

A Happy Musical New Year For Dilijan Students

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

DILIJAN, Armenia – Students at the State Art College of Dilijan are ringing in the New Year with music, and with brand new instruments, thanks to the initiative of the Foundation for Armenian Relief (FAR). FAR, established in 1988 as a relief effort after the earthquake, has continued to raise funds for economic, social and educational programs in Armenia and cooperates with other foundations on specific projects. One of them focuses on music education.

The State Art College of Dilijan is a special institution that plays a unique role in the musical education of Armenia, as it is the only one that trains teachers of music. Established in 1997, it is an outgrowth of the Dilijan Musical School, which had been operating since 1945. Over the past two decades, the College has become the cradle of musical education in the entire marz (province) of Tavush (in the northeastern



Staff applauds the arrival of new Instruments

part of Armenia) and coordinates 15 music schools there.

The college provides two levels of musical education, the first comprising a seven-year curriculum for students attending classes after their regular school, and the second consisting of a four-year vocational curriculum, open to the graduates of the seven-year program and others. It is these students who go on to become teachers themselves and develop careers in music schools throughout the nation.

Both in the first and second levels, the curriculum offers instruction in vocal and instrumental music, winds, piano, string

and national instruments. The college has a choir, and ensembles for wind and traditional national instruments. Currently there are 178 pupils in the first level and 63 students in the second level.

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Actor Ken Davitian Transitions into New Genres

By Michael Melkonian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES – Ken Davitian, a prominent actor, best known for his co-starring role in the blockbuster comedy, “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan,” continues to evolve and advance the Armenian cause and venture.

He was unforgettable in the movie, speaking Armenian when playing the role of Azamat Bagatov, the Kazakh agent of the title character. One of his most famous scenes in the movie involved wrestling Sacha Baron Cohen in the nude, a scene so shocking that it was one of the comedy’s stand-out clips.

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Ardashes Kassakhian, third from left, meeting with voters

Glendale City Clerk Strives to Increase Voter Involvement

GLENDALÉ – Ardashes “Ardy” Kassakhian has played a steady role in Glendale municipal governance and local politics for several decades. He now is in his fourth four-year term as Glendale City Clerk, and the motto on his website, appropriately, is “helping you navigate through city government.” He is the highest vote receiver among elected officials in Glendale.

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

Kassakhian was one of those fortunate people who became interested in their future professions at a young age. In fact, he said that his interest in public service goes back to his parents and grandparents. His mother, Loussik Kassakhian, whose family lived in Greece, was a public school teacher who only recently retired, while his father Dr. Garabed Kassakhian was an environmental chemist dedicated, according to his son, to insuring that there is clean air, water and soil on this earth. His grandparents and his parents were very involved in the cultural institutions of Jerusalem and Lebanon, including in the Armenian General Benevolent Union and the Ramgavar or Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, of whom one grandfather was a prominent leader. In addition, a great-grandfather was friends with the noted poet and activist Vahan Tekeyan.

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Ken Davitian and his “Borat” co-star Sacha Baron Cohen

NEWS IN BRIEF

Forbes: Armenia Among Top Budget Travel Destinations

YEREVAN – An article in *Forbes* magazine named Armenia among the best budget travel destinations for 2019.

“Set in the Caucasus Mountains, Armenia is a hidden gem that’s still untouched by mass tourism, and yet has so much to offer: rich history, wineries, impressive landscapes, ancient monasteries and breathtaking mountains as far as your eyes can see. The capital, Yerevan, is a lively city with wide avenues, delicious restaurants, museums and street markets selling local handicrafts,” the article by Alexandra Talty notes.

“For wine lovers, Armenia is the perfect place to try wines made from different fruits such as pomegranate (Armenia’s national symbol), blackberries and cherries. Outside of the capital is picturesque nature. You can pay a visit to the oldest winery in the world in Areni, stop by stunning monasteries, or check out the oldest cathedral in the world in Echmiadzin.”

President Sarkissian Celebrates Season With Young Guests

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Armenian President Armen Sarkissian on December 28 hosted children from orphanages, care centers and boarding schools.

With the help of specialists the children made baubles for decorating the hall and the Christmas Tree.

“What I want from Santa is that all our kids be happy during the whole year, sing and receive good gifts. I want for those boys who dream of becoming a soldier, to become a soldier and defend our homeland, but without war,” the president said.

He talked to the little guests, asked their names, ages and about their dreams, and noted: “Each of you has a great future. I know that some of you don’t have parents, some have, and many live in difficult conditions. When I was in your age, I lost my father. This is difficult, but I am sure that you are stronger than the remaining children as you are able to overcome the difficulties from an early age. Do you understand that you are good, and in case of hard work, studying hard you can become the President of Armenia?”

He told the children his favorite job is being a teacher. “I think the work of the teacher is better. In some sense the president is also a teacher, but I am a teacher who meets with you once or twice a year. They are so lucky that they communicate with you every day,” Sarkissian said.

He urged the kids to send him a letter in case of needing help.

The event was held with the support of the Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR).

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ARMENIA

News From Armenia

Court Rejects Sergio Nahabedian's Lawsuit Against ADL

YEREVAN (Azg) — The First Tribunal of the Court of General Jurisdiction in the Republic of Armenia rejected Sergio Nahabedian's suit against the Central Executive of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) at the end of December 2018.

Hayk Poghosyan, who represented the ADL in court as its lawyer, declared in an interview with the Hay Tzayn news site that the case began because certain people in Armenia were using the name, coat of arms and flag of the ADL though they were not members of the ADL which had been registered under that name in the Republic of Armenia. These people organized press conferences and gave interviews in which they stated that they would not participate in elections in Armenia such as the recent parliamentary ones. When the ADL attempted to prevent such actions, legal measures were undertaken in response. However, by this court order any or all claims within Armenia have been denied to them.

Azeri Forces Continue Attacking Artsakh

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Azerbaijan has made more than 150 individual ceasefire violations during the period from December 23 to December 29 in the line of contact, Artsakh's military said.

It said that Azerbaijani forces used various caliber small arms and fired nearly 1500 rounds at their positions.

Arrested Businessman Requests Trip Abroad For Medical Care

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Lawyers for businessman Samvel Mayrapetyan claim he needs immediate medical attention and have requested authorities to allow him travel abroad for the matter.

Mayrapetyan is charged with bribery-related accusations and was arrested pending trial but later released on a 30,000,000-dram bail. He was taken to a hospital following his release.

His lawyers released a statement recently on his health condition. They said that surgeons have confirmed that the required medical equipment for treating Mayrapetyan's condition is not available in Armenia, and thus he needs to be immediately taken to Germany.

Since Mayrapetyan's passport is at the Special Investigative Service, his lawyers appealed to the agency.

New Year's Message From Pashinyan

YEREVAN — Acting Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan addressed a congratulatory message on New Year and Christmas.

The message says, in part, "The year 2018 was a year when the Armenian nationals and the Diaspora-based Armenians, adults and children, male and female, rural or urban united around one common goal and forged our common victory, which ultimately became an exceptional achievement of national unity.

"I consider it necessary to record that the passing year was not the summit of our victories, but only the base, not the end of our march, but the beginning. In 2019 we must achieve new heights, new achievements, first of all in our socio-economic life.

"Our main task in 2019 is the economic revolution and making its results more tangible. But next year will not be the climax of our victories, not because our flight will be low, but because our national and state ambitions will be higher and higher."

He sent a special greeting to "all our soldiers, officers and generals who are on the frontlines."

"Finally, I welcome all the citizens of the Republic of Armenia, all our compatriots in Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora. I love all of you, I am proud of you and I bow before you all," he added.

Russia Raises Gas Prices for Armenia in New Year

By Joshua Kucera

MOSCOW (Eurasianet) — Russia has raised the price for the gas it sells to Armenia by 10 percent. The negotiations over the gas price were seen as a litmus test for the new government in Yerevan and its ability to deal with its often overbearing ally in Moscow.

In 2019, the Russian state gas company Gazprom will sell gas to Armenia at \$165 per thousand cubic meters, Gazprom said in a statement following a December 31 meeting between its chairman, Alexei Miller, and Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigorian. The previous price had been \$150 per thousand cubic meters.

The Armenian government had repeatedly said it was seeking to instead reduce the price it pays Russia for gas. "Negotiations are being conducted toward the reduction" of gas prices, Garegin Baghramyan, Armenia's minister of energy and natural resources told reporters in November. As late as December 27, Baghramyan said that "Of course, we are holding talks on reducing the tariff, but I am unaware of Russia's proposals. The best result for us must be to reduce the tariff."

That the price was instead raised is another item in a growing list of setbacks to Armenia in its relationship with Russia. Armenia imports the large majority of its gas from Russia. Its only other supplier is Iran, and US officials have been pressuring Yerevan to curtail its ties with Iran. (See related editorial on page 18.)

The price increase comes as Armenia

also appears to be on the verge of losing its position heading the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, and just days after Russian President Vladimir Putin and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met in Moscow. The day after the meeting, Putin pointedly sent public holiday

Pashinyan's foes in the formerly ruling Republican Party of Armenia pounced on the defeat. "We are finishing the year not entirely proudly and fruitfully," wrote Eduard Sharmazanov, the party's press secretary, on his Facebook page the day the announcement was made. "Nikol, who for months



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on December 27. Days later, Russia announced it was increasing the price of natural gas it sells to Armenia. (photo: kremlin.ru)

greetings to former Armenian president Robert Kocharyan, a Pashinyan nemesis currently in jail in Yerevan on abuse-of-power charges.

The price increase is "symptomatic of how the Kremlin is exploiting Armenia's acute dependence on Russian hydrocarbons, using gas supply as a political instrument to put pressure on the Pashinyan-led government," Eduard Abrahamyan, a London-based analyst of Armenia, told Eurasianet.

has been accusing us of artificially increasing prices on gas and creation of a corrupt gas scheme, saying that since his becoming prime minister that Armenia-Russia relations have been wonderful, today reported that the price of gas is increasing."

Pashinyan himself tried to put a brave face on the news, saying that consumers would be paying the same price for energy thanks to "our certain internal adjustments," which he didn't specify.

Armenia Reports Further Rise in Tourism

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — The number of foreign tourists visiting Armenia has continued to grow this year, reaching a new high of almost 1.3 million in January-September, a senior government official said late in December.

The figure represents a nearly 9-percent increase from the same period in 2017, Hripsime Grigoryan, the head of the government's Tourism Committee, said at a news conference.



Hripsime Grigoryan

Grigoryan said that Russian nationals continued to account for the largest share of tourist arrivals (41 percent), fol-

lowed by residents of neighboring Georgia and Iran.

All three countries have sizable Armenian communities, as does the United States. More than 46,000 Americans visited Armenia in the ninth-month period, according to government data publicized by Grigoryan.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan hailed news reports saying that Armenia is a leading destination for Russians planning to spend their New Year and Christmas holidays abroad. "This is certainly a chance for many Armenian businesspeople to do their share of economic revolution and lay the groundwork for a bigger tourism boom next summer," he wrote on Facebook.

Grigoryan said that the influx of tourists intensifying following this spring's "velvet revolution" which brought Pashinyan to power. "We had a particularly high rate of growth in the period from July through October," said the

official.

Official Armenian statistics shows that the number of foreign visitors rose by an average of 9 percent annually between 2012 and 2016. This growth, which accelerated in 2017, appears to have been facilitated by the former Armenian government's decision in 2013 to liberalize the domestic civil aviation sector.

The average cost of air travel to and from Armenia has fallen considerably since then. The last several years have also seen a major increase in new hotels and guesthouses across the country.

The Armenian authorities unilaterally scrapped visas for citizens of the European Union member states and the U.S. in 2012 and 2014 respectively. An agreement on visa-free travel between Armenia and Iran came into effect in August 2016.

Yerevan also lifted visa restrictions for citizens of Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and several other nations last year. In addition, it allowed Russian citizens to visit Armenia with Russian internal passports.

She noted the new government is now trying to improve the domestic tourism infrastructure for the same purpose.

Hackers Target Armenian State Websites

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Three million attempts hackings were made on the websites of Armenia's state structures during January-November 2018, Colonel Armen Kinaktsyan, head of the scientific-educational center of the National Security Service, said during the meeting with reporters, reports Armenpress.

"The talk is about the hacker attack attempts on the websites of state structures which are under the NSS control. But these

attacks resulted in failure", he said.

The NSS official said most of the hacker attacks were made from Azerbaijan and Turkey.

"The hacker attacks, for instance, could not be from Azerbaijan, but they can hire hackers in other countries", he added.

Armen Kinaktsyan said the hacker attacks today even can cause physical damage to a person.



ARMENIA

TUMO Fundraising For Center in Koghb

KOGHB, Armenia – The TUMO Center for Creative Technologies and the Koghb Foundation have launched a fundraising effort to build a TUMO center in Koghb.

TUMO CEO Marie Lou Papazian declared: “At TUMO, our mission is to give every teen in Armenia access to a 21st-century skillset at the intersection of technology and design. Our next step in meeting that objective is to establish TUMO Koghb, our fifth Armenian center.”

Koghb is a town on Armenia’s northeastern border in the Tavush province. It is easily accessible from neighboring villages and towns such as Noyemberyan and Berdavan. TUMO Dilijan, which was founded in 2014, is in a different part of Tavush Province. Thus, the establishment of TUMO Koghb makes a center accessible to students in the remainder of the region.

The establishment of a TUMO center in Koghb was initiated by the Koghb Foundation for Education, Culture and Sports and by the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, with support from the JHM Foundation, Boghos Egsertsian, Grigor



Simsiroghlu, Nshan Devedjyan, Ucom, and Mission Enfance.

Construction of TUMO Koghb began in July 2017 and is scheduled to be completed by 2020. It will open its doors free of charge to up to 1,000 teenagers living in Koghb and neighboring towns. The building will be a multi-purpose facility, equipped with state-of-the-art technology. Students will have access to self-

learning stations, workshop rooms, a recording studio, a movie theater and sports facilities.

The learning program at TUMO Koghb will be the same as the other four existing Armenian TUMO centers: <https://tumo.org/en/education-program/> The TUMO program covers 14 learning targets: Animation, Game Development, Filmmaking, Web Development, Music, Writing, Drawing, Graphic Design, 3D Modeling, Computer Programming, Robotics, Motion Graphics, Photography and New Media. It is made up of autonomous activities supported by coaches, alternating with hands-on workshops taught by the center’s specialized staff, and project labs led by industry leaders from across the globe. Teens combine the TUMO learning targets into personal learning paths that are automatically generated and dynamically updated, adapting to the evolving preferences and rate of progress of each student. Soft skills including teamwork, initiative-taking, empathy and effective communication are built into the educational program along with the technical skills and know-how specific of the areas of instruction.

There are no students cohorts at TUMO – students of all ages, social background and interests work together at various times in different workshops and labs; no entrance exams, requirements or fees – all applicants are accepted free of charge; no grades – students do not compete with each other, but are rather motivated to gain access to their favorite workshops and labs, and to level up, as they would in a video game; and no certificate of completion – instead, each student’s work is automatically uploaded to their online portfolio, which becomes their “living diploma.”

TUMO and the Koghb Foundation have secured \$3,070,000 of the \$4,270,000 needed to open the Koghb center and cover the first ten years of its operating costs. TUMO still needs \$1,200,000 to complete the construction of the center and ensure that it fosters the maximum development of youth in Armenia’s border towns, but is starting with a modest \$100,000 goal as the first step.

Donations can be made online at tumo.org/donate.



Ghoghanj Children’s Center Team Takes First Prize in 3-D Modeling Contest

YEREVAN – The Paros Foundation announced recently that students from the Ghoghanj Children’s Center Arm-math Robotics program took first place in the Armenia’s nationwide Union of Information Technology Enterprises (UITE) 3-D Modeling contest. Seventy teams from throughout Armenia and Artsakh entered the contest. Of these teams, 38 were selected to advance to the finals, including teams from the Debi Arach Children’s Center and the Nerkin Karmir Aghbyur School. The Paros Foundation is the primary sponsor of both the Ghoghanj and Debi Arach Children Centers. Paros has also renovated the Nerkin Karmir Aghbyur School including their computer and robotics classrooms. The team from Nerkin Karmir Aghbyur received honorable mention in the Historical Monuments category for their 3-D model of the church in Berd.

“I am very proud of my student’s accomplishments. Since we began teaching our Arm-math curriculum at Ghoghanj three years ago, I have witnessed the manner in which our students have engaged and understand engineer-

ing technology,” said Diana Grigoryan, executive director of the Ghoghanj Children’s Center.

“It is very exciting to see three of the organizations we support achieving such high accolades in this impressive competition,” said Peter Abajian, Executive Director of The Paros Foundation. “We congratulate the students and teachers for this outstanding accomplishment, and the donors to these organizations for their vision and on-going support.”

The Ghoghanj Children’s Center operates two locations in Yerevan’s downtown and Nork communities. The center’s students are defined as at-risk, with most of the children coming from economically challenged families. The Debi Arach Children’s Center operates in Gyumri and works primarily with children from impoverished families living in domiks and inadequate housing. The village of Nerkin Karmir Aghpyur is located in the isolated and often dangerous Berd community of Armenia’s Tavush Region.

For more information about these organizations or The Paros Foundation, please visit www.parosfoundation.org.

Sargsyan Bodyguard Out on Bail

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – A court in Yerevan on December 31 granted bail to former President Serzh Sargsyan’s former chief bodyguard less than two months after he was again arrested on corruption charges.

Vachagan Ghazaryan, who headed former Sargsyan’s security detail for more than two decades, stands accused of illegal enrichment and false asset disclosure. The charges stem from his failure to declare to a state anti-corruption body more than \$2.5 million in cash that was mostly held in his and his wife’s bank accounts.

Ghazaryan was obliged to do that in his capacity as deputy head of a security agency providing bodyguards to Armenia’s leaders. He held that position until the end of May.

Ghazaryan was first detained in June after police raided his apartment in Yerevan and found \$1.1 million and 230,000 euros (\$267,000) in cash there. The National Security Service (NSS) said he carried a further \$120,000 and 436 million drams (\$900,000) in a bag when he was caught outside a commercial bank in Yerevan.

Armenia’s Court of Appeals ordered his release from custody in July after he offered to post a 1 billion-dram (\$2.1 million) bail. The higher Court of Cassation overturned that ruling on November 15 following an appeal lodged by prosecutors.

Ghazaryan’s lawyer, Armen Harutiunyan, said the Yerevan court agreed on Saturday to free his client on a much smaller bail worth 50 million drams.

The decision came just one day after the Court of Appeals rejected Ghazaryan’s appeal against his pretrial detention.

Earlier in December, the NSS had said that Ghazaryan, who has the rank of NSS general, has offered to pay the state as much as \$6 million in compensation. His lawyer confirmed the information.



INTERNATIONAL

International News

Direct Flights between Armenia and Romania to Start

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Romania's flagship airline, Tarom Airlines, has announced that it will launch flights from Bucharest to Yerevan, Armenia, according to Financial News.

The airline said the direct flight service is expected to develop and expand trade and economic relations, including tourism, between the two countries.

Tarom is Romania's national airline, the largest and oldest airline in the country, based at Henri Coanda International Airport in Otopeni.

Feodosia National Gallery to Digitize Aivazovsky's artwork

FEODOSIA, Crimea (Panorama.am) — The artwork of the Russian-Armenian artist Hovhannes Aivazovsky kept at the Aivazovsky National Art Gallery in Feodosia, will be digitized, TASS reported.

"The collection of the artwork is not yet digitized yet it is planned," Minister of Culture of Crimea Arina Novoselskaya told the agency, adding no time frame for the completion of the digitization is set yet.

The Aivazovsky National Art Gallery is a national art museum in Feodosia. In 1845, Ivan Aivazovsky acquired a plot on the outskirts of Feodosiya, on the very seashore. He decided to build a house with a big art studio and dreamed to establish a school of painting there. The same year, 1845, the first exhibition comprising 49 works was opened in a part of the house.

The art gallery in Feodosiya was the first one-painter museum in the Russian Empire and has grown very famous even in Aivazovsky's lifetime.

Aivazovsky is considered one of the greatest seascape painters in history. Baptized as Hovhannes Aivazian, Aivazovsky was born into an Armenian family in the Black Sea port of Feodosia and was mostly based in his native Crimea.

Armenian Defense Chief Visits Russian Troops

GYUMRI, Armenia (RFE/RL) — Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan praised the Russian military base in Armenia and its geopolitical role when he visited its headquarters in Gyumri on Saturday.

Tonoyan attended and addressed an official ceremony there marking the 77th anniversary of the establishment of the Russian military unit.

According to the Armenian Defense Ministry, he said in a speech that the Russian military presence in Armenia "stems from the long-term strategic and political interests of our countries."

"Davit Tonoyan stressed the importance of the military base's role in maintaining regional stability and expressed confidence that the close [Russian-Armenian] partnership will continue to be strong and fruitful," read a ministry statement.

The Russian base numbers up to 5,000 troops mainly deployed along Armenia's closed border with Turkey. It has hundreds of tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery systems as well as over a dozen MiG-29 fighter jets. Moscow has bolstered the base with helicopter gunships and other military hardware since a 2010 Russian-Armenian agreement extended its basing rights in Armenia to 2044.

Armenian leaders have long said that Armenia hosts Russian troops on its territory primarily because of a perceived security threat from Turkey. From Yerevan's perspective, they preclude Turkey's direct military intervention on Azerbaijan's side in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Troops from the base and the Armenian army's Fifth Corps make up a joint Russian-Armenian military force originally set up in 2000. Moscow and Yerevan signed in November 2016 an agreement designed to upgrade its mission and ascertain its command-and-control structure.

The Russian-Armenian United Grouping of Troops most recently held exercises in October. Tonoyan watched them together with other senior military officials.



Female Kurdish soldiers

Where Do Kurds Fit into Syria's War?

BEIRUT (Reuters) — The future of Kurdish-led areas of northern and eastern Syria has been thrown into doubt by President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops who have helped to secure the region.

Amounting to about one quarter of Syria, the area is the largest chunk of territory still outside the control of President Bashar al-Assad, who is backed by Russia and Iran.

Trump said on Wednesday the United States would withdraw slowly "over a period of time" and would protect the U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters as Washington withdraws troops, but without giving a timetable.

Syrian Kurdish leaders fear Turkey will use the withdrawal as an opportunity to launch an assault.

As a result, they are in contact with Moscow and Damascus in the hope of agreeing arrangements to protect the region from Turkey while also aiming to safeguard their political gains.

The main Syrian Kurdish faction, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), began to establish a foothold in the north early in the war as government forces withdrew to put down the anti-Assad uprising elsewhere. An affiliated militia, the People's Protection Units (YPG), secured the region.

Early in the conflict, their control was concentrated in three predominantly Kurdish regions home to roughly 2 million Kurds. Kurdish-led governing bodies were set up.

The area of YPG influence expanded as the YPG allied with the US-led coalition against Islamic State (IS), becoming the spearhead of a multi-ethnic militia, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

SDF influence widened to Manbij and Raqqa as IS was defeated in both. It has also reached deep into Deir al-Zor, where the SDF is still fighting IS.

Kurdish leaders say their aim is regional autonomy within a decentralized Syria, not independence.

The PYD is heavily influenced by the ideas of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, a founding member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a 34-year insurgency in Turkey for Kurdish political and cultural rights. Ocalan has been in jail since 1999 in Turkey. He is con-

victed of treason.

The PKK is designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. Turkey says the PKK is indistinguishable from the PYD and YPG.

Turkey has a Kurdish minority equal to 15 to 20 percent of its population, mostly living in eastern and southeastern areas bordering Syria. Wary of separatism, Turkey views the PYD's Syrian foothold as a national security threat.

about independent entities or federalism".

Talks between the sides last year made no progress.

The Kurdish-led authorities are launching a new initiative aiming to put pressure on the government to reach a political settlement "within the framework of a decentralized Syria," leading Kurdish politician Ilham Ahmed said last week.

Analysts say the Kurds' negotiating position has been weakened by Trump's announcement.



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Syria's main Kurdish groups do not hide Ocalan's influence: they organized elections towards establishing a political system based on his ideas.

Turkey has already mounted two cross-border offensives in northern Syria as part of its efforts to counter the YPG.

Syria's Baathist state systematically persecuted the Kurds before the war. Yet the YPG and Damascus have broadly stayed out of each other's way during the conflict, despite occasional clashes. They also have been seen to cooperate against shared foes, notably in and around Aleppo.

The YPG has allowed the Syrian state to keep a foothold in its areas. The YPG commander told Reuters in 2017 it would have no problem with the Assad government if Kurdish rights are guaranteed in Syria.

But Damascus opposes Kurdish autonomy demands: the Syrian foreign minister last month said "nobody in Syria accepts talk

The territory held by Damascus and the Kurdish-led authorities accounts for most of Syria. A political settlement - if one could be reached, perhaps with Russian help - could go a long way to stitching the map back together.

But it would not mark the end of the war. Anti-Assad insurgents, though defeated across much of Syria by the government and its allies, still have a foothold in the northwest stretching from Idlib through Afrin to Jarabulus. Turkey has troops on the ground in this area.

The rebels include Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army groups and jihadists.

Enmity runs deep between the YPG and these groups.

For the YPG, one priority is recovering Afrin from the rebels who seized it in a Turkey-backed offensive last year.

Assad also wants Turkey out as he vows to recover "every inch" of Syria.

Armenia's Sergey Smbatyan to Conduct New Year Concert in Malta

VALLETTA, Malta (Panorama.am) — The artistic director and principal conductor of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, Sergey Smbatyan is set to perform his first concert of 2019 in Valletta, Malta.

Smbatyan is set to conduct the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra in performance

of its New Year concert on January 6, the Armenian symphony orchestra announced.

be held at Mediterranean Conference Centre built in the 16th century.

Under the direction of Smbatyan, the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra will be performing pieces by Strauss, Rossini,

Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky, Bernstein and other composers.

The concert program also features Sabre Dance from the ballet "Gayane" by Aram Khachaturian. Popular mezzo-soprano Clare Ghigo will share the stage with the orchestra during the concert.



INTERNATIONAL



Eli Melki

In Search of Leonard, My Martyred Ancestor

By Eli Melki

ISTANBUL (BBC) – Eastern Turkey had a large and thriving community of Christians a little over 100 years ago, but since then most have been dispersed or killed. The BBC's Eli Melki went to look for traces of a relative, who was martyred at the age of 33.

One evening in June, I sat in the sunset among the Roman ruins of Zirzawan hill, in south-east Turkey. This is where it's said the remains of one of my ancestors are buried in a mass grave. Leonard Melki was about 33 years old at the beginning of World War One, and his fate was determined by his Christian faith.

At that time, between a fifth and a quarter of the inhabitants of eastern Turkey - then part of the Ottoman Empire - belonged to an array of Eastern denominations of the Christian Church, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syriac Church, the Church of the East (Nestorians) and the Chaldean Church.

All except the Armenians worshipped in Syriac – a dialect of Aramaic, the language of Christ.

They lived among the empire's Muslim majority and, while many prospered, at some times and in some places they were subject to outright persecution; in World War One, it went far, far beyond that.

Leonard, my great-grandfather's cousin, was born a member of one of the Eastern churches – the Maronites – but later became a Capuchin friar, and in his mid-20s he was sent to run the order's school in the city of Mardin, close to what is now the border between Turkey and Syria.

At this point Christians represented between 35 percent and 40 percent of Mardin's inhabitants. The Capuchin monastery, where Leonard taught boys the rudiments of the Christian faith, stood alongside a Franciscan monastery in a prominent position in the city centre.

To find out more about Leonard, I spoke to his great-nephew, Fares Melki, who has set up a website dedicated to Leonard and other missionaries from Baabdat, the small town near Beirut where we were both born. As we sat under our family oak tree, he told me that Leonard was born Yusuf (Joseph in Arabic) in about 1881, one of 11 children. As a boy he would have tilled the land around where we were sitting.

Fares showed me some yellowed letters and photographs Leonard sent to relatives and to his superiors. They reveal a young man dedicated to his faith, attached to his sister Tamar, and eager – despite problems with his health – to embark on a mission 1,000 kilometers from his picturesque and prosperous home in Mount Lebanon.

In one letter, written in 1912, he wrote about young Muslim men from Mardin being sent to fight in the Balkan Wars.

"Poor souls, I pity them. They are marching like sheep to the



Eli Melki's ancestor, Leonard Melki

slaughter, poorly trained and equipped, but displaying an admirable courage despite of it all. Lacking everything – even bread – they end up by devastating everything and terrorizing people wherever they set foot. May God put an end to all this misery, and grant peace and tranquility to the land."

But not long afterwards, World War One did the opposite, and

the nationalist Young Turks then in control of the Ottoman Empire began to fear a possible alliance between the local Christian populations and Russia, which had quickly gone on the offensive.

The decision was taken to deport the Armenian population into the interior provinces - though in practice men were often simply executed, and women and children forced into convoys that morphed into death marches.

While these actions were directed against the Armenians, they had the effect of signaling that all Christians in the region had lost the protection of the state. The result was a wave of pogroms, carried out both by the local Ottoman authorities and some Kurdish tribesmen.

Some Syriac Christian churches are estimated to have lost up to half their congregation in the violence. They call this Seyfo, the Year of the Sword, and Leonard was one of the victims.

Today, almost nothing remains of Mardin's ancient Christian heritage. There is no trace of the Capuchin monastery in Mardin, though by chance I met a local historian – possibly the last Armenian living in the city – who was able to point out the precise location of the neighboring Franciscan monastery. Using old photographs and the memoirs of her grandmother – once a pupil at the girls' school run by Franciscan nuns – she has been able to pinpoint exactly where each arch of the building stood. Today the site is a busy and noisy car park among the narrow shopping streets of this Turkish city. It's hard to imagine now the sounds of the schoolyards and the monastery bells.

But below ground level, in a former public bath building, my Armenian guide showed me an archway, a remnant of one of the two defunct monasteries. And suddenly in my mind's eye I could see Leonard and his pupils passing by – or being dragged along after his arrest.

Leonard was seized in June 1915, when the authorities rounded up a number of clergymen and other notables of the city on trumped up charges of collaboration with the enemy, usually the French. Christians had widely come to be seen as a fifth column of the Western powers, and the missionaries treated as enemy agents.

We walked along the winding old main street referred to by a Dominican monk, Jacques Rhétoré, in his account of the arrests.

"Father Leonard, a Capuchin, was in front of the convoy of detainees, between two students of Saint Francis's school. As he passed by his convent, he looked upward, in a last salute to the holy house where he lived in the bliss of doing good deeds. There, the soldier flanking him dealt him a blow on the head with a club, yelling at him: 'Walk straight you dirty *Faranji* (Foreigner)!'"

The convoy, one of many, was led towards the city of Diyarbakir, where the detainees were to be tried for treason. However, in the middle of the journey, the column of detainees, now in a sorry state, was led to the hill of Zirzawan.

Their final hour was recounted by another Dominican, Hyacinthe Simon.

"They were killed by groups of four, with knives, daggers and scimitars, or clubbed to death, then their bodies were thrown in the wells. The old fortress still holds their bones and the secret of their last moments," he wrote.

Sitting on Zirzawan hill, I wondered what must have gone through Leonard's mind as his life was about to end. Did he remember our peaceful hometown, the family land with its majestic oak tree, his fellow friars, his beloved sister?

For me, Leonard personifies the tragedy of hundreds of thousands of mostly innocent and unarmed people, who were were killed during the fateful spring and summer of 1915 in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire. It helps me to fathom the enormity of this disaster.

In the distance, I could still see the sprawling new city of Mardin. The old road taken by the death march has now been replaced by a motorway, emblematic of a resurgent Turkey, a country where the two-millennia-old Christian presence has been reduced to the ruins of places of worship. And to about 2,500 Syriac speaking people, who still cling, against all odds, to a handful of towns and villages in the nearby region of Tur Abdin, the "Mountain of the Worshippers."

What was once one of the most ancient and dense Christian presences in the world now stands on the brink of extinction.

Twenty-five years ago a new church was consecrated in the town of Deir al-Zour in eastern Syria, dedicated to the Armenians killed en masse in 1915. Ironically the building erected in memory of the victims of violence has now been destroyed by bombs.

(Eli Melki made a documentary for BBC Arabic on the Christians of Turkey and Iraq. The English-language version – "The Last Christians" – was shown on the BBC World News. This article originally appeared on the BBC on December 31.)

Community News

Reagan Speechwriter Bakshian Speaks about Armenia and Future of Diaspora at Armenian Assembly Reception

WASHINGTON – The Armenian Assembly of America featured Aram Bakshian, Jr. as the guest speaker at its Annual Holiday Reception last month at the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia, in December. Bakshian spoke about “Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.”

“Armenia became more of a dream, an abstraction, than a practical reality. Like the vision of Mount Ararat just across the Turkish border, it was always in sight but just out of reach. Then, in 1991, with the disintegration of what Ronald Reagan called ‘The Evil Empire’ the Armenian nation rose from the ashes,” Bakshian said. “Meanwhile the Armenian diaspora had been an incredible success story all over the globe, especially in America. Thanks to both Church institutions and civic institutions like the Armenian Assembly of America, the latest generation of Armenian Americans is re-connecting with both the Armenian heritage and the reborn Armenian nation. But it’s a constant battle, and perhaps the greatest challenge we face: keeping the Armenian spirit alive and connected with each new generation of diaspora Armenians,” he added.

Bakshian continued: “I deeply believe that if institutions like the Church, the Assembly, and various youth-oriented programs do their jobs well, the same qualities that have made



Aram Bakshian Jr. speaks.

Armenians so successful in the New World – hard work, family, loyalty, faith, initiative, and pride in heritage – can forge unbreakable bonds of brotherhood between the young people of the diaspora and the young people of a reborn Armenia. It is our job to make sure that happens.”

“President Reagan is known as the ‘Great Communicator,’ which I suspect was in no small part attributable to Aram Bakshian, among his other speechwriters,” Armenian National Institute (ANI) Director Dr. Rouben Adalian said introducing Bakshian. Dr. Adalian was the Master of Ceremonies at the Armenian Assembly’s Annual Holiday Reception at the Armenian Embassy.

Bakshian has served as an aide and speechwriter to three U.S. Presidents and as Editor-in-Chief of American Speaker, an award-winning guide to public speaking and speechwriting, which he helmed from its founding in 1992 until his retirement 17 years later. He is currently a Contributing Editor of The National Interest and a regular columnist for The American Conservative. He served three tours of duty in the White House, with Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, and was Director of Presidential Speechwriting for President Reagan from 1981 to 1983. In 1986, President Reagan nominated him - and the Senate confirmed him - for a six-year term on the National Council for the Humanities.

“We appreciate Aram Bakshian’s thought-provoking remarks on Armenia’s long history, catching us up on today’s realities, and his vision for the future of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora,” Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny stated.



Ambassador Lynne M. Tracy

Senate Confirms by Voice Vote Ambassadorial Nominees for Armenia and Azerbaijan

WASHINGTON – On January 3, the United States Senate confirmed by a voice vote Ambassadorial nominees Lynne M. Tracy and Earle D. Litzenger to represent the United States in Armenia and Azerbaijan, respectively.

Last month, during the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) business meeting on the nomination, Ranking Member Robert Menendez (D-NJ) explained his support for both candidates, as well as the importance of strong U.S.-Armenia relations.

“Armenia and the Caucasus region will continue to be vital to regional and global security. According to the OSCE, Armenia’s elections over the weekend met international standards. I look forward to supporting the government’s efforts to build strong democratic institutions, a vibrant Armenian economy, and oppose any efforts to violate Armenia’s sovereignty,” Menendez said.

During Ambassador-designate Tracy’s nomination hearing she promised to support Armenia’s “remarkable” democratic reforms.

As to questions at the hearing by Menendez and Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) on the Armenian Genocide, she agreed that “1.5 million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their death in the final years of the Ottoman Empire” in 1915, but fell short of properly categorizing the killings as a genocide.

“Throughout my time in the Senate, I have advocated for an honest accounting of the Armenian genocide. I believe we have a moral imperative to recognize the atrocities that were committed against the Armenian people. Ms. Tracy’s experience in Russia and Central Asia positions her to help navigate U.S. policy in this critical time. I support this nomination, but expect to work closely with Ms. Tracy on how she will encourage an honest acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide, support Armenia’s ongoing efforts to ensure accountable, citizen-responsive governance, and support efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,” he added.

During the SFRC business meeting, Menendez also noted the importance of safety in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), and his expectations for the US Ambassador selected to be the representative in Azerbaijan.

“I support Mr. Litzenger’s nomination and expect to have close and continuing dialogue with him on how he will urge the Azeris to step back from any threatening behavior that could disrupt the line of contact in Nagorno Karabakh, support respect for human rights, and support efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict,” Menendez said.

The hearing for Ambassador-designate Litzenger occurred in October, where he restated the U.S. position condemning violence along the line of contact, which undermines the peace process and violates the 1994 cease-fire agreement.

“We appreciate the important issues raised by Senators Robert Menendez and Ed Markey during the confirmation process. We look forward to working with the new Congress to ensure robust assistance to further Armenia’s democratic development,” Armenian Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny said.

Western Diocese Joins the 100 Pillars of AUA

LOS ANGELES – The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church announced it will become a Pillar of the American University of Armenia through “The Archbishop Hovnan Derderian Scholarship Fund of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America.” To mark the symbolic occasion, leadership from both AUA and the Western Diocese gathered together on Tuesday, December 11 in a meeting of partnership and camaraderie at the Diocesan headquarters in Burbank.

“This is truly an outstanding milestone,” said Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese. “There should not be one Armenian student who does not receive a university education.”

Academics have always been a priority for the Primate, which led to the formation of the scholarship fund that aims to provide scholarships and financial aid to students of Armenian descent enrolled in Armenian schools.

Derderian remarked that the Western Diocese is “proud” of this initiative and highlighted the importance of the reciprocal notion of giving and receiving in life.

“I know how hard it is to fund an education,” said Derderian, who earned both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in theology at Oxford University. “I hope other organizations will now be encouraged to support this endeavor as well.”

Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, president of the American University of Armenia, expressed his gratitude to Derderian, the Western Diocese and to Dr. Kris Mirzayan, an AUA Pillar and member of the Western Diocese Educational Committee, who served as the conduit between the University and the Church, noting he is a “big champion” of AUA and has been a “strong force in promoting the University.”

“In our history, the Armenian Church has always been a strong proponent of education,” said Der Kiureghian. “That continues today as the Western Diocese becomes a Pillar of our University.”

Der Kiureghian emphasized the noteworthy mission of AUA that “prepares future leaders of Armenia” and the integral role the University plays in the country’s development.

He provided further insight about the 100 Pillars of AUA program, which is an elite group of 100 donors who contribute \$50,000 over a five year period to benefit the University where the funds are needed most, covering everything from scholarships to state-of-the-art facilities, to recruiting high-quality professors. Recent funds have been allocated towards the establishment of three new educational programs, including the MS in Strategic Management, BS in Engineering Sciences and BS in Data Science.

Sharing his thoughts, Mirzayan said the afternoon was a “happy occasion to bring together these two great institutions to help our students because no one should be left behind.”

On behalf of The Archbishop Hovnan Derderian Scholarship Fund, Alice Chakrian, chair, elaborated on the organization’s goals and the strides it has made in its brief history in terms of providing scholarships and establishing an endowment for future growth.

“Our short-term goal was to provide scholarships for Armenians in the Los Angeles area Armenian schools but our long term goal was to always aid Armenia,” said Alice. “Thanks to Dr. Kris Mirzayan, our long-term goal became a short-term goal.”

Established 6 years ago to ensure that every Armenian student is able to receive an Armenian education in an Armenian school, the scholarship fund also recognizes the significance of advancing the greater community by encouraging and mentoring students to one day become leaders of the Armenian Church and the Armenian people.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenia's Ambassador Thanks Met for Promoting Armenian Cultural Diplomacy

WASHINGTON — Recently the Armenian Assembly of America hosted a luncheon at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, which featured remarks by The Met's President and CEO Daniel H. Weiss, "Armenia!" exhibit curator Dr. Helen Evans, and Armenia's newly

appointed Ambassador to the United States, the Honorable Varuzhan Nersesyan.

Following the luncheon, guests were given a special tour of the "Armenia!" exhibition by the catalogue contributor Dr. Rachel Goshgarian, who is also an intern alumna of the Terjening-

Thomas Assembly Internship Program.

"On behalf of the Armenian Assembly of America, we extend our deep appreciation to Met President and CEO Daniel Weiss, exhibit curator Dr. Helen Evans, and Ambassador Nersesyan for their insightful remarks. It was a fantastic afternoon, and we would especially like to thank Dr. Rachel Goshgarian for leading the tours, going above and beyond to explain the importance of each artifact," stated Assembly Board Member Alex Karapetian, who spearheaded the event. "We strongly encourage everyone to attend with family and friends. It is truly amazing," he added.

Met President Weiss thanked the guests for attending the exhibit, noting Evans' hard work and dedication which made the "Armenia!" exhibition the success that it is today. To date, The Met recorded over 152,000 visitors to the "Armenia!" exhibit, with even more views on its website which features an interactive map of Armenians in the Medieval World. The interactive map will remain accessible to the public even after the "Armenia!" exhibit concludes on January 13.

Evans addressed the audience with her overarching goal of the exhibit. She explained her hope for the larger public — those who do not know what or where Armenia is — to leave The Met more interested in Armenia and its culture. And, thanks to her efforts, Evans' goal has been a success. She told the guests at the luncheon that people are leaving more fascinated with Armenia and want to learn more. She also noted that almost every University in the area is featuring a class on The Met's "Armenia!" exhibit, including her own course at Columbia University as the Nikit and Eleanora Ordjanian Visiting Professor, called "Origins of Armenian Art: Creating An Identity."

The "Armenia!" exhibit features more than 140 objects, including opulent gilded reliquaries, richly illuminated manuscripts, rare textiles, cross stones (*khachkars*), precious liturgical furnishings, church models, and printed books — most of which are on view in the United States for the first time. It explores the arts and culture of the Armenians from their conversion to

Christianity in the early 4th century through their leading role on international trade routes in the 17th century.

Representing the cultural heritage of Armenia, most of the works come from major Armenian collections: the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin; the Matenadaran of Ancient Manuscripts and the National History Museum in the Republic of Armenia; the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Lebanon; the Brotherhood of St. James in Jerusalem; the Mekhitarist Congregation of San Lazzaro degli Armeni in Venice; the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon; the Diocese of the Armenian Church (Eastern) in New York; the Armenian Museum of America in Boston; and the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum in Michigan.

Ambassador Nersesyan thanked the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and especially



Armenian Assembly Director Executive Bryan Ardouny, Armenian Assembly Co-Chair Anthony Barsamian, Armenian Assembly President Carolyn Mugar, Armenian Ambassador to the U.S. Varuzhan Nersesyan, The Met President and CEO Daniel H. Weiss, Armenian Assembly Co-Chair Van Krikorian, and Armenian Assembly Board Member Alex Karapetian

Dr. Evans, for their contributions to Armenian American cultural relations, introducing Armenian civilization, nature, and soul to New York. "This exhibit is about both Armenian culture and resilience," he said. The Ambassador drew upon all the Armenian cultural events which occurred throughout the year, including the Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall and the William Saroyan House Museum in Fresno, which introduced Armenian culture to Americans throughout the country.

Guests in attendance at the Armenian Assembly's luncheon included United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management Movses Abelian, Armenia's Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Mher Margaryan, Lafayette College President Alison Byerly, and Ambassador Henry Morgenthau's great-nephews Roger and Christopher London. Representing the Armenian Assembly of America were Board of Trustees Co-Chairmen Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian, President Carolyn Mugar, Secretary Oscar Tatosian, Assistant Secretary Lisa Kalustian, Board Member Alex Karapetian, and Board Member Annie Simonian Totah, in addition to Armenian Assembly's State Chair Herman Purutyan in Massachusetts and Narek Sevacheryan in New York.

Western Diocese Joins the 100 Pillars of AUA

AUA, from page 6

President Emeritus of the American University of Armenia and Chair of the Turpanjian Rural Development Program, Dr. Haroutune Armenian, spoke about the far-reaching effects of funding the education of students in Armenia and cited many examples of successful AUA alumni who continue to remain connected to the University upon graduation.

"These scholarships impact both the student and a wider circle," said Armenian. "AUA has awarded thousands of scholarships and that is a big sacrifice on the University's part, but we do it because we know it can change the entire future of a people and of a country."

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COMMUNITY NEWS

OBITUARY

In Loving Memory of Eliz Vanerian Dilsizian (1924-2018)

By Liana Varjabedian

Eliz Vanerian Dilsizian was born in Sayda, Lebanon, on September 5, 1924. She was the first of seven siblings to survive born to Hovannes and Serpouhi Vanerian. After this miraculous life took her first breath, Eliz's parents decided to baptize their angel in Jerusalem, putting her survival in the hands of God. Eliz was imprinted with a special tattoo after being taken to the Basilica of the Nativity. It symbolizes her survival as the seventh born yet first surviving child. Her brother Hagop and sister Siranoush were born thereafter and lived in Lebanon prior to immigrating to Cambridge, Mass.

Eliz was undeniably dedicated to her Christian faith. She served at the local Armenian church in Sayda, starting at the age of 7, and continued being part of the church choir all her adult life. The Armenian badarak was engraved in her soul.

She earned her driving license for the sole reason of driving herself to St. James Armenian Church in Watertown, Mass., every Sunday. She served as treasurer of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) women's chapter and St. James Women's Guild, participating in every community function.

Eliz and Hagop Dilsizian were married 1949, in Beirut, Lebanon, and they were blessed with four children: Vicky Kherlopian, Bedros Dilsizian, Vasken Dilsizian and Silva Varjabedian. All four continued to nurture their Armenian heritage throughout their lives by attending AGBU Armenian private schools in Lebanon, and continuing to participate in Armenian dance, sports and education. Eliz ensured to instill the common thread of love and dedication to the Christian faith within her family.

Not only was Eliz a devoted, talented and caring mother, but she also managed the household successfully while Hagop supported the family as a businessman with charm like no other.

A woman with elegance, warmth and incredible passion, she not only nurtured her family,



but welcomed all guests with open arms lovingly. Her unsurpassed cooking and decadent pastries left all wanting more. Eliz translated her artistic handiwork in the kitchen to needlepoint. She created exquisite, delicate pieces of art using her skills of needlepoint and crochet.

Eliz Dilsizian lived an incredibly healthy and happy life for 94 years while touching each and every human being she encountered in different ways.

From her four children came eight grandchildren who are all inspired by her talents. Her legacy will live on forever due to her love, dedication and true passion for creating a loving, supporting family based on Christian values, which have been woven into each and every family member. They in turn will live on and follow her path.

(The author is granddaughter of Eliz Dilsizian)

John A. Ohanian

NEW YORK — John A. Ohanian, 85, passed away on December 8, 2018, surrounded by his family.

He was born on June 18, 1933, in New York, the son of the late Satianek Victoria (Tarzian) Ohanian and Avedis (Tomboulouian) Ohanian.

He was a graduate of Queens College.

He leaves his wife, Xrista; children, Karen, John and Allison; daughter-in-law Andrea; son-in-law Michael; grandchildren Samantha, Mica, Grace, Rafaella, Sarah and Charlie; brother, Jack; sister, Lucy.

In addition to his parents, he was predeceased by his sisters, Sema and Anne.

The family extends special thanks to Harmony Hospice for their excellent care and concern for John Ohanian.

As per his wishes, there will be no public viewing or services. There will be a celebration of his life in June 2019, for what would have been his 86th birthday.



Caucus on Armenia Leaders Urge Secretary of State To Enhance US-Armenia Economic Task Force

WASHINGTON — The Congressional Armenian Caucus leadership wrote a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in December to enhance the United States-Armenia Joint Economic Task Force (USATF) "into a platform for sustained strategic dialogue," fostering "shared interests, common values, and the enduring friendship" between Americans and Armenians, stated the Armenian Assembly of America.

"In the wake of Armenia's recent political transition, capped by this past week's free and fair Parliamentary elections, Armenia has emerged as a model of democratic development, far outperforming many other states in the post-Soviet space and setting an international standard for the peaceful, civil society-driven, constitutional transfer of power," the letter said. "Now is the time to build off Armenia's democratic progress, taking our bilateral relations to the next level - in the political, economic, military, and cultural arenas."

The letter to Secretary Pompeo follows the December 14th congratulatory letter to Nikol Pashinyan and the citizens of Armenia by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA), Jack Reed (D-RI), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), along with the Armenian Caucus leadership.

"The Armenian Assembly applauds the Armenian Caucus for looking at ways to deepen U.S.-Armenia relations as Armenia continues its remarkable democratic reforms. Expanding economic development and trade opportunities as well as addressing the dual blockades imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan against Armenia for over a quarter century are important priorities," Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny stated.

Donations

The Ajemian Foundation donated \$1,000 to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.

The Armenian Missionary Association of American donated \$150 to *Baikar* Armenian-language newspaper.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Glendale City Clerk Strives to Increase Voter Involvement

GLENDALÉ, from page 1

Kassakhian began to become engaged in politics while in college. As a child, he moved a lot with his family, from Boston, where he was born, to Canada, to New Jersey, to Armenia and finally to Glendale. In all these places his parents were involved in local Armenian communities, and helped establish the Armenian church in Ottawa, Canada. Kassakhian remembers driving to New York as a child through the tunnels to go to the Armenian cathedral.

Despite all this, he did not really feel engaged, he said, until senior year at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He had become involved with the Armenian Student Association there and studied Armenian history, among other things. While he was president of the student association, in 1997, the Turkish government tried to establish a chair of Turkish and Ottoman studies at UCLA, as Prof. Stanford Shaw was about to retire.

The problem, Kassakhian and others realized, was that the Turkish government would retain influence over the chair and thus a foothold in American academia. Consequently, he and other student activists protested, wrote to the newspapers and were quoted in some articles, and got members of congress involved. Ultimately, through the work of Prof. Richard Hovannissian and others, the UCLA History Department narrowly voted to relinquish the Turkish money and end the proposed relationship.

Kassakhian recalled, "That opened my eyes to how no one can avoid having politics touch them in some way or form." Even today, he likes to quote Pericles (while noting his own partial Greek heritage), who said, "Just because you are not interested in politics does not mean that politics won't take an interest in you." The UCLA incident led him to an internship in Washington, DC with the Armenian Assembly of America at Rep. Frank Pallone's office. He further studied and raised awareness of similar infiltration efforts of American academia by foreign governments.

More significantly, he said, he saw that the number of Armenians in the ranks of the hordes of interns who descend upon Washington every year and from whom policymakers and leaders of

the US emerge, was minuscule. Kassakhian exclaimed, "We talk about defending Hayasdan, taking up arms, singing the patriotic songs of these heroic battles of the past, but the realization came to me that the real battles here are fought in the halls of power at state legislatures, and in the nation's halls." Kassakhian did a second internship the next year with a different congressman and went back again to Washington to become the Armenian Assembly's internship coordinator.

A Community Awakening

In 2000, back in California, Kassakhian joined the public relations firm of Stoorza, Ziegus and Metzger, which specialized in government relations and public affairs, but in 2002, he was hired as Government Relations Director for the Armenian National Committee (ANC) of America Western Region and in 2003 became its Executive Director, remaining in this post until 2004.

Switching from the Armenian Assembly to the ANC, Kassakhian said, did not matter that much. He made an analogy with Armenian food. Every group of Armenians, from diverse countries like Iran or Lebanon, has types of food in which it is considered superior, he explained. You go to the restaurants of each group for its specialties. In the same way, the Armenian Assembly internship program, he added, offered what he sought, to be working in Congress, whereas the ANC only at the time offered internships at its own office.

When Kassakhian came back to the West Coast, he said, the ANC was active and the Assembly had no presence. Consequently, he said, "As an Armenian-American who wants to be involved today, if you here on the West Coast want to be where the fight is, the fight is being fought here by the people who are in the ANCA. You have to look past the other differences which divides us and look more to what binds us. You can call me a mercenary, or whatever it may be, but I am an Armenian."

In this period, there was a new political awakening in the Armenian community, which had candidates running for office and trying to get elected with Armenian votes for the first time. Kassakhian said he became involved in several of

those campaigns. By then Rafi Manoukian had been elected to the Glendale City Council in 1999 in this manner. Kassakhian worked on Paul Krekorian's State Assembly campaign in 2000, and eventually decided himself in 2004 to run for city clerk.

He explained that the main reason was because the city clerk, aside from being a custodian of records, was in charge of running elections. He said, "I remember the difficulties we had before with previous city clerks in trying to acquire materials translated to Armenian that would help the public understand the voting process." Many recently naturalized Armenian citizens did not have sufficient master of English to be active participants in this process. However, Armenians were told that the cost of translating materials into Armenian was too great, while the Armenians were not considered a protected class under the Federal Voting Rights Act like Latinos or Asians.

Instead, various Armenian candidates running for office, like Rafi Manoukian, Paul Krekorian or Kassakhian himself, had to register thousands of voters themselves. Kassakhian said, "In large part, though, the lion's share of the credit goes to groups like the Armenian National Committee."

City Clerk

In the broader sphere of his work as city clerk, Kassakhian said that his office was able to raise the number of voters in Glendale to the highest numbers it has been in at least the last 50 years. He has attempted to provide easier access to government by taking advantage of advances in technology. Digitalization has made access to public records easier. Council meetings can be viewed on line. Kassakhian said that he avoids cutting edge technology because he wants to be sure that it will be a lasting format before adopting it in his office. He gave the example of laser discs which quickly were replaced by DVDs as what might happen if changes adopted too rapidly.

His efforts in the broader American sphere, he said, can be characterized as follows: "I have worked to make sure that Americans and Glendale resident stakeholders know how their government works and why it sometimes doesn't work — because there is a friction that has been designed into our American system of government; and lastly, what they are capable of doing as citizens to make government work the way they want it to. That means voting, coming to council meetings and participating, writing letters, and how to contact and access their elected officials."

Simultaneously, he said, "I am a servant also to my community, the Armenian community. I have helped it in particular by creating opportunities for Armenian Americans who are interested in learning. I am very generous with my time for Armenian causes, and individuals who are interested in learning about government who happen to be Armenian."

He said that dozens of Armenian-American interns and others have participated in programs established in city hall. For example, the majority of the high school students who benefit from the student city hall ambassador program, by virtue of Glendale demographics, tend to be Armenian.

Kassakhian gave an example of how having Armenians in city affairs helps bring more Armenians into involvement in the political process. In the last election, he said that there were some votes that they could not tally because the signatures on the envelopes did not match those on the original affidavits. At first glance, this might appear to be voter fraud, but it turns out that sometimes it is voter error.

He said that a trilingual letter was prepared, in Armenian, English and Spanish, for these individuals asking them to come to city hall to resolve this discrepancy. Most people ignored it but afterwards a team of Armenian-speaking youth were hired on a temporary basis to go to people's homes to check their signatures. At that point they sometimes found out husband and wife signed each other's envelopes by mistake, or the new immigrant originally signed his name in Farsi or Armenian but now is comfortable using English so there is a difference.

This allowed reregistering a number of people with their new signatures so that in the future their votes will count.

In his "free time," Kassakhian keeps in contact with Pallone, and the Armenian Caucus has asked him to be master of ceremonies for the

Capitol Hill Armenian Genocide service several times. His past connections with both the Assembly and the ANC no doubt were useful for this.

He was also able to take a trip as Glendale city clerk to Armenia as part of a California state delegation in September of this year to encourage investment in technology in Armenia. He and the delegation met with the mayor of Glendale's sister city of Ghapan there and offered his knowledge and experience to ministers or deputies in charge of local municipalities. He also told various individuals within the Armenian government that Glendale would be happy to facilitate their visiting to observe its municipal elections. He said, "I know the meetings were positive, but unfortunately, a lot of it has to do with timing. We are hoping that we can do something in the near future."

While Kassakhian has good working relations with the rest of the city government, he notes that he only has five fulltime staff at present, reduced from a number over 10, due to budget cuts and attrition. While sustainable, ideally he would need seven individuals to function well. He hopes, he said, that if the city's financial footing improves over the next few years, staff can be added.

Kassakhian has some suggestions for the Glendale city government. He said he believes the city council should be expanded from its current five seats to seven because of the growth in the size of the city's population. It would give an opportunity for greater diversity of representation in the decision-making process. He also thought it would help further the general understanding of the public concerning how government works. Kassakhian used religious terminology, which perhaps indicates how seriously he believes in his work, when he said, "Each council member almost becomes a missionary or an apostle. He goes out there in the community and spreads the knowledge of the mystery that goes on here in the council chambers every Tuesday."

Though there is a movement in California for election to municipal councils by district (as in Pasadena), he prefers at-large elections for council members because that can allow for greater diversity (for example, by gender). However, he would like to expand it. He said, "My ideal election voting system is a cumulative voting model, rather than district. If there are three seats up you get three votes. You can give all three of your votes to your one candidate of choice, or spread them around among three candidates," or split it between two candidates.

He also is interested in broader electoral reforms. He worked with State Sen. Anthony Portantino in introducing a California state senate bill, SB25, which recently became law, to reverse the ballot order for elections, at least in Los Angeles County, on a trial basis. The problem is that when local races are at the very end of a long ballot, Kassakhian said, "your eyes have glazed over, your interest has sort of waned, and good luck if you fill out that ballot completely." In the past, cities had stand-alone elections, but a state law forced their consolidation with county elections to ensure higher voter participation rates. To improve this situation, Kassakhian came up with the idea of having the local races first, and Portantino introduced it as legislation. The 2020 election will show if this approach will help.

Kassakhian noted that though he is a registered Democrat, and has his opinions, his and for that matter all local offices are nonpartisans, and that regardless of a person's political ideology, he can still do whatever work is assigned to him.

Kassakhian ran unsuccessfully for California State Assembly in 2016. When asked the obligatory question of whether he had any plans for further runs for office outside of the city clerk position, the short version of his answer was simply, "desnank [we shall see]."

Meanwhile, his message for Armenians remains the same: "Being a small diasporan nation with more Armenians living in practically every corner of the world outside of Armenia, it is important for us to know how the world works, how politics works, how government works...and what we as citizens of our respective nations can do to make government work in ways that can benefit us as communities living in those places, as well as to help preserve our heritage and culture."



TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION GREATER NEW YORK

50th ANNIVERSARY

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
THE TCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF USA AND CANADA

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BENEFACTORS

VARTAN NAZERIAN

Valentine's Day Dinner Dance

2.9.2019 7:00 PM

Entertainment by
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&
DJ SHANI

THE ELAN
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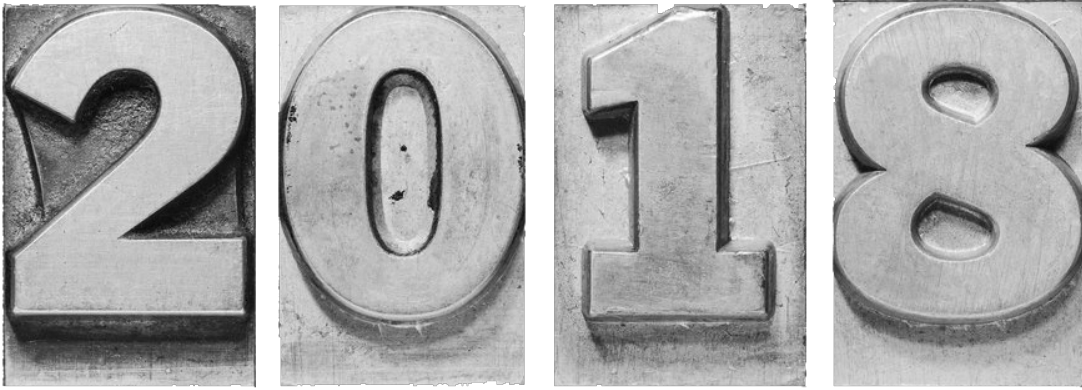
TICKETS \$125 | \$150 AFTER FEBRUARY 2 | YP \$100

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2018 IN REVIEW



JANUARY

• The World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS) formally recognized the Armenian Genocide at its 44th World Congress in Israel, after a Jewish-Australian advocate, Ariel Zohar was among the key speakers for the motion, reported the Armenian National Committee of Australia (ANCAU).

• Clark University history professor Taner Akçam was honored for the decades he has spent gathering historical evidence to document the 1915 Armenian genocide, with the 2018 Outstanding Upstander Award from the World Without Genocide organization. According to its website, World Without Genocide, housed at the Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul, Minn., works “to protect innocent people around the world; prevent genocide by combating racism and prejudice; advocate for the prosecution of perpetrators; and remember those whose lives and cultures have been destroyed by violence.”

• The 2018 Rose Parade awarded the American Armenian Rose Float, titled “Armenia Roots,” the Judges Award. The entry was a tribute to Armenian women, whether they be mothers, daughters, grandmothers or aunts, who work tirelessly to be the foundation of their family, said Noubar Derbedrosian, a board member of the association.

• Antoine S. Bazarbashian, the former chairman of the Philadelphia chapter of the Tekeyan Cultural Association, and member of the Central Board of Directors of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada died on January 23. Born in Beirut, Lebanon, to Hester and Sarkis Bazarbashian, Bazarbashian came to the United States in 1960. He organized and directed hundreds of Armenian cultural events for the Philadelphia community. He was, member of TCA Board of Administrators, Executive Committee, member of the Philadelphia chapter of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, and a member of the District Committee of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party of the Eastern United States and Canada. He was an active parishioner of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian



Apostolic Church for many years as well as a member of the Knights of Vartan. In 2015, Bazarbashian was honored with a lifetime achievement award from the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association. He is survived by his wife Rose (Yessayan), sons Armen (Bridget) and Vicken. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Tekeyan Cultural Association, 755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown,

• Sarkis Hatsbanian, Karabakh war veteran, political commentator and activist, passed away in Lyon, France at age 55.



Born in Adiyaman, southeastern Turkey, he had left for France in 1980 to avoid persecution of the military dictatorship in Turkey, and then had moved to Armenia to join the Karabakh war in 1990. He participated in the liberation of the Karvajar (Kelbajar) region. A photo of him with an elderly Azeri woman became a symbol of the war. She was left behind, along with other elderly Azeri women and children in the Karvajar district, when all the able-bodied Azeris had fled ahead of the advancing Armenian forces. Hatsbanian was in charge of taking care of the Azeri civilians, and eventually providing safe passage to Gandzag (Kirovabad).

• The Yazda organization and the UN Goodwill Ambassador for dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking Nadia Murad welcomed the adoption of the resolution recognizing the genocide of the Yazidi people by the National Assembly of Armenia on January 16.

• Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar) Supreme Council Chairman Vartan Nazerian received the Gratitude Medal of the Republic of Armenia from President Serzh Sargsyan on Sunday, January 28. The Gratitude Medal is given out traditionally on Army Day, in gratitude for support shown toward the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia. Nazerian is a resident of Los Angeles.



FEBRUARY

• The family of George Keverian created the Honorable Speaker George Keverian Public Service Scholarship, offered for the first time this year through the administration of the Armenian Student's Association (ASA). The scholarship provides support for those who have provided a public service or who aspire to provide a public service and/or advance the principles of democracy.

• Armen Sarkissian, the candidate for president of Armenia proposed by the current president, Serzh Sargsyan, met on

February 11 with members of the Central Committee of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) and Vartan Nazerian, president of the ADL Supreme Council. at the ADL headquarters in Yerevan.

• Archbishop Aram Atesyan will continue serving as the patriarchal vicar for the Armenian community of Istanbul, the patriarchate's religious council decided on Monday, February 5. The Istanbul Governor's Office sent a letter to the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople noting that it does not recognize Archbishop Karekin Bekjian, who had been serving as Locum Tenens, but recognizes Atesyan as Vicar General. The Patriarchal seat was declared vacant in 2016 due to the health of Patriarch Mutafyan.

Mutafyan, who suffers from dementia and has been incapacitated for years.

• A new initiative, the Science and Technology Angels Network (STAN), launched by the Foundation for Armenian Science and Technologies (FAST) was announced. FAST Founding CEO is Armen Orujyan. The purpose of the Angels Network is to facilitate joint investments in science and technology startups in Armenia, as well as to share and engrave the best international practice in the country.

• A German reporter detained in Turkey for more than a year was released from jail pending trial, even as six other journalists and newspaper employees were sentenced Friday to life imprisonment by a Turkish court. Deniz Yucel, a correspondent for the German daily *Die Welt*, was detained as part of a Turkish government clampdown on civil society in the wake of a failed coup attempt in 2016.

• Prof. Taner Akçam's latest book, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide*, is the latest volley he has launched to bring down the curtain of denial of the Turkish government. The book, published by Palgrave Macmillan, is an expanded with additional two new chapters available only in English-language translation of his book on Naim Bey, which was originally published in Turkish last year. In it, Akçam literally shows the orders from the central government to exterminate Armenians in various parts of the country.

• Jerusalem's mayor suspended a plan to impose taxes on properties owned by Christian churches, backing away from a move that had enraged religious leaders and led to the closure of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In a statement, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said a professional team was being established to negotiate with church officials to “formulate a solution.” “As a result, the Jerusalem Municipality is suspending the collection actions it has taken in recent weeks,” it said.

MARCH

• Dr. Hayk Demoyan, a visiting Fulbright Scholar at Harvard University and the former director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, completed a new volume titled



2018 IN REVIEW

The Armenian Legacy in America: A 400-Year Heritage. This work was dedicated to the 400th anniversary of the arrival of “Martin the Armenian,” the first Armenian known to have reached America, is in some ways a coffee table book. It presents the history of the Armenian-American community through over 2,200 primarily previously unknown illustrations, comprised of rare documents, photos and artifacts. The structure of the book was already prepared when Demoyan came to the US for his Harvard stay, and after enriching it further he submitted it in December to the press.

- The Armenian parliament voted to elect Armen Sarkissian, a former prime minister. Sarkissian was nominated for the post by the outgoing President Serzh Sargsyan and the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) in January.
- Diana Der Hovanessian, poet and long-time president of New England Poetry Club, died on March 1. She was the author of 30 books of poetry and translations, several plays, and was twice a Fulbright professor. She received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Poetry Society of America, PEN/Columbia Translation Center, National Writers Union, Armenian Writers Union, Paterson Poetry Center, Prairie Schooner, American Scholar, the Armenian Ministry of Culture, and others too numerous to list. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *AGNI*, *Nation*, *the New York Times*, *CDM*, *Paris Review*, etc. She worked tirelessly to educate the public about the Armenian Genocide. A tribute to her was held on November 4 at the Armenian Cultural Foundation.

- The University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation received the Richard G. Hovannisian Armenian Genocide Oral History Collection as a part of the Visual History Archive. The more than 1,000 interviews will constitute the largest non-Holocaust-related collection to be integrated into the institute’s Visual History Archive. It will also be the archive’s first audio-only collection.

APRIL



- Pope Francis consecrated the bronze statue of Saint Gregory of Narek (Grigor Narekatsi), a 10th-century poet and monk. The historic event was attended by President Serzh Sargsyan, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia Aram I as well as the head of the Armenian Catholic Church Krikor Bedros XX Gabroyan. For the first time in history, all three Armenian Church leaders were gathered together with the Roman Pontiff.

- Former President Serzh Sargsyan was elected Armenia’s new prime minister amid continuing opposition demonstrations in Yerevan. Sargsyan denounced the ongoing protests but at the same time downplayed their significance moments after the Armenian parliament voted by 76 to 17 to appoint him to what will now be the country’s top government post. The main organizer of those rallies, Nikol Pashinyan, pledged to continue his campaign which he said is turning into a popular “velvet revolution” against Sargsyan.

- On Monday, April 23, at the State Capitol in Sacramento, both houses of the California state legislature passed resolutions recognizing the Armenian Genocide and urged Washington to follow California’s lead.



- The Velvet Revolution toppled President Serzh Sargsyan. US Ambassador Richard Mills on Tuesday, April 24, praised the Armenian police and anti-government protesters led by Nikol Pashinyan for avoiding bloodshed during their 11-day standoff that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan on Monday, April 23. Mills also commended Sargsyan, saying that the former president acted like a “real leader” and listened to “the voice of the Armenian people” when he stepped down on Monday.

- Democratic State Rep. James R. Miceli, the second-longest serving member of the Massachusetts Legislature, collapsed during opening Little League ceremonies in his hometown of Wilmington on April 21, and died at a local hospital, officials said. Miceli, 83, suffered a heart attack. Miceli was a regular presence at the Armenian Genocide commemorations at the State House. He always spoke proudly of his mother’s Armenian heritage. He was not present at this year’s program because of ill health.

- The Diocesan Council issued its first communication on April 30 concerning the upcoming election of the Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern). Diocesan Council Chair James M. Kalustian, the signatory of this communication, noted that on April 25, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, longtime Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) unexpectedly announced the withdrawal of his candidacy for the election of the Primate.

- The times have changed, and so has the educational environment in Berdzor’s Vahan Tekeyan Middle School No. 1, located in the Kashatagh (Lachin) District. At present, around 200 students study in the Berdzor school, and they now have the possibility of studying in the fourth renovated classroom, which bears the name of Sarkis Hatsbanian. The renovation of the classroom was supported by the Tchobanian Institute of



Paris. The inauguration of the renovated classroom took place on April 21. The president of the Tchobanian Institute, Varoujan Sirapian, was present, along with Gayane Muradyan, representative of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada, Artsakh Minister of Education, Science and Sports Narine Aghabalyan, Davit Davtyan, head of the district administration of Kashatagh, and school administrators, teachers and students.

- The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College received a rich trove of Coptic textiles, and an extensive library of accompanying volumes, from collectors Donald and Barbara Tellalian of Newton. The Tellalians, who have a long history



with the McMullen as both exhibition lenders and visitors, chose the museum to house these important works, to ensure that they are accessible to future generations of students, scholars, and the public. The Tellalian Collection – which comprises 34 Late Antique/Coptic textiles from the fourth to eighth century – is significant due to the quality, importance and conservation of the textiles, as well as the related comprehensive library of 129 books and folios, many of which are rare volumes.

MAY

- The Armenian parliament voted to elect opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan prime minister on Tuesday, May 8, nearly one month after he launched sustained antigovernment protests that led to resignation of Armenia’s longtime leader, Serzh Sargsyan.

- President Armen Sarkissian received a delegation of leaders from the ADL Central Committee and Supreme Council on May 21. A series of critical issues were examined which concern the Armenians of the homeland as much as the Armenians of the diaspora. The ADL delegation included Vartan Nazerian, president of the Supreme Council, Hagop Avedikian, president of the Central Committee, Edmond Y. Azadian, Hagop Vartivarian, Kevork Marashlian, Armen Manvelyan, Khoren Kalinian, Edward Manoukian, and Karen Kakoyan.





2018 IN REVIEW

• The 116th Assembly of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America on May 4 elected Very Rev. Daniel Findikyan as its new Primate.

• The awards ceremony of the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA), supported by the Shake Tekeyan-Ghazarian Fund of the TCA of the United States and Canada, took place on May 17 at the Tekeyan Center in Yerevan. These annual awards recognize and encourage the best work in various fields of Armenian culture. During its existence, over 100 worthy individuals have been recognized. Rouben Mirzakhanyan, president of the TCA of Armenia, announced the winners, Poet Manvel Mikoyan received the award in the field of literature for his collection of poetry, titled *Stvernerits andin* [Beyond the Shadows]. Edmond Y. Azadian, overseas member of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, presented the award, declaring, “The volume *Stvernerits andin* characterizes the universal thoughts of contemporary man.”

• The second Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) youth assembly took place on May 20 in the Sardarapat Complex. Approximately 450 newly enrolled ADL members



participated, along with some party leaders from Armenia and various diasporan communities, such as Vartan Nazerian, president of the ADL Supreme Council and Hagop Avedikian, chairman of the Central Committee. Ozheni Avetisyan, chair of the ADL youth group of Armavir, led the opening ceremonies and acted as master of ceremonies throughout the event. Edmond Y. Azadian, member of the ADL Supreme Council and president of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada, delivered his words of welcome, recalling the vital role of the Battle of Sardarapat and its significance in the history of the Armenian people.

• The 100th anniversary of the First Republic of Armenia and the May heroic battles were solemnly celebrated in Armenia on May 28. Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, President Armen Sarkissian, Catholicos of All

Armenian Karekin II, President of Artsakh Bako Sahakyan, Defense Minister of Armenia Davit Tonoyan, Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of Armenia Artak Davtyan, Director of the National Security Service of Armenia Artur Vanetsyan, Police Chief Valery Osipyan, Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan and other high level officials were present at the ceremony at Sardarapat Memorial.

• On May 17, the State of Rhode Island General Assembly approved a measure to recognize the Sumgait massacres committed by the Azeri government, a few months after its 30th anniversary was commemorated. The bill recognizes that Artsakh has been Armenian land and that during their quest for liberation from Azerbaijan and attempt to be unified with Armenia, the Azeri armed forces rounded up Armenians in Baku and Sumgait and massacred them.

• The Society for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) received one of the most significant archives of documents relating to the Armenian Genocide—the archive collected by the late Very Rev. Krikor Guerguerian — for research and study in NAASR’s Mardigian Library. These materials are considered “priceless” by scholar Prof. Taner Akçam, who relied on them heavily for his book, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha’s Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide* (Palgrave, 2018).

JUNE

• The third annual \$1.1 million Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity was awarded to Kyaw Hla Aung, a lawyer and activist recognized for his dedication to fighting for equality, education and human rights for the Rohingya people in Myanmar, in the face of persecution, harassment and oppression. Kyaw Hla Aung was presented the 2018 Aurora Prize, granted by the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors, at a ceremony in Armenia.

• Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his wife went to Moscow on June 13 for a two-day visit. Pashinyan also met with Russian Premier Dmitry Medvedev. The interlocutors discussed a number of issues related to Armenian-Russian economic relations, evoking the programs implemented in the economic sector and the planned activities. Nikol Pashinyan and Dmitry Medvedev stressed the need to step up bilateral trade based on the active and effective efforts of the Armenian-Russian intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation.

• The first day of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival began on June 27 with a downpour of rain, but this did not dampen



the spirits of the artisans, specialists and volunteers on the National Mall, nor of the guests, many of whom had traveled from far corners of the United States to see this year’s two festival components, called “Armenia: Creating Home” and “Catalonia: Tradition and Creativity.” The theme uniting both the Armenian and Catalan exhibits is the linkage between cultural heritage and economic enterprise. The Armenian exhibits include demonstrations of various types of crafts, including ironworking (the old-fashioned way with an anvil), pottery, carpet making, weaving, lace making, and stone and wood carving, and various food-related displays, including cooking demonstrations, lectures on Armenian wine, and volunteers collecting information from visitors on their family food traditions.

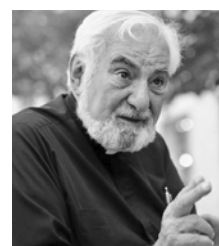
• A delegation of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) met with visiting President of the Republic of Armenia Armen Sarkissian and Ambassador to the United States Grigor Hovhannissian on June 28. Together they discussed a number of topics ranging from foreign policy questions concerning the situation in Nagorno Karabakh to



Armenian domestic issues such as the ongoing political changes, the state of the courts, and the degree of reliability of the Armenia media. In the picture, from left, members of the ADL Supreme Council Kevork Marshlian and Edmond Y. Azadian, President Armen Sarkissian of the Republic of Armenia, President of the Supreme Council Vartan Nazerian, and Supreme Council member Hagop Vartivarian

JULY

• Henry Morgenthau III, who dedicated himself to honoring the memory of his grandfather, Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, passed away on July 11 at age 101. He was honored on many occasions by Armenian organizations across the country. The Armenian National Institute and the Armenian Assembly of America organized his trip to Armenia in 1999 where he was honored by the National Academy of Sciences, the Armenian Genocide Museum, and the City of Yerevan.



• Fr. Dajad Davidian, the former pastor of St. James Armenian Church, died on July 14. He was 84. He served the church from 1969 to 1999 and was succeeded by Rev. Arakel Aljalian. Aljalian, speaking on Monday, July 16, remembered him as a larger-than-life personality.

• Ara Vardanyan, the former executive director of the Hayastan All Armenian Fund tendered his resignation on July 9 to President Armen Sarkissian following his arrest on embezzlement charges. He released a statement apologizing to all donors of the fund. Vardanyan stepped down after authorities revealed he had been misappropriating funds from the charity organization for personal goals and even online gambling.

• Lawyers for former President Robert Kocharyan said on Monday, July 30, that they will appeal a Yerevan district court’s decision to allow the arrest of the former Armenian president on coup charges which he denies as politically motivated. The accusation stems from the use of deadly force on March 1-2, 2008 against opposition supporters demonstrating against alleged vote rigging. Security forces broke up those protests on March 1-2, 2008. Eight protesters and two police servicemen died as a result.

• Russia criticized Armenia in unusually blunt terms following criminal charges brought by law-enforcement authorities in Yerevan against Yuri Khachaturov, the Armenian secretary general of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Khachaturov was charged with involvement in what an Armenian law-enforcement agency now considers an “overthrow of the constitutional order” that followed a disputed presidential election held in February 2008.





2018 IN REVIEW

AUGUST

• The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) awarded the Distinguished Public Service Medal, its highest honor, to astronomer Yervant Terzian, the Cornell Tisch Distinguished Professor Emeritus. NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine presented the medal at the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston on August 2.

• Arsene Tchakarian, the last surviving member of the Manouchian group, a World War II resistance cell made up of foreigners that carried out attacks in Nazi-occupied France, died. President Emmanuel Macron praised him as a “hero.” The last survivor of a famous group of immigrant workers that fought against the Nazi occupation of France during World War II died on Saturday, August 4, at the age of 101, French media reported. He died at a hospital near his home in the Paris suburb of Vitry-sur-Seine, where he had lived since 1950. He had dedicated his life to fighting “facism,” French paper *Le Figaro* reported.

• New diaspora minister Mkhitar Hayrapetyan visited the U.S. in August, including meeting members of the ADL.

SEPTEMBER

• A written petition to request a special session of the assembly of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America was submitted on July 22 with enough Diocesan delegates’ signatures to meet the requirement of the Diocesan bylaws. The request is for the special session prior to September 22, 2018, and prior to the execution of any agreements or commitments, to review a proposal concerning the sale or conveyance of interests of the Diocesan complex in New York City.

• German Chancellor Angela Merkel described the Ottoman mass killings of Armenians as “heinous crimes against Armenians,” which “cannot and must not be forgotten” dur-

Gamavors) defeated a combined Turkish and German Army in the opening salvo of the Allied offensive that led a few weeks later to the complete surrender of the Ottoman Turkish Army and the end of World War I in the Middle East. The victory at Arara took place at a time when the Armenian nation was in a desperate condition, reeling from



the savage deportation of its people from their native villages and towns in Western Armenia to deserts in the south that left them homeless, impoverished, and almost without hope for the future.,

• Edmond Azadian new Armenian-language book, *With My Time and Contemporaries* [Zhamanagi yev zhamanagagitsneru hed], was presented at the Tekeyan Center in Yerevan on September 19 in the presence of literary critics, teachers and well known figures of Armenian art.

• Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in New York for the opening session of the United Nations, met on Sunday, September 23, with members of the Armenian community. During the reception, he spoke at length about the country’s political situation domestically as well as international ties. He addressed the results of the mayoral election in Yerevan, which netted his supporters a landslide victory, and tied it to the upcoming parliamentary elections which he said he sought.

• Chicago’s budding friendship with Yerevan took a step forward on September 9, during a special ceremony in Connor Park. The busy corner, just off Chicago’s Michigan Avenue, was the setting for the unveiling of six park benches, donated by local Armenians, proclaiming the enduring partnership between the two cities.



ing hr visit to Armenia, on the second leg of her three-country visit to the South Caucasus on August 24, made the statement following a visit to a memorial dedicated to the Armenian Genocide. After being greeted at Yerevan’s airport by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Merkel traveled to the Tsitsernakaberd hilltop complex to lay a wreath at the monument dedicated to the victims.

• Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, former Primate of the Eastern Diocese for 28 years, arrived in Rome on his new assignment from Echmiadzin by Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II. In relaying the appointment in a September 1 letter this year to Pope Francis, the Catholicos received the Catholic Pontiff’s response that Barsamian’s presence at the Vatican will “definitely be helpful for deepening further” the relationship between the two churches.

• The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* expanded its coverage of the community in the Greater Los Angeles area, home to the largest concentration of Armenians in the world. Helping the Mirror-Spectator in this endeavor are a trio of writers, Taleen Babayan, Monique Svazlian Tallon and Michael Melkonian. (Kevork Keushkerian, a Tekeyan member, covers many of the group’s activities at the Beshgetourian Center Hall in Altadena.)

• Another milestone commemorated in 2018 was the Victory at the Battle of Arara, September 19, 1918. A contingent of Armenian volunteer soldiers serving as a special unit of the French Army known as the Armenian Legion (or



OCTOBER

• “Crows of the Desert: A Hero’s Journey Through the Armenian Genocide,” written, directed and produced by Emmy Award winner Marta Houske, debuted locally. The film tells the incredible story of one man’s heroism during the Armenian Genocide. It has been shown at numerous film festivals and won several awards, much to the delight of Houske.

• Thousands of people gathered in the Armenian capital of Yerevan on Tuesday, October 2, to sign a condolence book and pay their last respects to Charles Aznavour, who died on Monday, October 1. His death at the age of 94 was announced by the French Culture Ministry. October 1 was

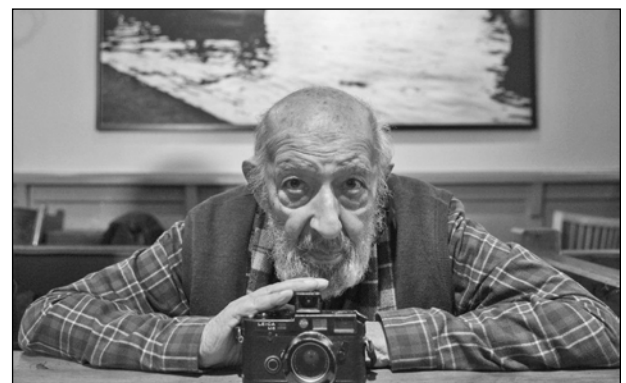


declared a day of mourning in Armenia, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan announced on his Facebook page. Aznavour, who sold more than 100 million records in 80 countries and was sometimes called the “French Frank Sinatra,” died at one of his homes, in the southeast of France. For Armenians, he was more than a legendary singer; he was the quintessential hyphenate, successful as a Frenchman and Armenian, never forgetting either. Born Shahnour Varinag Aznavourian in Paris in 1924, Aznavour began his career peddling his music to French artists of the 1940s and 1950s such as Edith Piaf, Maurice Chevalier, and Charles Trenet. The Eiffel Tower was illuminated in honor of Aznavour. France paid a moving national homage on October 5 to the late singer. With honors that are usually reserved for national heroes, one of the greatest songwriters of the 20th century was lauded as a cultural giant by the leaders of his two homelands – France and Armenia – at a ceremony in Paris.

• The leaders of more than three dozen French-speaking countries wrapped up on October 12 a two-day meeting in Yerevan, including French President Emmanuel Macron, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The International



Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) summit, also attended by government delegations from more than 40 other states, was the largest international forum ever held in Yerevan. It highlighted what the current and former Armenian governments have described as Armenia’s “privileged relationship” with France.



• Ara Guler, a Turkish-Armenian photographer who was best known for capturing poignant and nostalgic images of a bygone Istanbul but who also portrayed famous figures and everyday life in far-flung lands, died on October 17. He was 90. His assignments had him circling it as he documented the well-known faces of the 20th century, including Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, Alfred Hitchcock and Winston Churchill, as well as more obscure subjects like the head-hunters of Borneo.

• US national security adviser John Bolton vowed that President Donald Trump’s administration will “squeeze Iran” with maximum economic pressure in response to Tehran’s “malign” behavior in the Middle East and around the world in an interview with RFE/RL on October 25 after he met in Yerevan with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Bolton’s talks with Pashinyan came a day after the US national-security adviser met in Baku with Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev and Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov vowing that Washington will continue to support a peaceful resolution to the conflict



2018 IN REVIEW



• Artist Chant Avedissian died in Egypt. He had been born in 1951 in Cairo, the son of Armenian refugees who had fled the Armenian Genocide. Avedissian’s art celebrates popular culture and politics in Egypt using images printed over stenciled backgrounds that are hand-painted and colored using local pigments.

• The Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York Chapter (TCA-NY) inaugurated an exhibition featuring Armenian artist Simon Samsonian (1912-2003) at the Tekeyan Center. Born in 1912 and orphaned during the



Armenian Genocide, Samsonian moved to Egypt and later to the United States. He became a giant in the art world with his “Symbolic Cubist” style.

• For the first time in their history, a substantial portion of the archives of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and the first Republic of Armenia, held in the Hairenik Building in Watertown, have been opened to the public. On October 25, leaders of Boston-area Armenian organizations were invited to the Papken Suni ArmenianAmerican Social Club for a wine-and-cheese reception and a first look at the archives next door. The event was intended as an educational part of the celebration of the centennial of the first Republic of Armenia.

• Armenian sacred objects graced eight rooms at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York as part of the

exhibition titled “Armenia!” which explored the remarkable artistic, cultural, and spiritual achievement of the Armenian people over 14 centuries. This extraordinary exhibit will be on view for the public until January 13. Introducing this special event were president and CEO of the Museum Daniel Weiss, as well as a representative of the Hagop Kevorkian Fund which has had a 50-year association with the Metropolitan.

NOVEMBER

• Mari Manoogian, a 26-year-old former US State Department worker, won the Michigan State House District 40 seat, currently held by Republicans on Tuesday, November 6. Birmingham resident and Democrat Manoogian defeated Republican David Wolkinson. “Tonight, after 15 months of campaigning across every corner of this district, I’m honored to have earned my neighbors’ trust to serve as the next State Representative for Michigan’s 40th district.” Manoogian said in a victory post.

• Lorig Charkhoudian won the Democratic Primary for the Maryland House of Delegates, to represent District 20, which includes Takoma Park and Silver Spring. Charkoudian has dedicated more than two decades to public service in Maryland.

• Former TCA President Dr. Kevork Keshishian died in Los Angeles. Dr. Keshishian was a community activist from his youth in Lebanon, taking his place among the ranks of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Tekeyan Cultural Association. He continued this role after moving to the East Coast of the United States.

• Longtime member of the Tekeyan Cultural Association and an active member of the community Yeghishe Hajakian died on November 28. He was born on February 4, 1940, in Beirut, Lebanon. He had two brothers, both deceased, and two sisters, one of whom lives in Kuwait and the other in Qatar. He also is survived by many nieces and nephews. He was involved in a number of Armenian organizations, including the AGBU, Knights of Vartan and the Tekeyan Cultural Association, with the active participation in the Mher Megerdichian Theatrical Group.

• Aram Arkun, executive director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association and the assistant editor at the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, gave a talk in Altadena, Calif., on November 18, titled “Captain Jim Chankalian: Leader of the Armenian-American Volunteer Soldiers.” The talk was sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association metro Los Angeles Chapter. It was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Victory at the Battle of Arara by the Armenian Legion.



• The Armenian Museum of America inaugurated its redesigned main floor introductory gallery, called “Armenia: Art, Culture, Eternity,” during an evening reception on November 15. President Michele Kolligian and Executive Director Jennifer Liston Munson presented their vision for



the museum and thanked all those who participated in the renovation work.

DECEMBER

• Armenia’s acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan won a convincing victory in the snap parliamentary election on December 9. His bloc won more than 70 percent of the vote, the country’s election commission said. A journalist turned politician, Pashinyan spearheaded a peaceful revolution in April. International observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said the elections had respected fundamental freedoms and were characterized by genuine competition. Final official results show that the centrist My Step Alliance, which includes Pashinyan’s Civil Contract Party, won 70.4 percent of the vote.

• Former President Robert Kocharyan was placed under arrest again and was kept at a pre-trial facility in the building of Armenia’s National Security Service in Yerevan, the service’s head Artur Vanetsyan said on December 7.

• Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan chaired a special meeting of his cabinet in Gyumri on Friday, December 7, as Armenia marked the 30th anniversary of a catastrophic earthquake that killed more than 25,000 people and left hundreds of thousands of others homeless. Pashinyan also led an official commemoration ceremony in Armenia’s second largest city, laying a wreath at a local memorial to the victims of the earthquake.

• 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

• Two former business associates of Michael T. Flynn, President Trump’s first national security adviser, were 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. s requiring firms to register their work on behalf of foreign clients.



Arts & Living

TCA NY Valentine's Day Dance to Feature André

LODI, N.J. — The Tekeyan Cultural Association of New York, under the auspices of the TCA Board of Directors of USA and Canada, will present a Valentine's Dance, on February 9, starting at 7 p.m., featuring international Armenian superstar André.

The dance will take place at The Elan, in Lodi. Tickets are \$125 (\$150 after February 2), and \$100 for Young Professionals. There will be an open bar and a four-course dinner.

André is one of the most popular pop stars of Armenia, winning the Best Male Singer trophy at various music awards in Armenia starting in 2004.

André, who was born in Stepanakert, Artsakh, started singing at the age of 3. Although war was taking its toll on the country and its people, the only guiding light and hope for Andre was the music and his dream of singing. These events led him to write his first song, *Prayer*, at the early age of nine.

Upon winning the musical contest "Road to Renaissance" at the age of 15, he started his professional career. While working for five years at the State Theater of Music, he pursued his education at the Yerevan State Conservatory of Music and obtained his PhD.

In addition to success as a singer, he has been a judge in several big television shows in Armenia, such as "Pop Idol," "My name is...", "Premiere" and "The X Factor." André also has his own reality show called "Andrenaline."

In 2006 he was the first artist to represent Armenia in the Eurovision Song Contest, performing one of the 37 songs in Athens. There André sang *Without Your Love*, a mixture of modern Western and traditional Armenian music. The song was composed by an Armenian celebrity, Armen Martirosyan, the conductor of the Armenian Jazz Orchestra. After qualifying through the semi-final André finished in 8th place in the competition with 129 points.

Also providing music to dance to that night will be DJ Shant (Shant Babikian), a New York and New Jersey based DJ.

Hilda Hartounian, chair of TCA of Greater New York, expressed her happiness with the



Singer André

lineup.

The event's benefactors are Ed and Carmen Gulbenkian and Vartan Nazerian.

"Valentine's Day is such a fun celebration and the local branch of the TCA wants to bring that joy to our friends in the area," she said. "And we are grateful for the generosity of our sponsors, the Gulbenkians and Vartan Nazerian."

To see him sing one of his songs, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHlz9wa4t9uU>

To reserve seats, visit <https://ticketstripe.com/TCAValentinesDayDinnerDance>. For further information and seating, write to rsvptaliab@gmail.com or call 917-238-3970.



Dmitri Hvorostovsky and Constantine Orbelian at concert

An Interview with Three-Time Grammy Nominee Constantine Orbelian

YEREVAN — Constantine Orbelian has received a Grammy nomination for his recording of Giuseppe Verdi's "Rigoletto." The nomination, in the Best Opera Recording category, was announced by the Recording Academy on December 5. The 61st annual Grammy Awards ceremony will be held on February 10, 2019, at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. The show will air on CBS at 8 pm EST.

By Sona Hamalian

Released by Delos Music in November 2017, the nominated recording, "Verdi: Rigoletto," was conducted by Maestro Orbelian and features the late Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky in the title role, American soprano Nadine Sierra, Italian tenor Francesco Demuro, the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra, and the Men of the Kaunas State Choir. The recording was produced by Vilius Keras and Aleksandra Keriene.

This is Orbelian's third Grammy nomination. In 2014, he was nominated for conducting a recording of Rossini's virtuoso arias, performed by American tenor Lawrence Brownlee with the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra. Orbelian received his second Grammy nomination in 2017, for his recording of composer Georgy Sviridov's "Russia Cast Adrift," featuring Dmitri Hvorostovsky and the State Symphony Orchestra of St. Petersburg.

This interview was conducted in Yerevan, where Constantine Orbelian leads the Yerevan Opera House as its Artistic and General Director.

Q — Out of the literally thousands of recordings released in 2018, your recording of "Rigoletto" was among those outstanding works that were selected to receive a Grammy nomination. This must be an extraordinary honor, especially considering that you are now the recipient of no less than three Grammy nominations. You are also the only Armenian musician and conductor nominated for the prestigious award this year, and the only one to have been nominated three times. "Rigoletto" is widely regarded as a revolutionary opera — par for the course, it should be said, since you've always been known for taking on trailblazing works. What are some of "Rigoletto"'s distinct qualities that appeal to you most?

A — First of all, I love opera and love Verdi. What appealed to me most is Dmitri Hvorostovsky's incredible interpretation of the title role. I had heard him perform "Rigoletto" in London and at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, and I was at his very first "Rigoletto" in Moscow, at the Novaya Opera Theater, in 2000. Dmitri was one of the GREAT voices and GREAT interpreters of the music of Verdi. He infused the role with so much pain and heartache that one immediately bonded with the poor hunchbacked court jester. His performances became legend and brought a new dimension to his "usual" onstage presence of either a prince or a duke or a king. During my 20 years of collaboration with Dmitri Hvorostovsky, I had heard him perform most of the great Verdi roles, whether at the Metropolitan Opera House, Royal Opera House in London, Paris Opera, or Vienna State Opera, not to mention the San Francisco, Chicago, and Los Angeles operas. One of his signature roles was Simon Boccanegra, and after five or six years of him performing that opera around the world, we decided to record it, in 2012. We had a stellar cast including the great Italian

see ORBELIAN, page 16

St. Vartan Cathedral Marks 60 Years of Gomidas Choir

By Florence Avakian

NEW YORK — Close to 500 people crowded into St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral on Saturday evening, December 15, to celebrate the blessings of Christmas — and to honor a milestone in the history for New York's great Gomidas Choir.

The evening went forward under the auspices of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, with its Primate, the Very Reverend Daniel Findikyan, presiding. Also present were a number of priests from Diocesan parishes.

The concert of Christmas music — mixed with selections by the choir's namesake, Gomidas Vartabed — was beautifully rendered by the singers of the Gomidas Choir, under the direction of its musical director Kris D. Kalfayan, to mark the 60th anniversary of the distinguished vocal ensemble.

The youngest member of the choir, 22-year-old Andrew Varujan Yenigag, warmly welcomed the enthusiastic crowd, paying tribute to the glorious history of the choir and "our forefathers who had the vision to preserve our identity and pass it on to future generations."

He recalled the legacies of such dedicated founders as Isahag Aprahamian, Dr. Ara Bohcalian, and Onnig Hepshen — former members of the Gomidas Choir in Istanbul who "planted the seed of our choir in March 1948, by singing the Gomidas arrangement of the Divine Liturgy on Holy Thursday at the Holy Cross Church in upper Manhattan."

As the choir grew in numbers, female voices were added to the original all-male chorus. In 1958, it was formally named the "Gomidas Choir," and was brought under the auspices of the Diocese by then-Primate Archbishop Mampré Calfayan. In his welcoming remarks, Yenigag asked two of the 60-year members who were present to stand, Dikran Cherchian and his grandfather, Varoujan Arslanian, both of whom were greeted with thunderous applause.

Among the concert highlights sung by the 36-voice choir was one of Gomidas' most sacred works, the *Lord's Prayer*, and his beautifully melodic *Wonderously Marvelous Flower*.

The program also included Christmas carols and festive classics by international and Armenian composers — Ara Bartevean, Khoren Mekanejian, and Wardan Sarxian. Soloists included Anoush Barclay, Alyne Corrigan, Anoush Givlekian, Alvard Mayilyan, and Solange Merdinian. James Hopkins was the guest organist.

"The beauty of Christmas songs symbolizes the miracle and beauty of the birth of Christ," said Diocesan Primate Fr. Daniel Findikyan, in remarks following the concert.

He stated that in his new role as Primate, "I am privileged to be the beneficiary of so many wonderful accomplishments, including the 60-year legacy of the Gomidas Choir." He revealed that his grandfather Hagop Findikyan directed the Gomidas Choir in the 1950s.

"One of the greatest gifts God gives us is to sing and speak with angels — something we do every Sunday during our Badarak," the Primate continued.

The concert concluded with the benediction hymn, *The Lord Bless You and Keep You*.

During the reception that followed in the Diocesan Center's Haik and Alice Kavookjian Auditorium, Kris Kalfayan — who has directed the choir for 37 years — said that the concert was dedicated to the memory of "those who sang and no longer are with us." He recalled that the 70-strong, all-male Gomidas Choir sang for the consecration of St. Vartan Cathedral 50 years ago.

"Gomidas means Armenian music," Kalfayan said with passionate emphasis. "Without him, we would have nothing preserved from the past."



ARTS & LIVING

An Interview with Constantine Orbelian

ORBELIAN, from page 15

soprano Barbara Frittoli, and superstar Russian Bass Ildar Abdrazakov, and the superb Italian tenor Stefano Secco. The recording was met with great critical acclaim in the press and became a new benchmark for that particular opera. After Dmitri's tragic diagnosis of brain cancer, in June 2015, he told me he must do two things before he couldn't sing any longer: he must record "Rigoletto" and an extraordinary vocal cycle by Russian composer Georgy Sviridov. So I began planning to do both recordings in the summer of 2016. We first recorded the "Rigoletto" in Kaunas, and then flew to St. Petersburg to record the Sviridov CD.

Dmitri was a true musical and vocal genius. He respected his art and expected total dedication to the work at hand. Having said that, he was extremely easy to work with and was the ideal colleague. He respected his colleagues and helped shape their interpretations to make a "whole" and total vision of the opera. Since there can never be "too many ears" at a recording session, we had our great friend and musical colleague John Fisher from the Metropolitan Opera with us at the recording sessions, preparing us before each session.

Q - The recording of Verdi: Rigoletto also stands apart with an extremely high level of artistry manifested by soloists including Nadine Sierra and Francesco Demuro, as well as Lithuania's Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra and the Men of the Kaunas State Choir. How would you characterize your experience collaborating with such musicians?

A - Nadine Sierra is a true rising star and has one of the most beautiful, glorious, and lovely voices in the world today. Besides being a true and dedicated artist, she is a lovely person and has a great sense of humor, which makes these grueling (long and difficult) recording sessions fly by with ease. Dmitri had performed "Rigoletto" with Nadine in Naples a couple of years before we made our recording. Francesco Demuro is a true Duke... He has a beautiful voice, a great personality, and was very charismatic in the role. Francesco is a well-known folk singer (and of course a great opera singer) in Sardinia, so the famous aria "La Donna mobile" came out with a particular youthful buoyancy and mood. He's a star at the Met and other opera houses.

Q - The year 2018 was one of the most prolific years in the history of the Yerevan Opera House. Do you believe that the Yerevan Opera House has what it takes to be in the vanguard of world opera?

A - You're right. 2018 was an incredible year for the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theater.

Since my becoming the General Director in August 2017, I've been working very hard on bringing something which would be very meaningful to the Yerevan Opera. Doing something in the short term is of course very difficult, so when I heard that our star tenor Liparit Avetisyan had won the prestigious Golden Mask Award (Russia's highest theatrical honor) for his portrayal of Le Chevalier des Grieux in Massenet's opera "Manon," I spoke with Andrejs Zagars, the director of that particular production. It was produced by the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater in Moscow. Subsequently I brought the entire production to Yerevan to honor and highlight the success of our wonderful tenor, and also to show Yerevan audiences a completely new type of opera production. It was a huge undertaking, and, I must say, a huge success.

It happened that our opening night, on October 10, coincided with the opening of the Francophone summit in Yerevan, and the entire delegation came to the gala performance. I invited American conductor Christopher Ocasek to conduct the opera, as he had been working on "Manon" during a production at the San Francisco Opera the previous fall and was highly recommended and did a superb job.

Earlier in the season, in July 2018, we took Khachaturian's ballet "Gayane" to the Bolshoi, along with our incredible sets, designed by the incredible Minas Avetisyan, and costumes, designed by Rubina Hovhannisyan. This was the first time in history that the Yerevan Ballet performed on

the historic stage of the Bolshoi Theater. The sold-out event was something that all of us who were there will remember for a very long time. Our star dancers Ruben Muradyan, Syuzi Pirumyan, and Meri Hovhanisyan, as well as our young star Razmik Marukyan "brought the house down," so to speak, and were met with screaming stomping ovations. They were even forced to do "Sabre Dance" as an encore!

Then we received an invitation to open the season at the glorious new Dubai Opera House at the beginning of September, with three perfor-

mances of our new production of "Carmen," directed by our very talented Naire Stepanyan and with costumes by Kristina Avetisyan; and also 3 performances our new production of "The Magic Flute," produced by the extraordinary Italian opera director Paolo Micciche and costumes by the renowned Alberto Spiazzi. All of the performances were sold out and our singers and both productions were met with great enthusiasm by the audience. Then, all 200 of us performed the first staged opera productions in the history of Kuwait, at the brand-new Kuwait Opera House.

Our season of "firsts" culminated with our glorious production of Karen Khachaturian's "Cippolino" Ballet.

So, yes, it has been a very important and ambitious season for us in Yerevan, and, of course, I absolutely believe that our beloved Yerevan Opera House does have what it takes to be at the forefront of world opera.

Hopefully we will be able to have a new production of Tigranian's "Anush," in honor of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the illustrious author Hovhannes Tumanyan, as well as many other projects which are coming up.

Recipe Corner

Guest Recipe

by Christine Vartanian Datian

Dungeness Crab Cakes with Creole Mayonnaise



Contributed by David Vartanian, the Vintage Press Restaurant in Visalia, California, named one of America's Best Chefs*



INGREDIENTS

CRAB CAKES

1 pound crabmeat, picked over to remove any shell and cartilage
1/4 cup celery, finely chopped
1/4 cup green bell pepper, finely chopped
1/4 cup scallions, finely chopped
1 teaspoon thyme leaves
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 large eggs, beaten
1/4 cup heavy cream
3/4 cup seasoned breadcrumbs
Salt and fresh ground black pepper
2 tablespoons unsalted butter

CREOLE MUSTARD:

2 tablespoons scallions, finely chopped
2 teaspoons garlic, finely chopped
1/2 tsp garlic, finely chopped
1 small lime, squeezed
1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
1/4 cup creole mustard
3/4 cup mayonnaise

PREPARATION

FOR THE CRAB CAKES:

Combine the first six ingredients thoroughly. Add the eggs and the heavy cream in a large bowl and stir until well mixed. Fold in the breadcrumbs and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Form the crab mixture by hand into small balls. Flatten the balls into cakes and place on wax or parchment paper.

Melt the butter in a large skillet and cook the crab cakes over medium heat until golden brown and heated through, about 4-6 minutes per side.

Serve immediately with Creole Mayonnaise.

FOR THE CREOLE MAYONNAISE:

In a stainless steel bowl, combine all of the ingredients and blend thoroughly with a whisk. Cover and chill the dressing before serving.

Serves 4.

See: <http://www.visalialifestyle.com/classic-christmas-celebration/>

*Best Chefs America features premier chefs that have been nominated and recommended by their peers in the culinary field. See: <https://www.bestchef-samerica.com/>

Recipe and photos courtesy of Chef David Vartanian, the Vintage Press, Visalia, California

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



ARTS & LIVING

CALENDAR

CALIFORNIA

JANUARY 25 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro LA Chapter presents a tribute to Vladimir Yengibaryan, the gold medal winning Armenian boxing legend. Keynote speaker Avetis Bairamian, sports editor of Nor Or. Remarks by legendary boxers Khoren Injeyan and Nshan Munchyan. 7 p.m., Glendale Public Library, 222 El Harvard St., Glendale. For more information contact Carl Bardakian at 626-345-9705.

FEBRUARY 9 — Ara Dabandjian Quartet of Element Band, Saturday, 8 PM Dinner, 9:30– 10:30 p.m. Ara Dabandjian Quartet of Element Band. 11 p.m. International Singer Koko Hayitian. Phoenicia Restaurant • 343 N. Central Ave, Glendale. Admission •\$80 • www.tekeyanla.eventbrite.com. Contact • info@TekeyanLA.org for group seating. Tickets must be pre-purchased. • No tickets will be sold at the door.

FEBRUARY 24 — Lecture by Aram Arkun of Boston, Executive Director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada, on Roupen Herian: "Rescuer of Armenian Orphans." Sunday, 5 p.m. at the Tekeyan Center in Altadena

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 entrainment, 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 & Kheyra 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. 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, or log onto 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

FEBRUARY 9 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association of New York, under the aegis of the TCA Board of Directors of the US and Canada, will present a Valentine's Dance featuring international Armenian singer Andre. The Elan, Lodi, NJ. Tickets are \$125 before February 2, and \$150 after, while tickets for young professionals are \$100. To reserve seats, visit [https://ticket-](https://ticket-stripe.com/TCA_ValentinesDayDinnerDance)

[stripe.com/TCA_ValentinesDayDinnerDance](https://ticket-stripe.com/TCA_ValentinesDayDinnerDance). For further information and seating, write to rsvptaliab@gmail.com or call 917-238-3970.

MAY 18 — SAVE THE DATE! A Celebration of Gratitude & Hope, honoring His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian and Bishop-elect Fr. Daniel Findikyan. 6:30pm. Old Tappan Manor, Old Tappan, NJ. For more info, please go to www.stnersess.edu.

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

JANUARY 5 — "Gorky's Dream Garden Dance Premier. A musical theater opera of Love, courage and ... modern art. Featuring Lynne Needle, showcasing a scene from the opera with Booking Dance Festival, NYC, at Jazz at Lincoln Center: The Appel Room, 10 Columbus Circle. 5.30 p.m. "The Dance of the Exiled Heart," a dramatically charged 10-minute scene from Michelle Ekizian's new musical hybrid will open the five-hour dance fest. The program will be followed at 10.30 p.m. by a VIP reception open to Premium ticket holders in the Ertegun Atrium where composer Ekizian will perform on the piano excerpts from Gorky's Dream Garden. Tickets JALC box office and Center Charge (212) 721-6500.

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.

A Happy Musical New Year For Dilijan Students

MUSIC, from page 1

The College students take part in contests, festivals and competitions. The ensembles and the choir are frequently invited to perform at diverse celebrations in Dilijan, the marz and beyond. Since the College functions as the coordinator of the marz music schools, it frequently hosts master classes by prominent musicians from Yerevan and thus ensures continuing education to teachers from all the music schools in the marz. It also hosts concerts at the College for all official, international delegations, guests of Dilijan and/or the marz. Its dedicated and professional staff have earned the respect and gratitude of the entire community.

A Wish List

The building that houses the facility is quite adequate, as it is big and sunny, with lots of light. But, it is old, has not been renovated for over twenty years, and, despite the care given it by its staff, has fallen into disrepair. In hopes of finding support for an overhaul, a team of teachers and their supervisor drafted a wish list, detailing what the school would need to be able to perform at the highest level. The entire building would have to be renovated, including the 300 square meter concert hall; once that were done, the concert hall would need new chairs and the classrooms would have to be equipped with new furniture. Most importantly, the school required new instruments, as well as training manuals.

Thanks to a donation by a benefactor, FAR was able to purchase and provide the school with the 200 new chairs for the concert hall, but the facility itself still awaits renovation. This is an urgent task, considering the school's function not only to educate its students but also to provide adequate conditions for visiting musicians who come to give concerts and master classes.

FAR also purchased the quality instruments after matching an initial donation by the Mirak-Weissbach Foundation with a contribution by the Galust Galo fund. Shortly before Christmas, the shipment of instruments arrived, 37 in all, and the students were excited. Margarit Piliposyan, FAR's Deputy Country Director and Program Director, reported on December 19, "the teachers and students are happy! They called it a gift from heaven." The new instruments include pianos, string, wind and traditional national instruments, as well as some devices for the sound system in the concert hall. The school expressed appreciation "for the priceless assistance to the younger generation, who love and study music," and promised to prepare concerts to greet the benefactors in the New Year.

(See www.farusa.org and www.m-w-stiftung.org)

Carrying in a new piano





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COMMENTARY

How Long Will the Self-Delusion Last?

By Edmond Y. Azadian

Armenia's relations with Russia are of vital importance. The same could be said about Armenian-Turkish relations. But in the latter case, Turkey determines the terms of its relations with Armenia and Yerevan does not hold the key in those relations. A huge shadow hangs over Turkey, that of the genocide. But despite that, Turkey is able to implement its policies in the region almost unhampered.

Armenian-Russian relations do not have the same baggage, yet they determine Armenia's security, economic viability to a certain extent and in the most extreme case, its very existence.

Armenia's geostrategic position more or less defines its policy with Russia, leaving almost no room for a choice. To defy that determinism goes against common sense, let alone the ability to maintain a healthy foreign policy.

Georgia is almost in the same situation but former leader Mikheil Saakashvili's rash policy brought about the amputation of his country after it picked a fight with Russia. And the West, which had fueled his arrogance, remained as a neutral bystander when war broke out in August 2008. There are some lessons to be learned from Georgia's experiences.

The Velvet Revolution of April, which was supposed to be only a domestic affair to get rid of a corrupt government that had been insensitive to the needs of the people, today is facing some foreign policy challenges, particularly straining Armenian-Russian relations.

Citizens of Armenia are being assured by the leader of the revolution that there are no changes in Armenian-Russian relations, but all signals indicate otherwise.

Great powers have long memories. At times, they pretend that some hostile actions or statements by neighbors or adversaries are forgotten, but old accounts come to the surface when the chips are down.

When Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his opposition group were fighting the corrupt regime, they did not exempt that regime's foreign policy from their campaign rhetoric. The reason for the Russian military base in Gyumri was questioned

President Putin. At this time, it is beside the point whether it was simply poking the hornet's nest when Armenia recalled Gen. Yuri Khachaturov from Moscow, where he was serving as the general secretary of the CSTO, and arrested him on charges related to the 2008 popular protests after the presidential election. The arrest of Khachaturov even led to a rare public rebuke from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

What followed next was significant; when Armenia tried to keep the position for the country for the duration of the term, it was rejected. Instead, Belarus and Kazakhstan promoted Gen. Stanislav Zas to replace Khachaturov and the candidate made official visits to Astana and Moscow to legitimize the stolen term. He even invited himself to Yerevan to shove his candidacy down the throat of the Armenian government.

While all these dramatics were taking place, President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus publicly insulted and taunted Pashinyan on the Khachaturov arrest, blaming the new prime minister for losing his country the CSTO leadership, while President Putin maintained a meaningful silence.

Kazakhstan and Belarus, the so-called strategic allies of Armenia, have been promoting Azerbaijan's membership in the EEU when Armenia is at war with that country. Azeri petrodollars have bought Lukashenko's allegiance.

Pashinyan in late December paid a visit to Moscow to negotiate natural gas prices which stood at \$150 per 1000 cubic feet. At the conclusion of the trip, gas prices went up to \$165. Pashinyan had assured the public that it will continue paying the same price through an "internal arrangement." People knowledgeable in the area fear that the government will tap Armenia's strategic resources which leaves the country vulnerable should a war break out.

In the past, the Iranian government had indicated that it could provide natural gas at competitive prices to Armenia. Voices have been heard that the country has to approach Tehran. But it is highly questionable whether the government in Iran will jeopardize its relations with Russia to save Armenia when Iran is in the same boat with Russia vis-à-vis US sanctions and both are strategic allies in Syria.

No matter what measures the Armenian side adopts, in all probability natural gas supplies by Russia may cost \$300 by the end of year.

Energy is a powerful political tool in Moscow's hand, which can (and is) used to enforce its policies.

Another sign of Armenia's alienation from its strategic allies is the decision of the Kazakhstan government to cancel flights between Astana and Yerevan in an attempt to further isolate Armenia.

In his domestic policy, Pashinyan, true to his pre-revolution pledge, has been keeping the courts independent and resisting the temptation to give in to mob psychology which is out for blood. That maintains his government's democratic credentials in the eyes of Western societies.

But the news media and social media, which carefully orchestrated his ascent to power, are replete with anti-Russian rhetoric. And the tenor of that rhetoric is hitting Moscow, before Pashinyan can clearly enunciate his

government's position toward Russia.

For example, one pundit, who writes under the penname of Sarkis Arzruni, has stated the following in his analytical column: "No matter how much Nikol Pashinyan may insist that Armenia has not changed its foreign policy vector, it is obvious that the developments of the revolution will bring Armenia to a point where the Russian factor will become a policy issue. For Putin's Russia, there are no allies; all countries are either enemies or vassals. In the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution Pashinyan's team is trying to change the status of a vassal, for which it has been antagonized in Moscow."

It is anyone's guess why this writer is hiding behind a mask. There are other similar writers under assumed names. One thing is very obvious: the lexicon that these analysts are using is that of "grant eaters," as they are called in Armenia. Their calculations seem to be that once Armenian-Russian relations are spoiled, Armenia will land in the NATO structure. They are not worried about the Turkish factor and its power in the NATO alliance.

At this time, Armenian-Russian relations are on a shaky footing. The goal of the Velvet Revolution was domestic reform and the defeat of the corrupt regime. Pashinyan repeatedly assured Armenians and the international community that Armenia will not change in its international relations. If that policy is subverted, we should expect problems on the horizon. Problems that Armenia can ill afford, let alone overcome.



as well as Armenia's long-standing treaties with Russia. Now Moscow shows openly that it will not let Yerevan cherry-pick the terms of that relationship with Moscow and has been holding the new administration accountable for its past posture, particularly when the media which ushered the revolutionary government to victory is continuing its anti-Russian campaign.

Before coming to power, when Pashinyan was questioned in the parliament about this antagonism toward the Russian base and about his harsh criticism of Russian policies in general, he gave a very realistic answer. He stated that he has to contend with existing realities. That answer may be satisfactory in Armenia but it looks like it did not cut muster in Moscow and it has come to haunt his new government which enjoys overwhelming popular support.

In recent months, Moscow has sent several signals to Yerevan expressing its displeasure over the course that the new government has adopted. Many of the Western heads of state congratulated Pashinyan for his landslide victory in December. President Putin, however, has yet to make a public comment on the fair and democratic elections. To make things worse, he sent his New Year's greetings to Robert Kocharyan, the former president, who is currently in jail, and to Serzh Sargsyan, Pashinyan's predecessor, who is in semi-hiding after being toppled from power.

But more dramatic developments have taken place within the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) forums with the acquiescence of



COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Another Azeri Scandal: Aliyev's Daughters Try to Buy \$76 Million London Home

The British *Guardian* newspaper exposed in its December 21, 2018 issue the latest financial scandal involving the daughters of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev.

Leyla and Arzu Aliyeva sought to purchase two luxury Knightsbridge apartments in London for \$76 million using a secret offshore company. The price included \$4 million to convert the properties into a single home. The apartments are located near the garden of Buckingham Palace, according to the *Guardian's* reporter Luke Harding.

In a 2016 article, the *Guardian* reported that Aliyev's daughters had set up in 2015 a secret offshore company in the British Virgin Islands to manage their multi-million dollar property portfolio in Britain.

The two daughters are shareholders in Exaltation Limited, incorporated in 2015 with the purpose of "holding UK property." The offshore company was set up by the London law firm of Child & Child which claimed falsely that the Aliyev

women "had no political connections." This information was exposed when the Panama Papers, the secret database of the offshore law firm Mossack Fonseca, were leaked to the international media.

Aliyev's daughters, according to the *Guardian*, have "amassed vast personal business empires. They own luxury apartments in the UAE, as well as interests in telecoms and gold mining. It was already known that Leyla Aliyeva owned a \$22 million mansion on Hampstead Lane in north London." In addition, the Aliyev family has luxury apartments around the globe worth over \$140 million and these are just the known properties, according to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. The Aliyevs also own an apartment valued up to \$8 million overlooking the Speakers' Corner of Hyde Park (London), nine waterfront mansions in Dubai valued at \$44 million, a dacha near Moscow worth at least \$37 million, and a \$1.1 million villa in an exclusive neighborhood in the Czech spa town of Karlovy Vary.

Under British rules, the Aliyev daughters are classified as "PEP's" — politically exposed persons, making them subject to greater scrutiny and due diligence checks by banks. The *Guardian* reported that the law firm of Child & Child did not declare the two women's high-profile status to the British government. On the official form asking if they are PEP's, the law firm checked the "no" box instead of "yes."

Another British lawyer, Derrick French, "set up a second clandestine Panamanian trust called UF Universe Foundation, "which controlled a majority stake in Ata Holding, one of Azerbaijan's biggest conglomerates," according to The *Guardian*. Ata Holding, established in 2003, was owned by "Azerbaijan's minister of taxes, Fazil Mammadov, with a secret controlling stake in the \$600 million conglomerate.

Ata Holding owned "two major banks, construction firms and Baku's five-star Excelsior hotel, with Pres. Aliyev's three children."

In 2005, the control of UF Universe Foundation changed hands. Pres. Aliyev's three children, Leyla, Arzu and their brother Heydar, who at the time was just seven, had a combined 50% interest in the trust. Their mother Mehriban was the "protector," an anonymous role giving her control over the Foundation. The other "protector" was Mammadov with a 30% share. Ata's chairman, Ahmet Erentok, received only 15%. In 2007, UF Universe Foundation was closed down, but Leyla and Arzu Aliyeva were listed as the majority owners of Ata, via another Panamanian firm, Hughson Management, Inc. Javad Marandi, a close associate of Pres. Aliyev, had introduced the Aliyeva sisters to the law firm Child & Child, the British tribunal was told. Attorney Khalid Sharif, senior partner of Child & Child, then set up on behalf of the two sisters, Exaltation Limited, a British Virgin Islands firm.

In the case of the attempt by Pres. Aliyev's daughters to purchase the \$76 million property in London, a British disciplinary tribunal fined Sharif \$57,000 and \$51,000 in costs for failing to carry out money-laundering checks and breaching his professional code.

After the contract was signed, the Aliyeva sisters began to pay the purchase price of the two London apartments in installments, transferring \$13 million. However, "the deal 'unraveled' in 2016 after their ownership was exposed," according to the *Guardian*.

Not surprisingly, the *Guardian* newspaper revealed that "Leaked US diplomatic cables suggest President Aliyev is Azerbaijan's richest person!"

Turkish Event at Lexington, Mass. Library Draws Armenians and Controversy

By David Boyajian

APPROXIMATELY one hundred Turks, a half dozen Armenian Americans, and a dozen members of the Armenian Youth Federation's (AYF) Greater Boston Chapter attended the opening of a Turkish-language book collection at Cary Memorial Public Library in Lexington, Mass. on the evening of December 10, 2018.

Ceylan Özen Erisen, Turkey's Consul General in Boston, was the main speaker.

A Lexington police officer, an apparently Federal "special agent", and presumably Turkish security guards attended in plainclothes.

The AYF distributed flyers outside about the Armenian Genocide of 1915-23. The flyer, which juxtaposed a "1915" Turkish fez and moustache with a "1939" Hitler hairstyle and moustache, stated, "By Condemning the Previous, We Could have Prevented the Following."

Over 100 books in the Turkish language were "donated" by a local "Turkish Library Group" to the library's growing "World Language Collections." Other languages include Bengali, French, Hindi, Italian, Korean, and Tamil. There is no Armenian section.

Interestingly, the library's "Collections" policy states that it "will not accept donations of titles in [foreign] languages" but may make "exceptions."

Books, stated Consul Erisen, were for "our souls, intellects, and hearts." Turks and the library, she said, would organize events as well as Turkish story hours for children.

Erisen wants the Turks to be a "positive, contributing part of the society that they are living in ... we will make the world a better place." She didn't indicate whether "we" includes the repressive, aggressive, jihadist-supporting, genocide-denying Turkish government and its

bombastic, perpetually enraged leader, President Erdogan.

Earlier that day, documentary filmmaker and Lexington resident Roger Hagopian visited Library Director Koren Stembridge. He expressed dismay that the Turkish Consul's widely advertised presence marked the event as blatantly political. Hagopian also wondered if some of the donated books might fraudulently diminish the factuality of the Armenian Genocide.

Turkish Books

After cutting the Turkish collection's ribbon, Erisen reportedly remarked, "Protect me from the negative energy." When Armenians press legitimate demands, you see, they supposedly give off "bad vibes."

Among the books were the non-fiction *Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari and novels by Edgar Allan Poe, *Da Vinci Code* author Dan Brown, and Turkish authors Orhan Pamuk and Elif Safak, both sympathetic to Armenians.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk appears on several books by Orhan Çekiç about the battles and politics of Turkey's genocidal, misnamed War of Independence (1919-23).

Bilinmeyen Lozan (Unknown Lausanne [Treaty]) by Taha Akyol deals with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) between Turkey and its World War I European opponents. The treaty betrayed Armenians by casting aside the Treaty of Sevres (1920) which had aimed to restore "eastern Turkey" to Armenia.

Since there was no question and answer period, I approached Consul Erisen after the event. The "special agent" stood 10 feet away.

Turkey is the world's biggest jailer of journalists. I asked Erisen to compare her government's suppression

Director Stembridge

Two Armenian Americans and I spoke to Library Director Stembridge immediately after the event.

We explained that Erisen represents an autocratic government that imprisons journalists and political dissidents, violates the human rights of Kurds, Alevis, Christians, and others, and denies the Armenian Genocide. Should a library be spotlighting such a person?

Stembridge replied that because the Turks themselves invited the consul the library could do little about it.

Stembridge also understood our uneasiness about the possible presence of factually dubious books about the Armenian Genocide.

We noted that a new genocide could occur. For 25 years Turkey has closed its border with Armenia, threatened another "1915," and in 1993 had planned to attack Armenia during a coup attempt in Russia.

Stembridge is of ethnic Russian ancestry. She took our concerns seriously and was gracious and sympathetic.

Blatantly Political

I believe that Consul Erisen's conspicuous presence and the donation of Turkish books were essentially political, intended to boost Turkey's image in this prominent, historic, upper-middle class town 10 miles northwest of Boston.

The first battles of the American Revolution between colonists and British troops were fought in Lexington and nearby Concord in 1775.

Settled around 1642, Lexington's colonial populace was primarily of Anglo-Saxon ancestry. But over the last decades substantial numbers of Jews and Asians, along with many Armenians, have moved there.

In 2007, Armenian residents and human rights advocates forced Lexington to eject the Anti-Defamation League's programs due to its collusion with Turkey and Israel to diminish the factuality of the Armenian Genocide and defeat Congressional resolutions on that genocide. About a dozen other municipalities and the Massachusetts Municipal Association did the same in what quickly became an international embarrassment for

Jews, Israel, and Turkey.

Erisen noted in her speech that similar Turkish book collections have been established in Santa Clara, CA and Houston, TX.

It seems clear that the Turkish Foreign Ministry has had a hand in all this.

Such activities are yet another sign that the Turkish government, in addition to spending millions on lobbying in America, is working to increase the political influence of Turks in this country.

David Boyajian is a freelance journalist. Much of his work is archived at http://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/David_Boyajian.

“.THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT, IN ADDITION TO SPENDING MILLIONS ON LOBBYING IN AMERICA, IS WORKING TO INCREASE THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF TURKS IN THIS COUNTRY.”

of freedom of the press and speech with American libraries' support for these freedoms. She just stared at me.

A man, presumably Turkish, immediately thrust himself between us and attempted to bully me. Walking away, I recalled the violent attacks Turkish President Erdogan's hoodlum entourages have made upon journalists and protesters in the U.S. and elsewhere.

The AYF did manage to hand Erisen a letter that included demands for Turkey to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide and return occupied Armenian lands. The Turkish consulate in Boston had for years refused to accept the letter during AYF demonstrations.



Actor Ken Davitian Transitions into New Genres

DAVITIAN, from page 1

After years of trying to get his big break in Hollywood, Davitian made his mark thanks to a breakout role in “Borat,” released in November 2006. With a budget of \$18 million and box office revenue of \$262 million, this critically-acclaimed film is labeled by many to be one of the greatest comedy films of this generation.

Recounting on how he got the role of Azamat, Davitian describes how tedious the process was. “The casting directors were looking for a shabby foreigner who didn’t speak very good English to play the role, which in a way, is like what many of our grandfathers were like when they came over,” Davitian stated. “I remember calling the casting agent multiple times to read for the role but was declined due to my American accent and nationality. The last call we made however, wasn’t to the casting director, but to the associate. I came in full character and acted just like a person like Azamat would’ve acted.” Many industry experts believed that Borat wouldn’t succeed commercially since its budget was considered too low for a movie to garner commercial success. However, Davitian and his co-star Sacha Baron Cohen were not fazed by the cynics. “We were in London in a cab, when one of the producers said to us that Tim Allen’s movie, ‘Santa Claus,’ is opening the same day as Borat,” Davitian said. “He said we aren’t going to be number one, so let’s just hope for number three. Sacha and I both said to the producer, you’re nuts.” Looking back at the huge commercial success of Borat, Cohen’s and Davitian’s predictions were spot on.

Born in LA

Davitian was born and raised in Los Angeles, after his family took varied paths to get to America. His maternal grandparents came over after the Armenian Genocide, while his father was a Soviet soldier in World War II who was captured by the Germans and put into a concentration camp. His father was then brought over to the United States by the Armenian-American philanthropist, George Mardikian.

Davitian’s desire to act got its roots at home. Davitian’s maternal grandmother was part of an Armenian acting troupe run by Virginia and Zachary Mamoulian. Davitian noticed at a young age how actors in the troupe – and the Mamoulians themselves – were treated with great deference.

“When the actors came to our house, the way they were treated was just so above everyone else. They were so respected,” Davitian said in a recent interview. “I remember running across the stage as a kid and telling myself, ‘I am going to be a movie star.’”

Political Animal

During the interview, Davitian was outspoken about his political beliefs. While much of Hollywood is considered liberal, supporting the Democrats, Davitian stressed that he is a moderate Republican.

“I believe in some of the conservative policies of the Republican Party, especially on the issues of the economy and guns,” Davitian said. “I’ve only shot a gun twice, I don’t own a gun and I don’t want a gun, but I believe everyone should have the right to have one for their own protection.”

On foreign policy however, Davitian strikes a more dovish tone. “Instead of nation building, I believe that nations should build their countries themselves. On the Syrian Civil War, I believe that Russia and America shouldn’t be involved, and to let this dispute be settled by the Syrian people only.”

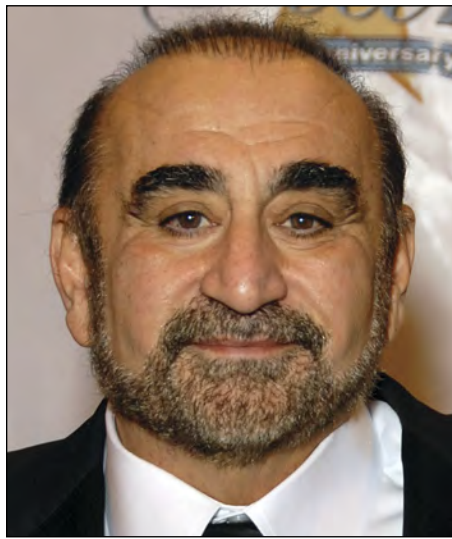
Davitian added that he believes that there are many closet Republicans who remain hushed. “I think there are a lot of Republicans in the industry, but they keep their views private due to intense backlash.”

Helping Armenia

The country of Armenia has had a rich film history dating back to 1924, when the first Armenian film studio, Armenfilm, was established.

Davitian has also been pursuing the idea of bringing about modern film studios in Armenia and establishing a cost effective film production industry which can generate jobs and create new revenue for the country.

“I have the ability because of the connections



Ken Davitian

I have to know how to build a proper studio in Armenia,” Davitian said. “A film production incentive will have to be offered to attract producers to bring projects there as many other countries currently offer. This would help stimulate the West to invest in Armenia and create new jobs.”

Armenia went through a velvet revolution earlier this year which completely changed the

complexion of the entire Armenian government. This changeover is expected to attract potential investors, such as those brought by Davitian, as the new government is encouraging foreign investment and development. A production tax rebate is a proposal that Davitian plans to present to the government officials to attract more investors to come into Armenia.

“I want solid studios such as Universal and Warner Brothers to oversee the build out so that the improvements would be permanent and not short-lived,” Davitian said. “However, most of the new leadership is young and with the tumultuous nature of the past year, it will take a few months for our studio incentives to be considered.”

Davitian feels strongly about his heritage and his reasons for wanting to help his ancestral homeland. “Because I am Armenian-American,” Davitian said. “If we don’t help Armenia, no one else will. The AYF (Armenian Youth Federation) also helped me become passionate about Armenian issues, and the swearing-in ceremony when I was 21 really helped open up my eyes to its purpose and how we can help and make an impact.”

Davitian has been an actor, comedian, producer, and a restaurant owner. However, on what achievement makes him the most proud – his granddaughter, Talia. “Talia just turned 3 and she is the light of my life,” Davitian said. “I

spent the last two years, three days a week with that girl, and I’ve enjoyed every second of it.”

On what is next in the life of Ken Davitian, he describes his numerous pilots in development. “I have four pilots, I started six years ago with a pilot called ‘Popo Papa.’ The show is about how an Armenian father goes to live with his daughter and her African-American husband,” Davitian said. “The next pilot is called ‘Ass and Garcia.’ My character is Boris Asatoryan, a captain of the Russian police in Moscow who goes to Las Vegas to track down his daughter, and meets Natasha Garcia, a member of the military police. The third pilot is called ‘Assbasator,’ where I am the illegitimate son of Gorbachev and I have his birthmark on my butt. I am the Russian Ambassador to the United States and I have a great time partying and having fun until a hardass new American President comes along. My fourth pilot will be a story on how my character, Al, an older Armenian man, dates a transgender woman and invites her into his Armenian home, where Al teaches her Armenian values and his girlfriend teaches him the ideas of the LGBT movement.”

The veteran actor has guest starred in many movies and TV shows, including “The Closer,” “Boston Legal” and “Mind of Mencia,” among many others. He is also working on many TV series and movies, including “Stupid Cupid,” “African Mystique” and “The Wicket Path.”



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