



Paruyr Hayrikyan not to Seek Delay in Election Schedule

*Candidate Shot outside His Home
On January 31 in Yerevan*

YEREVAN (Reuters/Arminfo) — An Armenian presidential candidate who was shot last week will not seek a postponement to this month's election to avoid the risk of further instability in the former Soviet republic, his lawyer and other backers said on Tuesday.

Hayrikyan was shot in the shoulder on January 31 near his home in Yerevan.

He could have asked the Constitutional Court for a two-week postponement of the February 18 vote, which would have raised the prospect of instability in the republic in the volatile South Caucasus region that carries oil and natural gas to Europe.

Hayrikyan did not want to let that happen, a spokesman said.

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Presidential candidate Paruyr Hayrikyan gets a visit from fellow candidate and current president, Serge Sargsian.

Armenia Accuses Azerbaijan of Making 'False Comments' on Paris Meeting

YEREVAN (ArmeniaNow) — Armenia has accused Azerbaijan of making false comments after an official in Baku said his country made new suggestions regarding the Karabagh settlement at the latest meeting with international mediators in Paris.

Answering a media question regarding the statement by Azerbaijan's deputy foreign minister that the Armenian side turned down certain suggestions put forward by the Azerbaijani side during the meeting in France, Armenian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Tigran Balayan said: "The Azerbaijani side has not put forward

any suggestion during the recent meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the co-chairs in Paris. Moreover, the Azerbaijani side still has not publicized on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the agreement agreed upon by the ministers and the co-chairs. And the spokesman of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempts to render false comments regarding the meeting. The same happened with the agreed message of the previous meeting in Paris. This is nothing more than an intention to mislead its

own public, which is so characteristic for Azerbaijan."

"The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan is right only in one thing: in Paris the approaches of the Armenian Foreign Minister did not differ from the approaches expressed previously. That is natural; Armenia's position has been and is in line with the approaches of the international community expressed by the three co-chairs," continued Balayan. "Yet, the Azerbaijani side obstinately continues to reject or attempts to revise all the proposals made by the Co-Chairs, which were repeated also during the latest meeting in Paris."



Tigran Balayan



Shant Hovhannissyan as Gen. Garegin Njdeh

Film Based on Life of Garegin Njdeh Is Hit With Audiences in Armenia

FILM

YEREVAN (ArmeniaNow) — PanArmenian Media Group company's film "Garegin Njdeh," dedicated to the 21st anniversary of the Armenian army, tells the story of national hero, Gen. Garegin Njdeh, his life and military path.

The film premiered at Moscow Cinema on January 27 and 28, but social networks and media have been discussing it for the past two weeks. The most criticized part is a fragment (misjudged from the trailer) where the actor embodying Njdeh, Artashes Alexanyan, fiercely responds "I am Garegin Njdeh." A number of mocking videos were made and placed on Youtube, which also fed the Azeri media.

"Only after watching the film one can be entitled to criticism or praise. But it's a trailer. It is used for advertising purposes, it is unacceptable to take that one sentence and make a big deal out of it. I see it as betrayal and desecration. Azerbaijan proclaims a murderer as national hero, and we, like traitors, defame our prophet," Alexanyan told ArmeniaNow. "And by the way, the audience stood up and applauded after both showings, which speaks about their good impressions of the film."

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By Nazik Armenakyan

Domestic Violence Takes a Toll in Armenia

By Gayane Abrahamyan

YEREVAN (Eurasia.net) — Increasingly, the issue of domestic violence in Armenia is a topic for public discussion. Yet, greater attention to the issue has not yet translated into an expansion of programs to alleviate suffering and address policy shortcomings.

In 2012, Armenia set a grim record for domestic violence when six women, ranging in age from 21 to 50, died over the course of six months in incidents involving their husbands or fathers-in-law. Collectively, the six dead women left behind 12 children. No official registry of domestic-violence attacks exists in Armenia. But a 2008 survey of 1,000 Armenian women by Amnesty International found that more than three out of 10 had suffered from physical abuse, and 66 percent from psychological abuse.

The outcry over the recent deaths prompted activists to believe that the

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NKR Foreign Minister Congratulates Kerry

STEPANAKERT (Armenpress) — Foreign Minister of the Nagorno Karabagh (Artsakh) Republic Karen Mirzoyan sent a congratulatory message to Sen. John Kerry on the occasion of his appointment as the US secretary of state.

In the message, Mirzoyan extended his good wishes to Kerry in his new role.

"We highly appreciate the mediation efforts of the United States and are confident that during your tenure the US, along with the Russian Federation and France, will further contribute to the peaceful settlement of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabagh based on principles of international law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Mirzoyan also expressed his gratitude for the assistance the US rendered to the people of Artsakh.

Istanbul Street to Be Named after Hrant Dink

ISTANBUL (Armenpress) — The Malatia Municipality has made a decision to name the street where Hrant Dink, the former editor-in-chief of the Istanbul-based *Agos* newspaper was born, after him. *Agos*, in a report said that Malatia Mayor Ahmet Çakir had communicated the decision.

Çakir noted that there are a number of streets in Malatia bearing the same names and that while the municipality was discussing renaming them, they decided to pay attention to the people who were born on those streets and renaming the streets for them.

Dink was killed on January 19, 2007.

Armenian School Damaged in Aleppo

ALEPPO (Armenpress) — Aleppo was the site of several armed clashes on January 31. Berio National Primacy Press Secretary Jirayr Reysyan said one of the Armenian schools located in Ashrafie district was damaged, with several windows broken in the blasts. The pupils were evacuated for security reasons.

The explosions did not take place in Armenian-populated districts, though they did occur in areas directly neighboring the Armenian communities.

Regarding plans to open the Aleppo airport, Reysyan said, "There was no clear news regarding the opening, yet the state is making efforts to reopen it." Reysyan did not confirm the news of Hovsep Abgaryan, a young Armenian, murdered and robbed days before.

According to the United Nations' data, more than 60,000 people were killed during 22 months ongoing clashes in Syria, including four dozen Armenians.

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ARMENIA

News From Armenia

State Youth Orchestra of Perform in Gumri

GUMRI (PanArmenian.net) – The State Youth Orchestra of Armenia, led by artistic director and conductor Sergey Smbatyan, presented a new concert program on February 7 at Vardan Achemyan State Drama Theater.

The orchestra performed classical compositions and music from Hollywood movies.

The program included pieces by Alexander Arutiunian, Dmitri Shostakovich, Edward Mirzoyan, Edvard Grieg, Monty Norman, John Williams, Hans Zimmer, James Horner, Ennio Morricone and Nino Rota.

Armenia to Get \$51.4 Million From IMF After Passing Loan Review

WASHINGTON (Bloomberg) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a disbursement of \$51.4 million for Armenia after completing a fifth review of the country's economy.

The loan is part of a three-year, \$403 million accord agreed with the Washington-based lender in June 2010, it said on Tuesday in a report.

Armenia's economic growth is forecast to slow to 4.3 percent this year compared to 6.2 percent last year, the fund said in the report. The country's budget deficit is expected to widen to 2.6 percent this year from 2.1 percent in 2012 and inflation will remain about 4 percent this year, the IMF said.

Film Exposes Turkish State Policy of Erasing Armenian Culture

YEREVAN (Hetq) – On January 24, the documentary film "Crime after the Great Crime," premiered. The film exposes the ongoing Turkish state policy of destroying all traces of Armenian culture in Western Armenia.

Prepared by the Research on Armenian Architecture Foundation, the film chronicles Western Armenian cultural monuments before and after the 1915 Genocide.

The film states that pre-1915 there were approximately 170,000 cultural monuments in Western Armenia, of which, a mere 2-3 percent still remain intact today.

The documentary is in Eastern Armenian and is narrated by Samuel Karapetyan.

President Sargisian Vows To Fight for Genocide Recognition

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – The centennial of the Armenian Genocide is an important event which must not be the end of the efforts aimed at seeking its recognition, said President Serge Sargisian during a meeting with the voters in the Malatia-Sebastia district, which took place on February 5, during his campaign to seek reelection.

"The 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide is just a harbor, an important and crucial one. We will struggle for the recognition of Armenian Genocide as long as needed," Sargisian said. "The words 'genocide' and 'eghern' are the same, and even not using the word 'genocide,' the US president has said everything," he said, adding, "we would be grateful to every nation recognizing Armenian Genocide."

Sargisian assured his audience that comparing the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide with a tsunami, as done by the Turkish press is silly. Recognition of the Genocide is not just a moral issue but also an issue of security, since by denying the Genocide, Turkey is endangering Armenia's national security, he said.

Sargisian said that a new committee headed by Armenian president had been formed for organizing events dedicated to 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Hayrikyan not to Seek Delay in Election

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"The goal of the attack was to kill Hayrikyan and organize a new election. Taking that into consideration, we want to make sure they do not attain their goal," Karo Yeghnukyan, a spokesman for the candidate, said at a news conference.

Stability is vital to the nation of 2.3 million to woo investors and boost an economy struggling with regional isolation and the effects of a war with neighboring Azerbaijan in the 1990s.

Violence flared after Sargisian's election in 2008, leaving 10 people dead when police clashed with supporters of former president and opposition candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian who protested for days on the streets of the capital.

The government imposed a state of emergency during the unrest in the landlocked nation that borders Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran and Georgia.

Hayrikyan's lawyer, Levon Baghdasaryan, confirmed that he would let the election go ahead as planned despite difficulties in continuing his campaign.

Regardless of the fact that as a result of the assassination attempt insurmountable hurdles have arisen, Hayrikyan will not appeal to the Constitutional Court with a demand to postpone the day of presidential election," he said.

Doctors have removed the bullet and said Hayrikyan's life was not in danger, but he remained in the hospital on Tuesday. Police have not named any suspects.

Hayrikyan, a pro-Western former Soviet dissident, said hours after the shooting that he suspected a foreign secret service and suggested he was referring to Russia, which is Armenia's main ally and has a



Paruyr Hayrikyan at a press conference

military base on its territory.

Hayrikyan, 63, leads a moderate opposition party, the National Self-determination Union and ran for president in 2003.

Washington Concerned

Washington is concerned over the assassination attempt, US State Department Spokesperson Victoria Nuland said at a press briefing last week.

"Obviously we condemn this violence. We understand that Paruyr Hayrikyan is in stable condition after being shot by an unknown gunman and that the Armenian police have promised a full investigation."

"We understand that there are some reports now that there may be some postponement of the elections which were scheduled to take place on February 18th under constitutional provisions if he's unable to campaign. We obviously call on Armenians to settle this constitutionally in a way that

ensures that these elections go forward in a way that is free and fair and protects the rights of all candidates", she said.

Sargisian visited the wounded candidate at the St. Gregory the Illuminator Medical Center to meet Hayrikyan.

Hayrikyan repeated his opinion voiced earlier that "Russian imperialism" is behind his assassination attempt, while divine intervention is to be thanked for his survival.

"Can you imagine a 25-centimeter bullet piercing a human body and that person staying alive? I am alive by the will of our Lord, however it does not mean that my opponent missed by mistake. He did what he had planned to do, but angels did not let it happen," said Hayrikyan.

To the reporters' question when he was planning to resume the campaign, he said, "I am already back at work."

(Armenpress and ArmeniaNow contributed to this report.)

Domestic Violence Takes a Toll in Armenia

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government would start making state funds available for the protection and treatment of victims of domestic violence. But on January 21, the government blocked passage of what would have been the country's first domestic-violence law, saying that revisions should be made to existing legislation, or to the bill itself.

In the absence of government funding, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are struggling to meet needs. "There are many cases, and only NGO efforts do not suffice," commented Susanna Vardanian, director of the Women's Rights Center, a Yerevan-based NGO, which is a backer of the stalled draft law.

At present, three private domestic-violence shelters (two in Yerevan and one in the nearby region of Armavir), along with several NGO-run hotlines are all that exist for female domestic violence victims. Over the past two years, the Women's Rights Center, which runs two hotlines, four regional crisis centers and one shelter, has received some 2,557 calls from women seeking help, according to Vardanian.

At a facility run by the charitable foundation Lighthouse in the village of Ptghunts, the 55 women residents are mostly unemployed, and either pregnant or raising children. The shelter provides basic job training, as well as psychological counseling.

For decades, domestic violence was a topic that not only battered women, but also officials and law-enforcement authorities shied away from acknowledging or discussing. But now, that has begun to change, with people starting to be held accountable for abusive actions.

For example, Haykanush Mikayelian received a 10-month sentence in 2012

for her role in the abuse of her 23-year-old daughter-in-law, Mariam Gevorgian, over a prolonged period starting in 2009. According to testimony at the trial, Mikayelian burned Gevorgian's body with an iron and a cigarette lighter, beat her regularly and kept her locked indoors under key.

Although police officers are arguably now more aware of the domestic-violence problem than several years ago, they are often left flummoxed by the lack of state-run shelters and legal mechanisms to prevent ongoing abuse of a woman by a husband or relative.

"As soon as it comes to taking actual steps, we seem to be faced with the same resistance," remarked Lara Aharomian, director of the Women's Resource Center, another Yerevan-based NGO active in addressing domestic violence.

The draft domestic-violence law that the government rejected earlier in January would have tried to strengthen official measures to protect victims by introducing restraining orders and expanding the number of shelters, among other measures.

Activists believe that the six fatal domestic-violence cases in 2012 might have been prevented if Armenia had had a law outlining responses to the abuse, and, correspondingly, providing state assistance for shelters. "[T]he law proposes the creation of a number of facilities, [and the] training of police, which are preventive measures," said Anna Nikoghosian, a project manager for the non-governmental organization A Society Without Violence. If shelters had existed near the homes of the six murdered women, all of whom lived outside of Yerevan, "some . . . might be alive today."

"There are many badly in need of support, but it is impossible to house all of

them in only three shelters," agreed Lighthouse Director Naira Muradian.

Lala Ghazarian, head of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare's Department for Family, Women and Childcare Issues, stressed that the domestic-violence bill isn't gone for good. "It just needs some changes" to bring it into line with existing criminal law, she said. "We are all well aware that we need a law, shelter, trained policemen, functional tools, but it implies extensive work to change legislation, and it will be done."

Some government members have said that parliament, now controlled by the Republican Party of Armenia, could pass a domestic-violence law by 2014 or 2015, once ongoing amendments to the criminal code are complete.

Meanwhile, as the topic's stigma fades away, many ordinary Armenians affirm openly that they are eager to find solutions. In the village of Burastan, 30 kilometers outside of Yerevan, women in 2006 told EurasiaNet.org that questions about domestic violence "destroy traditional Armenian families." Seven years later, they admitted that abuse is an issue that "has to be addressed."

"Our children have been growing up in an atmosphere of beatings and fights," commented 67-year-old Karine Galstian, a mother of four. "Only now we realize how wrong it is to keep silent, because we should at least teach our daughters that the husband has to respect his wife, should not beat her, should not humiliate her in front of the children."

In the absence of further government measures against domestic violence, such realizations could make a critical difference.

(Gayane Abrahamyan is a reporter for ArmeniaNow.com in Yerevan.)



INTERNATIONAL

FBI Joins Search for Murderer of US Mom

Istanbul Police to Take DNA Samples

ISTANBUL (*Hürriyet*) – The FBI is playing a significant role in the investigation into the death of a New York City woman found dead in Istanbul while on a vacation, a US congressman has said.

Rep. Michael Grimm, a former FBI agent, said US investigators were invited by Turkish authorities to assist as they try to find out what happened to Sarai Sierra, the Associated Press reported February 4.

Grimm and Sierra's parents, Betzaida and Dennis Jimenez, said the family's immediate concern was repatriating Sierra's body to the US. The Istanbul police will collect blood, DNA and saliva samples from 21 people who testified earlier about the death of Sierra, who had been missing since January 21.

Sierra's body was found in Sarayburnu, 13 days after she went missing, with evidence of head injuries. Her jewelry was still on her, but her tablet computer and smart phone were gone. A blanket was found nearby, suggesting she may have been taken from another crime scene to Sarayburnu. Police have been searching for the tablet and the mobile phone in the surrounding area.

The samples are expected to be collected February 5 upon a demand by Istanbul prosecutor Hüseyin Kaplan, Dogan news agency reported. The prosecutor had listened earlier in the day to Sierra's husband Steven Sierra and her brother David Jimenez, who came to Turkey to search for their lost relative.

The family collected Sierra's body later on February 4 from the Forensic Medicine Institute following a post-mortem.

Her body was taken to a morgue at an Armenian church, Surp Yerrortutyun, before being sent to the US.

Preliminary autopsy results from

opened to their mother. "Their father is going to talk to them when he comes back, and we'll all be there to support him," she told NBC's "Today Show" on February 5.

"I wanted to see my daughter alive. At least we have closure. At least they found her," her mother said in tears.

"There are some people who are still waiting for their loved ones," the New York Daily News quoted her as saying.

Sierra's sister could not join them "because she's too broken. All she does is cry." "I wanted to see my daughter, her beautiful smile. She was full of life. She loved her children, her husband. She was my friend. We did many things together."

"We traveled together. This was

the first trip she took by herself, taking photos and photos she took," Sierra's mother said. She thanked the Turkish police and an association in Istanbul for missing loved ones for sharing Sierra's photo while she was missing. Her brother's church also helped fund the trip to bring her back, mom said.

Sierra's father, Dennis, recalled when going to pick her up from the airport. "I didn't want her to go, but she wanted to go because this was an opportunity for her to sight see and to pursue her photography hobby," he said.

"Turkey was a land of rich culture and ancient history. She was very fascinated with that." He said she kept them abreast of every side trip and move she made and talked daily on Skype.



The body of the late Sarai Sierra is taken to the Surp Yerrortutyun Armenian Church.

Sierra's body suggest the cause of death was a single blow to the head. There was no evidence of sexual assault, according to initial reports. However, the results of the full autopsy report will reportedly be announced in three months. Crime scene investigators arrived on the scene early on February 4, accompanied by security officials and canine units.

The Fatih Municipality cleared the bushes from the area to make the search easier for officials, according to Anatolia news agency. Some 260 policemen searched for Sierra using Istanbul's security cameras after she was reported missing on January 25.

Sierra's mother said her two grandsons did not yet know what had hap-

Outlaw Group Targets US Embassy in Ankara, Kills Two

ANKARA (*Hürriyet Daily News*) – A suicide bomb attack at the US Embassy, killed one Turkish security guard along with the attacker, Ankara Gov. Aladdin Yüksel said.

A woman, who was at the embassy

for business, was also injured.

The explosion occurred at the entrance used by embassy personnel and their visitors, CNN Türk reported. A security guard working the X-ray machine at the embassy's entrance

was killed in the explosion, which occurred as the suspected suicide bomber was passing through the machine, the report said.

Bomb experts are currently investigating at the site. Police have taken precautions against the possibility of a second attack.

Turkish Interior Minister Muammer Güler arrived at the US Embassy in Ankara following the blast.

US Consulate in Turkey advises its citizens against visiting its missions until further notice.

Security cameras were not recording at the moment of the blast due to a power outage in the area. It is not clear whether or not the embassy building was the only building experiencing the outage.

According to US embassy personnel, there was no damage inside the embassy.

All US embassy personnel have been taken to safe-rooms within the embassy.

The undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry, Feridun Sinirlioglu, was reportedly bound for the embassy.

On September 11, 2012, the anniversary of the 2001 attacks by al-Qaeda, heavily armed militants stormed the US consulate in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi and attacked a nearby CIA safe-house.

Four Americans died in the assault, including US Ambassador Chris Stevens. President Barack Obama's domestic opponents attacked the administration's handling of both security prior to the attack and public statements afterwards.

International News

Analyst Says Azerbaijan Risks Label of Aggressor

BAKU (Armenpress) – The Nagorno-Karabagh conflict is in a "frozen" phase and there is no prospect for the resolution in near future, according to Mark Urnov, a Russian political scientist, in an interview with vesti.az.

"Azerbaijan wants to take NKR under its jurisdiction, while Nagorno-Karabagh and Armenia will never agree with it," he underlined.

Referring to the exploitation of Stepanakert airport, he noted that if Azerbaijan shoots down even a military plane, Azerbaijan will certainly face punishment. "The international community is tired of local conflicts. It is waiting only for peace from the parties of the conflict. If Azerbaijan strikes even a single airplane, the reaction of international community will be not simply negative but extremely harsh. I do not rule out international sanctions against Azerbaijan. As a result, Azerbaijan risks get being labeled an aggressor," Urnov said.

Touching on possible war of the West against Iran and Azerbaijan's participation in it, Urnov said, "This is hardly possible. But in case it starts and Azerbaijan's supports the West, one can hardly hope that the West will support Azerbaijan in the matter of the Karabagh conflict settlement."

Ambassador to Romania Discusses NKR on TV

BUCHAREST (Armenpress) – Armenian Ambassador to Romania Hamlet Gasparian was hosted by Romanian DIGI 24 channel on February 2. On the TV program, lasting 30 minutes, the ambassador spoke about the Artsakh (Nagorno Karabagh) stalemate, the current situation in Armenian-Romanian trade, as well as the history of Armenian community, highlighting efforts by members of the community to keep their Armenian heritage.

The program started with a video on Armenian history, including the Armenian Genocide and Artsakh war. The author of *Book of Whispers*, Varujan Vosganian, and the book's Armenian translation, were discussed during the TV program.

Court of Human Rights Returned 16 Verdicts Against Armenia in 2012

STRASBOURG (Arminfo) – In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights attained 16 verdicts against the Republic of Armenia.

The court received 238 claims from 3,274 people from Armenia in 2012. This is the highest number registered over the last four years.

The verdicts against Armenia in 2012 were chiefly regarding freedom and immunity of citizens, their right for fair proceedings as well as freedom of conscience and religion. Since the moment of Armenia's joining the Council of Europe the European Court of Human Rights attained 46 verdicts against Armenia with a demand to compensate 560,000 euros. According to Armenia's Justice Ministry, the government has already repaid compensation in the amount of about 400,000 euros.

The Russian Federation is the leader on the number of cases being investigated by the European Court of Human Rights (28,593 cases).

Bishop Promotes Ties With Minorities

ISFAHAN, Iran (IRNA) – The head of the Armenian Diocese of Isfahan, Archimandrite Babken Charian, said the international community should look at Iran as a role model for proper treatment and protection of religious minorities.

In a meeting with Governor General Alireza Zaker-Esfahani Wednesday evening, the bishop praised the Islamic Republic for having managed to establish positive relations with members of religious minorities.

Zaker-Esfahani, stressed that promoting positive interaction among religions should be a priority in the global community.

Britain's Last Remaining Armenian Genocide Survivor's Death Ruled 'Accident'

STROUD, England (Hetq) – Genocide survivor, Astrid Aghajanian's death was ruled accidental this week after a coroner's investigation.

The 99-year-old was believed to be Britain's last survivor of the Armenian Genocide. Aghajanian was 2 when the Ottoman rulers began the annihilation of the Armenians and her father was killed. She was deported with her mother and marched into the Deir ez-Zor desert with her grandmother and baby brother.

Her mother refused to let Aghajanian go with officials, who were burning children alive, and the pair hid under a pile of corpses for a night before venturing into the desert alone.

They were found by a Bedouin tribesman, who then sold them to another. They lived in hiding until a Turkish officer took them to the city of Deir ez-Zor.

They made their way to relatives and began rebuilding their lives before moving to Jerusalem in the 1920s.

Aghajanian became a teacher, married her husband in 1942 and the pair had two daughters before fighting in the West Bank broke out. The family fled to Cyprus, where Aghajanian volunteered for the Red Cross and ran a kindergarten.

The family had to flee again during the Turkish invasion in 1974 and they emigrated to England as refugees.

At a Gloucester inquest into her death yesterday, her GP Noah Thomson said she was in good health before the unwitnessed fall.

In a statement Thompson wrote: "She was an incredible person I feel humbled and honored to have attended [to her] and I wish her family well."

Deputy Gloucestershire coroner, David Dooley said Aghajanian, who died at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital on May 11, was a "99-year-old with an interesting, but traumatic early history."



INTERNATIONAL

First Rising Talents Art Fair Draws More than 200 Guests

BEIRUT — More than 200 guests came out for the AGBU Young Professionals of Lebanon's (YP Lebanon) first Rising Talents Art Fair last month, prompting the group to turn an inaugural event into an annual tradition. The exhibit, which featured the work of local Armenian and non-Armenian artists, brought in close to \$3,000, 100 percent of which will benefit directly the three AGBU schools in the greater Beirut area. The schools are determined to meet the needs of the steady stream of displaced students arriving from Syria, but they are incurring significant costs in the process and the YP donation provides much-needed support.

The call for submissions drew dozens of applications. On opening night, Thursday, December 13, 2012, guests crowded the popular downtown restaurant SUZ, where 10 up-and-coming artists were spotlighted: Virgine Ashkharian, Krikor Avessian, Diane Ayoub, Norayr Boudakian, Maral Der Boghossian, Karen Klink, Angela Mahserejian Manouchakian, Boghos Naziguian, Antoine Saliba and Karine Sarkissian. Each presented three pieces in different styles and mediums, showcasing their work and selling the majority of their pieces. As YP Lebanon Coordinator Sarine Karajerjian commented, "We were so pleased with the great response of applicants, as our mission was two-fold: one, to encourage and promote the talents of local young artists who may not otherwise have had a platform for their work and two, to provide the Lebanese community with affordable art."

the other featured artists. Now 92-years-old, Guvder was born in Lebanon to a family of Armenian refugees. He studied in both Paris and Rome before establishing his own art institute in Beirut and later joining the city's Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts), where he still teaches today. Throughout the event, he engaged each of the participants, and later commented, "I was extremely happy to present my work to the local community and to see many young talents emerging in Lebanon. At my age, imparting my knowledge to youth makes me feel that I am in a continuous learning process."

Proceeds from Guvder's paintings, as well as the pieces by the young artists, will provide critical support to AGBU's Beirut schools, which are struggling to meet the needs of scores of Syrian-Armenian students displaced by their country's ongoing conflict. In recent weeks, requests for enrollment in the three local AGBU schools have more than quadrupled and administrators are doing everything possible to ensure that no student has to sacrifice a high-quality education amidst the crisis. The donation from YP Lebanon will help the schools serve more Syrian-Armenian youth.

The YP Lebanon Rising Talents Art Fair was made possible by several sponsors: Arame Art Gallery, Chateau Khoury Wine, Printkom, Radio Sevan, SUZ and Raffi Tokatlian.

To support AGBU's humanitarian aid efforts for Syrian-Armenians, donate online here:



Members and friends of the AGBU Young Professionals of Lebanon Committee celebrate the success of the group's first Rising Talents Art Fair, which raised almost \$3,000 to benefit displaced Syrian-Armenian youth in the three AGBU schools in greater Beirut.

AGBU Longtime Member Hagop Altounian Premieres Two New Books

TORONTO — On Sunday, January 13, the former Chair of the AGBU Lebanon District and the AGBU Toronto Chapter, Hagop Altounian, launched his publications, *Along the Luminous Paths of Armenian Culture* and *Nubar Pasha and Boghos Nubar Pasha*, at the Alex Manoogian Cultural Center.

The book launch drew several audience members and speakers, including Archpriest Zareh Zargarian, pastor of the Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Toronto. Addressing the crowd, Zargarian, the former religious studies teacher at the AGBU Alex Manoogian School in Montreal, stressed the importance of passing on the torch of the Armenian Cause to younger generations.

Altounian, who will celebrate his 90th birthday this year, looked on while young professionals Laura Darakjian and Garin Yacoubian read excerpts from his books. The two were introduced by the event's moderator, Varak Babian, another member of Toronto's Armenian community.

Along the Luminous Paths of Armenian Culture traces the development of the Armenian language, while *Nubar Pasha and Boghos Nubar Pasha* chronicles the lives of the legendary Armenian leaders. Both draw from Altounian's decades-long experience serving the diaspora.

Educator Hasmig Kurdian, who introduced Altounian, commended the critical role he played within the AGBU Lebanon District, especially during the country's civil war. In a letter read by AGBU Toronto Executive Director Salpi Der Ghazarian, AGBU President Berge Setrakian applauded Altounian for his years of dedication to the organization.

During his presentation, Sarkis Hamboyan, editor of *Along the Luminous Paths of Armenian Culture*, pointed to the book's extensive research. Both books were available for purchase and signing by the author.

Altounian's book launch was co-sponsored with the Hamazkayin Society's Klatsor Chapter. At the author's request, proceeds from the event's book sales will benefit both AGBU Toronto and the Klatsor Chapter.

To learn more about AGBU Toronto, visit <http://www.agbutoronto.ca/> or write agbutoronto@bellnet.ca.



AGBU YP Lebanon committee members prepare to greet the crowds at the Rising Talents Art Fair in Beirut.

Also on sale throughout the three-night fundraiser was a special collection of limited-edition prints donated by John Guvder, the noted Lebanese artist. Guvder, who received the Arshile Gorky medal from the Republic of Armenia on the same day the YP exhibit was unveiled, had much experience to share with

<https://donate.agbu.org/agbu-urgent-appeal>, or call +1-855-AID-AGBU (243-2428) Monday through Friday, during business hours.

Please send checks to: AGBU, Syria Emergency Fund, 55 East 59th St., New York, NY 10022. Indicate "Emergency Humanitarian Fund" in memo line.

Tigran Sargisian Discusses Armenian Progress

MOSCOW (Armenpress) — In an interview with *Moskovskie Novosti*, Prime Minister Tigran Sargisian spoke about the economic growth of Armenia, Armenian-Georgian relations, regulation of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict and Armenian-Turkish relations.

The following is an excerpt from the translated interview, which appeared this week in *Moskovskie Novosti*.

Moskovskie Novosti (MN): What was 2012 like for Armenia? What progress was made and what problems occurred?

Tigran Sargisian (TS): Our political system proved its vitality, as seen by the successful parliamentary elections, which were considered by the international community as the most democratic in the entire modern history of Armenia. The GDP grew almost 7 percent in 2012. This is one of the best results in the post-Soviet era. And if we take into consideration that Armenia is in a vulnerable geopolitical state with some of its neighbors, this is indeed a remarkable result.

MN: Last year Armenia and Russia created a working group to create a format for Armenian participation in the Customs Union.

TS: The matter is not about the absence of common borders alone. One of the Armenia's

peculiarities is that the structure of the Armenian economy largely differs from the countries of the Customs Union, which have vast energy resources. Armenia was one of the first CIS countries to join the World Trade Organization. Therefore it's necessary to find the formula for the most efficient instruments of our cooperation with the union.

MN: Armenia has strained relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Are there any chances for the regulation of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict and establishment of Armenian-Turkish relations?

TS: In my opinion, it first depends upon the political will of Azerbaijan. Armenia has always adopted a constructive position in the negotiations process, which means that a mutually acceptable decision must be made. But unfortunately our neighbors are not ready for that. In the case of Turkey, Armenia started negotiations with Turkey for the establishment of diplomatic relations and opening the borders without preconditions. The protocols have been signed after negotiations and the parliaments were to suppose to ratify them. Armenia expressed its willingness to do that, but Turkey decided to freeze the process.



Author Hagop Altounian (left) presents his new publication alongside editor Sarkis Hamboyan at the book launch in Toronto's AGBU Alex Manoogian Cultural Center.



Community News

Genocide Survivor Ojen Fantazian: *A Tribute*

By Tom Vartabedian

BILLERICA, Mass. — Even in death, Ojen Fantazian has left an indelible impression.

Dignified to the end, the 99-year-old Genocide survivor gave her family and friends another reason to celebrate her life — and a monumental one at that.

Dozens gathered at St. Stephen's Armenian Church in Watertown to pay their final tributes to a woman who never wavered, not during the turmoil which struck her native village of Chimichgaidzag, nor after the loss of her husband Harry at an early age, nor after suffering health problems which cost her



Ojen Fantazian

her physical vitality, yet never her spirit.

She showed up regularly at Genocide commemorations, often the only survivor representing her peers; attended church services with family members; continued reading her Armenian newspapers and still listened to the opera.

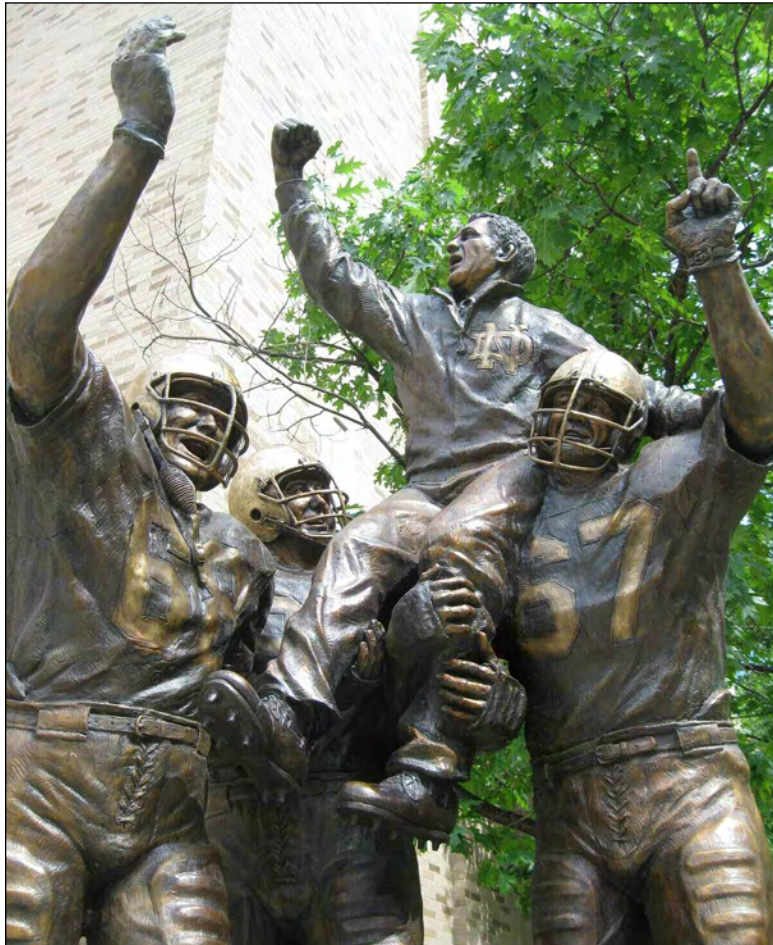
Her death brings the number of remaining survivors in Merrimack Valley and Southern New Hampshire to two: Nellie Nazarian and Thomas Magarian, both in their centennial years.

As a member of the Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee of Merrimack Valley, I looked forward to her annual visits to our observances, much the same way I did my own mom. And for good reason.

Aside from the fact both my mother and Fantazian were both survivors, they also shared a first name. They would sit next to one another and bring each other comfort with their red carnations in hand and their faces pained with emotion.

The similarities were remarkable. Both escaped turmoil in their native villages, my mother from Dikranagert, Fantazian from Chimichgaidzag. Both succumbed just short of their 100th year.

As they fled for their lives, they watched loved ones being deported and persecuted.
see TRIBUTE, page 7



Statue of Ara Parseghian at Notre Dame

Notre Dame's Ara Parseghian:

Football Coach, Philanthropist, Founder

MIAMI (FLArmenians) — Earlier this month, the annual College Bowl Championship Series (BCS) title game was held at Miami's Sun Life Stadium and featured top seated Notre Dame versus Alabama. The Crimson Tide rolled over the

By Grant Pakhtigian

inspired to revisit the life of former Notre Dame University head football coach Ara Raoul Parseghian.

Prior to joining Notre Dame, Parseghian was the head coach at Miami, Ohio, where he once played from 1946 to 1947 as running back and defensive back. He also played for the Cleveland Browns from 1948 to 1949.

In 1950 he first began as an assistant coach and later, head coach for the Miami of Ohio college football team. From 1951-1955, he served as head coach at Miami and began and ended a career in which few are as accomplished and consistent.

To put into perspective what he did, a 170-58-6 overall record, or equal to an .836 winning percentage, one must have both feet on the ground with a good dose of confidence. A football coach is part teacher, part father, modest, a great communicator and an excellent leader.

From 1956 to 1963, Coach Ara served as head coach for the Northwestern University football team. Some say that Coach Ara had the most impact at Notre Dame University where he coached the Fighting Irish. While at Notre Dame, from 1964 to 1974, Parseghian was responsible for winning two national championships, in 1966 and 1973.

He was named "Coach of the Year" twice in 1964, once in 1966 and in 1980. In 1980 he was also named to the College Football Hall of Fame.

While at Miami University, his coach was the great Woody Hayes, and an interesting fact to point to was that while coaching at Northwestern, Parseghian defeated the Fighting Irish on four separate occasions.

Upon being hired in 1963 as the 22nd head football coach at Notre Dame, he inherited a team with a 2-7 record, and with young men who were down on their luck as a unit. The next year Parseghian brought Notre Dame a National Championship.

In 1964, a player from Parseghian's second year tenure named John Huarte won the Heisman Trophy. The Heisman is the most significant and important accolade a college football player can receive in his career.

After coaching, Parseghian went into business. A family man, Parseghian and his wife, Kathleen, have three children. He has two foundations. He founded a charity, which serves to eradicate Niemann-Pick disease and also works for the foundation to cure Multiple Sclerosis.

A couple of months back, Parseghian joined former Notre Dame Coaches Lou Holtz and Brian Kelly on the set of ESPN College game day. At 89 years of age, Parseghian is a testament to health and wellness and will always be revered as an iconic Armenian-American sports figure.

Church Razed, to Be Replaced by Housing

BELMONT, Mass. (*Boston Globe*) — The oldest church in Belmont was demolished last week, according to town officials and the developer who plans to

By Evan Allen

build three duplex houses where it stood.

"It's over. It's pretty sad," said Selectman Andy Rojas. "I'm sure [the developer] will build some nice houses on there, but it's really not the same."

The former First Congregational Church on Trapelo Road in Waverly Square was sold last month for \$1.3 million to developer Edward Hovsepian, who had obtained a demolition permit from the town in December.

Hovsepian said he looked at the possibility of saving the church, and building housing units inside and behind the structure. But ultimately, he said, the structure needed too much work, and the lack of parking was too big an issue.

"It doesn't make sense to keep it, and that was just the bottom line," he said. "I don't feel good about tearing down a church. No one feels good about that."

Hovsepian said he is having plans drawn up for the duplexes, which he said will be sold as condominiums, and that he hopes to break ground on the project in the next five or six weeks.

Demolition started at around 8 a.m., said Hovsepian, and the church was completely demolished by about noon. Stained glass windows, pews, some furnishings, and light fixtures were sent to a salvage company, he said.

Residents were saddened by the loss of the church, which had stood at the heart of the square since 1870.

"I am more emotional than I even thought I would be today," said Lisa Oteri, who grew up in Belmont and serves as a Town Meeting member. "I think it's just a great loss."

With the demolition of the church, she said, Belmont has lost a piece of its quaint New England charm.

"We're just losing these wonderful reminders of architecture past," she said. "We're losing small houses, we're being crowded out by oversized townhouses on small lots. I just feel like part of it could have been saved as a remembrance of a time past for Waverly Square. But I guess not."

Rojas said that the town did make an effort to save the church, and that one individual approached Hovsepian about the prospect of buying it, but was turned down.

Hovsepian declined to comment on who approached him or what they offered, other than to say it was a town official.

Rojas said he was surprised that no members of the community picketed or otherwise acted to save the church. "The community, in a way, didn't respond forcefully enough."

The sale and demolition of the church has prompted drafting of bylaws by Belmont officials to provide some protection for historical buildings.

Michael Smith, chairman of the town's Historic District Commission, said the commission will put a demolition-delay bylaw before Town Meeting in April that would temporarily halt the demolition of historic buildings to allow a search for other options. The Planning Board is also drafting a bylaw, according to the chairman, that would create incentives for developers to preserve historic buildings.

Rojas said that while the town did not step up to buy the church, the developer could have been more flexible and waited to see whether the bylaw proposed by the Planning Board passed at Town Meeting.

Oteri said that perhaps everyone in town bore some responsibility by not doing more to protect the church.

"Maybe we should have helped each other create a public outcry earlier in the process," she said, "but I don't know where the opportunity was lost."



COMMUNITY NEWS

Keeping the Balance by Rev. Dr. Vahan Tootikian and More

By Betty Apigian Kessel

DETROIT — The object of this column is to inform readers that although he is a prolific writer, scholar, lecturer, teacher and an exceptional minister of the Lord in his duties as a clergyman in the Armenian Congregational Church, Rev. Dr. Vahan Tootikian deserves to be revealed as to the sum total of how he became the venerated man of the cloth we have come to love and respect.

One day the postman arrived at my house with a huge box containing 30 books Rev. Dr. Tootikian had written over the many years of his ministry and just after the first of this year one more book arrived titled *Keeping The Balance* and who could share the benefits of keeping balance better than the author? That makes 35 books. He is revered by every element of the Metro Detroit Armenian and American community and is known worldwide

as a true humanitarian. He delivers the word of God because he lives it.

He writes: "There ought to be a fair balance between one's faith and one's good works, for without faith a person's good works are futile and without good works one's faith is dead."

I am privileged to have read the tributes and accolades paid to him in a testimonial banquet book in celebration of Rev. Dr. Tootikian's 40th anniversary of his pastoral and public service as well as another such event honoring him on September 25, 2005 marking his retirement.

His story begins in Ekiz-Olouk near his beloved Kessab, Syria, one of four sons born to Hagop and Keghanoush Tootikian. Rev. Dr. Tootikian says of them, "They were simple, good people whose dignity showed us how life should be lived through example of integrity, love and faith."

A graduate of the Near East School of Theology, the Rev. Tootikian did his graduate work at Hartford, Harvard and Newton

Theological seminaries earning two master's and a doctorate.

He was happily married for over 25 years to the now late Juliette (Nazarian) Tootikian and together had three beautiful daughters. In 1991, on June 22, a date suggested by his mother because it also was his birthday, Rev. Dr. Tootikian married Californian Rosette Pambakian who as his life partner totally immersed herself to be at his side in everything affiliated in his ministry.

Rosette Tootikian possesses an endearing, warm personality. She is an accomplished woman in her own right. She gave up a successful 28-year career with Pan Am Airlines beginning in ticket sales at a very young age to become the Yeretgin of the pastor of the Armenian Congregational Church in Southfield, offering support to her husband's life and ministry.

During her airline career, she traveled extensively, first class, around the world enjoying the lifestyle and culture of many different people. It was excellent preparation for her future life in Detroit.

She admitted to her then future husband that although she helped her mother in the kitchen cooking, she never actually considered herself well versed in that area. He asked, "Are you willing to learn?" She now can honestly say "Yes" to that question having become a helpmate to her church's ladies guild when preparing food for banquets and family nights. She is involved!

I observed his popularity when I recently attended a Kessab picnic in Cambridge, Ontario. I noticed a throng happily surrounding someone with hugs and handshakes. Upon closer observation I discovered it was

my good friend Rev. Dr. Vahan Tootikian and the people loved their fellow Kessabtzi and were unabashedly showing their respect.

Rev. Dr. Tootikian is now the Minister Emeritus of the Armenian Congregational Church of Greater Detroit after service of 30 years. He and Yeretgin (Pampeesh) Rosette travel across America, Canada, and other countries in his duties as the executive director of the Armenian Evangelical World Council.

Along with his ecclesiastical involvement, Dr. Tootikian has been a lecturer at Lawrence Technological University and the University of Michigan. He was elected moderator of the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America four times. He also served as secretary and president of the Armenian Evangelical World Council.

The letters of congratulation and thanks for his service to God and community are from United States Presidents, Senators, Governors, other noted luminaries and people who have had the honor of his friendship. He maintains a remarkable relationship with his fellow Detroit Der Hayrs, brothers in the service of the Lord believing all are closely connected to the Mother Armenian Church.

Without question through his faith and humility he has garnered the admiration of all who have come to know the Rev. Dr. Vahan Tootikian. Detroit has been most fortunate to have him in our midst. Our best wishes are extended to him and the lovely Yeretgin Rosette for many more years as valued community members.

His book can be purchased by contacting: Armenian Heritage Committee, 3925 Yorba Linda Blvd., Royal Oak, MI 48073-6455.

OBITUARY

Yeretgin Varteni (Mikirditsian) Barsamian

BELMONT, Mass. — Yeretgin Varteni (Mikirditsian) Barsamian died on February 1. She was the wife of Rev. Arsen Barsamian.

In addition to her husband, she leaves her children, Raffi Barsamian and his wife Lilith of California, Steven Barsamian and his wife Dorian of Virginia and Lucy MacMasters and her husband George of Watertown; grandchildren Lucine and Harry Andrew Barsamian and brother Mikirdits Mikirditsian of Beirut. Another brother, Artin Mikirditsian, predeceased her.

Services were at St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, on Wednesday, February 6.

Interment was in Ridgeland Cemetery, Watertown.

Expressions of sympathy may be made in her memory to St. James Armenian Church or to a charity of one's choice.

Arrangements were by the Giragosian Funeral Home.



Yeretgin Varteni (Mikirditsian) Barsamian

Irene H. (Melkonian) Zartarian

WARWICK, R.I. — Irene H. (Melkonian) Zartarian, 98, died on January 7.

She was the wife of the late George H. Zartarian.

She was the daughter of the late George and Mary (Hagopian) Melkonian. She was the mother of three sons, David and his wife Janet of Narragansett, Alan and his wife Marilyn of Warwick, and Robert of Branford, Conn., and the grandmother of Lori and Brian Zartarian, Alison and Adrien Hebert, and great-grandmother of Julian Cepeda. She was predeceased by her siblings Albert Melkonian, Harold Melkonian, and Florence Hedison.

She was born in Rehoboth, Mass., in 1914. When she was very young, her family moved to Providence before they settled in the Shawomet section

of Warwick, where she grew up on the family farm.

In 1931, she graduated from Warwick High School and worked as a switchboard operator at Warwick City Hall before her marriage in 1942. She and her husband lived in Warwick throughout their marriage, eventually settling in the Lakewood section where they raised their three sons.

After her husband's untimely death in 1965, Irene was devoted to honoring his memory, and did so through charitable donations. She estab-

lished a student scholarship in his name which is given annually by the Armenian Student's Association, as well as a donation to St. Vartan Cathedral in New York City in his honor.

As a widow, her devotion and life's work concentrated on raising her three teenage sons. Though she dedicated many hours as a volunteer worker at The Ocean State Center for Independent Living in Warwick, as well as the Rhode Island Hospital Gift Shop, her primary life work was centered on caring for her family and ensuring that her sons were successful in their life endeavors.

She enjoyed traveling, especially her visit to Yerevan, Armenia, reading, knitting, hook-rug-ging and playing cards and Scrabble with her grandchildren, relatives and friends. She played pinochle for nearly seven decades with her dear friends, the "card group."

She was a life-long member of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church of Providence and a sister in the Daughters of Vartan organization. In 1998, the Ladies Aid of the church honored her as "Mother of the Year." She was proud of her Armenian heritage. Her love of the Armenian Church was a guiding force in her life and she was happiest when attending Divine Liturgies on Sunday mornings.

She donated a digital music system to the church in honor of her late husband.

The wake was on Friday January 11 at Nardolillo Funeral Home & Crematory, Cranston. Funeral services were held from Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church at on Saturday, January 12, followed by interment at North Burial Ground Cemetery, Providence.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church, 70 Jefferson St. Providence, RI 02908.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Dr. Sona Haroutyunian to Present Series at Fresno State on Armenian Genocide in Literature, Translation and Cinema

FRESNO – Dr. Sona Haroutyunian, from the University of Venice, the 10th Henry K. Khanzadian Kazan Visiting Professor of Armenian Studies at California State University, Fresno, will hold three illustrated public lectures on the theme of the Armenian Genocide, concentrating on the renowned Italian-Armenian novelist Antonia Arslan's Genocide narrative, *Skylark Farm*.

The first lecture, to be held at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 27, will focus on the literary genre as an instrument, which brings greater attention to the historical phenomenon of the Armenian Genocide. To what extent are these narratives true to historical events? To what extent can an author use the devices of literary fiction while still remaining authentic in the telling of history? Does reading fiction about this particular historical event alter the way we think about the nature of historical memory? These are some of the questions that will be explored during the first lecture. This lecture will feature an accompanying slideshow of documents.

In the second lecture, to be held at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 14, Haroutyunian will both explore and problematize the power of translation related to the Genocide as an instrument of cultural, historical and linguistic interaction. For example, why has this particular book been chosen for translation into 18 languages? What difference does reading Genocide literature in translation make? Is there something about the Genocide as an event that calls into crisis the very notion of eventfulness that resists or eludes translation? And finally, in what ways have these translations contributed to the awareness of the Genocide in their given countries?

Haroutyunian will also explore the different impact of languages on interpretation by presenting exclusive interviews

with some of the translators. During the lecture the metaphorical relationship between memory and translation will also be examined.

The third lecture, to be held at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 10, will focus on the theme of "The Armenian Genocide in Cinema" and will deal with the Italian directors the Taviani brothers and their film "Skylark Farm," a co-production by Italy, Spain, Belgium, France and the European production company Eurimages.

The aim of the three public lectures will be to analyze the different effects that each medium (literature-translation-cinema) may have on the experience of its readers/audience – what that medium is trying to cultivate, the limitations of each and how all of them in different ways bring greater attention to the historical phenomenon of the Armenian Genocide.

Haroutyunian is a graduate of Yerevan State University, where she received her master's in pedagogy, philology and literary translation in 1996, and later her PhD in philology. She received her second PhD in linguistics at the University of Venice, where she has been a professor of Armenian language and literature since 2001.

Along with teaching, Haroutyunian has also directed her skills towards working as the cultural advisor to the ambassador of Armenia in Italy, and the Italian and Armenian Website coordinator and translator for the Armenian Embassy in Italy.

Recently, Haroutyunian completed mapping translations from the Armenian language into Italian, a project she has worked on with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO.)

Each of the lectures is free and open to the public and will



Dr. Sona Haroutyunian

take place in the University Business Center, A. Peters Auditorium, on the Fresno State campus.

For more information on the lecture, contact the Armenian Studies Program.

Genocide Survivor Ojen Fantazian: A Tribute

TRIBUTE, from page 5

Through sacrifice and commitment, they maintained their identity and were a voice for fellow immigrants who followed them here.

I watched with pride as the two Ojens took each other's hands and sang the Hayr Mer. It made me realize that among the truly precious commodities in life is the love we share for those who made our existence possible and the friendships of all those whom we treasure deeply.

The pedestal Ojen Fantazian was put upon one year at the Statehouse could have very well have been the footstool in her kitchen.

My mother was the last of her kind to leave Haverhill. Ojen Fantazian was in a class by herself in Billerica inside a community that once boasted some 75 survivors in the mid-1960s.

In her later days, she held court at an assisted living facility.

"We took a horse and buggy and we were with the animals in the train," she recalled.

To illustrate the severity of her situation, Ojen told the story of an Armenian general who handed her mother a gun for protection on the road. She always remembered him as her hero.

"It's a wonder we escaped," Ojen often said. "A lot of times, we didn't have food. We would

suffer."

After having her head shaved to ensure she would pass a lice inspection, Fantazian and her family boarded a vessel departing for Greece, crossing the Black Sea and eventually landing on Ellis Island in 1920.

She recalled mothers throwing their children into the river, believing that such a burial was a more desirable fate than falling into the hands of the Turks. Her own mother once admitted she had considered doing the same.

"We would have been murdered or taken as slaves by the Turks," she recounted. "I never knew my father who had previously come to

America when I was a baby. He never made it back to Armenia."

When the family arrived in the US, they lived with an uncle in Leominster.

Her mother remarried a fellow Armenian refugee and they moved to Lawrence, then Worcester, where her stepfather bought a convenience store. She worked there as a child.

She spent most of her adult life in Arlington where she and her husband raised two children, James and Nancy. She also had two grandchildren, James Asbedian and Susan Ciaffi, and six great-grandchildren.

For 10 years, she helped teach English to foreign children in the Arlington schools and once presided over the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). She was a lover of classical music, especially opera, and often attended the Metropolitan Opera Society presentations in Boston.

She supported a number of Armenian charities throughout her life, donating what little money she could spare. For years, she sent the Prelacy checks for orphans, always with an encouraging note. Her generosity was straight from the heart.

"My age had nothing to do with it," she often told others. "So long as I feel healthy and willing, I want to serve my heritage."

Among her other survivors is a brother, David Davidian.

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New York METRO

Hamazkayin of NY Screens Zareh Tjeknavorian's Documentary, 'Enemy of the People'

By Arto Khrimian

NEW YORK — On Sunday, January 27, at the Pashalian Hall of St. Illuminator's Cathedral, the New York chapter of Hamazkayin Educational and Cultural Society organized the screening of the documentary film "Enemy of the People: Armenians Look Back at the Stalin Terror," directed and produced by Zareh Tjeknavorian.

Dr. Ara Caprielian, chairman of Hamazkayin of New York, began the program with welcoming remarks, during which he expressed his gratitude to Rev. Mesrob Lakissian for making the Pashalian Hall available gratis for such cultural events. Then, he introduced Zareh Tjeknavorian to the audience.

Tjeknavorian was born in Fargo, ND, but grew up in a cosmopolitan international environment due to his father, composer and conductor Loris Tjeknavorian's tours in various countries. The younger Tjeknavorian lived in San Francisco, Iran, London, Germany, Paris, New York City and Armenia. He graduated from the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University in 1992, with a bachelor's degree in film and television production.

"Enemy of the People," narrated by Eric Bogosian, is Tjeknavorian's most widely-known documentary film, which depicts Stalinist oppression in Armenia. In fact, *National Geographic Magazine* recommended it as one of three must-see films about Armenia, along with "The Color of Pomegranates" by Sergei Paradjanov and "Ararat" by Atom Egoyan.

Tjeknavorian interlaces black and white archival film with his original color footage of interviews and scenes in this documentary. The film opens with a scene of Joseph Stalin's funeral procession. Thousands of mourners wait in line to pay their last respects. Then, a direct quote from Stalin eerily encapsulates the historic perspective of his terror: "The death of one man is a tragedy. The death of millions, only statistics."

During Stalin's reign between the early 1930s and his death in 1953, a terror campaign swept the USSR; nearly twenty-five million people were executed or exiled to "gulags," forced-labor camps in remote areas of the Soviet Union. Armenia represented the epitome of Stalin's terror in the entire USSR, where nearly each citizen was turned into either an informant or a victim. The victims were accused of being "enemies of the people." Stalin demanded conformity supposedly for the good of the state, rationalizing that since he represented the state, to be against him meant to be against the Revolution. Thus, Stalin coerced the entire society into becoming an accomplice in his crime.

In the interviews, the survivors of the gulags and the children of the prisoners who perished talk about their tragic experiences. It is heart wrenching to listen to their stories. The truth is revealed that common working people along with innocent intellectuals were persecuted and

exiled, many of whom disappeared without a trace. Against the archival footage depicting the torturous labor in the gulags, the film juxtaposes a new footage that shows the unearthing of human bones from an obscure mass grave in a newly-developed residential area in Armenia. Later, the documentary film shows one of Stalin's "glorious" speeches where he promises to a fervently applauding crowd to protect the Soviet people: "[I will protect] the working class, the peasants, and the intelligentsia." Those, particularly the intelligentsia, were the very same people whose lives were destroyed by his paranoid oppression.

Although this is a documentary, with his artful filming and skillful editing, Tjeknavorian succeeds in adding subtle drama and suspense to his work. At the heart-wrenching finale of the film, the audience wishes that it were much longer than 58 minutes.

During the question and answer segment of the program, Tjeknavorian explained that he had no choice but to edit some of his favorite parts out of film so that it could be shown on public television. He said, "Frankly, I was green when I made this film," as this was his first full-

length film, commissioned by Louise Simone of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU). "I would do it a little differently today," he continued.

However, he is happy with the entirety of this work, which includes more than 200 interviews and about 100 hours of documentary footage. He went to the remotest corners of the Soviet Union to film the locations where Armenians had been exiled. He also interviewed former NKVD (Soviet secret police) officials. His contacts helped him find surviving Armenian victims. Those interviews are of historic value now that most of the interviewees/witnesses have passed away. Among very many valuable interviews, he mentioned the interview with Elena Bonner (Lusik Alikhanyan), who was a human rights activist in the Soviet Union and the wife of the renowned physicist and dissident, Andrei Sakharov.

Tjeknavorian added, "That interview was very interesting, but I could not include her in this film because it would not fit into the storyline."

Tjeknavorian also mentioned the attempts made by certain apologetics to whitewash the

truth about Stalin's terror (also known as the Great Purge) and to absolve him of his despicable crimes, but such efforts eventually turn out to be futile in the light of the truth and the verdict of historians.

This statement gives us another glimmer of hope. Regardless of how emotionally deranged they were, tyrants such as Talaat, Hitler, and Stalin were avid students of history and they were cautious of promoting an admirable image of themselves during their reign. Now that history has identified them as the utmost villains of human kind, can we hope that future tyrants of the same kind will think twice before committing another purge or genocide?

At the conclusion of the program, Dr. Ara Caprielian invited Fr. Mesrob Lakissian to the podium to make the closing remarks. Lakissian expressed his pleasure at seeing such a poignant film, congratulated Tjeknavorian on his accomplishment, and presented him with a miniature replica of the Armenian Genocide Commemoration Monument erected in Antelias. He also praised Caprielian and the rest of the Hamazkayin board members for organizing this significant function.



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Flamenco Dancers Perform at Armenian Society Center

NEW YORK— The Arts Flamenco dancers will perform at the Mark Kyrkostas Remember Me With Music & Dance Concert, 7 p.m., March 8, at the Armenian Society Center, 39-03 Little Neck Parkway.

Ivy Adrian, the concert pianist, will perform Kyrkostas' classic pieces accompanied by Ani Djirdjirian on vocals. Djirdjirian is an Adelphi University music major and a graduate of the Holy Martyrs Day School.

The Khanamirian Dance Group will also perform traditional Armenian dances.

The event is presented by the Anthropology Museum of the People of New York and is open to the public. Parking is available. A reception with refreshments will follow the program.

For tickets, contact the museum: <http://www.anthropologymuseum.org/>.



New York METRO

Mardigian Gift will Help One of Armenia's Poorest Regions

NEW YORK — The Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) announced recently a gift by benefactors Edward and Janet Mardigian and the Mardigian Family Foundation.

The magnanimous gift — one of the largest ever contributed to FAR — will allow the humanitarian organization to launch a new initiative, Breaking the Cycle of Poverty, Developing Thriving Communities, aimed at relieving poverty and decreasing its effects on children and families in one of the key provinces in Armenia.

A portion of the gift will also help support the FAR Children's Center in Yerevan, increasing and extending the five-year commitment that the Mardigian family has already made to support the center.

"We are extremely thankful," said FAR Chairman Randy Sapah-Gulian, "that the Mardigian family gift will provide critical support for these most important initiatives of FAR for the next five years."

The board members and staff of FAR have been deeply touched by this expression of the Mardigians' continuing confidence and good-

will.

"I can hardly find words to express how blessed we feel to have such people in the fold of our Diocese," said Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese and President of FAR. "The dedication Edward and Janet have always shown to our heritage is a shining light to people throughout our community, and especially in Armenia."

Barsamian also reflected on the vision of the late, senior generation of the family, Edward and Helen Mardigian, who were longtime, heroic benefactors of the church in America and Armenia. "The late Edward and Helen Mardigian both shared a strong conviction about the importance of transmitting our heritage from generation to generation," said the Primate. "Their effort was waged on many fronts, and I feel that the Mardigian family's support of these FAR projects is of a piece with the enduring family legacy to improve and advance Armenian youth."

With the Mardigians' generosity behind it, FAR's new groundbreaking program aims to break the "cycles of poverty" presently handi-

capping people in Armenia's Tavush region, and set them on the road to greater self-sufficiency and dignity.

Today, even more than 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tavush still suffers from poverty, malnutrition, unemployment and poor infrastructure. These factors weaken families, individuals, and ultimately the community

employment as adults.

Established in 1955, the Helen and Edward Mardigian Foundation has provided significant support to various religious, cultural, and educational philanthropies, including a major contributions towards the building of the St. John Armenian Church of Greater Detroit and the restoration of many historic Armenian churches and monasteries worldwide. It has also provided generous support to the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Armenian Assembly of America.

The foundation has funded three museums, including the Edward and Helen Mardigian Museum in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem, and the museum in the Armenian monastery in Geghard, Armenia.

The family also created the Helen and Edward Mardigian Institute at the Eastern Diocese, a highly successful training program for educators and Sunday School teachers.

"My parents taught us to want to give back; they communicated that this country had been good to them, and so they wanted to give back to the community," said Edward Mardigian. "My father focused on the Armenian community; however, he wanted to serve everyone, which is why my father started the foundation."

The Helen and Edward Mardigian Foundation has been supporting many causes in Armenia, most notably helping the country's younger generation. The FAR Children's Center continues to be a pioneer in the field of child protection in Armenia, thanks to the ongoing support of the FAR Edward and Helen Mardigian Child Protection Foundation, established by the family in 2007.

In 2013 the entire Mardigian family — Edward, Janet, Matthew and Grant — were in Gumri for the start of construction on a new school of music to serve the city, which still labors under the shattering effects of the 1988 earthquake. The new music school became possible thanks to the Mardigian Foundation.

"I knew the elder Mardigians, the late Edward and Helen, since I was a child," recalled Sapah-Gulian, "and they have always focused on the children. The recent gifts to FAR by their children — Edward and Janet and the family — are in keeping with that vision to support children's programs."

"Ultimately," he added, "we will help foster a strong and confident next generation, to lead



Edward Mardigian reviews the blueprints of the new Octet School.

as a whole. Instead of being able to focus on their potential to improve their lives, many Armenians in the region find themselves in a day-to-day struggle to survive.

Through Breaking the Cycle of Poverty, FAR will combat this situation by focusing on goals like stabilizing families, developing sustainable industry and training and educating a qualified, competent work force in Tavush.

Its many successful programs already extant in Armenia give FAR the right foundation of experience and hard-won knowledge to take on such a transformative task.

The experienced counselors at the FAR Children's Center in Yerevan are ready to address the needs of vulnerable children, while also working with parents to help strengthen the family unit. The Children's Center will also provide training to Tavush's native child protection agencies, so that they can better assist their population.

FAR will encourage residents to forge stronger connections with the Armenian Church, by partnering with local pastors and giving children the chance to benefit from FAR's excellent summer camp programs.

Doctors trained through FAR's Continuing Medical Education Program will also be partners in this new initiative, working among local families to provide higher quality healthcare and nutrition.

To improve the fields of agriculture, construction, trades and traditional crafts that are vital to Tavush, FAR will draw on its connections to broader regional markets, while partnering with leaders in the private sector, professional associations and government to support local entrepreneurs and business development.

FAR will also work with government agencies at all levels to support much-needed rehabilitation of the province's infrastructure and provide better access to natural gas, clean water and irrigation.

With an eye to long-term prosperity, FAR will make its diverse scholarship and vocational training programs more readily available to children and students in Tavush, giving them opportunities to obtain higher education and gain the requisite skills for stable, dignified

Armenia into a brighter future."

As one of the pre-eminent humanitarian and development organizations working in Armenia today, FAR has a long record of leadership in providing high quality programs in healthcare, education, child protection and economic development to the Republic of Armenia. The result has changed the lives of thousands of Armenians. In more than two decades of operations, FAR has implemented more than \$290 million worth of relief and development programs in Armenia and Karabagh — programs which not only meet immediate needs, but also contribute to lasting positive change to Armenia and its citizens.

To learn more about FAR's Breaking the Cycle of Poverty, Developing Thriving Communities program, or to make a contribution to FAR's ongoing efforts, visit www.farusa.org.



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From left, Grant Mardigian, Matthew Mardigian and Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

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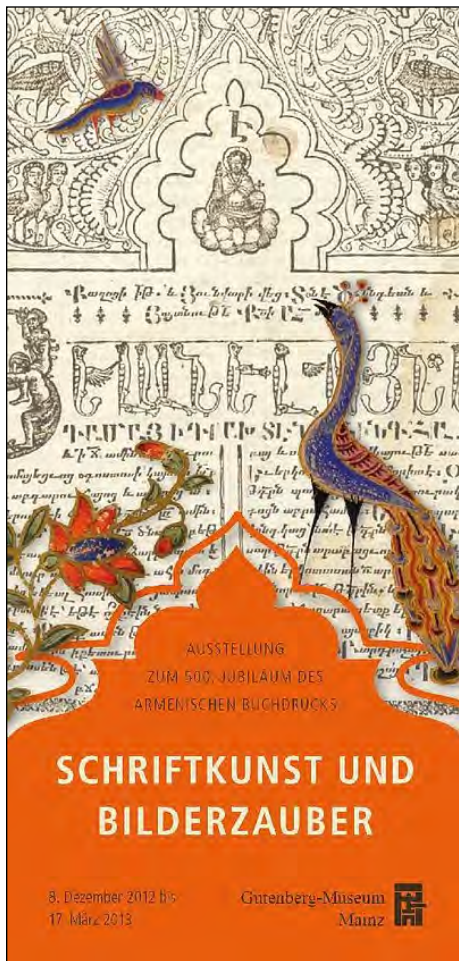
Arts & Living

Gutenberg Museum Displays Armenian Book Treasures

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

MAINZ, Germany — The relationship of Armenians to their language is very special, actually unique. To my knowledge, Armenia is the only country that offers the foreign visitor a monument composed of giant letters of the alphabet, standing as stone sculptures in a vast field outside Yerevan. And Mesrob Mashtots (360-440), the genius who invented the alphabet as a perfect phonetic system in the year 405 AD, is not only honored as a great intellectual but is revered as a canonized saint. His biographer Koriwn compared his arrival in Echmiadzin with his alphabet to the appearance of Moses with the holy tablets from Mount Sinai. Mesrop and his students are honored in the church calendar, especially with the celebration of the Festival of the Holy Translator, again a unique event.

The reason why Armenians reserve such a privileged place for their language lies in the historical fact that it, along with the church, was what saved the Armenian people and their culture from extinction over centuries. Though their nation was occupied by foreign powers,



The poster for the exhibit

and the people were expelled from their native lands, they managed to maintain their identity as a people thanks to the continuity of their language culture. And a crucial factor in preserving this tradition was the Armenians' adoption of the technology of book printing invented by the great German scientist Johannes Gutenberg. In fact, the Armenians were among the first Christians of the Orient to print books. That was in 1512, and last year, UNESCO commemorated the 500th anniversary by designating Yerevan officially as the world book capital.

In the context of these anniversary celebrations, exhibits of Armenian book printing were organized in Yerevan, Venice, Amsterdam and Washington, DC. A very special additional exhibit opened in December in Mainz, Germany, and will run through the middle of March. The site of the exhibit is the Gutenberg Museum, dedicated to the life and work of Johannes

see EXHIBIT, page 12



Raffi Joe Wartanian performs.

Eclectic Mix of Music Debuts on Raffi Wartanian's 'Pushkin Street'

YEREVAN — Raffi Joe Wartanian, a multi-platform Armenian-American artist and Fulbright research fellow, has launched "Pushkin Street," his debut album of 11 original "gypsy zest" songs under artist name "Raffi Joe." The album — a fusion of Armenian, rock, Greek, gypsy, funk, Latin, folk and theater music described as "Salvador Dali meets Frank Zappa meets Dick Dales meets the Beatles — is available on iTunes, Bandcamp, Spotify, CD Baby, Amazon, Soundcloud, Google Play and other major online distributors.

Wartanian was born in Baltimore to Armenian immigrants from Beirut, Lebanon, where he spent most summers of his upbringing absorbing the eclectic local Lebanese culture, and spending time with his grandparents, survivors of the Armenian Genocide, along with extended family. He attended the Hamasdegh Armenian School in Washington DC every Sunday where he learned to sing and dance before taking up the piano at 8 and the guitar at 12.

Wartanian, a graduate of The Johns Hopkins University, has studied guitar with Brian Kookan, and with Paul Bollenback at the Peabody Conservatory. In Armenia he has studied flamenco guitar with Hakob Jaghatspanyan and oud with Miran Demirjian, both instructors at the Komitas Conservatory of Music in Yerevan. His poetry has been published and he has been commissioned to write original music and lyrics for Eileen Khatchadourian, whose album, "Midan," was awarded Best Rock Album at the 2009 Armenian Music Awards. Wartanian has also worked as an actor with Golden Thread Productions in San Francisco, Theater Hopkins in Baltimore, and with the Hamasdegh Theater Group aboard the 10th annual Armenian Heritage Cruise.

Studying the development of civil society through volunteerism and the arts in Armenia as Fulbright research fellow, Wartanian has continued performing, studying and writing music. He has performed 11 times since arriving in Armenia, including performances for school children in villages, and around Yerevan for audiences that have included the US Ambassador to Armenia, and is currently forming a band for a forthcoming CD release party and future performances.



Raffi Joe Wartanian performs at a school in Talin.

Design Selected for Armenian Genocide Memorial in Pasadena

PASADENA, Calif. (*Los Angeles Times*) — The winning design for a public memorial commemorating the Armenian Genocide was announced Tuesday.

The design by Catherine Menard, a student of Art Center College of Design, was submitted to the Pasadena Armenian Genocide Memorial Committee for consideration. The memorial sketch was praised as "an emotionally compelling design" that would serve to "inspire a similar emotional connection in those who encounter it, for generations to come," according to a statement by the committee.

The central feature of Menard's design — a carved-stone basin of water straddled by a tripod arrangement of three columns leaning into one another — is a single drop of water that falls from the highest point every three seconds, each "teardrop" representing one life lost. A rendering of the winning design was not immediately available.

Over the course of one year, 1.5 million "tears" will fall into the pool, representing the estimated number of people who died during the Armenian Genocide from 1915 to 1918, which occurred under the Ottoman Empire, or what is now the modern republic of Turkey.

The project is slated for Memorial Park in Pasadena and is expected to be completed by April 24, 2015, the 100th anniversary of the Genocide.

Menard, a 26-year-old of French-Cajun heritage who is majoring in environmental design at the college, immersed herself in the history of the Armenian people to create the design.

In a statement, Menard said the research process was engrossing and inspirational.

"At first I felt unworthy — who am I to respond to such loss?" she said. "But art lends itself to the deepest, darkest parts of human experience. It can create sympathy, empathy, understanding. I wanted to pair this horror with something uplifting and beautiful, to create a way to remember. I developed three different ideas and settled on the one that I felt most terrified and most moved by," Menard said.

Tigran Hamasyan, YoYo Ma among Vilcek Winners

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — Yo-Yo Ma, the popular and successful cellist who has already received several major cash awards, has won another: the \$100,000 Vilcek Prize, given by the Vilcek Foundation. The foundation, which this year is recognizing achievements in contemporary music, also gave three \$35,000 awards to three other musicians: Tigran Hamasyan, an Armenian-born vocalist and pianist; the British-born songwriter James Abrahart, known as JHart and Samuel Bazawule, a Ghanaian producer and composer known as Blitz the Ambassador.

The foundation was set up to recognize contributions by immigrants in the United States to science and the arts by Jan T. Vilcek, a scientist at New York University who made his fortune in research that led to the drug Remicade, an important anti-inflammatory. Ma has also received the Dan David Prize (\$1 million), the Léonie Sonning Music Prize (\$80,000), the Glenn Gould Prize (\$34,000) and the Polar Music Prize (\$166,000).



Pianist Tigran Hamasyan



ARTS & LIVING

For Entertainment Promoter Ed Atamian, Risk Makes the Job More Fun

By Richard Duckett

WORCESTER (*Worcester Telegram and Gazette*) — Ed Atamian, 61, of Shrewsbury, is the head of Elite Entertainment, Inc. He and his wife, Susan, have two sons, Ross and Kirk. For the past 35 years, he has brought some of the most famous names in music to area venues. Among them, he rattles off, are, “Diana Ross, B.B. King, Tom Jones, Aretha Franklin, Bill Cosby, Kenny Rogers, The Moody Blues, Vince Gill, Martina McBride, Crosby and Nash, Trace Adkins, Regis Philbin, Susan Lucci, Patti LaBelle, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Jennifer Hudson, Melissa Etheridge, k.d. lang, Tony Bennett, Doobie Brothers, Avicii ...”

WT&G: What attracted you to this type of business?

EA: “I always loved music and live concerts, and was always very curious as to how concerts were produced and what takes place behind the scenes. So one day I started to make calls to booking agents in New York City and told them I was a promoter from Massachusetts and finally I found one talent agent who did listen to my story, Phil Citron, and we are still working together to this day along with my son Ross, who is Phil’s assistant, working in New York for the past seven years. My first major show was at the Centrum with Tony Bennett, Sarah Vaughn and Buddy Rich.”

WT&G: What is the degree of risk involved in promoting a show? Do you have to pay up-front to the performer, the venue, others, then hope that tickets sell?

EA: “The risk on every show is enormous. Performers require a 50 percent deposit 30 days before the show, some venues require deposits, some media outlets, i.e. radio, TV, newspapers, require payment up front. Everyone wants to get paid regardless of ticket sales.”

WT&G: What would most people not know about what you do?

EA: “As the promoter for the show, I buy the show from the booking agents and then proceed to sell tickets. I take the risk on every show and hopefully get the reward. I set ticket prices, time of the show, advertise the show, arrange for the setting up day of show, hiring the catering, booking hotels and limousines, et cetera. I work directly with the theater and the artist tour manager on a daily basis.”

WT&G: How has the business changed over the years?

EA: “It really hasn’t changed that much — give people a good show at a fair price! There is nothing like a live concert.”

WT&G: What is the most frustrating aspect of your job?

EA: “Dealing with inclement Northeast winter weather and sometimes not selling enough tickets to a show.”

WT&G: You’ve worked with some very high profile stars such as Diana Ross and Bill Cosby. Are big names also high maintenance? Any horror stories/feel good stories?

EA: “The big names I have worked with have not been high maintenance at all. Most are very gracious, and I do whatever is necessary to

Wednesday night to Tuesday night. He agreed and the Kenny Rogers show went on Wednesday night.

Feel good: Last year I did a show in Jacksonville with Diana Ross. About three weeks before the show I received a letter from a fan telling me that her mother grew up loving Diana Ross and The Supremes, she had never seen her in person, and would not be able to attend the concert due to medical issues. However, knowing Diana Ross was in her hometown on that night would make her feel good. I



Ed Atamian, president of Elite Entertainment, Inc., in his office

make them happy when they play my shows.

One interesting story, about five years ago I was presenting the Kenny Rogers Christmas Show in Lowell. There was a threat of bad weather and Kenny was traveling from Philadelphia (where he performed the night before). I received a call from his tour manager about 4 a.m. saying the buses were on the side of the road outside of Pennsylvania and couldn’t move because of the ice. At noontime, after waiting and hoping, I had to postpone the show. This was on a Sunday and the only open day Kenny had in his schedule was the following Wednesday. However, the arena in Lowell was booked with a hockey game.

After speaking with the GM of the arena I called the president of the hockey team to see if he could move the hockey games from

called the daughter and told her if there is any way her mother is able to make the show that I would love for them to be my guest and there would be four tickets left at the box office. I left her my number to call me if she came. Half an hour before the show she called me, we met and they were able to see Diana Ross in concert.

WT&G: What do you enjoy most about your job?

EA: “Working with so many wonderful people.”

WT&G: What advice would you give to someone considering becoming a promoter?

EA: “Walk before you run, it is a very risky business and one bad show can put you out of business as fast as you got into business. However, if you try and have the passion go for it and don’t look back!”

ALMA Presents New Series, ‘In Conversation’

WATERTOWN — On Wednesday, February 20, at 7:30 p.m., the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA) will hold the first in a new series, “In Conversation,” beginning with poet and singer/songwriter Arto Vaun. The conversation will be moderated by Prof. Taline Voskeritchian. The program will focus on the question of literature’s relevance in diasporan culture and space.

This ongoing series seeks to be a forum where intellectuals and artists, along with the audience, can engage in an open conversation.

Born in Cambridge, Mass., Vaun has attended Harvard and is currently finishing a PhD in English literature from Glasgow University. A poem from his first collection, *Capillarity*, was included in *The Forward Book of Poetry* (2010). Other poems have been included in the anthologies *New Poetries V* and *Matter 10*, as well as in various journals and magazines. He has been interviewed about his work on the BBC. Vaun was the co-founder of *Aspora Literary Journal* in Los Angeles, a co-editor of the *Armenian Weekly*, and is the current poetry editor of *Glimpse Journal*. His next book of poems, *Isinglass*, is forthcoming from Carcanet Press. He has recorded three CDs and performed with artists such as Rufus Wainwright and Ben Kweller. His new CD, “The Cynthia Sessions,” is being released in February.

Voskeritchian teaches writing and literature at Boston University. Her work has appeared locally, nationally and internationally in *American Literary Review*, *Ahégan* (Beirut), *London Review of Books*, *The Nation*, *Agni Review*, *Book Forum*, *Words Without Borders*, *The Daily Star/International Herald Tribune* (Beirut), *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *MERIP/Middle East Report*, *Alik* (Tehran), *Warwick Review* (UK), the radio program “On Being” and the on-line journals *Jadaliyya* and *HowlRound*.

The event is free. A donation of \$5 is suggested. Wine and coffee will be served.

Vaun will be available to sign copies of his most recent book and CD.

ALMA is located at 65 Main St.

‘Vartanantz and the Armenian Nation’ Exhibit, Lecture at ALMA

WATERTOWN — On Sunday, February 17 at 2 p.m., the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA) will feature a new exhibit, titled “History, Art, Icon: Vartanantz and the Armenian Nation.”

Although Napoleon Bonaparte once noted that “History is written by the victors,” the experience of losing can be just as central to a people’s identity. The crushing defeat of Armenians at the battle of Vartanantz by an invading Persian army in 451 CE has become the most important battle in Armenian history, defining a people and a culture for future generations.

The exhibit will showcase Vartanantz as a symbol of Armenian determination, martyrdom and heroism through paintings, publications and other media. A lecture given by Gary Lind-Sinanian, titled “When Life Gives Lemons: the Armenian Victory of Vartanantz,” will explore the process of transforming historic defeats into symbolic victories at Avarayr, Masada, the Alamo, Bunker Hill and comparable events.

Lind-Sinanian is an Armenophile who has served as ALMA’s chief curator since 1987 and has created many of exhibitions and presentations examining and celebrating the complex history of the Armenian people. His lecture will start at 3 p.m.

The event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served following the presentation.

STATE HOUSE COMMEMORATION OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE
10:00 AM

Friday, April 19, 2013

Free buses will leave St. James and St. Stephen’s Churches at 8:30 a.m. (Courtesy of Knights of Vartan)

Details to follow



ARTS & LIVING

Gutenberg Displays Armenian Book Treasures

EXHIBIT, from page 10

Gutenberg, who was the first to develop the technology of movable print in ca. 1439, a technology which was to unleash a revolution in learning worldwide. The exhibit, “Schriftkunst und Bilderzauber,” (The Art of Calligraphy and the Charm of Pictures), is modeled on an earlier exhibit in the Artistic Forum in Halle and is organized in cooperation with the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz) and the MESROP Center for Armenian Studies at the Martin Luther University in Halle-Wittenberg. The precious books and other artifacts for the exhibit came on loan from the Berlin State Library, which houses the most important collection of early Armenian printed works in all of Europe as well as the largest number of Armenian manuscripts in Germany. Other institutions that made books available are the Library of the German Oriental Society, the National Library of the Republic of Armenia and the Mashtots-Matenadaran Manuscript Institute in Yerevan. The Bavarian State Library in Munich and the Halle Saalesparkasse Foundation also contributed articles for the show. It was the financial contribution of the Armenian government that made the exhibit possible.

And what a wonderful exhibit! With a generous display of artifacts, especially printed books and beautifully illustrated manuscripts, and explanatory panels, the organizers have succeeded, with great economy of means, in giving an overview not only of the beauty and brilliance of the Armenian art of book printing but also of its significance as a contribution to world civilization. The scientific value of Mesrop’s alphabet is explained as well as the political conditions under which the Armenian people struggled; thus the

visitor is able to grasp the reason why the Armenian script, the language and its literary tradition (religious as well as profane) gained such importance that a veritable “book cult” developed. Armenians cherish their books like the Bible. Books were not objects but “fellow citizens” and “soldiers,” we read in the accompanying pamphlet. This also helps explain the extraordinary love and care dedicated to producing the magnificent books on display – from the very first

Calcutta and so forth.

Why such an exhibit should be hosted in Mainz, Germany deserves special mention. Obviously, the fact that after all Gutenberg was the one who made such book printing on a mass scale possible is important. And certainly Gutenberg would have been delighted to see such a magnificent exhibit in the museum dedicated to his work. But there is more to it. Germany, the nation of “poets and thinkers,” is also the home



Prof. Armenuhi Drost-Abgarjan

book in Armenian printed in movable type, the 1512 Venice edition of *Ovorbatagir* (Friday Book) of Hakob Megapart, to the translations of the Bible, whose illustrations maintain a continuity with the art of hand illustrated manuscripts from the earliest times. The value of other Armenian translations is evident in the books that transmitted the works of the ancient Greeks, many of which survived only through these early versions in Old Armenian.

The vanguard role of the church in promoting printing is impressive. From the 16th century, Echmiadzin led the effort to preserve the national language and religion through book printing, and the clergy continued to be active in the publishing field. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Armenian works were printed in European centers, Rome, Amsterdam and Venice. From the late 17th century Venice developed as a special center of Armenian book printing, through Italian and Armenian printers as well as through the Mekhitarist Order of Priests on the Venetian island of San Lazzaro, who established their own printing press in 1789. Other centers of Armenian printing documented in the exhibit are Constantinople, Saint Petersburg, Persia, Madras,

of the greatest philologists of the modern era. Leibniz, Bopp, the Grimm brothers, Humboldt are just a few names associated with this illustrious school, names known outside Germany.

Less well known but just as important in the history of philology are the German scholars who dedicated their efforts to the study of Armenian. The Gutenberg Museum exhibit includes books by Germans who wrote about the Armenians and studied their language.

Hans Schiltperger, for example, presented a report on the Armenians in a book published in Augsburg in 1476. A Bavarian nobleman, Schiltperger was captured by Turks in the battle of Nikopolis (1396), then fell into the hands of the Mongols and was taken through Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Persia, Turkmenistan, and Armenia. After being freed in 1427, he wrote up his adventures in a travelogue, a copy of which is on display in Mainz. Then there was Bernhard von Breydenbach, a canon in Mainz who undertook a journey through the Holy Land together with Erhard Reuwich, a painter from Utrecht. His account of the pilgrimage, the *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam*, published in 1486 in Mainz, reported on the Armenian community he met in

Jerusalem. It was the first illustrated travelogue, and was so popular it went through eight editions in various languages in the 15th century.

Also exhibited under glass in Mainz is the *Abdias hayeren id est Obadias Armenus primum in Germana specimen characterum Armenicorum, in celeberrima Accademia Lipsiens procuratorum*. This book, issued in Leipzig in 1680 by Andreas Acoluth, is the first German edition of this work, and is quite extraordinary. There are seven pages of text, each divided into three columns, with the transliteration (according to West Armenian), the Armenian text in Armenian script and the Latin translation. There follows a section in which the etymological and theological aspects are researched. Acoluth’s thesis was that the Armenian language might be related to Egyptian, an idea which would be further investigated in the 19th century. Acoluth worked together with the Armenian priest Grigorientis in Leipzig and had Armenian letters for printing produced at his own expense. His work is considered the beginning of Armenian philology (Armenology) in Germany. On exhibit are also the *Thesaurus Linguae armeniscae*, published in 1711 by the Marburg Orientalist Johann Joachim Schroeder.

The German scholar who laid the foundations for Armenian philology in the modern era was Heinrich Huebschmann (1848-1908). It was he who first established that Armenian was an independent language within the group of Indo-Germanic (or Indo-European) languages, whereas earlier it had been considered a dialect of Iranian. He compiled a grammar and a dictionary of Middle Armenian. Another important German Armenologist was Franz Nikolaus Finck (1867-1910), who issued the *Magazine for Armenian Philology* beginning in 1901, and who collaborated with Armenian translator Abgar Hovhannesean (1849-1904), who contributed to making Armenian literature known in Germany.

Armenology (Hayagitut’iwn), the study of Armenia, its language, religion, history and culture, has a long and illustrious history in Germany, which is reflected in the Mainz exhibit. And Armenology is alive and well here. Its leading representative is Prof. Armenuhi Drost-Abgarjan, from MESROP, the Center for Armenian Studies at the Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, who was curator of the exhibit. Working with her to create this wonderful show are Meliné Pehlivanian, from the Berlin State Library, Prussian Cultural Heritage, Orient Department, and Dr. Annette Ludwig, director of the Gutenberg Museum. They also prepared the brochure for the exhibit, from which material for this article is drawn.

Chookasian Ensemble Announces Berkeley Performance

BERKELEY, Calif. – The Freight & Salvage Coffee House Concert Hall, will host the Chookasian Armenian Concert Ensemble, in an evening celebrating traditional Armenian folk music and dance.

The performance by the Chookasian Ensemble, Armenia’s National Gold Medal Award recipients, will be hosted in partnership with Armenian Cultural Visionaries, a non-profit, California-based organization, promoting education and cultural preservation in all areas related to Armenians.

The concert will take place on Saturday, February 23, at 8:00 p.m., at the hall, located at 2020 Addison St. This is the sixth performance by the ensemble at this venue.

The ensemble, composed of conservatory graduate musicians from Armenia and the US is known for its performances encompassing the full spectrum of Armenian classical, troubadour, folk song and folk dance music.

The Chookasian Ensemble weaves Armenian stories and traditions into musical performances with the hope of connecting audiences with the music and the lore. Both the Eastern and historic Western Armenian musical forms are featured in the ensemble’s performances of music from the 16th to the 20th centuries.

The Chookasian Armenian Concert Ensemble’s most recent live concert CD, “Passage to Armenia,” was chosen from all global submissions, as the first place universal winner, for the “Best Traditional Armenian Folk Album,” at the 2010 International Armenian “Grammy” Awards Celebration, presented at the Nokia Theater, in Los Angeles.

Under the direction of Fresno clarinetist, John Chookasian, the full roster of musicians includes: John Tarpinian, *oud*; Barbara Chookasian, principal vocalist; Vergine Alimian, *kanun*, *surik*, *tarr* and *saz*; Jirair Vaganian, *d’hol*; Sarkis Bukujian, violin; Hayk Nalbandyan, *dumbeg* and *deff*; Andranik Mouradian, keyboards and Norik Manoukian, *duduk* and *zurna*.

For information and tickets, contact: info@freightandsalvage.org or www.freightandsalvage.org.

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COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN Mirror-Spectator

Established 1932
An ADL Publication

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The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is published weekly, except two weeks in July, by:

Baikar Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472-1509
Telephone: 617-924-4420

FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

U.S.A.	\$80 a year
Canada	\$125 a year
Other Countries	\$190 a year

© 2011 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston, MA
and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 0004-234X

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, P.O. Box 302, Watertown, MA 02471-0302

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COMMENTARY

The Rise of the Ottoman Specter

By Edmond Y. Azadian

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu portrays the Ottoman rule in idyllic terms pretending that subject nations lived in perfect harmony, with their human rights respected. Therefore, he has become a proponent of nostalgia regarding the olden Ottoman days. Armenians, along with other subject nations, were at the receiving end of that iron-and-blood rule, and know full well its significance and its impact on weaker nations which may be trapped once again under that bloody rule.

For the West, Turkey is a trusted ally. For the Islamic world, Turkey is the standard-bearer of Islamic ideals and "defender" of Palestinian rights. For Israel, it is the only strategic ally in the region to help it maintain its hegemony over the Middle East. But, for the current leaders of Turkey, all these external relations are useful factors or building blocks for the greater purpose of reviving Ottoman dreams.

For all the nations which have suffered under the harsh Ottoman rule, the successful outcome of Turkey's grand designs signifies only gloom and doom.

But, unfortunately, Ankara has been making headways in its ambitions, fueled by its economic and military power.

Since 1974, Turkey has been occupying 38 percent of the island of Cyprus, and the West, which kowtows to Ankara, views the conflict as a problem between two equal partners, not necessarily an aggression against the territorial integrity of a sovereign nation.

We should be reminded that the island of Cyprus was ceded to Britain in 1878 at the Berlin Conference, where Article 16 of the San Stefano Conference was watered down to give a free hand to the Ottoman Sultan to continue his murderous policy against the Armenians.

In short, it was a political transaction paid for by Armenian blood.

Since its occupation of the island, Ankara has been populating the northern sector with peasants from Turkey's interiors, to change the ethnic balance of the country. Turkey does not even recognize the legitimate Cypriot government, member of the European Union, irrespective of its plea to join that union.

When Iraq was occupied, Turkey rushed to revive its claim from the Ottoman-era legacy over the oil rich northern part of the country, using the Turkmen minority as its fifth columnists. The majority Kurds preempted that action and established an autonomous rule and the US prevented Turkey from dismembering Iraq in its favor, although allowed, encouraged and participated in Turkish raids against the Kurds.

If Turkey is not there as a controlling power, it is not because there is much sympathy towards ethnic rights of the Kurds, but because Israel has set up shop in that region, to follow and influence the flow of events.

Another dimension of Turkey's Ottomanist claim is of course in the Caucasus, where Turkey and Azerbaijan are featured as one nation with two governments. Therefore, it was no surprise that recently President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan claimed the entire territory of Armenia as historic Azeri land.

Although Central Asian Turkic nations remain out of Ankara's grip, its Ottomanist dreams have had more resonance in the Balkans.

During the Bolshevik revolutionary wars, Enver Pasha tried to unite the Central Asian nations and become their leader (caliphate).

Kosovo's independence was a gift to the Islamic world by the West to counterbalance its assaults in the Middle East, disclaiming that

the US and European Union are not against Islam.

Today there is no political arrangement in the Balkans without Turkey's participation and consent, as the former colonial ruler of the region.

More dangerous is Turkey's foothold in Bulgaria, which had suffered under Ottoman rule for 500 years. Many uprisings were crushed with blood, but during the Balkan War of 1912-1913, a coalition of Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian forces, eventually chased the Ottoman rulers from the Balkans. Our General Antranik was a participant in the liberation movement in Bulgaria, where he was awarded the title of general legitimately. Otherwise, he would have gone down in history as a mere guerilla leader.

Despite the fact that the Bulgarians had endured the same fate as the Armenians under the Turkish rule, Bulgaria's government failed to pass a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide, because of the opposition of the Turkish faction in the parliament.

Out of a population of seven million, one million are Turks and they have 6 percent representation in the 240-seat parliament.

The plight of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria has not always been as comfortable as it is today. In the 1980s, the communist leader Todor Zhivkov began a campaign of cultural assimilation, forcing the Turks to close their mosques and ethnic schools and adopt Slavic names. As a consequence of that campaign, 300,000 ethnic Turks relocated to Turkey.

Until recently, the leader of the Turkish minority was Ahmed Dogan, a relatively moderate political figure who was forced out of politics by more extremists, aligned with Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

There was a dramatic incident recently in the news, which was dismissed as a simple skirmish between panelists on the TV screen. But in reality, it had deeper implications and far-reaching political ramifications.

Indeed, a young Bulgarian Turk pulled a gun on Mr. Dogan, who was giving a speech at the podium. He was forced out and the incident ended without bloodshed, because the young man was using a gas pistol, which looks like a gun but cannot shoot bullets. As a consequence of this assault, Mr. Dogan resigned from the leadership of his party, the "Movement for Rights and Freedoms," which had empowered the Turkish minority and helped win seats in the parliament. The gun-wielding young man, Oktay Yenimehmedov, was a former member of Dogan's party who had left that party to join its radical offshoot, "Freedom and Dignity" party, founded by a former deputy of Dogan, Kassim Daly, who claims to be a follower of Erdogan's pan-Turkish policy.

Incidentally, the founding of Daly's party was officially congratulated by Erdogan himself.

Therefore, we find out that the TV incident was a power play by Turkish minority groups in Bulgaria, radicalizing their political activities in the country.

The Turks have to push their political agenda wherever they can. That is understandable. But what is unbelievable is that the assailant was not punished, nor reprimanded. On the contrary, Bulgaria's President Rosen Plevneliev considered the incident as a contribution to Bulgaria's democratization process.

Since the Turks are becoming more assertive in Bulgaria (especially after the country joined the European Union), we can imagine the plight of small Armenian community in the country and the prospects of the Armenian Genocide bill in the parliament.

As the specter of Ottomanism rises in the Balkans, we should not be surprised one day if Turkey lays claim to a chunk of Bulgaria's territory, much like what happened in Cyprus, as part of its Ottoman legacy.

LETTERS

Eastern Armenia Misinterpreted by Reader

To the Editor:

Mel Menasian's letters about the Eastern Armenians seem to be based on few facts, and these few he has misinterpreted. That the Syrian-Armenian refugees (many of whom are better-educated in Arabic than Armenian) prefer to learn Russian rather than Armenian is not a matter of lacking patriotism, but simply, that the Armenian language (and the alphabet) is much more difficult than the Russian alphabet. I know this from my multiple stays in Armenia, where I went to do research starting in 1971 on government grants.

When I first arrived, neither my Russian nor my spoken Eastern Armenian was fluent. When I left after my first 13 months, my Russian was, alas, better than my Armenian.

Russian was easier. It was also universal and was taught to every child in school. I also knew that many Armenians in their high school and the universities preferred Russian to Armenian because Russian made it easier to get ahead. This is pragmatism, a quality of

Armenian-ness. That is why the Syrian-Armenian speaks Arabic better.

I noticed, over the years, that western Armenians are hostile to the eastern Armenian language, as if it weren't a real form of Armenian, but a corrupt mishmash. As a linguist, who started off with Grabar, I can assure you that both languages are equally conservative. Not just in pronunciation, but in morphology and syntax.

Languages constantly change, and sometimes change is accelerated by a new ruling language. From 500 BC the Persians were dominant in Armenia, and by 500AD, almost half of the Armenian everyday vocabulary was Persian, just as the Eastern Armenian vocabulary was influenced by the dominant Russians. After 1000 AD, the Turks came and the sub-Caucasian Anatolian Armenian language changed because of that. That large Turkish substratum was forcefully removed by the Mkhitarist fathers in the 19th century, who brought a deeply depressed Armenian popula-

tion back to par and education returned.

Armenian will never be a world language, and even linguists steer clear of it because the 38 letter alphabet makes for a big initial hurdle.

Menasian's uneducated and biased argument is common to western Armenians who have lost their homeland, and have settled almost happily in the prosperous West, forsaking the last remnant of their homeland in the Caucasus. Much of the hostility to the eastern dialect comes from those abroad who know they rejected the last remnant of greater Armenia. It's the ardent patriotism of a people in diaspora.

That Menasian came back from Armenia thinking the Armenians there did "not speak their own language" reflects poorly on the level of Armenian culture in the West, where Armenians know so little about their Classical and Medieval culture, as well as Eastern Armenia.

John A. C. Greppin, PhD
Cleveland, Ohio

A Week of Renewed Cultural Interest On the Shores of the Caribbean

By Taleen Babayan

When a friend of mine suggested I join her on the 16th Annual Armenian Heritage Cruise, I wasn't completely sold on the idea at first. After all, as someone who has been saturated in the Armenian community since birth, I didn't find it necessary to spend seven days on a boat listening to Armenian music, attending Armenian-themed lectures and participating in traditional Armenian dance lessons as well as social and networking events. The itinerary basically described my daily life. What good would it do to commit myself to a boat for seven days with no land in sight?

Thinking ahead to the shivering temperatures in January and how a trip to the Caribbean with a boat full of Armenians would be much less stressful on my mom's conscience than my prior trip to rural Nicaragua, I decided to give it a chance and heed the positive remarks of my predecessors. I figured at best I would have the opportunity to meet Armenians from around the world and engage in conversation with new people. At worst – it would provide fodder for an Armenian-centered play I had been working on.

During the first day on the cruise I met a flurry of people – hailing as far away as Lebanon and as close as one town over in my native New Jersey.

While I knew only a handful of people attending, the common thread of a shared culture was the only introduction I needed when making a new acquaintance. In fact, my first evening on the cruise had me following the trail of baritone voices of a familiar yet ancient tune. By the time I reached the elevators and found the culprits – a group of young men from Toronto, Canada – I discovered they were singing the traditional hymn of Der Voghormia from our centuries-old Divine Liturgy – and it was then I realized that this trip would be unlike anything I had experienced before.

The environment that quickly unraveled on the cruise was one reminiscent of the “older days” my mom and my friend's parents would talk about while growing up in Armenian Diasporan communities around the globe. There was a refreshing openness and sense of camaraderie among Armenians I had never witnessed.

During many late afternoons, after our departure from the day's island, I would settle myself at a table on the pool deck with a notebook as I welcomed people to join me – those I knew and those whom I hadn't met before. All were welcome as conversations were quickly sparked about the church parish we attended, how we were enjoying our time and my favorite – figuring out our six degrees of separation.

On my way to the gym one particular afternoon, I was sidetracked by the “Der Voghormia” singers who invited me to a game of Trivial Pursuit. As we familiarized ourselves with one another in between turns, our conversation naturally shifted to more relevant topics at hand – our religion, our homeland and our respective Armenian communities.

Following a couple hours of discussion and laughter, we had all lost track of time, the purple haze of sunset on the calm azure waters of the Caribbean Sea serving as the only signal for us to get ready for dinner. As I walked back to my room afterwards, I realized a deep-seated concern that weighed on me heavily had been quelled in that moment. The potential erosion of our culture, both in the Diaspora and our homeland, has always worried me. But after being engrossed in conversation with this group of friends who exhibited maturity, intelligence and nationalism and who were learned of the Armenian culture – from the traditions of the sacred Armenian *Badarak* to the political situation in Armenia – I felt a renewed sense of hope.

Feeling at ease with the state of my cultural heritage came in other unexpected ways as well. While preparing for dinner, my friend and I would put on the Armenian channel on the television in our room and become enamored with the videos shown, from modern pop musical performances taking place on stages in Armenia to Armenian youngsters in America from the 1970s performing plays in their traditional costumes and impeccable Armenian language skills.

Another highlight for me was seeing how many close-knit Armenian families were present, not to mention generations of Armenians, ranging from great-grandparents to newborns. Couples – some of whom I was told had met on a previous cruise – brought their children on the dance floor and exposed them to a culture that will ultimately define them for the rest of their lives.

As we approached our last day of the cruise, it occurred to me that the past week spent on a boat with eight hundred Armenians didn't have anything to do with learning about my culture. It went beyond that. It allowed me to reconnect with my culture in a way I didn't think was possible.

Growing up, Armenian pride never lacked in my household: we spoke Armenian at home, attended Armenian school on Saturday mornings and we even traveled to Armenia so my brother and I could be baptized in Holy Echmiadzin. But finding myself among a myriad of Armenians whom I had never met before, but with whom I danced the tanzara, shared laughs over a coffee and engaged in colorful discussions, was certainly a special and euphoric feeling. I had experienced fragments of this in my own community, but never during an event of this length and magnitude.

It is through well-organized, meaningful and large-scale cultural undertakings like the Armenian Heritage Cruise, organized through the efforts of the Armenian Cultural Association of America, that highlight the uniqueness of our culture and serves as a conduit as to why we continue to flourish as a people, while those more powerful now cease to exist. Weeks like these inject a level of cultural prowess into our lives that can only help lead us forward to usher in the next chapter of our history.

My experience on the cruise culminated on the final evening when both headlining musicians for the week – Khoren Mouradian of Toronto, and Khatchig Jingirian of San Francisco, were unable to sing due to the straining of their vocal chords, a result of our “kef” night after night. The crowd; however, did not have a chance to display any disappointment because the young but talented Toronto-based musical group Pyunik seamlessly assumed the entertainment portion of the evening. As Razmik Tchakmakian picked up his drumsticks, Sevag Haroutunian laid his fingers on the keyboards and Sevag Titizian grabbed the microphone and steadied himself in the center of the stage, the baton was silently passed – a symbolic moment which to me, was the essence of the entire trip.

During a time when I've been questioning my identity and the stronghold it has on my life, the time I spent on the cruise proved to me that there is an unbreakable fiber of patriotism that is rooted within each of us – and while it may become dormant at times, lost in the shuffle of our every day lives, it can easily be revived with one familiar pluck of the oud or a conversation with a new friend in our mother tongue.

For seven nights we stood in a shared space where time stood still, and where the longing to be unified as a people – devoid of a tragic history, divisions within our Christian faith, our Diaspora or our homeland – was fulfilled. We were surrounded by our rich language, our triumphant folk songs and our own people and for a static amount of time as we charted unmarked waters together – we were one.

Armenia Reforms Disability Rules

By Gayane Mirzoyan

Armenia is about to introduce major changes to the way disabled benefits are assessed, so that people will be categorized according to their ability to work.

Experts point to a shortage of workplaces with proper accessibility in Armenia, and warn that the new classification system might be just as open to corrupt practices as the current one.

Until now, the health authorities have put disabled people in one of three categories, ranked by severity of impairment. Category one is the most serious, category three the least; and this determines the level of disability benefits that the state pays out to each.

The employment register currently shows 170,000 registered disabled people in Armenia, of whom 90,000 are considered to be able to work to some extent.

The authorities plan to replace the current system with one based on models used in Lithuania and the Czech Republic. It will take two years to launch, during which time the method for assessing disability will be refined.

Jemma Baghdasaryan, deputy minister for labor and welfare, explained that anyone classed as able to work would be provided with a job, and would then lose disability benefits.

“People will be deemed to be disabled if they have lost a certain percentage of their ability to work,” she explained. “For children, the criteria applied will be ‘activeness’ and ‘engagement.’”

Marianna Chalikyan, spokeswoman for the disabled rights group Unison, doubts that the conditions exist to make the change so quickly.

“Under the new system, they will assess individuals' state of health and circumstances, and then assign them a level of employability. [Most workplaces] are totally unprepared for this,” she said. “If you look at the state of the country as a whole, it is not ready to provide work, so an employer who wants to take on a disabled person will have problems.”

Anna Khachatryan, a lawyer with Unison, expressed concern at the way the criteria had been drawn up for the new classifications. She said concepts like “ability to move around” and

“ability to work” were defined in very broad terms, so someone might be assessed as fit for work if even they had only limited mobility.

The current system, where people come before a medical commission to be placed in one of the three categories, is widely accepted as being open to abuse.

Last September, the government sacked the head of the Labor Ministry's medical examinations agency after hearing the results of an investigation which found that 65,000 people paid bribes every year to be classified as disabled. Investigators found that the bribes ranged from 15,000 to 150,000 drams, or \$37 to \$370.

Karen Hovhannisian notes that the reverse is common, too – people who are undeniably disabled but find their status is downgraded or annulled altogether when they appear before a medical commission.

Marat Atovmyan, a lawyer who heads the Anti-Corruption Centre in Yerevan, cited the high-profile case of Armenui Arakelyan, a disabled woman called before an army conscription commission in 2011 after her son asked to defer his military service on the grounds that he was a carer.

At the hearing, three doctors downgraded Arakelyan's disability category, and that of her husband as well, so that their son could no longer claim the right to a deferment. The Anti-Corruption Centre stepped in and helped her reclaim her original disability status.

Atovmyan and others argue that the new system of categorization is liable to be just as arbitrary.

“The structure needs to be made more transparent so as to reduce the risk of corruption,” he said. “Professional doctors often can't tell from a diagnosis which category a patient should be assigned to. It's natural that lawyers and judges find it hard to discern what is illegal, since there are no clear categories.”

Under the new system, Hovhannisian predicts, “the number of appeals will rise.”

(Gayane Mirzoyan is a freelance reporter and a media expert with the Journalists for the Future group in Armenia. This piece was originally written for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting.)

Armenian Bar Association Asks President To Commit to ‘Free, Fair’ Elections

The following letter was sent by the Armenian Bar Association and addressed to President Serge Sargsian and Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian:

On February 18, the Republic of Armenia will hold its fourth presidential election since its 1991 independence.

Having Armenia's best interests in mind and holding to a deep belief in certain universal and inalienable rights, among which is the people's right to self-governance through a representative and legitimate political system, I appeal to you, Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister, to deliver to the Armenian citizenry its constitutional right to free, fair and democratic elections.

We call on you, Mr. President, to see to it that the tragic and abhorrent shooting incident involving presidential candidate Paruyr Hayrikyan is fully investigated, the culprits brought to justice and that no efforts be spared to secure the safety of all presidential candidates.

We welcome President Sargsian's repeated commitments before the Armenian people and the international community to hold the “best elections since 1991.” We concur with President Sargsian's characterization that free, fair and democratic elections are vital for Armenia's national security and its ability to prosper.

Since the beginning of the presidential campaign period, we have observed – through press reports, videos and records of eyewitness accounts – apparent improper pressures exerted on members of the public and private sectors compelling them to fall in line, in the absence of free will and to join in

artifices of support, if not to submit to candidate-specific vote-casting directives, in favor of the incumbent executive leadership.

As has previously been widely reported and accepted in part, both by opposition and ruling adherents, these types of flaws have negatively marked every Armenian election since 1991. While we appreciate the current administration's commitments, made and announced before its people and the international community, to ensure that the campaign process will be even-handed and that the election results will be free from manipulation, the specter of past irregularities continues to resonate today in the current election climate and landscape.

We respectfully request that you publicly and clearly instruct and hold accountable all officials and others responsible for organizing, supporting and conducting the upcoming presidential election in a fair, free and democratic manner with the requisite checks and balances. These instructions should unequivocally prohibit irregularities and illegal acts, and the appearances of them, which can only serve to bring discredit and illegitimacy to all of Armenia's other laudable and positive achievements.

We look forward to working with Armenia's freely-elected president, as well as with all those in different places along Armenia's political, professional and socioeconomic spectrums, in service to our One Nation and One People.

Garob. Ghazarian
Chairman,
Armenian Bar Association



COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Will the REAL John Kerry Please Stand Up!

Some weeks ago, when Sen. John Kerry's name was first mentioned as a possible successor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, I cautioned Armenians not to get overly excited just because "a good friend" of the Armenian community could assume such an influential post.

Unfortunately, it did not take long to discover that my words of caution were fully justified. Despite his 30-year-record of support for Armenian issues, Sen. Kerry proved last week, right before assuming his new position, that even such a close "friend" could reverse his long-held views, disappointing the Armenian-American community.

Regrettably, Sen. Kerry turned out to be no different than President Obama, Vice President Biden and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. As US Senators and presidential candidates, they all made lavish promises in seeking the backing of Armenian-American voters, and completely ignored them after assuming office.

While some may argue that Armenians should only blame themselves for trusting dishonest politicians, I believe all voters have the right to expect elected officials to keep their promises. Otherwise, lying to the public

becomes an acceptable practice with no prospect of replacing deceitful officials with honest ones.

Sen. Kerry experienced an overnight transformation last week, when for the first time in his political career, he shied away from using the term "Armenian Genocide." In the past, Senator Kerry had strongly criticized presidents and secretaries of state for not acknowledging the Armenian Genocide. Ironically, he now refuses to practice what he preached for so many years.

Senator Kerry proved that he is not the man he used to be, when responding to written questions on Armenian issues submitted by Senators Robert Menendez (Dem.-NJ) and Barbara Boxer (Dem.-CA), after his confirmation hearing in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

When asked for his views on the Armenian Genocide, Senator Kerry shamefully repeated the euphemisms used by President Obama in his annual April 24 statements. The nominee for secretary of state, after using the term "Armenian Genocide" throughout his long Senate career, all of sudden shied away from that term and employed every other word in the English dictionary, except genocide. This is what he stated:

"The US government clearly acknowledges and mourns as historical fact that 1.5 million Armenians were massacred or marched to their deaths in the final days of the Ottoman Empire. These events resulted in one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century, and the United States recognizes that they remain a great source of pain for the people of Armenia and of Armenian descent as they do for all of us who share basic universal values. The President honors the victims every April 24th on Remembrance Day, so that we never forget this dark chapter in history."

In a follow-up question reminding him of his own sponsorship for legislation to acknowledge the Armenian

Genocide, Sen. Kerry ducked the issue by insisting that he would "represent the policies of the President and administration faithfully."

Sen. Kerry's response to questions on the Armenian-Turkish Protocols were just as disappointing. He insisted that he would continue to support the failed efforts of Pres. Obama and Secretary of State Clinton, pressuring Armenia and Turkey to ratify the Protocols. Four years ago, in a private meeting, I explained to Sen. Kerry, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, why the Armenia-Turkey Protocols were doomed to failure and were contrary to Armenia's national interests. Back then, the senator seemed to find my arguments convincing. He has now reverted to supporting the Obama administration's position on the Protocols which Turkey, under pressure from Azerbaijan, has fortunately refusing to ratify.

In response to another written question, Sen. Kerry indicated that he might be willing to meet with the leadership of Armenian-American organizations, something Secretary Clinton and President Obama have refused to do in the last four years. Such a meeting would provide the opportunity to explain to Secretary Kerry why the Obama administration is wasting its time trying to push Turkey to ratify the protocols. Turkish leaders have made it clear that they would not finalize the protocols, unless Armenians make territorial concessions to Azerbaijan on Artsakh.

While Armenian-Americans may not be pleased with Sen. Kerry's sudden change of heart on Armenian issues, regardless of the reasons, they have no choice but to meet and work with the Secretary of State who is in office today. Armenians' only wish is that periodically they will be able to interact with the real John Kerry whom they knew and loved for the past 30 years.

Human Rights Watch World Report 2013

YEREVAN — Armenia's ruling coalition retained a parliamentary majority following the May 2012 elections amid allegations of abuse of administrative resources, and intimidation of voters, observers and journalists. Ill-treatment in police custody persists. The government has yet to offer conscientious objectors a genuine civilian alternative to military service and has failed to effectively investigate a troubling number of non-combat deaths in the military.

Politically motivated defamation lawsuits no longer appear to be a problem, but media pluralism is lacking, and some journalists covering the May 6 parliamentary elections suffered violent attacks by onlookers, some of them members of Armenia's ruling political party.

Violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation are serious problems. Bureaucratic restrictions prevent people with terminal illnesses from accessing strong pain medications. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) monitoring report assessed the May 6 parliamentary elections as competitive and largely peaceful, yet marred by an "unequal playing field" due to misuse of administrative resources, and party representatives and local authorities pressuring voters, interfering in voting and hindering the work of journalists.

Several violent incidents occurred during the campaign period in Yerevan, including assaults on opposition party Armenian National Congress (ANC) candidate Babken Garoyan and three other ANC members on April 15, and on ANC candidate Karen Tovmasyan on April 17. In both cases, the ANC members were distributing campaign information. Police opened investigations into each case. Helsinki Association campaign monitor Arman Veziryan filed complaints alleging that Yerevan resident Tigran Manukyan punched him and hindered his work as an observer while Veziryan observed an opposition activist distributing election pamphlets on April 30.

Instead of investigating, prosecutors pressured Veziryan to withdraw the complaint and in June charged him with beating Manukyan, although Manukyan never claimed to be a victim. Veziryan was awaiting trial at this writing.

According to local human rights defenders, torture and ill-treatment in police custody persist. Authorities often refuse to investigate ill-treatment allegations or coerce citizens into retracting complaints. The October report of

the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) on a follow-up visit in December 2011 noted overcrowding, unhygienic conditions and inadequate medical care in two prison facilities. CPT also noted that it received no new cases of ill-treatment from these facilities in 2012. The government has not effectively investigated a complaint from seven ANC activists that police beat them in detention in August 2011.

The activists' lawyers also filed a complaints alleging police denied them access to their clients, refused their request for a medical examination for the activists and briefly detained the lawyers for seven hours. The activists testified about the abuse during trial, but a Yerevan court did not request an investigation. In July, the court sentenced four of the activists — Karapetyan, Tigran Arakelyan, Sargis Gevorgyan and David Kiramijyan — to two to six years of imprisonment for hooliganism and resisting authority.

In November, the appeals court upheld their sentences. In August, police dropped charges against the other three for lack of evidence. In October, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Armenia had violated the prohibition against inhuman or degrading treatment in the case of opposition party member Grisha Virabyan when police repeatedly hit him in the testicles with metal objects after detaining him following demonstrations in 2004. The court denounced the authorities' failure to effectively investigate.

Local human rights groups reported 44 non-combat army deaths through November. On

The government has yet to offer conscientious objectors a genuine civilian alternative to military service and has failed to effectively investigate a troubling number of non-combat deaths in the military.

February 29, conscript Tigran Varyan was killed by a gunshot wound. The government-mandated autopsy revealed that Varyan was subject to violence, but investigators classified his death as suicide. A report by local human rights groups noted the Defense Ministry's failure to initiate investigations promptly, to account for signs of violence in cases of alleged suicides, and to disclose the circumstances of many deaths. A January ECtHR ruling found Armenia had violated the right to religious freedom of

two Jehovah's Witnesses by imprisoning them for refusing to perform mandatory military service in 2003.

According to Forum 18, an international religious freedom nongovernmental organization, 32 conscientious objectors were in prison as of September 20 for refusing military and alternative service, believing the alternative service was not independent of the military.

In 2012, courts sentenced to prison terms 16 additional Jehovah's Witnesses for refusal to serve. The sentences were not enforced. In 2011, authorities proposed amendments to the alternative service law. However, the OSCE and the Council of Europe (CoE) criticized the amendments for not making alternative service truly independent of the military and for making it 12-18 months longer than military service.

In its July review of Armenia, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) urged the government to ensure a real alternative to military service, and release those imprisoned for refusing to perform military service or the existing alternative to it.

Politically motivated defamation lawsuits no longer appear to be a serious problem. However, a June 2012 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) report on media freedom in Europe found Armenian journalists' capacity to report was "hampered by pressures of self-censorship" and expressed concern about television stations' use of material from political advertisements in news coverage. At least two journalists suffered attacks while covering the May elections.

Notice to Contributors

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* welcomes articles, commentaries and community news from our readers. In order to assure the accurate and timely publication of articles submitted, please note the following policies:

- All articles submitted should be typed, double (or triple) spaced and printed in a type size large enough to be clearly legible (10 point or larger). Submissions that do not conform to these specifications will be assigned lowest priority.
- Articles sent by fax are acceptable, and e-mail submissions are encouraged.
- All submissions should include the name of a contact person and

a daytime telephone number.

- Deadline for submission of all articles and advertising is noon on the Monday of the week of publication.
- Photos will be published without charge at the discretion of the editors and art director. Photos will be returned only if a self-addressed and stamped envelope is included.
- The *MS* will publish only one article about an upcoming organizational event. For major special events, exceptions may be made only by special arrangement with the editors.
- Telephone numbers, ticket prices and other details (at the discretion of the editors) will not be included in press releases.

Report Shows Insufficient Progress In Armenia Media Freedom

YEREVAN (New Europe) – A new report by the Investigative Journalists’ NGO says Armenia is making insufficient progress in preserving media freedom. The organization is a member of the Association of European Journalists.

The study “Violence, intimidation and legal cases against journalists and the media in Armenia 2012” pays particular attention to incidents of violence against reporters in the country, as well as lawsuits against media on charges of slander and insult.

The report, financially supported by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office in Yerevan, is a compilation of media freedom violations in Armenia between January and October 2012 and legal analysis of two renowned experts, attorneys Ara Ghazaryan and Ashot Vareljyan.

After carefully examining various aspects regarding the freedom of news outlets, including legislative regulation, news accessibility, physical violence and slander/insult court cases, the study concluded that “overall judicial process is developing in the right direction.”

This means that defamation cases brought to the courts have decreased dramatically, as well as a significant drop in the amounts of compensatory damages awarded has become established judicial practice.

However, the judicial practice of defamation and libel lawsuits was found to be “the only area where steady positive developments continue.”

In contrast, when it comes to exposing incidents of violence committed against journalists, the report concluded that, “the situation hasn’t improved.” More precisely, police investigations of the cases reported in 2012 “have been more for ‘show’ than anything else and thus unproductive.”

Liana Sayadyan, deputy editor of the NGO-run online newspaper Hetq where the report appeared, told New Europe that journalists in Armenia faced various problems, including lack of access to information, violence and inefficient police investigations. However, in her opinion, the biggest weakness of the current media freedom environment in Armenia was the financial dependence of media outlets on politics, government or other institutions.

According to the press freedom index for 2013 recently released by Reporters without Borders (RWB), Armenia ranks 74th, marking a progress of three positions ahead compared to last year. Nevertheless, RWB emphasized that the country, together with Moldova and Georgia, “still faces important challenges concerning media independence and the working environment of journalists.”

NATO Guards Turkey from Syrian Fire

By Stephen Fidler

GAZIANTEP, Turkey (*Wall Street Journal*) – On a windswept plateau overlooking this fast-growing city in the south of Turkey, just 30 miles from the Syrian border, an array of US missile-defense launchers points south toward Syria, where a civil war rages.

The mobile missile-defense battery, which also includes a sophisticated radar that peers deep into Syria, started operations this week after being called in to protect Turkish cities against the possible threat of Syrian ballistic missile attacks.

This is as close as North Atlantic Treaty Organization ground forces have come yet to getting directly involved in the Syrian conflict. Officials insist they have no plans to go further, or to use the batteries here to enforce a Syrian no-fly zone.

The Turkish government requested the missile-defense support in November from its 27 allies in NATO to help protect its population. No Syrian missiles have hit Turkey, but the launching of missiles inside Syria by the government of Bashar al-Assad heightened fears in Ankara, the Turkish capital, that the country was threatened.

The US, Germany and the Netherlands, each of which has the most sophisticated version of the Patriot air-defense system, answered that call. After NATO agreed to the request in December, the three countries started shifting troops and equipment by air and sea into Turkey for an initial one-year deployment. Each contingent contains up to 400 men: Germany has alone shipped 200 vehicles into Turkey, including the heavy trucks that haul the missile launchers, radars, generators and control centers.

On Tuesday, command of the US unit was transferred to NATO, linking it to the Dutch and German Patriot missile batteries that also started operations in the last two weeks. Six missile batteries in all have been sent to the region – two from each country – each typically with six missile launchers.

All are linked into a NATO command and control center in Ramstein, Germany, that takes in satellite feeds and other intelligence to give the missile-defense teams a fuller picture of events inside Syria.

The US contingent is sited deep inside an enormous Turkish military base on the outskirts of Gaziantep. The US soldiers here, normally based in Fort Sill, OK., as part of the third battalion of the US second air defense artillery regiment, work in gray combat uniforms, their equipment mostly in desert camouflage that matches the rocky outcrops.

Their missile launchers contain both older-technology PAC-2 missiles designed to explode near an incoming missile and destroy it with shrapnel, and the newer PAC-3, a slimmer missile programmed to slam into an incoming rocket. Each truck-hauled launcher can carry four PAC-2 missiles, or 16 PAC-3s.

The second US battery is expected to be operating by mid-month on the other side of the mountain.

As a group of reporters arrived on the site, dull thuds could be heard as Turkish tanks engaged in a live-fire exercise in the middle distance, their shells sending up plumes of smoke and dirt.

The German group of 300 men is 60 miles away defending the city of Kahramanmaraş, with a population of some 440,000, while two Dutch batteries watch over the city of Adana, 140 miles to the west. In all, some 3.5 million people are being protected by the operation, military spokesmen said.

The Dutch have been in Turkey before, with missile-defense batteries deployed in 1991 and 2003 during the first and second Gulf wars. For Germany, this is the first foreign deployment of its missile-defense capabilities.

NATO and Turkish military spokesman repeat that the deployment is purely defensive in nature, and isn’t a prelude to the establishment of a no-fly zone in Syria. They are also keen to emphasize that Turkey has its own robust air-defense capabilities that would allow it to deal easily with any threat from Syrian aircraft. What it lacks is the sophisticated anti-missile capability provided by the Patriot systems, built by Raytheon.

“There is no way that it could support a no-fly zone or any offensive operation,” said Col. Steve Richmond, who commands the Gaziantep operation.

Putting the batteries on Turkish military bases means the allies don’t have to bring in more troops to protect their forces. But it required some adjustments by Turkey’s all-male military: accommodating women such as Capt. Leslie Dembeck, who commands the first battery to go operational above Gaziantep.

German troops are stationed further from the border, on another military base on a wooded hillside above Kahramanmaraş, the site of a famous battle in 1920 when the Turks ousted French forces from the city. Normally based in northern Germany, they have set up a makeshift operational headquarters.

Turkish workers are on-site building new barracks for the German soldiers that, when they have gone home, members of Turkey’s 700,000-strong military are expected to occupy.

“It would be very good if we don’t fire any shots. That would be best for the region and for our own soldiers as well,” said Col. Marcus Ellermann, the German commander.

Despite Early Criticism, Garegin Njdeh Film Is Hit with Armenian Audiences

NJDEH, from page 1

Director Hrach Keshishyan said the film is a story of boundless love for homeland, heroism, betrayal and disappointments, and also of unbreakable will, endless faith and dreams.

Young Njdeh is played by actor Shant Hovhannisyan, while Alexanyan portrays older Njdeh.

“It’s not an easy task to create a character. The challenge is to be able to put yourself in his shoes, get into his skin, know his blood type, his ways and moves, his daily conduct, habits... I am honored to have been trusted this role,” said Alexanyan.

The film is set during the First Armenian Republic. Warfare fragments show how without any foreign assistance, relying only on the native mountains and the power of spirit, the people of Syunik won their victory under Njdeh’s leadership.

During the Soviet years, speaking about the greatest heroes of any USSR member nation was forbidden, as Soviet authorities were trying to erase them from public memory. The film authors state that only 70-80 years later it became possible to tell the stories of Armenia’s national heroes.

The film depicts how due to Njdeh’s rebellious, daring spirit, inflexible will and bravery Syunik avoided sharing Nakhichevan’s and Nagorno Karabagh’s fate. With active hostilities he neutralized the treaty signed in 1920 between Armenia and Soviet Russia, by which three major regions of Armenia – Nakhichevan, Nagorno Karabagh and Syunik – were to be passed over to Azerbaijan with a status of autonomous regions.

“Geographically, Syunik is the spine of our motherland, without which Armenia cannot exist,” Njdeh tells his soldiers in the film.

Part of the three-hour movie was shot in Sofia, where Njdeh lived after leaving Armenia. In 1944 Soviet troops entered Bulgaria, and shortly after Njdeh was taken under arrest, giving up a chance to flee to Vienna.

“I have more serious reasons to stay ... I am bound to life only to an extent I still feel it as my duty to serve Armenia”, he said prior to his arrest.

He was transferred to Bucharest, from there to Moscow and put to prison in Lyubyanka. In 1946, he was sent to Yerevan, where he was sentenced to 25 years of confinement.

He spent the years between 1948-1952 in Vladimir prison, then until the summer of 1953 in a secret prison in Yerevan. Njdeh’s transfer to Yerevan prison was related to an attempt to mediate between the Dashnaks and the Soviet leaders to create a collaborative atmosphere between the two sides. After long negotiations with the state security service of Soviet Armenia, Njdeh and (Minister of Internal Affairs) Devejian prepared a letter in Yerevan prison (1953) addressed to the ARF leader Simon Vratsian, calling on him for cooperation with the Soviets regarding the issue of the Armenian struggle against Turkey. However, the communist leaders in Moscow refused to send the letter.

The final part of the movie is more emotional, when Njdeh is allowed to meet his grandchild he had never met. The stoic general collapses when he takes his granddaughter into his embrace. With equal warmth he takes a handful of soil of his motherland and takes it to Vladimir prison, where he dies in 1955. Only decades after his death, in 1992, the prosecution of the third Republic of Armenia, Njdeh was justified, something he never needed.

The film’s budget was \$7 million.

Eurasian Development Bank Suggests New Program with Participation of Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Eurasian Development Bank’s (EDB) Centre for Integration Studies has published a report titled, “The Customs Union and Neighboring Countries: Models and Instruments of Mutually Beneficial Partnership.” The study analyzes the models and forms of cooperation between the existing integration organizations, in particular the European Union (EU) and the Mercosur, and countries that are not their members and/or do not border them.

The representative of the press office of EDB, Yulia Ostrukhova, said the report analyzes cooperation between the EU and the Balkan countries, which is aimed at achieving their full membership of the EU and with the countries of Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus (including the EU’s Eastern Partnership program) and the Mediterranean which takes form of a system of partnership and cooperation agreements and the implementation of plans of actions in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy.

“The Customs Union could propose to its current and future partners various models of interaction and additional instruments of cooperation,” says Vladimir Yasinsky, managing director for research at EDB. “This is specifically important for the development of foreign economic ties of the emerging Eurasian Economic Union.”

The research reviews possible schemes of cooperation between the Customs Union/CES and Armenia, Moldova and Tajikistan. The authors propose to launch a Eurasian Partnership program to foster deeper integration and multilateral cooperation. This program could be used to develop both bilateral and multilateral relationships taking into account the specifics of each partner. These could be structured based on agreements and joint plans of action (as in the European Neighborhood Policy) and on the participation in joint programs.

“A flexible and pragmatic approach should be used to develop relationships between the CES and the countries of the Eurasian continent. Our report proposes a wide range of approaches to building economic integration based on international experience in this area,” says Evgeny Vinokurov, director of the Centre for Integration Studies.

Eurasian Development Bank is an international financial institution founded by Russia and Kazakhstan in January 2006 with the mission to facilitate the development of market economies, sustainable economic growth and the expansion of mutual trade and other economic ties in its member states. EDB’s charter capital exceeds US \$1.5 billion. The member states of the Bank are the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan.

Georgia Celebrates St. Vardanants Day with Charity Concert

TBILISI – On February 9, at 5 p.m. the Hayartun Cultural Center of the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Holy Church hosted a charity concert, dedicated to St. Vardanants Day at the Tbilisi Art Hall.

A charity exhibition and sale were organized in tandem. Song and dance ensembles, several artists and singers were scheduled to perform at the concert. All of the proceeds will be donated to the Syrian Armenian Relief Fund.

St. Vardanants Day is celebrated in memory of the Armenian Commander Vardan Mamikonyan and his 1,036 martyrs during the Battle of Avarayr. The holiday is celebrated at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and Armenian churches throughout the world each year.