconstruction and Center running costs in its first year.

Be part of the Youth House project, visit <https://www.generosity.com/community-fundraising/youth-house-open-youth-center-in-gyumri/x/17671534>.



Youth Center beneficiaries



A room inside the center, above left, and the neighborhood of the Youth House, above

Criminal Inquiry Launched into Yerevan Council Brawl

By Ruzana Stepanian

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Armenian law-enforcement authorities have formally launched a criminal investigation into last week’s violent clash between opposition and pro-government members of Yerevan’s municipal council.

The incident occurred during a session of the council chaired by Mayor Taron Markarian on February 13. Two female councilors affiliated with the opposition Yerkir Tsirani party were confronted by their pro-government colleagues when they tried to hand Markarian glass containers filled with sewage collected from a damaged sewer pipe in the city’s Nubarashen district. They called the foul-smelling substance a “gift” from Nubarashen residents.

The two sides scuffled and shouted insults at each other. Yerkir Tsirani’s Marina Khachatryan, slapped a male councilor representing the ruling Republican Party (HHK) after being jostled by him. The latter slapped her in response. Khachatryan and two other Yerkir Tsirani members, including the party leader Zaruhi Postanjian, were then physically forced to leave the council auditorium.

Postanjian sent a “crime report” to the Armenian police. The police also received a separate complaint from the municipal administration which blames the outspoken oppositionists for the violence.



Marina Khachatryan of the opposition Yerkir Tsirani party is confronted by pro-government members of Yerevan’s municipal assembly, 13 February 2018.

A police spokesman, Ashot Aharonian, said on Monday that a criminal case has been opened in connection with the incident under Criminal Code articles dealing with hooliganism and assault. He said the police have sent the case to another law-enforcement body, the Investigative Committee, for further investigation.

It was not immediately clear which side is risking prosecution for the high-profile incident

which was witnessed and filmed by many reporters.

In what appears to be a related development, officials from the Mayor’s Office on Monday stopped Postanjian from showing a group of journalists around the municipality building and an adjacent parking lot reserved for Yerevan officials and council members.

Postanjian and the two other councilors affil-

iated with her party have been unable to park their car there since the February 13 incident. The Yerkir Tsirani leader also said that the municipal administration is refusing to clean their room. She further demonstrated purported evidence of staffers playing cards in another room during their working ours.

Moments later, the head of Mayor Markarian’s press service, Artur Gevorgian, told reporters to leave the building. “No journalist has the right to enter the municipality building and move around it without our special permission, even if Mrs. Postanjian can escort you to the room allocated to her faction,” he said before telling police officers to usher them out.

Postanjian as well as Arayik Harutiunian of the Yelk alliance, a more moderate opposition group represented in the Yerevan council, accused Markarian of arbitrarily restricting media coverage of the municipal authorities.

“This is illegal because they thereby restrict the work of the city council,” Harutiunian told RFE/RL’s Armenian service (Azatutyun.am). He said Yelk has repeatedly appealed to the Markarian’s staff but has still not received any written rules of conduct for journalists or other citizens visiting the building.

The mayor, meanwhile, met with municipality lawyers and press officers later in the day to instruct them to propose ways of “regulating the work of media” in the building. It was not immediately clear what kind of restrictions he is planning to impose.



INTERNATIONAL

International News

EU to Provide 17M Euros To Armenia for Reforms

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Justice Minister Davit Harutyunyan on February 20 told those assembled at a press conference that human rights protection is a significant agenda issue in the Armenia-European Union cooperation.

“The 2017-2019 action plan under the national strategy of human rights protection was approved in 2017. The program was developed as a result of close cooperation with the civil society,” he said.

The minister said the EU will provide 17 million euros in assistance to Armenia to deal with five sectors having to do with human rights. During a period of five years, the fund will be used for “improvement of the electoral system, prevention of torture, gender equality, fight against discrimination and protection of children’s rights,” he said.

Putin, Erdogan Expected To Meet in Early April

MOSCOW (Armenpress) – Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan are expected to meet in early April in Turkey, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag said, RIA Novosti reported on February 20.

“The talks between Turkey, Russia and Iran on Syrian settlement continue. On March 14 a meeting with the participation of our foreign ministers will be held in Moscow. A trilateral meeting with the participation of Iran will be held in Astana on March 16”, the Turkish deputy PM said, adding that the meeting of Putin and Erdogan is planned to be held in early April in Turkey, but the exact date is still unknown. After that, as expected, Russia-Turkey-Iran summit on Syria will take place.

Armenian, Lebanese Presidents to Meet

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – At the invitation of Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, President of Lebanon Michel Aoun was scheduled to arrive in Armenia on an official visit on February 21, the Presidential Office told Armenpress.

During the visit the Lebanese President was scheduled to meet with the top leadership of Armenia – the President, the Parliament Speaker and the Prime Minister. Aoun was also to meet with Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. At the end of the Armenian-Lebanese highlevel talks at the Presidential Palace.

Transliterated Letters Demonstrate False Portrayal of Armenians

ISTANBUL (Armenpress) – As result of studying transliterated (Turkish written in Armenian letters) letters, Turkish historian Sukru Ilicak showed that the official Turkish historiography doesn’t reflect the true picture about Armenians who lived in the Ottoman Empire, Gazeteduvar reports.

Ilicak researched the family letters belonging to the Kojayan family from Kayseri. The letters were written in Turkish, but in Armenian letters. “The official Turkish historiography depicts Armenians as monsters with weapons in their hands who swore an oath to kill Turks, who were rising against the state. The official historiography says that Armenians are guilty for what happened to them. The study of these letters however, shows that this is false and that Armenians are real people in real life, they also get ill, love, hate, get concerned over collecting food supplies for the winter, make efforts for giving their children education and repaying debts,” he said.

Harutyun Kojayan and his son Karapet left for the US in 1912-1913 to work and later returned home. The Kojayans maintained correspondence with their family members back in their village. In 1915 the correspondence stopped, and it wasn’t until 1918 when they received a letter again, notifying them that their entire family has been massacred. The letters were discovered when the US-based descendants of the Kojayan family began to be interested in their roots.

Tillerson Is Trying to Defuse Tensions With Turkey, but the Rift May Be Too Deep

By Joshua Keating

ISTANBUL (Slate) – Both Barack Obama and Donald Trump have really wanted to get along with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. There was a time when Obama described his relationship with Erdogan as one of the closest and most trusting of any world leader, before rifts over Syria, Turkey’s drift toward authoritarianism, and other issues strained the relationship. Trump has continually lauded Erdogan as a friend, even congratulating the Turkish leader after Erdogan won a controversial referendum expanding his powers, even as overall US-Turkey relations have deteriorated sharply.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was in Ankara, Turkey, last week trying to repair relations that he admits have reached a “crisis point.” Tillerson met for 3½ hours with Erdogan on Thursday, February 15. In an unusual break with protocol, he wasn’t accompanied by an American translator nor note taker, with Turkey’s foreign minister serving as translator.

The biggest flashpoint at the moment is Syria, where Turkey is angered by US support for Kurdish fighters that it considers terrorists. Last month, Turkey launched a ground incursion into the border enclave of Afrin, Syria, to dislodge the Kurdish militia, the YPG, which it views as the Syrian branch of the PKK, the Kurdish militant group that’s been battling the Turkish government for decades.

Afrin is noncontiguous with the much larger area to the east controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces in cooperation with the US military. The US has worked closely with the SDF, the most effective fighting force against ISIS in Syria. American authorities have, unconvincingly, claimed that the Kurdish fighters in Afrin have no connection to their allies, even though most SDF commanders come from the YPG. The US has done little to interfere with Turkey’s Afrin incursion, but the problem is that Turkey has threatened to sweep east along the border to dislodge the Kurds from the town of Manbij, Syria, where US forces are also stationed. This could put US and Turkish troops in direct conflict. Erdogan has vowed that US troops that stand in Turkey’s way would receive an “Ottoman slap.”

The Turkish government proposed this week that the US and Turkey could jointly deploy forces in Manbij, as long as the YPG withdrew from the area. Tillerson said that joint working groups would be set up to address troop deployments.

This is something of a breakthrough, but the underlying issue remains: Turkey is unwilling to tolerate a semi-autonomous Kurdish region controlled by the YPG on its border, and the Pentagon is not going to stop cooperating with the one Syrian ally that can put up a formidable fight against ISIS. (The latest crisis started in January, when the US military announced American troops would be staying in areas liberated from ISIS to work with local forces – i.e., the Kurds, mainly – to establish a border security

force. Tillerson had to quickly dial back that announcement to placate Turkey, to the point that it’s not entirely clear what these troops will be doing now that the fighting against ISIS is starting to wrap up.)

Meanwhile, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is more than happy to watch his rivals, the Turks and the Kurds, fighting each other while the US is caught right in the middle.

It’s hard to see how this Syrian knot gets untangled, and it’s not even the only issue dividing the US and Turkey. Turkey continues to demand the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, the exiled cleric that Erdogan’s government blames for the 2016 coup attempt, and to criticize the trial of a Turkish banker accused of evading Iran sanctions. The US, meanwhile, is demanding that Turkey release U.S. citizens and government employees arrested as part of Erdogan’s wide-ranging crackdown since the coup. These include an American pastor whom the Turkish government appears to be using as a bargaining chip for Gülen. With Michael Flynn no longer available to whisk him away in the dead of night, the Gülen crisis also seems far from a resolution – the US government has found the evidence against the cleric unconvincing – and Erdogan does not seem likely to let the issue go.

The mistrust runs deep, and not just between the governments. A poll released by the Center for American Progress this week shows 83 percent of Turks expressing an unfavorable opinion of the United States. It’s going to take a lot more than a few meetings to bridge this divide.

Polish PM Seeks Dialogue with Israel on ‘Difficult History’

By Monika Scisłowska

WARSAW, Poland (AP) – Poland’s prime minister said Sunday, February 18, that dialogue with Israel about the Holocaust is necessary and would serve as a warning to prevent such “exceptionally terrifying” crimes from happening again.

Mateusz Morawiecki tweeted his thoughts after a telephone conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The call was prompted by a comment the Polish politician made that equated Polish collaborators in the Holocaust to alleged “Jewish perpetrators.”

The remark, given Saturday at the Munich Security Conference, reignited a weeks-long diplomatic dispute over Poland’s new law prohibiting some statements about the Holocaust. The law reflects the current Polish government’s approach to World War II history, which focuses on Poland’s suffering and heroism.

“Dialogue about this most difficult history is necessary, as a warning. We will conduct such dialogue with Israel,” Morawiecki wrote on Twitter.

Jewish leaders in Israel and elsewhere condemned Morawiecki’s comment as anti-Semitic. Sunday’s telephone conversation was the second one that Morawiecki and Netanyahu had in three weeks in connection to the new law.

Netanyahu’s office said he told Morawiecki that “a comparison between the activities of Poles and the activities of Jews during the

Holocaust is unfounded.” The two prime ministers agreed to work together to soothe the intense feelings in both their countries.

In a sign of the tension between the two nations, someone painted black swastikas, expletives and the word “murderer” on the entrance to Poland’s Embassy in Tel Aviv, Israeli police said Sunday. They have launched an investigation.

Morawiecki made the criticized comment as he was responding to an Israeli journalist’s question about the new Polish law, which criminalizes falsely blaming Poles for Holocaust crimes that were committed by Nazi Germany during its occupation of Poland. The journalist said his parents’ families were reported to the Nazis by Polish neighbors and asked if he would be charged if he had related the story in Poland.

“Of course it’s not going to be punishable, not going to be seen as criminal, to say that there were Polish perpetrators, as there were Jewish perpetrators, as there were Russian perpetrators, as there were Ukrainian, not only German perpetrators,” Morawiecki said in response.

The president of the World Jewish Congress, Ronald S. Lauder, issued a statement demanding an “immediate retraction and apology” from Poland. Lauder said that putting Jews in the same category as the other nationalities was “nothing short of an attempt to falsify history that rings of the very worst forms of anti-Semitism and Holocaust obfuscation.”

The spokeswoman for Poland’s conservative ruling party, Beata

Mazurek, insisted that Morawiecki “told the truth that is difficult for the Israeli side to accept.”

“There is no need to apologize for telling the truth,” Mazurek said.

In his tweets Sunday, Morawiecki sought to elaborate on what he was trying to say.

“The Holocaust, the genocide of Jews committed by Nazi Germans was an extremely terrifying crime. In these terrible times, there were individuals among all nations, who were ready to make gestures of the greatest mercy,” the Polish prime minister said.

“And unfortunately, there were also individuals, who by collaborating with Nazi Germans, showed the darkest side of human nature,” he wrote.

Earlier in the day, Morawiecki spokeswoman Joanna Kopcińska said the prime minister’s response to the journalist’s question was “by no means intended to deny the Holocaust.”

The spokesman for Polish President Andrzej Duda said the strong reaction in Israel “should not be ignored” but also attributed it partly to internal political tensions in that country. The spokesman, Krzysztof Lapinski, said Morawiecki’s reply was in Poland’s interest and meant to explain the new law.

Poland’s government says the law is needed to protect Poland from being slandered for crimes committed by Nazi Germans that took place during the 1939-45 occupation and to make the wartime suffering of Poles clear to the world. Poland lost six million citizens during the war, half of them Jews.



INTERNATIONAL

Turkey Releases Reporter for German Newspaper, Jails Three Others for Life

ISTANBUL (Reuters) — A German reporter detained in Turkey for more than a year was released from jail pending trial, even as six other journalists and newspaper employees were sentenced Friday to life imprisonment by a Turkish court.

Deniz Yucel, a correspondent for the German daily *Die Welt*, was detained as part of a Turkish government clampdown on civil society in the wake of a failed coup attempt in 2016.

The 44-year-old, who has both German and Turkish citizenship, was arrested in Istanbul on Feb. 14, 2017, on terrorism and propaganda charges that he denies. His case and that of five other German citizens still held in Turkey for

release “shows that talks aren’t futile.”

But she noted that others, including several Germans, remain in Turkish custody.

“We know that there are other, perhaps not so prominent, cases of people that are in Turkish jails and we hope they’ll enjoy a quick legal process and the rule of law too,” she said.

Turkey’s state-run news agency reported that a court ruled Yucel should be set free pending a trial, after approving a prosecutor’s indictment seeking between four and 18 years in prison for the journalist for “engaging in terrorist propaganda” and “inciting public hatred and enmity.”

Mathias Doepfner, the chairman of *Die Welt*’s publisher Axel Springer, said the company was



Deniz Yucel after being released from prison

what Germany considers political reasons badly soured relations between the two countries.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed his release Friday, saying she was happy for Yucel and his family “who had to endure a very difficult year of separation.”

A picture tweeted by lawyer Veysel Ok showed Yucel outside jail embracing his wife.

Germany’s foreign minister later told reporters that Yucel was on his way to an Istanbul airport and can “freely leave Turkey.”

Minister Sigmar Gabriel said the court appeared to have set no conditions on Yucel’s release, and insisted it didn’t result from any kind of deal between Berlin and Ankara.

“I can assure you there were no agreements, no quid pro quo and no — as some people call it — deal in this case,” Gabriel said.

Merkel, who met Thursday with Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, said the reporter’s

“endlessly relieved that Deniz Yucel can finally be free after more than a year in detention.” He added that the case underlined the importance of press freedom and the need to continually defend it.

Turkey’s official Anadolu Agency reported that a court in Istanbul sentenced six journalists and newspaper employees accused of involvement in a 2016 coup attempt to life prison terms Friday. They include Ahmet Altan, the former editor-in-chief of *Taraf* newspaper, his brother, journalist and academic Mehmet Altan, and prominent journalist Nazli Ilicak.

The journalists were accused of links to U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Turkey blames for the July 15, 2016, failed coup. Gulen denies the accusation.

The defendants were charged with attempts against Turkey’s constitution and membership in a terror organization.

Top German Lawmaker in Security Row with Turkey at Munich Meeting

BERLIN/MUNICH (Reuters) — A row broke out on Sunday, February 18, between a leading German politician of Turkish origin and Turkey’s delegation at the Munich Security Conference, with the lawmaker being given police protection after what he said was a tense encounter with Turkish bodyguards.

Cem Ozdemir, co-leader of Germany’s ecologist Greens until late last month and a critic of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said he was given protection at the conference after police told him Turkish security, staying in the same hotel, had accused him of being a “terrorist.”

“(The police) told me there was a problem with Turkish security, that they had pointed out that a terrorist, or a member of a terrorist organization, was staying (in the hotel) — so me,” Ozdemir told reporters after returning to Berlin.

He said that when he checked into his Munich hotel on Friday, Turkish bodyguards had cast nervous looks and pointed at him. On Saturday morning, a group of officers from the Bavarian police were outside his door to protect him, he said.

Munich police said in a statement they gave protection to a number of people at the conference, including Ozdemir, but could not confirm what Turkish delegates may have said about him.

Welt am Sonntag newspaper reported that the Turkish delegation to the conference was staying at the same hotel as Ozdemir.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu adamantly denied that Ozdemir had been targeted in any way, and accused the former leader of the environmental Greens party of trying to disrupt German-Turkish relations.

“This is not true. It’s fabricated,” Cavusoglu told reporters on the sidelines of the annual conference. “This is outrageous.”

He said he had checked with Turkish security whether anyone had been identified as a possible terrorist, adding: “They said, ‘no, it’s not true.’”

Cavusoglu said Ozdemir had played up the issue because he was “losing ground” at home, adding: “I think that’s why he did it — to be more visible, to (get) some attention.”

The episode came after a Turkish court freed a German-Turkish journalist on Friday pending trial after indicting him for alleged security offences — a move which promised to lead to an easing of tensions between the NATO allies.

Ozdemir last year called Erdogan “a hostage-taker” after Ankara detained two further German citizens, taking the total then to 12.

Greens lawmaker Claudia Roth told Reuters: “It is clear what the problem in Turkey is, and that is that anyone who dares to criticize Erdogan’s politics is immediately branded a terrorist. If Cem Ozdemir is a terrorist, then I am probably one as well.”



Cem Ozdemir

War of Words over Karabakh

BERLIN, from page 1

Sargsyan thanked Jafarov for the question before saying that Azerbaijani leadership needed to “sober up” and “give up on their unrealistic expectations” concerning Nagorno-Karabakh.

“You want to live freely. I assure you, the people of Karabakh want to live freely, too,” Sargsyan said. “They want to live in their historical land.”

He defended a 1991 referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh to secede from Azerbaijan as a “civilized” and legitimate expression of popular will, adding that no one can “break the will of the Armenian people.”

During a speech at the UN General Assembly in September, Sargsyan accused Azerbaijan of committing “a number of war crimes” against civilians and “prisoners of war” in 2016.

Days prior to this incident, Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev again publicly declared that Yerevan and other parts of Armenia are “historic Azerbaijani lands,” but was criticized by Russian officials.

Aliyev pledged to “return Azerbaijanis” to

Yerevan, Armenia’s southeastern Syunik province and the area around Lake Sevan when he addressed a pre-election congress of his Yeni Azerbaijan party on Thursday. That, he said, is a “strategic goal” of his regime.

Armenia condemned the statement, with President Serzh Sargsyan saying it shows that Baku is not committed to a compromise solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

“Reports about Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s speech at a congress of the ruling party have certainly been seen in Moscow,” the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said on Thursday, February 15. “We are well aware that Azerbaijan’s relations with neighboring Armenia are extremely tense. The comment in question will clearly not help to reduce the tensions.”

The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry rejected the Russian criticism on Friday. A ministry spokesman, Hikmet Hajiyev, said it runs count to Russia’s “strategic partnership” with Azerbaijan.

Hajiyev was quoted by Azerbaijani media saying that Aliyev did not lay any territorial claims to Armenia and only spoke of an even-

tual “return of Azerbaijanis to their historical lands.”

Aliyev has repeatedly made similar statements in the past. In 2014, for instance, he stated that Baku will eventually gain control of not only Karabakh but also parts of the “fascist” Armenian state which he said had been created on “historic Azerbaijani lands.”

The Russian, US and French mediators may have referred to the Azerbaijani leader’s latest claim when they urged the parties to the Karabakh conflict to avoid “inflammatory statements” after wrapping up their latest regional tour on February 11.

Aliyev will be seeking a fourth term in office in a snap presidential election slated for April 11. The ballot will be held two days after Sargsyan completes his second and final presidential term. Sargsyan is tipped to become prime minister immediately after Armenia is transformed into a parliamentary republic later in April.

Aliyev and Sargsyan pledged to intensify the Karabakh peace process when they last met in Geneva in October. Their foreign ministers held follow-up talks in December and January.

Turkey Summons Dutch Chargé D’Affaires

SUMMONS, from page 1

The proposals by the conservative Christian Union Party are due to be debated in parliament in the coming weeks.

(Reports from Dutchnews.nl and Reuters were used in this story.)



Community News

Philadelphia Celebration To Honor Armenian Assembly Trustees Peter And Irene Vosbikian

WASHINGTON - The Armenian Assembly of America has announced an evening of celebration in honor of two of its guiding figures, Peter and Irene Vosbikian on Saturday, April 28, at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. The evening's entertainment will feature Kevork Artinian and his Band.

Peter Vosbikian was on the Board of Directors from 2000 to 2006 and served as chairman in 2002 and 2003. He was on the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee from 2007 through 2009. During his Chairmanship, Vosbikian encouraged more delegations of public policy makers and mission trips to visit Armenia and Artsakh, especially for young Armenian Americans. He was motivated to expand the Assembly's government relations team and increase participation at advocacy conferences to build a stronger, better-informed and active grassroots network.

"Having served alongside Peter on the Assembly's Board, we are especially proud to honor Peter and his wife Irene for their life-time commitment to the Armenian people. The Assembly is fortunate to have had the benefit of their passion, dedication, and generosity throughout the years," Assembly Co-Chairs Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian stated. "We look forward to honoring this wonderful couple and family in Philadelphia later this year," they added.

Peter and Irene are both avid philanthropists, and are strong supporters of the Armenian Sisters Academy



Peter and Irene Vosbikian

in Radnor, PA, located in a suburb of Philadelphia.

Members of the organizing committee include Assembly Board Members Alex Karapetian and Bianka Kadian Dodov, and Celeste Ayjian, Jake Der Hagopian and Silva Santerian.

"We look forward to reconnecting with the Philadelphia community, as well as throughout the tri-state area and beyond. As an Armenian Assembly intern alumnus, I am excited to gather everyone for an entertaining evening where we can enjoy the accomplishments of the Assembly. It is an honor to work alongside such a great group of people on the Host Committee for what promises to be an unforgettable night," Karapetian said.

To learn more about the Philadelphia Celebration, visit the Armenian Assembly of America Facebook Page.



Detroit Armenian musicians donated their time to the Nor Keghi fundraiser.

Kef Time Keghi III Benefits Kindergarten In Nor Keghi, Armenia

DETROIT - A project to benefit school children in Nor Keghi, Armenia was launched just days after four years of spirited community work to fund classroom renovations achieved this past December by the Nor Keghi Association, an organization of Detroit Armenians who trace their roots to the old Keghi province in Turkish occupied Western Armenia.

By Mitch Kehetian

The project's successful funding goal was topped at Kef Time Keghi III as more than 300 Armenians dined on the legendary staple *Pagharch* grain meal *Keghetzis* in the ancestral homeland survived on during the freezing winter months that swept through the mountainous Keghi region.

An elated Richard Norsigian, president of the Nor Keghi Association, said "We topped our fund-raising goal because the *Keghetzi* community and friends from all four Metro Detroit Armenian Churches as well as compatriots from throughout the United States joined our effort," adding "the association's board remained dedicated to achieve success - and we did."

The attending clergy from the four Churches opened the evening program with a prayer of blessing for the project's success.

The initial project was to renovate the multipurpose room at the Arakelyan Kindergarten in Nor Keghi, Armenia, for use by the students as well as by the parents and community for various activities. The renovation also includes the



The Pagharch is brought into the salon.

immediate order of new auditorium-type chairs, audiovisual equipment, and a piano. The renovated multipurpose room will serve the needs of the current 30 students and the 30 additional kindergarten-age children now waiting for enrollment.

Norsigian visited Nor Keghi last fall to confer with local and state officials on the needs for the school improvements. He said other improvements in the project also include hallways, doors and stair-

well repairs.

In addition, the Nor Keghi Association's project will be monitored until its completion by the Paros Foundation, which is headquartered in Berkeley, Calif., and maintains field offices in Armenia.

Norsigian also praised local and state officials in Armenia for welcoming the support of the project by "Armenians with a DNA link to historic Keghi and now embracing Nor Keghi." The naming of Nor Keghi formally known as Pazmavan was proclaimed on February 12, 1962.

As Kef Time Keghi III was winding down after an evening of singing and dancing, the 28 Detroit Armenian musicians who had donated their services and had been taking turns to provide music throughout the night at St. John Armenian Church Cultural Hall all took to the stage together to put on a musical show that rocked the hall as throngs of young celebrants cheered while taking pictures with their cell phones.

see KEGHI, page 7

Nick Pittman, Peace Corps Volunteer in Armenia, Speaks at NAASR

By Judith Saryan

BELMONT, Mass. - It wasn't just the Armenian delicacies Nick Pittman tasted at his friend Laura Zarougian's house while growing up in Cambridge that led him to consider Armenia for his Peace Corps service, but they definitely came to mind. It was also the challenge of learning a new language and alphabet and discovering a new part of the world, as he explained in his talk, "Grassroots Development in Rural Armenia: Challenges, opportunities, and Lessons Learned," as part of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues, held at NAASR on January 18.

Most people don't realize that Peace Corps volunteers can now express a preference for where they want to serve and apply for an opening. A graduate in economics from Reed College, Pittman arrived in Armenia in spring



Nick Pittman at NAASR

2016 and jumped into intense language and work training.

After a stint in Sarnaghpyur, he settled in Margahovit in Lori Province in northern Armenia as a community and youth development volunteer and worked closely with a small grassroots NGO that focuses on youth empowerment. There are a total of 70 Peace Corps Volunteers in Armenia, all of whom work in rural areas or secondary cities such as Gyumri and Vanadzor, Pittman explained. Roughly one third are youth and NGO development volunteers, and two thirds teach English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) volunteers.

After the mandatory three-month home stay after training, most volunteers move into their own housing and work with local partners to develop and implement projects. Peace Corps Volunteers are welcomed in rural Armenia since they increase opportunities for personal advancement by bringing valuable skills, such as English-language education and organizational training. Young people in these communities are eager to get a good education and participate in programs the Peace Corps offers in conjunction with local organizations. Many of these enrichment programs emphasize creative thinking, including the English-language writing contest held each year called "Write On."

Pittman emphasized that Armenia is rich in human resources although limited in financial or physical resources. The lack of paying jobs for villagers across the rural landscape often leads to seasonal migration to Russia.

see PITTMAN, page 7



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenia Fund USA Launches 'Generations Society'

PARAMUS, N.J. — Armenia Fund USA announced recently the launch of its new "Generations Society," an initiative with the dual objective of familiarizing the public with the projects of the non-profit humanitarian organization and to open its doors in an effort to create a community of collaboration and networking.

The first gathering, slated for Thursday, March 15, in its Paramus offices, will give

guests the opportunity to learn about Armenia Fund's projects in Armenia and Artsakh, while expanding their networks.

Geared toward all generations and ages, "Generations Society" will have both an afternoon session, which will serve coffee and stimulating conversation, and an evening get together featuring live music, wine and cheese.

"I want to welcome our community to

Armenia Fund USA's offices to engage in conversation, read from newspapers and books in our library and meet new friends or reconnect with old ones," said Executive Director Lisa Stepanian. "Our space here is not only to learn about Armenia Fund projects, but to also discuss current events and what's happening here in our community and in our homeland."

In recent years, Armenia Fund USA has spearheaded projects in the fields of medicine, education, housing and infrastructure. Among the accomplishments is the complete reconstruction of the Tchaikovsky Music School in Yerevan, where more than 600 students are enrolled to study music and earn a quality education; Martuni Regional Hospital, which provides medical care for over 25,000 Armenians in the Martuni Region of Artsakh; Arstakh Housing Project that accommodates shelter for the neediest families and the HyeBridge Telemedicine program,

which offers medical training seminars.

"We would like to educate the community about our mission and programs and invite them to join us, while also creating a chance for everyone to come together," said Stepanian.

During the "Generations Society" dates, which will be held every third Thursday of the month, community members will receive an overview of the work being done while connecting with the Armenia Fund USA network and the greater Armenian community in order to cultivate relationships to benefit their professional and personal lives.

The program will rotate monthly with a different agenda, ranging from lectures to cultural activities to mentoring programs, with its main focus on strengthening community both in the Diaspora and in the homeland.

The first session of "Generations Society" will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and the second from 7 to 9 p.m. at Armenia Fund USA offices, 594 Valley Health Plaza.

Jazz singer Mariam Vardanyan, a graduate of the Tchaikovsky Music School and Yerevan State Conservatory, will sing selections from her repertoire at the evening gathering on March 15. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-2SbojwHdM) No RSVP necessary. Free parking available.

For more information visit www.armeniafundusa.org/

-Taleen Babayan



Guests gather at the Armenia Fund USA offices in Paramus, NJ during a recent event.

Dr. Hayk Demoyan to Discuss Modern Identity and Memory Politics Of the Armenian World AT NAASR

BELMONT, Mass. — Dr. Hayk Demoyan will give a talk titled "Between Realism and Mythology: Modern Identity and Memory Politics of the Armenian World" on Thursday, March 8, at 7:30 p.m. at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) Center, 395 Concord Ave. The program is sponsored by the NAASR / Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues and is open to the public.

In this presentation Demoyan will analyze and discuss modern aspects of identity and memory politics in Post-Soviet Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora, taking particular note of the manipulation and instrumentalization of history and historical markers — old and new symbols, heroes, historical events, etc., — as well as their reinterpretation and (mis)representation.

For a long time such questions were considered as taboo within the official rhetoric of both the Armenian state and some diasporan circles, which tended to downplay existing antagonistic and opposing attitudes and to assert a kind of Armenia-Artsakh-Diaspora triple unity. In fact, in different diasporan circles there are contradictory views towards Armenia and its status as

'Homeland.' At the same time, the institutionalization of Artsakh as a separate political entity, contrary to the initial policies of unification and merging, as well as the development of parallel diasporas, create further challenges.

Demoyan is the director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in Yerevan, Armenia, a position he has held since 2006. In 2017-18 he is a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University. He is the author of 12 books, including *The Armenian Genocide: Front Page Coverage in the World Media* (2014, in Armenian, English, Russian, and French), *Foreign Policy of Turkey and Karabakh Conflict* (2013, in Russian), *Armenian Sport and Gymnastics in the Ottoman Empire* (2009, in Armenian) and *Western Media Coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in 1988-1990* (2008, in English), as well as some 40 academic articles.

For more information about this program, contact NAASR at hq@naasr.org.



Hayk Demoyan

Kef Time Keghi III Benefits Kindergarten in Nor Keghi

KEGHI, from page 6

In saluting the musicians who dedicated their participation, Norsigian said "The closing with all the musicians on stage and the cheering crowd easily topped any Super Bowl half time show. Abreek Detroit musicians. We thank you. The children of Nor Keghi thank you."

A review meeting to determine the Nor Keghi Association's future role in Armenia will be held at a later date by its Board.

Whatever that course of direction, the words of the legendary William Saroyan rang loud and clear at Kef Time Keghi III. In a salute to Armenians for their survival after the genocide, Saroyan etched an everlasting tribute in which he said ... "Go ahead, burn their homes and churches, send them into the hot burning desert to die but whenever two of them meet again see if they won't pray and sing again."

They did at Kef Time Keghi III.

Nick Pittman, Peace Corps Volunteer in Armenia, Speaks at NAASR

PITTMAN, from page 6

In less than a year, Pittman had mastered one of the biggest challenges — language acquisition. Today, he not only speaks Armenian very well, he reads poetry in Eastern Armenian and delights in humorous Armenian sayings. A popular one he shared with the audience was, "Don't die donkey, spring will come," which, depending on tone of voice, can mean what you'd expect, that there is no need to worry, or can mean the exact opposite, that something like the bus you are waiting for will never come.

Last June, Pittman was one of the leaders of a project called Border to Border, founded several years ago. Groups of volunteers, a mix of Peace Corps and local youth, hike across Armenia taking different routes and stopping along the way to teach classes focused on healthy living to youth.

He and his organization also initiated a four-day camp in Margahovit named GLAD, Girls Leadership and Development, focus-

ing on mental and emotional health for local girls. The curriculum included yoga, journaling, and seminars focused on team-building, business development and entrepreneurship, artistic and creative expression and environmental responsibility. An important phase of the project is follow up, which includes a monthly club for camp participants to review what they learned and check in with each other on their health, and a monthly seminar at which the participants share skills and practices from the camp with other village youth.

The Peace Corps has also developed programs targeted for boys including TOBE (Teaching Our Boys Excellence). The Internet has made communications much easier for remote villages and can now be used to teach organizational skills and collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs, he said.

Pittman inspired the audience, as was evident during the question-and-answer session, when several people asked about

opportunities to volunteer in Armenia. In addition to Peace Corps, he described many ways to volunteer, chief among them Armenia Volunteer Corps, which accepts people of all ages, and Birthright Armenia. He has also worked in Armenia with US-based nonprofits like the Armenia Tree Project. In addition, mentorship programs are springing up, including a new Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) program of cooperation between the Diaspora and Armenia called Bridges for CSOs.

The positive response to the talk at NAASR showed the importance of presentations like this, offering ways for the Peace Corps in Armenia to connect with the Diaspora and for the Diaspora to learn about connecting directly with Armenia.

To learn more about Pittman's experiences with Peace Corps in Armenia and to read more of his favorite Armenian sayings about donkeys, check out his blog at (<https://nickinarmenia.wordpress.com/>)



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenia Tree Project and Paros Foundation Launch Strategic Partnership in Rind Village

NEW YORK – An enthusiastic crowd of Armenia Tree Project (ATP) and Paros Foundation supporters gathered at the popular Almayass Restaurant in November to kick off a strategic partnership. The two organizations are teaming up to improve the primary school in Rind, a village in Armenia's southern wine region of Vayots Dzor.

"The central element of this new partnership is capitalizing on the strengths of the two organizations," explains ATP Executive Director Jeanmarie Papelian. "Paros has a

environmental education to the students and create new green spaces around the school for the benefit of the children."

The sold out benefit event in New York created a terrific environment for socializing and featured the beautiful voice of Hooshere, who performed and was one of the lead organizers. Guests were able to bid on several silent auction items that were donated to benefit the Rind school including items from Michael Aram, Eileen Karakashian, Tufenkian Artisan Carpets, Zorah Wines,



From left, Hooshere Bezdikian, event co-host, Jason Sohigian, ATP deputy director, and Anahid Ugurlyan, event co-host

proven expertise in renovating schools and creating a clean, healthy atmosphere for students to learn and grow. ATP will provide

World's First Wines and Simon Ardem.

The event was attended by ATP founder Carolyn Mugar and Paros founder Roger



From left, Anthony Barsamian, Ambassador of Armenia to the United Nations Zohrab Mnatsakanian, Carolyn Mugar, Roger Strauch and Peter Abajian

Strauch. "On behalf of the Paros Foundation and ATP, we would like to thank the organizing committee composed of Anahid Ugurlyan, Hooshere Bezdikian, Lisa Sarajian, and Nicole Vartanian for making this event such a huge success," emphasized Strauch. "We're excited about this partnership and hope this project is the first of many in Armenia. The hard work and dedication shown by our committee was instrumental in the success of the event and very much appreciated."

This project will bring about positive improvements for the more than 1,700 people that call Rind their home. Armenia's ambassador delivered a moving appeal, urging people to give the kids of Rind Village a chance to

excel. "Look at their faces. Look at their confidence," he exclaimed while pointing to a photo of them in classroom. "Let's support these organizations to give these kids the opportunity to do great things!"

As a result of the generous support of the guests, Paros will completely renovate and furnish the school's kitchen and cafeteria, which will allow the school to prepare hot meals for the children. ATP is planting more than 550 trees and shrubs at the site, and introducing its "Plant an Idea, Plant a Tree" environmental education curriculum at the school. The tree planting was initiated the day after the New York benefit event, with the remainder of the work scheduled for 2018.

The two organizations will report on the progress of this project as it proceeds in the coming months. To learn more or to support either organization, visit www.armeniatree.org or www.parosfoundation.org

OBITUARY

Felice Takakjian-Bedrossian Noted Pianist and Teacher

LIVERMORE, Calif. – Felice Takakjian-Bedrossian, concert pianist and pedagogue with a long and distinguished career, died peacefully on February 11 at age 91. Successful debuts at Weill Hall in 1949 and Town Hall in 1953 launched her on a concert career that took her through North America, Central America, Europe, and Japan under Columbia Artists. She served as Goodwill Ambassador to Germany in 1953 and to Japan in 1959, with her recitals

bachelor's degree in music education from New York University in 1948 and an Artist Diploma from New York College of Music in 1949. She served on the faculty of the New York College of Music from 1950-1960, of Syracuse University from 1960 to 1963, and of Molloy College from 1971-1980.

She was a champion of contemporary composers, and her premieres of piano works of the Armenian-American composer Alan Hovhaness earned critical acclaim. She also served as one of the organizers of the K h a c h a t u r i a n Competition in NY, which helped to launch the careers of distinguished, Armenian concert artists.

She married in 1960 and continued teaching privately in her studio in Freeport, Long Island until her relocation to California with her husband, Paul, in 2013. Her specialty was teaching piano pedagogy, and her legacy is felt and continued

by her many piano students.

She is survived by her husband, Paul, and son, Peter, of Livermore, CA.



and lecture programs broadcast over Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberation.

A native of Oceanside, NY, and graduate of Oceanside High School in 1944, she earned a

Giragosian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Rep. Sherman Secures Treasury Secretary Commitment To Pursue US-Armenia Double Tax Treaty

WASHINGTON – US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, during Congressional testimony earlier in February before the US House Financial Services Committee, agreed – in response to direct questioning by Representative Brad Sherman (D-CA) – to commit Treasury Department officials to pursue a new US-Armenia Double Tax Treaty, a long-overdue bilateral accord that will remove barriers to the growth of US-Armenia economic relations, reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).

Rep. Sherman was joined by Rep. David Valadao (R-CA) in collecting the Congressional signatures of their House colleagues on a letter to Secretary Mnuchin in support of the Tax Treaty. He referenced the legislators in his question to the Secretary, asking whether, in response to their calls to

action, the Treasury Department would dedicate 28 hours (the number of Congressional signatures collected to date) to negotiating this agreement. Secretary Mnuchin replied in the affirmative, noting: “Yes, I can commit the 28 hours.”

“We are grateful for Congressman Sherman’s policy expertise and persistence in securing the support of Secretary Mnuchin for a mutually-beneficial US-Armenia Double Tax Treaty,” said ANCA Chairman Raffi Hamparian. “We look forward to the Treasury Department moving forward with this accord, a long-term ANCA priority that will – by removing the threat of double taxation – eliminate a major barrier to the growth of the US-Armenia economic partnership.”

In the wake of the 2015 signing of the US-Armenia Trade and Investment

Framework Agreement (TIFA) in 2015, the ANCA has worked closely with a broad range of legislators to encourage the Department of Treasury to negotiate a new US-Armenia Double Tax Treaty. In September 2017, the ANCA joined with Paul Korian and Peklar Pilavjian, leading US investors in Yerevan’s Marriott hotel, for a series of Capitol Hill and State Department meetings making the case for an updated compact. Internationally renowned Tufenkian Artisan Carpets; Triada Studio, the Armenia-based creator of the Apple Design Award-winning Shadowmatic Game; and PicsArt, the Yerevan and San Francisco based makers of one of the most popular photo-editing, collage and drawing apps, are among the many firms urging the lifting of barriers to US-Armenia trade through the implementation

of a new double tax treaty.

A US-Armenia Double Tax Treaty would establish a clear legal framework for investors and individuals that have business activities in both jurisdictions, preventing double taxation and facilitating the expansion of economic relations. It would also help reinforce the friendship of the American and Armenian peoples, anchoring Armenia to the West, and providing Yerevan with greater strategic options and independence in dealing with regional powers.

The US has double tax treaties with many small countries, including Estonia, Jamaica, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, and Slovenia. Armenia has double tax treaties with many advanced countries, including Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, and the United Kingdom.

Young Offender Unit Opens at Middlesex Jail and House of Correction

BILLERICA, Mass. – The Middlesex Sheriff’s Office has formally begun a groundbreaking new initiative designed to reduce recidivism amongst young adult offenders in the New England’s most populous county.

The young offender unit is a result of a collaboration initiated by Sheriff Peter J.

Koutoujian with the Vera Institute of Justice. The MSO is the first local jurisdiction in the country to engage Vera as part of its Restoring Promise Initiative, which partners with state and local corrections agencies to transform living conditions for incarcerated young adults across the country in order to produce better

outcomes for individuals and communities.

“With the launch of this unit, we are reimagining corrections,” said Sheriff Koutoujian. “We are pursuing a better, more effective approach to the way we deal with the individuals in this critical population with a goal of not just reducing recidivism, but setting these individuals on a path to a more successful and fulfilling life.”

The new PACT (People Achieving Change Together) program is specially designed for individuals aged 18- to 24. The name was coined by MSO staff members who will work in the unit.

The first group of PACT participants moved into the repurposed space at the Middlesex Jail and House of Correction on February 5, with a second group expected to move in later this month. Programming in the unit will be specifically geared towards addressing issues impacting young adult offenders.

As part of a review of the Commonwealth’s justice system in 2016, the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG) found 18-to 24-year-olds released from Massachusetts correctional facilities have higher recidivism rates than older offenders. CSG reported 52percent of those released from houses of correction and 56 percent of those released by the department of correction were re-incarcerated within three years.

Nationwide, 18- to 24-year-olds comprise 10 percent of the population, but account for 21 percent of all individuals admitted to adult prisons each year. Additionally, young adults make up 28 percent of arrests and people in jail, and 1 out of 5 people in a prison or jail are between the ages of 18-24.

“With the opening of PACT, Sheriff Koutoujian, Special Sheriff [Shawn] Jenkins, and the team at the Middlesex Jail and House of Corrections are transforming the current correctional culture away from punishment and isolation, and towards equity, accountability,

restoration, and healing,” said Alexandra Frank, Senior Program Associate at the Vera Institute of Justice. “Our work through other jurisdictions participating in Restoring Promise has already demonstrated that reimagining the approach to interacting with incarcerated young adults results in sustainable change for people who live and work in prisons and jails, as well as their families and communities. We’re so pleased to build on this and support Middlesex Jail & House of Corrections as they seek to provide meaningful opportunities for young adults to be successful.”

The Middlesex Sheriff’s Office also engaged Lowell-based UTEC as part of the new initiative. The MSO and UTEC have been working together since 2012 to provide reentry support for young adult offenders returning to the Greater Lowell area.

“Research on young adult justice has surged in recent years. The Middlesex Sheriff’s Office is the first local jurisdiction to put some of these findings into action, and we’re glad to bring UTEC’s experience to their unit,” said UTEC Executive Director Gregg Croteau. “This is an important opportunity to innovate for young adults here in Middlesex County, and to establish a model that can be adapted by other partnerships too.”

In preparation for the unit’s opening, the MSO and Vera undertook an exhaustive planning and implementation process. The process included data collection, collaborative onsite research, immersive three-week training for staff and visits to the Cheshire Correctional Institution – the first department of correction facility to join the Restoring Promise Initiative.

“I want to thank our partners for their incredible support and our staff for embracing this shift,” said Koutoujian. “We know we’re making history with this initiative, but it’s the future we’re focused on – the future of the young men in our custody, their families and our communities.”

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Artsakh Movement Marks 30th Anniversary

By Taleen Babayan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

SADDLE RIVER, N.J. — The 30th anniversary of the Artsakh Movement brought together 75 supporters and community activists for a reception and presentation benefitting the Artsakh Fund of the Armenian Cultural Association of America (ACAA), hosted at the home of Greg and Meline Toufayan on Sunday, February 11.

Organized by the ACAA of New Jersey, the gathering served as an opportunity to reflect on the origins of the movement, which emerged



Hratch Kaprielian

on February 13, 1988 during the first demonstrations in Stepanakert that called for the majority Armenian-populated lands to be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Soviet Republic of Armenia. Over the last three decades, funds were raised not only for the war with Azerbaijan in the 1990s but to continue providing aid to citizens, particularly in the border villages.

The program opened with a cocktail hour and a musical performance by pianist, compos-

er and conductor Karén Hakobyan, who played classical and jazz selections from Komitas, Gershwin and Kapustin.

Serving as the master of ceremonies, Artsakh Fund member Alex Sarafian reflected on his experiences in the late 1980s when the movement for autonomy began to unfold. Sarafian provided a historic sketch of the turbulent times as protests in Armenia and Artsakh gained momentum and the consequential need emerged for weapons, ammunition, vehicles and fuel during the ensuing war as well as aid for the countless refugees, which were funded by the greater American-Armenian community.

“Whenever we are faced with a dire situation or calamity, we have always come together to help,” said Sarafian. “This is what happened with the Artsakh Movement when American-Armenians from all the organizations and from all corners of the world helped the cause.”

Setting the tone for the evening, Sarafian noted that the evening’s speakers “will share stories today that have become part of our oral histo-

ry.”

In his welcoming remarks, community leader James Sahagian, active with the Artsakh Fund and a member of ARF Dro Gomideh, said that over the past 30 years, “there has been a continuation of our national aspiration to live independently and to live freely.”

Sahagian also elaborated on the importance of advancing towards the mission of “surviving and thriving, economically, politically and militarily.”

Sharing his story as a Diasporan Armenian on the ground in Artsakh during the war, Hratch Kaprielian, who was initially involved in helping raise funds, spoke about his eye-opening experience in the region.

“I first arrived in June 1992 and there were four of us in a small truck,” recalled Kaprielian, a businessman and chairman of the Board of the Artsakhbank. “All of a sudden, we were in a war.”

During the battles, he remembered how they found four brothers and a grandmother who were stranded and despite the gunfire and road closures, they found a way to safely arrive in Stepanakert.

“That was the day we lost Martakert and lost many of our men,” he continued solemnly, referring to the Azeri capture of the largest town in the region on July 4, 1992. “I said I would rather die here than anywhere else.”

Richard Sarajian recalled how quickly the American-Armenian community mobilized upon learning about the first demonstrations in Stepanakert and the subsequent pogroms against Armenians in Sumgait.

“In 1988 there was no Internet, no cell phones, no email blasts,” said Sarajian, former ARF Eastern Region Central Committee Chair. “But in less than 24 hours of the first pogrom, we began demonstrations at the Soviet Mission in New York City.”

He observed the unity of the churches and organizations that came together for demonstrations, numbering up to 3,000 people outside the Soviet Mission to pass on messages to then-leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. With the onset of the tragic earthquake in Armenia a few months later, Sarajian



Pianist Karén Hakobyan

said it was a “time of major cooperation.”

“There is no question the people in Artsakh truly benefited by the work done here by all these organizations and groups to help build infrastructure,” said Sarajian. “That’s why we are here to continue that work.”

Zaven Khanjian, chairman of the Armenian Missionary Association of America, recounted a humanitarian trip to Armenia when for the first time he heard, through the radio, that the Parliament in Stepanakert had declared union between Artsakh and Armenia.

“It was a moment of reckoning and really made an impression on my mind,” he said.

Along with the AMAA, he soon entered Artsakh in the early 1990s with humanitarian aid and started camps, schools and after-school centers. He recalled one momentous day when the roads were closed in Martakert and Gandzasar so they had to take an alternative route through the mountainous roads and villages.

“Nowhere in my life had I seen such beautiful nature,” said Khanjian.

“We have a free and independent Artsakh and our top priority as a nation should be to sustain the people and populate the land,” said Khanjian. “A safe and secure Artsakh is a safe and secure Armenia.”

Reporting from Artsakh as a freelance journalist during the war, Antranig Kasbarian spoke about the effects of the Artsakh Movement on the Armenian community, for him personally, and for the Armenian nation.

As the editor of the *Armenian Weekly* in the 1990s, Kasbarian spent nights translating news that arrived from Armenia’s news agency but he wanted to become more immersed in the cause.

“I was accustomed to being active from afar,” said Kasbarian, “But I really thirsted for on-the-spot involvement.”

That thirst led him to Artsakh for periods of time between 1990 and 1993.

Kasbarian remarked that up to the late 1980s, the community was divided along political and church lines, but Artsakh was “one of the instrumental moments to bring our community together.”

“We finally got beyond the labels and got to know each other and realized what brings us together is stronger than what divides us,” said Kasbarian, a trustee of the Tufenkian Foundation.

He emphasized the significance of lending aid not only during times of crises but to also focus on long-range development work, which ACAA has been working on during peacetime.

“There is a need for wounded soldiers, demining and safeguarding the liberated territories, which are the most historically ancient Armenian lands,” said Kasbarian, noting that there are fourth-century Armenian churches in the Lachin Corridor, which provides a passage between Armenia and Artsakh. “Without the Lachin Corridor, Artsakh becomes an island.”

Kasbarian spoke about the current efforts being made to resettle and develop the strategic borderlands of Artsakh, which “require massive investment in resettlement and economic development so it can never be given back or negotiated again.”

‘The Last Inhabitant’ Comes to New Jersey

SCREENING, from page 1

along with the support of multiple Armenian community organizations, introduced the filmmaker, who was present, and remarked on the importance of the evening’s film as the Armenian community reflects on the 30th anniversary of the Nagorno-Karabakh movement.

“This is a special film and a special anniversary,” said Araz. “Thirty years ago the Nagorno-Karabakh movement was launched on the world stage capturing everyone’s attention and served as a watershed moment for the Armenian nation.”

Araz thanked the co-sponsoring organizations and highlighted the work of each, particularly the Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund, which provides first aid kits for the soldiers who defend Nagorno-Karabakh, noting that half the deaths that occurred during the four-day war in April 2016 could have been avoided if they had had proper medical kits. He also touched upon the work of the Naregatsi Art Institute and Tufenkian Foundation in Nagorno-Karabakh, illustrating Diasporan support in the conflicted region.

Following the screening of the film (in Armenian, with English subtitles) which brought to life the atrocities of war and ethnic cleansing, a discussion took place where guests interacted with the director and explored the nuances and layers of the film. Nareg Hartounian, founder of the Naregatsi Art Institute and a long-time supporter of Avetisyan’s work, served as the translator.

After thanking everyone in attendance along with the organizers and supporters of

the event, Avetisyan shared the latest developments of the film, including its recent acceptance into the Shanghai Film Festival.

The universal themes of family and friendships appeal to all people, noted Avetisyan, who elaborated on the friendship of the two main characters, one Armenian and one Azeri, who have been longtime friends in the village of Khachmach (in Nagorno-Karabakh’s Askeran region). As the Armenian-Azeri war escalates in the early 1990s, the Azeri tries to help his Armenian friend and his sick daughter, who was abused by Azeri soldiers, escape their village and find safety.

“Regardless of their religion or color, you see two human beings and their similar mission,” said Avetisyan. “What they want to do is save the life of this girl so there is a humane element in the film.”

He pointed out “as much as you try to destroy and kill the enemy, you may also need him for preservation.” Throughout the film, both men turn to each other to give comfort and assistance to one another.

Remarking on the friendship during a complex time in Armenian-Azeri relations, Hartounian highlighted Avetisyan’s ability to “tap into the Azeri psyche,” revealing another dimension to the film.

While the story doesn’t conclude with a definitive ending, Avetisyan said it’s “left up to your imagination and interpretation” but did say that there is “nothing coincidental” in the film.

“The Last Inhabitant” has been shown in various countries, including Iran, Lebanon, Italy, Sweden and Greece, among others. While it has been received positively in many

different communities, there has been backlash from the Azeris, who “have done their best to create obstacles and try to discredit myself and the cast,” said Avetisyan. The cast, he said, which is made up of an international background of Greek, Persian, Lithuanian actors, “are part of our cause and are on the right side of justice.”

All of Avetisyan’s films center on Nagorno-Karabakh, his birthplace, including his upcoming “Gateway to Heaven,” which received support from the evening’s ticket proceeds. His previous films include “Broken Childhood” and “Tevanik,” the latter screened at St. Leon three years ago.

Born in Khachmach, where “The Last Inhabitant” was filmed, Avetisyan’s family moved to Gyumri when his father was appointed head of a textile factory there. At the age of 7, he and his family experienced the tragic earthquake there. Their mother badly injured, they returned to Nagorno-Karabakh in 1989, but the war began soon after.

“He lived in basements to find haven from the bombs,” said Hartounian. “These traumatic experiences had an incredible impact on the filmmaker and are deeply rooted within him.”

A reception followed the discussion and gave guests the opportunity to share in conversation about the film. Co-sponsors of the event included St. Leon Church, the Tufenkian Foundation, SR Socially Relevant Film Festival, AGBU Ararat, the Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund, the Naregatsi Art Institute, the Daughters of Vartan Sahaganoush Otyag and the Knights of Vartan Bakradouny Lodge.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Sevan Bıçakçı Documentary Movie presented in Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON – On February 19, The DC Independent Film Festival presented the documentary “Sevan The Craftsman” at the Carnegie Institution of Science. A small number of local Armenians attended the screening of the movie.

The film presents the life of Sevan Bıçakçı, an Armenian jeweler, from his early days as an apprentice to receiving international awards from Honk Kong to London and Las Vegas.

Of Armenian descent, Bıçakçı was born in 1972 in Istanbul, Turkey. His nickname is “the King of Rings.”

At the age of 12, his father, who was a the-

ater actor, placed Sevan under the apprenticeship of Hovsep Catak in the Grand Bazaar of Istanbul. After serving four years of apprenticeship, his master died. However, he had learned a great deal about jewelry design and craftsmanship. He then opened a workshop in order to serve bigger manufacturers as a freelance jewel designer. He worked on his first collection for a year before unveiling it in the global market in 2002.

His jewelry designs reflect the Byzantine and Ottoman styles. Some of Bıçakçı’s famous clientele include Catherine Zeta-Jones, Elizabeth



Sevan Bıçakçı with one of his fans, Brooke Shields



From left, Vartiter Marashlian, Alice Ors, Hrip Sivaslian, St. Mary Armenian Church Parish Council President Onnig Sivaslian, Rakel Chubuk, director Umran Safter, Kevork Marashlian, Sona Bakirci, Clara Andonian and Shenny Fahrli

Hurley, Celine Dion, Liv Tyler, Mariah Carey, Brooke Shields, Angie Harmon, Kim Raver, Halle Berry, Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen, Michelle Monaghan and Tory Burch.

Michelangelo once said, “I saw the angel in the marble and I carved until I set him free.” This is the other-worldly gift of Sevan Bıçakçı. He creates an alternate universe in each one of his precisely, intricately and exquisitely hand-made rings, bracelets and pendants. After con-

ceptualizing each design, they are made with impossibly perfect, minute details balanced with vast beauty. Each piece of his jewelry is a collaboration of painters, calligraphers, engravers, micro-mosaic masters, sculptors, and gem setters. The documentary is produced and directed by Umran Safter, who was present and answered audience questions.

Queens Woman Arrested for Running Visa Fraud Ring

By Christopher Barca

QUEENS, N.Y. (*Queens Chronicle*) – A Rego Park woman was indicted earlier in February in federal court for allegedly running a visa fraud scheme in which she smuggled Armenian nationals into the United States, charging them thousands of dollars in the process.

According to U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York Richard Donoghue, 47-year-old Stella Boyadjian – an Armenian-born, naturalized American citizen – was arraigned on February 14 on one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, 10 counts of visa fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft, two counts of money laundering and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering.

Two alleged co-conspirators, one from California and the other from Armenia, have also been hit with many of the same charges.

According to the complaint against her, Boyadjian and the two other defendants allegedly recruited Armenian nationals and helped them obtain P-3 visas, which allow foreigners to temporarily travel to the U.S. to perform, teach or coach as artists or entertainers under a program that is “culturally unique.”

None of the people Boyadjian recruited, however, were performers.

Instead, she helped obtain fake dance certificates and had them pose for photos in traditional Armenian dance garb to make them appear more legitimate during visa interviews.

She also allegedly coached them on how to answer questions that would be posed by immigration officials and created posters of fake Big Apple Music Awards Foundation shows – complete with dates, times and venues – to serve as proof.

According to the criminal complaint and her LinkedIn page, Boyadjian is the CEO of BAMAFA, a nonprofit Central Asian cultural performance and talent promotion organization founded in 2010 and based in Queens.

In return for her services, Boyadjian allegedly charged each recruit between \$3,000 and \$15,000, in addition to charging extra fees when it came time to extend the fraudulently obtained visas.

Donoghue’s office did not announce how much prison time she is facing.



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Peter & Charleen Onanian	Weston MA	\$200.00	Mrs. Nina Arabian (Montreal)		\$160
Michael & Kathleen Casey	Andover MA	\$10.00	Mr. & Mrs. Kevork Tutundjian (Toronto)		\$160
Herman & Laura Purutyun	Concord MA	\$100.00	Mr. & Mrs. Vahran and Rakel Salibian (Toronto)		\$160
Emma Sogoian	Bloomfield Hts. MI	\$200.00	Dr. Isabelle Basmadjian (Toronto)		\$160
Diana Lee Khachaturian	Farmington Hills MI	\$400.00	Mrs. Suzanne Benlian (Toronto)		\$160
Armenian Renaissance Association	Walled Lake MI	\$200.00	Miss Taline Baltayan (Toronto)		\$160
			Mr. & Mrs. Gary & Alice Armen (Vancouver)		\$160

Arts & Living

New Volume by Taner Akçam Focuses on Armenian Genocide 'Smoking Gun'

WORCESTER – For more than a century, Turkey has denied a role in organizing the Armenian Genocide.

In his new book, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide*, Turkish historian and Clark University's Prof. Taner Akçam, has identified the "smoking gun" proving Turkey's involvement in organizing the Armenian Genocide. While decades of scholarly research has decisively established the systematic annihilation of Armenians, the scarcity of direct evidence has allowed the Turkish government to persist in its denial up until now.

Akçam uncovered the original telegram from the trials, in an archive held by the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Until recently, the smoking gun was missing. The story begins in 1915 in an office in the Turkish city of Erzurum, when a high-level official of the Ottoman Empire punched out a telegram in secret code to a colleague in the field, asking for details about the deportations and killings of Armenians in eastern Anatolia, the easternmost part of contemporary Turkey.

Later, a deciphered copy of the telegram helped convict the official, Behaeddin Shakir, for planning what scholars have long acknowledged and Turkey has long denied: the organized killing of up to 1.5 million Armenians by the leaders of the collapsing Ottoman Empire, an atrocity widely recognized as the 20th century's first genocide.

Akçam is an internationally recognized human rights activist and was one of the first Turkish intellectuals to acknowledge and openly discuss the Armenian Genocide.

Akçam, described as "the Sherlock Holmes of Armenian Genocide" in a *New York Times* article in April 2017, made these landmark discoveries in a private archive. He argues that the documents he has uncovered remove a cornerstone from the denialist edifice, and definitively prove the historicity of the Armenian Genocide.

"Successive Turkish governments have gone to great lengths to ensure that evidence of the intent to extinguish the Armenian people could not be located," said Akçam. "These findings are 'an earthquake in the field of genocide studies.' They will make it impossible for the Turkish Government to continue to deny the Armenian Genocide."

Dirk Moses of the University of Sydney, Australia, says the book is "essential reading for all those interested in Genocide and Human Rights Studies."

Akçam holds the Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair in Armenian Genocide Studies at Clark's Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. An internationally recognized human rights activist, Akçam was one of the first Turkish intellectuals to acknowledge and openly discuss the Armenian Genocide. He has lectured widely and published numerous articles and books, translated into many languages.

His previous book, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (2012), was co-winner of the Middle East Studies Association's Albert Hourani Book Award and one of ForeignAffairs.com's "Best Books on the Middle East."

Akçam's many honors include the Hrant Dink Spirit of Freedom and Justice Medal from the Organization of Istanbul Armenians and the Hrant Dink Freedom Award from the Armenian Bar Association (both in 2015); the 'Heroes of Justice and Truth' awarded at the Armenian Genocide Centennial commemoration in May 2015. The Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) recognized him as a Friend of the Armenians in 2016. In May, he will receive the 2018 Outstanding Upstander Award from the World Without Genocide organization.

Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide, was published by Palgrave Macmillan.



Author Tasoula Hadjitofi

Author Traces Theft of Christian Art in Cyprus in Wake of Turkish Invasion

NEW YORK – A nation's cultural cleansing is a destruction of its history, a "rape of its culture," stated Tasoula Hadjitofi, on Friday, February 2, to an overflow crowd at the Zohrab Information Center of the Armenian Diocese.

Hadjitofi was born in Famagusta, Cyprus, now occupied by Turkish forces for more than four decades, related her spine-tingling story of orchestrating one of the most riveting European art trafficking stings since World War II. She has meticulously detailed her engrossing 40-year detective work in her newly released book, *The Icon Hunter: A Refugee's Quest to Reclaim Her Nation's Stolen Heritage*.

By Florence Avakian

The art sleuth was introduced by Zohrab Center executive director, the Very Rev. Daniel Findikyan who called her book "a memoir of entry into the international art trafficking of icon antiquities from the monuments and monasteries of Cyprus, belonging especially to the Orthodox Christians." These precious relics, many which were disfigured and partially destroyed, have now been restored and returned to Cyprus, including a priceless 14th-century Armenian manuscript gospel.

The author used a Power Point demonstration to illustrate what she called the "most beautiful island in the Mediterranean – Cyprus." She emotionally related how she, at the age of 14, and her family, were forced to flee in 1974 when Turkey invaded and occupied 40 percent of the island, including her "beloved" home city of Famagusta.

"I woke up to the sound of planes roaring, and bombs exploding," she related. "Many of my classmates were raped and killed. During the invasion, my mother was kneeling and praying for three days. I saw war through the eyes of a child. Where was the United Nations? Where were the British and the Greeks who had once occupied the island? Where were the American cowboys?"

She went to England, working to pay for her studies, and eventually became a successful

see HUNTER, page 15



Ara Sarafian To Speak about Vasbouragan Book

FRESNO – Ara Sarafian, director of the London-based Gomidas Institute, will present a lecture titled "Van 1915: The Great Events of Vasbouragan" on Friday, February 23, at 7:30 p.m., in the University Business Center, Alice Peters Auditorium, Room 191. The presentation is part of the Spring Lecture Series of the Armenian Studies Program. The Leon S. Peters Foundation is a co-sponsor of the event.

Van 1915: The Great Events of Vasbouragan is the most detailed report on what happened to Armenians in the Ottoman province of Van in 1915. It was published in Yerevan in 1917 and remains one of the most important works ever published on the Armenian Genocide. A-Do [Hovhannes Ter Martirosian] personally interviewed eye-witnesses, described key incidents in harrowing details, and gave a sober analysis of what had happened. He pinpointed April 16, 1915 as the beginning of genocidal attacks against Armenians.

However, A-Do also related how Armenians were not passive victims and defended themselves in many places, most notably in the city of Van and Shadakh. Much of this book is a blow by blow account of the actual fighting that took place.

A-Do's report also covered the formation



Ara Sarafian

of a provisional Armenian government during the Russian occupation of this region, as well as the great exodus of Armenians to the Caucasus when the Russians withdrew.

In his presentation at Fresno State, historian Sarafian will introduce A-Do's work in its broader historiographical context, before focusing on some of the critical details at hand. His presentation will include photographs, maps, and diagrams that bring A-Do's work alive.

Sarafian is an Armenian historian specializing in the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. He was a founding director of the Gomidas Institute and is its current director. He has edited and written critical introductions to several of the institute's publications.

Van 1915: The Great Events of Vasbouragan will be available for sale at the presentation.

The lecture is free and open to the public. Free parking is available in Fresno State Lots P6 and P5.

For more information about the lecture visit www.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies.



ARTS & LIVING

Barbara Eryisian's Movie Tells Story of Armenian Genocide, Grandmother's Survival

By Andrew Westrope

AUBURN, Calif. (*Auburn Journal*) – Barbara Eryisian has lived with the story since before she was 10 years old.

She doesn't remember the first time she heard it, but the details – a man buried alive, children orphaned and starving, a global migration to escape the extermination of 1.5 million fellow Armenians – never left her.

Eryisian, a Granite Bay resident, heard the story from her grandmother Alice Zerahian many times growing up. It was autobiographical, and always ended with a plea: "Tell your children. Tell your children's children. Never forget."

Now 55, Eryisian knows she is descended from a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, in which the Ottoman Empire targeted a religious minority for annihilation by executions, death marches and other brutal tactics between 1914 and 1923. Taking her grandmother's plea to heart, she has launched into a years-long process of turning Alice Zerahian's story into a movie.

Old terror, new headlines

Alice Zerahian immigrated from Armenia to Massachusetts in the early 1920s and then moved to Fresno, where Eryisian remembers spending time with her on holidays and week-long summer visits. As a math professor at Sierra College since 2004, Eryisian hadn't had much occasion to revisit her grandmother's story until she saw TV reports of ISIS activity in 2013, and it stirred something in her memory.

"I felt that people should know somehow, and understand, this persecution is not a new thing – that this has been going on in that region for a very long time," she said. "As a child I did not even understand what (my grandmother) was telling me, but she would tell me the story repeatedly, and it laid on my heart. Four years ago, I just realized that (sharing it) was something I needed to do."

Hoping to reach the widest possible audience and being skeptical that a book would do it, she set about writing a screenplay. Eryisian had never attempted such a thing before, so she started researching in earnest – not only history, but screenwriting and storytelling.

Around her grandmother's story she had to populate an entire world of missionaries, supporting characters, soldiers and antagonists with their own backgrounds and struggles. The act of

creation was a challenge, fulfilling the dramatic needs of a screenplay without compromising the reality of the story that inspired her in the first place. She also wanted to respect why the story resonates without leaning too hard on timeliness.

"There's a lot of animosity still between the Turkish people and the Armenians, because to this day the Turkish government denies that there was a genocide," she said. "It was important to me through this process to not make it political – to genuinely make it just her story."

The Pitch

Every summer, writers descend on The Great American PitchFest in Los Angeles to woo producers and investors with their dream projects. It was there that Barbara Eryisian saw her window. Having spent the better part of two years on writing and research, she flew to Los Angeles in 2015 with a completed draft.

The title was simple: "Who Will Remember." The pitch was quick, by necessity, limited to about five minutes. The audience each time was tired, having listened to who-knows-how-many love stories and pipe dreams that day. But where seven producers passed, an eighth, Max Freedman, had a vision.

"I work intuitively, so I was struck positively about it. I heard probably 50 or 60 five-minute pitches that day," Freedman said. "I saw Barbara approach my table with her grandmother behind her, which was impossible since her grandmother had long ago deceased, but I could visualize her grandmother ... (Barbara) just said really clearly to me what the story was, and I instantly got it. It just clicked. For whatever reason, it was somewhat magical, I think."

More than just a producer, Freedman, 73, is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker who makes his own movies through MFM Productions, the producing arm of his filmmaking and publishing company. Instantly sold by Eryisian's pitch in 2015, he spent most of the ensuing two and a half years refining Eryisian's original script.

"The first thing I did was read the script, and I was amazed that someone who teaches math for a profession for 30 years could achieve such poignancy the first time out," he said.

Eventually the script scored a rare "recommend" rating from Slated, a professional script-analysis company, as opposed to "consider" or "pass."

The next step was to budget and raise money for the project. As with most films, that's where

"Who Will Remember" hit its first snag, so Eryisian suggested making a short film – a proof-of-concept to persuade investors to pay for a feature. Freedman and Eryisian had budgeted the feature version at \$14 million, but a 15-minute short they could finance themselves for about \$13,000.

Write Global, Shoot Local

To assemble the crew Max Freedman tapped Stephen Chollet, a two-time Emmy Award-winning video producer in Chico who then recruited most of the talent behind the camera.

Chollet has done a little of everything, from independent films and shorts to documentaries, commercials and corporate videos. But besides being an opportunity for work, he said, the project intrigued him. It was a learning exercise, as he didn't know much about the history of the Armenian Genocide, and he liked that it was a dramatic short film with a documentary quality to it, like recreating history.

"It's a true family story, and we're bringing that to life," he said. "(It's about) bringing some awareness to that – as the name of the film says, 'Who Will Remember.' I think it's an important project."

Unable to shoot across the globe due to budget constraints, Freedman, Chollet and their crew found what they needed in and around Eryisian's home in Granite Bay. They recruited actors from Los Angeles, the Bay Area and Merced, shooting nine scenes in two days at three locations in January 2018: in Eryisian's house, at Folsom State Park (the north shore can pass for a desert, as Eryisian pointed out), and on an impromptu set in La Belle Vie in Old Town Roseville.

They also consulted Armenian members of His House Ministries Armenian Church in Rancho Cordova to be sure the costumes, props and other details were accurate. The church gave a blessing for the project on Jan. 7, and members were present for some of the filming. Lusine Aleksanyan, a member of the church whose first

experience on a film set was watching the reenactment of a murder, found it eye-opening.

"It's a lot of fun, but sad to watch at the same time, because it really happened," she said. "I feel like more people need to know what really happened back then ... how many people got killed, how women were treated, the kids, the men."

Lessons from History

One of the ironies of Alice Zerahian's story is that she lived into her 90s, got Alzheimer's disease and forgot everything in the end. But she survived the genocide to tell the tale, and her granddaughter has spent much of the past four years contemplating why it's so important to remember.

"This movie is told from the perspective of a young girl and her little brother who survived, and I keep asking myself two questions: one is, why did she survive, or how did she survive that genocide ... and why me?" she said. "Why do I feel so compelled ... to tell this story?"

A diminutive figure at 5'1", perhaps Eryisian relates to her grandmother in that respect. At least she marvels at the girl's mettle in surviving what millions of others did not. But Eryisian never really found the answer to "why me," save a few spiritual insights that amounted to, "It doesn't really matter." Though she's not a screenwriter, or "Hollywood," or even fluent in Armenian, she believes an important story was handed to her by her grandmother, and she's doing something with it.

She hopes to see the short film completed by April 24, in time for a premiere at the Capital Christian Center's commemoration of the genocide.

"When 1.5 million people are killed for the reason (of) their particular culture, religion or ethnicity, and killed in violent and barbaric ways, I don't think that it's good as a human race for us to ignore those events or deny that they happened," Eryisian said. "I think people should know about those events, so we can learn from them."

Balakian to Go on Lecture Tour in US

NEW YORK – Starting with his reading and talk at the University of Kansas on Thursday February 23, Pulitzer prize winning poet Peter Balakian will be reading, lecturing, and meeting with students at colleges and universities and libraries in the coming months. Balakian's other appearances include Georgia College, the Associated Writer's Programs Convention in Tampa, San Jose State University, Bucknell University, Worcester State University, and the Katonah (NY) Poetry Series.

The following is a list of his appearances:

February 23: University of Kansas, Hall Center, 7:30 p.m.

March 7: Georgia College, 11 a.m. Poetry Reading; keynote lecture 5 p.m.

March 8-9: AWP, Tampa Convention Center, March 8, 3:15; March 9, Noon

April 5: Bucknell University, Janet Weis Endowed, reading, 7 p.m., Stadler Center

April 12: San Jose State University, Reading, Hammer Theatre, 7 p.m.,

April 26: Worcester State University, lecture and reading, 11:30 a.m.

June 3: Katonah (NY) Poetry Series, Katonah Library, 4 p.m. reading

Balakian is the author of many books including the Pulitzer Prize winning *Ozone Journal*, and *Black Dog of Fate*, winner of the PEN/Albrand Award. He is the Donald M and



Peter Balakian

Constance H. Rebar Professor of the Humanities in the department of English at Colgate University.

Belmont Public Schools' Asadoorian Honored for Arts Programs

BELMONT, Mass. (*Belmont Citizen-Herald*) – Belmont Public Schools' Director of Visual and Performing Arts Arto Asadoorian was honored with an Award of Excellence by the Belmont Council on Aging on January 25. The award recognizes Asadoorian for the intergenerational programs his department's staff and students have organized for seniors throughout the year such as parent/teacher chorus and

parent/teacher band, the Belmont High School Jazz Collective concert, BHS Madrigal Singers caroling, the BHS Chamber orchestra and the Senior Dance.

"It's a real honor to accept the recognition on behalf of the work that our department does, the teachers and students do. It's gratifying to know that it's appreciated when we send students to the Beech Street Center to perform," said Asadoorian.

He said it is beneficial for students as well to be part of the intergenerational programs.

Superintendent John Phelan, Town Administrator Patrice Garvin and Selectman Adam Dash were present for the award ceremony. Phelan thanked Asadoorian's wife and two children because he knows how much Arto is out of the house for these programs.

"Your dad's a big deal. Thank you for sharing your 'big deal' dad with the whole town," he said.

Asadoorian is a saxophonist, woodwind specialist and composer. He grew up Shrewsbury but visited Belmont often while growing up because his mother is from Belmont and his grandparents lived in Belmont. He recalls being a young musician sitting next to older players.

"As a young musician you feel like a hot shot when you're playing, then you sit next to an 85-year-old saxophonist who has been practicing for 60 years and realize you keep getting better at it the longer you do it," he said.



Arto Asadoorian (Belmont Citizen-Herald photo)



ARTS & LIVING



Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian Datian

Eggplant Appetizer with Garlic Tahini and Mint

INGREDIENTS

1 large eggplant, washed, cut into 1/4 inch slices
 3-4 tablespoons tahini
 4 cloves garlic, mashed
 1 1/2 cups plain white or Greek yogurt (more to taste)
 1/2 medium cucumber, chopped or diced
 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
 Juice of 2 large lemons (more to taste)
 Sea or Kosher salt, red pepper, black pepper, and dried herbs to taste
 Olive oil
 Finely chopped tomatoes, green onions and flat-leaf parsley as garnish
 Chopped fresh basil and mint as garnish
 Olives, lemon wedges, roasted peppers, Armenian lavosh or pita bread, and sliced cheese

PREPARATION:

Lightly brush eggplant slices with olive oil and choice of dried herbs. Grill for 5 minutes on each side until eggplant is cooked and skin is charred or bake in a 400 degree oven until eggplant is browned and tender. Remove eggplant from grill or oven and set aside.

In a blender or food processor, combine the tahini, garlic, yogurt, cucumber, mint, lemon juice, salt, red pepper, and black pepper with some olive oil until ingredients are smooth. Adjust seasonings, adding more lemon juice or olive oil to gain the taste and consistency desired.

Chop or mash eggplant slices, add to the blender or food processor, and blend until ingredients are well mixed. Add more lemon juice, olive oil, or salt to taste. Cover and chill for 1-2 hours before serving or serve at room temperature.

Place eggplant mixture in a bowl and top with chopped tomatoes, green onions, and parsley. Drizzle with olive oil, if desired. Serve with olives, lemon wedges, roasted peppers, Armenian lavosh, pita bread, sliced cheese, and chopped fresh basil and mint.

Serves 4-6.

*Christine's recipes have been published in the *Fresno Bee* newspaper, *Sunset* magazine, *Cooking Light* magazine, and at <http://www.thearmeniankitchen.com/>

Knights Organize Youth Festivity with Elie Berberian on Eve of Times Square

FORT LEE, NJ. — Hundreds of Armenian-American youth will gather once again in a show of solidarity on the eve of the Times Square Armenian Genocide Commemoration for a remembrance event held on Saturday, April 21, at City Perch here. Singer Elie Berberian will make a special appearance.

This annual event, sponsored by the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, is now in its fourth year and unites Armenian youth and young professionals from the New York metro area to observe the Armenian Genocide and also have a chance to network and spend time with their fellow Armenian peers.

"As the next generation we need to make sure we have a strong presence every year in Times Square to commemorate the Armenian Genocide," said Jirair Khorozian, a member of the Knights of Vartan. "By hosting this event the day before the commemoration, we're able to spread the word and gain enthusiasm for all of us to be present in Times Square."

An integral member of that next generation is Elie Berberian, who has succeeded in connecting with his generation of Armenian youth while also honoring the musical traditions of the past. Berberian himself encourages all Armenians to play a part in their cultural preservation.

"Every nation outside of its roots is suffering," said Berberian in a recent interview. "There has to be more effort. Instead of saying 'it's dark,' light a cultural candle in your house. Wherever you walk, let flowers bloom."

The evening will feature music, drinks and food along with camaraderie and dialogue. The Knights and Daughters of Vartan, an international organization that has been sponsoring the Times Square Commemoration in New York City since 1985, welcomes the attendance of all Armenians at the youth event and the commemoration on Sunday, April 22, 2018 from 2 pm to 4 pm in Times Square, where noted politicians and elected officials will pay tribute to the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide and also speak of recent developments regarding recognition.



Elie Berberian

"We are fortunate to inherit such meaningful and influential events such as the Times Square Commemoration," said committee member Taleen Babayan. "It's our duty now to show strength in numbers and come together in harmony and conviction."

The event will be 8 p.m. to midnight at City Perch (2023 Hudson Street). Visit 100yearsandbeyond.eventbrite.com for tickets and more information.

-Taleen Babayan



Celebrants from last year's event.



Author Traces Theft of Christian Art in Cyprus in Wake of Turkish Invasion

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entrepreneur, and started a family. Her life's work of becoming the "art Sherlock" was just beginning. During the Turkish occupation of Cyprus, hundreds of churches were desecrated and destroyed, and thousands of religious icons were stolen, sold or destroyed. Greek place names were changed.

"In every war, there is the pillaging of history of a country or region. Greed, power and money dominate. It has been so from the earliest times of mankind and it continues today," she said. "There is no greater loss than one's culture," she stated. "Every penny that I have earned is to be used to chase, find and retrieve the icons around the world."

During her intensive work, she worked closely with Archbishop Chrysostomos I of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, as well as Dutch art dealers, Canadian sellers and German detectives and police, at times forced to play "cat and mouse." She was targeted by art traffickers. Fearing for herself and her family's life, she finally had to pay for private security.

The four-decades-long journey finally all culminated in the dramatic and climactic arrest of Turkish art trafficker Aydin Dikmen by Interpol, leading to the recovery of \$60 million of stolen icons and other treasures from Cyprus, and from around the world.

During a robust question-and-answer session, the speaker detailed more of the history of Cyprus, and emotionally spoke of her return

trip to Cyprus. "I used my cultural heritage as my right to go home. I walked into the crystal clear sea to see my city, now destroyed and empty, even though Turkish soldiers were pointing guns at me. I shed all my 40 years into that water."

Hadjitofi and her assistant Dr. Marina Mkhitarian have established the "Walk of Truth" non-governmental organization, in efforts to continue the work of tracking down and preventing the art smugglers, war profiteers and terrorists who today are continuing to steal countless cultural artifacts from vulnerable war-torn countries, including Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and several African nations.

"The Walk of Truth gives me a platform to continue the idea that culture can be what connects us, not what divides us. The cultural history of the world belongs to each of us which is why we must all contribute to protect it," she declared with emphasis.

At the reception following her presentation, attendees lined up to have the author sign her book. All proceeds from the sale of "The Icon Hunter" will benefit the Walk of Truth NGO which raises awareness and rallies governments, political figures, museums, and cultural organizations in stopping art trafficking and protecting cultural heritage in war torn countries and areas of conflict.

The Icon Hunter: A Refugee's Quest to Reclaim Her Nation's Stolen Heritage is available on Amazon.

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Exile and Waiting Transformed into Film Through the Work of Tamara Stepanyan

STEPANYAN, from page 1

In the beginning, it was quite difficult. Aside from the issue of languages, she said, "All my friends were asking, are you Tashnag [adherent of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation]? Are you Hnchag [adherent of the Social Democratic Hnchagian Party]? I said, what the hell is that? I am just Armenian. They asked me, are you Homenetmen or Homenmen [Armenian sport associations affiliated respectively with the two aforementioned political parties]? I answered, I don't know. They said, oh, you are Homenmen then; you are a traitor...I remember I went home crying."

It was not all bad. She said, "There were also nice kids who were supportive and helpful...This kind of openness to other cultures, religion, race made me somebody who I am. I gained a lot. My trips, my searching [for] homes, because something that is important for me is to establish home where I am. I realize that I was 11-years-old when I lost my home. Since then, I am searching for a new one. I guess I can say I found it here."

Stepanyan grew up surrounded by art, as her parents were both artists, and her mother a cellist. Her mother's cousin or "uncle," Edgar Baghdasaryan, himself a filmmaker, provided her first introduction to cinema. Stepanyan said, "I was 6 years old when he made a film called 'Khagher' [Games]. I acted in it. We were all children and it was a war film. We were all warriors, prisoners. ... I was really fascinated by the ambience – the light, the darkness, the mysterious world that cinema could create. The moment that he would say silence, and action, he was entering into another dimension, another world. I did not want him to say cut, because it would become so dull."

By coincidence, a museum dedicated to film director and artist Sergei Parajanov was next door to Stepanyan's house, and she grew up playing in this museum with all the dolls and other objects he had created. At the time, Stepanyan admitted, she did not know who he was or his cinema. She went to his funeral at the age of six because her parents were great admirers of his. However, Stepanyan said, "In some unconscious way, it had a great effect on me."

She studied communication arts at the American University of Beirut, with an emphasis on radio, television and film, and made several films there, including "The Needle" and "The Last Station." Trips to participate in the Busan International Film Festival in South Korea in 2007, and in the Den Danske Filmskole exchange program in Denmark in 2012 had an important effect on her.

In Beirut Stepanyan was studying fiction narrative in the classic sense, but friends persuaded her to go to the documentary film program in Denmark because it was extraordinary. She said, "It is true that it changed my life... it really changed me because there I understood that cinema is cinema...What is important is to say that it is something that comes from inside...Look at what is inside you and then think of how you want to express it. The form will come later."

Her new film, "Those from the Shore" [in French titled "Ceux de Rivage"] which will be shown soon in the Boston area, can be considered one of its fruits. Stepanyan said that though it is a documentary, there are fictional elements in it. She said, "I like to explore this thin line between the two. It is about issues that bother me, that want to get out. My language of exploring is cinema." It is an 84-minute black-and-white film in French and Armenian, which she co-wrote with her husband, Jean-Christophe Ferrari. "Those from the Shore" is a slow moving and melancholy documentary portraying the travails of a group of Armenian immigrants to France. Tellingly, the only use of color in this dark film is in a brief section of reverie about the native villages of some of the immigrants.

When asked about the tempo and length, she responded, "Of course I could have cut this film down to 60 minutes, but then it would have been massacred...Some people

have said that it is long and slow, but that is the voyage to which I am inviting you. It is as if I give you my hand and say, 'come, do you want to accompany me on the street.' Every film has its own rhythm. I also follow my own interior rhythm because I am a very instinctual person."

She said that though this film was about Armenians, it was not only about Armenians, but about what is happening in the world today. And it is not only about the refugee crisis, but, she said, "really to approach from the interior the human feeling of what it means to wait. How do we wait? In this waiting, what do we lose? What do we gain?"

She said that she does not intent to explain, but rather to give an opening to create some civility about what is happening in the world. She said that it is not so much about giving a message to the world, but rather about sensi-



Tamara Stepanyan

tivity. In other words, though there is a political element in her work, it is not in a direct way.

Stepanyan first became aware of Armenian refugees in France when she happened to see tent dwellers in Lyon near the train station. She said, "I was very affected. I did not know that people lived in the streets. In France there are a lot of people who are homeless." And when she heard the children speaking Armenian, she said, it was so painful. She said, "I needed to find out why these people were there. Then, as the subject grew deeper in me, I needed to know how they endure it."

She went to Marseille to shoot the film, and some organizations there helped connect her with Armenian refugee families. For her, she said, "The beauty of documentary filmmaking is a kind of dialogue created between me and these people. It is something we share for life. These relations are constructed and they stay. They invited me into their lives and I invited them into my life."

She filmed for over a year and a half, because she said that to understand waiting, she needed time to observe these people. Her filmmaking process is based on a lot of improvisation. She said that she writes a film three times. "First I write the film on paper, then I write the film through shooting, taking in all the improvisations, and then I write in editing," she said. She developed this method of working on her own.

The film has many visual references to the sea and to waves. Stepanyan said, "For me, the sea brought Armenians to Marseille a hundred years ago after the Genocide. Boats brought Armenians to Marseille. For me, today, the sea is bringing a lot of immigrants from everywhere in the world." This sea is not just blue and lovely. It can, Stepanyan said, turn black and deaf. The Armenians who go to the shore are waiting, meditating and expecting.

A visit by the Armenian refugees to the Chateau d'If resonates symbolically. In the 1844 French adventure novel *The Count of*

Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas, the title character Edmond Dantès is framed for a crime he did not commit and unjustly sentenced to prison in the Chateau d'If, an island fortress from which no political prisoner could escape. Stepanyan explained that this visit was her idea. In the Soviet Armenian education system, it was obligatory to read this novel (in translation). So all the Armenians were interested in this prison and Stepanyan arranged the visit when she had a team of cameramen ready (normally she prefers to film alone, using digital equipment).

Much of the dialogue is in Armenian, as the refugees often remain with each other. Funding for the film came from the region around Marseille, and the region in the south where her producer comes from. Though Stepanyan works in France, she is also still considered a filmmaker of the Arab world

short fiction narrative shot completely in a train. She intended it to be a meditation on lost love.

Stepanyan said that of her work so far, this film "is the most special to me, I think, because the process was so insanely interesting. It was not at all a classical way of writing a film. It was a lot of thinking, experimenting, trying, talking, doing, writing, erasing, and the process, I shot over four nights in the train, and, I don't know...it was a way for me to breathe. I was going through a very difficult time in my personal life." In the end, she said, "I felt I had come out of an expedition to the North Pole, or something as unique."

The film also opened a lot of new paths for her. She explained, "First of all, because of this film, I met my husband. And secondly, in Armenia, I won an Oscar for the best short, and in a way, it was my way to enter the cinematographic world."

Stepanyan is working on two new projects. "The things I see, I read, I hear...lead to documentary ideas," she said. One is a film on a far-away village in Armenia, and the effects of seasonal emigration. The other fictional narrative, she said, "is about how much we know the person we love, and how far we can know the person we love." It too is connected with Armenia, as a voyage film, but it is also about death. Both films are French productions, with French producers.

Though she generally works alone, she is also very loyal to her collaborators. Part of it also is, as she said, "I am a control freak." In her first films, she worked with Cynthia Zaven, an Armenian-Lebanese composer who composed music for her short film "Embers," her first documentary. She said, "I trust the people I work with. I know what I want. I know Cynthia would do something great." While "Those from the Shore" had ready-made music from Charles Ives that fit well, but Cynthia also composed for "February 19," in which music has an important role. Stepanyan said, "I had talked with her the whole night about the film. I left in the evening, and in the morning she came to me and gave me a disk, and said, there is your music." She had composed all through the night.

She said that she has the same relationship with her cinematographer, Tamam Hamza, a Syrian who used to live in Armenia but now is in Canada. Stepanyan said, "Sometimes I don't even tell my cinematographer what I want – he just knows." Her producer brought him from Canada to France to work with her, and she will ask for him again in Armenia, as well as for Cynthia and her editor. Stepanyan said, "It is a family, and this relation, this is a value for the film. It is teamwork."

Making films is more a passion than a job for Stepanyan. Musing, she said, "For me, cinema is almost a sacred art form. I look at it as something very precious and important in my life...It takes time. It takes time, like good cooking, to slowly choose the ingredients and cook."

Boston-area residents can see Stepanyan's "Those from the Shore" on Sunday, March 11 at 3:30 p.m. at the third annual Global Cinema Film Festival at the Studio Cinema (376 Trapelo Road in Belmont). There is a possibility that Stepanyan may be present to discuss her film in person.

Award-winning documentarian Raouf Jacob explained why the festival chose to show this film: "Those From The Shore' is a timely and urgent piece that speaks directly to the millions of immigrants and refugees around the globe seeking asylum in places near and far. The director uses her lens to create an observational study of the human condition when we are forced to remain still, as we live between different worlds, between two lives; moreover, as we live in a hostile world. From a technical standpoint, 'Those From The Shore' is a cinematic contribution that showcases the ongoing evolution of the documentary form. Carefully composed and beautifully photographed, it is a piece of visual art that simply makes us care."

because of her years in Lebanon, and so she also received funding from Arab sources, including the Doha Film Institute of Qatar. In its turn, the film, she says, is an open one. She placed an Arabic poem in the film, for example, because it is universal.

Aside from Parajanov, Stepanyan's Armenian influences include Ardashir Peleshian. She said, "There is something very Armenian in me. At the same time, there is something very international. I moved so much and grew up in so many cultures and languages and literatures."

However, at present, Stepanyan said, "I am very sad to say that I don't think there is an Armenian school of filmmaking. If there is, I am very sad to say that it is very poor and mediocre, though there are some very talented filmmakers." When people start to do films, they leave the country, and there are so few professionals left to teach in Armenia, largely because of the low incomes.

Stepanyan explained further that "Arts have a very tiny place in Armenia. If you are a businessman, and have a shop, then you have a good income, and even if you work as a secretary, you have a better salary than a professor in a university. It is absurd."

Stepanyan says that Armenian themes remain close to her heart, and she continues to think much about Armenia. She said, "I cry a lot about Armenia. It is my country, my language, my literature." Her parents, she felt, were the two biggest lovers of Armenia she has ever seen, and now she has transmitted this love of Armenia to her daughter, who is four years old, she said. "Films," she exclaimed, "are my way of remaining in contact with my homeland. I want to fight for it in my own way. I don't fight with arms...my arms are my films."

Armenia, Stepanyan said, has been supportive within its means of her work. There is a cinema center fund which gave most of the money for her prior film, "February 19," her

ARTS & LIVING

CALENDAR

MASSACHUSETTS

MARCH 1 — The Armenian Memorial Church of Watertown will hold its annual Lenten kufte supper on Thursday evening, at 6:30 p.m. in the church hall. Gourmet dinner features the delicious home-made lentil kufte, salad and Syrian bread. The popular tahine bread, also homemade, will be the dessert. This special dinner always attracts a full house. Tickets are \$18 for adults and \$10 for children 10 and under, and will be available at the door or by calling the church office at 617-923-0498. 32 Bigelow Ave., Watertown.

MARCH 4 — 2:30 p.m.: Hasmik Khalapyan, "Women's Activism During the Western Armenian Renaissance, 1860-1914" at the NAASR Center, Sun., 395 Concord Ave., Belmont, MA. Presented by the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) and the National Association for Armenian Studies & Research (NAASR). The program is open to the public. Contact: hq@naasr.org or 617-489-1610.

MARCH 8 — 7:30 p.m.: Hayk Demoyan, "Between Realism and Mythology: Modern Identity and Memory Politics of the Armenian World," Thursday, at the NAASR Center, 395 Concord Ave., Belmont. The program is sponsored by the NAASR / Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues and is open to the public. Contact: hq@naasr.org or 617-489-1610.

MARCH 8-11 —The Global Cinema Film Festival of Boston (GCF) announces its 2018 Official Selections. The 3rd annual global event will be held at the Studio Cinema, 376 Trapelo Road, Belmont, MA. Festival kicks off on March 8, at 6 p.m. with Red Carpet Event and film screenings until 10 p.m. Film screenings will continue from Friday, March 9, through Sunday, March 11, 2018 from 12 to 11 p.m. For info visit @ www.worldwidecinemaframes.com. globalcinemafilmfestival@gmail.com

MARCH 11, 2018 — "Jazz and Art for YerazArt" on Sunday, 5 p.m., at Anoush'ella Saj Kitchen, 35 W Newton St., Boston. More information will follow.

MARCH 13 — Armenian Business Networking (ABN) Winter Business Networking event, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m., the Sheraton Commander in Cambridge. Stephen Demirjian guest speaker from The Achieve Institute shares methods on creating greater personal and work life success. This event is free of charge. RSVP: armenian-businessnetwork@gmail.com

MARCH 16 — Program to combat domestic violence in Armenia, Papken Suni Agoump, 76 Bigelow Ave., Watertown, 7 to 9 p.m. Maro Matosian, executive direc-

tor of the Women's Support Center, Armenia. Advance RSVP required Email Lenna.garibian@gmail.com. This fundraising event is sponsored by the Friends of the WSC. Donations to the WSC will be made via the Tufenkian Foundation and are tax-deductible. Learn more at www.womensupportcenter.org.

MARCH 18 — Book Presentation by Adrienne G. Alexanian, Forced into Genocide, Memoirs of an Armenian Soldier in the Ottoman Turkish Army, Sunday, 12:30 p.m., Charles and Nevert Talanian Cultural Hall, Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston, 145 Brattle St., Cambridge. This book is a riveting memoir of Yervant Edward Alexanian, an eye-witness to the massacre and dislocation of his family and countrymen in Ottoman Turkey during WW I, while he served as a conscript in the Turkish Army. Reception and Book Signing to follow Presentation. All are welcome! Log onto <http://www.htaac.org/calendar/event/527/> for further information.

MARCH 22 — 7:30 p.m.: Siobhan Nash-Marshall, "The Sins of the Fathers: Turkish Denialism and the Armenian Genocide," Thursday, at the NAASR Center, 395 Concord Ave., Belmont. The program is open to the public. Contact: hq@naasr.org or 617-489-1610.

MARCH 23 — Sirusho - Live For the First Time In Boston! Friday. A World Music Award nominee, Sirusho combines Armenian traditional instruments with modern compositions. This is Sirusho's first concert in Boston and she will perform with SNDC. Sponsored by the Sayat Nova Dance Company of Boston. 8 to 10.30 p.m., Berklee Performance Center, 136 Mass. Ave., Boston. For tickets visit www.berklee.edu

APRIL 11 — A recap on the status of the documentary project "Neighbors in Memory," accompanied by a panel of community members shedding light on the state of Armenian-Turkish relations as they live and witness it. Wednesday, 7 p.m., Capitol Theatre, 204 Mass. Ave., Arlington. Screenings, discussions and refreshments. For more information: gonca59@gmail.com

APRIL 21 - MAY 13 — Off-Broadway production by Pan Asian Repertory Theatre of Joyce Van Dyke's play, "Daybreak:" the lyrical story of two Armenian women friends, survivors from 1915, who are transported with their families into the 21st century future. Starring Lorraine Serabian as Victoria. Performances at the Beckett Theatre, 410 W. 42nd St., New York, Tuesdays through Sundays; weekend matinees; discount tickets for seniors, students and groups. For tickets and information: Telecharge: www.telecharge.com or call (212) 239-6200. Or contact the theatre: info@panasianrep.org, (212) 868-4030.

MAY 5 — Saturday, Kentucky Derby Watch Party, Fun and festivities to support Armenia Tree Project, At the elegant/historic Gore Place in Waltham. Details to follow

MAY 5 — Save the date! Annual Meeting, Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA). Details to follow. Contact: info@aiwainternational.org or 617-926-0171.

MAY 11 — Welcome His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, to Celebrate with Rev. Father Mampre A. Kouzouian on the 60th Anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood. Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge. Hrshapar Service in the Sanctuary followed by a Celebration in the Charles and Nevert Talanian Cultural Hall. Details forthcoming.

APRIL 14 — Saturday, St. James Great Gatsby Gala! A Roarin' 20s Celebration! Live Jazz & Armenian Music, Passed Hors D'oeuvres, Mezza and Dessert Stations and more. St. James Armenian Church — 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, 8 p.m., Tickets \$100. Purchase online at www.stjameswatertown.org or contact info@stthagop.com.

WASHINGTON, DC

MARCH 16 — The Cultural Committee of the Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church presents new and exclusive screening ARMENIAN FILM FESTIVAL "THE NATION'S PAST & PRESENT" Presented in English. In Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence, RI 02908. Donation \$ 10, Friday, at 7 pm - "Our Yerevan — Capital of Armenia" (Matenadaran, Museums, Cascade, Ani Plaza hotel, modern architecture, Vernisazh,...)

RHODE ISLAND

MARCH 10 — Saturday, 6:30 p.m. Benefit theatrical presentation for the teachers of Knights of Vartan School in Armenia. Taleen Babayan's "Where Is Your Groom? II" At Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale Campus, Ernst Community Cultural center, 8333 Little River Turnpike, Annandale. Tickets \$30. By credit card go to paypal.me/DaughtersofVartanUS or call Takuhi at (301) 219-4041.

Calendar items are free. Entries should not be longer than 5 lines. Listings should include contact information. Items will be edited to fit the space, if need be. A photo may be sent with the listing no later than Mondays at noon.

Chilingirian-Bagraturuni-Hakobyan Trio to Perform at Fresno State

FRESNO — Violinist Levon Chilingirian will be joined by cellist Suren Bagratuni and pianist Karén Hakobyan in a concert to be held on Friday, March 2 at 8 p.m. in the Concert Hall on the Fresno State campus. The concert, part of the Philip Lorenz Memorial Keyboard Concert Series, is co-sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program

of Fresno State, the Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation, and the Orpheus Chamber Music Ensemble.

This concert brings together three of today's most prominent Armenian musicians: violinist Chilingirian, cellist Bagratuni, and pianist/composer Hakobyan. These three colleagues have received international acclaim for their activities as performers, pedagogues, competition jurors, and recording artists.

Chilingirian is the founder of the Chilingirian Quartet and also a professor and Chamber Music Artist in Residence at the Royal Academy of Music and professor of Violin and Chamber Music at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, both in London.

Bagratuni was the winner of the silver medal at the 1986 International Tchaikovsky Competition while still a student at the Moscow Conservatory. He has gone on to a distinguished international career as a soloist, recitalist and chamber musician. He is currently professor of cello at Michigan State University.

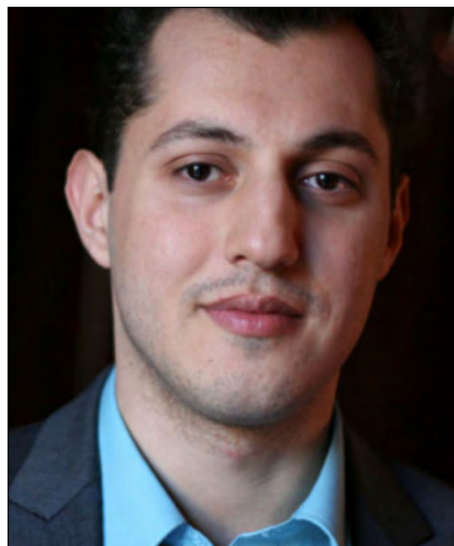
Armenian-American pianist and composer Hakobyan has emerged as

a versatile force on the international musical scene. Since his Carnegie Hall debut at the age of 17, he has been performing in major concert halls in Armenia, Argentina, Mexico, Germany, France, Japan and the United States.

The trio will perform Haydn's *Trio in C Major, Hob.XV:27*, Beethoven's *Trio in B-flat Major, Op. 97 "Archduke"* and Babadjanian's



Suren Bagratuni



Karén Hakobyan



Levon Chilingirian

Trio in F-sharp Minor.

General tickets for the Concert are available for \$25 per person, for seniors \$18 per person, and students \$5 per person. Ticket reservations for the Concert may be made by calling the Armenian Studies Program.

Tickets may also be purchased online at the following website: <http://www.keyboardconcerts.com/special-events.aspx>.

COMMENTARY

Armenia's Voice and Concerns Reverberate in Europe

By Edmond Y. Azadian

While Armenia is undergoing an internal political transformation, it has to preserve its international relations and project its voice and concerns in international forums. There is no peace on Armenia's borders nor in Karabakh. Soldiers and civilians continue falling victim to ceasefire violations by Azerbaijan.

No justifiable reason nor explanation was offered as to why Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev decided to hold a snap presidential election in April rather than its normal time in October. It is obvious that whenever those elections are held, the Aliyev dynasty's rule for perpetuity is a foregone conclusion.

In the course of the election campaign, the New Azerbaijan Party held its sixth congress to feature its new and old candidate, Aliyev. It was not enough to hear the Azeri president's continued bellicose comments threatening to solve the Karabakh conflict through force; he raised the ante at the said congress by further extending his territorial ambitions to Yerevan, Zangezur and Sevan, which he claimed had been historic Azeri lands and that it was Baku's "strategic goal" to regain those territories. He was reading from a prepared text and thus his comments could not be construed as a slip of the tongue in a heated moment.

After a backlash to this outrageous claim, one member of parliament representing the New Azerbaijan Party, Rasim Musabekov, tried to reinterpret Aliyev's claim to mean the return of Azeri people to their homes in those territories. It was an awkward justification, especially when the counterpart of the claim was absent. Indeed, if ethnic Azeris wish to return to their homes in Armenia, how about the fate of Armenians who were expelled from Baku, Sumgait and Ganja during the pogroms committed by Azerbaijan?

Aliyev certainly meant what he said because his rhetoric needed that tenor for his domestic audience.

This new escalation of warring words was interpreted in contradictory ways in Armenia. Many tried to dismiss it as election propaganda but others took it very seriously and began suggesting strategies to counter the rhetoric. Some even believed that since Aliyev has been referring to Yerevan, maybe Azeri forces are prepared to attack from Nakhichevan, reinforced by Turkish forces. Some hawks in Armenia even recommend a preemptive strike before the Azeri forces have made a move.

In this day and age, strategic planners have to take into consideration the domino effect of their actions. In any war scenario, Armenia needs to keep in mind the Turkish factor. During the first conflict, Turkey was not part of the equation. Besides, first and foremost, Yerevan needs a nod from Moscow, as Armenia cannot face the combined forces of Azerbaijan and Turkey on its own. Neither can it fight a war without at least the strategic participation of Russian forces.

It was perhaps this sudden development in the Caucasus that precipitated President Serzh Sargsyan's trip to Munich to participate in the security conference in that city. For many years, Armenia's participation has not been on the presidential level. In the introductory segment of his speech, Armenia's president stated that being situated at the crossroads of major powers offers challenges and opportunities. He was certainly referring to the tensions existing in general between the European Union and Turkey and in particular between Germany and Turkey. Last year, Turkey's arrogance vis-à-vis Germany helped the passage of historic legislation in the German Bundestag recognizing the Armenian Genocide. Simultaneously, a side show also emerged when the Netherlands decided to consider two resolutions in the parliament. One recognizes the Armenian Genocide, while the other makes mandatory the participation of a Dutch government representative at the Genocide commemoration in Armenia.

This, of course, angered Ankara, leading Turkey to recall its top diplomat from Amsterdam. The ritual has to be repeated every time a country recognizes the Armenian Genocide, only for relations to revert back to normal.

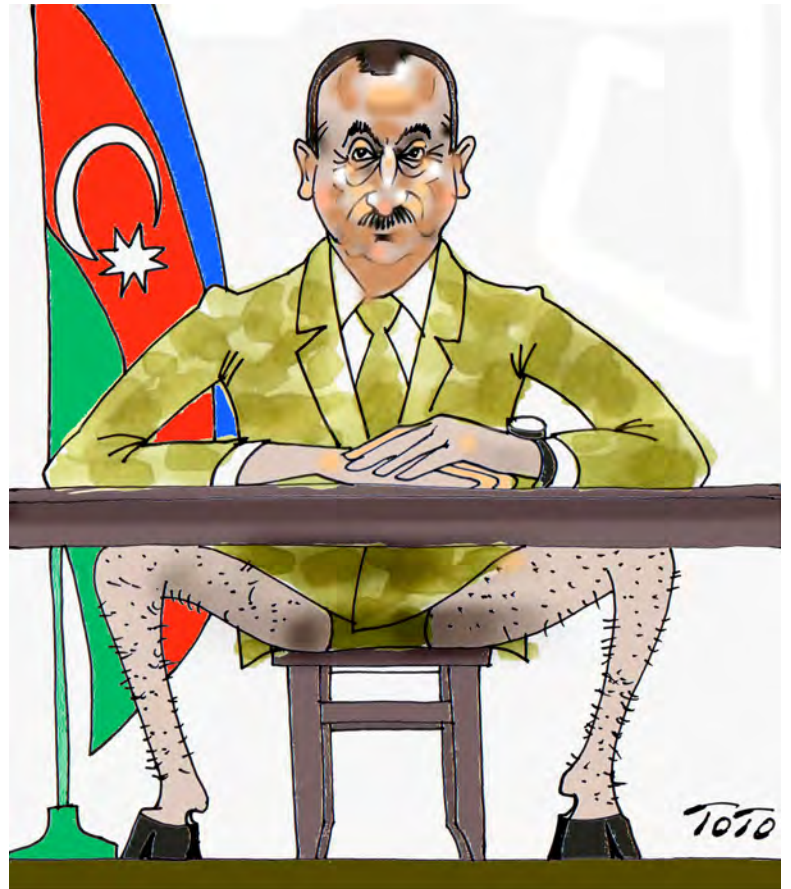
While Armenians overestimate their lobbying efforts regarding resolutions recognizing the Armenian Genocide, we should not underestimate Turkey's role in forcing its opponents to retaliate and to hit where it hurts most. Turkey accused the

Netherlands of taking that initiative with election considerations in mind.

A case in point is the vote which was taken last week in the Israeli Knesset, which debated and then defeated a motion on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

For some time now, relations between Israel and Turkey have become strained. Perhaps, the administration of embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to send a signal to Turkey to improve their relations.

It is common practice to use third-party issues to send messages or to settle scores between adversaries. Armenia's president was certainly referring to those opportunities in his speech, where he laid out broadly Armenia's foreign policy. He made a reference to Helsinki final act where the principles of Karabakh resolution are enshrined, namely the right to self-determination and preservation of territorial integrity. He cautioned diplomats not to separate those principles for the sake of convenience.



He took also the opportunity to expose the recent territorial ambitions of Azerbaijan, which he called "delirium," and invited the world community to react to that kind of arrogance. "When Europe is silent in view of those outrageous claims, they may have dire consequences," he warned.

He also referred to the Berlin Wall, which fell even as Turkey's blockade of Armenia has continued. Armenia, he said, expressed its good will by signing protocols to normalize relations with Turkey, but Turkey reneged by bringing in last minute preconditions since the latter had been hoping that Armenia would never agree to go forward. For all practical purposes, the protocols are dead because Armenia cannot wait forever for the ratification of the protocols by the Turkish parliament.

The entire exposé by Sargsyan was crafted in a conciliatory and constructive tone, not to give the impression that Armenia was at the gates of Europe airing its grievances. The president also outlined Armenia's positive role as a bridge between the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union. Armenia's participation simultaneously in both structures has not hampered cooperation; on the contrary, it has spurred industrialization and modernization in the region.

He intimated that currently Armenia is in negotiations with its partners to build a transit corridor between the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea. Once that project is complete, it will serve not only participants but all countries in the region, he said.

He concluded his remarks by stating the cooperation between the EU and EEU is in the interest of all parties.

Currently the Middle East and Caucasus are reshaping and shaping, it is time for Armenia to pursue its place in the world assertively.

While soft-peddling in Europe and for that matter, on the world scene, the country is building and modernizing its armed forces to forestall another blitzkrieg from Azerbaijan.

Armenia is exercising President Roosevelt's advice by talking softly and carrying a big stick.

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COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Erdogan Admits that Turkey Is the 'Continuation' of the Ottoman Empire

For many decades, Turkish officials have outright denied the occurrence of the Armenian Genocide. In recent years, however, some Turks have made the excuse that today's Turkish Republic is not responsible for the genocide, since it was committed by the Ottoman Empire – a defunct state.

With this pretext, the issue is no longer whether genocide was committed or not, but who is responsible for it. Those who use this justification, claim that the Republic of Turkey is neither the successor nor the continuation of the Ottoman Empire, but a new and separate state.

This argument has gradually grown weaker as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan began speaking and acting as an Ottoman Sultan.

Two weeks ago, the Turkish leader made matters worse for his country when he, according to the Times of London, asserted that “modern Turkey is a ‘continuation’ of the Ottoman Empire – a direct contradiction of [Mustafa Kemal] Ataturk’s ideology, which cast the Imperial era as backwards, stale, and to be discarded and forgotten rather than celebrated.”

By stating that Turkey is a “continuation” of the Ottoman

Empire, Erdogan effectively concedes that today's Turkey is responsible for the actions of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, the Republic of Turkey, which inherited the Ottoman Empire's assets, also inherited its liabilities.

To confirm his allegiance to the Ottoman dynasty, Erdogan attended a ceremony earlier this month to mark the centenary of the death of Sultan Abdulhamid II, the “Red Sultan,” who has been rehabilitated by the current government. Erdogan conveniently ignored the fact that the Red Sultan had ordered the killing of 300,000 Armenians from 1894 to 1896 – also known as the Hamidian massacres.

“The descendants of one of the last Ottoman sultans are to be given Turkish citizenship, ending almost a century of outcast and ostracism,” notes the Times’ article, which continues:

“Abdulhamid II ruled from 1876 to 1909, and was much maligned in Kemal Ataturk’s modern Turkish republic for his authoritarianism, anti-Westernism and clampdowns on the media. Yet, in the era of President Erdogan he has been rehabilitated. A television series, ‘Pavitah,’ which depicts the life of Abdulhamid in glowing terms, has been lauded by Mr. Erdogan as essential viewing for Turkish youths to find out about their country’s history... ‘We see Sultan Abdulhamid II as one of the most important, most visionary, most strategic-minded personalities who have put their stamps on the last 150 years of our state,’ Mr. Erdogan said. ‘We should stop seeing the Ottomans and the Republic as two eras that conflict with one another.’ Abdulhamid died in 1918 and at celebrations for the centenary this week, Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that he would personally oversee the granting of citizenships to the family.”

Arrogantly, Erdogan then warned that U.S. soldiers in Northern Syria would soon receive the “Ottoman slap,” according to Reuters. He was “referring to a half-legendary Turkish martial move that involves a potent open-palm hit, resulting in a one-hit knockout or even skull fractures and death.” An illustration published by a pro-Erdogan Turkish

media outlet shows President Donald Trump receiving an “Ottoman slap” by President Erdogan. Furthermore, Reuters quoted Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu stating that Washington was backing the YPG [Kurdish forces in Syria] because it shared the same “Marxist, communist, atheist” ideology.

Professor Alfred de Zayas, an international law expert, explained in an essay titled, “The Genocide against the Armenians 1915-1923 and the relevance of the 1948 Genocide Convention,” that a successor state is responsible for the crimes committed by its predecessor regime. Moreover, a state that is a continuation of a previous entity is even more responsible because there is no difference between the two, as admitted by Erdogan two weeks ago.

In addition, in his study Alfred de Zayas quoted Professor M. Cherif Bassiouni: “In international law, the doctrine of legal continuity and principles of State responsibility make a ‘successor Government’ liable in respect of claims arising from a former government’s violations.” De Zayas concluded that “the claims of the Armenians for their wrongfully confiscated properties did not disappear with the change from the Sultanate to the regime of Mustafa Kemal.”

Finally, Professor de Zayas affirmed that “the principle of responsibility of successor States has been held to apply even when the State and government that committed the wrongs were not that of the ‘successor State.’ This principle was formulated, inter alia, by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Lighthouse Arbitration case.”

President Erdogan, by affirming that today's Republic of Turkey is the continuation of the Ottoman Empire, has inadvertently admitted that Turkey is responsible for the genocidal, territorial, and economic damages caused by the Ottoman Empire to the Armenian people. Erdogan's confession should be presented as evidence when demands emanating from the Turkish Genocide of Armenians are submitted to the World Court.

What Is 'Armenian' In Armenian Identity?

By Hratch Tchilingirian

THE DEBATE on “Armenian identity” has a long history and is an ever-evolving discourse, especially in the Diaspora. At least in the last 100 years since 1915, along with efforts to build communities in dispersion, there have been hierarchies of identity and canonical approaches to definitions of “Armenian,” especially as articulated, rationalized and promoted by elites, institutions and political parties in the Diaspora and in Armenia. This essay is not a study of identity per se, but about one of the aspects of identity – the “Armenian” bit of it.

Definitions of ethnicity encompass “all ascriptively-based group boundaries, including based upon race, religion, language, and/or region.” Generally, scholars argue that “characteristics such as religion, language and region are viewed as ascriptive rather than cultural because they are typically defined for purposes of ethnicity,” which refer to ethnic lineage and ancestral customs rather than current practices or locality of a person or a group. Therefore, “while individuals may adopt new languages, lapse or change religions, or alter their places of residence, it is much more difficult for them to change their ethnicity, even when ethnicity is based upon such characteristics.”

Contemporary scholarship and theories of ethnicity have shown that “ethnic boundaries” – patterns of social interaction that reinforce self-identification of a group and outsiders’ confirmation of the group’s distinctions – are socially constructed. They are “not predetermined by biology or customs, but malleable and responsive to changes in the surrounding social environment.” As such, ethnic boundaries are social mediums through which members associate with the larger group. Culture and geography are the two most emphasized elements in most of the literature on ethnic identity research. The cultural element is generally “viewed as a social construction involving insiders and outsiders mutually acknowledging group differences in cultural beliefs and practices.” The other

is employed to define the geographic origin of ethnic groups and, as such, “social origins that are foreign to the host society.” The geographic element has a largely objective basis, but is also partly subjective.

In the Armenian case particularly, on one hand, there are a host of assumptions on identity and “politically correct” definitions, expectations and interpretations of “who is an Armenian;” on the other, new self-defined and actualized “Armenian identities” are prevalent among post-genocide third and fourth generation Armenians spread around the world. These include, for example, not only hyphenated Armenians (American-Armenian, Lebanese-Armenian, Russian-Armenian, etc.), but also percentile-Armenians (half, quarter, 1/8 Armenian, etc.) and, recently, the more openly discussed category of “Islamized Armenian” identity.

In short, identity is not a fixed notion; it is an evolving concept depending on the social, political, and cultural environment, among other aspects, in which Armenians find themselves. For instance, the case of the Armenian communities in the Middle East provides a glimpse of the fact that identity construction, preservation and extension are not only a matter of internal group self-definition, externalization and internalization. In the Middle East, identity is also imposed from a variety of sources that include state and social structures, political processes and religious-cultural conditions. On one hand, identity markers for both the majority host society and the minority communities are state-defined, socially constructed and objectified. On the other, what might be termed the ‘soft othering’ of Christians and other non-Muslim groups by state and religious discourse reinforces the ‘differences’ and ‘incompatibilities’ of the ‘others’ in the mind of the larger society.

Generally Arab states impose, for instance, a national curriculum on Armenian or minority schools and draw socio-political (and legal) boundaries around non-Muslim communities. The state grants citizenship and a passport to an ethnic or religious “other,” yet limits or bans careers in high level civil service for minorities. The imposition of ethnic-religious identity is also systemic, overriding individual choice. For example, should an Armenian person declare him/herself to be an atheist or is not a member of any church – and does not speak the language – in legal records that person would still be classified or labelled by the State and its institutions as an ‘Armenian Christian.’ As a member of a non-Muslim group, there is virtually no choice except to be identified by one’s ‘birth group’ or ethno-religious affiliation. In other words, the person always remains as the ‘other’ vis-à-vis the dominant ethno-religious group, with its attendant implications.

There are intergroup influences on identity construction as well. Referring to the post-genocide first generation Armenians growing up in the Middle East, Yervant Pamboukian, a leading intellectual, teacher and former editor of Aztag newspaper in Beirut, said: “We lived our childhood in a period when we constantly heard about the sufferings and persecution” that his parents’ generation had been subjected to. “A great weight was put on us, to secure the rebirth of the nation. It gave us strength as the nation was going to be reconstructed by the

children of the survivors of the Genocide, the generation of those whose lives were worn out in the orphanages.”

In the 21st century, the perceptual and functional understanding of identity is changing, especially for an ever mobile and globalized Armenian Diaspora. Here, it is important to make a conceptual distinction between “Armenian identity” – the ascriptive aspect described above – and “Armenianness” – the cultural aspect – which at times are used interchangeably. One could compare Armenian identity to an “ethnic passport,” which one possesses to be identified with a group or a country; it is granted, acquired or self-claimed. However, Armenianness is what one does with that ethnic passport, how far and deep one travels into the “Armenian world” or into a world made of “things Armenian” – that is, the process by which one finds venues, opportunities, causes or reasons to actualize the wishes, desires, feelings, and thinking that are driven by one’s sense of identity. Put in another way, identity is the structure (the hardware), Armenianness is the agency (the software). While all Armenians who are or claim to be Armenians are fully Armenian, some Armenians choose to “travel” or explore more than others into the “Armenian world.” As such, Armenian identity “cannot be described exhaustively” and “in its totality,” like Foucault’s concept of “archive of a society, a culture, or a civilization,” – that is, the systems of enunciability, functioning, formation and transformation of events or things.

The distinctions between various types of Armenianness are not absolute, for instance, between traditional and symbolic Armenianness, as Anny Bakalian, in her seminal study of Armenian Americans, suggests. However, there are differences in perceptions, emphasis and expectations. The traditionalists advocate that speaking Armenian and being immersed in ethnic subculture are essential preconditions of “being Armenian.” Conventionally, the Church, political parties, voluntary associations and other collective structures have defined the structural parameters of Armenian identity and have advocated an essentialist form of collective expressions of Armenianness. In this thinking, Armenian identity is an ascribed status, that is, if one is born of Armenian parentage or has “Armenian blood,” they are automatically considered a member of the larger Armenian nation. In this traditional perception of identity, the idea of choice is not taken into consideration – an aspect of modern life so prevalent among and significant for the newer generations of Armenians.

Between the traditional and symbolic views, there are yet other perceptual varieties which define Armenianness through a set of qualities rather than just origin. A good example of this is the “definition” that Peter Balakian’s mother provides, when he describes the type of woman she expected him to go out with. “A woman had to qualify by being jarbig, which meant she had to have energy, wit, vitality. She had to be achgapatz, open-eyed, so that nothing could get past her, for she was keeper of the gate, the protector of things sacred: family and husband. If a woman wasn’t jarbig and achgapatz – clearly my mother thought she possessed these qualities in abundance – she wasn’t worthy, she wasn’t in the existential sense, ‘Armenian.’”

see IDENTITY, page 20



What Is 'Armenian' in Armenian Identity?

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In the 21st century, Armenian identity is a matter of choice for the vast majority of the third and fourth post-genocide generation of Armenians in the Diaspora, who participate in community life voluntarily rather than as a matter of obligation.[10] This choice is expressed through a sense of pride in one's heritage, feelings toward people and things Armenian, and involvement with other Armenians. For the new generations, as Bakalian explains, Armenianness is "voluntary, conscious, rationalistic, segmental, transitory, sporadic, that is, symbolic. Sentiment and convenience become the modus vivendi for maintenance of almost all aspects of Armenianness. Feelings run high, but when it comes to behavioral participation, convenience is the key." Symbolic Armenianness is more to do with emotions than genetic origins. Seen in its positive dimension, it provides valuable psychological function in today's increasingly individualistic and highly mechanised world. It provides a sense of rootedness and belonging. Indeed, practicing one's Armenianness is not dependent only on participation in traditional community life, but there are myriad of other choices in today's ultra-connected world where symbolic ethnicity could be lived or experienced.

In the past, the elites and institutions had influence and possessed authority in the discourse on identity. For instance, in the post WWII period, Armenian political parties had, arguably, a dominant position in community life in the Diaspora. Their ideological discourse was disseminated through party newspapers, schools, clubs and youth programs they ran. Although positions were sharply contested by rival parties, Khachig Tölölyan explains that "it was enthusiastically celebrated by [their] adherents and profoundly resented by [their] opponents, and the struggle served as the generator of polemics in which notions of diaspora were implicitly and explicitly elaborated." Indeed, in the ideological discourse of one of the largest parties, the ARF, the Diaspora was a "temporary and transitory" condition. The Party preached an "eventual return to the homeland" and "declared [it] essential and inevitable." Community institutions, like the ARF, had a strong influence on identity construction and, as Tölölyan describes, "even on the poems we would memorize, the songs we sang, and the

books and newspapers we read."

In sharp contrast, the 21st century is increasingly becoming a "world of self-reference" – that is, a world where trust in organizations, institutions or governments are increasingly declining and one's own position and beliefs are considered more relevant than other sources. The conventional sources of institutional authority and influence, therefore of trust, are not taken for granted anymore. Top-down traditional influence on discourse and identity is in a process of reversal and is becoming more horizontal than vertical.

Institutions that are relevant to identity seem to be losing effectiveness under the weight of the enormous complexities of these changes. In this age of social media and rapid technological advancements, people no longer rely "on a few well-informed opinion shapers," such as newspaper columnists, political actors, party or church leaders, but increasingly use, for instance, social media, peer-driven media, search engines, "where content is shaped by the search preferences of other users, or directly curated by friends or family." Studies show that "peer voices today are more powerful than the opinion of traditional authority figures." This is a world where "a person like yourself" is as credible as "an academic expert" and far more credible than, say, a community leader or government official. For sure, in the 21st century, there are more "informed Armenians" than "masses of followers." Armenians in their 20s and 30s are highly educated, socially and professionally well-connected, news and media savvy, and economically comfortable.

What is 'Armenian' about Armenian Identity in the 21st century?

I shall try to explore this rather conceptually risky question by looking at the question of what is "Armenian" about Armenian culture. My approach is informed by the hypothesis that, in the Diaspora, culture – in the widest sense – serves the role of land for a country, even as it includes the imagined or real homeland in it.

From an anthropological/sociological perspective, culture could be defined as everything learned, actions, beliefs, behaviors that are maintained and transmitted through symbols and objects, not genes. Culture denotes all the

knowledge, technologies, values, customs, behaviors and characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. Through culture, groups define themselves, conform to society's shared values, and contribute to society. Organizations and social institutions, such as the family, education, religion, work, so on, play important roles as they provide clusters of rules and cultural meanings associated with specific social activities.

So, what is "Armenian" about Armenian culture?

To answer this question, one could look into the various domains of culture: literature, music, architecture and visual arts to see what it is in these cultural traits or domains that make them "Armenian."

In this short essay, I shall take only one area and provide a sociological reading of Armenian folk music as observed and analyzed by Komitas (Father Komitas Soghomonian, 1869-1936), a priest in the Armenian Church, who was an ethno-musicologist, singer, choir director, music teacher and composer. Komitas spent years in villages and towns collecting Armenian songs and dance music and attempted to penetrate into the depth of this significant cultural domain. I chose to focus on folk music because this genre is most relevant to the problematics of cultural production and identity in the Diaspora.

Komitas explains that, in general, Armenian folk music could be divided into two branches: Eastern and Western Armenia. "Western melodies are broad and complex, rich and serious, bright and brisk; Eastern melodies are compact and simple, unsophisticated and light, prosaic and peaceful." [18] Indeed, one could make similar observations on other cultural aspects of East and West.

More important for the discussion here, the music of the "common people," or as Komitas comments, the peasants' music of both Western and Eastern Armenia "is extraordinarily rich and complex and condenses the entire inner and outer life of the Armenian. Each song is the genuine echo of his rustic heart and the clear mirror of his soul. Each song depicts a broad slice of life confined within a small frame."

He identifies six genres of folk music: Peasant, Ritual, Epic, Ballads, Ditties, and Antounis. These songs related to virtually all aspects of life. They reflected the social-cultural context of peasants and enforced connections with everyday life, rituals and traditions. Singing, as Komitas puts it, "is routine" for the peasant "as bread and water." He explains the significance:

Villagers adhere strictly to the prescribed use of the different types of songs. Each song must be learned or sung in its proper place and time. They will sing work songs during work, and domestic songs while at home, and so forth. No villager will sing a threshing song when at home, for the place to sing the threshing song is on the threshing floor. Therefore, villagers will most often refuse to sing songs that a non-peasant may request, for it is strange to them to be asked to sing songs when neither the time nor the place is appropriate. Each song is tied to the moment in village life and is related to just that moment. The peasant cannot comprehend, create, or utilize a song that is removed from that moment.

In modern times, new technologies, e.g. CDs, DVDs, MP3 have influenced and continue to impact music making and performance, and have altered the social (sociological) dimension of music. The idea of live music has been altered or modified by the reality of recorded music; even at some "live" concerts artists sing with playback, where voice is live, but music is recorded.

In the 21st century, the 20-30 years olds – unlike the ones described by Komitas – do not sing at functions anymore; they listen to music and dance to recorded music; the song does not have anything to do with the occasion or the gathering, or any particular relevance to aspects of daily living, but is rhythmically relevant to the dance. Rhythm or tempo is more important than the words or meaning of the song itself. Thus, today music listened to (or used) during social gatherings or "clubbing" is not expressions of daily life, or community rituals, but reproduced and reshaped, mixed and

matched to consumer needs and expectations. In the past, as Komitas notes, "the peasant gives more attention to the words of the song than to the tune and, not surprisingly, the texts of the songs live longer than their melodies." Today it is the opposite in most cases.

Komitas draws a delicately nuanced and elaborate definition of what "the Spirit of National Folk Song" is: The spirit of national music is the aggregate of patterns that a nation instinctively employs in singing. It is the particular movement of pitch and tone, it is the relationship between those tones and the phonemes of the language (grammatical expressive accent, musical accent). The spirit of national music is the rational articulation of the text and the corresponding improvised melody, which is the articulation of the heart. [It] is the choice of tone color (nasal, guttural, or chesty sounds). [It] is the genres of songs, and so on... All things which have an immediate association with a song, provided that they are immediate, non-artificial, intrinsic reflections of the internal and external life of the folk, express the spirit of national music.

Clearly, the relationship of word/text to melody, to rituals/occasions, memory and creativity is significant. In the 21st century, one would ask what are the connections, the relationships, the occasions in diasporic life that would make a piece of music, "Armenian music?" Is it the composer or the musician who makes the song "Armenian" or is it the "connections" a piece of music makes that define the song? These are questions that, I believe, need further exploration.

Music, as observed by Komitas in the life of the villagers, is one of the domains of culture that contains some of "the codes" as it were, of Armenianness. While in the past, communal singing was part of living out one's daily life as an Armenian, today this medium has lost its functional meaning in the lives of new generations of Armenians dispersed globally. If for Armenian peasants, culture in the form of music and dance was as natural and organic as going about their daily chores and life, in the 21st century Diaspora it is a matter of planning, choosing, adapting and performing. In short, beyond being and feeling Armenian, it requires thinking.

In conclusion, even as it is impossible to describe exhaustively and in its totality what "Armenian" is in Armenian identity, I suggest, it is the connections, the relationships, the occasions in diasporic life in the 21st century that makes a piece of music or a painting, or literature or a bowl of harissa "Armenian." It is the memory, thought and message that a cultural object or creation represents that makes it "Armenian" by connecting it to a meaning system that is larger than an individual's personal world.

Over two decades ago, Anny Bakalian suggested that the generational changes in the Diaspora indicated that Armenians are moving "from being to feeling Armenian." I would add that, in the 21st century, what is "Armenian" in Armenian identity is what you think Armenian is – as such, one could say the process has moved from feeling to thinking Armenian.

While the dream of an eventual return to the real or imagined homeland might still be dreamed by many, the vast majority of Armenians in the Diaspora will continue to be integrated into their societies, even as Armenia will probably remain to be a source of revitalization of Armenian identity in dispersion.

The realities of the 21st century require a new thinking and understanding of identity from the perspective of the specific places and context where Armenians live rather than on the basis of the rigid binaries of the dominant discourse.

Finally, a broader understanding of "Armenian identity" would benefit from a process of de-ethnicization of identity in order to fully appreciate its Armenianness[23] – that is, rather than essentialist or substantive definition of identity, a more functional and open-ended definition would provide a better catchment for the varieties of Armenian identities in the 21st century.

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