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## US Again Tells Turkey to Honor Armenia Accord

ANKARA and ISTANBUL (RFE/RL) – US Vice President Joe Biden pressed Turkey to unconditionally ratify its Western-backed normalization agreements with Armenia “in the months ahead” during a visit to Turkey that ended last weekend.

A senior official from the administration of President Barack Obama said the fate of the two Turkish-Armenian protocols signed in 2009 was on the agenda of Biden’s talks with Turkish President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Parliament Speaker Cemil Cicek.

The official said that during a breakfast meeting with Cicek on Friday, December 2, Biden “applauded the fact that the protocols for normalization with Armenia were back on the agenda of the [Turkish] parliament.” “And he expressed his hope that the parliament will be able to act those protocols in the months ahead,” the official told US journalists traveling with Biden.

Biden met Gul later on Friday before traveling to Istanbul for separate talks with Erdogan held on Sunday.

“On Armenia, he said to the prime minister what he had raised with President Gul, as well the hope that now that the protocols for normalization were back on the



Vice President Joe Biden with Turkish President Abdullah Gul

agenda of the parliament that Turkey would be able to move on those protocols in the months ahead,” the Obama administration official said.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton conveyed a similar message to the Turkish government when she visited Istanbul last July.

The Turkish leaders and Erdogan in par-

ticular have repeatedly made clear that the protocols will not be ratified by Turkey’s parliament before a breakthrough in international efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.

Armenia rejects this precondition. President Serge Sargsian threatened earlier this year to withdraw Yerevan’s signature from the accord if the Turks stick to the Karabagh linkage.

According to the *Hurriyet Daily News*, Biden told Gul that Ankara should “speed up the normalization process with Armenia” if it wants the Obama administration to block further resolutions in the US Congress recognizing the 1915 mass killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as genocide.

This warning attributed to Biden could be seized upon by Armenian critics of the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement who say it has helped Ankara to thwart a broader international recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

They were already incensed when Biden claimed last year that Sargsian himself had asked the White House not to use the word genocide with regard to the slaughter of some 1.5 Ottoman Armenians while Turkish-Armenian negotiations are in progress. Both official Yerevan and the US Embassy in Armenia denied Biden’s claim videotaped by an Armenian-American activist.

Biden strongly supported Armenian Genocide resolutions debated by Congress when he was a member of the US Senate.



### ADL and ADL Armenagan Parties Unite in Armenia

YEREVAN – On December 1, Hagop Avedikian, chairman of ADL Armenagan party of Armenia (at left), and Edward Aydinian, chairman of ADL Armenia, announced at a joint press conference at the Marriott Armenia Hotel that the two parties are uniting and that this unified party will participate in the coming parliamentary elections, scheduled for May 6, 2012.

## Firm to Examine Armenian Genocide Fund Dispute

By Mark Kellam

LOS ANGELES (*Los Angeles Times*) – An accounting firm will review 178 insurance claims as part of a deal struck in a case involving a multimillion-dollar compensation fund for descendants of Armenian Genocide victims, attorneys announced Monday.

Lawyers Mark Geragos and Roman Silberfeld, who sit on opposing sides of a dispute regarding the fund, said claims for \$10,000 or more will be examined to make sure there were no accounting discrepancies.

Originally, Silberfeld’s client, Glendale-see DISPUTE, page 2

## Catholicos Honors Vartan Ouzounian

LONDON – Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II bestowed upon a member of the Armenian Church in the UK, Vartan Ouzounian, the St. Nerses Shnorhali medal with an encyclical for his many years of service to the Armenian Church and Armenian people, both in the Motherland and the diaspora.

This is the first time that someone in the UK has received the St. Nerses Shnorhali medal.

Born in Syria, Ouzounian was brought up and educated with the Armenian spirit. At an early age he realized the importance of preserving the national identity and since his student years, Ouzounian has been actively involved in the national and spiritual life of Armenian communities.

Ouzounian was active in the Lebanese-Armenian community. While at the AGBU see OUZOUNIAN, page 3



Vartan Ouzounian and his family

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Azeri Cleric Pleased With Armenia Reception

BAKU (Armenpress) – Sheykhulislam Allahshukur Pashazade, Grand Mufti and chairman of the Caucasus Muslim Board, recently spoke about his visit to Armenia. According to simsar.az, on the television program “Inclusive Circle,” broadcast on Azeri TV, Pashazade said he had departed for Armenia with doubts. “I was thinking that a provocation would be organized against me at every step. But I enjoyed friendly attitude everywhere. His Holiness Karekin II and President Serge Sargsian treated me with respect. I think in case of negotiating longer, we could have solved the Nagorno Karabagh issue in a peaceful way. As Sheikh of Azerbaijan, I do not want military solution of the issue. God never allows it,” Pashazade said.

He was in Armenia on November 28 and participated in the Commonwealth of Independent States’ Inter-Religious Council.

### Nairi Brandy Takes Top Prize at International Wine Festival

YEREVAN (Panorama) – Ararat company’s Nairi Brandy, which is aged 20 years, took the gold medal at the 15th Jubilee International Wine & Spirits Competition in Moscow.

The competition, held under the auspices of the International Organization of Vine and Wine, hosted more than 115 brands of spirits from 15 countries, the press office of Yerevan Brandy Company reported.

Nairi Brandy is receiving its second award this year. Earlier, on February 12-13, 2011 Nairi Brandy won the gold medal at the International Wine & Spirits Competition in Moldova.

Nairi Brandy has been produced by the Yerevan Brandy Company since 1967. It has won 29 gold and one silver medals.

### Turkish Foreign Minister Meets with Armenians, Assyrians In Germany

BERLIN (news.am) – Turkey’s Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was in Germany this past week to more closely look into the case of Turks who were killed by neo-Nazis, met with representatives of the country’s Armenian and Assyrian communities.

First, Davutoglu met with the Assyrian representatives, at the Assyrian Church in Cologne. Davutoglu also met with the Armenian community representatives, but no information is given as to the whereabouts and participants of this meeting, Aksam daily of Turkey reports.

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## ARMENIA

## News From Armenia

## Armenian Sites Attacked By Azeri Hackers

BAKU (PanARMENIAN.Net) – On November 27-28, Azerbaijani Black Hats hacking group attacked a large number of Armenian websites, an information security expert and blogger said.

Samvel Martirosyan noted that news sites, even the Ararat Bank site, were among those hacked.

According to Martirosyan, hackers have targeted websites registered for the Armnet Awards 2011 competition.

## Book on History of Artsakh Published

PARIS (armradio.am) – On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the independence of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic, an illustrated book, *Artsakh: a Garden of Armenian Traditions and Art*, was published here in French and English, under the aegis of the NKR Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs and with the assistance of the Support to Nagorno Karabagh organization.

The book deals with the history of the republic, its archeological heritage, monuments, manuscripts and carpet-weaving.

The book's authors are prominent scientists and academics of Artsakh.

## Changes in Education in Next Five Years

YEREVAN (Arminfo) – Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian said during a briefing on Sunday, when asked to comment on the lack of highly-qualified personnel in Armenia, that the partnership between the private sector and the government will result in revolutionary changes in Armenia's education system in the next five years.

He said that the new program to develop Armenia's economic potential will give universities a clearer vision of what and how many specialists the economy needs and will foster continuous integration in the education system.

"When the private sector clearly says how many specialists are needed, the government is obliged to provide necessary financing. For example, there is a high demand for highly-qualified specialists in the high tech sector, and we consider it when forming our order," Sargsian said.

## No Progress in Global Graft Rankings

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – A leading international watchdog last week reported no progress in Armenia's curbing its corruption.

Armenia as well as the Dominican Republic, Honduras, the Philippines and Syria share the 129th place in Transparency International's (TI) latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 183 nations. Armenia shared the 123rd place with three other states among 178 nations in the previous CPI released by the Berlin-based group a year ago.

The 2011 survey assigned Armenia a score of 2.6 measured on a 10-point scale, with zero indicating an extremely high degree of corruption as perceived by entrepreneurs and experts. Armenia thus repeated its score of 2010. Countries that score below three are believed to have "systemic corruption."

Varuzhan Hovhannesian, the executive director of Transparency International's Armenian affiliate, says the most painful aspect of Armenia's reality is corruption in electoral processes.

Georgia is the only former Soviet country to have made progress according to the latest CPI scoring. It shares the 64th spot with South Africa and has a score of 4.1.

Azerbaijan has a score of 2.4 and shares the 143rd-151st positions with such countries as Russia, Belarus, Nigeria, Togo, Rwanda, among others.

New Zealand, Denmark and Finland are regarded as the least corrupt countries according to the CPI 2011 results, while Somalia is perceived as the most corrupt.

## Dr. Alan Whitehorn Discusses Current Challenges to Armenian Society, Legacy of Armenian Genocide

YEREVAN – The Armenian Assembly of America's Yerevan Office, as part of its ongoing Youth Club lecture series, hosted a presentation by Dr. Alan Whitehorn on the Armenian Genocide and the challenges facing Armenian society.

Whitehorn, on the faculty of the Royal Military College of Canada, is an expert on human rights and genocide. He is also a specialist on Canadian politics. Whitehorn is also a poet who has published numerous books and articles.

During his presentation, Whitehorn stressed the importance of proper human rights and genocide education and focused on key methods to develop and improve genocide education in Armenia. In order to better understand

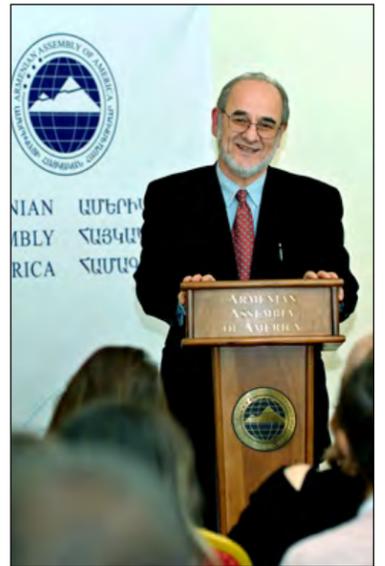
the magnitude of the crime, Whitehorn underscored the importance of addressing the multifaceted dimensions of genocide and the consequences of its denial. He also explained that when discussing the subject matter with non-Armenians, the emphasis should not only be on the numbers of those who died, but also on the lasting impact the Genocide has left throughout society. He went on to speak about the importance of recognition of the Genocide and compensation.

Whitehorn shared that he started studying the Armenian Genocide when he was a college student. His grandmother greatly inspired him with the stories of her journey of deportation and survival. He visited the Republic of

Armenia for the first time in 2005. Ever since, he has been a regular guest at many Armenian universities, public and private institutions, as well as government ministries.

The Youth Club members also enjoyed Whitehorn's poetry reading.

For the second part of his lecture, Whitehorn discussed the current challenges of modern Armenia. He focused on the major divisions and disparities



Prof. Alan Whitehorn

## US Envoy Hopes to Ride Train From Armenia to Turkey One Day

By Satenik Vantsian

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – The newly-appointed ambassador of the United States, John Heffern, has reiterated his government's continued support for rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey as he paid his first fact-finding visit to the northern Armenian town of Gumri near the Turkish border.

In Armenia's second largest town, Heffern described, last Monday, the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border as one of the priorities of his work as ambassador to the South Caucasus country.

"Getting that border open is one of my top priorities," said Heffern. "I hope to come here one day and ride the train to Kars. That's my goal."

The eastern Turkish (and historic Armenian) province of Kars borders on the Shirak region of Armenia, but communication is hampered by the lack of diplomatic relations between Yerevan and Ankara.

The two nations signed normalization protocols in 2009 after a rapprochement process was strongly backed by the United States. But the process remains stalled as the documents committing Ankara and Yerevan to establishing diplomatic relations and opening the border still await ratification in both parliaments amid new conditions being advanced by the Turkish leadership to their counterparts in Armenia.

Speaking at a Turkish-Armenian business conference in Yerevan last week, Heffern said that reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia still remains a goal. He also spoke about the United States continuing to sponsor people-to-people contacts between the two neighboring nations in the hope of facilitating the eventual normalization of their relations.

On his visit to Gumri on Monday, the US ambassador also spoke about projects being implemented by the United States government in conjunction with Armenian partners all over the country, including in Gumri.

"I am very proud of what we have been able to do together with the Armenian people in terms of economic development, health and a number of areas, and we do have partners in Gumri. And that's why I met with some of our local partners who are doing good social work and good health work here in Gumri," said Heffern.

Asked about what social needs are particularly obvious in Gumri, the US ambassador said: "Everybody that we talked to here talked about the need for jobs in this part of Armenia. And then with jobs and with economic development, the hospitals will be better, the housing will be better, everything will improve with better job growth in this region."

Heffern also spoke a few words in Armenian that he said he had already learned during his stay in Armenia. He promised to speak more fluently the next time he visits Gumri.

within Armenian society. He also talked about Armenia's role in the Caucasus and the importance of regional cooperation and economic development.

"We appreciate Dr. Whitehorn's thoughtful presentation and ongoing commitment to foster greater awareness and recognition of the Armenian Genocide," stated Country Director Armina Darbinian."

## Red Cross to Provide First Aid in Armenia's Border Regions

YEREVAN (News.am) – The Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) will provide first aid courses in border regions.

During the current year, courses were offered in Berd and Koti. Now courses will also be offered in Vazashen and Kapan.

Each year ARCS organizes six courses with 72 participants (12 people in each group). This year there will be five courses with 18 people in each group. The courses are free.

## Firm to Examine Armenian Genocide Fund Dispute

DISPUTE, from page 1  
based attorney Vartkes Yeghiayan, had sought an audit of all 1,300 claims made to a compensation fund set up by France-based insurer Axa S.A. to check for problems.

Accounting issues had previously been raised, including the assertion that some claimants who received multiple checks only cashed those for smaller amounts, even though checks for larger amounts were supposedly sent out at the same time.

Also, in some instances, separate but identical claims were filed by siblings. One sibling's claim would be approved, but the claim from the other sibling would be denied.

Audit costs will come out of the \$2.5 million left in a \$17.5-million compensation fund set up by Axa several years ago. The attorneys also agreed that all

claims will be moved to a neutral location.

"That way everyone will have access to them," Silberfeld said.

The claims are currently stored in the basement of a building owned by Geragos.

It was also discovered a few months ago that the multiplier used to determine payment amounts was off by 0.1 percent.

Silberfeld and Geragos agreed that the correct multiplier will be used on claims for \$10,000 or more.

Claimants paid \$10,000 will receive about \$10 each, which is economically feasible, Silberfeld said. Paying the additional amount on claims under \$10,000 would not be worth the time and postage, he added.

The fund's administrator, Glendale resident Persagh Kartalian, will submit a

sworn statement to the court providing details about the fund's distribution, staff and operations, Silberfeld said.

Judge Christine Snyder said Kartalian's input is important. "He does owe everyone here some explanation about what happened," she said.

Yeghiayan's motion is tied to a lawsuit filed earlier this year by Geragos and attorney Brian Kabateck against Yeghiayan alleging that he and his wife, attorney Rita Mahdessian, set up sham charities and misused nearly \$1 million during the last six years.

Geragos, Yeghiayan and Kabateck were on the same legal team that in 2005 brought a lawsuit that resulted in Axa's compensation fund, which was set up to pay claims that it failed to compensate descendants of Armenian Genocide victims who bought policies between 1875 and 1923.



## ARMENIA

## ATP Plants Nearly 250,000 Trees in Urban and Rural Communities throughout Armenia

YEREVAN – Heavy snow and rapidly decreasing temperatures presented an added challenge to Armenia Tree Project (ATP) programs this fall. Despite a temporary delay in northern Armenia until the weather cleared, ATP was able to plant a total of 87,143 trees this season. The total number of trees planted by ATP in 2011 was 246,397.

“The unpredictable weather conditions forced ATP to finish planting relatively early this fall. However, even during this short period, ATP had significant achievements in its tree planting programs,” notes ATP Forestry Services Manager Ani Haykuni.

This year, ATP’s SEEDS program (Social, Environmental and Economic Development for Sustainability) has been maintaining previously planted sites to improve survival rates by clearing grass around thousands of seedlings that survived their first growing season and planting new trees.

A total of 62,728 trees were planted this fall on community lands in Tsaghkaber and Jrashen in the Lori region. In spring, the SEEDS program planted 124,057 tree seedlings.

“The challenges we faced this fall have mainly been related to weather. On the other hand, we experienced significant improvements in the quality and care shown by our seasonal work force,” states SEEDS program manager Vardan Melikyan. “Since we have a group of workers who have been with ATP for several planting seasons, they fully grasp the standards of quality required by ATP in order to ensure the best results. Nevertheless, we constantly monitor the quality of work to make sure that everything meets the highest standards of quality.”

“The goal of our programs is not only to plant individual trees but also to support further development of planted areas as ecosystems. In a few decades, those planted areas will become community parks and forests and will hopefully meet the needs of local residents in promoting community development. I believe the contribution of ATP to social, economic and environmental sustainability in Armenia will be appreciated by future generations,” adds Haykuni.

The seedlings for ATP’s reforestation programs were grown in the John and Artemis Mirak Nursery in Margahovit Village and in Backyard Nurseries in the Getik River Valley. The Backyard Nursery Micro-Enterprise Program has been one of ATP’s poverty reduction initiatives since 2004.

“In addition to large-scale reforestation, ATP has worked with local partners to create small ‘community forests.’ Villages that are located



WWF Armenia Director Karen Manvelyan (fourth from right) conducts a field visit to Katnajor tree planting site in northern Armenia with ATP’s leadership team: SEEDS Manager Vardan Melikyan, Deputy Director of Operations Areg Maghakian, Executive Committee member Anthony Barsamian Jr., Executive Director Jeff Masarjian, Manager of Forestry Services Ani Haykuni and ATP founder and Executive Committee member Carolyn Mugar.

far from forested areas are being given attention in this program, since they are in need of green spaces,” explains Melikyan. The SEEDS program provided 5,860 trees for community forests this fall and plans to provide additional seedlings next year to Teghenik and Karenis in the Kotayk region.

ATP’s flagship Community Tree Planting (CTP) program has also successfully finished its fall activities. A total of 24,415 fruit and decorative trees were planted this season, in addition to 35,197 planted in the spring. New communities that partnered with ATP this fall include the villages of Ptghunk, Agarak, Saralanj, Dzorap and Ferik.

Fruit trees have been provided for the rural communities of Aknaghbyur, Teghenik and Vardenut to restore orchards and backyards of poor rural families. In addition, fruit trees were provided to the Fuller Center for Housing in order to support the program’s beneficiaries in the Aragatsotn and Lori regions. The total harvest of fruit from ATP trees was 231,022 pounds from more than 200 community planting sites. Varieties included apricot, cherry, wild apple, peach and pear.

## Prof. Chilingarian Elected American Physical Society Fellow

YEREVAN – Prof. Ashot Chilingarian, the director of Yerevan Physics Institute and the head of its Cosmic Ray Division, was elected American Physical Society (APS) Fellow this year.

The mission of APS is to be the leading voice for physics and an authoritative source of physics information for the advancement of physics and the benefit of humanity. Annually the APS names physicists from around the world whose work has contributed to the mission of advancing physics knowledge and benefiting humanity, as APS fellows.

Chilingarian is being recognized for bringing one of the world’s largest facilities for monitoring different species of secondary cosmic rays located in Armenia to the International Space Weather initiative as a global warning system from violent space events. He was nominated by the Forum on International Physics.

The APS was founded in 1899 by 36 promi-



Prof. Ashot Chilingarian

## Catholicos of All Armenians Honors Vartan Ouzounian

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Hovagimian Manougian Secondary School in Beirut, he set up an annual intercollegiate cultural festival which continued for more than two decades. Over the years it brought together Armenian students from all political factions under a cultural umbrella and established a level of friendship and co-operation between them not seen in the past.

Ouzounian continued his efforts in favor of the prosperity of the Armenian community in Ethiopia and Great Britain, organizing cultural, social and sporting events. He made great contributions to the activities of the AGBU, the Tekeyan Cultural Association in London, the ADL and other national institutions. Ouzounian is one of the founders and the secretary of the Tekeyan Trust in London (TTL), which supports Diaspora-Armenia cooperation by bringing theatrical groups, dancers, musicians and other artists from Armenia to the UK for performances as well as by organizing various exhibitions and lectures. The TTL included the Institute of Armenian Music, Arax Folk Dance group, which continued to perform for seven years, and *Erebouni*, the biweekly and then monthly paper in London, which was printed for more than 15 years.

Being a member of the Church Council for many years and then its chairman, Ouzounian devoted himself to the prosperity of the Armenian Diocese of the UK.

Ouzounian is one of the founders and the chairman of Tekeyan Centre Fund in Armenia, which serves as a symbol of unity of the Armenians all over the world. The fund aims to develop culture, education and science.

The impressive ceremony of reading of the *Gontag* and the bestowal of the medal took place at St. Yeghishe Church in London on November 27. More than 300 people (leaders of various organizations, long-standing Tekeyan supporters, benefactors, friends and family members) had come to extend congratulations to Vartan Ouzounian and his family. Among the dignitaries present at the ceremony were Karine

Kazinian, ambassador of Armenia to the UK, Charles Lonsdale, British ambassador to Armenia, Jonathan Aves, ambassador-designate of the UK to Armenia who will take over in January 2012.

Rev. Nerses Nersessian performed the *Badarak* on this occasion. In his sermon, Nersessian referred to the concept of serving without expecting any rewards and mentioned the fact that he had worked with Ouzounian for many years. At the conclusion of the *Badarak*, he read the *Gontag*. Then Bishop Vahan Hovhannessian, the newly-ordained bishop at Echmiadzin, who approached Karekin II to honor Ouzounian, fixed the Nerses Shnorhali medals on Vartan Ouzounian and his wife, Rosette. The bishop mentioned that the catholicos knew Vartan Ouzounian and his activities very well and thought him to be worthy of the honor.

The celebration continued with a reception at Cothorne Tara Hotel in the presence of 100 guests. The evening featured Armenian music, slide show of the TCA, TTL and TCF activities, speeches as well as words of congratulations from high-ranking clergymen and dignitaries. The master of ceremonies was Hratch Koumrouyan, a close friend from Lebanon.

After lunch, Hovhannessian expressed his good wishes to the Ouzounian family and referred to Ouzounian’s background which had given him the encouragement in recommending him to the catholicos for this medal, which was the first in the community.

Kazinian, in her brief speech, congratulated Ouzounian and wished him more successes in the future. Then Koumrouyan read a message from Sylva Krikorian, the chairman of the Tekeyan Trust London (she could not attend because of health reasons). In her note, Krikorian also detailed the creation of Tekeyan Centre Armenia, which seemed too hard to realize. It has become a reality due to the efforts of one person – Vartan Ouzounian, who took the responsibility for the construction of Tekeyan Centre. He sacrificed his health, his time and

family to complete the project successfully. For many years acting as the fund’s chairman, Ouzounian has been overseeing the activities of the fund. On behalf of TTL and TCA, Krikorian thanked him for his devotion to his nation.

Taline Avakian, a Trustee of TCF Armenia and TTL, took the podium and after expressing her heartfelt good wishes to the Ouzounian family, referred to more of the difficulties that the Tekeyan Trust and Ouzounian faced starting the Tekeyan Centre project. Even now, she said, the Tekeyan Centre is experiencing difficulties. In addition to closing the debt, the funds go toward the renovation of the building.

In his address to the well-wishers, Ouzounian expressed gratitude to the catholicos for recognizing his services to the Armenian communities in Lebanon, Ethiopia, the UK and Armenia. He thanked the Primate, Hovhannessian, for his initiative in recommendation, as well as all the supporters of his activities over many years. Then Ouzounian specifically referred to the TCA London work over the past 36 years and mentioned that the TCA activities would recover with a formation of new committee and also the establishment of a website (together with the Tekeyan Trust). He also announced that the new committee would get ready to celebrate in a few years’ time the 40th anniversary of the TCA London with a publication which would also include the names and pictures of all the active participants, committee and subcommittee members not only of the TCA but also those of the Tekeyan Trust. At the end of his speech Ouzounian launched the fund raising issue to support the structural needs of Tekeyan schools in Armenia and Karabagh.

The reception was concluded by Rosette Ouzounian. She expressed her thanks to all their supporters and spoke about their commitment to serve the Armenian people and the church. She closed the function with her recitation of Vahan Tekeyan’s “Hashvehartar,” which was delivered so movingly that the guests gave her a standing ovation.

nent physicists of the time, who gathered at Columbia University for that purpose. Browsing through the names of the APS presidents from founding days to today is like reading the Who’s Who in the field of physics. Some of these scientists are so famous that they have famous experiments or units of measure named after them.

## Arrested Policeman Pays Back ‘Embezzled Money’

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – The former chief of the Armenian traffic police arrested in September has paid some \$100,000 to compensate the state for what law-enforcement authorities call a large-scale embezzlement of public funds allocated to his police unit, his lawyer said on Monday.

Col. Margar Ohanian is facing up to eight years in prison on charges of fraud and abuse of power. He was sacked shortly after his arrest.

The accusations stem from a criminal investigation into the alleged theft of more than 150 tons of fuel that was allotted to police cars. The case against Ohanian is based on incriminating testimony given by four of his former subordinates.

Throughout the investigation conducted by state prosecutors’ Special Investigative Service (SIS) Ohanian has denied the charges, saying that he is not responsible for the alleged embezzlement.

According to his lawyer, Mkrtich Vasakian, the disgraced police official has nevertheless raised “several dozen million drams” in order to “reverse the damage caused to the state.” “That sum was collected by his family, relatives and friends,” Vasakian said.

“Despite that he still does not consider himself guilty,” he said.



## INTERNATIONAL

## International News

## Lebanese Delegation Heads to Armenia

BEIRUT (*Daily Star*) – President Michel Sleiman is scheduled to visit Armenia December 8-10, accompanied by a large delegation.

Accompanying Sleiman are Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour, Tourism Minister Fadi Abboud, Industry Minister Vrej Sabounjian, Minister of State Panos Manjian, Metn MP Hagop Pakradounian and Beirut MPs Serge Torsakissian and Jean Ogassapian.

Sleiman is scheduled to hold talks with Armenia's President Serge Sargsian and Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian.

The delegation is also to hold meetings with members of the Lebanese community in Armenia, Catholicos Karekin II and parliament members.

Bilateral agreements in the fields of tourism, education and culture are to be signed by the two sides.

## Diyarbakir Seeks More Trade with Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – Turkey's south-eastern province of Diyarbakir is trying to increase trade with Armenia three to five fold, according to the Diyarbakir Chamber of Commerce Deputy Chairman Diyadin Gezer, who was on a week-long visit here.

Gezer had accompanied a delegation of 50 businessmen to meet with their Armenian counterparts in a bid to increase cooperation and trade between the two countries.

Turkey's trade with neighboring countries has increased from 10 to 35 percent of the country's whole trade volume, according to Gezer, who said they aimed to make this figure 60 percent, an average figure according to world standards.

"We think Armenia is very important for this region. We want to increase the existing \$300-million trade volume between the two countries three to five folds," Gezer said.

## Israeli Knesset to Discuss Genocide Issue

TEL AVIV, Israel (Arminfo) – The Israeli Knesset (Parliament) will discuss the Armenian Genocide this month. IzRus reports that the December 5 meeting of the Committee on Education, Culture and Sport concerning the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 has been put off for one to two weeks.

Chairman of the Committee Alex Miller says that the meeting was postponed because Speaker of the Knesset Reuven Rivlin wanted to take part in the discussion. December 5 he will be abroad. Thus, he asked the commissioners to postpone.

The precise date will be announced next week.

## Composer's Requiem Praised in Germany

BERLIN (Tert.am) – Armenian composer Tigran Mansurian's requiem, dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide, received a warm welcome in Germany.

Speaking at a news conference on Tuesday, November 29, he said he had been thinking about such work for nearly 10 years.

"It was a very important composition for me as the idea to create something of the kind had been haunting me for around 10 years. After a long search I was finally able to find a format to properly introduce the topic," he said.

Mansurian characterized the requiem as work of ritual music, a unique performance that has to be presented differently every time.

"The Armenian psychology and mentality were taken into consideration while creating this requiem. When I saw the singers I realized what I was supposed to do," he added. "They looked so much like the biblical miniatures. I used the Latin language to create an Armenian-sounding piece of music. The Armenian music was so closely interwoven with the Latin language that even I was surprised."

Mansurian said the requiem will tour around the world, without being performed in Armenia.

## Armenian, Azeri Leaders 'Ready' to Meet Again

VILNIUS, Lithuania (RFE/RL) – The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan are ready to meet again soon and try to iron out their differences on a framework peace agreement on Nagorno-Karabagh drafted by international mediators, it was announced last Tuesday.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and a top French official made the announcement as they urged Yerevan and Baku to "give further careful consideration" to the proposed basic principles of resolving the Karabagh conflict.

In a joint statement during an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) ministerial meeting in Lithuania's capital Vilnius, they expressed "regret" at the conflicting parties' failure so far to achieve a breakthrough in their drawn-out negotiations mediated by the United States, Russia and France, the three co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

The statement, which was also signed by Foreign Ministers Elmar Mammadyarov of Azerbaijan and Eduard Nalbandian of Armenia, reiterated the mediating powers' view that "there can be no military solution to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict." It at the same time

described as "unacceptable" the status quo in the unresolved dispute.

"They [Mammadyarov and Nalbandian] informed the heads of delegation of the co-chair countries that their presidents are ready to meet again jointly in the near future under the auspices of the co-chair countries to continue their direct dialogue, building upon recent experience, on how to bring peace, stability, and prosperity to their peoples," read the statement.

Mammadyarov and Nalbandian met in Vilnius late Monday in the presence of more low-level US, Russian and French diplomats co-chairing the Minsk Group. It was not clear if they also had a separate encounter with Clinton, Lavrov and France's European Affairs Minister Jean Leonetti on the sidelines of the OSCE conference.

President Serge Sargsian and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev appeared to be very close to cutting a long-awaited peace deal at their most recent meeting hosted by Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev in Kazan, Russia last June. But contrary to the mediators' expectations, they failed to do that.

Yerevan says Aliyev scuttled the agreement with last-minute objections

to the latest version of the basic principles co-authored by the mediators. Azerbaijani officials have not explicitly denied that.

The Minsk Group co-chairs have since tried to salvage the peace process with a series of visits to the conflict zone. But there have been no indications yet that they may achieve decisive progress in the Armenian-Azerbaijani talks in the months to come.

The envoys appear to be increasingly changing the focus of their diplomacy to the strengthening of the shaky ceasefire regime along the Armenian-Azerbaijani "line of contact" around Karabagh. Deadly skirmishes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces deployed there are a regular occurrence, highlighting the risk of renewed large-scale hostilities.

The five-party statement issued in the Lithuanian capital called for "further efforts" to work out details of a mechanism to investigate ceasefire violations near Karabagh and along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

The co-chairs proposed such a mechanism earlier this year. They said in October that the conflicting parties have agreed to its principle.

## Armenian Town's Evictions Stir Lebanon Debate

BEIRUT (Agence France Presse) – A mainly Armenian suburb of Beirut has stirred controversy over a decision by local officials to expel foreign workers, with some linking the move to the revolt in Syria and others to sheer racism.

The controversy erupted earlier this month when the municipality of Bourj Hammoud, located east of the Lebanese capital, requested all foreigners without rental leases leave the area by the end of November.

Targeted by the measure were Syrian Kurds as well as other laborers from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and from African countries, who for years have been drawn to affordable housing in Bourj Hammoud. The majority has no signed rental agreements, a common practice in Lebanon.

Officials say the decision came after local residents began to complain of increased petty crime and harassment of young women in the streets, pinning the blame on foreigners.

But Syrian Kurds say the measure was a bid by the Armenian Tashnag party, a member of Lebanon's pro-Syrian alliance led by the powerful Hezbollah, to punish them for taking part in anti-Syrian rallies.

"The goal is to drive us out of our homes... and leading this campaign is a certain prominent party here in Bourj Hammoud," said Khalil, 37.

Ahmed, a 28-year-old Syrian Kurd who has lived for five years in a one-room flat in Bourj Hammoud, said he also believed the eviction order he had recently received was politically motivated.

"This decision is aimed at us, at all Kurds who are standing against the Syrian regime," said Ahmed, who requested his real name be concealed for fear of reprisal.

Officials in the bustling suburb, however, deny that the evictions are political ly motivated, noting that the measure concerned all foreigners – not just Syrian Kurds – without identification papers or legal contracts.

"Several residents have contacted us to complain that they feel the district is becoming an increasingly dangerous place because of increased crime with foreigners living here," said Arpineh Mangasarian, head of the City Council's Engineering and Planning Department.

Tashnag officials in a statement also denied the evictions were related to politics.

But Nadim Houry, director of the Beirut office of Human Rights Watch,

said he believed racism was at the heart of the problem.

"Lebanon has a serious problem with racism – racism towards foreigners but also racism towards other Lebanese," he said.

Some Armenian residents of Bourj Hammoud have also criticized local officials for the indiscriminate expulsions.

"It's true that when young people, like foreign laborers, hang out in the street at

night they might stir trouble," said one shop owner, requesting his name be concealed.

"But a lot of foreign laborers live near my shop and they are really hard-working people who come home late at night and don't bother anyone," he added. "Now they're being asked to leave too."

Lebanon is home to a 140,000 Armenians, mostly descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

## EU Urged to Speed up Free Trade Talks with Yerevan

BRUSSELS (RFE/RL) – Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian urged the European Union on Monday, December 5, to accelerate the official launch of negotiations on a far-reaching free trade deal with Armenia that has been hampered by Yerevan's controversial taxation rules and practices.

Making his fourth visit to Brussels in less than a year, Sargsian also reaffirmed the Armenian government's ambitious reform agenda, which he said will enable his country to "move forward along the European path."

"We are implementing a program of serious and ambitious reforms," the government's press office quoted him as telling the EU's Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele.

Sargsian detailed those reforms during his earlier visits to Brussels. He said they cover 33 specific areas of state policy, including human rights protection, judicial reform, tax and customs administration as well as food safety.

"We expect your support for accelerating negotiations over an agreement on the creation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)," he told Fuele on Monday.

The DCFTA is a key element of an "association agreement" offered to Armenia as part of the EU's Eastern Partnership program covering six ex-Soviet states. It envisages not only mutual lifting of customs duties but also harmonization of Armenia's eco-

nomics laws and regulations with those existing in the EU.

Despite reporting major progress in the more than yearlong association talks on with Armenia, the EU has still not set a date for the start of separate DCFTA negotiations. Its top executive body, the European Commission, wants Yerevan to abolish first the discretionary authority of the Armenian customs service to ignore payment invoices submitted by importers and determine the market value of imported goods in accordance with its own "control pricelists."

The commission is also seeking changes in the collection of excise duties from domestic and imported alcohol. It says the existing tax rates and procedures discriminate against importers of alcoholic beverages.

Gunnar Wiegand, head of a European Commission team negotiating with Yerevan, said in late October that the Armenian side pledged to address the EU concerns by the end of this year. Speaking after talks with Sargsian, Wiegand said that would pave the way for the start of the DCFTA talks.

Sargsian's government has yet to announce corresponding changes to Armenian legislation regulating customs valuation and excise taxation.

Armenian statistics show trade with the EU rising by 21 percent to \$1.46 billion and accounting for almost one-third of Armenia's overall commercial exchange in the first 10 months of this year.

# Community News

## Alecko Eskandarian Visits Armenian Sisters' Academy For Thanksgiving

RADNOR, Penn. – The students and faculty of the Armenian Sisters' Academy were thrilled to host Alecko Eskandarian, former professional Major League Soccer (MLS) player, at the school on Monday, November 21.

Eskandarian grew up in Bergen County, NJ. He finished his high school career with 154 goals, which is the most in Bergen County history and the second most in New Jersey high school sports history. While at Bergen Catholic High School, Eskandarian won the 1999-2000 Gatorade National High School Athlete of the Year Award. Prior to playing as a professional, he played three years of soccer for the University of Virginia, where he was named the best player in college soccer and awarded the Hermann



Alecko Eskandarian with the students and staff at the Armenian Sisters' Academy in Radnor

Trophy in 2002 after scoring 25 goals, yet another record he holds to this day.

Eskandarian has played professionally for DC United, Toronto FC, Real Salt Lake and LA Galaxy before retiring due to multiple injuries. In 2004 while playing for DC United, he won the MLS title as well as MVP of the MLS Cup game. He earned his reputation in the league as a powerful and influential striker.

Eskandarian currently works as the youth technical director with the Philadelphia Union.

He visited the school and spoke to students in grades three to eight and faculty about his career and his love of soccer. He stressed to the children that it is important to love what one is doing and to have a passion for it. He encouraged each child to dream big and strive for the best and reinforced the message that each child has potential that should not be wasted. The most important message he imparted was one that he learned from his father, which is, "If you want to be good at anything, you first need to be a good person." He encouraged the children to be kind and sensitive individuals in order to achieve great things in life.

Students were then encouraged to ask questions. They wanted to know how many countries he has played in (more than 60), if he has ever played in Armenia (no, but he is hoping to visit next summer with his family) and if he ever got a red card, to which he responded, "of course, I'm a hot-blooded Armenian!"

Following the questions, Eskandarian signed autographs and promised to visit again soon. The Armenian Sisters Academy family was inspired and star-struck during this visit and looks forward to his next visit.



A walk in Ushbeg

## From the Plains of Govdoon to the Mountains of Ushbeg

**I**n September 2011, Elenne, my wife, and I participated in a pilgrimage to historic Armenia (Anatolia) with Armen Aroyan. Aroyan is an encyclopedia on the villages and life in historic Armenia during the 20th century. As one travels with him and other pilgrims to cities and villages where our parents and grandparents came from, one enjoys an odyssey through the past that is both enlightening yet bittersweet. One certainly appreciates the richness of our heritage and culture including religion, art, music, literature, architecture, commerce and specifically the highest order of civilization at the time. As Aroyan says, every individual finishes the pilgrimage with an expanded view of their ethnic identity.

This was my third trip to Govdoon, the village of my grandparents with whom I lived with until I was 5. Govdoon is a village about 20 kilometers east of Sivas, the capital of Sepastia. During my grandparents' life, there were 250 Armenian families and only three Turkish families living in Govdoon. The village is located on the plains

along the Alice River, juxtaposed to a mountain range providing fertile soil for farming wheat, the primary occupation then and now. This visit was the most rewarding because I walked the unpaved roads of the village and there was little change from my grandparents' time. St. Garabed Church, where they married, exists but sadly it is used as a barn. With a map drawn by a former Armenian villager, we located the foundation for the Mikaelian (grandmother's) home. There are many abandoned homes, just walls with no roofs or just foundations. One Turkish family from the turn of the century still lives in an original house belonging to Armenians and they remember Mourad Pasha, the Armenian freedom fighter. Today the remaining 25 Turkish families were relocated from the eastern parts of Turkey to farm the fertile soil. They were hospitable, as they knew our story. They mentioned that families who survived the Genocide and moved to Istanbul would return to Govdoon right up until the 1950s but none since. I visited one morning as a guest in the home of one of the current Turkish families. The house sitting was the same as my grandparents' home: three rooms, one room was a kitchen/living room, one was a bedroom and the third was for the animals. The bathroom was outside. They farmed, made their own bread and lived a simple life not too different from my grandparents' time.

Elenne and I visited for the second time, the village of Ushbeg near the city of Chemishkezeg, from where her father and mother's family immigrated. During our visit in 2004, we saw only two homes, with artifacts from a church by the house and nothing resembling a village. As we were leaving this time, two women approached us, both from the village of Ushbeg but having relocated to Istanbul. One of the women indicated her grandmother was Armenian and offered to show us where the church was located. Even Aroyan was surprised as this was a new

see PILGRIMAGE, page 7

## Former Azusa University Star Mike Danielian Signs Contract With German Basketball Team

LOS ANGELES (*BallinEurope*) – Mike Danielian will soon begin his professional basketball career with the Wolfenbuettel basketball team of Wolfenbuettel, Germany. Danielian will play both the shooting and point guard positions for Wolfenbuettel, which is officially known as SG MTV/BG 93 Wolfenbuettel.

Danielian rose to prominence under Coach Howard Levine at Grant High School in Van Nuys. Under Levine, Danielian was twice named to the Los Angeles All-City team. As a senior, Danielian averaged 30.3 points per game to lead all of southern California in scoring. He also scored 58 points in one game, which broke the Grant High School single-game scoring record, which was then held by current NBA player Gilbert Arenas.

Danielian was a member of Azusa Pacific University's 2010 NAIA finalists. Danielian made over 200 three-point shots in his time at Azusa Pacific, and he remains the No. 2 all-time three-point scorer in school history.

In August, Danielian was named most valuable player of the Fifth Pan Armenian Games in Yerevan, Armenia. Danielian led Los Angeles to a gold medal with a 49-point performance in the championship game against Sochi, Russia, with Armenian President Serge Sargsian in attendance.

Carl Bardakian, Los Angeles men's basketball head coach and US represen-



Mike Danielian

tative to the Basketball Federation of Armenia, stated "Danielian's deep three-point shooting range, competitive drive and outstanding work ethic impressed the Wolfenbuettel coaches and scouts. I anticipate Danielian making an immediate impact for Wolfenbuettel." Basketball Federation of Armenia President Hrachya Rostomyan expressed his congratulations to Danielian on behalf of the federation. Rostomyan stated, "We are very proud of Mike and look forward to him having great success with Wolfenbuettel. Mike has the full support and encouragement of the Basketball Federation of Armenia."



## COMMUNITY NEWS

### Backgammon Tournament Has Knightly Winners

CHELTENHAM, Penn. — Knights of Vartan's Clarence Kalenian founded the Souren Avedisian Backgammon Tournament some 20 years ago. He now resides in Dothan, Ala., but is still very much a part of supplying not only his thoughts but also sponsorship to ensure the tournament's success. Knights of Vartan Ardashad Tahlij #5 can be proud to have Kalenian and his dedication to bring to the Philadelphia community each year the Backgammon Tournament.

The latest tournmanet took place on

November 13. Arnold Peckjian Jr. donated his first-place trophy back to the Knights of Vartan, N.A.S. George Yacoubian Sr. donated his second-place \$75 cash prize back to the Knights (applied to student scholarship fund) and Haig Dadourian donated his \$50 cash prize back to the Knights.

Commander Gregory Meranshian, a jeweler by trade, has decided to bestow upon brother Kalenian the Silver Vartan Medal for all his work associated with the tournament.



The winners of the Souren Avedisian Backgammon Tournament, from left, chairman of tournament, Bryan Peckjian; second-place winner, George Yacoubian Sr.; first-place winner Arnold Peckjian Jr. and Commander Gregory Meranshian (Not pictured, Haig Dadourian)

## OBITUARY

### Boston Jazz Scene Fixture Al Vega

*Pianist Was 90*

BOSTON (*Boston Globe*) — Al Vega, a long-time Boston musician who played with some of the finest jazz talents through a career that



Al Vega

spanned 70 years, has died. He was 90.

Vega died Friday, December 2, at Massachusetts General Hospital, hospital spokeswoman Kory Dodd said. No cause of death was given.

Vega, born Aram Vagramian in Worcester,

was the house pianist at the Hi-Hat jazz club, and spent the late 1930s, '40s and '50s playing with some of the jazz greats, Boston radio personality Ron Della Chiesa told the Associated Press.

Della Chiesa said Vega teamed up with many greats including Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Count Basie and Duke Ellington and played many of the city's legendary jazz clubs. He later led his own trio and became a fixture at Lucky's Lounge, where he played Frank Sinatra tunes on Sunday nights.

"He was one of the most beloved musicians in the history of the city," Della Chiesa told the AP.

Vega played both the piano and the vibraphone, and had hundreds of recordings as a pianist and a backup artist.

Della Chiesa describes Vega as a legendary musician and teacher who launched a number of careers. He called him a friend to generations of Massachusetts politicians, including senators, congressmen, governors and mayors, regardless of their party affiliation.

Vega, a World War II veteran, was also a long-time Little League and Babe Ruth baseball coach in Everett, Mass., where a square was dedicated in his honor in October.

Vega was due to appear at Sculler's Jazz Club in mid-January, and Della Chiesa said the event will go on, as a memorial to his friend.

### Abgar Kostikian

WATERTOWN, Mass. — Abgar Kostikian died on November 29.

He was born on May 1, 1920 to Garabet and Mathagh Kostikian in Bursa, Turkey.

He was the husband of Mariam (Simonian) Kostikian of Watertown. He is survived by children, Karpis Kostikian and his wife Lianoush of Watertown, Aracse Kurkjian of Weston and Khachatour Kostikian and his wife Takoush of Watertown; grandchildren, Levon, Paul Ara, Deranik, Arthur, Abgar and David and great-grandchildren, John, Alex and Grace. He was pre-deceased by his granddaughter Mari Kostikian and son-in-law John Kurkjian.

Kostikian was a member of St. James Armenian Church in Watertown and could be seen in church worshipping every Sunday.

Funeral services were held at St. James Armenian Church in Watertown on Saturday,

December 3, followed by interment in the family lot at Ridgelawn Cemetery in Watertown.

Expressions of sympathy may be made in his memory to St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472.

Arrangements were by the Giragosian Funeral Home in Watertown and condolences may be written to the family at [www.giragosianfuneralhome.com](http://www.giragosianfuneralhome.com).



Abgar Kostikian

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Tour Guide Looks Back at 20 Years of Globe-Trotting

By Tom Vartabedian

WATERTOWN — Adrina (Goshgarian) Kletjian remembers the time when she toured Western Armenia some years back with guide personified Armen Aroyan.

She had purchased a piece of pottery from Avanos — land of her ancestors — and wanted it shipped back home to Boston. The parcel arrived shattered to bits, breaking Adrina's heart like the package in her hands.

"I was devastated," she recalled.

The remorse didn't last very long. She placed a call to Aroyan explaining the circumstances and on the next trip abroad, Aroyan visited that same outlet and purchased a similar product.

"He had it shipped right to my home and it arrived intact," recalled the woman. "Leave it to Armen to do something like this. He has helped so many people like myself discover their roots and connect us to our ancestry."

Aroyan made his most recent stop to St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, appearing here at the invitation of Sona and Charlie Aslanian, who have made two trips with him. About 75 people turned out, many of them previous Aroyan adventurers.

"He displays his tenacity when trying to find a remote village for the first time, usually with success," said Charlie Aslanian. "But not before many stops to ask for directions. Arriving at your destination is the ultimate reward and Armen has been rewarding his fellow travelers for quite some time. He possesses all the required skill, patience and attention to detail you need to get the mission accomplished."

On this afternoon, Aroyan's mind was like a mechanical encyclopedia, working without a hitch.

For two hours, the tour guru went through a vivid travelogue showing one image after another. Not a note in front of him. It was all recall as he pored through towns, villages, experiences and names of people who solicited his services from a California-based operation.

Places like Morenig, Shepig, Govdun and Zak are not exactly household names or places one would necessarily find in a guidebook. Nor would they typically appear on a seasoned traveler's list of places to see.

But to an Armenian living in the diaspora, they are very special places. They are the ancestral homes of family — the old neighborhood, one might say.

Some say his farewell tour is imminent. Aroyan agrees.

"One more trip, maybe two," he admitted. "But, yes, the end is in sight."

This comes from a man who has made 60 trips to Historic Armenia and Cilicia over these two decades while escorting more than 1,000 guests. In all, some 600 villages have been encountered. Two Kurdish drivers (father-son) answer every call.

Among his more recent personalities was clarinet virtuoso Khachig Kazarian, who played his instrument inside churches and the foothills of Mount Ararat with a dancing entourage exuding its spirit.

What's his secret? Really no secret at all.

"It's all a matter of being in the right place at the right time and having faith in God for guiding me," Aroyan said. "There's no problem in finding people who will go. The desire becomes a fulfillment of a dream they didn't think possible. It's all about passing a heritage from one generation to another."

Since Aroyan caters every trip to the specific needs of his clients, those who join his Armenian Heritage Tours come away with a

feeling of being embraced. It's the personal attention that makes for a more meaningful pilgrimage.

"It's all custom-planned," said Aroyan, who recalls his first junket in 1991 with 20 visitors. "Even though we may visit the same places, it still becomes a unique adventure every time."

Ed and Maryann Kazanjian have been with Aroyan twice (2009 and 2010) and came away so enamored, they're now giving presentations of their own throughout the country. They packed the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA) twice and recently filled the Andover Public Library. Both agree Aroyan was the inspiration behind their every move.

"Armen Aroyan is a facilitator," said Ed Kazanjian. "He has all the contacts. Nobody else can find these villages the way he does. When he retires, I can't think of anyone who could do a similar job. He'll put in a 14-hour day to fulfill everyone's wishes. It's exhausting but he's willing to make the sacrifice. He truly believes it's his calling."

Kazanjian said he's put hundreds of hours into creating DVDs of his trips and giving proceeds to worthy charities in Armenia.

"Armen Aroyan has helped find cousins, parents and grandparents," added Maryann Kazanjian. "He has an infinite capacity for names and places. Speaking multiple languages doesn't hurt his cause, either. He likes to surprise people on trips with an imaginary hat of tricks. He waits 'til you get to a certain location



Armen Aroyan is on his last leg of a 20-year career as a professional tour guide throughout Western Armenian.

before telling you it's the origin of your family roots."

Aroyan ended his presentation with several awe-inspiring scenes of Ararat.

"My dream is for all Armenians to see this mountain from the Turkish side," he said. "Many churches are being restored now and not being used for mosques. It offers us some closure to see this."

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[electhecht@gmail.com](mailto:electhecht@gmail.com)  
617.320.8905

## From the Plains of Govdooon to The Mountains of Ushbeg

PILGRIMAGE, from page 5

find for him. As we walked for almost an hour up the hill, the woman pointed to the foundations of homes, one after another saying, "Ermeni, Ermeni" (former Armenain homes). At the top of the hill, at the edge of the cliff, was the ever-present wall surrounding the former church. When we turned to walk back down the long winding road, in front of us, stood the famous Chemishkezeg rock known as Moornayee Kar. Elenne's father had pictures of this rock and it was the symbol of the village where he played as a child. It was a moving moment to be where her father, aunts, uncles and cousins lived and played. Elenne heard often about the village up the mountain, Ots

Quig, where they visited during the hot summers. Our Turkish guide told us the new name of the village so we drove the seven kilometers and found her father's summer village with a church.

Unexpected but cherished times, all provided by Aroyan. As a student of Armenian history, I am well aware of our past turbulent story. If our parents and grandparents dreamed about a free and independent Armenia, which is a reality, one may still dream about the future of our historic homeland. But I still ask myself, these people with such intellect and talent, how did it happen?

(Dr. Louis Najarian is a psychiatrist practicing in Manhasset, NY.)



Plains of Govdooon



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# New Equipment Doubles Capacity to Diagnose Osteoporosis in Armenia

YEREVAN – Dr. John P. Bilezikian, professor of medicine and pharmacy at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University is the chief of the division of Endocrinology and director of the Metabolic Bone Diseases Program at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center. Accompanied by his sister and brother-in-law, Pauline and Armen Barooshian, respectively, he just returned from a trip to Yerevan in which he spoke at the fifth annual Osteoporosis Symposium.

In conjunction with the symposium, the announcement was made that Hologic, Inc. has donated three more Dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) instruments for the diagnosis of osteoporosis in Armenia. This brings the number of DXA units donated by Hologic, Inc. to Armenia to five over the past four years. DXA is the most accurate and advanced of the technologies used to measure bone mineral density (BMD). Low BMD indicates osteoporosis,

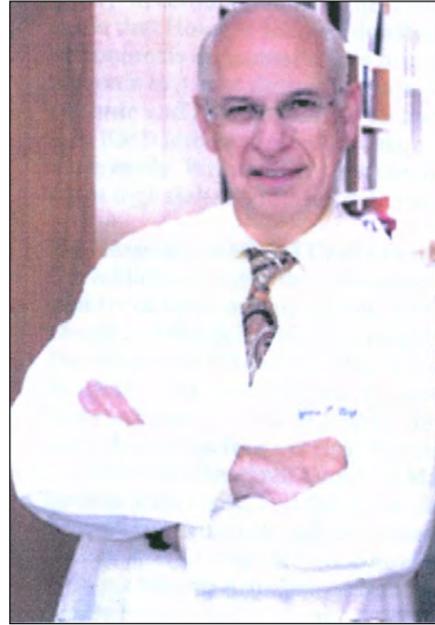
which causes bones to weaken and break more easily. Without DXA testing, people are unaware that they have the serious disease and are at high risk of suffering debilitating fragility fractures.

The addition of three densitometers doubles the number of densitometers to six for this country of 3 million people. The new machines will be placed in the Erebuni Medical Center and the Scientific Center of Traumatology and Orthopedics, major Yerevan hospitals. The other new DXA unit will be placed in the Center for Mother and Child Care in Nagorno-Karabagh. The new DXA machines, valued at more than \$100,000, are equipped with the latest software, including FRAX, the WHO Fracture Risk Assessment calculation tool that helps determine fracture risk. The three units that are currently operating in Yerevan are at The Scientific Research Center of Maternal and Child Health Protection, Yerevan State Medical University and the Armenian-American Wellness Center.

Armenian radiologists will be trained in the use of the machines in December by Larry Mowat, RT, Hologic's senior application specialist. Mowat has participated in several trips to Armenia, generously donating his time and expertise in DXA installation, quality control and training.

A wide segment of Armenian health professionals have benefited from annual osteoporosis symposia, organized and directed by Bilezikian. This year's symposium attracted record participation from more than 350 clinicians and allied health professionals. International speakers at the symposium included: Prof. John Kanis, president of the International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF), Bilezikian, Samuel Badalian, professor and chair, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, SUNY Upstate Medical Center, Syracuse, NY and Sara Takii, DPT and president of the Armenian International Institute of Physical Therapy, Bakersfield, Calif.

The symposium included presentations and discussions on a broad array of topics, including diagnosis of osteoporosis, FRAX, nutrition, exercise and treatment. Participants were



Dr. John P. Bilezikian

given comprehensive presentations of osteoporosis and its management with the goal to translate this knowledge to better care for patients who either have or are at risk for osteoporosis. Three local Armenian physicians presented their work based upon the three instruments that have been in the country for the past several years.

Bilezikian stated, "I am pleased that these symposia have served to improve knowledge of osteoporosis and its management in the country. I would also like to thank Hologic for their generous donation of the new DXA machines."

## Raffi Hovannisian To Speak on 'Fresno To Yerevan, Armenia, The Dream Of a Lifetime'

FRESNO – Raffi Hovannisian will present a talk titled "Fresno to Yerevan: Armenia: The Dream of A Lifetime," at 7 p.m., on Friday, December 23, in McLane Hall, Room 121, on the Fresno State University campus.

Hovannisian will speak about the journey from Fresno, where he was born, to becoming a prominent member of parliament and a national leader in Armenia. He will also provide a first-hand update on the political situation and life in Armenia today.

Hovannisian founded the Armenian Bar Association in the US, participated in earthquake relief in Armenia, and documented the earliest stages of the Karabagh war first hand.

He became Armenia's first foreign minister (1991-1992) and raised the tricolor at the United Nations. He is the founder of Armenia's Heritage Party and the founding director of the Armenian Center for National and International Studies, a think-tank in Yerevan.

Hovannisian graduated from Georgetown University Law Center and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley and the University of California, Los Angeles (BA, summa cum laude, awarded in 1980 in history and Near Eastern studies).

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# Pilgrimage To the Depths Of History

By Hagop Vartivarian

*This article is in memory of Dickran Simsarian (1890-1978), a native of Dikranagerd, who played an instrumental role in the formation of the American-Armenian community. For many decades, he served in the leadership ranks of the Armenian Church, the AGBU, the Knights of Vartan, the ADL and the Tekeyan Cultural Association. He made a major contribution to the organizational structure and legal affairs of these organizations. He was helpful to our activists who immigrated to these shores from our communities overseas, facilitating their citizenship applications.*

**T**wo months ago, I received a warm and touching invitation, by phone, to join a pilgrimage. Suffice it to say that I was in a dream world until my departure for Historical Armenia. Each day of that entire two-month period, I was overcome with emotions and inner, spiritual happiness. A dream was to turn into reality. The realization of a dream nurtured over many long years was imminent, and I would soon be setting foot on our historical lands. I probably had had that same feeling prior to visiting Soviet Armenia for the first time 40 years ago.

Now I would be visiting the other Armenia, which had been a living dream, one that made our daily life complete, as far as my generation was concerned, at least. Thus, it was



Divine Liturgy at the altar of St. Giragos Church

that happiness that I experienced for 60 days, sometimes unable to hold back my emotions, sometimes with tears in my eyes, with memories from the past and my recent life, but always with the feelings of a plaintiff whose just demands remain unsatisfied.



At the entrance of St. Giragos Church

## Initiative of Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate

This was the pilgrimage on which we were preparing to embark. I thanked our Primate, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, who had also taken me into consideration to join this pilgrimage, which he himself had previously undertaken. The pilgrims were those with positions of authority within the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America and well-known benefactors of our community. Most probably, he had wished for the presence of this constant friend, who shared the true pains of the nation, to participate in this group, in order to record this singular initiative for history's sake.

My friend, Hirant Gulian, who was the organizer of this pilgrimage, relayed the good news. Right away, I phoned Archbishop Khajag and thanked him. It just so happened that we had arrived in New York around the same time, 38 years ago — he as a newly ordained archimandrite and I as a political activist. Back then, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian said, "Archimandrite Khajag is here from Jerusalem, he's practically the same age as you, look after one another like brothers..." Here it is, four decades later, and an indestructible friendship has developed into devotion and loyalty; our good relations continue, becoming an example for others in our community to follow.

Seeing historical Armenia was the only thing left for an Armenian who has visited more than 100 countries, crossed all the continents of the world a few times, from the African jungles to the Arabian deserts to the steppes of Asia, received a fair dose of European civilization and climbed Mayan temples. For that reason, in turn, each day of those two months, daytime and nighttime alike, was constituted of moments of anticipation.

I received an open letter dated September 26 from Oscar Tatosian, chairman of the Diocesan Council and a close friend. It contained the list of participants, as well as his cordial remarks: "I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel extensively abroad. This trip, however, feels to be the most exciting journey in years." I saw that he too had the same feelings and was preparing to depart for Historical Armenia with the same purely patriotic spirit. We would undoubtedly share those feelings together upon our return.

It bears mentioning that Archbishop Khajag considered the reconsecration of Diyarbakir's St. Giragos Church as the best opportunity for members of the American-Armenian community, including benefactors, to become acquainted with histor-



The main Entrance of St. Giragos Church

ical Armenia. According to the itinerary, the journey would begin in Diyarbakir, continue on to Holy Cross Church of Akhtamar and end with visits to Armenian institutions in Istanbul. This pilgrimage would surely be educational for all, some of whom belong to the second and third generations in this community. A few of them perhaps don't even speak Armenian yet they had already signed up to go on the pilgrimage.

On May 14, when Archbishop Aram Ateshian, deputy patriarch of Turkey, had visited New Jersey and presented the plan for the reopening of St. Giragos Church to the natives and descendants of natives of Dikranagerd at St. Leon Church, perhaps I too, like most of those present, hadn't been able to grasp the real significance of the reconstruction of that city's large church. However, like the 500 Dikranagerdtsis assembled there, I remained interested. They had come with a deep love for their homeland and wanted to contribute their share toward the rebuilding of St. Giragos Church, where many of them had been baptized and gotten married. Although some were Turkish speaking, nevertheless it was the call of the Armenian soil that had brought them that evening, to spiritually reconnect with those traditions.

## On the Way to Istanbul

On Thursday evening, October 20, the pilgrims from the New York metropolitan area were gathered at Kennedy Airport. Archbishop Khajag, Dr. Raffy and Shoghag Hovanessian (vice chairman of the Diocesan Council), Randy Sapah-Gulian (chairman of Fund for Armenian Relief), Michael and Marie Haratunian, Hratch Toufayan (national benefactor), Hirant and Ruby Gulian, and I, as well as Dr. Garo Garibian and Hovhannes Hash from Philadelphia, were ready for depar-



## SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

ture to Istanbul.

The following morning, we got settled in the Grand Oztanik Hotel not far from Taksim Square, where the other members of the group had previously arrived: Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Diocesan Legate in Washington, DC, and former president of the National Council of Churches; Oscar Tatosian from Chicago; benefactors Kevork Atinikian and Nishan and his wife Margrit Atinikian from Boston; Rafi Bedrosyan from Toronto; benefactor Rouben Terzian from Malibu, Calif.; Sandra Shahinian Leitner from New Jersey; attorney Lisa Esayan and Dr. Ohannes Koroglyan from Chicago; Hagop, Zaven and Sahag Uzatmacyan brothers from New Jersey; and Ararat Hacet from Wisconsin.

Very Rev. Haigazoun Najarian (Armenian Primate of Central Europe) of Vienna and Papken Megerian of Philadelphia (treasurer of the Diocesan Council) were scheduled to join our group in Diyarbakir.

I knew some individuals personally, others by name only, while a few were complete strangers, yet for an entire week the members of the group would share impressions and exciting moments together – all in all, the whole experience occasioned by this pilgrimage. However, strangely enough, from the very first minute, it seemed that owing to a gift from Providence, a warm relationship was created among the members of the group, as if they were old friends. Whether born in Chicago, Aleppo, Beirut, Cairo, New York, Diyarbakir, Istanbul, Siirt or Arapkir, they all had one thing in common: they represented the true picture of the Armenian people.

It was difficult for us to believe only a decade ago that it would have been impossible to organize such an official pilgrimage; to go to our fatherland – usurped Historical Armenia – and carry out the re-consecration of the church according to our national and Christian traditions; to be present and pray and then share a sacrificial meal with the people. The grace of God was mingled with the Armenian people's will.

The members of the group were free in the afternoon.



Billboard reads in Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian "Welcome"

Headed by Archbishop Khajag, the rest of the group visited Istanbul's famous Covered Market, whereas Hirant, Ruby and I went separately to visit the Armenian cemetery of Shishli, where our deceased patriarchs of Constantinople, intellectuals and other prominent members of the Constantinople Armenian community rest in peace. Hirant's twin brother, Yervant, is buried there. We visited the tombs of Patriarchs Malachia Ormanian and Shnork Kaloustian, the journalist Puzant Ketchian and others; we reflected at length in front of the tombstone of Hagop Martayian (Dilachar), which had newly been installed. At Mustafa Kemal's request, this Armenian, who was a linguist and a friend of doctor professor Hrachya Ajarian, had come to Turkey from Bulgaria in the early 1930s and engaged in ground-breaking study and research on the Turkish language until his death in 1979.

In the evening, we were the guests of

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian's cousin, Boghos Yilan (that evening, we christened him with the nickname Otsnetsi), who took us to the moorage in the town of Kuler on the shores of the Bosphorus, where Archbishop Ateshian and Vazken Baron, the Armenian deputy mayor of the district of Shishli with a population of two million, were to join us at the Balik restaurant. The *Bolsetsis* (residents of Istanbul) would say "Siro Seghan," we say dinner party, but that of the *Bolsetsis* is more intimate; ultimately it was love that had joined us and brought us under one roof.

According to the Armenian customs, heartfelt words and greetings were expressed. Welcoming remarks were made by Archbishop Khajag, who, being familiar with all present, also served unofficially as toastmaster. The first to speak was Archbishop Ateshian, who pointed out the importance of St. Giragos Church for the Kurdified and Islamicized Armenians living in those regions. He said that the Armenian Church should open its doors without hesitation to welcome the future generations, who will be baptized as Armenian Christians. He also announced that approximately 20 apostate Armenians had already returned to the house of their faith.

Then Nishan Atinikian gave a brief account of the sacred work that had already been started in 2001 through the ini-



Left to Right, Rouben Terzian, Dr. Raffy Hovanesian, Ararat Hacet, Hagop Vartivarian and Oscar Tatosian



Armenians from all over the world gathered for the first Devine Liturgy at St. Giragos Church.

tiative of Archbishops Mutafyan and Ateshian. Being the largest house of worship in the Middle East, this church has a critical significance in our national life. Like Archbishop Ateshian, the deputy patriarch of Istanbul, Atinikian was born in Diyarbakir and baptized in that church.

Vazken Baron, the most high-ranking political figure of the Istanbul-Armenian community, gave ample information about the origin of his name. He received this name from Archbishop Shahan Svajian, when he had been a student at the Holy Cross Seminary. His real name had been Jemil but being baptized with the name of the then-catholicos, Vazken I, gave new meaning to his life. Mr. Baron concluded his remarks by reciting an excerpt from the immortal poet Vahan Tekeyan's poem "The Armenian Church."

Others who spoke at the dinner were Kevork Atinikian, who underscored the Armenian people's spirit of patience; Archbishop Vicken, who extolled the virtues of the Shishli mayor, and Hratch Toufayan, who stressed the importance of this pilgrimage.

In my remarks, I said that St. Giragos will become a pilgrimage site not only for former residents of Dikranagerd but also for the Armenian people as a whole, to show our young generation that our sanctuaries on the Armenian plateau of Historical Armenia still appeal to us to return to the homeland and baptize our children there, as in Dikranagerd, so too in the Armenian churches of Sepastia, Ankara, Mersin, Malatia and Kayseri, thereby renewing their vow to pursue our great dream.

Dr. Raffy Hovanesian spoke from the heart, expressing feelings suitable for the occasion as he focused on the importance of this pilgrimage, as did Michael Haratunian, Lisa Esayan and Randy Sapah-Gulian.

### On to Dikranagerd

Early the next morning, Saturday, October 22, we took a flight to Diyarbakir that lasted an hour and a half. The members of the Parish Council of St. Giragos Church greeted us upon arrival. We were taken by bus to the Dedeman Hotel, where Papken Megerian, who had come by car from Armenia via Georgia, was already waiting for us. He had left his wife Anahid in Van for two days. We embraced. Thus, we four *ungers* with Ramgavar ideology were part of the group: Rouben Terzian, Papken Megerian, Oscar Tatosian and I.

We didn't have much time, as we were due at St. Giragos for the re-consecration ceremony three hours later. We did have the opportunity to wander about old Dikranagerd and the fortified city of Sour with its Armenian and Assyrian past. Undoubtedly this is the most scenic and memorable area of Diyarbakir. "The Armenians are coming..." was the impression gotten by the curious onlookers standing on the sidewalks and in front of the houses. More accurately, they were returning.



## SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT



On the shores of the Bosphorus, the pilgrims pose with Istanbul Mayor Dr. Kadir Topbas in the center, standing

Perhaps the grandfathers and grandmothers of many of those Kurdish children surrounding us had been Armenians. Language wasn't important there; it was the warm Armenian feeling that enveloped us every step of the way. Who will be that blessed fool who will go and collect those scattered Armenians, then bring them back to the fold of our people? I wonder, who will be the one within the confines of St. Giragos Church to organize that retrieval and to open an Armenian school where the history of their forefather, Tigranes the Great, the conquering Armenian king, will be taught.

Who?

The large announcements about the re-consecration of St. Giragos Church, written in three languages with the words "Welcome to your home," were visible on the city's bustling boulevards and intersections, as well as its squares. As it was, those huge banners were facing us every step of the way. Our dear Dikranagerdtsis were experiencing moments of exhilaration.

The *Dikranagerdtsis* have yet another Armenian Church in town, St. Sarkis, whose fate was similar to that of St. Giragos. The half-ruined church has the same architectural style as St. Giragos. All of us pilgrims also joined in saying the Lord's Prayer with Archbishop Khajag. We continued our fast pace to see a lot in a short period of time. We visited a *caravanseraï*, which had been a safe refuge for caravans coming from the four corners of the Ottoman Empire, but which had since been converted into a hotel. We also visited the mansion of an eminent Armenian, which the government is renovating and plans to turn into a museum.

### St. Giragos Again Becomes an Armenian Church

We were at St. Giragos Church by 4 p.m. Very strict security measures had been taken both along the roads leading to the church and in its confines. Everywhere in the city there were cards announcing this event in Armenian and Turkish but excitement and indifference, sometimes even inimical attitudes, were simultaneously noticeable. During those days, some people even heard cursing and ugly remarks in the streets.

Several thousand Armenians had come from all corners of the world. It was the call of the Dikranagerdtsis' soil that invited them to return to their historical lands. The Armenians having come from Syria and Lebanon, Armenia, Germany, Holland, Canada and Istanbul constituted an unprecedented scene. An assemblage of Armenians never before seen, added to which were the Kurdish-speaking faithful. Are they Armenian or not? Two young girls were standing near me in the church and praying with hands open. In answer to my question, they said that they were attending university in

Istanbul and that their mother had said that they were Armenian. They wish to return to the Armenian fold. They only know one prayer. It's their dream to learn the Armenian language.

All in all, it was too much to take in. As if the significance of the day, which already made one emotional, weren't enough, now there were these two lovely Armenian girls who wished to learn Armenian...I, for one, didn't want to be privy to that...when our young generation in America has every freedom and means to learn their mother language, yet it is those coming from the depths of Anatolia who wish to learn Armenian.

On the altar were: Archbishop Aram Ateshian, Archbishop Barsamian, Archbishop Aykazian, Bishop Shahan Sarkissian (Primate of the Diocese of Aleppo), Bishop Sahag Mashalian and Very Rev. Haigazoun Najarian, Pontifical Legate for Central Europe. Also present were the clergy of the Patriarchate of Istanbul: Very Rev. Tatoul Anoushian, Very Rev. Zakeos Ohanian and priests.

Scott Kilner, consul general of the United States; Darion Darnel, American consul in Adana; Osman Baydemir, mayor of Diyarbakir; Abdullah Demirbash, mayor of the Sour municipality in the Ichi region and Scott Avedisian, mayor of Warwick, RI, had taken their places inside the church.

The church's five altars were re-consecrated. The service, with the participation of the choir from the Vartanantz Church of Istanbul, was soul-stirring. The singing of the hymns was just right, as they can only be heard in the Armenian churches of Istanbul.

Fifty gilt crosses prepared in New York by Gulian, a New Jersey resident originally from Dikranagerd, were given to the church for placement on its columns.

At the end of the ceremony, Baydemir welcomed the visitors first in Armenian, then Kurdish, Turkish, English and Arabic. He said to the pilgrims, "Pari yegak tser dune" (Welcome to your home.) At that, all had goose bumps. Our home? "You are

not guests here, this is your home. Every time you come here, you will have come to your home. Today is a happy and exceptional day not only for you but for us all. We all know about the events of the past, and it is our wish that our children jointly celebrate the future successes." These statements by the Kurdish mayor were often interrupted with applause. Both inside and outside the church, the attendees expressed their gratitude for the firm statement that this city had truly been a historical Armenian center. (Mayor Baydemir is now facing a



From left, Randy Sapah-Gulian, Rouben Terzian, Raffi Hovannisian, Michael Haratunian and Hagop Vartivarian

possible 28 years in prison, for attending the funeral of a Kurdish freedom fighter who was killed by the Turkish army in early November)

Raffi Hovannisian, the first foreign minister of the Republic of Armenia and the chairman of the Heritage Party in that country, was a part of the group, also. My friend Shahan Khachatryan, art historian and former director of the Sarian Museum and State Museum of Art in Yerevan, was there too, as was Kapriel Chemberdji, the Damascus-Armenian national benefactor, along with other familiar Armenians.

Hereafter, St. Giragos Church will become a functioning church.


**SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT**


From left, Lisa Yessayan, Oscar Tatosian, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Archbishop Aram Ateshian, Archbishop Vicken Aykazian and Dr. Raffy Hovanessian

this historic event. We share the hope of optimism.” Archbishop Khajag’s words of tempered and cautious optimism also had political significance. He gave the St. Vartan medal to Baydemir and Municipal Chief Demirbash. Archbishop Ateshian, in turn, gave silver gifts to both mayors and the architect of the church’s renovation plan.

Mayor Baydemir concluded the day’s program by saying, “today is not just an opportunity for celebration but also a day to express our forgiveness for the regrettable incidents of the past. We wish for you to come again, not as tourists but as compatriots returning to your home. Here it is not tolerance that will be shown toward you but respect as well.”

Scheduled to take place in addition to the religious ceremonies was an artistic program at the initiative of the Anatolia Cultural Foundation. Bedri Ayseli, a singer from Istanbul originally from Dikranagerd, oudist Yervant from Los Angeles, Sahag Uztamacyan from New Jersey, and Gurgun Dabaghian from Armenia were to perform in a concert together. Local Kurds and Turks had also organized art and photo exhibits. However, because of the attacks made two days earlier by Kurds of northern Iraq, 24 Turkish soldiers were killed and national mourning was declared throughout Turkey. For this reason, unfortunately, the artistic programs were cancelled.

Jets from the Turkish Air Force frequently made flights in the vicinity of the airport.

The American officials approached our group and met each of us.

This was also an opportunity to become closely acquainted with the other pilgrims having come from various foreign countries. Among them, intellectuals, writers and artists constituted a noticeable presence.

### Sad History of St. Giragos Church

According to the inscription at the entrance of the church, St. Giragos was founded in 1376. The first mention of St. Giragos Church is contained in the volume titled *Ughekrutian* [Travel Accounts] of the Armenian traveler Simeon Lehatsi (Simeon of Poland, 1584-1637), which was written during the years 1619-1625 in the city of Lvov, Ukraine. According to Simeon of Poland, after seizing Dikranagerd in 1515, the Ottomans converted the city’s St. Theodoros Cathedral to a mosque in 1515-1518, naming it Kurshunlu Cami. Other churches too were converted to mosques. After St. Theodoros was converted to a mosque, the Armenians built the Armenian St. Giragos Church on the grounds of the cemetery having belonged to the church. However, the actual year of the construction is not known precisely. The church was renovated in 1722 and expanded in 1729 during the reign of Hovhannes Golod of Paghish as patriarch (1715-1741). St. Sarkis Church and St. Hagop Chapel were located within the church complex.

In 1881, the church was damaged by fire and once again was renovated. In 1913, lightning struck the onion-shaped dome and belfry. As a result of this, a new belfry was built in the same year in Gothic style at a height of 29 meters (95 feet); a bell made by the famous Zildjians and a golden cross were installed in it. During World War I, St. Giragos Church was used by the Germans as an arsenal, and after the war it served as a warehouse. In 1960, the church was returned to the Armenians of Dikranagerd, but it remained in a neglected state for years, owing to insufficient financial means.

After the 1915 Genocide, the Armenians of Dikranagerd continued their ecclesiastical life by remaining around St. Giragos. Their emigration from the city began in 1950, such that by 1990 the city was already emptied of its Armenian inhabitants, and the church’s roof had collapsed.

In 2008, new laws permitted those living away from Dikranagerd to be elected as executives of St. Giragos Church. Subsequently, the St. Giragos Foundation, was formed in Istanbul. After consulting with the Patriarchate, the executive committee of the fund decided to renovate the church in 1992 and not add it to the list of approximately 2,000 lost churches. The cost of the church’s rebuilding was \$2,400,000, while that of the belfry was \$250,000.

Commenting on the city’s history, Mayor Baydemir stated, “Diyarbakir is a multi-religious, multicultural and multilingual city. It belongs to the Christians as much as it belongs to the Muslims. At one time, the Armenians and Assyrians were our compatriots. Although today they are scattered all over the world. I hope that one day they will return to their home.”

The mayor also said, “If a mosque doesn’t have a minaret, it can’t be considered a mosque. So too, a church can’t become a complete religious structure without a cross. Therefore, St. Giragos’s dome will have its cross.”

At the time, when Vartkes Ergun Ayik, chairman of the St. Giragos Foundation, had contacted the municipality, he had obtained a promise of \$660,000 from them. The municipality also had promised to return to the church the lands and proper-

ties that had been seized from it, the income of which would cover the church’s current expenses.

The overwhelming majority of the city’s population – 90 percent – is Kurdish. The Kurdish language is no longer prohibited. A booklet about Dikranagerd has been published in Armenian, as well as a book of Armenian and Turkish for children.

This is the past and present of Dikranagerd-Diyarbakir, presented in brief.

### Mayor Honors Guests from Abroad

That same evening, a reception was given at Diyarbakir’s Park Restaurant in honor of the clergymen, guests and former residents of Dikranagerd who had come from abroad. Our diocese in America would label that evening as a “Day of Hope.”

Mayor Baydemir treated us with a banquet. Among the approximate 200 invited guests were the Consul General of the United States in Istanbul and the Consul in Adana.

Vartkes Ayik, chairman of the St. Giragos Foundation, welcomed the attendees, expressed his thanks to all those who had contributed financially toward the expenses of renovating the church, and invited Archbishop Khajag Barsamian to deliver his message.

Among other things, the archbishop said (in Turkish, which he hasn’t forgotten), “The success accomplished today has great significance for us all. Owing to general and joint efforts, we have every hope that today will be a day of hope, most of all a day to look to the future with greater optimism. As pilgrims from America, we are fortunate to have participated in

### Inaugural Divine Liturgy

On Sunday morning, October 23, the Divine liturgy was offered in the re-consecrated St. Giragos Church; subsequently, Archbishop Ateshian gave the sermon. The Komitas mass was superbly sung by the members of the choir of Saints Vartanants Church in the Ferekoy section of Istanbul, conducted by Adroushan Haladjian. Kevork Atinjian of Boston joined them as a guest member of the choir. The singing of the choir resounded from the church’s newly-built arches. The organ was played by Lucy Kahvejioglu, a singer in the choir with a beautiful voice. Also present next to the Armenian clergymen were the bishop of the Assyrian Orthodox Church of Abiden, Bishop Melki Yurek, the representative of the Greek Patriarch, and the two mayors.

It is worth noting that some Kurds and Turks had come from Ourfa, Adana, Merdin and various provinces of Turkey to honor the memory of their apostate forefathers.

Archbishop Ateshian preached, first in Armenian, then in Turkish. At the end, he offered good wishes in Kurdish, which were received with applause. He stated that he would have been happier that day, if the patriarch, Archbishop Mesrob Mutafyan, had been present too with his flock. He expressed thanks to the Patriarchate’s clerics and the clergymen having come from abroad, as well as the benefactors and the vestrymen having supervised the renovations. He evoked the memory of the monks and priests having served in this church over the centuries.

Subsequently, a pectoral cross was given by Archbishop Aram to Avedis Tabashian, the priest of Iskenderun and the vil-



Near St. Sarkis Church in Dikranagerd, which has yet to be renovated



## SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT



During the Divine Liturgy

lage of Vakif. Then a general confession was performed by Bishop Shahan, followed by Holy Communion, which was received by numerous pilgrims.

Among those present were the well-known Turkish intellectuals Osman Koker, Osman Kavala and Ragip Zarakolu, Deputy Leyla Zana and others. A group of 47 individuals, headed by Aragats Akoyian, National Assembly deputy, and including Raffi Hovannisian as well as Tigran Harutiunian, director of the Noyan Tapan news agency, had come from Armenia.

An exhibit titled "Armenians of Old Dikranagerd," prepared by Osman Koker in Armenian, Turkish and English, was on display along the exterior walls of the church.

Hustle and bustle prevailed in the church garden. There was a crowd of some four thousand Armenians...this church had never had so many Armenians and will probably not have such



Kevork Atiniazian of Boston with Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbas

a large number again. Television reporters and radio correspondents were everywhere.

In the afternoon of the same day, the *Trnpatsek* (Opening of the Doors) ceremony took place, led by Archpriest Krikor Damadian. Thus, the church's door was opened not only as a simple religious ceremony but also as a gesture of remembering and evoking the past. The chancels and altars were consecrated with canonical prayers, followed by vespers. Very Rev. Tatoul read the address of Egemen Bagis, chief negotiator with the European Union. Then the first baptism took place. A family formerly of Dikranagerd, which currently resides in Holland, had wished to baptize their 1-year-old daughter. Damadian performed the baptismal ceremony and Archbishop Ateshian the rite of confirmation. The child was named Rosalynn-Vartouhi.

### To Van and Back Again

The same day, Sunday, we were scheduled to go to Van, in order to visit Holy Cross Church of Akhtamar. We had already set out when Archbishop Barsamian received an unexpected phone call from the US Embassy with instructions for the group not to go to Van because of the earthquake. Thus, this visit was cancelled.

Perhaps I was sadder than the rest of the members of the

group. For me, the pilgrimage was incomplete. The birth of our political party had been in Van with the Armenians, and this year marked the 90th anniversary of the ADL. I had made a vow to go there, and now that vow was to be broken. I was extremely disappointed. However, we were more concerned



Clergy and guests during the Mass at St. Giragos Church

about Father Haigazoun and Papken Megerian who had already left for Van by car in the morning. After not receiving any word from them for a few days, we finally found out that they had safely crossed the Georgian border. On the way they had also visited the island of Akhtamar but the church had been closed because of the earthquake.

We pilgrims visited the only Armenian Church located in the region called Derek near Merdin. Named St. Kevork, it was built in the 17th century and renovated through the efforts of Patriarch Mutafyan. We met the church's caretaker, Jersalem – the town's only Armenian woman – and her daughter, little Nazeli. We bowed down in front of a 300-year-old Bible. A hymnal was also kept in the church. On this visit, we became acquainted with the Kurdish intellectual Eyub Guven, who is the author of a book titled *Kohar* [Jewel], the biography of a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. Here too, led by Archbishops Khajag and Vicken, we sang the Lord's Prayer. Still standing next to the church and surrounded by a flower garden is a building that once housed an Armenian College, where higher education was provided; even the French language and French literature were taught there. The school had

two sections: one for boys, the other for girls.

Outside, locals approached us and revealed that they were of Armenian descent. One by one, Archbishop Vicken questioned them in Turkish. Some of them went further and began to point out others, who also had Armenian blood. It was impossible not to be moved by this scene. All around us were Armenians and we were incapable of being helpful to them. Too bad!..

### Istanbul and the National Central School

On Monday morning, October 24, we returned to the same hotel in Istanbul, where we had stayed the first night. After having lunch at the famous Haji Baba restaurant on Istiklal Caddesi (Independence Avenue), part of the group headed for the Central School (Getronagan Lycée).

This visit was a must, especially for our American-born pilgrims to see under what conditions a 125-year-old school has been kept open, what important national figures have studied there and what educators have taught generation upon generation there. It was there that they would see the procession of our illustrious intellectuals.

The school's principal, Silva Kouyoumdjian, warmly greeted us in the teachers' room; with her were some of the Armenian-language teachers. The Primate, Archbishop Barsamian, introduced each member of our group, giving their qualifications. During the reception, the principal reflected considerably on the historical role played by the school, as well as presenting its current situation fraught with financial and other difficulties. Mrs. Kouyoumdjian, who has been the principal since 1980, proudly stated that the school's graduates don't have any difficulty in attending the universities of Istanbul. She has always had friendly ties with the deans of colleges and universities.

The school has 235 pupils and 42 teachers; there are 12 classrooms and three labs. The annual budget is \$1,157,000, while the tuition is \$4,923 per pupil. Of course, it is difficult for students to manage the payment of almost \$5,000 per year, therefore the Board of Trustees, chaired by Haroutiun Ebeoglu, relies on donations from charitable organizations and individual benefactors.

Adjoining the school is the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church of Galata, which was built in 1391. The present-day

Central School was erected in place of the All-Savior Elementary School in 1878, with Patriarch Nerses Varjabedian leading the fundraising campaign. The remains of Patriarch Golod, known for his great works, are buried in the church.

The school was expanded in 2008 by taking over a section of the adjacent Keoshe Khan. As it is, today's Central School has assumed a lovely and complete appearance through a combination of the old and new. The principal showed us the various departments of the school, after which we climbed up to the historic hall, where she emotionally recalled the national figures having appeared there and whose photographs are hanging appropriately on its walls until now.

Among the first students of the Central School were Arshag Chobanian and Papken Suni. The first principal was Minas Cheraz (1886-1888); Vahan Tekeyan held the post of principal there for three months in 1922. The immortal Komitas and Tigran Chouhajian taught there. After the Bank Ottoman incident of 1896, the school was in shambles for more than 10 years; the same thing happened in 1915-1917 too.

The sight of this "museum" can only produce a fusion of emotion and pride. Here is the piano that Komitas played on.



## SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT



In the Armenian Patriarchate with Archbishop Aram Ateshian

The school's music teacher elevates our spirits with a rendition of the Armenian song *Yerevan-Erebuni*. Meanwhile, the school has a centralized sound system, through which Armenian classical and popular music and songs are heard in all the rooms, so that Armenian song will forever remain in the students' subconsciousness.

When the time came for us to leave, the principal gave each of us booklets about various Armenian writers, which were printed on the occasion of the school's 125th anniversary.

The American-born members of our group were greatly impressed by the tremendous work done by this educational institution and were thankful that they had at least visited a living Armenian "sanctuary," a true "hearth" of the Armenian mind and soul.

We left the Central School with a feeling of pride.

In the evening, we had free time.

I had invited an old acquaintance from my youth, Gulen Aktash, an educator and currently vice president of Bogazici

University (Robert College), and his wife, Toni, who, like her father, was an instructor of history in the same university. On this occasion, I also invited Silva, the principal of Central School, with whom my acquaintance dates back a decade, and her husband Ardash, who is the director of Araz Publishing House. They too had been friends of my Turkish guest at the university.

I learned from Gulen that the Armenian studies courses begun recently in the university were being continued, attracting wide interest among students. I broached issues pertaining to Armenian life and, in particular, the new tolerant policy regarding minorities that had been adopted by Turkey's new government and the mutual trust engendered by it. Conversations also took place about the renovation of Armenian sanctuaries and, more recently, the return of properties.

My friends gave every reason for optimism.

The opportunity arose in the hotel to introduce Gulen Aktash to Archbishop Khajag Barsamian.

### Visit to Armenian Patriarchate

A full schedule awaited us on Tuesday, October 25. In the morning, we went by bus to the Armenian Patriarchate in Kumkapu (Kumkapi), where Archbishop Ateshian was waiting for us. Patriarch Mutafyan had undertaken the project of renovating the building and refurbishing it anew. Fortunately, he had completed that work just prior to his illness, rendering it into a first class institution. You'd think it was a small palace, made resplendent with works of Armenian art and tasteful furniture. After all, this was the national home that reflected the past glory of the Constantinople-Armenian community, where patriarchs Malachia Ormanian, Nerses Varjabedian and Megerdich Khrimian (Hairig), among others, had resided.

Archbishop Ateshian received us in the great assembly room, where he briefly presented the patriarchate's past and present. He also gave us a general account of today's Istanbul-Armenian community, with its churches, schools, Holy Savior National Hospital and cemeteries, as well as an overview of its cultural life. He gave assessments of families from Armenia having found refuge in Turkey – often sad and sometimes favorable. He also mentioned, on a sad note, that Armenian women sometimes engaged in unsuitable, immoral behavior. He gave explanations about the new laws regarding the education of the children of those families in Istanbul-Armenian schools.

He also discussed the overall condition of our sanctuaries on Turkish territory and the possibilities of the return of Kurdified Armenians to the Mother Church, giving satisfactory explanations.

He spoke too about the close relationship with the Mother See, as well as highlighting the necessity of preparing clergymen for the Istanbul-Armenian churches.

The See of Constantinople was established in the 10th century during the period of Byzantium's Latin kingdom. In the days following the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks (1453), Fatih Sultan Mehmed II of Bursa recognized Archbishop Hovagim (Joachim) as the patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire (1461). On the eve of World War I, the spiritual jurisdiction of the patriarchal see extended from Anatolia to Northern Africa, from Thrace to Europe, and subsequently to the newly established communities in America. Presently, the patriarchal see wields spiritual authority over Turkey and Crete.

While the renovations were going on, a section of the previous patriarchate was uncovered in the basement, which has been rendered into a beautiful museum. The museum is filled with Armenian icons, ecclesiastical garments, pectoral crosses, staffs and other religious objects. It is possible to have a museum with three times the space, considering the historical items placed there, about which the priest in charge gave ample explanations.



The Four ADL members Oscar Tatosian, Rouben Terzian, Papken Megerian and Hagop Vartivarian



## SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Archbishop Ateshian proceeded to escort us to the St. Asdvadzadzin (Holy Mother of God, or Holy Virgin Mary) Cathedral, the seat of the patriarchal see, and another church adjoining it, which also serves as a hall. The patriarchal see was transferred from Samatia to Kumkapu in 1641. Adjoining the church is the Bezdjian School, named after Haroutiun Amira Bezdjian, whose charitable acts greatly benefitted the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The group departed from the patriarchal complex with the best of impressions.

Patriarch Mesrob II Mutafyan, who hasn't been able to function normally for several years, lives in the detached house surrounded by the garden behind the patriarchate. For a moment, I imperceptibly left from the group and prayed for him by the garden.

### Guests of Istanbul Mayor

At 1 p.m., our group was invited to Feriye restaurant, one of the most luxurious restaurants on the shores of the Bosphorus, by Dr. Kadir Topbashi, mayor of Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul. Also present was Francis Ricciardone Jr., US ambassador in Turkey, who was appointed to this position on January 1 of this year. (The American ambassador left early so he didn't have the opportunity to speak.)

The guests were introduced, one by one. On behalf of his municipality, the mayor welcomed us and painted a rosy picture of the economic and social life of present-day Istanbul with its population of almost 15 million. Generally speaking, he found the brisk activity of investors in the financial and manufacturing realms promising insofar as Turkey's future is concerned. As it is, his country occupies the 20th place among the economically-advanced countries of the world.

He highlighted the multicultural aspect of Istanbul and stressed the place of the old Armenian community in this mosaic. Likewise, he praised the creative genius of the Armenian architects as manifested in the monumental structures of this city. He spoke about the benefits of the present-day government's open policy and considered the decision adopted by the state regarding tolerance of minorities to be very helpful.

Archbishop Barsamian also spoke and presented the mayor with a replica of the porcelain model of New York's St. Vartan Cathedral.

The mayor spoke at length in connection with the questions raised by our group, giving balanced and convincing answers.

When the lunch was over, we pilgrims received, as gifts, lavish albums titled "Istanbul - City of Reminiscences and Memories" and Nusret Choban's "Miniature Istanbul," as well as a porcelain model of old Istanbul.

Right after lunch, the well-known Turkish industrialist Ahmet Calik had wished to meet with us pilgrims from America in Kempinski Hotel. Also present at this meeting was Kaan Soyak, chairman of the Turkish Armenian Business



Abdullah Demirbash, mayor of the Sour municipality in the Ichi region surrounded by the pilgrims

Development Council, who knows the American-Armenian community well, in particular.

Calik called for joint economic cooperation, from which the Republic of Armenia would also benefit.

Of course, it wasn't possible to have a more intensive and serious conversation within those narrow time limits, but he held forth with the prospect of creating possibilities for mutual profitable economic cooperation.

### Meeting the Istanbul-Armenian Community

The Mavi Yeshil restaurant was the rendezvous of high-ranking clergymen, benefactors, executive committee members and intellectuals known in the Istanbul-Armenian community and holding positions of authority therein - more than 150 individuals. Also present were Archbishop Ateshian, national benefactors Bedros Shirinoglu, Haig Arslanian, Onnig Nalbandghazaroglu and others. A true "Siro Seghan."

Kind, heartfelt words were spoken by the clergymen at the

head table, as well as the guests. There was no shortage of expressions of thanks and gratitude.

The closeness between the members of our group and the Istanbul-Armenian nationals was palpable right from the beginning. It was as if there was a friendship of many years between us and the representatives of this long-established and venerable community.

Our pilgrimage ended thus, with a prevailing mood of contentment.

### Sweet Memories

Every evening, when the formal agenda came to an end, a few of us would keep the evening going by getting together in the ground-floor restaurant of the hotel or a nearby café and speak through the wee hours of the morning. Forming part of this group were Archbishop Vicken, Randy Sapah-Gulian, Oscar Tatosian, Rouben Terzian, Ararat Hacet and Ohannes Koroglyan. This time spent together was the happiest for us - to get to know one another and tell jokes, stories and memorable occurrences from our daily life in an intimate atmos-



The group in St. Kevork Church in Derek, Merdin



## SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

phere. The six days really passed too quickly. Each of us experienced the satisfaction of forming new friendships.

Some of us, as Dr. Raffy Hovnessian attested, had often gone on such pilgrimages but this one was truly different in nature, quality and the constitution of the group. If Archbishop Khajag decides to organize such a trip next year, I am certain that this group in its entirety will want to sign up for it.

With his sociable personality, Archbishop Vicken became everybody's friend. As much as we continued to show him respect, considering his position as clergyman, we were nevertheless surprised by his warmth and degree of communicativeness. The more we delved into conversation with him about ecumenical relations, the more we noticed that he is a true defender of the authority, stability and immovability of the Mother See. That, in turn, was enough for us to love him more.

I had always been on formal terms with Hratch (Harry) Toufayan. Despite his princely acts of charity, he is equally a model of humility. Throughout his life, he has continued to display the warmth of his native Cairo. He has a unique and quick wit, which he reveals to close friends. He always has a smile on his face, is in a good mood and is ready to help the nation and homeland.

Despite familial relations that go back years, whether with Dr. Raffy's parents or with Shoghag's, our beloved Sisag and Araxie Varjabedian, I saw during this trip the Hovnessians'

**"As for me, I continued my journey the next day, October 26, and headed for Beirut. I visited the cemetery of the Armenian Evangelical community of Furn El Chebbak, where Kersam Aharonian, the Traveller towards the Great Dream, is buried. I had promised him that I would visit Historical Armenia. However, that was left undone since we hadn't been able to go to Van because of the earthquake. However, once again I made a promise to him as I bowed in respect to his memory. "Unger Kersam, certainly, next year in Van."**

uncompromising devotion to our national values. Their service, first to the AGBU and now to the Eastern Diocese, became a boon to both institutions. Dr. Raffy, with his circumspect character, unbiased *modus operandi* and avoidance of extremes, brings a balance to our otherwise turbulent community life.

Despite our relationship of many years as ADL members, it was because of this pilgrimage that I got to know Rouben Terzian as a fellow Armenian, a believer in his ideology and a tactful individual, through his intricate and edifying stories,



The Istanbul Armenians with the pilgrims, after the farewell dinner

which sometimes required two days to complete.

Oscar Tatosian, the chairman of the Diocesan Council and a rug maker by profession, is without a doubt a beloved *unger*, with his broad range of interests, his knowledge of the minutia of the Diocese, his concern for our national cause, his love of culture and his ability to undertake new projects.

Randy Sapah-Gulian is always ready to party and have a



At the Getronagan Lycee with principal Silva Kouyoumdjian, seated, second from left, surrounded by Rouben Terzian, Archbishops Khajag Barsamian and Vicken Aykazian, Dr. Raffy Hovnessian, Hratch Toufayan; standing from left, Hagop Vartivarian, Lisa Yessayan, Michael Haratunian, Randy Sapah-Gulian, Shoghag Hovnessian and Hirant Gulian.

good time. Despite having a large company and extensive means, he is always modest. He has probably inherited that trait from his grandfather, the Hunchak leader Stepan Sapah-Gulian, or his mother, Armenine. He got involved in Armenian life through the Antranig Dance Ensemble and became the worthy successor to the late benefactor Kevork Hovnanian, as chairman of the Fund for the Armenian Relief. On the last evening of our trip, I shared a table with the Istanbul-Armenian intellectual Arsen Yarman, and the topic of conversation turned to the traditional political parties, during which he made it known to me that he had Hunchak leanings. When I said that Randy Sapah-Gulian was with us, he jumped up and went over to him, staying with him the remainder of the evening. I noticed that slowly but surely it was becoming my turn to make a toast.

Rafy Bedrosyan is a serious intellectual with a probing mind. He also has serious interests connected with our past. I invited him to contribute to our official organ, the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.

For me, Ararat Hacet became a true revelation with his broad interests in the social and political realms of Armenian national life. He spoke extensively about Turkish life, Istanbul and Armenian affairs.

It was a pleasure to become acquainted with Sandra and Lisa; it was only with them that we had the opportunity to speak English. They were ready to savor every aspect of the pilgrimage, paying close attention. Sandra is the daughter of George and Shake Shahinian from the parish of St. Thomas Church in Tenafly, NJ. She continues to seek new sources of revenue for

ing that the painting needed restoration and that it was a shame to keep an oil painting like that for such a long time. If Shoghag lived in Istanbul, that painting would have already been immediately restored, without a doubt.

Michael Haratunian is a respected personality within the Armenian community. As for his wife, Marie, those of us who knew French had all the opportunity to speak French with her. When we were going from Diyarbakir to Derek, Michael



The Mayor of Istanbul with Harry Toufayan

Haratunian experienced inner turmoil, realizing that Armenian deportees had walked along those roads. Meanwhile, I said, "Our *fedayees* too."

Of course, it wasn't possible to have such a well-organized pilgrimage as this, if it hadn't been for Hirant Gulian. Every step of the way, he took charge of the programs, menus and bus schedules, calmly and capably. As for his gracious wife, Ruby, she helped out immeasurably and was a pleasant fellow traveler. I had a lot of topics to discuss with this daughter of the renowned Bakalian family of Beirut, which pertained to the period of the repatriation to Armenia, her paternal uncle living in Lome (Togo, Africa), the Hovnanian School of New Jersey and other matters of national concern. Ruby became my inseparable companion on buses and in reception rooms. And, besides all this, her photographs will remain the permanent recorder of memories from the trip.

Finally, it remains for me to express thanks to the Primate, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian. With such group pilgrimages, it is difficult for a high-ranking clergyman to maintain the solemnity of his rank; however, as much as he was on an intimate basis with us, to the same extent he maintained his serious demeanor as he led this pilgrimage.

As for me, I continued my journey the next day, October 26, and headed for Beirut. I visited the cemetery of the Armenian Evangelical community of Furn El Chebbak, where Kersam Aharonian, the Traveller towards the Great Dream, is buried. I had promised him that I would visit Historical Armenia. However, that was left undone since we hadn't been able to go to Van because of the earthquake.

However, once again I made a promise to him as I bowed in respect to his memory. "Unger Kersam, certainly, next year in Van."

(Translated by Aris G. Sevag)


**New York**  
**METRO**

# Basketball Players Bring back Championship Experience

By Harlan Green-Taub

ITHACA, N.Y. (*The Ithacan*) – More than 10,000 spectators cheered as music blared and fireworks erupted above Republican Stadium here during the opening ceremonies of the fifth annual Pan-Armenian games on August 13. There to take it all in was junior guard Eric Halejian and junior forward Andrei Oztemel.

The games, played every three years in the former Soviet republic, featured athletes from Armenia or of Armenian descent. Halejian, whose great-grandparents are Armenian, start-

cultural pride behind the whole thing, and because it was at the end of the summer and I wanted to get ready for school, I wasn't sure about going," he said. "I talked it over with my dad, and he thought it would be a great idea because I don't know when else I would have an opportunity to go there."

Oztemel and Halejian flew to Los Angeles in July and only had limited practice with the team before flying over to Armenia for the games. Oztemel was one of only two new players added to the team before this year's games.

Upon arriving, Oztemel said he was curious and eager to explore the country.

"I expected a village with dirt roads and mud

accept Christianity as a religion, in the beginning of the fourth century, and features some of the oldest churches in the world, which Oztemel toured.

Oztemel also visited the Armenian Genocide Memorial while he was in the country. Both players were born in the United States, and Oztemel's grandfather escaped to Turkey, where he changed his last name to Oztemel during the Genocide before World War I, in which the Ottoman Empire massacred more than 1.5 million Armenians.

Oztemel said his visit conjured up a lot of emotions.

"It was a sad, eye-opening experience. Not even the United States recognizes the genocide happened because of their connection to Turkey, so going through there and seeing the pictures and graphic photos evoked a lot of anger and sadness," he said. "I was real ignorant about it before so it was pretty surreal going through there."

The purpose of the trip though was to win a gold medal, and in order to do so the team had to win seven games in eight days. Four teams in the competition featured players who were playing professionally in the Middle East and Europe, providing a unique challenge for the two college players.

Oztemel said he could tell which players were professional, from their appearance to simply the way they played the game.

"Their games were much more fundamentally sound," Oztemel said. "The style of play is much different over there, and the size was another issue we had to deal with."

In the final game against two-time defending champion Sochi, Oztemel was forced to guard several players who stood three or four inches taller. Bardakian said he could see Oztemel's growth as a player with his performance in the final, which Los Angeles wound up winning 93-86 in overtime.

"When Andrei grabbed 13 rebounds a few games ago, I said to myself his rebounding definitely improved having to go up against bigger and stronger players in Armenia," he said. "Also, with FIBA having the longer three-point line in International competition, without a doubt it's going to help prepare him to be a better shooter this year at Ithaca."

Bardakian said Halejian became a fan favorite because of his quick and flashy moves.

"When he would get the ball, people would look for him to do something creative off the dribble," Bardakian said.

Halejian and Oztemel also got to meet Armenian President Serge Sargsian, who handed them their gold medals following their championship victory. Oztemel said he took pride in representing his heritage by playing in front of

such a large crowd.

"That was such an amazing feeling," he said. "Being a team from Los Angeles, they treat you like you're celebrities, and we had a nice little following of fans out there."

Halejian and Oztemel said they gained plenty of knowledge that they planned to bring back to the Bombers this winter.

"Leadership and toughness are the two big ones," Halejian said. "We were down big in the final and were pretty discouraged. We knew we had to come together as a team and grind out a win."

Oztemel said he wants his South Hill squad teammates to feed off of his experience of winning at the international level.

"Just bringing together a team in a short period of time speaks in and of itself," he said. "We were able to get it done through adversity and I keep joking about it, but we were able to bring back a little championship savvy. We haven't had a championship here, but that's what we're working for."



From left, junior forward Andrei Oztemel and junior guard Eric Halejian pose in their uniforms with the gold medals they won at this summer's Pan-Armenian games. Oztemel and Halejian played for the Los Angeles-based team. (Michelé Boule/*The Ithacan*)

ed at point guard and Oztemel, whose father is Armenian, played forward for the Los Angeles-based team that went on to win the gold medal in men's basketball.

A family friend who had previously played in the games talked to Halejian about playing in Armenia in the 2009 games.

Carl Bardakian, head coach of the team, recruited Halejian to play point guard that year.

Upon enrolling at the college in the fall, Halejian found out Oztemel was Armenian as well and started recruiting him to play for the team.

Oztemel said he was skeptical about playing overseas at first, but eventually came around to the idea after talking with his father.

"Initially I didn't really understand the whole

huts but, it's completely different," he said. "The capital of Yerevan where we stayed was really built up and affluent. The second we got there I felt an immediate sense of culture."

Halejian had been to the country before, but said he didn't realize the difference in culture until he stepped off the airplane during his first visit.

"When we landed at the airport, there's all these people waiting to pick up family and friends, and it kind of hits you then that everyone looks a little different and speaks a different language," he said.

Though Halejian and Oztemel enjoyed success on the court, it was their time off the court that truly impacted them.

Armenia was the first country in the world to

## Dr. Arman Grigoryan Appointed Nikit and Eleanora Ordjanian Visiting Professor at Columbia for Spring

NEW YORK – Dr. Arman Grigoryan has been appointed the Nikit and Eleanora Ordjanian Visiting Professor of Armenian Studies at Columbia University for the spring 2012 semester, when he will teach a course, titled "Politics of Post-Soviet Armenia."

The course will examine the opposing views on some of the most central events and issues that have dominated the conversation in and about modern Armenia while attempting to cover topics on modern theories and debates in the social sciences about ethnic conflict, nationalism, democracy, development, etc.

Grigoryan received his PhD in political science from Columbia University in 2008, where he defended his dissertation on the role of third parties in state-minority conflicts. He is currently a visiting professor of international relations at Lehigh University and is working on a book which examines the causes of increased probability of mass violence against minorities during interstate wars. He has published articles in the *International Studies Quarterly* and *Ethnopolitics*.

The visiting professorship program is made possible by an endowment established in 1998 by the late Dr. Nikit and Eleanora Ordjanian. Previous visiting professors have included Dr. Vardan Azatyan, Dr. Levon Abrahamian, Dr. Melissa Bilal, Prof. George Bournoutian, Dr. Seta Dadoyan, Dr. Helen Evans, Prof. Roberta Ervine, Dr. Rachel Goshgarian, Prof. Robert Hewsen, Prof. Armen Marsoobian, Dr. Ara Sarafian and Prof. Khachig Tololyan.

The visiting professorship is one of several programs of the Armenian Center at Columbia, which raised the initial funds to establish a chair in Armenian Studies at Columbia in 1979 and which continues to provide funds for scholarships, library acquisitions, academic publications, lectures, conferences and symposia.

Registration for this course begins January 10. The course is open to auditors as well as to matriculating students. Classes will be held on Thursdays from 6:10-8 p.m., starting the week of January 17.

Registration may be done online at [www.ce.columbia.edu/auditing](http://www.ce.columbia.edu/auditing).

## St. Nersess Seminary Launches Annual Appeal

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. – "We look to you, our long-time friends, to support this year's direct appeal campaign, which serves to not only sustain, but also allows us to further develop our beloved St. Nersess Armenian Seminary," encouraged Very Rev. Daniel Findikyan, seminary dean and professor of liturgical studies.

Over the past five decades, the seminary has served the Armenian Church and people in a variety of ways, including educating future priests and lay leaders; offering continuing education programs to currently ordained priests; expanding upon online liturgical resources available to the public and rooting young people more deeply into the life of the church.

"St. Nersess has a proud history of providing the Armenian Church in America with invaluable resources and will continue to do so in the years to come," affirmed Findikyan, "However, we need your assistance."

"The seminary has made progress in managing costs, though the long-term financial model still needs some improvement," said Stephen Mekenian. The Board of Directors is working towards this. One option being researched is



Three new seminarians (from left) Eric Vozzy, Dn. Christopher Sheklian and Saro Kalayjian, worship in the Seminary chapel alongside Dean Fr. Daniel Findikyan.

the possible relocation of St. Nersess. "The current facility in New Rochelle has served us well, but it is now time to consider making a move to a property that will be more functional and allow us to expand our work while having a more solid fiscal foundation," explained the enthusiastic treasurer.

"Until that objective is realized, a vast major-

ity of our funding comes directly from donations by the community. Therefore, I encourage you and especially those of my generation whose lives have been impacted by St. Nersess, to contribute towards this year's annual appeal campaign," continued Mekenian, an actuarial consultant from Pleasantville.

The St. Nersess Board of Directors hopes to surpass last year's record-breaking annual appeal and also to secure a wider support base. To achieve these goals, they are asking current supporters to help spread the word about the seminary by reaching out to friends and family, encouraging them to make a donation towards this effort.

"Our ability to effectively educate our future priests and to inspire our young people for the next 50 years depends upon friends like you," said Mekenian.

To help the seminary, tax-deductible contributions may be sent to St. Nersess Armenian Seminary at 150 Stratton Road, New Rochelle, NY 10804 with "2011 Appeal" marked in the memo; or make a secure online donation at [www.stnersess.edu/support](http://www.stnersess.edu/support).

# Arts & Living

## Haig Ellian's Talk Show Wins Awards

WASHINGTON – Maryland lawyer Haig Ellian produces and hosts a TV talk show, "Focus with Haig Ellian," that has run for 21 consecutive years on Channel 21, MCM media TV.

At the annual awards dinner, the show won two Monty awards and one honorable mention for outstanding show of the year. One of the Monty winning shows featured an interview with Dr. Meline Kevorkian, PhD, Ed now assistant provost at Nova University, in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

Kevorkian is the author of six books and is an authority on bullying. She is the daughter of Ara and Carol Kulhanjian of Ft. Lauderdale and the granddaughter of John and Mary Kulhanjian of Hye Hotel fame.

The other awards were for a show on tae kwondo and a show on the Philharmonic Orchestra of Maryland.

"Focus with Haig Ellian" has had many notable guests over the years including Peter Balakian, David Papkivian, a violin maker, for which the show won honorable mention in 2010, Helen Thomas, Rep. Chris Van Hollen, Sen. Barbara Mikulski and many others.

Ellian resides in Chevy Chase, Md., where he served as mayor for almost 10 years. He is a member of the Rotary and serves on the Board of the YMCA and the Chevy Chase Fire Department. He is married to the former Sue Rahanian of Providence, RI and they have one son, Levon, who is in law enforcement.

Ellian was a one-time contributor to the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.

He is a retired lawyer who served in the federal government as an appeals officer, later renamed administrative judge. He has also been a reporter for the *Miami Herald* and an aide to Rep. Robert Nix, Sen. Vance Hartke and a campaign aide to Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

Ellian was in a private law practice for the past 25 years after retirement from the federal government with offices in Bethesda and Ocean City.

## Richard Hagopian Performs at Hye Pointe Holiday Kef

BRADFORD, Mass. – The Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe Choir hosted a Holiday Kef Dance on November 19 at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, Inn & Conference Center. Music for the event was provided by the guest



Richard Hagopian

vocalist-oudist Richard Hagopian and the Kef Time Ensemble with Jason Naroian on dumbeg and vocals, Mal Barsamian on clarinet and saxophone, Bruce

Girgajian on guitar and Paul Mooradian on tambourine.

Middle Eastern mezza was served throughout the evening. The event also had numerous raffles that included holiday cheer prizes appropriate for the occasion. The Hye Pointe Choir Holiday Kef drew attendees from the Merrimack Valley, Boston area, Metro West, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Canada and those who accompanied Hagopian from California.

For those of you who attended the Kef or missed the festivities, it can be viewed on YouTube, titled "Hye Pointe Richard Hagopian Choir Dance 11-19-11."

For further information on the Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe, visit [www.hyepointechurch.org](http://www.hyepointechurch.org). The church mailing address is: P O Box 8069, Ward Hill, MA 01835.

– Robert Serabian



Archbishop Hovnan Derderian addresses delegates at the recent Choir Assembly; the Primate is flanked by assembly officers, seated from left, Secretary Debbie Derderian, Assembly Chair Deacon Allan Jendian, Assembly Vice Chair Deacon Sarkis Mesrobian and Central Council Chair Lucy Tashjian.

## Church Choirs of the Western Diocese Assemble at St. Sarkis Armenian Church of Santa Clarita

BURBANK, Calif. – The ninth Annual Assembly of the Association of Armenian Church Choirs of the Western Diocese (AACCWD) convened on Saturday, November 12 in the sanctuary of St. Sarkis Armenian Church of Santa Clarita, presided by Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western

By Deacon Allan Y. Jendian

Diocese. St. Sarkis, consecrated on December 20, 2009, is one of the newest parishes in the Diocese.

After welcoming the delegates, Assembly Chairman Deacon Allan Yeghia Jendian, invited Archpriest Fr. Nareg Matarian, Diocesan musical director, to offer the opening prayer. The delegates from 12 parishes sang *Vork Zartarestseen*, led by Deacon Stepan Gozumian, with Ben Krikorian accompanying on the organ.

The host pastor, Fr. Nerses Hayrapetyan, welcomed the clergy and delegates to St. Sarkis Parish and offered a spiritual message based on a reading from Psalm 113.

Jendian individually welcomed the Diocesan clergy in attendance: Primate Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Archpriest Moushegh Tashjian, Archpriest Hovsep Hagopian, Archpriest Nareg Matarian, Archpriest Yeghia Hairabedian and Archpriest Shnorhik Demirjian. He extended a special welcome to Fr. Haroutioun Tachejian, the newly-appointed pastor of St. James of Los Angeles, to his first choir assembly and acknowledged and thanked Hayrapetyan and his parish for hosting the assembly. The Assembly officers: Deacon Dr. Sarkis Mesrobian, vice chair; Debbie Derderian, secretary, and Choir Central Council Chairwoman, Lucy Tashjian, were then introduced.

The assembly continued with the presentation of administrative and financial reports by Matarian, Tashjian and treasurer Manik Manukian. Tashjian shared a relevant message concerning the purpose and mission of the AACCWD: to promote the sacred music of the Armenian Church.

Deviating from the business portion of the Assembly, Christian Education Director of the Diocese Mashdots Jobanian presented an informative lecture on "Healing through Badarak."

Prior to elections, Jendian thanked the outgoing Choir Central Council members, Marian Derderian, secretary; Manik Manukyan, treasurer and Vazken Azizian, advisor; and the remaining members, Tashjian, Deacon Stepan Gozumian, Deacon Hrant Rakijian and Hrair Yeghyaian for their efforts throughout the year.

The newly-elected members of the Choir Central Council are: Deacon Ari Demiral, Alice Kalustian and Alenoush Yeghnazar. Assembly officers elected are: Mesrobian, chair; Jendian, vice chair, and Debbie Derderian and Vazken Azizian, English and Armenian secretaries, respectively.

The Primate offered the closing prayer prior to lunch and referred to his recent trip to the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, emphasizing that the purpose of the Assembly was to revitalize the traditions of the Church. This would include learning new chants and hymns.

The archbishop acknowledged the efforts and dedication of Jendian, Deacon Ari Demiral, Fr. Nerses Hayrapetyan, Lucy Tashjian, Marian Derderian, Ben Krikorian, Manik Manukian, Elise Tashjian, Gozumian and Matarian and presented each with the new Diocesan publication *Sharagan* by Archbishop Yeprem Tabakian. He also presented crosses to the committee members of St. Sarkis Ladies Society for hosting the luncheon.

In the afternoon, following lunch, four workshops were presented: "Zhamamoodnehr" by Matarian and Demiral; "Meghehtenehr" by Manukyan, prepared by Archpriest Arshag Khatchadourian; "Jashou Sharagannehr" by Elise Tashjian and "Taporee Sharagannehr" by Gozumian.

Participating delegates represented the following parishes: St. Leon Cathedral, Burbank; St. Mary, Costa Mesa; St. Gregory, Fowler; St. Paul, Fresno; St. Peter, Glendale; La Canada parish; LaVerne parish; St. James, Los Angeles; St. Sarkis, Newhall; St. Gregory, Pasadena; St. John Garabed, San Diego and St. Peter, Van Nuys.

## Letter for Turkey

By Elif Batuman

The flight from Istanbul to Kars took two hours. When the wheels touched ground and I turned on my cell phone, it was already ringing. The caller was my old friend Çagan, whose voice I hadn't heard in more than 10 years. He had a grant deadline and couldn't make it to the airport. A colleague of his would pick me up in a Land Cruiser. I would have no trouble recognizing it, because it was the only Land Cruiser in Kars.

The airport was tiny, antiquated. You felt you had traveled in time as well as space. In Orhan Pamuk's novel *Snow*, a writer called Ka returns to Turkey after 12 years in Frankfurt and, finding that his childhood home in Istanbul doesn't look decrepit enough, heads straight to Kars. Gazing at old teahouses and at shop windows full of spirit stoves, black rubber over shoes and a local cheese "things you never saw in Istanbul anymore" – he finally feels at home.

Kars is a city in suspended animation, a museum of its more prosperous past. In the 10th century, it was the capital of the Armenian Bagratuni Kingdom. Under the Ottomans, it became a military administrative center, a strategic fortress against the Russians, who besieged the city several times during the 19th century and held it from 1878 to 1918. Kars reverted to Turkey in 1920, and the Soviet-Turkish border – was set some 40 miles away. Kars was the major railway hub for trade with the Soviet Union and with post-Soviet Armenia – until 1993, when the Turkish government shut down the border, in a show of solidarity with Azerbaijan, which was at war with Azerbaijan. The war ended in 1994, but the border is still closed, leaving Kars one of the poorest and least developed regions in Turkey. The frozen atmosphere is heightened by the region's heavy snowfall, by the fact that *kar* is the Turkish word for "snow" (in early drafts, Pamuk titled his novel *Kars'ta Kar* or *Snow* in Kars), and by the fate of 90,000 Ottoman soldiers who froze to death in a nearby forest during an ill-conceived operation against the Russian Army in the First World War.

The natural history of Kars shares with its human history a certain tumultuous, elegiac quality. Kars is at the meeting point of two of the world's 34 biodiversity hot spots – regions where an unusually large number of species are threatened by unusually rapid habitat loss. Mt. Ararat – where, in Noah's time, the densest collection of biological variation once confronted the direst environmental peril – hulks symbolically in the distance. My friend Çagan, an ornithologist and conservation biologist, had specialized for years in tropical ecosystems, when he found himself drawn to Kars, sucked in by its melancholy ecology as surely as Pamuk was sucked in by those run-down teahouses and rubber galoshes.

I met Çagan in my first year of college, in the Turkish Student Association. He was the first Turkish monomaniac I met; Turkish culture doesn't produce a lot of them. As a small child, growing up in a suburb near the Istanbul airport,

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## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Letter for Turkey

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Çagan started bringing home animals – frogs, lizards, tortoises, hedgehogs, insects, anything he could catch. His mother, fearing nascent psychosis, took him to a child psychiatrist. Çagan later diagnosed his condition as what E. O. Wilson called “biophilia”: an “innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes.”

In high school, Çagan found a rare beetle specimen and donated it to the Harvard Entomology Collection. As an undergraduate, he later inventoried that very beetle. He spent the summer after his junior year counting birds in the jungle in Uganda, all alone except for a local guide. He was back at Harvard the next year, but nobody saw him – he was working really hard on his thesis. One night, I ran into him at a party. Tall, solidly built, ill-shaven, in all respects unbirdlike, he was holding a tiny plastic cup of red wine. He was jut back from a bird-watching contest. Contestants drove around the wilderness with a list of birds; the winner was whoever checked off the most species. You didn't have to take pictures of the birds.

When I asked what prevented people from cheating, Çagan stared at me with ravaged eyes: “Who would cheat at a bird-watching contest?”

Çagan and I got back in touch last December, when the Turkish paper *Radikal* named us both in an end-of-the-year feature: he was the scientist of the year, and I was the “person of letters.” I was so excited to see him there, wrangling with a large bird of prey. That was when I learned that Çagan – who was recently named a National Geographic Emerging Explorer, and who had spent his early career all over the globe, about as far from Turkey as he could get – now worked two months a year in Kars, running an NGO to save the world's least glamorous swamp birds. In recognition of his achievements and idealism, he was awarded a

Whitley Gold Award, England's highest honor for conservationists. Princess Anne presented him with the award and invited him to a reception in the garden of Buckingham Palace, where Çagan gave her a model of a ruddy shelduck.

Outside the airport, the sun was blazing. The only Land Cruiser in Kars pulled up at the curb. It bore the logo of Kuzey Doga, the NGO that Çagan setup in 2008 to protect regional biodiversity. The name is a play on the Turkish words *kuzeydogu* (northeast) and *doga* (nature). Behind the wheel was Kuzey Doga's science coordinator, Emrah, a young biologist whose beard, physique, and general demeanor put me in mind of Sancho Panza. Because Çagan was still working on his grant proposal, Emrah took me on a detour to the ancient Armenian city of Ani. In the 11th century, the city's population exceeded a 100,000, but by the 18th century Ani was completely deserted. The ruins were excavated at the turn of the 20th century by a famous Russian crackpot, who believed he had traced the origin of all non-Indo-European languages to Noah's son Japheth. Excavations were discontinued after the Russian Revolution and today you can't even reach Ani by bus.

We wandered among the ruins. In a 13th-century church, Emrah indicated a swallow's nest overhanging some frescoes of the life of Gregory the Illuminator, who converted Armenia to Christianity. In Ani's 11th-century cathedral, we took turns looking through Emrah's enormous binoculars, which resembled two giant beer steins, at a red-billed chough feeding its chicks. I thought of E. O. Wilson, who, on a tour of the walls of Jerusalem, had been interested primarily in the harvester ants.

Night falls early in eastern Turkey, and it was past dark when we reached the Kuzey Doga headquarters, in an apartment in the back streets of Kars. Heaps of shoes and plastic slippers lay at the foot of a scarred chifonier. In the living room, a documentary filmmaker and several volunteers were lounging on two long sofas, which were upholstered in that yellowish color peculiar to provincial sofas and stray dogs.

A huge obsolete television was tuned to a political debate, the volume turned inaudibly low. In the kitchen, two volunteers were fixing dinner. One handed me an onion to mince: “Cut both dorsal and ventral.”

“Dorsal and ventral?” the second volunteer repeated. “What are you talking like that, brother?”

“We want her to feel at home. ‘Dorsal’ and ‘ventral’ are English words, right?”

The volunteers were both veterinary students at Kafkas University. “Kafkas” is the Turkish word for “Caucasus,” and Kars is also home to Kafkas Medical Supplier, Kafkas News Agency, and the Kafkas warbler. It's easy to understand why Orhan Pamuk felt the spirit of Kafka in this city, which is dominated by a massive black medieval castle.

A door flew open at the end of a dark hallway and there was Çagan, well over six-feet-tall and perhaps a bit heavier than when I had seen him, wearing tracksuit pants and plastic slippers. You could tell at once that he was the animating principle of the place. Even the furniture seemed to pull itself together. His proposal, for a grant to improve the condition of life on earth, was a couple of thousand words over the limit, and due in a few hours. “I hate to put you to work right when you get here,” he said.

I followed him to his room and sat at the computer and we began consolidating paragraphs and eliminating passive constructions. Çagan was proposing to build Turkey's first transborder wildlife corridor. Running along the Kura River watershed, it would enable a brown bear someday to stroll clear from the Sarikamas Allahüekber Mountains, where the Ottoman soldiers froze to death, to the forests of Akhaltsikhe, in Georgia.

Sometime past midnight, I made my way to one of the surplus bunk beds that Çagan had appropriated from a government warehouse. Of the apartment's dormitory-style bedrooms, one was occupied by an injured baby long-eared owl; someone had rescued this perpetually astonished-looking creature from under a tree outside a municipal building. I found a spare bed in the other room. In the adjacent bunks, two visiting biologists were already fast asleep, stacked peacefully one on top of the other.

I found the city of Kars much as Pamuk described: “the old decrepit Russian buildings with stovepipes sticking out of every window, the 1,000-year-old Armenian church towering over the wood depots and electric generators.”

The Armenian church is now a mosque. So is the Alexandra Nevsky Cathedral, from which the gilded onion domes and spires have long been removed. Local detractors liken the cathedral to the stork in the tale of folk hero Nasreddin Hodja and the stork. Unable to fathom the stork, Nareddin Hodja takes a pair of scissors and cuts off its long beak and legs. “Now,” he says with pride, “you look like a bird.”

I climbed the hill to the Kars Castle: an ancient fortress of such forbidding and impregnable aspect that Pushkin, who visited the city during the Russian campaign of 1829, later dubbed his mother-in-law Mama Kars. Nearby stood the remains of a Monument to Humanity, commissioned in 2009 to commemorate Turkish-Armenian friendship. (More than a million Armenians were massacred in Turkey in 1915; Kars's Armenian community was driven out of the city when the Turks took over, in 1920.) This past January, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared the incomplete hundred-foot monument a “monstrosity,” a “weird thing” that was overshadowing the nearby mausoleum of the 10th-century Islamic mystic Hasan el-Harakani. A 200-ton machine was brought from Istanbul just to dismantle the Monument to Humanity. A sculptor who protested the dismantling got stabbed in the stomach.

The monument had originally consisted of two blocklike human figures, whose relatively small beveled heads resembled drawer knobs. The figures were intended – in an interesting iconographic choice for a friendship monument – to represent Cain and Abel, or Habil and Kabil, as they are known in the Koran, although the story of the demolition might equally have been called Abel and Cable, because the construction cable broke four times before Abel's 19-ton head could be lowered to the cargo truck. The removal process had begun more than a month earlier, but two pairs of rectan-

gular stone feet still stood proudly on the intact plinth.

In the Russian part of the city, long, straight avenues were lined by basalt houses with gingerbread trim and carved wooden doors. Several shops were dedicated to kasar, Kars's famous yellow sheep's-milk cheese, and to grayer, a local Gruyère. It was early June, and Turkey's general election was less than two weeks away. Campaign vans were blaring propaganda songs: Erdogan's Islamic conservative party was playing a dance track called *One More Time*; the Republican opposition countered with a folk ballad about how the people had been deceived. The nationalists had a rap about how nobody had enough money to buy an onion. Kurdish-language banners in the Kurdish colors promoted the pro-Kurdish candidate, a woman with the remarkable name Mülkiye Birtane (“Civil Only-One”).

I first read about Kars in Pushkin's Turkish travelogue, *Journey to Arzrum* (1836). I had been very excited to discover this book in college, back when I was a student of Russian literature and a member of the Turkish Student Association. Travel to Turkey had never been a particularly dear dream for Pushkin: he would have greatly preferred to see Paris, but he was barred for political reasons from travel to the West. In 1829, he accepted an invitation to visit the Russian encampment in the Caucasus, and although his motivation was apparently a simple desire to set foot, for once in his life, on foreign soil, some have suspected that he was plotting to escape for Russian gold.

Pushkin eagerly spurs his horse across the Turkish border – only to learn that the border has moved and he is still in Russia. At the military base in Kars, he enjoys a seemingly light-hearted reunion with some old school friends, many of whom had been banished to the Caucasus for political reasons. An undercurrent of political menace pursues him throughout his travels. When he visits an underground cottage near Kars, it blows up 15 minutes later after he leaves. He strikes up a conversation with some cart driver, and discovers that the cart contains the mutilated corpse of Alexander Griboyedov, author of the play “Woe from Wit,” who had been lynched in Tehran. In my favorite scene, a Turkish dignitary bows to Pushkin, saluting him as “brother to the dervish”; minutes later, a half-naked man turns up in a sheepskin cap, waving a cudgel and shouting at the top of his lungs. “I was told that this was my brother, a dervish,” Pushkin writes. “He was driven away by force.”

Pamuk's *Snow* shares certain thematic elements with Pushkin's *Journey*. Like Pushkin, Pamuk's hero is a poet and travels under police surveillance. He, too, narrowly avoids an explosion, meets old school friends and sees a mutilated corpse. A political figure salutes him as “a modern-day dervish.” As a modern-day dervish, he is beaten by the police and driven from town.

Pamuk, unlike Pushkin, was not a formative writer for me. For many years, I even thought that, despite being a writer of Turkish descent, I might live my whole life without reading any of his novels. My first inkling that this would not be possible came in 2008, when I was interviewed for the first time by a Turkish newspaper. The interview was about the band Vampire Weekend, but the reporters still required my opinions on Turkey's only Nobel. My answer appeared as a subhead, in all caps: “I WAS UNABLE TO FINISH PAMUK.”

In subsequent interviews, I was asked not only about Pamuk but about my inability to finish Pamuk. “You know, everyone always asks about this,” I told one journalist this spring. “Why don't we talk about something else?”

“I'll tell you why,” she said. “None of us can finish Pamuk, but you're the only one who says so openly.”

I never had set out to become a national spokesperson for the inability to finish Orhan Pamuk. So I went to the library and checked out Pamuk's most Russian book – the one he conceived as a “Dostoyevskian political novel” and set it in the shadow of the gigantic architectural emanation of Pushkin's mother-in-law.

*Snow* opens with Ka's arrival in Kars, where, pretending to be a journalist, he starts investigating a mysterious suicide epidemic among young girls. On hearing the girls' stories, Ka is most struck by the offbeat manner in which the suicides have taken place. One teenager, forced

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## Meet the Director

at

### New Jersey's Premier Screening

## Grandma's tattoos



*Grandma's Tattoos* is a personal film about what happened to many Armenian women during the genocide. It is a ghost story—with the ghosts of the tattooed women haunting us—and a mystery film, where many taboos are broken.

This riveting new film lifts the veil of thousands of forgotten women—survivors of the Armenian Genocide—who were forced into prostitution and tattooed to distinguish them from the locals. In 1919, just at the end of World War I, the Allied forces reclaimed 90,819 young girls and children who, during the war years, were forced to become prostitutes to survive, or had given birth to children after forced or arranged marriages or rape.

Following the screening there will be Q&A with Suzanne Khardalian. Ms. Khardalian is an independent filmmaker and writer. She studied journalism in Beirut and Paris and worked as a journalist in Paris. She also holds a master's degree in international law and diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. She has directed more than 20 films.

**Date:** Friday, December 9, 2011  
**Time:** 7:45 P.M.  
**Place:** St. Leon Armenian Church  
 Charles & Grace Pinajian Youth Center  
 12-61 Saddle River Road  
 Fair Lawn, NJ  
 201-791-2862

Jointly Sponsored By:  
 St. Leon Armenian Church  
 Armenian National Committee of NJ

The Knights of Vartan  
 Tekeyan Cultural Association

The Event is free and open to the public. A reception will follow the presentation.  
 This film is not appropriate for children.



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Letter for Turkey

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into an engagement with an elderly teahouse owner, got up from the dinner table to fetch dessert, went to her parents' bedroom and shot herself.

Pamuk didn't invent this epidemic. Beginning in the late '90s, a disproportionate number of women have killed themselves in Batman, a city a couple hundred miles south of Kars. Most were very young and many departed this world in just the offhand manner described by Pamuk. Some had been forced to marry against their will. Others — so-called “honor suicides” — were bullied into self-annihilation in order to cleanse their families' honor of stains they had incurred by, say, wearing jeans or holding hands with a boy. You couldn't always tell the honor suicides from the other suicides. On teen jumped out of a seventh-floor window after her father said her skirt was too tight. Many of the real-life “suicide girls” belonged to rural Kurdish families who had been displaced to Batman earlier in the decade, when the Turkish Army was practicing scorched-earth tactics against militant Kurdish separatists throughout southeastern Anatolia. Kurdish village girls, exposed to television for the first time, were said to have been driven to despair by the discovery of a world in which women studied in universities, drove cars and dated handsome men.

Interestingly, although the suicide girls in *Snow* initially seemed like a major plot element, they soon cede their importance to the “head-scarf” girls barred from school refusing to bare their heads. One head-scarf girl, threatened with expulsion, strangles herself with her head-scarf — neatly transforming the debate about suicide into a debate about head scarves. So successful is this transformation that — although Ka actually remarks toward the end of the book, “there was only one suicide who was involved in the head-scarf protest” — many reviewers misremember *Snow* as a book about “the suicides of a number of young girls forced by their schools to remove their headscarves” (Margaret Atwood), or “an epidemic of suicide by young girls thwarted in their desire to take the Muslim veil” (Christopher Hitchens). There is something unsettling about the replacement of the “suicide girls” by the “head-scarf girls” — the replacement of domestic drama by political spectacle, patriarchal repression by secularist repression, real suicides by fake suicides. There really are jeans suicides in Turkey, but I have heard of only one head-scarf suicide, attempted, unsuccessfully, by a 14-year-old girl in 2002, shortly after the publication of Pamuk's novel. “The Suicide in the Novel *Snow* Came True,” one paper said.

In 2008, the mayor of Batman tried to sue the producers of “The Dark Knight,” citing, among other complaints, his theory that the psychological effects of the superhero's success were contributing to his city's high rate of female suicides. Everyone made fun of this mayor, but I felt sorry for him. Was it because of my surname — because, I know, at least a little bit, what it's like to be confused with Batman? In any case, I had no trouble imagining how I would feel seeing one Batman raking in a billion dollars while my Batman had nothing.

Pamuk's novel reminded me, in some ways, of Çagan's life in Kars: a long sequence of political conversations, in a array of melancholy venues. On the first day we spent together, Çagan was meeting with the president of Kafkas University, to work out some kinks in the ornithology on the faculty, the Kafkas Ornithology Program is run by an entomologist. The final exam for the ornithology course, composed by the entomologist, had six questions. As Çagan recalls (though the entomologist denies it), one question was “Which parts of a bird are edible?”

I joined Çagan at several of his meetings. We drank tea with a provincial governor, with a giant mustached car-rental agent, and with the head of the Kafkas News Agency, who shared with us a piece of breaking news: the

Monument to Humanity was going to be replaced by a monument to Kars's sheep's-milk cheese. Later, we drank tea with numerous representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. A few hours after we had met a certain official for tea, that same official called Çagan and began berating him for not having stayed for tea on some other occasion, even that other occasion had been inconvenient for both parties. I could hear him clearly through Çagan's cell phone. “You've broken my heart!” he kept shouting.

Çagan and I later debated the purpose of this phone call, which had lasted several minutes and activated a tic in his eyelid. I thought that the official had really wanted to have tea, but Çagan said the whole thing was an ancient form of folk theater, a cultural relic of times when people had no access to drama.

“I should just put on an adult diaper and drink tea all day long,” Çagan reflected, rubbing his eye. “They'll be like, ‘That Çagan, he's a really good guy — the other day he had tea with us for five hours. Let's declare this a protected habitat.’”

In certain respects, the lives of birders resemble the lives of the saints: the early portents, the moments of revelation, the physical mortifications, the miraculous apparitions and violent ends. Çagan realized he was a birder at the age of 14, the moment he saw his first field guide. His father bought him a pair of Russian-made military binoculars; their extravagant weight caused him terrible neck pain, but he carried them around everywhere. While birding, Çagan has narrowly escaped being taken out by a Turkish military sniper and losing his legs to a lymphatic infection in Papua New Guinea. In Ethiopia, he was carjacked by Afar tribesmen wielding AK-47s, minutes before spotting two regal, three-foot-tall Arabian bustards. He once pursued a plain leaf warbler into the middle of a military operation against Kurdish terrorists. A nine-centimeter-long brown songbird with no distinctive features or markings, the plain leaf warbler looks almost exactly like the willow warbler, except the willow warbler is 11 centimeters long. Çagan helped discover seven “cryptic species” of butterflies: species visually identical to but genetically different from some other butterflies. Because he spends a lot of time hiding behind trees and rocks in politically-unstable countries, Çagan is often mistaken for a spy. He says that birding and spying aren't really all that different. Ian Fleming, both a secret agent and a bird-watcher, borrowed the name James Bond from the author of a manual called *Birds of the West Indies*.

Kuzey Doga runs two bird-banding stations: one at a Kars-area lake called Kuyucuk, the other in Aras village, close to Mt. Ararat. At Lake Kuyucuk, Çagan has documented more than 200 bird species. He successfully petitioned the Ministry of Environment and Forestry to declare the lake a protected wetland, built an island there for bird nesting, helped run seminars to educate local villagers in ecotourism and converted an abandoned teachers' dormitory into an ecotourist hotel — although, when we visited the village, we found the hostel boarded up and the windows broken. It was hard to get villagers to keep up the hotel, because they didn't especially need the money. They had government health care, and plenty of cows. In a pinch, they could always sell a cow for \$2,000 or \$3,000, and who needed more than that? The growth of village-based ecotourism was essentially being inhibited by a lack of consumerist mind-set. In their own way, of course, the villagers were just as acquisitive as anyone else. It was difficult to signpost ecologically important areas, because the minute you put up a sign large enough to be seen from a car someone might take it down and use it for roofing.

One day, Çagan took me to visit the Aras station, an hour's drive southeast of Kars, near the Armenian border. Merging onto the highway, we passed a flatbed truck carrying away the feet from the Monument to Humanity. These last remnants of Kabil and Habil were on their way to a government warehouse outside the city.

At the edge of a swamp about half an hour into our journey, Çagan pulled over, got out with his binoculars, and was soon deeply absorbed in the contemplation of waterfowl. He had been petitioning for years to have this area

declared a wetland; it's a breeding ground of the endangered white-headed duck, which has one of the longest penis-to-body ratios of all vertebrates. Its pliant, corkscrew-shaped penis is longer than its body, with a spiny base and brush-like tip. The first time Çagan observed one of these outgrowths, he thought the duck had been disemboweled.

A couple of hundred yards away from us were a handful of pink plaster houses: a settlement formed 30 years ago by refugees from a Kurdish village feud. Some small boys came out of the houses and stood a short distance away. Looking through the binoculars, Çagan reeled off the names of the duck species he could see: “Gadwall, mallard, garganey, pochard.” The children edged closer, gazing up into our faces. After several minutes, Çagan lowered his binoculars and engaged the boys in seemingly effortless conversation — about how their settlement managed its water supply and when their uncles hunted geese. I realized that although an obsession with birds can isolate you from people, a more intense obsession with birds can do exactly the opposite. Çagan seemed driven to talk to everyone he met. Like Don Quixote, he never had to cast about for a subject. He just had to tell everyone about their role in the big story.

“Only eat the geese you raise yourselves,” he told the boys. “Don't eat the wild ones. It's bad. It's a sin.”

“The wild ones taste better!” one boy declared.

“Well, now you know that's not true,” Çagan said. “They're tougher, they have less meat.” The boys seemed enraptured. They didn't want to let him go. Çagan promised to come back next week, bringing bird posters.

Farther along the road, we came upon some piles of gravel and lengths of blue PVC piping. I barely registered them at first, but they caused immediate, personal grief to Çagan. He parked the car and went over to two men sitting in an excavating tractor at a turn in the road. He wanted to know if they were getting EU funding. A few minutes later, he headed back, wearing a fixed smile. When he got in the driver's seat, a black expression fell over his face. The men were digging a channel, part of the national program of hydraulic development: Erdogan had recently vowed to build 2,000 new dams by the centenary of the republic, in 2023. Under existing guidelines, rivers could be diverted up to 90 percent and still be considered “environmentally intact.” The Minister of Environment and Forestry, who had once publicly declared, “My job is to build dams,” was not someone you could count on for oversight. “He keeps talking about water ‘running in vain,’” Çagan said. “By which he means rivers reaching the sea.”

Çagan was on edge, having stayed up till 6 a.m. several days running, revising an article about threats to Turkish biodiversity. The deadline was long past, but every time Çagan thought he was finished some new environmental outrage occurred and had to be incorporated. First, someone decided to build a cement factory in the habitat of a globally-threatened gazelle. Then a dam broke near a silver mine, flooding the closest town with arsenic-laced water. Meanwhile, Erdogan announced his intention to dig a 40-mile canal linking the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, destroying acres of forestland and transforming European Istanbul into an island.

“This is Africa!” Çagan fumed. “It's worse than Africa.” There was more environmental awareness in Africa, and it got more international funding, because who doesn't love lions, giraffes and elephants? “Look around,” he said. “Do you see any charismatic animals?” I looked around. I saw a brown bird sitting on a pile of rocks.

We drove on. Clouds cast huge shadows on rolling hills. We passed white yurts, beehives, an armored vehicle with a machine-gun turret. A shepherd was driving his flock across the road. Around dusk, we came in view of the border. Through the trees we glimpsed houses — Armenian houses. “It's obvious this used to be one community,” Çagan said. “Of course, in the Mesozoic Era this whole area was part of the Tethy's Sea.” The mountains here were exposed seabed. There might be dinosaur bones, but nobody could excavate them because of border politics.

Behind gathering clouds, the shape of Ararat began to emerge. Thunder boomed and echoed

around us. A pink flash at the horizon lit up the mountains. When Pushkin first saw Ararat, he had a vision of Noah's Ark poised at its peak and “the raven and the dove flying off, symbols of retribution and reconciliation.” The vision was consonant with Pushkin's over-all experience in the Caucasus: reconciliation may be flying out toward you on beautiful white wings, but retribution is never far behind.

The Aras bird-banding station was housed in a government-surplus trailer surrounded by swamp vegetation. Water swished and sucked around our tires. A girl in jeans and rubber galoshes ran out to meet us, beaming, her hair pulled back from her pale bright face. We followed her into the trailer. At a worktable, illuminated by a floodlight, sat a wiry, tanned young man with sunken eyes, long hair and a beard: this was Kuzey Doga's chief field officer, a Kurdish biologist named Sedat. Along the wall beside him hung a row of small white sacks, quivering and thrashing in gloom, making a soft, eerie sound against the wood paneling. Sedat opened one of the sacks and drew out a songbird, lightly grasping its neck between his index and middle fingers. Angling the bird head first into a small cardboard cone, he placed it on a scale. Around its twiglike ankle he fixed an aluminum band imprinted with letters and numbers, which he copied into a giant book.

It was 9 p.m., time for the nightly rounds of the bird-catching nets. Borrowing galoshes and a headlamp, I went out with Ayse, the bright-faced girl. In places, we waded through water, and in others the cool mud gripped our ankles. All around us, nameless birds and insects chirped, hooted and whirred, like parts of a giant machine. Groping in the mesh, Ayse plucked out a warbler. She put it in white cloth sack tied to her belt, to be measured, weighed and banded. All kinds of birds turned up in these nets: a barn swallow banded in Durban, a hawk from Tel Aviv University. Çagan had heard back about the first bird banded at Aras, a song thrush. A hunter in Cyprus had roasted and eaten it as an appetizer with raki.

We spent the night in the village and the next morning we headed toward the highlands near Mt. Ararat, where Çagan hoped to spot some high-altitude bird species undocumented in Turkey. Field work had been nearly impossible in this region for decades, because of Kurdish guerrillas operating from the caves. Some picnickers had recently been killed by one of their land mines. Birds, however, often flourish in geopolitical conflict zones. The demilitarized zone between North and South Korea is home to one of the world's rarest cranes.

As we drove down the shimmering highway, I noticed an elderly man walking along the side of the road, under the blazing sun, wearing a navy suit and tie.

“Globally endangered Egyptian vulture!” shouted Çagan slamming on the brakes. Glancing skyward, I caught a glimpse of something brown flapping away. The body of the Egyptian vulture is brown and off-white, but its face is bright yellow. “They get that color from eating s\*\*t, which is full of yellow carotenoid pigments,” Çagan explained. In males, the bright-yellow face is an indicator of fitness and virility, signaling a capacity to eat enormous quantities of s\*\*t without getting sick.

On behalf of the Egyptian vulture, as well as the region's other vulture species, Çagan had recently opened a “vulture restaurant” — a project uniquely illustrative of the human, biological and political complexity surrounding his work. A fund set up by Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, had donated \$5,000 to this restaurant, which in its pilot phase had served mostly dead dog. Emrah, Çagan's science coordinator, was charged with retrieving dog carcasses from the city dumps and depositing them in random locations around Aras, to see how the vultures reacted. The vultures reacted well. You bring the dead dog, it turns out, and the vulture takes care of the rest. The one problem was that a lot of the dogs in the dumps had been poisoned as part of a stray-dog reduction program. In fact, one study has suggested that, because dogs and vultures both eat carrion, a better way of getting rid of your stray dogs might simply be to nurture your vultures; in India, declining vulture populations once

*continued on next page*



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

## CALENDAR

## MASSACHUSETTS

**DECEMBER 11 — Christmas Holiday Concert: Erevan Choral Society and Orchestra**, 3 p.m., church sanctuary, Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston, 145 Brattle St., Cambridge. Conductor Konstantin Petrossian. For further info, contact the church office at office@htaac.org or (617) 354-0632.

**DECEMBER 31 — St. Gregory Armenian Apostolic Church of Merrimack presents its annual New Year's Gala**, Saturday, at 8:30 p.m. \$75 pp, Wyndham Hotel, Andover. Includes mezza and the midnight soujouk and eggs full breakfast, buffet and desserts. Music with Richard Berberian, Mal Barsamian, Bruce Gigarjian and Ron Tutunjian. For tickets, contact Christine Kourkounian at (508) 878-4199, Greg Minasian at (978) 470-3075 or the church office at (978) 685-5038.



**On January 21, at 8 p.m., the Armenian Missionary Association will present a concert by Grace Kelly, pictured here, with proceeds to benefit the Avedisian School. Tickets are \$35 and \$25 with student ID. For more info, visit [www.gracekelly.com](http://www.gracekelly.com)**

**JANUARY 21 — The Armenian Missionary Association presents jazz sensation Grace Kelly in concert.** Proceeds to benefit the Avedisian School. National Heritage Museum, Lexington. Tickets: \$35, \$20 with student ID. Cocktails, 6:30 p.m.; concert, 8 p.m. For more information, visit [www.gracekellymusic.com](http://www.gracekellymusic.com) or [www.amaa.org](http://www.amaa.org).

## NEW YORK

**DECEMBER 11 — Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs presents Shnorhali Choir.** Celebrating the 20th anniversary of Armenia's independence at 4 p.m., Madison Theater of Molloy College, 1000 Hempstead Ave., Rockville Centre. For info, (516) 678-5000, ext. 7715.

**MAY 19, 2012 — HMADS Gala Dinner Dance.** Details to follow, June 25. HMADS 30th Commencement Exercise at 8 p.m., Kalustyan Hall.

# Letter for Turkey

from previous page

contributed to a rabies epidemic. Viewed in this light, there was a certain cosmic justice in the prospect of Egyptian vultures eating the stray dogs — but not, of course, if the dogs were full of poison.

Thus began a phase of Emrah's life that might have been called "CSI: Dog Dump": did this dog die of natural causes, or was it poisoned? He started bribing the staff at dumps, a pack of cigarettes for every clean carcass. It was a good system, although Emrah inevitably began asking himself certain questions. Was it for this that he had completed his master's in biology? Furthermore, workers at the dumps clearly thought he was some kind of pervert. One of them once remarked that Emrah might not find that day's god suitable: "The thing is, this one is male."

The vulture restaurant now has its own plot of government land is supplied with free offal by a local butcher. Emrah no longer drives dead dogs around the countryside. But Çagan's stories never end simply; the consequences sprout consequences, each trailing its own inexplicable tendrils. Now there is the problem of how to keep dogs from eating the free offal intended for vultures. It turns out you need a fence with a two-foot concrete foundation — otherwise the dogs can dig under it.

"I never thought, as a Harvard-trained biologist, I would be calculating how many feet of concrete you need to put under a dog-proof fence," Çagan mused. He is trying to get \$30,000 from the government to pay for the fence.

The road grew narrower as it wound into the mountains, and the sun disappeared. Ararat periodically showed through the clouds to our left, a swirling black-and-white shoulder, suggestive of a giant hidden zebra. Oryx had lived here until the 15th century. Nutria were introduced by Russian furriers; known in Turkish as "water monkeys," they now bred only in the Edirne and Kars regions. People didn't know what they were, and killed them. You read about them in the news: "Giant Rat Found in Edirne." At 700 feet, we saw a shepherd helping a ewe give birth, and an empty armored personnel carrier. A corn bunting emitted its distinctive cry, which resembles jangling keys. I became fascinated by a green caterpillar that was inching along Çagan's leg. It raised its head, seeming to look around, then hurled itself forward in the

most exaggerated manner, as if making fun of someone.

Çagan pointed out a Kafkas warbler, which I had wanted to see because of its name. Çagan's favorite bird name was Caucasian black grouse: "I'm like, 'Make up your mind — are you Caucasian or are you black?'" Caucasian black grouse are beautiful jet-black birds with white armpits. In spring, they gather among rhododendron bushes, and the males dance. The women — Çagan called them "the women" — sit in the bushes, choose the best dancer and mate with them. I thought it sounded marvelous.

We came to a military checkpoint. Two soldiers approached the car. "Çagan Sekercioglu, docent doctor," Çagan said, thrusting his hand out the window. Torrential rain began pouring from the sky. Çagan explained the nature and purpose of our excursion. The soldiers shifted their weight and squinted in the rain.

"There's an operation in progress," one of them said finally. "We have me on the field, men in the mountains. We've received a communiqué of activity. We've seen images."

Although things here were far quieter than they had been six or seven years earlier, a small number of Kurdish guerillas were still said to be hiding out in these mountains.

"Can we drive through?" Çagan said. The soldiers didn't answer. "Will we encounter any annoyances?" he persisted.

"Do you mean land mines?" A clap of thunder sounded.

"We don't know anything about land mines."

Rain streamed down the faces of the soldiers, who made no move either to let us go or to make us turn back.

"You guys are wet by now — we've inconvenienced you," Çagan observed.

"It's no inconvenience. We're on duty. We often get wet."

"Well," Çagan said after a pause, "I guess we'll be heading along then." The soldiers nodded and returned to their barracks, and we drove through the checkpoint.

Çagan said that if there had been a real danger they would have made us turn back. But the higher we climbed the more nervous he seemed. He remembered a story about some Germans who had been kidnapped somewhere around here and held hostage for a week.

The rain stopped as abruptly as it had started. A blond Kurdish girl came walking along the road toward us. "Take it easy," Çagan called out the window. The girl evidently hadn't expected to be spoken to by unknown people in an unknown car, and the most dramatic expressions passed over her face — she looked aghast, terrified, surprised and then began to giggle. A bit further down the road, we waved at three surly children who were sit-

ting on top of a ruined wall. They waved back, suddenly wreathed in smiles. We waved at a little boy carrying a stick; he pointed the stick at Çagan like a gun and shot him. Of course, kids do things like that everywhere.

As we drove, Çagan occasionally called out the names of the songbirds he spotted — finches, warblers, wheatears — but for once his mind didn't seem to be on birds. The road grew narrower and wound around the flanks of mountains. On a hill above up appeared the silhouettes of two men with rifles. We stiffened. The light changed, and they became shepherds with staffs. One staff was a broken umbrella.

"There's probably two guys total in these whole mountains, and 200 soldiers hunting them down," Çagan said. "That's why it's called terrorism." He explained the biological concept of the "landscape fear," and talked about how a small number of predators could combine with certain features of the terrain to inhibit animals' behavior and mess up their eating. We came to a white van broken down at the side of the road. Two men were waving at us to stop. We didn't stop. We came to a settlement with a sign that said "Kolikent": Cardboard Box City. The rectangular gray plaster buildings did in fact resemble cardboard boxes. The road began to wind downhill. Soon we were back in the flatlands, jouncing along a narrow rutted road through a marsh, and we headed back to Aras.

Çagan and I stayed that night with a well-to-do farmer and his wife who lived near the field station. On learning that I was a writer, the wife gave me a volume of poetry written by her uncle during the end stages of his struggle with cancer. I opened it with some trepidation. The poems were about how interesting it is to be alive, about how you're never sure what nature is telling you, but it's definitely telling you something. There was a poem about the Aras River in spring, when the black stones tumble over like ghosts, and another about street vendors. The vendors shout, "There are tomatoes!" and "there are carrots!" They shout about the existence of many vegetables, and this annoys a woman in a late-model car.

I knew how to categorize these poems: they were eco-poetry. I had never heard of eco-poetry before last year, when I took up a post at an Istanbul university. As soon as I arrived on campus, I started hearing about closet poets: shadowy figures from all departments who had long been waiting for a writer with whom to discuss their work.

"What kind of poetry are we talking about?" I asked one professor.

"Speaking for myself," she said, in an urgent near-whisper, "my current tendency is toward eco-poetry."

I did some research, and learned that, according to one of its most quoted defini-

tions, eco-poetry tends to represent humans and nature as "a dynamic, interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems," in contrast to traditional nature poetry, in which nature is merely a kind of backdrop to human activity. In fact, the very idea of "nature" — implying something exterior to humanity and human culture — may be inimical to true ecological thinking, which presupposes the interconnectedness of all things. In the eco-poetry of the future, we may, in the words of one eco-theorist, "have lost nature, but gained ecology."

Lying on a sofa bed in Aras, I tried to imagine the landscape of ecology without nature. You wouldn't have to choose between the walls of Jerusalem and the harvester ants. Neither would be the backdrop, neither the subject. You wouldn't have to choose between the Turkish-Armenian border and the Tethys Sea — both would be part of the same story. I thought about Kars and about weather. It still snows in Kars, but not the way it used to — not ceaselessly, for weeks. In his Kars journal, Pamuk contemplates this loss, wondering what went wrong: "the ozone layer, the nearby Çildir dam, global warming?"

Meteorologically speaking, in any case, he has written "a historical novel": "Much like the bourgeois who used to trade with Russia, who used to skate on the frozen Kars River, travel by sleigh and stage plays at the theaters, the snow, too, has vanished."

Did the lack of Russian dry up the snow, or did the absence of snow drive away the Russians? Did the gilded church domes simply evaporate when there was no snow to weigh down? What would survive here — the Armenians or cheese? The raven or the dove? Would we ever again see the nine-centimeter bird that looks almost identical to the 11-centimeter bird or the seventh butterfly outwardly indistinguishable from the eighth, to which is not related?

Early the next morning, we stopped at the banding station before heading back to the city. Sedat was suffering from some allergic reaction — his skin was bright red. Nevertheless, he sat at the worktable, banding a great reed warbler. He looked like a figure in a stained-glass window.

"Do you want to hold it?" Sedat asked, holding the warbler toward me. When I took it in my hand, the bird turned its little head and bit my thumb, but it was such an ineffectual, weightless creature that I scarcely felt anything. It was like holding pure motion, pure life, in barely enough physical mass to keep it together. When I went outside and opened my head, there was a rapid beating and a gray blur and the bird was gone.

(Elif Batuman is a writer for the *New Yorker*. This story originally appeared in the magazine's October 24 issue.)



## COMMENTARY

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## COMMENTARY

## Placing our Bet on Putin

By Edmond Y. Azadian

Relations between Armenia and Russia are long and complex. Armenians have placed their bet on Russia, as a Christian nation, and most of the time, they have enjoyed positive results. Yet, there have been times, when some of the Russian leaders have not hesitated to formulate a more cynical policy regarding Armenia, stating that in essence, they need Armenia without Armenians.

Current Russian policy, albeit not verbalized, is no different. Armenia's northern ally has set up offices in Yerevan offering jobs, homes, travel expenses and citizenship to lure desperate families to Russia's Far East to populate depressed areas and to prevent a future takeover by Chinese or Muslim populations which are growing at alarming rates in Russia. Meanwhile, Armenia is being depopulated – ready for a further Russian bear hug.

Yet, Armenians intrinsically veer towards Russia. Even Eastern Armenia's first novelist, Khachatour Abovian, wrote in his novel in 1828, *Wounds of Armenia*, "Blessed be the moment when Russia set foot on our land."

Fiction apart, relations with Russia are a mixed bag.

My wife zealously redraws the map of Armenia and the rest of the Caucasus, swapping territories with the neighbors. She generously seizes land from Georgia and Azerbaijan for Armenia. One day, a visiting academic, historian and map specialist, Papken Haroutunian asked, "why do you make those territorial changes?" My wife answered, "in order to access the Russian territory and become next-door neighbors."

"Lady, we are better off loving Russia from a distance," he said.

The wise political adage could serve us well, when analyzing our relations with Russia.

Russian leaders have a very realistic, objective and profit-driven policy towards Armenia, perhaps with the exception of Boris Yeltsin, who still mixed sentimentalism to politics and valued friendships. Yet the Yeltsin era marked the decline of Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet system. The West encouraged Yeltsin, and especially President Bill Clinton built a personal relationship with the late Russian president who symbolized a decline of historic Russian power. Under Yeltsin, Russia's recovery had as much chance as Yeltsin's recovery from alcoholism.

That era is behind us. Enter Vladimir Putin – political realism has dawned again.

While the US spoils Georgia with generosity to make it a showcase for Western friendship for the former Soviet republics, Russia taxes Armenia by acquiring assets versus debt and statesmen in Armenia pride themselves that we are a reliable nation that pays its debts.

We delved into this historic perspective, to find out what Russian parliamentary elections on December 4 and presidential election next March could offer to Armenia.

Traditionally, Russian people respect authoritarian rule. They see the nation's power and greatness in its rulers, even if the rulers are not Russians; that is how a cabal of foreigners ruled Russia for 70 years under the guise of communism.

Indeed, Stalin was Georgian, Laurenti Beria was Megrel (from Georgia) Anastas Mikoyan (Armenian) and Lazar Kaganovich (Jewish), who ruled the empire along with some Russians.

Putin's strong-arm rule is a reflection of that political impulse.

In the last parliamentary elections, liberalism retreated in Russia as more authoritarian, hardline parties gained more seats in the Russian Duma. Especially significant was the advance of the communists, which marks nostalgia towards the "good old days" of monolithic Soviet power. Out of 110 million registered voters, 60 percent cast ballots, down from 64 percent four years ago. One-fifth of those voters favored the Communist party, which won 92 seats, versus 57 seats four years ago. Left-leaning Just Russia Party gained 64 seats, up from 38 and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's nationalist LDPR party netted 56 seats, up from 40.

Putin's United Russia Party lost 77 seats and ended up with 238, a slim majority in the 450-member lower chamber of parliament. United Russia, which got 49.5 percent of the votes, used to command a two-thirds majority in the Duma. However, Putin personally has no competitor. He may easily win 50 percent of votes to avoid a run-off election.

Putin, to console his followers, stated that 226 seats were enough to pass most legislation. However, should more votes become necessary, United Russia will depend on the communists or other leftist parties to form potential coalitions.

Putin, now 59, can rule Russia well into the 2020s, if his health permits, assuring a strong leader in the Kremlin.

"Putin has a very difficult choice," stated one of the radio commentators. "To survive politically, he needs to reform, but he can only reform if he gets rid of many vested interests in the ruling circles. To stay as he is, means the opposite of political survival."

Many voters, tired of the widespread corruption, refer to United Russia as the party of swindlers and crooks and resent the huge gap between the rich and the poor. Some analysts believe Putin's return to the presidency may mean economic stagnation, reminiscent of the Brezhnev era.

Armenia has also gotten the hint and the current ruling Republican Party there is trying to get rid of the uneducated oligarchs during the next parliamentary elections. Only the elections will prove how much the president and his party are beholden to those oligarchs. Armenia is also goaded by the example of neighboring Georgia, which was able to uproot corruption overnight and take the path of economic recovery.

At this time, some of the old political figures are being resurrected to replace the oligarchs. The appearance on TV screens of people like former presidential candidates Artashes Geghamian and Vasken Manukian cannot be coincidental. Also, former speaker of the Parliament Khosrov Harutunian is back on the scene.

Putin's re-election will not change Russia's relations with Armenia, nor impact the outcome of presidential election in Armenia. Some political pundits believed that Putin's special relations with Robert Kocharian may encourage the latter's comeback. But a recent panel of political analysts concluded that Russia may not have a preference among Armenia's presidential candidates, because, they hold the cynical view that no matter who is elected, they will do Russia's bidding.

As Putin emerges as Russia's leader, Armenia will follow Kremlin's drumbeat. However, with an authoritarian Putin at the helm, the Cold War may be revived and Armenia will be in a difficult position to implement its foreign policy of complementarity.

Yerevan has no choice but to place its bet on Putin.

## Phoenician Footprints all over Beirut

By Robert Fisk

I walked down a Phoenician street the other day, built under Persian rule.

A bit bumpy and uneven underfoot – like many a street in modern day Iranian and Lebanese cities – but this one happened to be about 2,600 years old. It ran down to a small harbour, lined by covered stone sewers and drainage ditches on each side, massive door lintels before private homes and a row of shops and warehouses and possibly a temple, five streets and 18 buildings over an area of 3000 square miles.

I should say at once that this street constructed under Persian occupation is scarcely two miles from my home on the Beirut seafloor, one of the great excavations which the rebuilding of the post-civil war city opened up for future generations, layer after layer of Paleolithic, Phoenician, Greek, Roman and Ottoman Beirut. The place was originally known as "byrt" – which possibly means cistern or well, according to researcher Josette Elayi – then it became Berytos in Greek, Berytus in Latin and now, of course, Beirut.

The names are sandwiched together like the layers of streets. This street even yielded up terracotta figures of a woman with outstretched arms, probably the deity Ashtart.

And, true to so much of Lebanese history, Beirut was, in effect, under occupation. In the first millennium BC (875-332 BC), all the cities of Phoenicia were under first Assyrian and then Babylonian and then Persian control. Beirut belonged to Sidon – it always seems to belong to someone else – which is now a scruffy Crusader seaside port 30 miles to the south of the modern Lebanese capital. So the coins found in Beirut are Sidonian; the local military power was Sidonian; it was Sidon which dealt directly with the Persians. Beirut was a fishing and trading port, its wooden vessels with their high prows sliding out to Greece, Italy and distant Carthage.

Archaeologists have found sycamore wood here, Egyptian blue pigment, marble, silver, iron, jars for carrying Phoenician olives, olive oil, wheat, walnuts, grapes and wine across the Mediterranean. There's even a stone with a carved graffito of a Phoenician merchant ship, mast fixed with ropes to the sides, two oars tied together as a rudder. It reminds me of the

fishing boats carved into the Tudor wood of the old port of Rye, still visible today on the south side of the Sussex churchyard long after the sea has withdrawn from this cinque port.

Today, the Persian-ruled city in Lebanon is exposed beneath the new *souks* of Beirut. It is part of the city's "Heritage Trail" – in Lebanon, the word heritage means what it says and does not carry the grotty reputation of Britain's tawdry historical re-creations – so that future generations can walk around the old/new city and "watch" its creation over the centuries in Roman streets and Crusader walls, a project overseen by Amira Solh, the young Cornell-trained urban planner who works for Solidere, the company that rebuilt Beirut. She has dreams of an interactive film display behind the underground Persian streets – and promises me there will be no English-style guides flouncing around in Persian costumes. This is serious history for serious people.

Nothing, of course, could be more serious than finding yourself under Persian rule. Roula el-Zein, an archaeologist and consultant for Solidere, described Beirut at the time as  
see BEIRUT, page 23



## COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## US Court to Rule on Turkish Banks' Motion to Dismiss Armenian Lawsuits

Two separate lawsuits were filed last year in US Federal Court in Los Angeles against the Republic of Turkey and two of its major banks demanding compensation for properties confiscated from Armenians after the 1915 Genocide.

The first is a class action lawsuit seeking what could amount to billions of dollars from the Turkish Republic, T.C. Ziraat Bankasi and the Central Bank of Turkey for unjust enrichment from liquidation of properties belonging to Armenians deported and exterminated during the Genocide.

The second lawsuit, filed by three Armenian-Americans, seeks \$64 million for their confiscated properties in Adana, Turkey and millions more for accrued rent and interest paid by the US government in the past 60 years for use of the strategic Incirlik Air Base, built on land taken from families of the Armenian plaintiffs.

When these lawsuits were initiated, the Turkish govern-

ment and its two banks ridiculed the charges, claiming that US courts have no authority to judge the actions of other governments. In order to block the lawsuits, the Turkish entities refused to be served with the legal documents, which is the first step in filing a lawsuit. After lengthy cat-and-mouse games, Turkish officials finally received the court documents transmitted to them by the US Embassy in Ankara at the request of the State Department.

After grudgingly accepting the court papers, the Republic of Turkey refused to appear in US Federal Court, despite warnings from the State Department that it risked a default judgment. The Turkish banks, however, fearing a similar fate, rushed to the court and filed a motion to dismiss the pending lawsuits.

In their filings, the banks objected to the lawsuits, claiming that American courts lacked jurisdiction due to sovereign immunity. They argued that the lawsuits should not go forward because of the Ankara Agreement of 1934, the "political question doctrine," potential harm to US-Turkish relations, lack of evidence that the plaintiffs are heirs of the owners of the confiscated properties and the expiry of the statute of limitations.

Surprisingly, the Turkish banks conceded that even if the Republic of Turkey did confiscate Armenian properties, international law precluded the filing of such lawsuits, since Turkey had taken "the property of its own nationals."

The banks' lawyers made the outrageous suggestion that the wills of Armenian Genocide victims be reviewed to determine the legal heirs of the confiscated properties. In case these victims did not have a will, the lawyers proposed that the relevant laws be examined to see who was really entitled to their properties!

The attorneys for the Armenian plaintiffs countered the

Turkish objections and asked the court to deny the motion to dismiss. The plaintiffs asserted that the Ziraat bank branch in the United States is a private commercial bank and has no reason to enjoy sovereign immunity. Moreover, "genocide and the associated plunder of property is never deemed a legitimate act of the state. There is no application of a political question, as this case focuses on the return of unjust gains from the sale and/or rental of property held in trust. Finally, the statute of limitations does not apply because the properties were held in trust and the failure to return them is a continuing injury." The attorneys further asserted that there are no statutes of limitations for War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity.

Contradicting the banks' claims, the lawyers for the class-action lawsuit maintained that the Foreign Sovereign Immunity Act does not preclude the prosecution of foreign entities engaged in commercial activity in the United States which both the Republic of Turkey and the two banks have done for many years. The lawyers also asserted that the defendants falsely claimed that international law does not apply to foreign countries "for wrongs perpetrated against their own nationals." On the contrary, "international law prohibits states from expropriating property of nationals conducted during genocide and human rights abuses."

A hearing is scheduled in Federal Court on December 19 to determine the validity of the Turkish banks' motion to dismiss the two lawsuits. Should the court reject the Turkish motion and the Armenian plaintiffs end up winning their lawsuits during a subsequent trial, the court may order that the US assets of both Turkish banks be seized, up to the value of the claims and turned over to the heirs of dispossessed Armenian victims as fair compensation.

## LETTERS

## Lessons of Dersim?

To the Editor:

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently apologized on behalf of the Turkish Republic for the 1936-1939 Dersim massacres. Prime Minister Erdogan showed documents dated August 1939, which stated the Turkish government had organized military operations killing more than 13,000 civilians between 1936 and 1939, in the province of Dersim. Erdogan further defined these events as "the most tragic events of our near past" and that "this disaster should now be questioned with courage."

Dersim is an eastern province of Turkey, bordered by Erzincan, Elazig and Bingol provinces. During Ottoman times, the Dersim region formed part of the Harput province, adjacent to the Erzurum province. Its population is mainly Kurds of the Alawi sect, Shiite Moslems often persecuted by the majority Sunni Moslem Turks.

Throughout Ottoman times and later Turkish Republic history, the central government had difficulty establishing authority in this region, controlled mostly by Kurdish feudal lords and tribal chieftains. The killings took place between 1936 and 1939 when the Kurdish population of the region resisted the efforts of the newly formed Turkish republic to exert its authority there. After disarming the local population and arresting some of the leaders, the Turkish army attacked the entire region, killing indiscriminately. Women and children trying to hide in caves were either smoked out or burned alive by sealing the cave entrances. Army planes dropped bombs and poison gas on the fleeing civilians. One of the bomber pilots was Sabiha Gokcen, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's adopted daughter and a war hero, whose name is given to one of the two Istanbul airports. All arrested Kurdish leaders were hanged. The number of dead range from 13,000 by the Turkish sources, to 40,000 by US records, to 80,000 by Kurdish sources. One fact remains clear that Dersim was de-populated, as most of the remaining population was forcefully deported to western Turkey, "in order to accelerate the Turkification of this rebellious group." Decades later, these people were allowed to return to Dersim, which is renamed the Tunceli province. For the past two decades, it has become one of the hotbeds of the Kurdish resistance movement.

There are many interesting twists of events which led to Prime Minister Erdogan issuing

the official apology about the Dersim massacres. Two years ago when Erdogan first attempted to end the Kurdish resistance peacefully, one of the leaders of the strongly nationalistic main opposition party, CHP, roared that the correct way to deal with the Kurdish question is not by peaceful means, but by tried and true methods used in Dersim in the 1930s. Ironically, the main opposition party is now headed by Kemal Kilicdaroglu, an Alawite from Dersim. One of his opposition party members recently demanded that Turkey face its past and apologize for the Dersim massacres; for this outburst, he now faces party discipline hearings. The main motive for Prime Minister Erdogan to issue the apology seems to be to put the blame of the Dersim massacres squarely on the CHP opposition party, which was in full control of the government in the 1930s, in the era of Ataturk, Ismet Inonu and Celal Bayar, as well as to attempt to lure the votes of the ethnic Kurdish population. Another opposition official from Diyarbakir praised Erdogan and criticized his own party for not issuing the apology and was immediately expelled from the CHP party. A member of Erdogan's governing party proposed to delete Sabiha Gokcen's name

from the Istanbul Airport and was promptly silenced by Erdogan. In the meantime, the opposition leader Kilicdaroglu accused Erdogan with treason and stated that he wouldn't be surprised if Erdogan apologizes to the Armenians next. Erdogan responded: "How dare you compare me with the Armenian Diaspora!"

There are several Armenian connections to the Dersim story, both ironic and tragic. During the height of the 1915 deportation and massacres, several Armenian groups from neighboring provinces sought refuge in Dersim. An estimated 25,000 Armenians from Erzurum and Erzincan survived under the protection of the Dersim Kurds and most of these Armenians converted to the Alawite religion. It is said that one of the reasons for the fury of the violent attacks by the Turkish army in the 1930s was vengeance toward these Kurds who saved the Armenians in 1915. It is also said that a significant portion of the Dersim massacre victims were converted Armenian women and children. On the other hand, the war hero and pilot Sabiha Gokcen was in fact an Armenian little girl from Bursa, adopted by Ataturk, after being orphaned during the 1915 events. We cannot help but wonder ironically: What did Sabiha Gokcen think when bombing the people below? Was she a Turk bombing the Kurds, or did she know she was an Armenian bombing the

Armenians?

The revelation of Sabiha Gokcen being Armenian was exposed with documentation by Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in 2004, which started the ball rolling toward his targeted assassination by the deep state in 2007. The hidden Armenians of Dersim have recently come out and officially formed the Dersim Armenians Union, some even changing their names and religion from Islam to Christianity. Their leader has recently stated that nearly three quarters of Dersim villages are inhabited by hidden Armenians, but are scared to reveal their real identities.

All these confusing but interrelated facts lead toward the inevitable necessity for Turkey to face its past, not only the selective good heroic deeds of her forefathers, but all of them. Prime Minister Erdogan has taken a first step by acknowledging and apologizing for the Dersim events. Other events in which Turkey needs to face its past, are the 1942 Wealth Tax imposed on minorities, resulting in total transfer of wealth to Turks; the September 6-7, 1955, violent events, resulting in the minority Greeks fleeing Turkey. But the biggest elephant in the room is still facing the truth about the 1915 events.

- Raffi Bedrosyan  
Toronto

## Phoenician Footprints all over Beirut

BEIRUT, from page 22

"just a small city belonging to Sidon, the city which had all the power." The Phoenicians, she says, "accepted Persian rule after the Babylonians left, and without any problem in assisting the Persian wars against Egypt. Sidon and Tyre were with the Persian kings" - King Baalshille the Second and King Abdashart, for those who want to know. But when the Persians decided to attack Phoenician Carthage, things quickly went wrong.

"According to Herodotus," el-Zein says, "the Phoenicians of Sidon refused to build ships for the Persians and help them. And because of this, the Persians never finished their north African project." It makes sense. Why should the Phoenicians of Sidon and Beirut help their masters attack the Phoenicians of Carthage? It would be left to the Romans ("Carthaga delenda est") to destroy the city whose remains lie in

modern-day Tunisia and whose land was sown with salt so that it could never be reinhabited.

It's always the same when you think you've got the Lebanese on your side. First they are your friends - the French thought that after the 1914-18 war - and then they become subversive and upset all your military plans, the amiable historical mosquito that bites you when you least expect it and then poisons you. It doesn't hurt until you realize what has happened. Message: leave the Phoenicians/Lebanese alone. Ask the Israelis.

And so the Persians should have left the Beirutis to their dyeing trade - there are murex shells and wood charcoal aplenty to prove it - and their fishing boats. In the old Roman cities of Europe - in Rome or at Corbridge on Hadrian's Wall - I like to run my hand along the rutted highways of antiquity, where the barrows and horse-drawn carts and chariot wheels

of history slowly carved their passage into the great stone Roman roads. Humans didn't just build this; they lived here and travelled here. Those double ruts in the road are fingerprints.

And old Phoenico-Persian Beirut has some "fingerprints" of its own. In the old port, now under rue Allenby - another imperial name, victor of Gaza and humble conqueror of Jerusalem - there is an ancient stone bollard, and cut into it are two natural slits, created during the decades of Persian power. They are the marks worn down by the ropes tying Phoenician ships to the quayside, the stone gradually worn away as the hawsers cut into it, pulled back and forth by the same Mediterranean tide which sloshes away outside my home.

(Robert Fisk is the Middle East correspondent for the *Independent* newspaper. This column originally appeared in the December 3, 2011 edition of the paper.)



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