

## Archbishop Aykazian Present at Iraq, Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act Signing

**By Aram Arkun**  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WASHINGTON — On December 11, President Donald Trump signed H.R. 390, the Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act of 2018, in the Oval Office. The goal of the new law is to assist religious and ethnic groups targeted by ISIS for mass murder and genocide in the two countries mentioned. It also authorizes the US government to help bring organizers and perpetrators of these crimes to justice. Among the high-level dignitaries present, besides the president, were the vice president, various congressmen and senators, and religious leaders of the persecuted communities. Legate and Ecumenical Director of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, a leader in many American and international ecumenical organizations, was among the latter.

Archbishop Aykazian was the only religious leader invited who was based in the United States, as all the others were from the targeted region. Even American church organizations in general were not invited. When asked how he got involved in this, he replied, “I don’t really know. I think the White House knew that I have been very active in defending the rights of the Christian minorities and the suffering of refugees in the Middle East. I just received



President Donald J. Trump talks with reporters after signing H.R. 390-Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act of 2018 Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2018 in the Oval Office of the White House.

the invitation 3 days ago directly from the White House.” He said that there were 35 people present at the very beginning, but they only asked for some 7 or 10 people to go see the president.

It started at 11 a.m., he related, when Vice President Michael Pence came to speak to them. Aykazian was asked to perform the invocation and open the meeting. He said, “For us, our challenge is to stand with these Christian communities in their

time of trial, to speak up on their behalf, and to act to preserve the ancient Christian enclaves in the Middle East. Our objective is to ensure that the rights of religious groups will be preserved, that faith remains respected, and that people of faith remain free to perform their obligations without impediment.”

Pence declared that it has always been on the agenda of the administration to not see ACCOUNTABILITY, page 9

## Drawing Conclusions Three Decades After Devastation

**By Alin K. Gregorian**  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BELMONT, Mass. — On Thursday, December 13, almost exactly 30 years after the devastation of the earthquake in northern Armenia, some of the people who first responded to that disaster gathered at the First Armenian Church to share an overview of what motivated them as well as the logistics of sending aid to their brothers and sisters so far away. The program was cosponsored by the First Armenian Church and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research.

One focus of the evening, the brainchild of retired *Boston Globe* Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Stephen Kurkjian, was not only the disaster and the response, but the changes that resulted from the collision of the need of the people in Armenia and the immediate response from people around the world, Armenian and non, and how they not only changed relations between Armenia and the diaspora forever, but possibly put the final nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union.

He wrote a lengthy piece about the many firsts that happened as a result of the earthquake aid heading from the US. (See <https://mirrorspectator.com/2018/09/13/the-untold-story-the-earthquake-that-shook-armenia-the-relief-effort-that-changed-the-world/>)

see CONCLUSIONS, page 7



Vatche Meguerdichian at Alcazar

## Vatche Delights Taste Buds and Ear Drums

**By Taleen Babayan**  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — It’s half past twelve on a Saturday afternoon in Sherman Oaks. Extended families are ready to feast on homemade *mante* and *manaish*, *kebab* and *kufteh* reminiscent of the flavorful meals of Beirut as they catch up with loved ones. The restaurant is abuzz with activity, the phone is ringing off the hook and warm greetings are extended to the Armenian regulars while recommendations are made for newbies as eggs are cracked and chicken is grilled on the hissing stove.

The man behind this lively scene, savory food and center of hospitality is Vatche Meguerdichian, the international singer who made a name for himself covering songs from across the globe with his trademark smooth voice and the longing emotion he injected into each lyric, delivering a glimpse of the sweet yesteryear for his loyal audience.

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Mirror-Spectator’s Annual Winter Break

WATERTOWN — This is the last issue of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* before its annual winter break. Publishing will recommence with the issue of January 5, 2019. The offices will reopen on January 2. The first issue back will be mailed later than usual because of the postal schedule.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all our readers.

### Lukashenko, Putin Had Urged Sargsyan to Cede Land to Azerbaijan

MINSK, Belarus (Armenpress) — President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko disclosed in an interview on December 14 earlier proposals made in 2016 by him and Russian President Vladimir Putin to then-President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan for the settlement of the Karabakh conflict.

Lukashenko revealed the discussion during a meeting with Russian news media representatives, according to Belta.

“Me and Putin suggested surrendering five regions to Azerbaijan,” Lukashenko said, noting that the issue was discussed during the 2016 CSTO summit in Yerevan.

“He [Sargsyan] said — if he were to surrender those territories, Azerbaijan would cut off the road and will occupy Karabakh. Me and Putin promised we would deploy our troops and we won’t allow it to happen. He rejected the offer,” Lukashenko said.

He also revealed Azeri President Ilham Aliyev wanted to run a gas pipeline through Armenia to Georgia, and wanted him to speak to Sargsyan to get permission but Sargsyan rejected it.

### Official Visits Kocharyan in Jail

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On December 14, Human Rights Defender of Armenia Arman Tatoyan met with Robert Kocharyan, the former President of Armenia, currently under arrest.

“We discussed all issues concerning the jurisdiction of the Human Rights Defender. We have prepared respective inquiries relating the issues that have been raised during the private conversation,” he said.

“We are also in contact with the attorneys,” he said.

Kocharyan had spent two weeks in jail in summer, but was eventually freed. But on December 7, a higher court overruled the release and ordered him to be remanded into custody pending trial.

Kocharyan is charged with “overthrowing constitutional order” during the 2008 post-election unrest, when clashes between security forces and protesters left 10 people dead during his final days as president. He denies any wrongdoing.

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## ARMENIA

## News From Armenia

## Pashinyan Meets with Czech Ambassador, NGO Director

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with Ambassador of Czech Republic to Armenia Petr Mikyska and People in Need NGO Executive Director Simon Pánek on December 14, Pashinyan's office said.

During the meeting Pashinyan attached importance to the continuous development of the Armenian-Czech relations and noted that the Armenian government is interested in further deepening and expanding of economic partnership.

Pashinyan in particular addressed the government's steps and projects aimed at improving the business climate, stressing that the Armenian government guarantees the security of each investment project.

The ambassador congratulated the Armenian premier on the successful early parliamentary election and wished good luck in future activities.

Pánek introduced the activities and projects of People in Need noting an adventure tourism development project is underway in Syunik, and a project on founding a wool processing factory is being carried out in Amasia. According to Pánek, 500,000 Euros have been invested for each of the projects.

Pashinyan commended the projects and expressed the government's support in successfully fulfilling them.

## State to Renovate Prisons

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — For the first time in 10 years, the government has allocated funds from the state budget for capital renovations in prisons, Justice Minister Artak Zeynalyan said at a news conference on December 17.

"Around 270 million drams was allocated for capital renovations of draining systems and several other parts namely in the Nubarashen, Vardashen and Sevan correctional facilities. Moreover, the tenders have already been held and around 100 million has been saved and will be returned to the state budget," he said.

He said that they plan to create healthcare departments in three hospitals of Yerevan and in Vanadzor and Goris for medical treatment of convicted prisoners.

## Pashinyan Eyes Eradicating Corruption In Judiciary

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — No former, present or future official will go unpunished for stealing from the state, Armenia's caretaker Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said during a campaigning rally of the My Step bloc, the political force he leads, on December 3.

"After the revolution too, whatever officials will use their tools or mandate for personal interests will receive harsher punishment," Pashinyan told a crowd of supporters in Ashtarak.

He said that the government will also pay great attention to the judiciary.

"There are numerous corrupt judges in the judiciary. The government has all tools to also carry out a revolution in the judiciary," he said.

Pashinyan tendered his resignation on October 16 in a maneuver to trigger the process of dissolving the parliament.

In accordance to the Constitution, when a prime minister resigns the parliament must elect a new PM within two weeks. Lawmakers deliberately failed to elect a new PM as a formality in order to pave the way for dissolution.

Pashinyan took office after massive protests in April forced president-turned PM Serzh Sargsyan to resign.

The parliament was dissolved by virtue of law on November 1. On the same day, President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian signed an order on calling early general election on December 9.

The incumbent parliament functions until the new parliament is elected.

## Moscow Clarifies Position on 'Foreign' Military Presence in Armenia

MOSCOW — Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov referred to Armenian biological laboratories donated by the United States when he stressed the need to prevent "foreign" military presence in Armenia, a senior Russian diplomat said on Tuesday, December 18.

Lavrov told a Russian radio station on Monday that Moscow and Yerevan are close to signing an agreement that will bar third countries from deploying military personnel in Armenia. He spoke in the context of American bio labs provided to several ex-Soviet states in recent years.

Armenia has received five such facilities from the US to boost food

safety and other sanitary controls on its territory. Earlier this year, it allowed Russian officials to inspect them after Moscow claimed that Washington seems to be running a clandestine biological weapons lab in neighboring Georgia.

The Russian ambassador in Yerevan, Sergey Kopyrkin, said the Russian and Armenian sides are now engaged in a "constructive dialogue" on the work of the labs.

"I don't exclude that at some point we will reach an overall mutual understanding and agreement," he told a news conference. "I can't tell yet what form that agreement could take but any [Russian] ban or diktat is out of

question."

"There is a dialogue and desire to achieve mutual understanding, including on the transparency of the biological laboratories and the presence or non-presence of foreign military personnel in those labs," Kopyrkin added in reference to Lavrov's remarks.

Commenting on the remarks, the Armenian Foreign Ministry likewise insisted that Lavrov spoke about the bio labs.

"The labs belong to Armenia and are of a civilian character," stressed the ministry spokeswoman, Anna Naghdalian. "As far as Armenia is concerned, there is no question of military presence there."

## Ex-PM Karapetyan Quits Former Ruling Party

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Former Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan has ended his membership in former President Serzh Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia (HHK), it emerged on Tuesday, December 18.

A senior HHK official, Ruben Tadevosian, said that Karapetyan submitted a written notification to the party leadership several days ago. He gave no reason for his decision, Tadevosian told RFE/RL's Armenian service.

Karapetyan already resigned as the HHK's first deputy chairman in late June, more than one month after Armenia's former government was ousted in what is widely referred to as a "Velvet Revolution."

The 55-year-old technocrat took up the number-two position in the HHK hierarchy shortly Sargsyan appointed him as prime minister in September 2016. He ran the government until Sargsyan served out his final presidential term and controversially became prime minister on April 17.

Karapetyan remained in government as first deputy prime minister serving under a new, parliamentary system of government. The former business executive took over as acting prime minister

on April 23 immediately after Sargsyan resigned amid mass protests against his continued rule.

The HHK-controlled parliament reluctantly chose the protest leader, Nikol

month that Karapetyan will be appointed soon to the board of directors of a state-owned Russian oil company, Zarubezhneft.

Karapetyan lived and worked in



Supporters take a selfie with Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan at an election campaign meeting in Togh village in 2017.

Pashinyan, as the country's new leader on May 8. Karapetyan has made no public statements since then. It is thus not clear whether he could again engage in political activities in Armenia.

Russian media reported late last

Russia from 2011 to 2016, holding senior positions in local subsidiaries of the Gazprom energy giant. He managed Armenia's Gazprom-owned natural gas distribution network from 2001-2010.

The former premier, who put forward an ambitious economic reform agenda during his tenure, announced his decision to quit the HHK following its poor showing in the December 9 parliamentary elections. The former ruling party won only 4.7 percent of the vote and will therefore have no seats in Armenia's new parliament.

Karapetyan topped the list of HHK candidates in the previous parliamentary elections held in April 2017. Sargsyan's party won those polls amid opposition allegations of vote buying.

## Hayastan All Armenian Fund Donations Coming in

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The donations received during the Hayastan All Armenian Fund's November 22 Telethon 2018 have increased, with additional donations being received during the following period.

"Fundraisers and individual donations have continued after the November 22 Los Angeles Telethon 2018 too," Hayastan All-Armenian Fund Executive Director Hayk Arshamyan said at a news conference on December 15.

Initially, \$11,109,633 was raised during the telethon, but the number grew to \$14,115,940 until now.

## Former Armenian Police Chief under Investigation

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — The former chief of the Armenian police, Vladimir Gasparyan, could be prosecuted for illegally campaigning for the ruling Republican Party (HHK) ahead of parliamentary elections held in 2012, law-enforcement authorities said on Tuesday, December 18.

The Investigative Committee claimed to have obtained "facts" suggesting that Gasparyan pledged to help an embattled businessman avoid bankruptcy in return for his pre-election support for the HHK.

The businessman owned two companies that operated commuter bus services between Yerevan and the nearby towns of Abovian and Charentsavan. The companies started incurring serious losses and eventually went bankrupt after he fell out with Gagik Tsarukyan, a much wealthier entrepreneur leading a major political party.

Tsarukyan's charity provided free bus services on the same routes in an apparent effort to drive his rival out of business. The tycoon acquired the two pub-

lic transport firms in 2015.

A statement by the Investigative Committee claimed that in the run-up to the 2012 elections Gasparyan offered to help the troubled businessman if the latter earns votes for the ruling HHK. To that end, it said, Gasparyan introduced him to police officials and HHK functionaries from Abovian so that they "work together." That amounted to abuse of power, added the statement.

The committee has not brought criminal charges against Gasparyan, however. It said it has instead sent the case to another law-enforcement body, the Special Investigative Service (SIS), for further investigation.

Gasparyan, who ran the national police service from 2011-2018, rejected the allegations as "completely false and slanderous" through his lawyer, Tigran Atanesyan. "I am sure that an objective criminal investigation would refute those claims," Atanesyan wrote on Facebook.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sacked Gasparyan two days after taking office on May 8.





## ARMENIA

## President Sarkissian Attends Inauguration of Georgian President

TEVALI, Georgia — On December 18, a delegation headed by the President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian was present at the swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected President of

Georgia. I wish Georgia and the president of the country. I wish Georgia and the new President success for the coming years. I am looking forward to working with the President of Georgia.”

Within the framework of the event, Sarkissian had brief conversations with the heads of the delegations present at the ceremony and a group of guests.

Sarkissian in Tbilisi had a private meeting with the Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze.

Bakhtadze thanked him for participating in the inauguration and underscored that it was a pleasure to host the Armenian president in Georgia.

Sarkissian and Bakhtadze exchanged views on the current agenda of the Armenian-Georgian relations and stressed

the importance of enhancing an efficient cooperation in a number of areas. They spoke in particular about the development of the trade and economic relations, cooperation in the areas of education and culture.



President Armen Sarkissian with Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze

Georgia Salome Zurabishvili, which took place at the palace of Irakli II in Telavi.

Before the ceremony, Sarkissian, responding to questions from journalists said, “Armenia and Georgia, as well as our two nations, have



President Armen Sarkissian with former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, left, at the inauguration of President Salome Zurabishvili

## Request for Arrest of Former Deputy Premier Denied

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — A court of general jurisdiction of Yerevan has denied the motion by investigators requesting to arrest Armen Gevorgyan, a former Secretary of Security Council and a former Deputy Prime Minister of Armenia.

“The court rejected the arrest motion,” Gevorgyan told reporters outside a courtroom on December 14.

Noting that a fair decision has been made, he nevertheless said that he “will continue proving his innocence.”

Former Secretary of Security Council Armen Gevorgyan’s lawyer Erik Alexanyan earlier had said they expected a fair outcome and justice of the judicial proceedings. Gevorgyan is currently under investigation and investigators were seeking his arrest pending trial.

Yesterday Alexanyan told reporters that the main argument of investigators is that Gevorgyan will obstruct justice if not placed in custody.

“We will dispute both conditions of the arrest and the grounds. But if the court rules that grounds and conditions exist for his arrest we will file a motion for an alternative measure of restraint, bail,” Alexanyan said earlier.

The lawyer said they won’t file a peremptory challenge for the judge because there are no grounds to do so.

Gevorgyan maintains innocence and denies the charges.

As reported earlier, the Special Investigative Service (SIS) has pressed additional charges against Gevorgyan: assisting the overthrowing of constitutional order, bribery and money laundering.



## Nikol Pashinyan Meets with Catholicos of All Armenians

ECHMIADZIN —Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan visited the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin on December 14 and met with Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. With His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

Welcoming Pashinyan, the Catholicos of All Armenians said: “We are glad to welcome you again at the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin. Taking advantage of the opportunity, we would like to convey our congratulations to you as a successful organization of elections, which was highly appreciated by representatives of observation missions, as well as for the impressive results recorded by the “My Step” alliance in the elections. Our people once again expressed their confidence in you, their hopes, expectations and expectations, their progress in the safe and peaceful life.

“We know that our country faces many problems, challenges and challenges that require the unity of our world-spread children, our social and political forces, consolidation of our national potential, strengthening of solidarity, tolerance, forgiveness, by which we must have the opportunity to lead the centuries-long dreams and dreams into reality, with all our joint efforts, with all of us in solidarity. We are confident that this high consciousness of our nation should strengthen every individual of the nation to unconditionally invest in the homeland’s construction, the cherished and sacred work of the homeland’s progress. Our Church should also put forth all its efforts to strengthen the national unity, to unite our people’s potential, and to use all the opportunities that we can also record our success in life. We wish you success in the implementation of all your homeland programs and dreams.”

## Great House of Cilicia Delegation Visits Pashinyan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received on Monday, December 17, a delegation that had arrived representing the Catholicos of Great House of Cilicia Aram I.

Greeting the members of the delegation, Pashinyan recalled with warmth his visit to Antelias, Lebanon this year and the meeting with the catholicos, during which issues of pan-Armenian importance were discussed.

Member of the delegation included Bishop Shahe Panossian noted that the delegation has arrived in Armenia on behalf Catholicos Aram I to congratulate Nikol Pashinyan on the successful results of the parliamentary elections.

“Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia has also sent a written message from the spiritual center of the Diaspora and conveyed congratulations to you and the entire Armenian people, wishing that in the future all the works will be accomplished with the same success, leading Armenia to new heights under your leadership”, he said, handing the written message of the Catholicos to Nikol Pashinyan.

Nikol Pashinyan thanked for the congratulations and the warm wishes, conveying his warm greetings to Aram I and our compatriots in Lebanon.

Panossian informed Pashinyan that the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia plans to pay a visit to Armenia in January 2019.

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## INTERNATIONAL

## International News

## Armenia Continues To Side With Russia At United Nations

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Underscoring its continuing close ties with Russia, Armenia has again voted against a United Nations resolution criticizing Russian actions in and around Crimea.

The latest resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly Monday, December 17, voices “grave concern” over the Russian military buildup in Crimea and calls on Russia to end its “temporary occupation” of the Ukrainian region. It also demands the release of Ukrainian sailors and warships seized by the Russian military last month.

The non-binding resolution was backed by 66 countries, including NATO and European Union member states.

Nineteen other nations, including Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Cuba, Venezuela and Syria, voted against it. Two other members of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization — Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan — abstained.

Ukraine’s President Petro Poroshenko hailed the US-sponsored resolution as “yet another important step towards the de-occupation of Crimea.” For its part, Russia criticized it and thanked the 19 states for siding with Moscow.

Armenia’s stance was consistent with its voting record at the UN and other international organizations. Yerevan has usually opposed measures critical of Russia, the South Caucasus state’s leading ally.

Those include a 2014 General Assembly resolution that that condemned Moscow’s annexation of Crimea and upheld Ukraine’s sovereignty over the Black Sea peninsula. The then Armenian government’s decision to vote against it angered Ukraine, which recalled the Ukrainian ambassador in Yerevan in protest.

Armenia’s current leadership has not changed that policy. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has repeatedly pledged to keep his country allied to Russia since he swept to power in a democratic revolution in May.

## Italy Embassy Organizes Conference on Armenian Genocide

ROME (Armenpress) — Through an initiative of the Armenian Embassy in Italy, a conference titled “Memory of the Armenian Genocide and Prevention of Genocides” was held in Rome earlier this month.

The conference was organized on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Armenian Ambassador to Italy Viktoria Baghdasaryan in her remarks stated that although more than 100 years have passed since the first genocide of the 20th century, today’s crimes against ethnic and religious groups based on identity show that the world is not free of this disgusting phenomenon.

“This is another signal to the international community that the threat of genocides and crimes against humanity is not eliminated yet and requires united and consistent efforts of the international structures, states and civil society”, the Ambassador said.

She also touched upon Armenia’s initiatives in high international platforms on preventing genocides and the importance of international condemnation and recognition of the Armenian Genocide. “Such crimes against humanity require common actions by the international structures and the civilian community. It’s worth to mention that the causes of the repetition of genocides and crimes against humanity are the absence of unity, vigilance and consistency to recognize and condemn genocides,” she said.

Viktoria Baghdasaryan added that Armenians, as a people who survived genocide, feel a moral responsibility for raising the issue of prevention of genocides.

A number of other political, cultural figures, professors and Armenian community representatives also delivered remarks during the event.

## Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Issues Call to Action To Fill ‘Humanitarian Void’ at Global Forum

BERLIN — Global humanitarian activists and organizations gathered at the Aurora Dialogues in Berlin on December 11-12, to discuss and identify solutions to some of the world’s most prevalent humanitarian challenges. The event titled, “Humanity in a Fragile World — Partnering for Change” focused on discussions about the ongoing refugee crisis, displacement and migration, conflict scenarios and the growing trend of populism, the IDEA Foundation told Armenpress.

The Aurora Dialogues, moderated by international broadcaster Nik Gowing, began with opening remarks from Joachim Rogall, President and CEO of the Robert Bosch Foundation and Ruben Vardanyan, Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and was followed by a conversation between Dorothee Nolte, editor of the German



Joachim Rogall

media outlet Der Tagesspiegel and Dr. Tom Catena, who was announced as the Chair of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative on the first day of the forum.

Catena spoke of his first-hand experience seeing how conflict can ravage communities, as the only permanent physi-

cian in the Nuba mountains in Sudan where human aid is currently restricted. He further explained that his experience has helped him better understand the need to foster a strong connection between humanitarian activists and those affected by humanitarian crises.

The opening panel, titled, “A World Under Pressure,” saw panelists decry the increasing pressure placed on humanitarianism work. Cem Özdemir, Member of the German Bundestag, stressed that European democracies are currently threatened by the rise of illiberal regimes. “Liberal democracies are under threat,” Özdemir said. “Unfortunately, we have more and more countries that are threatened by illiberal regimes. What is happening in the world is because we allowed it. We can be the same people to stop this. One country alone cannot make a difference, but the EU collectively can make a difference.”

Day two of the Aurora Dialogues began with a discussion on “Humanity in a Fragile World.” Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, chairman of the Munich Security Conference and former German Ambassador to the US and UK, called for each state to be responsible for raising its voice against injustice. “We in the EU and Germany have provided a catastrophic picture of our inability to deal with what has been the worst humanitarian crisis in decades, the war in Syria,” he said. “We looked away. But even if you look away you are still guilty. If you can do something and you choose not to, then you are guilty.”

Ischinger added, “We have seen a depreciation of international law and the resulting erosion of trust already having a devastating effect. We need to reinterpret international law into a direction that protects humans and citizens and not dictators.” The panel fur-

ther highlighted that human security must be prioritized in international law and that European countries can no longer hide at the side lines of humanitarian catastrophes happening around Europe.

Ruben Vardanyan, Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, told participants that the biggest challenge in the world today is indifference. “We are currently living in a world which is becoming increasingly polarized — this is fueled by a lack of trust and misinformation,” he said. “In today’s society, it is becoming increasingly important to collaborate and build a network of people you can trust. Personal ties are key and I am extremely glad to see that this year’s Aurora Dialogues has once again brought together outstanding representatives doing exemplary work in the field of humanitarianism. Thank you for being part of the Aurora movement and for bringing hope and helping to preserve the future of humanity.”

The Aurora Dialogues concluded with a “Call to Action” by Catena, who in his impassioned address referenced the mission of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative which uses the experiences of the Armenian Genocide to empower modern day humanitarian heroes to help those in urgent need of basic humanitarian aid and continue the cycle of giving internationally. In his call to action, Dr. Catena, declared, “Just as Armenians rose from victims to humanitarian donors, the Aurora community should emulate that and take humanitarian action and fill the humanitarian void.”

The Aurora Dialogues was held in partnership with The Global Perspectives Initiative (GPI), the German Federal Foreign Office, Roland Berger Stiftung, Robert Bosch Stiftung, EY and UNICEF.

## Former Non-Profit President Pleads Guilty to Scheme to Conceal Foreign Funding of 2013 Congressional Trip

WASHINGTON — The former president of a Texas-based non-profit pleaded guilty on December 10 for his role in a scheme to conceal the fact that a 2013 Congressional trip to Azerbaijan was funded by the Azerbaijan government.

Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benczkowski of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division, US Attorney Jessie K. Liu for the District of Columbia and Assistant Director in Charge Nancy McNamara of the FBI’s Washington Field Office made the announcement.

Kemal Oksuz, aka “Kevin Oksuz,” 49, and previously a resident of Arlington, Va., pleaded guilty to one count of devising a scheme to falsify, conceal and cover up material facts from the US House of Representatives Committee on Ethics. Oksuz will be sentenced on February 11, 2019 before US District Court Judge Tanya S. Chutkan for the District of Columbia.

According to admissions made in connection with his guilty plea, Oksuz lied on disclosure forms filed with the Ethics Committee prior to, and following, a privately sponsored Congressional trip to Azerbaijan. Oksuz falsely represented and certified on required disclosure forms that the Turquoise Council of Americans and Eurasians (TCAE), the Houston non-profit for which Oksuz was president, had not accepted funding for the Congressional trip from any outside sources. Oksuz admitted to, in truth, orchestrating a scheme to funnel money to fund the trip from the State



Kemal Oksuz

Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR), the wholly state-owned national oil and gas company of Azerbaijan, and then concealed the true source of funding, which violated House travel regulations.

A five-count indictment was returned earlier this year in the US District Court for the District of Columbia and ordered unsealed in September. Oksuz was recently extradited from Armenia where he was detained by authorities, pursuant to a warrant that was issued for his arrest.

The investigation was conducted by the FBI. The case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Marco Palmieri of the Criminal Division’s Public Integrity

Section, Assistant US Attorney David Misler and Will Mackie of the National Security Division’s Counterintelligence and Export Control Section. Assistance in the investigation was provided by Trial Attorney Amanda Vaughn of the Public Integrity Section, Assistant US Attorney Jonathan Hooks and former Assistant US Attorney Michelle Bradford of the District of Columbia. Trial Attorney Natalya T. Savransky of the Criminal Division’s Office of International Affairs handled the extradition request to Armenia. The Office of International Affairs, along with the US Department of State and cooperating Armenian authorities provided substantial assistance with the extradition.





## INTERNATIONAL

# Former Michael Flynn Business Associates Indicted in Turkey Lobbying Case

By Adam Goldman and Mark Mazzetti

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (*New York Times*) — Two former business associates of Michael T. Flynn, President Trump's first national security adviser, have been indicted as part of a federal investigation into Turkey's secret 2016 lobbying campaign to pressure the United States to expel a rival of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Charges against the two former associates, Bijan Kian and Ekim Alptekin, were unsealed on Monday, December 17, in an Alexandria, Va., courtroom. The two men were indicted last week as part of a conspiracy to violate federal lobbying rules, and Alptekin was also charged with making false statements to FBI investigators.

The indictment is further evidence of a broad crackdown on unregistered foreign lobbying growing from the inquiry by Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel who has investigated foreign flows of money from Ukraine, Turkey and other countries devised to manipulate decision-making in Washington. Mueller referred the Turkey case back to prosecutors in Northern Virginia.

The indictment said that the two men sought to conceal that Turkey was directing the work, and that cabinet-level Turkish officials approved the budget for the project and were given regular updates by Alptekin about the campaign's progress. Flynn's firm — Flynn Intel Group —

received a total of \$530,000 for its work.

"The defendants sought to discredit and delegitimize the Turkish citizen in the eyes of politicians and the public," the indictment said.

Kian appeared in court on Monday but was released after the hearing. His lawyer declined to comment. Prosecutors said that he faces up to 15 years in prison and Alptekin up to 35 years.

Alptekin's current location is unknown. Through a spokeswoman, he denied the charges, claiming that he never lied to the F.B.I., and that Turkey did not participate in the project.

The investigation into Turkish lobbying began in 2016 after Flynn — a former general and businessman who was advising Trump's political campaign — wrote an op-ed article for *The Hill* newspaper on Election Day attacking Fethullah Gulen, a cleric living in Pennsylvania whom the Turkish government has accused of helping instigate a failed coup.

The article called Gulen a "radical Islamist" and a "shady Islamic mullah." The Justice Department began examining whether Flynn and his company were working as paid lobbyists for Turkey. Kian helped engineer the lobbying project, which involved trying to persuade members of Congress that Gulen ought to be extradited.

Flynn and Kian also commissioned a lengthy dossier titled "Fethullah Gulen: A Primer for Investigators," which was written by Thomas Neer, a former F.B.I. agent.

Alptekin is a Turkish businessman close to Erdogan and helped finance the project. The indictment said that as part of the scheme, Alptekin used his company — a Dutch firm called Inovo BV — to conceal that Turkey's government was behind the payments.

According to the indictment, Turkey's government asked the United States in July 2016 to arrest and extradite Gulen, whom Turkish officials have accused of trying to overthrow Erdogan in the military coup earlier that month.

The Justice Department rejected Turkey's request, the indictment said, because it had not met "the legal standards for extradition."

The secret lobbying effort appears to have begun shortly afterward. Prosecutors said that on July 29, 2016, Alptekin sent an email to Kian saying that he had met with a Turkish government minister who was interested in exploring a lobbying campaign against Gulen.

They called the effort the "Truth Campaign" and later "Operation Confidence."

In another email to Kian and Flynn, Alptekin said he had several meetings with a pair of Turkish ministers in Ankara. "I have a green light to discuss confidentiality, budget, and the scope of the contract," the email said, according to the indictment.

One month later, the three men met in New

York with a pair of Turkish ministers to discuss the campaign against Gulen, the indictment said.

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Days before the 2016 election, Alptekin complained to Kian that the project had not "publicized enough negative information" about Gulen. Six days later, Flynn published his op-ed.

In 2017, after the lobbying effort was exposed, Flynn and Kian filed additional disclosures acknowledging that the Gulen project "could be construed to have principally benefited the Republic of Turkey." They detailed payments to other people and firms associated with the Gulen project.

When he pleaded guilty last December to lying to F.B.I. agents working on the Russia investigation, Flynn also admitted to prosecutors that he had repeatedly violated laws requiring firms to register their work on behalf of foreign clients.

Earlier this month, Mueller's prosecutors issued a sentencing memorandum saying that Flynn had provided "substantial help" in several unspecified but continuing investigations. It is believed that the Turkey inquiry is one of these investigations, since he had direct knowledge of different aspects of the inquiry.

# The Turks in Germany Who Defeated Denial

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — Since June 2, 2016, the German Bundestag (Parliament) has been counted among those political institutions worldwide that have officially recognized the Armenian Genocide. The names of the parliamentarians associated with launching the initiative and organizing the political muscle to force it through are known. But if those individuals served as midwives, they were not the ones to conceive the idea. In the beginning was a small group of Turkish citizens living in Germany who came together in an association called Soykırım Karşıtları Derneği (SKD), the Society against Genocide. At the beginning of December, they observed their 20th anniversary in Frankfurt and they had good reason to celebrate.

The festivities took place in a community center where some members had held birthday parties or wedding receptions. There were Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Arameans, Kurds and Germans, young and old, there was music, sung in all the languages, and dancing, and a buffet



Ali Ertem speaking at a Seyfo (Assyrian Genocide) event

dent, who first told him about the crimes committed by the Young Turk regime against the Armenians. Like many Turks who first learn about the genocide when they come to Germany, he decided to look into it, and his research quickly proved the case. Moved by the moral responsibility to act on this new knowledge, he set up the association with the commitment to get Turkey to recognize the genocide, and the first petitions began to circulate.

Ertem and his associates soon thereafter organized a visit to Armenia, which was to become an annual event every April 24. On his first visit, he was asked by his hosts why he set up the SKD, considering the policy of denial that reigned in Turkey. He answered with an anecdote about an old Shi'ite wise man. The man lived as a farmer with his family, at the foot of a mountain, and his sons had been urging him to move to a region with more sunlight, for the crops. The man refused, and instead he began to dig at the base of the mountain every day. In response to queries, he explained that by digging, he was preparing to move the mountain; if he did not complete the task in his lifetime, his sons would continue it, and after them, their sons. And so on, until the mountain had been relocated. "We have broken the monopoly on the genocide," Ertem said. "The situation inside Turkey is tough, to be sure," he said, "but we are moving mountains."

Dogan Akhanlı was the guest speaker. The German-Turkish author has been jailed and persecuted repeatedly by Turkish authorities, most recently a year ago when he was arrested in Spain on Turkish orders and released only after an international mobilization. As a result of this harassment, his fame as an author has been enhanced and his books are selling well.

His address filled out the story of the SKD and its significance. He recalled that in a speech he was invited to deliver on April 24, 2011 at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt, at the annual genocide commemoration event, he had characterized the SKD as the pioneer in the process of coming to terms with the genocide against the Armenians and Aramaeans. Akhanlı said that "denial of the genocide and expulsion of the Armenians and Aramaeans and Pontus Greeks was not only a social phenomenon inside Turkey." Outside the country, intellectuals with a Turkish background, even those committed to working through past history, shied away from using the term genocide — until Hrant Dink's murder in 2007. He cited the

usual argument, that one couldn't use the term genocide for events occurring prior to its having been coined as a juridical term, and reviewed the work done by Raphael Lemkin, which led to the UN Genocide Convention.



Dogan Akhanlı

Since then, he said, there is no question among researchers that this was genocide. So, it is wrong to talk about some "Armenian question."

Akhanlı noted, "The response to the so-called 'Armenian question' of the last century was annihilation. At present there remains only the Turkish question: Turkish denial of the genocide, Turkish defamation of the diaspora, Turkish arrogance and lack of respect for the victims and their descendants."

It was thanks to the diaspora, he continued, that the fight for recognition continued and sustained the memory of the victims. "And yet," he said, "when I came to Germany in the beginning of the 1990s as a refugee, I had only a vague idea of the dimensions of the Young Turks' violence." At the time no books on the subject were available in Turkey, and only in that decade did some works appear, those published by Belge in Istanbul, and German books like those by Taner Akçam. It was in that period that he met Ali Ertem and the other founding members of the SKD, who "were the first people in Germany, perhaps worldwide, who named by name the crime against the Armenians and openly pronounced it." He recalled the series of meetings, exhibitions, round table discussions and readings that the SKD organized, thus bringing together for the first time the successor generations of the perpetrators and the survivors.

Yet it took a good 20 years before the Bundestag would pass its resolution. Akhanlı

said it was above all "thanks to the struggle of the SKD" that the resolution passed. In November 1999 the SKD had gathered signatures from more than 10,000 Turkish citizens and sent the petition to the Turkish parliament demanding that it recognize the genocide in accordance with the 1948 UN Convention, but the petition was returned by mail, unopened. So, in April 2000, the SKD together with the Berlin-based Working Group Recognition (AGA), delivered the petition to the German Bundestag, demanding that it recognize the genocide and urge Turkey to follow suit. Of the 16,000 signatures of German residents, 10,000 were Turkish citizens, and support came from prominent individuals worldwide.

In closing, Akhanlı recalled the proposal he had launched in the Paulskirche address in 2011, that Germany expand working through its history, to include other atrocities committed during the colonial period. He had also proposed the creation of an Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (Aktions Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste-ASF) for Turkey. The ASF, founded by the Evangelical Church in 1958, has been active as a peace organization, promoting reconciliation in dealing with the legacy of Nazism, and had a major impact on Akhanlı's own development. Although there are individuals in Turkey eager to collaborate, the difficulty, the speaker explained, lies in the fact that, without genocide recognition on the part of Turkey, there are no institutional forces ready to act. One organization that has pursued peace work, he said, is Anadolu Kültür, and it has come under assault since the failed coup attempt in 2016. Its founder Osman Kavala sits in jail.

"But nevertheless," he concluded, "we have a core group, the SKD, which is fighting indefatigably and uncompromisingly against racism and anti-Semitism, against current and historical violence, which has made an admirable contribution to reconciliation and which is celebrating its 20th birthday today."

On a personal note, Akhanlı said this "association of solidarity work" had had the "magical effect of saving me from the jaws of arbitrary and arrogant power and made it possible for me to be here with you and to celebrate. Heartfelt thanks!"



# Community News

## Mark Hoplamazian of Hyatt Hotels on Airbnb And Why Stupid Questions Are Smart

By David Gelles

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — Mark Hoplamazian, the chief executive of Hyatt Hotels, has worked for one family for the bulk of his professional career.

He attended Harvard College and got his M.B.A. at the University of Chicago. After short stints at First Boston and the Boston Consulting Group, he joined the Pritzker family's sprawling business empire in 1989.

Inside the Pritzker organization, Hoplamazian got an intense and varied introduction to business, working closely with Jay Pritzker, the family's influential patriarch, on companies including Hyatt Hotels and the industrial behemoth Marmon.

But in the years after Mr. Pritzker's death in 1999, a family feud erupted, and it fell to Hoplamazian and his team to dismantle the Pritzker empire and try to appease warring factions. Eventually, Hoplamazian was made C.E.O. of Hyatt.

This interview, which was condensed and edited for clarity, was conducted at the Hyatt Centric Times Square in New York City.

### What did your parents do?

I grew up outside of Philadelphia. My father ran a landscaping business. My mom never worked outside the home, so she was the glue of our family. But I kind of lived a couple of different childhoods, because my father passed away when I was 13. My life hit an inflection point. My whole focus on school shifted after my dad passed away. I was the youngest of five kids, my dad had been the breadwinner, and I became hyper-focused on "How are we going to live and survive?"

### What was your first job?

In the landscaping business, there are many different things you can do even as a kid — taking ivy cuttings and planting them in little peat pots to let them grow, digging trees, a lot of physical work. That's what I would do for summers and on weekends from the time I was 10, or even younger. I was driving tractors and trucks when I was 13, 14 and 15 years old.

### Is that legal?

No. In fact, when I was 15, the first time I ever drove a truck on the road there was an amazing blizzard. It was 1978, I'll never forget it. It hit the whole East Coast. My brother had a contract to clear snow at this huge parking lot area, but he needed someone to drive one of the trucks over there to have it be available. He said, "Just get in the truck. I know you can drive it, because you've been driving around the nursery. Just follow me." We get on the road, and there was so much snow, and I'm driving illegally at that time. The good news is, there was nobody else on the road.

### How did you wind up joining the Pritzker organization?

A friend of mine was working with them, and I got a call from him. He said, "So we've decided that we're going to probably hire someone of your experience level. Why don't you come in and meet Jay?" I show up, and sitting at the table was Jay, the head of the machinist union at Eastern Airlines and his lawyer. Eastern was in bankruptcy, and so they were there pitching Jay on stepping in to take over the airline. At the end of that first meeting, Jay hands me the box of information they brought, and this was on a Tuesday. He said, "Why don't you come back on Friday and tell me what you think we should do?" I didn't know anything about airlines, and I knew even less about bankruptcy. That was my interview.

### So what happened?

I came back on Friday, and I fumbled around, I guess, well enough for him to say, "O.K., the see AIRBNB, page 8



Heghine Movsesyan visiting Massachusetts 911 center (courtesy Heghine Movsesyan)

## Education Champion Heghine Movsesyan Helps Vanadzor Students

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — People always seem to seek more uplifting and inspiring stories in the holiday season. Consequently, the story of Heghine Movsesyan is quite appropriate and rewarding.

Overcoming a variety of challenges in life, Heghine has created a free afterschool school program for children in her native city of Vanadzor, the capital of Lori Province of Armenia, and recently was in the United States on a two-week trip to gather more information for her work.

Movsesyan discovered while young that she had a talent for languages. Her mother paid for private lessons by selling the family's heirlooms. In 2006, she graduated the No. 8 Anoush Mathevosian School in Vanadzor, which itself is a manifestation of the good deeds of the school's namesake philanthropist in the United States, and entered Vanadzor H. Toumanyan State Pedagogical University. She graduated with honors, focusing on the English language and literature and then earned a master's degree in pedagogy in the fields of foreign language and literature in 2012.

Movsesyan now can speak many languages, including Armenian, Russian, English, German and French, and can read some Latin, Arabic, Italian and Urdu.

She said, "The more languages we know, the more capable we are in a changing world. I would like to speak to each person in his own language."

She applied for a job in the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia, and after taking the necessary examination and taking part in interviews, became one of only five people chosen out of 240 applicants. Her language skills in particular were a great asset. She began work in August 2014 at the Emergency Preparedness Services in Vanadzor. This is the equivalent of 911 in the United States. She responds to emergency calls, does translation and interpretation, and registers disasters.

Movsesyan knew that in Vanadzor, the public schools were not as good as they were in the Soviet period. Tutoring was necessary so that students could advance and get higher education. The same teachers from the public schools would charge money for afterschool lessons, but the poor could not afford this. She felt bad and wanted to create a free tutoring program.

She said, "First of all, I wanted to teach English, because it is an international language. In Armenian, you need to take an exam in English if you want to enter nearly any university. We wanted to start with English, but it turned into a school." She invited several dozen students to her home, an apartment on the seventh floor of a Soviet-era building, and implemented the program Reach Out and Touch the Stars. The students began receiving top marks of 10 out of 10 in English in school, while in Russian and Armenian they only were getting 7s and 6s. Peace Corps Volunteers helped teach in her program.

Movsesyan related that the parents were shocked and began asking for other subjects to be taught, and therefore Armenian classes were added. Peace Corps volunteer Steven Greenberg, in Vanadzor doing youth and community

see SHEIKHA, page 8



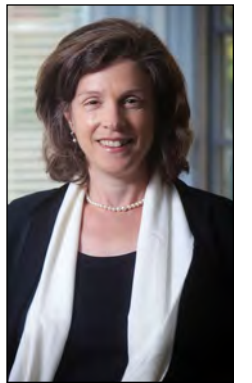
Heghine Movsesyan with Steven Greenberg (photo: Aram Arkun)

## Maud Mandel Named Williams College President

WILLIAMSTOWN, Mass. — Williams College announced recently the appointment of Maud S. Mandel, dean of the college and professor of history and Judaic studies at Brown University, as its 18th president. She will succeed Protik (Tiku) Majumder. Mandel will begin her tenure at Williams on July 1.

As dean at Brown, Mandel has been deeply involved in efforts to advance diversity and inclusion, including promoting programs to foster retention for historically underrepresented students in the STEM fields. She also led a collaborative process with students and staff to open the First-Generation College and Low-Income Student Center (FLI Center), the first center at any Ivy League school to be dedicated to first-generation students.

"The committee found Maud's passion for liberal arts education infectious and her commitment to deepening and enhancing inclusion and diversity stirring," says Ngonidza she Munemo, Williams' associate dean for institutional diversity and member of the Presidential Search Committee.



Maud S. Mandel

In her scholarship, Mandel examines the ways policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion in 20th-century France have affected ethnic and religious minorities, most notably Jews, Armenians and Muslim North Africans. Her work has won support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the American Philosophical Society, among others.

Her dissertation was titled "The Aftermath of Genocide, Armenians and Jews in 20th Century France."

A strong proponent of the liberal arts, Mandel established the Brown Learning Collaborative, aimed at strengthening student learning in the core competencies of a liberal arts education.

Mandel earned a BA from Oberlin College in 1989 and completed a PhD from the University of Michigan in 1998. After coming to Brown as a visiting assistant professor in 1997 she joined the university's faculty permanently in 2001, rising to professor of history and Judaic studies in 2014. During this time, she also held leadership roles in the university's Department of History and the Program in Judaic Studies. She became dean of the college in 2014.

"Both inside the classroom and as a senior academic leader, Maud Mandel's impact on the undergraduate experience at Brown has been nothing short of transformative," says Brown University President Christina Paxson. "Maud is a deeply knowledgeable higher education leader, a relentless champion for undergraduates and a truly inspiring colleague. We have been fortunate that she has made Brown her home for the last two decades, and I commend Williams College on its outstanding selection for its next president."

Mandel's husband, Steve Simon, and children, Lev and Ava, will join her when she arrives at Williams College this summer.

"I have always known that Williams was an extraordinary institution, and I've had the pleasure over the last few months as I've engaged in this process to really learn much more about why Williams occupies this spot," Mandel says. "And it is in that process that I have become so deeply drawn to this opportunity. I am excited to lead this extraordinary campus into the next phase of its development."





COMMUNITY NEWS

Drawing Conclusions Three Decades After Devastation

CONCLUSIONS, from page 1

The program featured a trio of women who had taken part in organizing the first wave of aid. They were Dr. Carolann Najarian, who had founded Armenian Health Alliance, Elaine Kasparian who cofounded the Armenian Children’s Milk Fund under the aegis of the Armenian Missionary Association of America, and Michele Simourian, who also headed up the relief projects for the Armenian Missionary Association of America. (Her husband’s involvement at her urging was explored in the second part of the program.)

Remembering Harrowing Times

An ABC “World News Tonight” report from December 8 opened the program, with the late anchor Peter Jennings narrating the scenes of utter devastation in northern Armenia.

Next, a video was shown of a brief interview between Kurkjian and Hayk Demoyan, the former head of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Museum-Institute in Yerevan.

Demoyan and his family lived in Gyumri and he recalled how his mother warned him and his brother, both of whom were in the same grade, to be careful on December 7 as she had had a bad dream. They walked the 15 minutes to

school and took part in the woodworking class when the quake hit.

“There was a roaring from the earth, like a demon or a huge animal,” he recalled, saying that the room’s glass cabinets shattered and the metal tools clanged against each other, adding to the otherworldly cacophony. He, his brother and the rest of the class made it out with difficulty, he recalled, as the floor was shaking both vertically and horizontally, making progress difficult.

“There were three shakes,” he said. Once they left the building, they looked back to see it had all collapsed.

Even more difficult, he said, was seeing someone on the eighth floor of a nearby apartment building shout for help. As he and other students were looking around to see if someone could help, they looked back at where the building was, but “suddenly the building was gone and you could see blue sky.”

His family was lucky to have all three children and parents survive, but Demoyan added, “you saw death everywhere. It was the first time I saw death up close.”

He got especially emotional when he recalled the death of his young cousins. Their bodies were identified by their shoes and their little fingers were still stained by ink from the day’s lessons.

Aside from the overwhelming sadness of their brethren, he said the citizens of the city and Armenia in general were mourning the loss of the crew of the Yugoslav plane that crashed on its way to deliver aid.

Phone Banks and Disbelief

Kurkjian stressed that the program did not attempt to present all the figures involved with

the effort, but “just to catch the conversation that went on by hundreds of people” responding to the tragedy.

Najarian, Kasparian and Michele Simourian each recalled their reactions to hearing about the quake and their desires to help.

Najarian was already involved with Armenia as she had been supporting efforts in Karabakh for independence and helping people there who had been brutalized by the Azeri government in Baku and Sumgait.

In fact, the morning of December 7 she and her husband, George Najarian, had placed a full-page ad in the *New York Times* promoting Karabakh’s independence from Azeri rule. Soviet Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev was in New York and the ad was supposed to get his attention. The morning of December 7, then-Speaker George Keeverian of the Massachusetts House also had planned to have a press conference to draw attention to the Azeri pogroms.

But, as Najarian recalled, “everything changed.” The press conference instead turned to one about the most intense earthquake to have hit any Soviet republic.

“The need was huge, beyond anything we could have comprehended,” she said.

Boston was home to the first wave of help directed at Armenia. The telephone company brought banks of phones to the Najarians’ home and then to rented offices, for fundraising.

Kasparian, of the Milk Fund, spoke about the help of local medical staff and also the sincere response of many who wanted to help children, many orphaned now, receive nutrition.

“I want to thank all of you. It took a whole

community to bring out what we could accomplish,” Kasparian said, adding praise for the Najarians’ leadership.

Michele Simourian spoke about the efforts she coordinated for the Armenian Missionary Association of America. She recalled that the organization’s leader, the late Rev. Movses Janbazian, put out a call to the faithful and asked them to help, after visiting the devastation and seeing for himself the extent of the need. Simourian coordinated with Elizabeth Agbabian on the West Coast, to help children and orphans.

The Armenian groups were supported by an advertising campaign led by Ed Eskandarian of the storied Arnold Communications (later Arnold Worldwide Partners), which “started to blitz for funds.”

According to a story in the *Washington Post*, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, \$26 million was raised in the US from organizations and individual, Armenian and non-Armenian. The Armenian community in the US raised a total of \$40 million.

Armenia happened to be in a closed empire behind the Iron Curtain. However, a confluence of powerful friends of the Armenian community in the state, including George Keeverian and Sen. Edward Kennedy, were able to break down a lot of barriers. Strange bedfellows in the delivery of aid to Armenia included the notorious arms dealer Sarkis Soghanalian, who lent his plane to Najarian for the delivery of 90,000 pounds of supplies.

Football Friends in High Places

The panel left, and Kurkjian invited John Simourian to sit and tell his story about how he managed to deliver one of the first batches of medical aid to Armenia, with the help of friends Vernon R. Loucks Jr., CEO of Baxter International medical supplies company and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, whom he joked was the only Democrat he had ever voted for, ever since they were teammates playing football (badly) on the Harvard team.

With great charm and self-effacement, Simourian recalled how his wife, Michele, urged him to contact his “good friend,” Loucks, to see if he could donate medical supplies. He quipped that he had not seen Loucks since their college days, when Simourian played for Harvard and Loucks for the rival Yale team for four years. They had formed a close friendship and had remained in touch, though they had not succeeded at seeing each other in person.

“I hadn’t seen him since 1957,” he recalled. He had left messages over the years and received and sent letters, but they had never connected, even on the phone.

Once he called Loucks in December 1988, everything changed. “I called him that morning. To my surprise, he picks up the phone,” Simourian recalled.

He was going to ask the Baxter executive to help send medical aid to Armenia and to his surprise, he learned that his old friend had just suggested doing that very thing during a meeting with the company’s executives.

With breathtaking speed, Loucks delivered his report and lined up his donations, letting Simourian know that he would need to find three planes for the delivery of the dialysis machines and 60 visas for the American specialists who would administer the treatments. Loucks said that according to his reports, after an earthquake, dialysis machines are vital.

Visas and planes heading to a Soviet republic were no easy feat, yet another Simourian friend, Kennedy, played a vital role. “Ted and I played football at Harvard,” he said. “We kind of hit it off.”

“I have never voted for a Democrat in my life, with one exception: Ted,” he quipped, drawing chuckles. “I called him and said we need three planes and 60 visas. He asked where do you want the planes?”

The planes carried \$2 million worth of equipment, many in use even today. The 60 Baxter staffers stayed for nine months.

Simourian and his friend Loucks kept in touch after that. When Simourian thanked Loucks for his help, the latter responded, “This was the most important thing I have ever done in my life.”

Kennedy also helped make possible the landing of Soviet military transport planes at Andrews Air Force Base for loading supplies headed to Armenia.

“Ted said, ‘I don’t want to see this [news of the assistance he provided] anywhere.’ I kept it a secret until he died,” John Simourian said.



Christmas Donations

- Herman Hintiryan, Oak Park, MI \$500
- Donald and Barbara Tellalian, Newton, MA \$500
- Elizabeth Aprahamian, Northville, MI \$500
- Tekeyan Cultural Association, Detroit Chapter, \$500
- Carolann Najarian, E. Orleans, MA \$500
- Parsekian Foundation, South Boston, MA \$300
- Hagop Sarkissian, Watertown, MA \$300
- Avedis and Houry Boyamian, Winchester, MA \$300
- Daniel and Ludmila Sahakian, State College, PA \$300
- Carl Bazarian, Amelia Island, FL \$300
- Karekin Arzoomanian, New York, NY \$250
- Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Watertown, MA \$250
- Charleen Mosesian Onanian and Peter Onanian Weston, MA \$250
- Yervant Chekijian, Watertown, MA \$250
- Hagop Vartivarian, Mahwah, NJ \$200
- Stephen Philibosian Foundation, Indian Wells, CA \$200
- Ernest Barsamian and Sonig Kradjian, Boca Raton, FL \$200
- Stephen Kurkjian, Manomet, MA \$200
- Varter’s Oriental Rugs, Belmont, MA \$200
- Ruth and Wilford Swisher, Newington, CT \$200
- Nelson and Anna Tabirian, Winter Park, FL \$200
- Armenian Missionary Association of America, Paramus, NJ \$200
- Heratch and Sonya Doumanian, Chicago, IL \$200
- Arlene Avakian, Boca Raton, FL \$200
- Dikran Meguerditchian, Lexington, MA \$120
- Toufayan Bakery, Ridgefield, NJ \$100
- Harry and Janice Mazadoorian, Kensington, CT \$100
- Sarkis and Ruth Bedevian, Wyckoff, NJ \$100
- Osep and Nadya Sarafian, Northville, MI \$100
- Aram Sethian, Monrovia, CA \$100
- Charles Tateosian, Walnut Creek, CA \$100
- John and Anita Wolohojian, New York, NY \$100
- Berge Tatian, Stoneham, MA \$100
- Berdj Kiladjian, Winchester, MA \$100
- Jacob Pilibosian, Arlington, MA \$100
- Jack and Eva Medzorian, Winchester, MA \$100

- John and Roxie Maljanian, Newington, CT \$100
- Richard and Gail O’Reilly, Winchester, MA \$100
- Parsegh Kartalian, Glendale, CA \$100
- Richard McOmber, Rumson, NJ \$100
- Karekin and Maria Movsesian, Paramus, NJ \$100
- Anna Marie Norehad, Glenview, IL \$100
- James Tashjian, Westborough, MA \$100
- Warren and Mary Melikian Haynes, New York, NY \$100
- Noyemi and Hagop Isnar, Haworth, NJ \$100
- George Haroutunian, Stoneham, MA \$100
- Doreen Bilezikian, Osterville, MA \$100
- Lucine Mardirosian Harvey, Windermere, FL \$100
- Anoush Balian, West Newton, MA \$100
- Edmond Y. Azadian, West Bloomfield, MI \$100
- Dr. Dennis and Dr. Mary Papazian, San Jose, CA \$100
- Robert Kallian, Shaker Heights, OH \$100
- Dorothy and Terrance Martiesian, Providence, RI \$100
- Margaret Ahnert, Fort Lauderdale, FL \$80
- Bruce Ohanian, Winchester, MA \$80
- Grace Pinajian, Wyckoff, NJ \$80
- Vahan and Anoush Chamlian, Fresno, CA \$80
- Sarah Hagopian, Lynnfield, MA \$80
- Edgar Mosesian, Haverhill, MA \$80
- Sue Mirakian, Cleveland, OH \$80
- Edward Mesrobian, Waltham, MA \$50
- Van and Mary Aroian, Worcester, MA \$50
- Armen and Brenda Shahinian, Franklin Lakes, NJ \$50
- Haik Biglari, Huntsville, AL \$50
- Richard and Ann Tarvezian, Watertown, MA \$50
- Sophie Garvanian, Albuquerque, NM \$50
- Apkar and Arpie Potookian, Waltham, MA \$40
- Naomi Zeytoonian, Racine, WI \$25
- Karen and Mihran Aroian, Austin, TX \$25
- Stephen and Dorothy Masoian, Cranston, RI \$25
- George Maksian, Englewood Cliffs, NJ \$25
- Art Zareh Luledjian, Monroe, CT \$20





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Education Champion Heghine Movsesyan Helps Vanadzor Students

SHEIKHA, from page 6

development, met her when she was starting the school in 2014. He suggested that she should also teach critical thinking and executive function skills, as he noticed this lacking in the Armenian educational system. He said, “I had become aware that even though I was dealing with many, many smart people, when a problem would arise, they did not have a rubric to deal with them.” He and other Peace Corps volunteers brought Movsesyan appropriate English-language source materials.

Teaching these skills was as simple as giving stu-

school. Today there are 100 students, and these are no longer just students from poor families, as the elite of the city also send their children. There are four paid teachers and the rest are volunteers.

The school’s official name is the Heghine Sheikh School. Sheikh is the feminine form of sheikh, and, Heghine said, refers to the ancient notion that the prince must do philanthropic work of his own will. If you do not share, what you have otherwise will be taken away from you.

Movsesyan tutors and manages the school for

oral, and grammar, as well as crisis management, at her school. Other teachers give lessons on Armenian language and literature, arts, human rights, first aid, and issues of civil defense and safety in emergency situations. Movsesyan said that the emphasis on emergency situations was necessary because unfortunately they were frequent in Armenia.

She said, “We have classes even for 7-year-old children on earthquakes. Parents ask why do you make such a difficult curriculum, but I say that if an earthquake happens, it will not say that you are a 7-year-old child, go away.” There was an earthquake in May 2018 scoring six on the Richter Scale. Heghine said, “The 7-year-old child not only protected herself but knew what to do and gave advice to her grandparents.”

Movsesyan spoke about the goals of her school, declaring: “We know that high-quality education is nothing but a perquisite to development. Our goal is to promote education in Armenia for leadership development and life skills, cultivating creative thinking in our students. We try to do the best for them because children are diamonds and we should keep them in a safe place. Education is a weapon in the cycle of life and nowadays, life is challenging.” Most importantly, she said, “We want our students to be the ideal that they want to be.”

Heghine said that the school has two children with disabilities at present and they are treated no differently than the other students. She said, “We believe in the power of every single child or person with disability or handicap, so our school doors are open to everyone.”

The curriculum is always being expanded, but chess maintains an important place in it. Some of her students took part in the Armenian National Olympics, and one, Vahe Hovhannisyan, took first place. Movsesyan said that he is one of the top students who wants to continue his education abroad and come back to make his own contribution in Vanadzor.

Movsesyan seems to have the qualities of a good diplomat as well as a good teacher and organizer. She keeps in touch with the leaders of Vanadzor city and Lori Province without being involved in political issues. She received a medal of recognition from the previous president of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, but everyone understands that this was not due to politics but a function of the office of the presidency.

When Greenberg’s cousin, Gerald Appelstein, learned of the school, he donated a transformational sum of money. A new planning and support team called Armenica was created, with Movsesyan, Greenberg, Appelstein and the latter’s partner, Estela Margarita Arco-Blaustein. Armenica stands for Armenia plus America, to continue to provide high-quality education in Vanadzor. The school at present is registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO), Heghine Sheikh Children’s Advocacy NGO, with Movsesyan as president and her sister Jane as executive director.

Greenberg and Appelstein coordinated Heghine’s two-week November visit to Boston and New Jersey/New York, which is her first trip to the United States. Greenberg had not seen her since he left Armenia two years ago.

Heghine said, “I came to the US to be trained, to learn more about the US educational system and to expand new horizons for our children.” She visited educational specialists at the Waldorf School in Lexington and the Meridian Academy in Jamaica Plain, which have child-centered approaches toward education. She spoke with the person who runs the Middlesex College World Language program, to see what they do with students. After visiting Harvard University, Heghine decided to have as a goal that one of her alumni will eventually attend it.

The visit also included emergency services work, so she became the first specialist from Armenia to go to the “Turret,” the operations division of the Boston police containing its 911 communications center. She went to the Brookline Incident Command Center, where the police showed her how their emergency system works. Heghine later compared it with the system back home, stating that “in Armenia, we do have some computers but not as much as it here, because of lack of finances. We sometimes still have to use paper and pen.”

Aside from providing Heghine firsthand information on American educational and emergency service techniques, and culture, the US trip had one more happy result: Gerald Appelstein announced that he would fund the school’s expenses for two more years to allow it time to become self-sustaining. For updates on the school, see <https://www.facebook.com/Heghine-Sheikh-Childrens-Advocacy-Ngo-263212510492839/>



Students of the Heghine Sheikh School (courtesy Heghine Movsesyan)

dents money for paying for something, like a taxi, and asking them how much change they should bring back. Usually children were not given such challenges in Armenia. Movsesyan applied this approach to everything, forming teams and people in charge of various parts of the class.

Greenberg said that they raised around \$1,000, the amount necessary annually to provide the costs of transportation of the students to and from the program, pencils and paper, snacks and other incidental expenses. Anecdotal evidence of the school’s success spread, so that both the topics taught and the numbers of students increased.

Even Movsesyan’s boss at work, a colonel in emergency services, requested that his children come to her school and two rooms were offered for free in the 911 center of Vanadzor for the

free, while the 911 center, recognizing her pedagogical and organizational abilities, has reduced some of her responsibilities like answering emergency calls, and instead asked her to focus more on educational projects for the children of Armenia. She works one 24-hour shift and then rests for three days. She has some opportunity even during the 24 hours to work on the school since the school is in her work building now. Movsesyan goes to other schools in the area to give training talks on emergency situations.

Her own school has classes from 1 to 7 p.m., four days a week, with Friday, Saturday and Sunday off. However, the children can call to ask questions on the days off, and Movsesyan said, “They treat teachers like their parents.”

Movsesyan teaches English, both written and

## Mark Hoplamazian of Hyatt Hotels on Airbnb and Why Stupid Questions Are Smart

AIRBNB, from page 6

kid’s not a complete idiot.” Jay elected not to move forward with it.

**When you joined the Pritzker organization, what did they have you do?**

Their portfolio was very wide and broad. But it was a tiny organization, so the stuff that I was involved with was everything from selecting members of management teams to negotiating operating contracts for businesses and then



Mark Hoplamazian

doing financing. It was like up and down the functional dimensions and across many different businesses. It was great, diverse kind of business experience.

**How did you develop as a leader during this time, especially given that the organization was pretty small?**

There was a highly complicated deal that we did in joint venture with an Israeli company to launch a new business jet. Wildly complicated transaction. It was my deal. Jay basically said, “Go see if you can make something work out of

this.” It was very, very, very challenging. There was lots of internal opposition.

It was really a lesson in perseverance. I had to say, “No, actually, I believe in this, and I think I can get this done. I’m going to compel myself to get it done even in the face of a whole bunch of opposition.” Ultimately it was a very successful deal. And my position in the organization changed after that. When you walk through that barrier, you have a different sort of posture with a lot of other people.

**You were there when the Pritzker family sort of unraveled.**

In the case of the Pritzkers, I describe them as sort of like communists in some ways because it was definitely a collective effort. Jay’s whole philosophy was: I’m here helping the entirety of the family advance. It wasn’t about my personal wealth versus others’. In fact, the whole structure was a complicated trust structure for the benefit of all the family members.

That is really the fundamental thing that changed when the food fight hit. The assertions were about lack of transparency and understanding how all this stuff actually worked. Most family-owned companies fall apart after the third or fourth generation because you have people who are involved in the business, and then a whole bunch of people who aren’t.

What was your role in the whole affair?

Our group was responsible for mapping out how we were going to unwind the entire portfolio. We were holding these family meetings where all the principal beneficiary groups were coming together. There were more lawyers in the room than there were family members. It was like having the first annual meeting of an enterprise that was three generations old at that time, and I was the M.C. I had to stand up

in front of the entirety of the family and lead the meetings. I did that for five successive years until I left to go join Hyatt.

It was pretty intimidating in some ways. I came into the business, and I was pretty ignorant. I knew a lot about the financial and tax structure of Hyatt because I had helped put the company together in the whole family reorganization. But I didn’t really know the business; I didn’t grow up in the business. That level of ignorance was super powerful because it just let me ask a whole bunch of stupid questions, which served me extremely well. Those simple questions often led to interesting discussions about why we do certain things the way we do, and that led to changes. But it was organic as opposed to me coming in thinking that I knew better. It was actually the result of inquiry.

**What’s the biggest challenge facing the hotel industry today?**

The sharing economy is one. Of course, Airbnb is like the poster child for that because they have grown so quickly. The lesson for us in Airbnb when they first started was that a lot of what that customer experience was about was the attractive human interface between a guest and a real human being on the other side, not a trained professional. But the company has evolved. No longer is it typical that you’re renting Aunt Millie and Uncle Ed’s apartment, but it’s Industrial Apartment L.L.C. #5 with 45 units in a building. It’s become very institutional.

I think Airbnb spurred a lot of focus around purpose and empathy and care as the cornerstone for why we existed, and from that perspective I think it’s been great, because that’s been tremendously beneficial in leading the company since then.

**You use the word empathy a lot. What are you getting at?**

We’ve focused a lot of time and attention on mindfulness as a key capacity. In order to practice empathy, you have to be present, and one great vehicle to being present is to be mindful. Mindfulness became the central element of our wellness investment. Miraval and Exhale, our two brands that we bought, their foundations are around mindfulness, a mindful approach to nutrition, yoga, fitness, you name it.

To me, first and foremost, I want people to be present, to be able to engage and really glean what’s going on with someone. Don’t be so focused on executing the checklist and the services that you’re supposed to provide to them that you’re skipping over what’s really going on with that person.

**A LinkedIn reader, Billy Byrne, asks how that focus on empathy translates to your corporate culture.**

It’s actually one of the things that we can do that is maybe not unique to our industry, but powerfully enabled by our industry. That is, bringing people with low skill sets into a vocational path that allows them to advance and have a career. One of the key problems in the United States, and actually this is a global phenomenon, is you have a large and growing number of people who are essentially disenfranchised. They’re young people who are out of school and out of work. To me, this is the area of focus that we should apply ourselves to from a philanthropic effort, but also from a fulfillment of our purpose perspective. Bringing more and more people out of that community into our industry is something that we’re focused on.





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Technology and Education Connect Fresno and Yerevan Through Visionary Action

FRESNO — The forces of Armenia and the Diaspora merged on Friday, December 7, in an event hosted by Agrian Inc., an agricultural technology company headquartered in Fresno, California, with offices in Yerevan Armenia, to benefit the American University of Armenia (AUA), a leading academic institution in the country.

Owners of Agrian, Nishan and Andriana Majarian, have enjoyed a long-standing fruitful relationship with the University, stemming from the opening of their Yerevan branch in 2004 that focuses on web-based tools for agriculture, and since then have steadily employed AUA graduates both in California and in Armenia.

“We are so impressed by the work AUA is doing in Armenia,” said Nishan Majarian, co-founder and CEO of Agrian. “We did our initial recruitment at AUA because of the quality of students as well as their competent English language skills and most of the candidates we recruited are still with us today.”

Nishan Majarian remarked that the company’s goal was to have a qualified, educated workforce that could help “build the foundation of Agrian in Armenia.” This was made possible by the partnership with AUA and its alumni, who have made a positive and lasting impact on the company.

Andre Gaspar, director of development at Agrian in Yerevan, and his wife, Arpi, were present at the event and shared their thoughts on Agrian and AUA, their alma mater.

Emphasizing the significance of the University in his life, Andre explained that the institution was where he gained the knowledge and skills to allow him to excel in his current profession. “AUA provided me with the education I needed to become a valuable contributor in a global economy,” said Andre, who noted that Agrian employs 30 AUA alumni. “Agrian helps support many families in Armenia by providing secure jobs.”

Reflecting on her time at AUA, Arpi said that she spent the “most memorable and life-changing years” as a student there. “I was able to make all my dreams come true by receiving a quality education and learning from the inspiring professors and students,” said Arpi, who met Andre at AUA. “We both studied hard to get the education we needed to stay and work in our motherland and make it a better place for us and everyone else.”

Arpi was able to attend AUA on scholarships and achieve her educational and professional goals without a financial burden on herself or her parents. “I distinctly remember the day I received the Balian Award for Best Student, which covered my tuition for the whole year,” said Arpi, who is a General Manager and Chief Technology Officer of the Armenian branch of NMX Global Software Inc., as well as a lecturer in the Computer and Information Science program at AUA. “At that moment I realized that I came much closer to getting where I wanted to be in my life.”

Arpi acknowledged the significance of donors who helped her overcome financial challenges, while receiving a college education and the far-reaching impact education has on Armenia’s development.

“AUA gave my husband and I the skills, the knowledge and the opportunity to have fulfilling jobs and to secure a better future in Armenia, thanks to the donors who realize the importance of having educated people in our country,” concluded Arpi.

While introducing AUA President Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, Nishan said he was “grateful for the leadership of AUA” and the progress he witnessed in the country over the years.

“We see so many great young people who want to change the world and don’t want to leave Armenia to do that and I think that’s really exciting,” said Nishan. “Dr. Der Kiureghian gave us a great tour of AUA and it’s a beautiful state-of-the-art building filled with so much energy and excitement.”

Nishan noted that his favorite place in the world is experiencing the view of Mount Ararat from Armenia, an image he remembers from his childhood. “Growing up I always saw the painting of Mount Ararat in my grandmother’s house and that dream of seeing Mount Ararat in person has now become a reality for Armenians around the world.”

Recognizing the 30th anniversary of the disastrous earthquake in Armenia, Dr. Der

Kiureghian described how the tragedy inspired Dr. Mihran Agbabian and himself to propose a Western style academic institution in Armenia. Dr. Stepan Karamardian would later join their initiative.

Selected by the National Academy of Sciences to survey the damage, Agbabian and Der Kiureghian arrived in Armenia a week after the earthquake and were “deeply affected” by the destruction and vowed to make a difference. Soon after, they wrote a proposal to establish an American-style university in Armenia. Since all three were affiliated with the University of California, they forged ties between the two universities, a relationship that continues today.

“AUA was a constructive response to that calamity,” said Der Kiureghian. “The University became a forward-looking and positive reaction in the face of the devastating earthquake.”

Since its establishment, it has been a priority

beneficial” for participating students of Fresno State and AUA, who have formed great friendships.

“The interaction between the two schools enriches the lives and educational experiences of the students,” said Der Kiureghian as he presented symbolic gifts to Georgeann and Tracy.

Attesting to the beneficial results of the exchange program, three former Fresno State participants attended the event with their parents and spoke highly of their studies in Armenia.

Stephen Gonzalez, who was an AUA Spring 2018 study abroad participant, said he was proud and grateful to be in Armenia, particularly at a time when the country underwent a transformation during the Velvet Revolution, which enhanced Stephen’s experience even further.

“I thank the Kashian Family for allowing me,

As a history major, Avedis Khatchadourian appreciated his time studying in Armenia at AUA last summer. “I was able to see for myself so much of what I had read about in my history books,” said Avedis, who enjoyed his courses and instructors throughout the semester. “The teachers combined their lessons with multiple excursions so I was able to understand far more about Armenia and the rest of the world than I ever had before.”

Khatchadourian remarked that he thought he would visit Armenia later on in his life but was happy he was able to travel there as a college student. “I am extremely grateful to the Kashian Family Foundation that gave me the chance to go to Armenia and study at AUA because this was an opportunity of a lifetime,” said Khatchadourian.

Spending a career in public education, Dr. Lawrence Pitts, chairman of AUA’s Board of Trustees, elaborated on AUA’s academic system, which was influenced by the University of California, where Dr. Pitts served as Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs. “UC has a merit-based admission policy that offers essential financial support and AUA has followed the same model,” said Pitts. “AUA admits students based on academic skill, which creates a highly valued environment of quality of classes and students as well as student success after graduation.”

He spoke about the freedom of expression at AUA and the “remarkable phenomenon” of the Velvet Revolution, which gave way to AUA alumni to assume high-ranking positions in the new government.

“AUA has accomplished what the initial founders wanted the University to achieve, including Western style education, values of academic knowledge, discussion and transparency,” said Pitts. “This is what AUA has brought to Armenia and it is now reflecting these values in the alumni who are serving senior positions in the country.”

Looking towards the future, Pitts said that AUA will continue to support education in the science and technology fields because it is a fast growing industry in Armenia and its products can be exported digitally, opening up a “world of opportunity.”

“Education is at the forefront and the best investment, in my judgment, that can be made in Armenia by contributing to the American University of Armenia,” said Pitts.

The evening concluded with a silent auction of an original William Saroyan watercolor painting that sold for \$6,000 to Nishan and Andriana Majarian. The work, which was created in Fresno, California, and is dated December 2, 1969, reflects the creativity of the Pulitzer Prize and Academy Award winning author, playwright and artist. The painting was generously donated to AUA by the William Saroyan Foundation, headquartered in San Francisco to support AUA projects in Armenia.

“We thank our wonderful hosts, Nishan and Andriana Majarian, for bringing the Fresno Armenian community together to learn more about AUA,” said Dr. Der Kiureghian. “Hopefully many more will be inspired to visit our campus and become involved with the American University of Armenia.”



From Left: Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, Nishan Majarian, Andriana Majarian, Dr. Larry Pitts

for AUA to help finance the education of its students. Der Kiureghian stressed the importance of raising funds for scholarships in order for AUA to continue its need-blind admissions policy and attract the best and brightest students in Armenia, regardless of their financial capacity.

“We have a rigorous program of scholarships where more than half of our students receive financial aid,” said Der Kiureghian, who noted that the University’s operating expenses are covered through donations. “It is essential that students receive some form of aid so all economic strata are represented at AUA”

## Pillar Program

Der Kiureghian highlighted two AUA donor programs in particular, one serving as the foundation and the other as the future. The 100 Pillars of AUA program, which is nearing its completion, gives donors the chance to be part of an elite club who contribute \$50,000 over a five year period in unrestricted gifts that can be used where the University determines is most needed.

The “Yes, Armenian Women Can!” campaign was created to build a special endowment to support Armenian women in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

“Technology in Armenia is advancing and we have many smart female students, especially from the rural areas, who will benefit from these scholarships and become part of Armenia’s advancement,” said Der Kiureghian. “Women are an untapped resource for Armenia’s rapidly growing IT sector.”

He then thanked the Kashian Family Foundation, that for years has provided scholarship opportunities for students from California State University, Fresno (Fresno State), to spend a semester abroad at AUA. He noted the presence of the Kashian Family Foundation President Georgeanne White and Vice President Tracy Kashian, elaborating on the partnership that has been “extremely

a non-Armenian, the chance to go to Armenia and study a culture that has had a lot of influence in the San Joaquin Valley,” said Stephen. “I have a lot of Armenian friends and learning their culture and their history in their homeland while walking on ancient soil was an amazing feeling.”

## Visiting Armenia

Although he was born in Armenia, Yervand Boyajyan moved to California at a young age and always had a desire to return. Through the Kashian Family Foundation’s partnership with AUA, he was able to do so as a study abroad participant in Spring 2018.

“I am grateful to the Kashian Family Foundation for giving us the opportunity to experience Armenia through such a unique educational opportunity,” said Yervand. “My time in Armenia and at AUA was memorable and made a lasting impact on me.”

## Iraq, Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act Signed, Archbishop Aykazian Present

ACCOUNTABILITY, from page 1

forget the sufferings of the minorities of the Middle East. Mark Green, administrator of the United States Agency for International Development spoke, as did five or six others, including White House counselor Kellyanne Conway and Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic fraternal benefit society which was an early supporter of the new law.

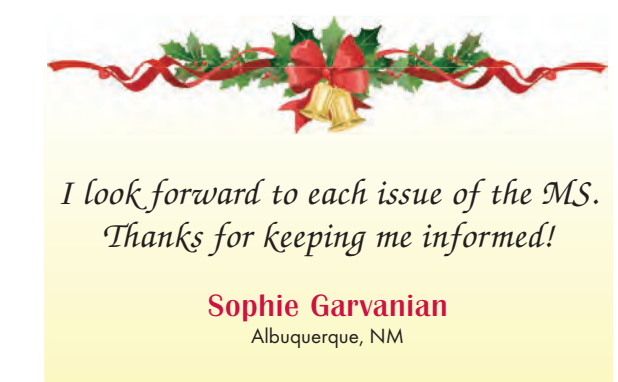
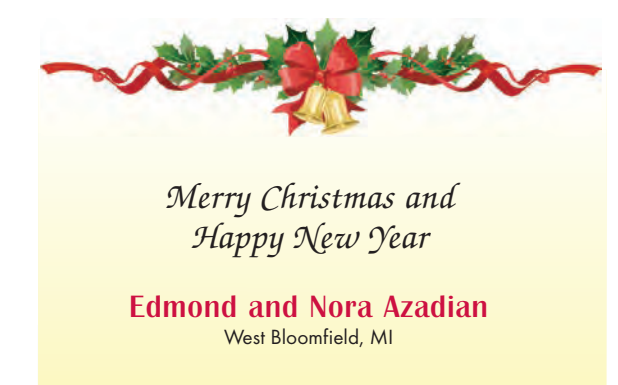
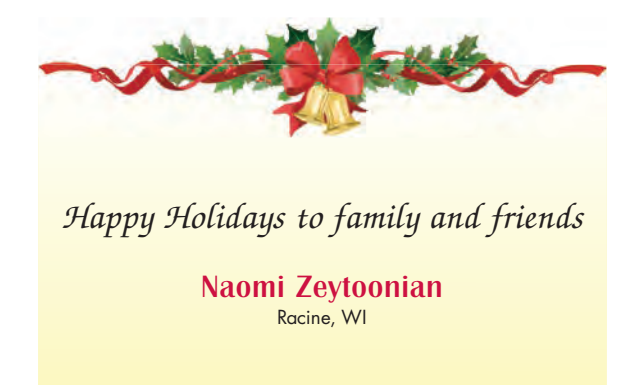
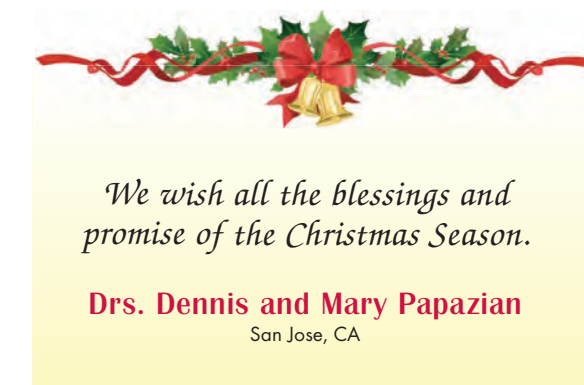
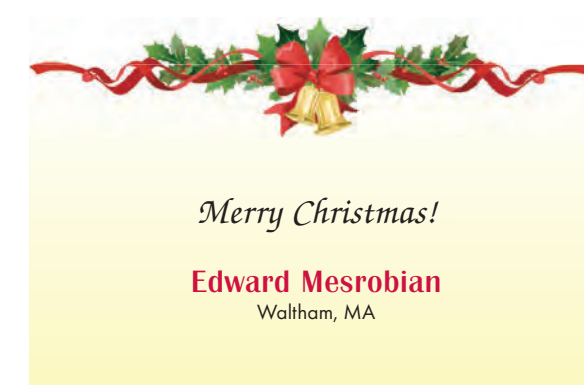
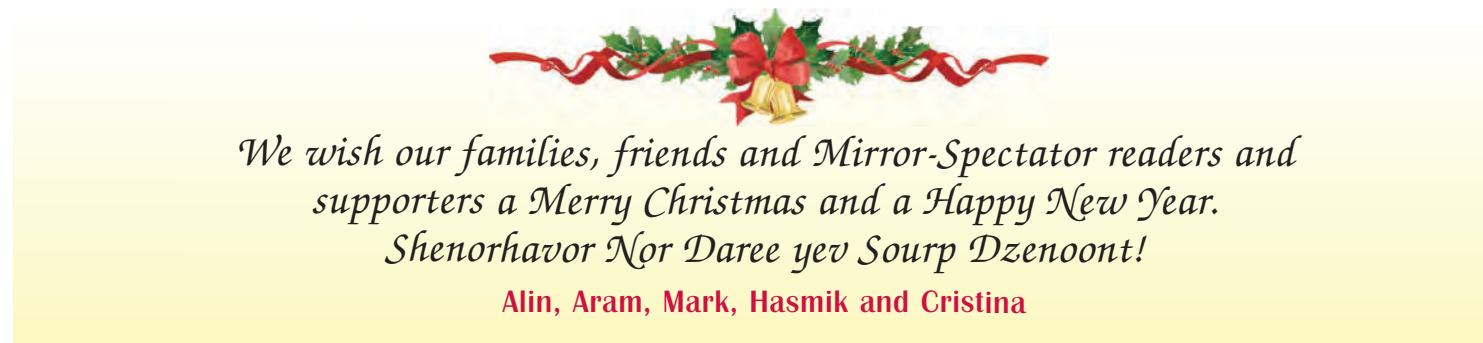
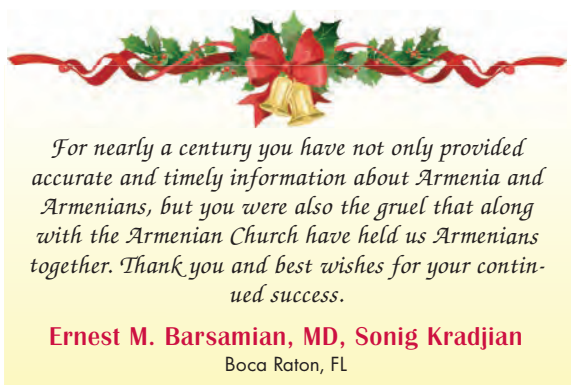
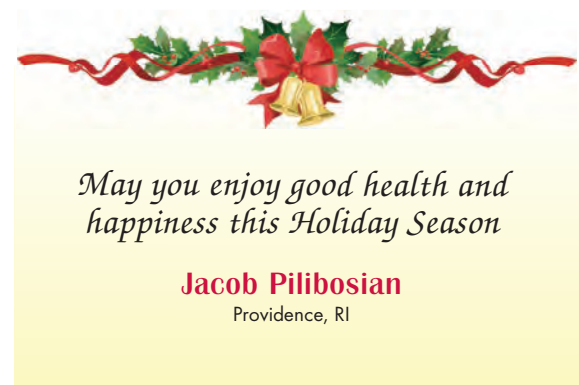
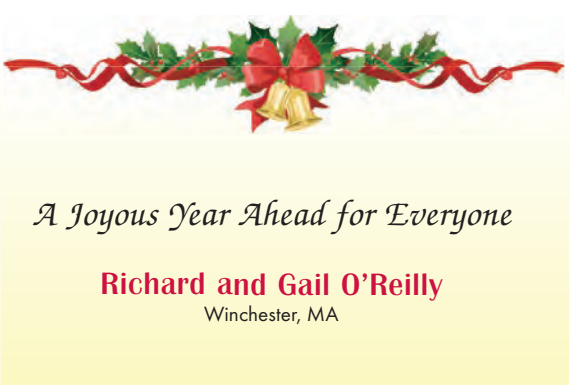
Afterwards, the guests had lunch together and continued their conversations, Aykazian said. Both Republicans and Democrats were present, as the law is sponsored by Representatives Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.). Eshoo is of Assyrian and Armenian heritage.

At the photo opportunity with Trump,

Aykazian had the chance to convey greetings from an Armenian friend of the former. In response, the president said that the Armenians are “intelligent people, hard-working people.” Aykazian also had talks with various congressmen and officials on Armenian issues, including concerning Turkey.

Aykazian, in addition to his positions with the Armenian Diocese, is president and the moderator of the Christian Churches Together, member of the executive committee of the National Council of Churches, the executive committee of the Church for Middle East Peace, the central and executive committees of the World Council of Churches, and chair of the finance committee of the World Council of Churches.









COMMUNITY NEWS

# Vatche Delights Taste Buds and Ear Drums

VATCHE, from page 1

For those aching for the sound and the taste of the Mediterranean, Alcazar is the place to be as a never-ending revolving door of customers satisfy the taste buds of all ethnicities, attesting to its success. Vatche says both singers and restaurateurs have elements of engaging with an audience and entertaining – one through the ear and the other through tastebuds. Hitting that notion home is a sign that hangs above the kitchen that declares: Without music, life would B (be flat) as a crystal chained cross dangles over the passionate words of the owner.

A prominent singer, particularly during the height of his success in the 1980s and 1990s, Vatche provided the soundtrack to the lives of so many Diasporans – displaced for a second round after the Armenian Genocide from those very communities they sought refuge in – Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Syria, to name just a few.

As the Armenian communities in the Middle East faced upheaval and instability, they made their way to Los Angeles, the weather perhaps similar to the Mediterranean climate. But the influx of immigrants, like those before them, were reminiscent and in search of their culture – and Vatche was able to fill that void. He brought that regaled life, the Paris of the Middle East, back to the displaced, giving them a flavor of home, from thousands of miles away.

His array of songs, ranging from French to Italian to Arabic, had roots particularly in the Golden Age of Lebanon where the cosmopolitan city attracted stars and tourists from around the world – Brigitte Bardot in one corner, Omar Sharif in the other. The city was offering the finest food, music and beaches on the surface while a war rumbled in the capital’s underbelly among the factions, sects and outside influences. It was during this multicultural apex in Beirut’s history that Vatche first emerged as a popular voice, paving the way for his future as a beloved pop icon.

As a youngster growing up in this culturally rich time, Vatche attended the Lebanon Evangelical School for Boys, where he was fixated on rock and roll, listening to Deep Purple, Elvis Presley, Stevie Wonder, Elton John and the Beatles, as well as the international crooners Charles Aznavour and Enrico Macias. He tuned into Armenian singers as well, appreciating the influences of Ardashes Avedian, Gyorky Minassian and Adiss Harmandian.

Gravitating naturally towards music, Vatche picked up a guitar and started teaching himself chords as he strummed on the strings. Pursuing his musical inclinations, he soon formed a band called The Dreams and their songs served as the backdrop for the trendy and fashionable nightlife of Beirut – from Le Paon Rouge at the Phoenicia Hotel to the Beachcomber at the Coral Beach Hotel. Vatche was immersed in an inspiring musical milieu.

“Bands from Italy would play at these venues and I would sometimes be invited to perform alongside them,” said Vatche. “I learned a lot from them but when they left during the civil war, I took over.”

While his father initially felt that a music career was too risky a venture to pursue, he gave his blessing once Vatche proved himself academically and passed his baccalaureate, receiving high grades and earning acceptance to the prestigious American University of Beirut, where he graduated with a degree in business administration.

### Leaving Beirut

But soon, the situation in war-torn Beirut became too precarious, and following stints in

Cyprus and Iran, Vatche arrived with his family in Los Angeles in 1981. He put his AUB degree to good use, working in accounting, but heeded the words of those close to him who encouraged him to return to singing.

“I started performing at a small restaurant in Pasadena called the Gypsy,” related Vatche. The owner was his friend from Lebanon and urged him to sing in the venue during the weekends. “After my start there, the gigs started coming in because the audience liked the variety of songs I sang.”

They liked it so much so that fans began to ask for his albums, which encouraged Vatche to enter the studio. Pursuing professional vocal training and refining his knowledge of eight languages, he recorded his first album in Los Angeles in 1983 to much fanfare. The volume was comprised of international songs once recorded by prominent French, Italian, Persian, American and Arabic singers, as well as newly penned English and Armenian songs for his audience that immediately “embraced” him in the Los Angeles community.

“People went to record shops in Hollywood and the owners would call me up and say the albums are selling and they wanted more,” said Vatche. As he continued to record hit albums in succession, he turned towards larger venues, the pinnacle of which was headlining a show at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas in 1986 to an audience in the thousands, where he was accompanied by an 11-piece band and 15 dancers. He followed this achievement with another colossal performance at the Tropicana Hotel in Atlantic City. Vatche continued to expand, building a studio in his home in order to record and produce in an independent space, arrange his own music and play all of the instruments himself, creating as authentic a musical album as possible.

The covers of his compositions, originally sung by greats including Joe Dassin to Adamo to Peppino Gagliardi to Demis Roussos, evoke nostalgia that may at first have captured audiences, but as they continued listening, they discovered the distinct voice and persona behind these updated covers.

“Musicians and music critics recognized I was doing covers but adding colors of my own,” said Vatche. “People would say they looked forward to seeing how I would arrange the songs with my own creativity.”

Perhaps what drew listeners to Vatche’s records went beyond the lyrics and the instrumentation; they symbolized a deeper meaning of survival for the scattered Armenians, unifying their multilingual and layered existence through his music.

As Vatche’s popularity continued to grow, so did his memorable performances. He recalls one in particular when he was invited to sing in Beirut alongside Barry White in the 1980s, noting that it was an “honor” to share the stage with the legendary Grammy Award-winner at an Armenian wedding that lasted until sunrise.

### Alcazar Is Born

Completing his goals with music, Vatche was ready to unveil another passion of his and in 2000 opened up the Middle Eastern restaurant Alcazar in Encino, California. For years his friends urged him to establish his own culinary space because they knew he loved to entertain, was “selective” about cuisine, and would provide the best experience to his customers.

“I felt it was time to have something else in my life,” said Vatche. “I always looked ahead and I was aware singing could not last a lifetime.” He performed at fewer events and began to learn about the restaurant industry, teaching himself about the business.

“I knew the taste but I worked on how to pre-

pare the dishes,” said Vatche. The timing was fortuitous, as the style of music transformed in the early 2000s and he took a step back to focus on his restaurant with his undivided attention.

“The whole landscape of music changed around that time,” said Vatche, who saw a red flag when technology and computer applications began taking over music production. “The market for my style of Estrada international music started fading.” Instead of selling out and playing a style he did not feel came from within, he decided the time was ripe to concentrate on food.

“Music is my first love and passion and I was blessed to make a living out of it,” said Vatche, who opened his current location in Sherman Oaks five years ago. “I feel very good that I excelled in two things in my life, both music and cuisine, and it gives me so much satisfaction that I never feel like I am working.”

Although he has his hands full expanding his restaurant, Vatche has his finger on the pulse of music and is encouraged by the next generation of Armenian musicians, who are fusing traditional and modern elements into their compositions.

“The last 10 years or so rabiz music became mainstream, a style I didn’t like listening to or singing,” said Vatche. “But right now I’m seeing new talent from Armenia who are reviving folk music with that Estradaian touch we had in the 1950s and 1960s, while utilizing technology to come up with something respectable.”

Vatche has always encouraged and welcomed collaborations with other artists, understanding the importance of humility and partnership not only for the good of the community but for the enhancement of music. A prime example of this partnership is when two Armenian music idols came together, Adiss and Vatche, to record their album of duets, “From the Heart,” in 1993.

“Adiss became an icon as an Armenian singer and he wanted to show that he could sing in other languages too,” said Vatche. At the peak of their respective successes, they merged the best

of both worlds – Vatche as a pioneer in the international music scene and Adiss’s stronghold in the Armenian language. They bonded and trusted each other’s musical inclinations in the recording studio as Adiss gave “carte blanche” to Vatche to arrange and record the music, delighting listeners with their duets, including *Karoun Karoun* and *Hayastan*.

In honor of the album’s release, the duo organized a Christmas dance, a sold-out concert pushing themselves to finish the much-anticipated album within a month while working up to 20 hour days.

“The album was very successful and people kept asking us when we would record volume 2,” said Vatche. “We enjoyed working together and that is an album I will always feel very proud of.”

More guests enter Alcazar while greeting the singer-restaurateur as “Chef Vatche,” including a business owner from next door who comments on how delicious and fresh the manaish is and mentions to the knowing guests that Vatche is a musician and to find his songs on YouTube.

While Vatche’s music came to light through live performances and recorded albums, it is through this digital age that he is rediscovered, over and over again, as his voice transcends the decades, genres, ethnicities and generations.

“I think my music is timeless because the songs I sing are timeless,” said Vatche. “My goal has always been to reintroduce these songs in a different shell.”

His audience eagerly awaits his return to the studio to see what Vatche, whose nostalgic voice and gusto remains intact, will come up with next. In the meantime, they will settle for a handmade Mediterranean meal from the legend himself.

To learn more about the restaurant, visit <http://www.al-cazar.com>. To see and hear some of Vatche’s songs, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oH34p4MgUuw&list=PL3mNbH958IISjN3hREZ4GE75mLmaxkmoJ>

## Donation

Annie Simonian Total of Washington, DC, donated \$500 to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.

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## Aranosian Family Donation

The Aranosian Family has donated \$5,000 in support of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* for providing coverage of news affecting the Armenian community.

“Your organization is doing a wonderful job providing Armenian news and we thank you for all the efforts. We are proud to have such a fine Armenian newspaper.”

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The exhibition is made possible by The Hagop Kevorkian Fund.

Additional support is provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Michel David-Weill Fund, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, The Giorgi Family Foundation, The Hirair and Anna Hovnanian Foundation, the Karagheusian Foundation, The Nazar and Artemis Nazarian Family, the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts, The Strauch Kulhanjian Family and The Paros Foundation, Aso O. Tavitian, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Altar frontal (detail), New Julfa, 1741.  
Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia.  
Photo by Hrair Hawk Khatcherian.



# Arts & Living

## INTERVIEW



### American-Armenian Teacher, Poet and Translator Raffi (Ralph) Setian

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Mr. Setian, we first met a century ago (in 1990), while I was a third-year student at Yerevan State University (YSU). That was a difficult transitional time in the history of modern Armenia. The world around us was rapidly changing; and you were the first foreign professor who came to YSU to present lectures on American literature. Your classes were unprecedented for us because you utilized maps and other visual materials to enhance your lectures on literature. How was your experience in teaching at an Armenian university during the last years of the Soviet Union?

Well, first of all, on a personal level, it was a great satisfaction for me to finally be able to come to Armenia and teach at the university level. My position at YSU as a Senior Lecturer was the result of a teaching fellowship which I was awarded through the Fulbright-Hays program administered by the Department of State in America. Little did anyone know at that time that the USSR was going to collapse while I was in Soviet Armenia. In any case, it was a particularly challenging period in the life of our people in the homeland. However, I greatly enjoyed my contacts with hundreds of students and dozens of colleagues at YSU. I was particularly gratified that some students who were not even specializing in English would attend my lectures at the university. Living conditions were somewhat dark and grim; yet I always had good attendance in all my classes. I have fond memories from that period in my life, when I made new acquaintances and friends, like yourself, Artsvi.

Before meeting you, I was aware of you as an American-Armenian poet writing in English. But you were also writing poems in Armenian, which was unusual for the poets of your generation. This equal literary mastery of both languages is a rarity among American-Armenians. How did you manage to gain this ability?

The answer to this question of yours would require me to provide you with a mini-autobiography, which would be too lengthy for an interview of this sort, I think. But please allow me to present a few pertinent facts which might provide a sort of explanatory outline of my background. First of all, even though I was born in the US (in the state of Massachusetts), see SETIAN, page 16



Supervisor Kathryn Barger with Museum Executive Chairman Berdj Karapetian

## Celebrating Differences And Heritage at LA Museum Gala

HOLLYWOOD – The wide scope and visionary initiative of the Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California was highlighted during its Inaugural Gala on Sunday, December 9, at the Ray Dolby Ballroom in Hollywood, as more than 1,000 supporters, community leaders and public officials gathered on the heels of the museum's Groundbreaking Campaign launch.

By Taleen Babayan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The objective of the evening was to raise awareness and funds to bolster the ambitious one-of-a-kind project that will be a world-class cultural and educational center. The mission of the structure will be to foster understanding of the diversity in America by conveying the Armenian-American experience. The museum will feature a permanent Armenian exhibition, traveling multicultural exhibitions, performing arts theater, a learning center, archives, a café and a gift shop, in order to be accessible to the general public that appreciates history and cultural ethnicities.

Serving as Master of Ceremonies, Fox 11 Morning News Anchor and Reporter Araksya Karapetyan expressed support for the "landmark" project in her remarks and stressed the importance of carrying on a legacy.

"Armenian-American leaders had a vision of how to pass on our heritage and that's how the idea was born," she said. "The museum will bring people together and celebrate the rich tapestry that makes up what this rich country is about."

Born and raised in Armenia, Karapetyan spoke of her journey to Southern California and her rise in the media industry, while always preserving her Armenian heritage, ultimately seeking to do the same for the generations to come.

"My roots are firmly planted in my homeland as is my heart," said Karapetyan. "My connection is strong all these years later."

She spoke of the significance of upholding the Armenian people and culture and that it is everyone's "responsibility to carry on our story."

Karapetyan acknowledged the hard work and effort it takes to pass on a legacy but stressed the "duty" to instill the Armenian culture and that the museum will be a "physical reminder" of that.

"Despite being all over the world we must never forget who we are and where we come from," said Karapetyan, remarking that the museum's doors will be open to anyone who loves history. "Everyone will have a place to embrace their roots and heart and that's what this Museum will be all about."

Following a touching video presentation, "Nation of Builders," that featured the symbolic structures around the Armenian Diaspora that have served as key gathering places for Armenians, Museum Executive Chairman Berdj Karapetian delivered his message.

Thanking the event organizers, volunteer committee and expressing appreciation to the leadership of the Board of Trustees, Karapetian underscored the deeper meaning of the museum.

"The Armenian American Museum is more than a museum," said Karapetian. "It's a museum about everyone who came to California and made it what it is today."

see GALA, page 15

## 'American Mirror' Wins Fabrique Du Cinema International Award

ROME –The fourth edition of *Fabrique Du Cinéma* Awards took place on Saturday, December 15, where the winners were announced at the Teatro India.

"American Mirror," directed by Arthur Balder and produced by David Shara, rose as winner of the Best International Documentary award, being the only US-production to garner an accolade in the international competition. The project stars Susan Sarandon and Tigran Tsitoghdzian.

The Canadian "The Grizzlie," by Miranda de Pencier won Best International Feature Film.

The ceremony, conducted by Italian actors Laura Adriani ("Blame Freud," "Questi jorni") and Riccardo Festa, presented also rising stars of Italian cinema with accolades, such as Sara Serraiocco, who won Best Italian Actress for "Traveling with Adele" and Gianni Zanasi, director of the surprising and innovative feature film, "Too Much Grace," won the Best Italian Experimental Film award.

Director Mario Martone, who introduced the trailer of the soon-to-be-



Arthur Balder receiving the award

released "Capri Revolution (in competition at the 75th Mostra di Venezia 2018), presented the Best International Documentary Award to Balder, who praised "Italian cinema and directors as among his all-time favorites."

Two-time Academy-award winner Paul Haggis, president of the *Fabrique Du Cinéma* Awards July 2018, highlighted "the extraordinary quality of the more than 1,400 films submitted." Haggis, the screenwriter of such iconic movies as "Crash" and "Million Dollar Baby" said he was intrigued by the talent of filmmakers ready to breakthrough internationally" and thanked *Fabrique Du Cinéma* organization "for its generosity inviting me to preside over such an incredibly wonderful event."

*Fabrique Du Cinéma* has become one of the most influential Italian magazines since its inception, focused on cinema, specifically the "new Italian cinema, directors and actors."





## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Celebrating Differences and Heritage at LA Museum Gala

GALA, from page 14

He spoke of the Museum as a learning facility where people can learn about the Armenian history and where they can learn to “prevent recurring injustices.”

Karapetian stated that the aim of the museum is to enrich the community and inspire people to promote mutual understanding of one another’s cultures. Above all, the Museum will bring together the youth, who will safeguard the Armenian people.

“Let’s build our museum in the name of our young people,” concluded Karapetian.

Senate President pro tem Toni G. Atkins said it was honor to be present at the Gala and expressed her thanks to the members of the Armenian-American community for their unified efforts in “today’s divisive world.”

She applauded the efforts of the Glendale City Council for their “incredible contributions in turning the Armenian American Museum a reality.”

“You are planting a seed kernel of understanding,” said Atkins. “We all have stories to share and we are all a part of a bigger family and I thank you for what you have taught me about Armenians.”

Award presentations were made to California State Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian, California State Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, California State Senator Anthony J. Portantino, California State Senate President



Performer Alene Aroustamian

Center of California as its official landmark project in 2014, a total of a \$4 million commitment was made from the State of California. In a surprise announcement, Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger delivered a \$1 million check for the Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center.

Reflecting on his honor, Senator Anthony Portantino referred to the Museum as a “wonderful project” and noted that California has the largest Armenian population outside Armenia, a fact that should be “celebrated and appreciated.”

“The story of the Armenian-Americans should be told,” said Portantino. “I share this honor with the community that welcomed me and it’s

my job to help in any way I can.”

He expressed his thanks to the ongoing support of the Armenian-Americans and their partnership. “You don’t do this work to get honored,” said Portantino. “You do it because it’s the right thing to do.”

As a member of the early planning stages of the Armenian American Museum, Nazarian secured the initial \$1 million within the California State Budget “to help build a beautiful museum in the heart of Glendale.”

“The museum will be a cultural campus that empowers individuals to embrace diversity,” said Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian. “I am grateful to have been an honoree at the Inaugural Gala and look forward to seeing the

museum come to life and offer a meaningful space for conversation.”

Entertainment was provided by singer Alene Aroustamian with musical partner Vahan Bznuni. The Flag Ceremony was conducted by the AGBU and Homenetmen Scouts and the National Anthems were sung by the Glendale High School Choir under the direction of Grace Sheldon-Williams. The Opening Prayer was led by the museum’s Board of Trustees Co-Chairs, including Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese, Archbishop Moushegh Mardirossian, Primate of the Western Prelacy, Bishop Mikael Mouradian, of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy in the United States and Canada, and Reverend Berdj Djambazian, of the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America.

For more information about the Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center,



Sen. Anthony Portantino



Glendale Mayor Zareh Sinanyan

please visit <https://www.armenianamerican-museum.org/>

Photos by Shahe and Sahag Melelian (Arka Photography)



Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian

pro Tempore Emeritus Kevin de Leon and the Glendale City Council, including Mayor Zareh Sinanyan and Councilmembers Ara Najarian, Paula Devine, Vartan Gharpetian, and Vrej Agajanian. The Glendale City Council was instrumental in dedicating land in Glendale for the historic project, marking Glendale Central Park as the future home of the museum.

“We are proud to support the Armenian American Museum and it is a great honor for the City of Glendale to be the future home of the world class cultural and educational center,” said Mayor Sinanyan, who spoke on behalf of the Glendale City Council.

Since the Armenian Genocide Centennial Committee Western USA adopted the Armenian American Museum and Cultural

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Four co-chairs conducting the opening prayer.



Master of Ceremonies Araksya Karapetyan



Glendale HS Choir and Homenetmen Scouts



Senate President pro Tem Toni Atkins





## ARTS &amp; LIVING

## An Interview with American-Armenian Teacher, Poet and Translator Raffi (Ralph) Setian

SETIAN, from page 14

did not begin speaking English as a child. In our home Armenian was the only language spoken between children and parents. And this practice continued throughout my life. I Never spoke English with either my father or my mother. I began to learn English only after entering public school when our family relocated to California. (There were no regular Armenian schools anywhere in the USA at that time.) So I attended free American schools where all the instruction was conducted in English. But I always loved to speak Armenian. During my last year of study in senior high school in my hometown of Pasadena, California, all my American classmates were applying for admission to various universities all over the country; but I had heard about a Collège Arménien (Nichan Palandjian Jemaran) in Beirut, Lebanon, where it was possible to enroll at that time (1959) as a boarding student. The Armenian Relief Society (ARS) was offering special scholarships to young American citizens to go to that institution to master the Armenian literary language and become immersed in Western Armenian culture. Well, I applied for that scholarship; I was accepted; and thereafter I spent two very intense years of study at the Jemaran (the school which had been established by Levon Shant and Nikol Aghbalian decades before).

Upon returning to the USA (1961), I continued my independent readings in modern Armenian literature. But later I enrolled as an undergraduate student at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles), majoring in English, but also doing a minor in Armenian. (In those years Dr. Avedis Sanjian was my teacher, the chair holder in Armenian Language and Literature.) Then several years later I matriculated as a graduate student in Armenian Studies at Columbia University in New York City, eventually earning an M.Phil. degree (Drs. Nina Garsoian and Krikor Maksoudian were my teachers.)

**You have lectured all around the world: in North America, in the Middle East, in Africa, and in Asia. Are there any peculiarities that you can explain about teaching the same subjects to university students in different cultures?**

Indeed, there are differences! I have taught English, linguistics, and American literature in numerous foreign countries: France, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Kuwait, Gabon, China, and of course... Armenia! And the students everywhere are different – not only in their attitudes towards learning, but also in their varying degrees of initial knowledge of the English language. Arabs, for example, are very open and voluble in classroom situations; they like to talk, to joke, and to pose questions. Chinese students are, on the other hand, reluctant to speak out in class, but they are very attentive and diligent in performing the tasks required of them. One thing that I can assert with no hesitation is that I have enjoyed teaching everywhere that I have lived; and students have almost always been kind and helpful toward me, the foreign teacher!

**We met again in 2005 as colleagues at the Intensive Summer Course in Armenian Language and Culture in Venice, Italy. And since that time we have been teaching every August in this city built on the water. You have been teaching Armenian language, literature, and history in this annual program for nearly a quarter of a century. How would you characterize your experiences over the past 25 years?**

This teaching post has been, indubitably, the most gratifying pedagogical experience of my life. Even though I have lived and traveled in so many wonderful countries as a teacher

# Recipe Corner

Guest Recipe  
by Christine Vartanian Datian



## Persimmon Walnut Raisin Cookies



Contributed by  
Mrs. Alice Vartanian

### INGREDIENTS

1 cup persimmon pulp (from 2-3 persimmons), skins removed, pureed  
1 cup granulated sugar  
1/2 cup shortening or unsalted butter, at room temperature  
1 large egg, beaten  
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, sifted  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon orange or lemon zest  
1/2 teaspoon each ground cloves, nutmeg and ginger  
1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts  
1 cup raisins or chopped dates  
1 cup dark chocolate chips

### Preparation

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease two baking sheets and set aside.  
In large bowl, cream the sugar and the shortening until fluffy. Add the egg and mix to combine.  
Add the flour, baking soda, vanilla, cinnamon, salt, zest, cloves, nutmeg, and ginger, and mix to combine.  
Add the persimmon puree, nuts, raisins, and chocolate chips, if desired.  
Drop by the rounded spoonful on baking sheet and bake until cookie top springs back when touched, for 12 to 14 minutes.  
Remove cookies from oven and cool on baking sheet for 5 minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

Note: This recipe can easily be doubled. Also, once cooled, dip half the cookie in melted dark or white chocolate and sprinkle with chopped nuts. Dried cranberries, dried cherries, chopped pecans or almonds may be added to this recipe. Or use 2 teaspoons of pumpkin pie spice to replace the cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and ginger for this recipe. Cookies may be glazed with orange or lemon glaze, if desired.  
Yield: About 3 dozen cookies

For health and nutritional information on persimmons, go to: <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/persimmon-nutrition-benefits>. For recipes, go to: <http://www.californiagrown.org/blog/perfect-uses-for-persimmons/>



of English, nevertheless, teaching Armenian language, literature, and history in Venice has been the most fulfilling job in my long academic career. This course is unique in so many ways. With 25 to 40 students every summer from nearly a dozen countries, one-third of whom are non-Armenian, it is a pleasure and a challenge to teach students from 18 to 80 years of age. It is like a mini-UN! And I have made so many new friendships over the years, with both students and colleagues. Indeed, I sometimes think that I have learned more from my students than they perhaps have learned from me!

**On many different occasions you and I have had the pleasure of meeting each other in Armenia, France, Italy, and the USA. And I have always been delighted with your extensive knowledge of different countries and cultures. You seem to have been able to adapt to different life styles and adjust to new living conditions – no matter where your fate has taken you.**

Yes, Artsvi, you are right. In many ways human beings are the same everywhere. But

the differences are the most interesting! Some peoples are more open and hospitable than others. Some cultures encourage competition more than others. Some societies breed creativity and allow greater freedoms of all sorts to their citizens. The greater Family of Man is a wonderful mosaic.

**You have translated several Armenian poets into English, for example, Zahrad and Krikor Beledian. The Armenian community in the USA is quite large and scattered all over the country; and there are many American-Armenian writers who create literature. But there is no longer any permanent platform – that is, a journal – where their work might be published. Raft disappeared long ago; and the Ararat quarterly (which was the oldest and most respected publication of its kind in English) has also ceased to appear, even in its Internet version. Don't you think that our Armenian literature needs to be translated and better represented for readers in the English-speaking world?**

Yes, I agree. But we must not be discour-

aged or pessimistic in this regard. Times are changing; media are not what they used to be. It is encouraging, however, to see that younger writers and scholars are translating and publishing entire books from Armenian into English. This is a trend that I expect will continue.

**If I am not mistaken, you were one of the first diasporan Armenians to purchase a residence in Armenia, soon after the collapse of the USSR. You continue to visit Armenia regularly. And you lived in Yerevan during those dark and difficult years at the beginning of the third Armenian republic. Having lived in various countries, how would you characterize living in Armenia as compared to other places?**

I purchased that apartment in Yerevan as a sort of personal commitment to myself—to affirm my ties to the land and its people. It is an ineffable pleasure to stroll in the streets of the capital and hear my maternal tongue spoken all around me. Each time I arrive in Yerevan I feel like I am coming home.



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

## CALENDAR

## FLORIDA

**JANUARY 20-27, 2019 — Armenian Heritage Cruise XXII 2019. Western Caribbean Cruise** aboard the Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Sea. Traveling to Nassau, Cozumel, Roatan, Costa Maya. Cabin Rates, starting from \$949/person based on double occupancy, including port charges and ACAA registration fee. Government rates of \$137.45 are additional. Armenian entainment, Armenian cultural presentations, Armenian Festival Day, Tavlou and Belote Tournaments and much more. Call Travel Group International at 1-561-447-08750 or 1-866-447-0750 ext. 108, contact person Janie.

## MASSACHUSETTS

**JANUARY 7, 2019 — St. James Men's Club Dinner Meeting - social hour and mezza** at 6:15 PM and dinner at 7:00 PM, St James Armenian Church Charles Mosesian Cultural and Youth Center - Keljik Hall, 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA. The speaker will be Jeanmarie Papelian, Executive Director of the Armenian Tree Project. She will present ATP's strategy to use trees to transform a village in Armenia. ATP is working to help create an Armenia that is clean and green, with a respect for people and planet. ATP is proud to stand out as the only non-profit organization dedicated to using trees as a means of improving the standard of living for the

Armenian people and protecting the environment. Mezza and a Losh Kebab & Kheyma Dinner \$16/person. Ladies invited. For additional information call the St James Church office at 617-923-8860 or call Hapet Berberian at 781-367-6598

**MARCH 2, 2019 — St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School (SSAES) PTO will present its annual fundraiser.** We hope you can join us in support of SSAES for an evening of food, drinks, art, music and fun! 7 to 11 p.m., Sanborn House, 15 High St., Winchester. SSAES is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All donations are tax-deductible. For additional information and sponsorship please e-mail: [event@ssaes.org](mailto:event@ssaes.org). Note: This event is 21+.

**APRIL 25, 2019 — Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston Presents The Dr. Michael and Joyce Kolligian Distinguished Speaker Series:** Anthony Ray Hinton, Author of The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row, "Surviving Criminal Justice in America." Charles and Nevart Talanian Cultural Hall, 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge MA 02138. Reception and book signing to follow talk. Open and free to the public. For further information, contact the Holy Trinity Church office, 617.354.0632, email [office@htaac.org](mailto:office@htaac.org), or log onto [www.htaac.org/calendar/event/622/](http://www.htaac.org/calendar/event/622/).

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2019 — SAVE THE DATE! InterContinental Hotel, Boston.** Extraordinary Benefit for Armenian Heritage Park's Endowed Fund for Care.

## NEW JERSEY

**OCTOBER 25, 2019 —SAVE THE DATE. Honoring Dr. Taner Akçam. Abajian Hall St. Leon Armenian Complex, Fair Lawn.** Sponsored by Knights and Daughters of Vartan, Under the Auspices of Primate Very Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan.

## NEW YORK

**SEPTEMBER 22 — January 13, 2019 — ARMENIA! at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Armenia!** is the "first major exhibition to explore the importance of Armenians and their remarkable achievements in a global context..." <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2018/armenia>

*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.*

## New Book *Bloodied, But Unbowed* Tells a Personal Story of Survival

LOS ANGELES — A new book by Alice Nazarian, *Bloodied, But Unbowed: A Memoir of the Ashur & Arshaluys Yousuf Family*, has just been released by Nineveh Press.

In this memoir, author Alice Nazarian tells the story of her parents and family in the shadow of the Armenian/Assyrian Genocide. Her father, Ashur Yousuf, a prominent Assyrian intellectual and professor at Euphrates College in Kharpert, Turkey, became a victim of the Genocide in 1915. Her mother, Arshaluys Yousuf, heroically struggled on after her husband's death, raising their six children while helping educate countless young children in orphanages and schools in the Middle East.

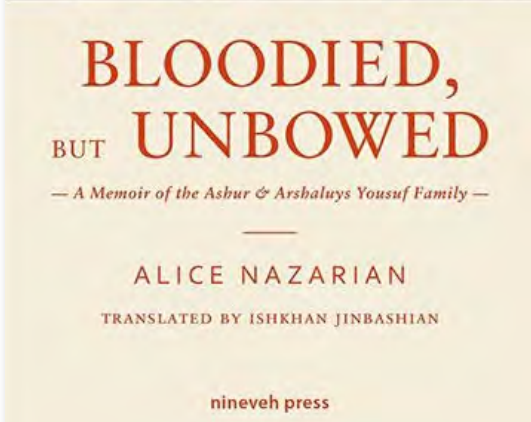
The memoir comprises a narrative of the turbulent life of Arshaluys and a section devoted to writings by and about Ashur Yousuf. This English translation, while faithful to the original Armenian, contains some new material and an updated genealogy of the descendants of Ashur and Arshaluys Yousuf.

Alice Nazarian was the fifth child of Ashur and Arshaluys Yousuf. In addition to this memoir, she wrote numerous articles, poems, and lectures. She was well-known in Aleppo, Syria, as an educator and director of plays. Having lived most of her life in Aleppo, she immigrated to the United States in 1967. She died in Los Angeles in 1976.

Ishkhan Jinbashian is a literary translator. His works include translations of novels, poetry, and memoirs by Hagop Oshagan, Shahan Shahnur, Zareh Vorbuni, Yeghishe Charents, Mikayel Shamtanchian, Armen Anush, and Aram Sahakian. Jinbashian lives in Los Angeles.

Nineveh Press publishes new books and reprints old and rare books and periodicals concerning Assyrian language, literature, history and culture.

The books can be purchased from: [www.nineveh-press.com](http://www.nineveh-press.com)



***Bloodied, But Unbowed: A Memoir of the Ashur and Arshaluys Yousuf Family*** AUTHOR: Alice Nazarian | TRANSLATED BY: Ishkhan Jinbashian. PUBLISHED BY: Nineveh Press. PRINTED BY: Lulu, Morrisville, NC, USA 2018. 5.5 x 8.5 in (14 x 21.6 cm), 426 pages PUBLICATION DATE: November 2018 | ISBN: 978-91-984101-9-8. PRICE: \$19.99

## Folk Traditions of Yore for the New Year

By Lucy Joulfayan-Yeghyayan

The articulate Armenian ancestors have weaved folded layers of unique folk traditions and colorful mythology dating older than many of the gods in prehistory let aside many of the modern nations!!!

Fortunately, "rituals" filled their lives. And, what was considered a religious ritual, at the time, we now consider a rich mythological element in our surviving cultural heritage.

The ancient Armenian calendar recognized the Navasart as the start of the New Year, Navasart happened in August, and it lasted for 10 days. It was based on the ancient Armenian Lunar calendar, and when "Amanor" the deity of festivals/festivities was combined to our New Years' tradition, a unique, prehistoric set of cultural traditions started... and continued, even after our nation adopted its new God, new calendar with the 365 days including the lapse year, and the New Year's Eve became December 31, New Year's Day January 1. And, here we are still practicing many of our beautiful, ethnic cultural traditions. For example: *Dari Hats* is one of the names given to the special *Gata* like bread prepared especially for this occasion. On December 31, we wish well to everyone, we pray for a fresh start and we hope for success and prosperity in the New Year, we wish it for ourselves and our loved ones, and in order to materialize the New Year related wishes and hopes, a little drama, a symbolic ritual, was created, which the majority of us call *Dari Hats* and its making, the specific elements involved

are symbolic too, because bread being a product of wheat which symbolizes prosperity, continuation, regeneration and life, had to be included, the dried nuts and fruits are the harvest of nature, and by including them nature was being honored, as for the honey, it was meant to bring sweetness to the mouth of the family members, meaning, be nice and positive towards each other, specifically the "daughters-in-law" would be nicer while addressing the "older" in-laws... and thus was the *Dari Hats*.

A young girl under her 8th spring (a symbol of purity), would knead a piece of dough with wheat flour, while the relatives sang and said prayers to the lord, this bread was prepared without milk or butter, then shaped in a way that some *Khoriz* filling would conceal the randomly placed coin(s) in it, and before baking it, some honey, walnut, raisins and other fruits would decorate its surface. Traditionally, this *Dari Hats* would be brought to the table right after dinner and before the games started, at the New Year's gathering, or on the next morning when the family gathers for breakfast, this gathering is symbolic too. Starting with the elder (recognizing the hierarchy was a sacred tradition in our patriarchal society), the family members would cut a piece by hand, knives and other sharp instruments were avoided as they symbolized cutting, breaking and dividing a "whole." Whoever found a coin in their piece of the *Dari Hats* would be considered the lucky person of the New Year. This person was supposed to keep the coin in his purse, because they believed that it would bring "Good Omen" to the person bearing it!

*Pari Dari, Pari Dari Hats, Pari Hats, Pari Nor Dari*



Taking part in the Navasart celebrations





# Mirror Spectator



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## COMMENTARY

# Is Kocharyan the Bellwether of Armenian-Russian Relations?

By Edmond Y. Azadian

While Armenians are carried away with euphoria following the peaceful December 9 elections, which placed the victory of the Velvet Revolution on legislative tracks, it seems a potential crisis is brewing in Armenian-Russian relations.

When Armenia's second president, Robert Kocharyan, was first incarcerated in July then released by court order, he had received a congratulatory message from Russia's President Vladimir Putin. The Russian president had demonstrably signaled that Kocharyan's well-being mattered to him. It looks like the signal was not missed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan camp, which chose the same venue to send a message to Russia that Kocharyan's case was a domestic issue and that Armenia, as a sovereign country, would not bargain away its independent judiciary with any power. Thus, Kocharyan was put in jail once again, two days before the parliamentary elections took place this month.

Some people interpreted the action as a measure to induce fear before the elections, while others connected it to souring Armenian-Russian relations. Yet others thought Kocharyan deserved what he got as the culprit who ordered the shooting deaths of protestors on March 1, 2008, following the presidential election which brought Serzh Sargsyan to power.

Pashinyan and his team are not naive; they knew what they were doing and they had already calculated the repercussions. The evidence of their awareness was the leaks of phone conversations between the security authorities and Pashinyan about another case which represents a different dimension affecting Armenian-Russian relations, that of Yuri Khachaturov.

Khachaturov was the secretary general of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and his term extended through 2022. He was charged on November 2 with "overthrowing Armenia's constitutional order" during the same March 1, 2008 response to protestors.

The officials have expressed their apprehension that sacking Khachaturov may ruffle some feathers in Moscow but they are being ordered to carry through the operation. And indeed, the reaction was harsh; Armenia was blamed for hurting the prestige of CSTO. But that was also a self-inflicted wound because the secretary of CSTO has a vantage point of observing and reviewing all the military operations in that alliance.

If the consequences of the action were indeed evaluated, the net gain for the country has yet to be divulged.

The chorus of robotic and supine media is applauding this move as a courageous demonstration of the country's independence.

Pashinyan is riding high on a wave of popularity. People are enjoying all the freedoms that he has promised through the Velvet Revolution. But any group or any media outlet which inflates his sense of infallibility will not be doing a favor to Pashinyan nor to Armenia.

Today Armenia is in a standoff with Russia. Following the December 9 elections, the US State Department and the leaders of Europe all congratulated Pashinyan for his landslide victory and there is unanimous approval for the democratic standards exercised during those elections. President Putin, who congratulated Serzh Sargsyan in 2017, the very next morning after the election, has kept silent thus far. This silence resonates louder than any message that the Kremlin is not pleased with the results of the election, nor does it approve of the direction of the policies that the Pashinyan government is pursuing.

After a week of silence, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova made a curt statement that Russia was "disposed to constructive dialogue" with Armenia, without any congratulatory message, while Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, on a state visit to Baku informed Azeri President Ilham

Aliyev that "Vladimir Putin sends his warm regards. He values your personal relationship, which helps to boost our strategic partnership, very highly."

Ms. Zakharova added insult to injury when she was asked about Putin's reluctance to issue a congratulatory message and retorted, "That looks like a woman asking a man, 'do you love me?'"

While Moscow is maintaining a deafening silence, it should be noted that all of Armenia's so-called strategic allies at the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and CSTO have adopted the same stance. While CSTO is supposed to serve as a counterweight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), its members, unlike NATO members, are at each other's throats or disagree on all issues except when they decide to oppose Armenia, all in unison.

While President Putin seems visibly disturbed and has decided to observe total silence, another villain is in action — Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko.

It seems that this Cold War relic has assumed the role of attack dog for the alliance and thus far, his attacks are directed at Armenia. Incidentally, Belarus and Kazakhstan are Armenia's official strategic allies, but they have unabashedly promoted Azerbaijan's interests within the alliance and the region.

When the alliance held one of rotational sessions in Yerevan, President Nursultan Nazarbayev did not even bother to attend.

Lukashenko is lobbying angry accusations and vulgar taunts at Pashinyan: "We are not the ones who created the scandal in the election of the secretary of CSTO. If Nikol Pashinyan were a wise person, we would resolve this question in a quick manner."

On the other hand, he announced unilaterally that the issue

of the election of the secretary general has been resolved at the session held in St. Petersburg. Stanislav Zas, the Belarus candidate, was to succeed Khachaturov as secretary. Pashinyan publicly refuted this statement because decisions within the alliance are reached through unanimous consensus and Armenia has not lent its support to that alleged election.

Lukashenko's verbosity has extended to a variety of issues, away from Kocharyan's incarceration and Khachaturov plight. He has touched upon the weapons system called Polonez Multiple Launch Rocket System, sold by Lukashenko's government to Azerbaijan, and from there he has taken another leap into an easy solution for the Karabakh conflict. He has blamed Armenia for refusing a "generous" offer that he had made in 2016 in Yerevan,

by asking Armenia to cede 5 regions to Azerbaijan, without any counter action, only assuring that Belarus and Russia could introduce peacekeeping forces to prevent Azerbaijan from taking over the rest of Karabakh. After observing his erratic political conduct, the last thing Armenia should do is to give credence to Lukashenko's assurances.

The mood is somber in Armenia. Commentators are worried about where this standoff may lead. For better or worse, a historic fact has been established that it is in the interest of Russia to guarantee the existence and the security of Armenia. Of course, there are other voices that advocate leaning towards the West or even joining NATO, oblivious of the Georgian experience and the fact that Turkey is a powerful player in NATO. Turkey has occupied 30 percent of Cyprus since 1974 without repercussions. Recently, it grabbed some land from Syria and just three weeks ago, a Turkish general threatened to destroy another ally, Greece, in four hours and NATO has yet to speak against the comment.

One of those pundits, who writes under the pen name Sarkis Arzruni (incidentally these people are called "grant eaters" in Armenia), has advised that there is no need to panic. Rather than waiting and wailing about why Putin has not extended his congratulations, let us take comfort in the fact and jump ship.

Now that Armenia has resolved one of its major domestic problems, a new, very serious foreign policy complication has popped up which may undermine our hopes and Armenia's drive to security and prosperity.







## COMMENTARY



## My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## Turkish Preconditions Should be Countered By Armenian Preconditions

Armenia's Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced last week that his government is ready to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey, however, without any preconditions.

This announcement came as a surprise to most Armenians who were hoping that Pashinyan will not repeat the mistake of former President Serzh Sargsyan who advocated for 10 years the ratification of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols which were intended to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries and open their mutual border. However, the Protocols included a number of unrelated issues such as the establishment of a historic commission to study the Armenian Genocide. The Turkish government, under pressure from Azerbaijan, demanded that Armenia first make territorial concessions on the Artsakh conflict before ratifying the Protocols. President Serzh Sargsyan was forced to reject this precondition and annulled the Protocols earlier this year.

The proposed Protocols had created a major dispute between the previous Armenian government and most Armenians worldwide. After coming to power in May of this year, Pashinyan repeatedly announced that he would focus on resolving Armenia's internal problems such as bribery and corruption, and would not change the country's foreign policy. Hence Pashinyan's recent announcement that Armenia is ready to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey without preconditions is simply the continuation of the previous gov-

ernment's position.

Back in September of 2018 when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was visiting Baku, he repeated once again his preconditions for establishing relations with Armenia: "We want good relations with our neighbors but solving the Karabakh problem is the absolute precondition for Turkey to improve ties with Armenia." Erdogan also mentioned his opposition to Armenia's pursuit of the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. On December 11, 2018, an Erdogan spokesman repeated the Turkish preconditions once again in response to Pashinyan's suggestion.

It is ironic that instead of Armenia putting preconditions on Turkey before agreeing to establish diplomatic relations, Turkey is the one demanding that Armenia comply with its preconditions. One would think that Armenians as victims of Turkish barbaric mass killings would be demanding that before establishing relations, Turkey acknowledge the Armenian Genocide and make adequate restitution for the enormous human and material losses! Such preconditions on Turkey are a trump card in the hands of Armenians which they should use as a bargaining chip.

In my opinion, Armenia's repeated begging of Turkey to establish diplomatic relations and open its border is embarrassing and reveals the Armenian side's weakness. Furthermore, Turkey would be the one benefitting from opening its border with Armenia, inundating the country with cheap Turkish products. As it is, Armenian markets are full of Turkish products imported via Georgia to the detriment of small scale Armenian manufacturers. The opening of the border with Turkey would be the death knell for many Armenian businesses.

One reason frequently mentioned by Armenia's officials for offering to establish relations with Turkey and open the mutual border is the hope that such a gesture would make Armenia look good in the eyes of the world and make Turkey look unfriendly and hostile by rejecting the Armenian offer.

Turkish leaders, however, never care what the world thinks of them. They act in the best interests of their country regardless of the opinions or criticisms of others. Likewise, Armenia's leaders should defend the interests of their country without trying to appease Russia, France, United States

or anyone else!

Furthermore, on an issue so vital to all Armenians worldwide, no Armenian official should make a unilateral decision on matters that relate to Turkey. This is the major mistake that was committed by President Serzh Sargsyan and it is hoped that the Pashinyan government will not repeat the same mistake, at a time when Armenia's new leaders are encouraging the integration of Diaspora Armenians in homeland affairs.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan continues to pressure Turkey not to open its border with Armenia until the Artsakh conflict is resolved in Baku's favor. Consequently, Presidents Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Erdogan of Turkey, by their intransigence, ironically are the ones preventing Armenia from reaching an agreement detrimental to its own interests.

On a related matter, the Turkish Anadolu News Agency falsely reported that during a meeting with Turkish journalists, the Acting Foreign Minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan had referred to the Armenian Genocide as "unpleasant events."

Unfortunately, several Armenian media members reproduced the Turkish distortion of the Armenian Acting Foreign Minister's words. Some even criticized him believing that he had in fact characterized the Armenian Genocide as "unpleasant events."

The spokeswoman of Armenia's Foreign Ministry, Anna Naghdalyan, set the record straight by stating that the Acting Foreign Minister had not said such a thing and that the Anadolu News Agency had misrepresented Mnatsakanyan's words. The spokeswoman told Hay Dzayn news that Anadolu had already apologized and corrected its error.

This is yet another lesson to Armenians who give interviews to the Turkish media, expecting their statements to be accurately reported. Having followed the Turkish media for decades, I can state that those who agree to be interviewed by a Turkish journalist should be warned that their words would be distorted. Once an altered interview is published, it is too late to complain by claiming that that's not what they had said. The best way to ensure that an Armenian's comments are not distorted is not to give an interview to the Turkish media!

# The Other Side of Home

By Ismail Akbulut

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

IN A TWEET fired off earlier this month, Turkish sociologist Yahya Mustafa Keskin from Abant Izzet Baysal University took aim at journalist Hayko Bagdat — who has Armenian roots — by mockingly referring to him as the "remains of the sword." This might seem cryptic for the average English speaker, but Keskin was insulting Bagdat's family as the lucky ones who managed to survive the 1915 Armenian Genocide carried out by the Ottoman Turks. Keskin then drove his point home by saying that Turks have never committed any genocides.

Author Jason Stanley argues in his recent book *How Fascism Works* that fascist regimes, especially ones with a history of atrocities, always emphasize a mythical narrative that portrays its own past as morally pure and free of tarnish. Today's Turkey not only denies its role in the Armenian Genocide, but is in the midst of carrying out atrocities against its own citizens, according to many academics and politicians. Today's victims are Turkey's marginalized dissidents: liberals, leftists, Kurds and, most notably, participants of the Gulen Movement (GM), or *Hizmet*.

Members of *Hizmet* were once accepted as legitimate players in Turkey's complex body politic until the movement ran afoul of current Turkish President Erdogan, who now refers to them as terrorists. *Hizmet* members are publicly demonized, have their assets and wealth confiscated, and their passports revoked. Many have been and are tortured, abducted and even murdered.

While participants of the GM are enduring these heinous atrocities in Turkey, GM participants active at the Colorado-based non-profit Multicultural Mosaic Foundation made a historically meaningful and courageous gesture last month by screening the film "The Other Side of Home."

Made by the award-winning filmmaker Naré Mkrtchyan, the movie centers on a Turkish woman named Maya, who discovers

that her great-grandmother was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. As the film unfolds, it becomes clear that Maya embodies the conflict. Her turbulent, mixed emotions represent opposite poles of the debate in Turkey regarding the crime: one that suffers and the other that denies. She goes to Armenia to participate in the 100th year commemoration of the genocide and to explore her conflicted identity. Aside from being a universal story involving identity and conflict, and the film explores how the genocide's effects ripple down the generations for both Armenians and Turks.

Historically, *Hizmet* participants would either support the Turkish state's narrative of denial or stay quiet about the topic. Discussing the issue publicly was taboo. But Erdogan's brutal witch-hunt against the movement in Turkey has led many participants to question state narratives on various issues, including the Armenian Genocide. A growing number of participants now fully recognize that the crime did actually happen. Many are even courageous enough to say so out loud in public.

Back to the film screening...

More than 80 people, including many Turkish-Americans, packed the film screening at the Multicultural Mosaic Foundation. One could observe in the audience many surprised faces and expressions. Other even teared up as the film moved them.

Mkrtchyan herself was also in the audience and stayed for a Q&A following the screening. The noted filmmaker was nervous at first about showing such a film to an audience with many Turkish-Americans, but was welcomed on stage with immense applause. She acknowledged that despite many screenings of the film across many countries, this was the first time it's been shown to an audience with so many Turks. Many questions were directed to Mkrtchyan about her feelings when she landed in Turkey and how she was treated there.

She said she was puzzled and uncertain when she arrived there for the first time. She felt as if she had, "I am Armenian" labelled on her forehead. She was especially surprised when someone referred to her in Turkish as "yavrum," or honey, the same way her grandmother would call her.

One highlight of the evening was when a woman in the audience who identified herself as Turkish admitted that she recently discovered that her ancestors were Armenian. Her parents made her believe growing up that she was either Turkish and Kurdish.

The audience also noted that the film promoted understanding for the narratives and realities on both sides. It shows the levels of denial on the Turkish side, borne out of ignorance, convenience, or fear of retaliation by the Turkish government. On the Armenian side, the film illustrates the pain and trauma that Armenians are still suffering through today as a nation.

The heinous witch-hunt in Turkey against participants of the Gulen Movement are experiencing the pains of murder and oppression first-hand. The film screening was simply a first step in trying to heal very old wounds. It's a symbolical gesture, statement, and opening by participants of *Hizmet*.

There's a lot more work to be done by members of the movement and beyond.

# Turkey's Crimes in Afrin

QAMISHLE, Syria — Turkey's President Erdogan was furious when the US announced the creation of a Border Security Force made up of 40,000 Syrian Kurdish fighters (YPG) to patrol the Turkish-Syrian border and guard against the Islamic State (ISIS). In a fit of pique, he vowed

By David L. Phillips

to attack Afrin, an oasis of tranquility in northwestern Syria, and then pivot east to create a security belt along Turkey's border with Syria as far as Iraq. Erdogan was true to his word.

On January 20, 2018, Turkish war planes started their bombardment of Afrin, launching an ethnic cleansing campaign aimed at expelling Kurds from their homes and replacing them with Arab refugees in Turkey. Turkish armed forces were joined by the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a jihadist militia with Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra affiliations. Attacks intensified over 58 days killing hundreds of civilians — Kurds, Christians and Yezidis — and displacing more than 300,000 people.

I recently interviewed survivors of the Afrin operation who described a systematic campaign of state-sponsored terror, aiming at ethnic cleansing and changing Afrin's demography. Afrin was an oasis of tranquility in Syria's bloody civil war, until Turkey's unprovoked attack.

Turkish forces and their jihadi proxies committed genocide and crimes against humanity, as defined by the Geneva Convention (August 12, 1949). It conducted indiscriminate bombing of civilian settlements, massacring members of an ethnic, denomination and belief group. It violated the Geneva Convention of January 12, 1951, which makes collective punishment a crime (Article 1) and criminalizes violence against national, denominational and religious communities (Article 2).

According to the Democratic Syrian Council (DSC), 157 civilians were killed by Turkish forces and their jihadi affiliates, including 56 women and 46 children. Among the 448 civilians injured are 104 women and 155 children. YPG tried to defend the people but were helpless against overwhelming air power, losing 525 fighters. More than 300,000 civilians fled Afrin for Til Rifat and Shehba regions.

see TURKEY, page 20?





# Turkey’s Crimes in Afrin

TURKEY, from page 19

Persons I interviewed recounted the gruesome carnage of elderly and disabled, killed while struggling to depart the city. A mother wept when remembering her daughter’s death. A surgeon described routine amputations of limbs mutilated by Turkish munitions. The DSC confirms that the Turkish state has:

- Targeted groups in violation of Article 7 of the 1998 Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court.
- Issued summary judgments leading to execution.
- Committed torture and murder, booty and plunder.
- Killed prisoners of war and mutilated bodies.
- Violated women’s rights, through kidnapping and abuse.
- Abducted children and took hostages.

The attackers also burned books, documents, historical artifacts, and destroyed sacred places, such as the historic temple of Eyn Dara. They destroyed the Yazidi Union Center, as well as water treatment and storage facilities. Journalists and medical workers were targeted. All these actions violate international human rights and humanitarian law.

Following are examples of crimes committed by Turkey and forces under its command against civilians in Afrin over a 58-day period, beginning on January 20, 2018:

Bombing a chicken farm in the village of Enabke (January 21). Eight family members lost their lives.

Bombing the village of Der Belut (January 23). Four civilians died and 5 were injured.

Bombing Koble village in the Shrawa district (January 28). Eight civilians from the same family were killed and 7 were injured.

Bombing the borough of Esrefiye in Afrin (January 31). One child died and 21 civilians, including women and children, were injured.

FSA members under Turkish control desecrated the dead body of Kurdish female fighter, Emina Mustefa Umer (February 1).

Attacks on the borough of Basutté (February 9) killed one child and injured 9 civilians.

Bombing a convoy of civilians, killing one and

injuring 12 (February 9).

Bombing Kaxire village of Mabata (March 2). One civilian died and 5 were injured.

Bombing the village of Berbene in Raco hitting a convoy of civilians (March 5). Three civilians lost their lives and 9 civilians were injured.

Eight civilians were wounded and three died from a mine explosion near Ferferiye village (March 6).

Two civilians died and four were injured in a mine explosion in Meydanke Beldesi (March 7)

A mine explosion in Gimrok, Babat province killed 2 civilians (March 13).

Near the village of Bediñe in the town of Raco, 4 civilians were injured while a civilian lost his life due to a mine explosion (March 13).

War planes bombed Afrin city center, killing 8 civilians and injuring 18 civilians (March 14).

War planes bombed Afrin city center, killing 6 civilians and injuring 5 people (March 15).

A convoy carrying civilians in Mehmediyaki neighborhood was attacked, killing 38 and injuring 47 civilians (March 16).

A mine explosion killed 4 civilians in the village of Tirinde (March 18).

The Afrin campaign served no strategic purpose. Erdogan prosecuted Afrin because he believes that the YPG is a branch of the PKK, Kurdish militias who have fought the Turkish state for decades, demanding greater political and cultural rights. There were few if any YPG in Afrin before Turkey’s attack.

Survivors testify that the campaign intended to “Turkify” Afrin and change the region’s demography. In addition to forcibly displacing the people of Afrin from their homes, students were forced to carry a Turkish flag and the JFA forced children to appear in videos thanking Erdogan. Kefer Cene District was completely Arabized through the settlement of gang members and 4,000 families. At least 300 families of JFA members were relocated to the village of Kefer Sefre. Others JFA members and their families were settled in the Ikbis and Moska villages, in the district of Shiye and Cindirese. Plundering of private homes was widespread. Street names were translated into Turkish and Arabic. Civilians who remained in Afrin were forced into madrasas offering radical religious

education and women were required to wear a veil. Yazidi people were forcibly Islamicized and required to attend religious services. Those who resisted were beheaded. Yezidi women and children were subjected to harassment and rape.

During our meeting, people displaced by the conflict broke into tears and pleaded to go home. They demanded justice. In fact, victims have a right to justice, according to the Geneva Conventions and principles of the Rome Statute. They also have the right to “Truth,” a full accounting of Turkey’s crimes.

The Rome Statute is clear on the matter of state responsibility. It affirms that, “It is the duty of every State to exercise its criminal jurisdiction over those responsible for international crimes.” Consistent with the principle of state responsibility, the Government of Syria should investigate and prosecute Turkish perpetrators and their jihadi proxies.

If Damascus is unwilling or unable, the international community could set-up a commission of inquiry to gather facts and recommend a criminal investigation. The commission’s work would address events over a specific period of time and geographic area.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is the best body to establish a commission of inquiry. If not the UNHRC, the Council of Europe (CoE) could take the lead. The CoE initiative could support cases brought to the European Court of Human Rights with backing by a resolution of the European Parliament.

The UN Human Rights Commission codified the right to truth in a 2005 resolution, which obligates the state authority to investigate human rights violations, provide information on official investigations, inform individuals of the fate of missing or forcibly displaced relatives, provide “mortal remains” of the victims, and disclose the identity of violators. The memory and stories of victims must be recorded through accounts by witnesses, family, and other survivors.. Data on war crimes would lay

the groundwork for criminal prosecution either in a domestic court or an international tribunal.

Official, semi-official and civic Truth Commissions (TCs) could be established to document events. A TC would seek to establish the facts and recognize the experience of victims. The Self-Administration of North and East Syria or a well-respected NGO in the region, such as the Rojava Center for Strategic Studies, could take the lead.

Afrin’s crimes can also be remembered through special projects that enshrine memory, creating public dialogue and opening civic spaces. These could include photo exhibitions, as well as theater, art, video, traveling exhibitions, and Web-based platforms. A Genocide Museum could assemble various materials telling the story of Afrin.

The perpetrators, including the Turkish state and its terror proxies, should be identified and held accountable, including those with command responsibility. Deterring Turkey’s future aggression is also an urgent priority, given Erdogan’s threat to expand operations. James Jeffrey, the US Special Envoy for Syria, recently testified that it is “unacceptable” for Turkey to attack US-allied Kurds in Syria. US Special Forces are establishing 5 posts along the Turkey-Syria border as a trip wire against aggression.

US engagement is critical. If the US does not defend the Kurds, and ultimately create conditions for their return to homes in Afrin, Northern Syria will become a bloodbath for which the US will share responsibility.

(David L. Phillips is Director of the Program on Peace-Building and Rights at Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights. He served as a Senior Adviser and Foreign Affairs Expert at the State Department under Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama. His recent book is titled – The Great Betrayal: How American Abandoned the Kurds and Lost the Middle East. This column originally appeared on the website Politurco.com)

## Turkish Police Raid Kurdish Opposition HQs, Arrest over 50 Women

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Turkish police on Monday, December 10, raided the local headquarters of the opposition People’s Democratic Party (HDP) in the Kurdish provinces of Diyarbakir and Batman, arresting at least 53 people, almost all of them women, who were on a hunger strike in solidarity with political prisoners.

Hundreds of police officers and armored vehicles surrounded the HDP’s local branches in the two cities, before entering the buildings to carry detentions ordered by Turkish prosecu-

tors on the grounds party members and activists were “members of a terrorist organization.”

The raids that came in the evening hours saw the arrest of 26 in Diyarbakir and 27 in Batman, among the first group an 80-year-old woman, Kurdistan 24’s Turkish language service wrote.

A short video the HDP shared on the party’s official Twitter feed showed a tense standoff between sitting women and police officers waiting for orders to detain them.

The detentions are not the first in this recent wave of a now years-long crackdown as earlier this month police took nine people from HDP’s branch in the Mediterranean city of Mersin into custody.

A jailed Kurdish lawmaker, Leyla Guven, launched the hunger strike in prison more than four weeks ago, demanding the Turkish state ends its policy of isolation on Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned founder of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

Ocalan, who serves a life sentence on the Imrali island in Turkey’s inland sea of Marmara for nearly two decades now and still holds large political leverage, has been held incommunicado since 2016, the last time a family member visited him. The last time Turkish authorities allowed him a meeting with his lawyers was in 2011.

Guven, who was elected an MP for the Hakkari Province in June 2018 elections while in detention, was arrested almost a year ago at the beginning of Turkey’s invasion of the Afrin region in Syrian Kurdistan due to her comments to the media condemning the assault. The “terror-related” case against her is pending trial.

### Pashinyan Sends Condolences to Macron in Connection With Strasbourg Attack

YEREVAN –Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sent a telegram of condolences to the President of the French Republic Emanuel Macron on the occasion of the terrorist attack in Strasbourg.

The message reads:”With deep sorrow I learned about the Strasbourg Christmas Market shooting, a terrorist act that hit France, causing casualties and injuries.

“I express my deep and sincere condolences to you, the French people and to the families of the victims, wishing patience and patience. At this difficult time Armenia and the Armenian people stand by friendly France.”

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