

# THE ARMENIAN Mirror-Spectator

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## Syria Recognizes Armenian Genocide

DAMASCUS (RFE/RL) – In a move welcomed by Armenia, Syria’s parliament voted on February 13 to recognize the 1915 Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey following the latest upsurge in tensions between Damascus and Ankara.

“The parliament ... condemns and recognizes the genocide committed against the Armenians by the Ottoman state at the start of the twentieth century,” reads the resolution adopted by it on Thursday.

The resolution followed deadly clashes between Syrian and Turkish troops in Syria’s northwestern region of Idlib. The Turkish military has sent reinforcements to the jihadist-dominated area after an offensive



Members of the People’s Assembly adopt a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey, Damascus, February 13, 2020.

launched by Syria’s Russian-backed army.

The Syrian parliament speaker, Hammouda Sabbagh, condemned the Turkish “aggression” as the legislature fully controlled by Syria’s ruling regime unanimously passed the Armenian genocide resolution.

“We are currently living through a Turkish aggression that relies on the same hateful Ottoman thinking” as “the crimes carried out by [Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan’s forefathers against the

Armenian people”, Sabbagh said, according to the AFP news agency.

The Turkish government, which vehemently denies a systematic government effort to exterminate the Ottoman Empire’s Armenian population, condemned the resolution, saying that it reflects the “hypocrisy of a regime which has indulged in every kind of carnage towards its own people.”

Predictably, the genocide resolution was hailed by Armenia.

see SYRIA, page 5

## Germany’s Merkel Praises ‘Deepening’ Ties with Armenia

BERLIN (RFE/RL) – German Chancellor Angela Merkel hailed Germany’s increased cooperation with Armenia and significant changes in the South Caucasus state when she met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Berlin on Thursday, February 13.

It was their third meeting in 18 months.

Merkel noted with satisfaction that German-Armenian relations have “intensified” since her previous talks with Pashinyan held in August 2018 in Yerevan and in February 2019 in Berlin.

“We will continue to talk today about deepening bilateral relations,” she said in a statement to the press made at the start of their latest meeting.

Merkel stressed that “a lot has changed in Armenia” since Pashinyan swept to power in the “Velvet Revolution” of April-May 2019.

“There is a parliamentary democracy, elections have been held, and there is also

see GERMANY, page 2

## Panel on Armenian-American Press at NAASR

BELMONT, Mass. – An overflow crowd gathered on Thursday, February 13, at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) Vartan Gregorian Building for a panel titled “The Armenian-American Press in Perspective: Its Purposes, Challenges, and Future Prospects.”

The program was presented by the NAASR/Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues and was co-sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association, the AGBU Young Professionals of Boston and the AYF Greater Boston “Nejdeh” Chapter.

The panel featured Alin K. Gregorian (editor, *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*), Leeza Arakelian (assistant editor, *Armenian Weekly*) and Stephen Kurkjian (Pulitzer Prize winner, *Boston Globe*, and NAASR Board Member).

The moderator was Stepan Piligian, a member of the NAASR board, as well as a columnist for the *Armenian Weekly*.

After a set of three questions from Piligian, the floor was opened for questions, see PANEL, page 11



Alin K. Gregorian (Jirair Hovsepian Photo)

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Tom McSorley, curator of the Canada Now festival, filmmaker Atom Egoyan and actress Arsinée Khanjian.

## New Egoyan Movie Again Mines Troubled Relationships

By Taleen Babayan  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

NEW YORK – The United States premiere of Canadian-Armenian auteur Atom Egoyan’s latest film, “Guest of Honour,” was screened at the IFC Center in the West Village and featured a live in-person, question-and-answer session with the award-winning filmmaker alongside his wife, actress Arsinée Khanjian, during the Canada Now festival that took place from Thursday, February 13 through Sunday, February 16, see EGOYAN, page 16

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Syria to Reopen Aleppo Airport for First Time In 9 Years

ALEPPO (PanARMENIAN.Net) – The Syrian Minister of Transport, Ali Hammoud, announced on Monday, February 18, the reopening of the Aleppo International Airport, nine years after its suspension, Al-Masdar News reports.

According to the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), the Syrian minister indicated that the airport will start its work next Wednesday, and that the first flight will be from Damascus airport to Aleppo, with flights to Cairo and Damascus scheduled in the next few days.

The governor of Aleppo, Hussein Diab, had announced in August of last year that the international airport was ready, and that it would be reopened soon after a solution to its security concerns was found.

The Syrian Arab Army took control of almost all of Aleppo city at the end of 2016, while launching a military operation to capture the northwestern countryside of Aleppo, the northern Hama countryside, and Idlib governorate on May 6, and managed to retake a number of towns and villages.

### Paylan Asks for Inquiry Into Vandalism of Christian Cemeteries

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Unidentified attackers have vandalized and set ablaze the cross of the grave of a Zehra Cholak at the St. Maria Catholic Church cemetery in Trabzon, Turkey.

Garo Paylan, the ethnic Armenian Member of Parliament of Turkey, on February 17 addressed an inquiry over the matter to Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu.

According to Paylan, prior to this attack a group of people attempted to incite a provocation by chanting Allahu Akbar during the funeral of Cholak.

“A similar attack also took place on February 7 at the Christian cemetery in Ortakiugh: unknown perpetrators vandalized 19 grave-stones. We are asking the interior minister: The crimes against Hrant Dink and Vardapet Santaro were committed by gangsters guided by the Trabzon police. Is there such a gang within the Trabzon police force? Paylan said.

The lawmaker inquired whether or not authorities are probing the incident during Cholak’s funeral and if perpetrators are identified. He also asked why authorities didn’t take appropriate security measures after the provocation during the Christian citizen’s funeral. The MP expressed opinion that the victims were targeted because of their Christian faith.

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## ARMENIA

## News From Armenia

## Perm to Yerevan Flights To Launch

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Ural Airlines will start operating flights from the city of Perm to Armenia's capital Yerevan. The Russian airline has received permission for operating regular flights, Armenpress reports citing the website of the Russian aviation.

The flights will take place three times a week.

There is no information yet about the flights to Yerevan in the flight list of the Perm airport.

In 2019 flights from Perm's Bolshoye Savino airport were carried out in 42 destinations. But now the geography of flights is expanding which in its turn positively affects the passenger flow.

## Ambassador Presents Credentials to Nepali President

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Ambassador of Armenia to Nepal Armen Martirosyan on February 13 presented his credentials to President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, the Armenian Foreign Ministry reported.

After the ceremony, Martirosyan held a private meeting with Bhandari during which they discussed the more effective directions of the bilateral cooperation.

The sides highlighted the mutual cooperation of the two countries within the UN.

The two also exchanged views on a number of other issues of bilateral interest.

## PM Pashinyan Holds Consultations over Multiple Recent Deaths In Army

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Monday, February 17, hosted consultations on the circumstances and causes of recent deaths in the Armenian Armed Forces.

Secretary of the Security Council Armen Grigoryan, Minister of Defense David Tonoyan, Acting Director of the National Security Service Eduard Martirosyan, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Artak Davtyan, Prosecutor General Artur Davtyan, Chairman of the Investigative Committee Hayk Grigoryan, other officials from the Armed Forces and law enforcement agencies were attending the meeting.

Officials in charge reported on the course of criminal proceedings initiated on some of the deaths.

Pashinyan said he prioritizes the resolution of issues related to criminal subculture in the Armed Forces.

He also stressed the need for taking consistent measures to significantly increase the level of discipline in the army.

13 soldiers have died in the Armenian and Nagorno Karabakh armies since the beginning of the year.

## US Ambassador, Armenia President Meet

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian met with US Ambassador to Armenia Lynne Tracy on February 18.

The two exchanged views on cooperation between Armenia and the USA in various spheres. Particularly, the sides assess promising the spheres of modern technologies, particularly, the implementation of joint projects in the sphere of artificial intelligence. In this context, the sides referred to the possible cooperation in the sidelines of the president-initiated ATOM project, the goal of which is to transform Armenia into a leading country in the spheres of artificial intelligence and mathematical modeling.

During the meeting the Armenian President and the US Ambassador also exchanged views on the referendum for Constitutional changes scheduled on April 5.

# Armenian, Azeri Leaders Spar over Karabakh

MUNICH (Combined Sources) – Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev publicly butted heads over the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict after holding fresh talks in Munich on Saturday, February 15.

Aliyev and Pashinyan gave no indications of major progress towards the conflict's resolution when they spoke during a panel discussion at the annual Munich Security Conference.

Pashinyan said that Karabakh had never been part of an independent Azerbaijani state and that its predominantly Armenian population exercised its right to self-determination during the collapse of the Soviet Union. He also called on the international community

made public.

Aliyev and Pashinyan met in the southern German city two weeks after their foreign ministers concluded two days of negotiations in Geneva held in the presence of US, French and Russian mediators.

In a joint statement with the mediators, the ministers said the "intensive discussions" focused on "possible next steps to prepare the populations for peace; principles and elements forming the basis of a future settlement; and timing and agenda for advancing the settlement process." They did not elaborate.

An Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said the Geneva talks were "the most intensive" in years.

During the panel discussion

that decision, which was a completely legal decision, on the personal initiative of Joseph Stalin, that decision was reversed in Moscow. It seemed like a chore, an agreement between Stalin, Lenin and Ataturk. Karabakh has never been part of an independent Azerbaijan state. Karabakh was put into Azerbaijan only in the process of forming the Soviet Union. And when we are talking about territorial integrity, we need to decide which country we are talking about.

"My question is, if Azerbaijan respected the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union as an independent state, how would it respect that territorial integrity if Azerbaijan withdrew from the Soviet Union in the same way that Nagorno Karabakh withdrew from the Soviet Union? You can say that I am now talking about a state that does not exist, that is, the Soviet Union, but the Soviet republic that comprised Nagorno-Karabakh does not exist either. There is no Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan, and that is the truth. And just as Azerbaijan gained independence from the Soviet Union, so too did Karabakh gain independence from both the Soviet Union and Soviet Azerbaijan."

Pashinyan also suggested that he and Aliyev come up with a new model for talks.

"Unfortunately, 25 times in 30 years we have been saying the same things, and I am afraid that the international community may be tired of hearing the same thing in some way. And I think we need to put forward new ideas," he said.

He stressed that a military solution was not one he was willing to consider.

"The international community must clearly and unequivocally emphasize and say it. If anyone thinks otherwise and says that there is a military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I think the people of Nagorno-Karabakh would answer that in that case we can say that this conflict is already resolved. But I think we need lasting, lasting peace."

Again he urged that Karabakh be represented in talks.



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (R) and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev meet in Munich, February 15, 2020.

to "make clear" to Baku that there can be no military solution to the Karabakh conflict

"The international community should first and foremost explain that Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijan and, secondly, exert pressure on the aggressor," countered Aliyev.

The public discussion, moderated by a former senior US defense official, followed a brief meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders. No details of those talks were immediately

Pashinyan said: "I would advise President Aliyev not to go so far into history. Because when Armenian King Tigran the Great was negotiating with the Roman military leader Pompeii, there was no state that would be called Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus and in the whole world.

"As for Nagorno-Karabakh as a state, you know I have to say that I disagree with President Aliyev. Because the Caucasus Bureau decided to make Karabakh part of Armenia, and after

## Germany's Merkel Praises 'Deepening' Ties with Armenia

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a major renewal process ... for example in the legal system," she said. "We naturally hope that Armenia will be very successful here because that's not an easy process."

"We are therefore very happy about your courage and your determination to follow this path," she told Pashinyan.

"Germany is a close friend and partner of Armenia and we feel the power of that friendship in both emotional and practical senses," Pashinyan said for his part. "Germany is one of the powerful bridges connecting Armenia to the European Union, European civilization and culture."

He added, "I would like to emphasize Germany's support for reforms in Armenia. We are grateful for the moral, political, expert and financial support of Germany and the European Union. It is essential to ensure the irreversibility of democracy in our country and to strengthen the rule of law for this purpose and to reform economic and political institutions.

"In 2018 Armenia transitioned to a parliamentary system of government and Germany is a very important and successful model for us as an effective, strong parliamentary government with clear counterbalance and compromise mechanisms in place and where democracy has long been in doubt. It is irreversible historically. In this regard, our relations with Germany are very important, and today we are going to talk to Mrs. Chancellor about the current devel-



Chancellor Angela Merkel and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

opments in Armenia, our reform agenda, including, as we have said before, about making democracy in Armenia institutionally strong and irreversible, and this is very much is an important conversation," Pashinyan noted.

An Armenian government statement issued after the talks said Merkel promised continued German assistance to "democratic reforms" in Armenia. It said Pashinyan briefed her on his political team's controversial decision to hold on April 5 a referendum on dismissing seven of the nine members of Armenia's Constitutional Court.

Economic issues were also high on the agenda of the talks, according to the

statement. Pashinyan was reported to urge German companies to invest in various sectors of the Armenian economy.

Germany is already Armenia's number one European Union donor and trading partner. It has provided the South Caucasus nation with hundreds of millions of euros in aid and low-interest loans since the 1990s. German-Armenian trade rose by over 4 percent, to \$451 million, last year, according to official Armenian statistics.

In her public remarks, Merkel said she will also discuss with Pashinyan the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Armenian government statement on the talks made no mention of the conflict.



## ARMENIA

## Armenian Hotel Offers Guests Taste of Middle Earth

DILIJAN (Reuters) – Located at the foot of one of Armenia's mountain ranges is "Cozy House" – a small hobbit-themed hotel that attracts hiking enthusiasts and Lord of the Rings fans alike.

Not surprisingly, its owner, Edgar Gulanyan is a fan of hobbits.

Hobbits are fictional characters created by English writer John Tolkien. They are best known for their love of comfort and good food. And they prefer living in small but snug underground houses built into the side of the hills.

The hotel, which opened in 2019, has six houses built into the side of the Caucasus mountains and can accommodate up to 16 guests.

Despite its theme, the rooms are not hobbit-size.

The ceiling is 2.5 metres high so guests will not need to stoop like Gandalf - one of the main characters in "The Lord of the Rings."

With prices ranging from 25,000 to 40,000 Armenian drams (\$52-83) per night, "Cozy House" is well above the local average price.

But this has not prevented people from coming. Off-season guests are around and all houses are already booked for the entire summer.

For these guests, a line from Tolkien's famous poem rings true: "home is behind, the world ahead."



One of the Cozy House rooms

## 'Monster Zeki': Armenian Diplomat Delves into Hidden Perpetrator of Genocide

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Salih Zeki (Kusharkov), the most brutal among the organizers of the Armenian Genocide, has been left in the shadow of historiography for decades, according to Arsen Avagyan, the head of the Department of Bordering Countries at the Foreign Ministry of Armenia and professor at Yerevan State University. On February 11, he spoke with Armenpress about his study of the Ottoman, Russian and Georgian archives, as well as his discovery of the mystery of Zeki.

"Salih Zeki was born in 1883 in the city of Samsun, was a Circassian by nationality. His father migrated to the Ottoman Empire in 1864 during the major emigration of Circassians from the Kuban region of Northern Caucasus. In the Armenian sources, or in all memoirs

documents. In addition, there are also very important materials about Salih Zeki in the Russian archives. I have found some materials from the Georgian archives as well because Zeki lived in Tbilisi in 1925-1933. As for the Azerbaijani archive, my Turkish historian colleagues helped and brought some materials. Salih Zeki played an important role in the establishment of Soviet rules in Azerbaijan, and this is proved by the archival documents. He has been the deputy chair of the commission for developing Azerbaijan's Latin alphabet, as well as the editor-in-chief of the Azerbaijani Dai Yildiz journal and Yeni Fikir newspaper," Arsen Avagyan said.

Salih Zeki played a major role in the implementation of the Armenian Genocide. He was appointed Governor of Deir ez-Zor for his cruelty and brutality.

"Salih Zeki was appointed Governor of Deir ez-Zor by the proposal of that time Governor of Syria Abdul Halik Renda. Moreover, Renda stated that the previous Governor of Deir ez-Zor was very compassionate towards Armenians, he didn't kill them, but even provided conditions for the displaced Armenians, but Renda said that someone is needed in order to carry out what has been planned against Armenians. Renda proposed Zeki's candidacy, and the latter already had a major reputation in Evrek with his cruelty. Many events in the history of the

Armenian Genocide are connected with Salih Zeki, for instance a member of the Ottoman parliament Grand Murad together with his 8 friends were hanged by Zeki in Evrek, as well as Zeki also exiled the family of Sargis Torosyan, a hero of Dardanelles, by violation of law," Arsen Avagyan said. His research showed that Zeki has used the converted Armenians for killing Armenians.

"Salih Zeki was using converted Armenians for killing Armenians. He told the converted ones that they should prove their faithfulness and kill their compatriots. Zeki also collected groups from the Chechens of the region and used them for killing Armenians. There are numerous eyewitness and survivors' reports which mention the name of Salih Zeki. MP of the Ottoman Parliament Emanuel Emanouilidis says he met with Salih Zeki in 1917, who told him that he regretted that he killed 60,000 Armenians, burnt children, adding that he even wanted to commit suicide.

In 1933, in his short biography written in Moscow, Salih Zeki, while describing the extermination of Armenians and the mass bloody actions taking place during the deportation of Armenians, confesses that: "as a Governor I bear a responsibility as I have taken part in that

terrible act," the Armenian diplomat said.

Salih Zeki left Turkey in 1918. In 1920 he was sentenced to death in absentia based on the decision signed by the sultan, but this decision remained on the paper and after that Zeki started his communist path where he was presented with the surname Kusharkov.

"Zeki became a communist, and it's worth noting that he also worked with Armenians at that time. This person cooperated with Armenian communists after killing thousands of Armenians. Moreover, Anastas Mikoyan helped Salih Zeki a lot during his communist activity," he said.

Several circumstances linked with Salih Zeki contributed to his real image remain undisclosed for decades. The reports released in the Armenian media in 1918 also played a role on that.

"The Turkish historiography doesn't deny the existence of Salih Zeki, but there is one problem as there is no study about him in the

Turkish historiography, and there is also one interesting factor that those who briefly touched upon Salih Zeki, gave a wrong surname thus contributing to the disappearance of this person from the history. The Armenian newspapers wrote that in 1918 Zeki and his assistant were arrested and then killed by the troops of the Armenian legion near Beirut. According to other reports, Zeki was arrested and killed by Armenians in Syria. But in reality he was in Istanbul at that time, but left for Baku already in late 1918. He was afraid that he would be jailed for his crimes against Armenians. And that happened," the Armenian diplomat said.

Salih Zeki was also a target in Operation Nemesis.

Most of the people working with him knew who he was. No encroachment against him by Armenians has taken place.

Salih Zeki died on November 3, 1940, at the age of 57 in Moscow.



Prof. Arsen Avagyan

relating to the Genocide or the events of that time, the name Salih Zeki is referred to as the Monster Zeki, who firstly was holding a position in Evrek in 1915 and later was the governor of Deir ez-Zor which had the largest concentration camp. According to various reports Salih Zeki organized the extermination of nearly 200,000 Armenians. The problem with Salih Zeki is that there is less information about his past and future life. When we look at the sources, it seems he appeared in 1915, did his brutal work in 1916 and disappeared," Avagyan said.

Arsen Avagyan found information about Salih Zeki in the Ottoman, Russian and Georgian sources, but in the Ottoman sources there are nearly 210 officials with the same name who were in office at that time, and this in its turn confuses the researchers.

"Since I served twice as Armenia's Permanent Representative to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization in 2001-2005 and 2015-2019, and since my monographs and scholarly articles have been published in Turkish in Turkey, in other words I am quite known there, I was allowed to use and examine the Ottoman archive. I conducted a research in the Ottoman archive for six years and collected various kinds of archival



## Delegation Leaves for Meeting with Pope

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – A delegation of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin departed for the Vatican on February 17 where it will have a meeting with Pope Francis, Echmiadzin's press service reported.

The delegation will take part in the meeting of young clergy as part of the Eastern Orthodox - Catholic Churches Official Dialogue.

"During the one-week introductory visit the delegation will visit the spiritual educational centers of the Catholic church, the Apostolic Palace, and will also have an official meeting with the Bishop of Rome, His Holiness Pope Francis," the Armenian Church said in a statement.

The delegation is composed of Priest Vahram Melikyan, the Director of the Information Services of the Mother See, Vardapet Mesrop Parsamyan, the Dean of the Gevorgyan Seminary, and Priest Adam Makaryan, the Secretary of the Catholicosate Office.



## INTERNATIONAL

## International News

## Freestyle Wrestler Claims Bronze at European Championships

ROME (PanARMENIAN.Net) – Freestyle wrestler Arsen Harutyunyan of Armenia won bronze at the European Wrestling Championships in Rome on Sunday, February 16.

Harutyunyan defeated Greek wrestler Georgios Pilidis in the 61 kilograms event to secure the third spot.

Towards the end of the bout, Pilidis suffered a knee injury which Harutyunyan couldn't help but notice.

Keeping to the rules of fair competition, the Armenian stopped putting pressure on his opponent and offered his help instead.

Earlier, Armenian Greco-Roman wrestlers Gevorg Gharibyan and Artur Aleksanyan had claimed the 60 and 98 kilograms titles, respectively, while Karen Aslanyan (67 kg) and Karapet Chalyan (77 kg) had won bronze medals.

## Bill Honoring Genocide Victims Submitted in Ukraine Parliament

KYIV (Armenpress) – A bill honoring the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide has been submitted to the parliament of Ukraine, AnalitikUA.net, reports. The bill was submitted by a parliament member representing the ruling “Servant of the People” Party Daria Volodina on February 14.

Chairman of the Union of Armenians of Ukraine Vilen Shatvoryan highlighted the bill, assessing it as a commitment to humanitarianism, truth and justice.

In the recent 10 years this is the 4th legislative initiative in the Ukrainian parliament related to the Armenian Genocide.

## New Envoy to Venezuela Has Armenian Roots

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN.Net) – President Vladimir Putin on February 18 appointed Russian diplomat Sergey Melik-Bagdasarov as the country's ambassador to Venezuela.

By another decree, Putin dismissed Vladimir Zaemsky, who was ambassador to Venezuela, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Born in 1968, Melik-Bagdasarov graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 1994.

Prior to this appointment, he served as deputy director of the Latin American Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

## Kavala Acquitted by One Court Then Rearrested

ISTANBUL (AFP) – A Turkish court acquitted leading businessman and rights defender Osman Kavala on Tuesday, February 18, in a controversial trial over the anti-government “Gezi Park” protests of 2013.

Kavala is chairman of the Anatolian Culture Foundation, which promotes human rights through art, including with neighboring Armenia, with which Turkey has no diplomatic ties.

The judge said there was “not enough concrete evidence” against Kavala and eight other suspects that appeared alongside him for the landmark verdict.

Kavala received loud cheers from the packed courtroom as he walked free.

“This is a trial that should have never happened in the first place,” Emma Sinclair-Webb, of Human Rights Watch, said at the courthouse in Silivri, on the outskirts of Istanbul.

Kavala spent more than 800 days in pre-trial detention and became a symbol of what critics say is a crackdown on Turkey's civil society under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in recent years.

Seven other defendants, who are fugitives, were not formally acquitted.

In a cruel twist, only hours after his release, he was detained by police for alleged links to the 2016 failed coup.

# Pashinyan Discusses Judicial Referendum With Council of Europe Secretary General

MUNICH (RFE/RL) – The Council of Europe's Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric spoke of “concerns” about ongoing political developments in Armenia when she met with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Munich at the weekend.

The meeting focused on the Armenian government's judicial reforms and, in particular, its controversial decision to hold a referendum on replacing most members of the country's Constitutional Court.

In his opening remarks at the meeting publicized by his press office, Pashinyan again accused the court of maintaining close ties to the former Armenian leadership.

“We are in a very, very careful process of demining our democracy, our judiciary, and I am very glad to have this opportunity to give you some information about the current processes because recently we decided to have a referendum connected with the Constitutional Court,” he said.

“Of course, from the Council of Europe side we watch very carefully what is going on,” responded Pejcinovic Buric. “There are some concerns and I would like to hear from your side how you see this process developing.”

“For us, it is very important that obligations and standards are followed as we have other bodies that will be involved in work with Armenia within the judiciary and the Constitutional Court,” she added in English.

According to a statement by his office, Pashinyan then “spoke in detail about the circumstances of the referen-

dum” slated for April 5. Pejcinovic Buric “expressed the Council of Europe's full support for reforms, including in the judicial field, taking place in Armenia,” said the statement. It did not elaborate

on the concerns mentioned by the head of Europe's leading human rights organization.

Opposition lawmakers have denounced the amendments drafted by



Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meet in Munich, February 15, 2020.

the concerns mentioned by the head of Europe's leading human rights organization.

The Council of Europe issued no statements on the meeting held on the sidelines of the annual Munich Security Conference.

Armenians are due to vote on April 5 on draft constitutional amendments that would end the powers of seven of the nine Constitutional Court judges installed by the country's former governments.

Pashinyan has repeatedly accused the judges – and chief justice Hrayr Tovmasyan in particular – of impeding his efforts to make the Armenian judi-

ciary “truly independent.” Critics claim that he is seeking to gain control over the country's highest court.

Earlier this month, the Armenia co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) urged the authorities to submit the changes to the Venice Commission for examination “as soon as possible.” A senior Armenian lawmaker countered that Yerevan is under no legal obligation to seek such judgment.

## Chef Torosyan Earns Michelin Star for Fourth Year in a Row

BRUSSELS (PanARMENIAN.Net) – Chef Karen Torosyan earned a Michelin star for his Brussels restaurant, Bozar, he revealed in an Instagram post on February 15.

This is the fourth year in a row that the restaurant is getting recognition as a fine dining establishment.

“When we love we don't count,” Torosyan said in a Instagram post.

According to the hospitality content hub World's Best Places, Torosyan is one of the most accomplished chefs in Belgium – if not in all of Europe.

He originally hails from Armenia and went to Belgium at the age of 18. He finished his hospitality studies at INFOBO and gained experience in various types of restaurants such as Michelin starred Bruneau and Chalet de la Forêt. It was at these restaurants that Karen discovered the real French cooking and the need of structure and hard work in the kitchen. At the famous La Paix restaurant of Chef David Martin, Karen also learnt the business aspects of running a restaurant. It was under the wings of Chef David Martin that Karen got the opportunity to go his own way with the start of Bozar Brasserie. After a few years he became fully independent and quickly gained name and fame in the culinary world.

Bozar Restaurant is housed on the ground floor of the famous center for Fine Arts in Brussels, and Torosyan took part in the whole building renovation and restoration project.





## INTERNATIONAL

# He Observed a Protest. Now He Faces a Possible Life Sentence

By Carlotta Gall

ISTANBUL (*New York Times*) – When the police banged on his door and took him away for questioning one dawn in November 2018, Yigit Aksakoglu assumed he would be home in time to catch his afternoon swim.

But after a 10-hour interrogation, he was hauled off to court and thrown into jail in solitary confinement for seven months on a charge that is among Turkey's most heinous crimes, violently attempting to overthrow the government.

The Turkish representative for a Dutch charitable foundation specializing in programs for the social development of young children, Aksakoglu, 43, never expected to run into trouble with the law. Even when President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey began mass arrests after a failed coup in 2016, sweeping up many innocent academics, journalists and human rights activists, he never thought he would be caught up in it, too.

"I was picked accidentally," Aksakoglu said in an interview at his office in central Istanbul. "And now they are unable to unpick me."

A verdict in his trial is expected on Tuesday and he, along with 15 co-defendants, faces a possible sentence of life without parole. "Just like a lottery I will probably spend a long time in prison," he said.

The prosecutor has called for the harsh sentence despite Aksakoglu's insistence that the charges are baseless and the evidence flimsy. Fears are mounting that under Erdogan's increasingly autocratic rule, he and his co-defendants will be punished in order to send a chill through Turkey's dwindling community of independent organizations and activists.

"The 18th of February will be the funeral of civil society in Turkey," Aksakoglu said. "No one will be willing to raise even a tiny voice."

The case stems from the Taksim Square protests of 2013, when students, artists and environmentalists opposed the construction of a shopping mall in one of Istanbul's central parks. The trial is being watched closely by Western diplomats who want to see an improvement in Erdogan's record on human rights and the rule of law.

One of Aksakoglu's co-defendants is Osman Kavala, a well-known philanthropist – often called Turkey's George Soros – who has been in jail for over two years. Another is the architect Mucella Yapici who has long been a vocal opponent of much of Erdogan's extensive urban development in Istanbul. All are accused of trying to overthrow the government by supporting the protests. (See related story on previous page.)

But Aksakoglu's fate is indicative of just how twisted Turkey's justice system has become: Someone who pulled himself up thanks to a state education is seeing his career crushed by his own government.

He was born in a small village, Aydin, in western Turkey, and together with his sister was raised single-handedly by his mother, a pharmacist in a state hospital, after his father died in a car accident when he was 11.

He gained a scholarship to the French-Turkish high school in the city of Izmir and another to study civil engineering at Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul. It was there that he became involved in activities for European integration, youth participation and good governance under a program sponsored by the European Union.

He went on to earn a master's degree – on a British scholarship – at the London School of Economics and a second master's at the University of Barcelona in advocacy and non-governmental organizations. Back in Turkey he began to work at Bilgi University, lecturing and publishing books on advocacy, management training and how to influence policy.

It was the early 2000s, a time when Erdogan was riding high in Western opinion. He was energetically pursuing Turkey's accession to the European Union and his government was making substantial institutional and human rights reforms to meet European standards.

But after a decade at the helm of government, Erdogan's early zeal for reform waned as corruption and cronyism grew. When protesters gathered to block the construction project in Taksim Square park, Erdogan saw it as a direct challenge to his rule and crushed the protests with riot police and tear gas.

Aksakoglu lived nearby and said he watched the protests with the keenness of an academic watching a real-life experiment. "I studied social movements," he said. "This was the first time I

saw a social movement so of course I was there, as a peaceful observer."

By then he was working for a Dutch organization, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, which was designing programs to improve child development in disadvantaged urban communities. In 2014 he became the foundation's representative in Turkey.

He held one workshop with fellow civil society members after the Taksim Square protests to reflect on the events but otherwise returned to what, by then, had become his main passion: helping improve the lives of children age 6 and younger.

He developed a program called Urban 95 looking at city planning and architecture from the view of 95 centimeters (or 37 inches) high, the average height of a 3-year-old. He mapped the areas of Istanbul where the most disadvantaged children lived and found neighborhoods without a single park and even a mother who had not left her house for two years.

He ran a program of home visits to help mothers improve their children's social and cognitive development through play. "I try to build capacities of municipalities so that they provide services to young children and their caregivers," he said.

Next he is designing playgrounds for young children for the newly elected mayor of Istanbul.

"I am working in this sector in order to create change," he said, "but not necessarily related to a political party or against a political party. I am a professional of social development. What I am doing now for the last 20 or 25 years is very obvious."

His detention came out of the blue. Five years after the Taksim Square protests, prosecutors pulled out old, discredited investigations and accused 16 trade unionists, artists and activists of trying to overthrow the government, destroying property and, for some of them, including Aksakoglu, disseminating and deepening the protests around the country.

The interrogation would have been risible were it not so serious. The evidence consisted largely of transcripts of taped phone conversations – the original tapes have never been produced in court. But the interrogator often misunderstood the conversations, Aksakoglu said. At the mention of the revolutionary Rosa

Luxemburg, the interrogator asked if he had attended a meeting in the country of Luxembourg.

Aksakoglu was locked in solitary confinement in the main high-security prison at Silivri, outside Istanbul. "It was really hard to cope with the shock on my own," he said. "I was not able to talk to anyone about my situation."

He asked to move to a cell with other people, but was refused. Eventually he learned the ways of the prison. Lying on a newspaper, his head on the floor by the door, he would shout under the door to the inmate across the corridor every day at 4 p.m. The corridor was filled with political prisoners, and they all shouted to their neighbors.

He saw his lawyers and received visits from his wife and two daughters, 8 and 4, but began to dread his elder daughter's questions as she counted the days he had been jailed and asked when he was coming home.

After seven and a half months in detention, he was released under orders to report to the police once a week. He quietly went back to work. But as the trial draws to a close, the prosecutor has requested the toughest sentence possible – a life sentence without parole.

Aksakoglu has little faith in the possibility of a fair judgment after seven months of hearings.

The government treats the defendants "like small change in their pockets," he said. "They came into the middle of our lives and they ruined them. My past is for nothing now and I have no future."

(This story initially appeared in the February 14 edition of the *New York Times*.)

## Scores of Opposition Leaders, Activists Detained Ahead Of Protest In Baku

BAKU (RFE/RL) – Police in Azerbaijan have detained three opposition party leaders and more than 100 activists ahead of a protest in Baku against the results of last week's parliamentary elections that were criticized by international observers.

Many of those detainees were released later on February 16.

The ruling Yeni Azerbaijan (New Azerbaijan) party won 72 out of 125 seats in the single-chamber legislature on February 9, according to the Central Election Commission (CEC). Nearly all other seats went to small parties and independents loyal to President Ilham Aliyev.

Before the February 16 unauthorized protest was scheduled to start, police detained either at their homes or outside their party headquarters the leader of the REAL party, Ilgar Mamedly, the leader of the Musavat Party, Arif Hajili, and the head of the D18 opposition movement, Ruslan Izzatly.

They were later released outside of Baku. Izzatly said he will sue the Interior Ministry.

Riot police surrounded the CEC building where the rally had been planned and put anyone arriving to take part in the protest on buses.

After his release, Hajili said some of those detained were "taken in police vans to remote, deserted places 200-300 kilometers from Baku and abandoned there."

Mehman Huseynov, who ran as a candidate in the municipal elections, was among those taken away from the capital. He posted on Facebook a picture of himself sitting on the side of a road in a deserted area.

On February 11, police in Baku detained more than 20 opposition and independent candidates who protested the results of the elections in front of the CEC building.

In a preliminary report, monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe cited widespread violations in the vote count, instances of ballot stuffing and multiple voting, as well as pressure on voters, candidates, and observers. The 58-year-old Aliyev, who has ruled Azerbaijan since shortly before his father's death 17 years ago, called the elections in December, nine months before it was formally due, amid public discontent over a slowing economy.

# Syria Recognizes Armenian Genocide

SYRIA, from page 1

"The genocide ... a significant part of which was perpetrated in the territory of Syria under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, is part of the common historical memory of the Armenian and Syrian peoples," the Armenian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

"The Syrian people ... were among the first to lend a helping hand to the victims of the genocide. Thousands of survivors found a new homeland in Syria, establishing one of the most flourishing Armenian communities and contributing to Syria's progress," added the statement.

Many of an estimated 1.5 million victims of

the World War One-era genocide were killed on their way to a vast desert in what is now eastern Syria. Many other Armenians were starved to death after reaching the desert on foot.

A genocide memorial in the area contained some of the remains of the victims and served as a pilgrimage site for Syria's Armenians before it was bombed by jihadists in 2014. Visiting the site in 2010, then-Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian said it is to Armenians what Auschwitz is to the Jews.

While helping descendants of survivors of those death camps become a thriving community in Syria, the Syrian government for decades avoided recognizing the 1915 mass

killings and deportations as genocide. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad pointedly declined to visit a genocide memorial in Yerevan during an official trip to Armenia in 2009. Assad had a warm rapport with Erdogan at the time.

The situation changed dramatically after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 and ensuing deterioration of Ankara's relations with the Syrian regime. In March 2015, the Syrian parliament held a special session to mark the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. Two months later Assad drew parallels between the Ottoman Turks who massacred Armenians and Islamist rebels in Syria who he said are sponsored by Ankara.

## Priest Arrested in Turkey for Giving Bread and Water to PKK Militants

ISTANBUL (Catholic News Agency) – Turkish authorities have arrested a Syriac Orthodox priest on terrorism charges after the cleric provided bread and water to members of an illegal Kurdish separatist group.

Fr. Sefer Bilecen of St. Jacob's Monastery in Nusaybin was first detained along with other local Christians on January 9, before being released on January 14 without charge. He was then re-arrested and indicted on January 16, and accused of being a member of a terrorist group. Information about the indictment was released on February 8.

Bilecen was arrested after an informant testified that he provided bread and water to Kurdish separatists at the monastery in 2018,

actions that the Turkish authorities have said constitute "helping and abetting" terrorists. According to a 2018 police report, members of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) visited the monastery on several occasions.

The PKK is a group dedicated to the creation of an independent Kurdish state within Turkey. Decades of fighting between PKK separatists and Turkish forces have resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of lives and the group is designated as a terrorist organization in the European Union, though not by the United Nations. The leader of the party has been in a Turkish prison since 1999.

In addition to the accusation of providing food and water to the PKK members, Bilecen is

also accused of failing to report their identities to the authorities, even though he was aware they were members of the banned group.

Nusaybin, where the monastery is located, is predominantly Kurdish.

Bilecen does not deny providing food and water to the PKK members, but he told authorities that his actions had no political motivation and were not a demonstration of either support or sympathy for the PKK. The priest said offering food and water to those in need was a requirement of his Christian faith, and that he never left the monastery grounds.

Bilecen is due in court on March 19.

If convicted, he faces a minimum sentence of seven and a half years in prison.

# Community News

## AESA 2019 Scholarship Awardee, Careen Khachatoorian

GLENDALE – Careen Khachatoorian, a PhD candidate in the Cell, Molecular and Developmental Biology Program at the University of California, Riverside was recently awarded the AESA Scholarship for her graduate work on the toxicity of Electronic Cigarettes (ECig). Her work involves identifying and quantifying the chemicals in the residue left behind from ECig use while also studying the toxicity of this residue. She is in the last year of her PhD program and currently working on her dissertation.

As a graduate student, she not only learns and conducts research but also furthers her education by joining professional societies, volunteering for numerous STEM programs, and communicates science through the Science to Policy certificate program at UCR. She is an active member in the Society of Toxicology, contributing her time as a secretary for the graduate student leadership committee and a graduate student representative for the dermal toxicology specialty section. She has been an active member of AESA for 5 years and was elected as a council member for 2020. It is her mission as a graduate stu-



Harout Bronozian presenting AESA Scholarship Award to 2020 Scholarship award winner, Careen Khachatoorian

dent to help the public understand science and she hopes to inspire a new generation of scientists.

AESA offers a \$3,000 scholarship every year to any Armenian graduate student involved in a thesis/dissertation program in an accredited university. The 2019 scholarship is sponsored by Harout Bronozian.

AESA is a non-partisan, non-sectarian, and non-profit organization founded in 1983 in Glendale, CA, based on a vision to create a worldwide Armenian scientific organization with the objective of creating venues for all engineers, scientists and industrialists of Armenian descent to network, interact and help one another. AESA is engaged in various activities including organizing an annual AESA Science Olympiad for middle and high school students, organizing an annual AESA STEM Conference and Expo, organizing various leadership and entrepreneurship programs through AESA Leadership and Entrepreneurship Academy, awarding scholarships for STEM graduates and undergraduates, organizing periodic STEM lectures, and finally recognizing STEM professionals with awards such as the award named after Victor Hambartsumyan, who was the first recipient of the prestigious award. Visit [www.aesa.org](http://www.aesa.org) to read more about AESA's initiatives. Sign up for AESA's newsletter to stay informed on events and opportunities in the local STEM community. Follow AESA on Facebook for all updates.



James and Marta Batmasian cut the ribbon.

## FAR's Parkar School Is Safe Haven for Disabled Youth

YEREVAN and BOCA RATON, Fla. – “I love doing everything with soil and gardening, and I cannot wait to graduate and go back to my village to work in the orchards,” says Aramays.

“I dream of becoming a singer or a dancer,” says Lilit who hails from Artik, a small town in Shirak marz.

And Armen who weaves carpets, desires to become a professional artist and do portraits.

The Paraker School for Children with Disabilities has been the highlight for these children (ages 17 to 20) who are among more than 250 youngsters in this safe and loving haven. These three young people along with two others who have different levels of retardation are scheduled to graduate in June, 2020.

**By Florence Avakian**

For them, and the approximately 200 others who live at the FAR Parakar Special School for Children with Disabilities, the prospect of leaving this safe and loving haven causes “their eyes to turn sad,” said Margarit Piliposyan, vice director of the Yerevan Office of the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), in a telephone conversation from Yerevan.

“They want to stay longer at the school. They live as a family,” noted Piliposyan. “They love everything about the school, including the teachers, the atmosphere, the conditions of life and their friends.”

The goals of this remarkable institution are to help these youngsters “acquire decent skills to land a job, and most importantly to believe in themselves, regain self-esteem and hope, become contributing citizens and be considered normal by others in society.”

However, in the last 30 years, the school's infrastructure has deteriorated. “It is no longer safe for children in wheelchairs, with its falling balconies and other structural failures. The teachers are also worn out from tending to these needs, and teaching there for decades. It has become a hell for the children,” reported Piliposyan.

Included in this crucial project are the crucial goals of ensuring a “safe and nurturing environment for learning and living, reimagining the role of teachers to be mentors, role models and collaborators, and giving necessary confidence to parents for a safe environment with caring and reliable professionals.

Included among the structural improvements are the renovations of the gym, dormitories with clean bedrooms, the educational center and the classrooms, completing the rehabilitation center, training for the therapists, and the creation of a greenhouse where the youngsters can use their creativity to learn, grow and eat their own vegetables.

A state-of-the-art Vocational Training Center is in the works.

All of these goals are for the easing and helping the students to progress from the classroom to the workplace with specializations in social, psychological, therapeutic life skills, in conjunction with Armenia's Ministry of Education.

see FAR, page 7

## NAASR Announces Winners of Sona Aronian Armenian Studies Book Prizes

BELMONT, Mass. – The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) announced this week the winners of the 2019 Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prizes for Excellence in Armenian Studies: Prof. Tamar M. Boyadjian for *The City Lament: Jerusalem Across the Medieval Mediterranean* (Cornell Univ. Press) and Prof. Jennifer M. Dixon for *Dark Pasts: Changing the State's Story in Turkey and Japan* (Cornell Univ. Press); and Prof. Peter Balakian and Aram Arkun for the translation of Krikor Balakian's *The Ruins of Ani* (Rutgers Univ. Press).

NAASR's Aronian Book Prizes were established in 2014 by the late Dr. Aronian and Dr. Geoffrey Gibbs, to be awarded annually to outstanding scholarly works in the English language in the field of Armenian Studies and translations from Armenian into English. The 2019 awards are for books published in 2018.

Boyadjian, assistant professor of Medieval Literature at Michigan State University, and Dixon, Associate Professor of Political Science at Villanova University, were named as co-winners for their monographs, each of which, coincidentally, was published by Cornell University Press.

Dixon's *Dark Pasts* analyzes the trajectories over the past sixty years of Turkey's narrative of the Armenian Genocide and Japan's narrative of the Nanjing Massacre, while Boyadjian's *The City Lament* focuses on elegies and other expressions of loss that address the spiritual and strategic objective of the early Crusades – i.e., Jerusalem – through readings of city laments in the English, French, Latin, Arabic, and Armenian literary traditions.

Via email, Dixon commented: “I am thrilled and honored to have my book recognized as a co-recipient of the 2019 Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies. I am deeply grateful for the recognition of my work by NAASR, and I am happy that, in spite of its comparative nature, my book is being recognized for its contribution to Armenian Studies. I am particularly appreciative of Marc Mamigonian's long interest in and encouragement of my work, and of the feedback, insights and connections gleaned from NAASR, where I presented an early version of my work and attended academic talks during the three years I was a fellow at the Kennedy School. I benefited from the interactions and feedback at NAASR, so it is especially gratifying to have my book honored with this award.”

Boyadjian conveyed that she is “deeply honored by the 2019 Dr. Sona Aronian NAASR book prize in excellence in Armenian Studies,” and explained that “for over a decade the subject of medieval lamentation has been on my mind. The idea for this book came from the desire to understand how other cultures translated the loss of their land and spaces deemed sacred to them. As someone whose grandparents survived the Armenian Genocide, and who along with my parents were forcefully deported from their homes, I started to examine more closely what it meant in the medieval Mediterranean world to mourn the loss of fallen cities – to lose the place one called ‘home.’ I came to find that despite differences, many ethno-religious groups reflected on this matter in similar ways in their literary traditions. I am indebted to the continuous support and encouragement of my family, friends, and colleagues, without whom this book would not be possible.”

Balakian, the Donald M. and Constance H. Rebar Professor of the Humanities at Colgate University, and Arkun, executive director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association and assistant editor at the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, were recognized for their efforts as editor and

see AWARD, page 9



COMMUNITY NEWS

# FAR's Parkar School Is Safe Haven for Disabled Youth

FAR, from page 6

"FAR started this program last year. This is a huge change in the mindset of the population," continued Piliposyan. "It has never done before in such a comprehensive way. We are creating a model for the families, the employees and the employers," she declared with obvious pride.

### Batmasians Come to the Rescue

"When the Fund for Armenian Relief presented this to the FAR Board of Directors, Marta Batmasian and her family immediately pledged \$1.5 million.

In a telephone interview, Marta Batmasian who has been deeply involved in 120 charitable endeavors throughout her life, enthusiastically jumped into this noble project "without a moment of blinking."

She stated, "I wasn't as emotional until I saw what impact it has had and continues to have in the lives of almost 300 young individuals, who

either have no home, or come very poor families.

"These are not your average orphans, or children with minor problems. These are youngsters who have been physically neglected, and thrown out of society."

For far too long, the atmosphere in Armenia has been a place of alienation and rejection for families with disabled members. They were denied the right to participate in society, robbed of their dignity and self-worth, and often put in an orphanage or an institution run by the government.

But in the caring and loving environment of the Parakar School, these children are "trained to enter needed professions that benefit their country," she continued, and mentioned a rug she cherishes made by one of the young ladies, calling it "a labor of love, innocence and appreciation."

Marta Batmasian's story reflects her deep



James and Marta Batmasian at the grand opening of Parakar Vocational Training Center



The Batmasians with children of the Parakar School.

empathy for the "less advantageous." Born and raised in Istanbul, she came penniless to the U.S. and met her husband James "who also was penniless." Proud in nature, she did not accept a penny from her parents, often going hungry.



Since then, through devoted hard work, life has dramatically changed for Marta and her husband James who are real estate pioneers in Boca Raton, Fla. They own Investments Limited, and are known for their vast philanthropic work.

Marta is on the FAR Board of Directors and eight other charities, and working with four non-profits. Close to her heart, in addition to her deep involvement with FAR is People Reaching Out to Provide Education and Leadership (PROPEL) which "helps youth living in economically depressed areas by providing an educational center" after their regular school day.

She gives enormous credit to the "inspired work of FAR, and its Ayo program with its 34 projects which she called her "real baby." Ayo, with its five young workers, placing donation boxes in different areas of Armenia, encourage Armenia's citizens as well as tourists to give what they can to help indigent children and elders.

"FAR has done more projects than anyone else in Armenia," she declared, emphasizing each word. "All these extremely worthy and needed FAR projects are things tangible, and will in the future become automatic. They are their own testimonial, and will change attitudes."



"It is my privilege and honor to do what I'm doing for this wonderful and dedicated FAR organization. I have received so much more than I have given."

The Tekeyan Cultural Association and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research / Calouste Gulbenkian Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues

present

## "The Ruins of Ani: From Sacred Landscape to Political Soil"

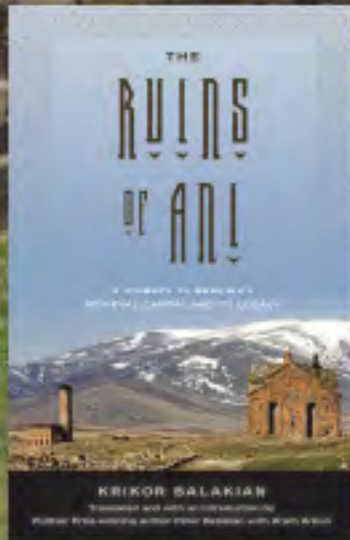
**Presentation by Peter Balakian, editor, and Aram Arkun, translator, of *The Ruins of Ani* by Krikor Balakian**

**February 27**

Batmasian Hall, NAAASR, 395 Concord Avenue, Belmont, 7:30 p.m.

Admission free.

For more information, email [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com) or [marc@naasr.org](mailto:marc@naasr.org)





## OBITUARIES

## Margaret Kyrkostas

### Founder of New York Anthropology Museum

SEA CLIFF, N.Y. — Margaret “Marge” C. Tellalian-Kyrkostas, 90, of Little Neck passed away on February 15. She was an anthropologist, an Armenian activist, a wife and mother, an author, a professor, a Yaya, a museum director, an actress and producer, and an aspiring stand-up comic.

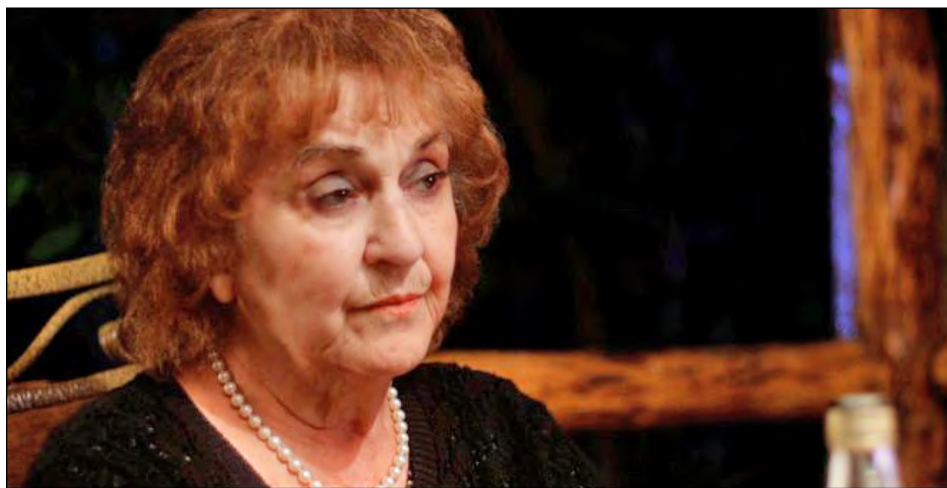
She is survived by two children: Theo W. Kyrkostas, Jr. (Ann) of Sea Cliff, NY and Peggy Hanlon (Liam) of Port Washington, NY; four grandchildren: Samantha Mills (Billy) and Calvin Kyrkostas (Isabella Gambuto), Tim O’Hanlon and Ani O’Hanlon; and one great-granddaughter, Nellie Day Mills. She also leaves behind a sister-in-law, many nieces, nephews, cousins, and relations in Romania, France, and Argentina. She was preceded in death by her second son, Mark Kyrkostas, her parents, her brother, Jack Tellalian, and her husband, Ted Kyrkostas, Sr.

She was born in Astoria, Queens to Garabed and Haiganoush (Yemenedjian) Tellalian, immi-

many international trips, including to communist Romania in 1966. Her love for all cultures and countries inspired her children and grandchildren to travel the globe. Often, Marge came along.

At 43, Marge achieved a lifelong goal, returning to school to earn her BA at Queens College and MA in Physical Anthropology at New York University. Her archeological work sent her further afield — to Greece, where she studied the Petralona Man with Dr. Aris Poulianos, England and Kenya. She taught in the Department of Anthropology at Queens College for 15 years.

In 1977, she founded the Anthropology Museum of the People of New York and Armenian Cultural Education Resource Center at Queens College alongside Margaret Mead. She served as its director until her death. In this role, she curated dozens of exhibitions, completed an oral history for the Library of Congress, organized community events, and



Margaret C. Tellalian Kyrkostas (screen grab from “After Water There Is Sand”)

grant parents from Anatolia who had survived the Armenian Genocide and fled to America to build a new life.

Marge was raised by her parents and grandmother, Mariam, among many Armenian friends and cousins in Astoria. She attended Julia Richmond High School, where she excelled in painting and made life-long friends.

She married Theodore W. Kyrkostas on February 15, 1948. After moving from Astoria, they made their home in Little Neck, NY, where they raised their three children. As a mother, Marge shared with her children a great curiosity for the world, taking them on a six-week trip across the US in a Greyhound bus, driving them through Alabama during race riots, and on

coordinated international trips.

After the death of her son in 1990, celebrated composer and pianist, Mark Kyrkostas, she became a champion for his music, introducing his works to a wider audience and hosting yearly “Remember Me With Music” memorial concerts to keep his music alive.

In 1997, she curated an exhibit on Armenian immigration for the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. The show, titled, “Armenia: Memories from my Home,” became the source of controversy when Ellis Island officials demanded that graphic photographs and text depicting the Armenian Genocide be removed from the exhibit. The incident was reported by the *New York Times* and CBS News. Marge refused to allow

## Agnes (Bizdikian) Sahagian

### Active in Church, Daughters of Vartan

WORCESTER — Agnes (Bizdikian) Sahagian, daughter of the late Nishan and Armenouhi (Kasparian) Bizdikian, passed away on Friday, January 10, surrounded by her children. She was 87.

Agnes was born in Rutland, Vermont on October 6, 1932.

She was the wife of the late Stephen Robert Sahagian for 47 years and also of the late Sahag Sahagian for 2 years.

She leaves her daughter Diana Johnson and sons Michael and his wife Laurie and Robert and his wife Leslie, 7 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren.

Agnes attended Rutland High School and graduated in 1950 with high honors. For 25 years she worked for the Massachusetts Public Welfare and Social Services as the administrative secretary. Later in life, she was a certified personal care nurse.

Agnes was a devoted member of the Armenian Church of Our Saviour and served in many forms over the decades. Some of her past duties within the church included Parish Council member, Women’s Guild Chairwoman, Diocesan delegate and member of the Endowment Committee. Recently, she formed a Friendship Guild for some members of the parish.

She was also an active member of the



Daughters of Vartan organization and was elected to the position of Grand Matron in 2011 for a two-year term in office.

She was an avid knitter and dancer; she was happiest playing poker and bingo with her friends and spending time with her grandchildren and great grandchildren.

her family’s history to be sanitized, eventually preserving the complete exhibition, a testament to her perseverance.

Kyrkostas was the first woman to be elected to the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs’ Parish Council and the first woman to crash the men’s AHEPA (American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association) meeting, an advocate not only for her Armenian heritage, but for her husband’s Greek roots, as well.

In her 80s, Marge began an acting career, traveling to Armenia to star in the film, “After Water, There Is Sand.” She continued to surprise her friends with unorthodox adventures in her later years: staying overnight in the dorms with her granddaughter at college, traveling to Cuba, Ukraine, Romania and Mexico, launching a budding career as a stand-up comedian and exercise instructor, and shocking

guests with X-rated stories at dinners and family reunions.

A child of the Great Depression, she never took any abundance for granted. She experienced as much joy growing a tomato plant on her windowsill as she did visiting extended family and friends around the world. To be with her was to see people more keenly, taste food more enthusiastically, dance with lighter steps, and meet any new place with excitement. She never met a person whose ethnic background she did not want to know. Her curiosity for the world was boundless.

At the time of her death, she was developing a screenplay, “Bad Good Men,” and writing her memoirs.

The funeral was held on Tuesday, February 18 at the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# NAASR Announces Winners of Aronian Book Prizes

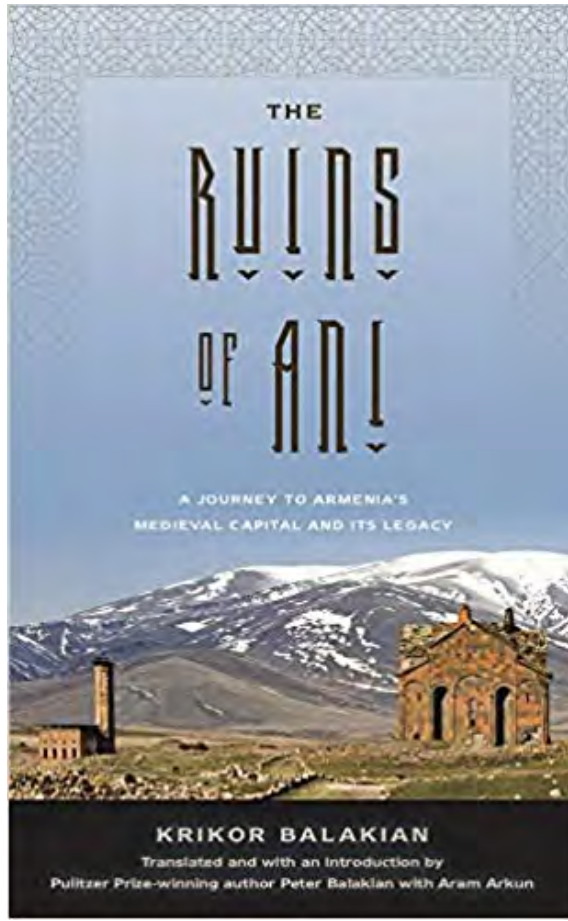
AWARD, from page 6  
 translator of *The Ruins of Ani*, which was first published in 1910 in Armenian as Nkaragrut'iwn Anii aweraknerun. The Ruins of Ani combines the genres of history, art criticism, and travel memoir in looking at the medieval Armenian capital of Ani almost on the eve of the Armenian Genocide; more than a century later, the city's history has been falsified in its presentation by the Turkish government as part of its campaign of denial and erasure of Armenian history.

Prof. Balakian remarked that "it's an honor to receive the Aronian Prize given by NAASR – book prizes matter because they remind the wider world that artistic and intellectual work matter, that books and works of imagination are the center of any culture's communal life. Without literature, art productions, and scholarship there is no glue to keep a culture cohesive and vital, to keep a culture – a culture." Aram Arkun observed that "NAASR and the Aronian Prize are playing an important role in supporting intellectual work in a period where social media seem to have taken first place in the attention of many in the West and

in the Armenian community as well. The extended work of research and writing on Armenian history and culture must continue so that there is a reliable and perpetually renewed foundation for popularized transmission of knowledge."

In announcing the Aronian Awards, NAASR Director of Academic Affairs Marc A. Mamigonian noted that Boyadjian's and Dixon's books, while not focusing solely on Armenian subject matter, "both serve to help extend the parameters of what Armenian Studies can be, and do so in ways that are, I think, consistent with what we might call the best traditions of the field." He added that "it was very much the hope of the late Dr. Aronian that the prize will serve as an encouragement to translators making available works of Armenian literature and scholarship for an English-language readership, and Balakian and Arkun have performed a great service in making Bishop Balakian's work accessible to non-Armenian readers."

The 2020 Aronian Prizes will be announced later this year. Authors or publishers wishing to submit books for consideration may contact Mamigonian at [marc@naasr.org](mailto:marc@naasr.org).



# Dr. Ari Sekeryan To Speak on Armenian Orphans and Refugees After First World War, on March 5

FRESNO – Dr. Ari Sekeryan will speak on "The Survivors: Armenian Orphans and Refugees After the First World War (1918-1923)" on Thursday, March 5, at 7:30 p.m., in the University Business Center, Alice Peters Auditorium, Room 191 on the Fresno State campus. The presentation is part of the Spring 2020 Lecture Series of the Armenian Studies Program and is supported by the Clara Bousian Bedrosian Fund.

Sekeryan was appointed the 16th Henry S. Khanzadian Kazan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies for the Spring 2020 semester and the March 5 lecture will be his second public presentation of the semester.

Following the First World War and the Armenian Genocide, protecting the lives of Armenian orphans and refugees was the greatest challenge that the community leadership faced. During the Armistice period, with the help of the Allied Powers and humanitarian aid organizations, thousands of Armenian orphans and refugees were rescued and brought back to community life. The lecture presents the story of Armenian orphans and refugees by employing Armenian and Ottoman Turkish media sources published in Istanbul and Anatolia during the Armistice period. It explores the nature of the aid campaigns organized



Dr. Ari Sekeryan

by the community leadership and the importance of the contribution of the Armenian intellectuals, press and the community members to these aid campaigns.





Sekeryan will give his final public lecture on "The Armenian Patriarchate, Politics and the Postwar Settlement in Istanbul: the Story of Patriarch Zaven, on Thursday, April 2.


Sekeryan graduated from the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford, defending his dissertation entitled, "The Armenians in the Ottoman Empire after the First World War (1918-1923)." In the 2018-2019 academic year, Sekeryan was an honorary fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research in the Humanities. Sekeryan was a visiting lecturer in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Yerevan State University (summer of 2018) and a Research Assistant in the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford in 2016.



The lecture is free and open to the public.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# ACYOA Mission Trip to Atlanta Shows Faith in Action

ATLANTA — After a long hiatus, the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA) Mission Trip was revived over the weekend of February 7-9, offering a faith-based service trip to young adults across the Eastern Diocese. Partnering with Habitat for Humanity of North Central Georgia, the young adults took part in a homebuilding project, while also serving the Armenian Church Mission Parish of Atlanta.

Seventeen young adults ranging from college students to working professionals participated in the trip. They traveled from 10 different states (Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Washington DC, and Wisconsin) representing 12 parishes of the Eastern Diocese. The group was organized by Jennifer Morris of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, with her colleague, Kathryn Ashabadian, assisting.

“God called on us to take part in this mission trip,” said Lerna Lacinian (of St. John Church in Southfield, MI). “He brought us together as a family and as Armenians to serve.”

This was the feeling of all the participants. Each morning the group gathered for a meditation led by the trip’s chaplain, Fr. Yeprem Kelegian. “They were always ready to go deep in



Young volunteers put a lot of effort into their work.



Hard at work with construction materials

the meditations,” he noted. “Compassion and love was evident in all of their interactions with the parishioners of Atlanta. I am filled with joy because if these are the type of people who will be stepping up in the Armenian Church, then we can rest easy. It will be okay.”

## Building a Home, Building Faith

Participants spent two days working with Habitat for Humanity in freezing and snowy weather, preparing materials to build a home for a single mother and her son in a rural community north of Atlanta. The group was impressed by the humility of the Habitat staff and volunteers who guided them through their work experience and enabled them to be successful in chal-

lenging tasks that involved saws, nail guns and heavy lumber.

Rebekah Nama, who coordinates volunteers for Habitat shared her impressions of the ACYOA group. “Everyone had only positive things to say about them. They were a joy to be around throughout both build days! If they’re ever in Georgia again, please join us.”

On Friday evening, the group split up to visit two homes of parishioners in the Armenian community. They shared life experiences, prayed together and broke bread together.

Lucine Boloyan (St. James Church, Watertown) reflected on the weekend: “I have one word to describe the weekend: home. From feeling at home with our ACYOA group, to build-

ing a home for a family through Habitat for Humanity, to being welcomed into the home that is the Armenian Church of Atlanta, I experienced the joy and stillness that comes from being at home in Christ.”

On Saturday evening, the group gathered at “Hye Doon” for vespers, dinner, and fellowship. The participants provided and served dinner to the parishioners and enjoyed time together, with songs and laughter filling the room. One of the participants, Taline Masoian — born in Massachusetts, raised in California — now resides in Georgia as a pediatric nurse, and she has found a new home and parish in Atlanta.



Habitat for Humanity Truck used by volunteers

“It is powerful that a group of young Armenians from all around the country, many whom were strangers to each other, could meet in one location and become family within three days,” she said. “Our group was blessed to be invited into the homes of Armenians within the Atlanta area as well their beautiful church, just as if we were their family.”

## Influencing the Lives of Armenian Youth

The weekend culminated Sunday morning, with Atlanta’s recently-appointed full-time pastor, Fr. Norayr Kazazian, celebrating the Divine Liturgy. “The ACYOA has great influence on the lives of the Armenian youth of the United States,” observed Kazazian. “This organization not only brings young adults to serve within Armenian circles, but it also allows them to serve humanity in general, as kind and good Armenian Christians.”

“The group visiting our mission parish motivated the youth of Atlanta to get reorganized as an ACYOA chapter,” he added. “They also gave a sense of hope to the older generation of parishioners, who had the satisfaction of seeing the fruits of their hard work in the next generation of devoted Armenian youth.”

The group felt spiritually moved Sunday morning as they came together to worship. For Melissa Mardoian (Sts. Joachim and Anne Church, Palos Heights, IL), experiencing the



Fr. Yeprem Kelegian with one of the volunteers

liturgy coalesced all the things she had been feeling throughout the mission trip. “I felt the Holy Spirit in the sanctuary, and it moved me to the point of tears,” she said. “The family we formed on this trip is unforgettable. I feel so blessed.”

“The badarak hymns that I’ve heard in our large St. John Church provoked the same feelings in me as in the mission parish,” said Celene Phillip (St. John Church, Southfield, MI). “I realized that the Armenian Church is the people and energy that fills the sanctuary, not the adornments in the sanctuary or the number of parishioners in the pews.”

Participants went home on Sunday with a sense of gratitude for their Armenian identities. Gregory Marifian (Holy Shoghagat Church, Belleville, IL) explained: “The Atlanta mission parish members gave us a lesson in how to open our doors to newcomers. They welcomed us into their homes, their kitchens, their church, and their hearts without hesitation. Because of our common Armenian ancestry that binds us together, it was no surprise that we enjoyed three days of fellowship and communion with our new family.”

The Mission Trip was underwritten by the ACYOA Central Council, using proceeds from the 2019 “Bishop’s 5K Run.” Participants were provided lodging, ground transportation, and two meals a day, as well as participant fees for Habitat for Humanity. In addition, participants were encouraged to help fundraise to cover costs of the ACYOA Mission Trip and to support the Armenian Church of Atlanta.

Check out their website at [www.acyoa.org](http://www.acyoa.org). Contact Jennifer Morris at [jennifer@armenian-diocese.org](mailto:jennifer@armenian-diocese.org).



The volunteers with Fr. Yeprem Kelegian



COMMUNITY NEWS

# Bishop Daniel Findikyan Visits Schools, Elders

NEW YORK – Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel made his annual visits to regional Armenian institutions in early February.

On February 4, he traveled to the Hovnanian School in New Milford, NJ, and the Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Emerson, NJ. Accompanying him were Fr. Diran Bohajian, Fr. Davit Karamyan and Fr. Daniel Karadjian.

On February 6, he visited the Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School in Bayside, NY, accompanied by Bayside pastor Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan and Deacon Eric Vozzy.



A young student and Bishop Daniel Findikyan speak at Holy Martyrs.

As part of each visit, the Primate officiated over the Home Blessing service, traditionally performed at the start of the New Year. Students at both the Hovnanian and Holy Martyrs schools sang, recited poetry, and spent time talking with and learning from the bishop.

At the Emerson Home, residents spoke with Findikyan and received his blessing. He met with staff members of each institution to discuss their recent accomplishments.



Bishop Daniel Findikyan has a nice chat with a young student at the Hovnanian School.



Bishop Daniel Findikyan with students and staff at Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School



Bishop Daniel Findikyan and other members of the clergy chat with young students at Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School.

# Panel on Armenian-American Press at NAASR

PANEL, from page 1 leading to a lively exchange. Each offered their specific perspectives regarding the press in general and the Armenian press, in particular.

Next, the three were asked questions regarding the papers' content, audiences and coverage of Armenia.

The trio was later joined by *Mirror-Spectator* Assistant Editor (and Tekeyan Cultural Association of US and Canada Executive Director) Aram Arkun and Armenian Weekly Editor Pauline Getzoyan.

Opening remarks were made by NAASR Executive Director Sarah Ignatius and Director of Academic Affairs Marc Mamigonian.

A reception followed after the program in the Shahinian Solarium.

(JIRAIR HOVSEPIAN PHOTO)



Marc Mamigonian, left, with Sarah Ignatius

(JIRAIR HOVSEPIAN PHOTO)



From left, Stepan Piligian, Pauline Getzoyan, Leeza Arakelian, Stephen Kurkjian, Alin K. Gregorian and Aram Arkun



## COMMUNITY NEWS

## Congresswoman Clark Welcomes Two New Staffers to Her Washington, D.C. Office

WASHINGTON – On January 14, Vice Chair of the Democratic Caucus Congresswoman Katherine Clark (MA-5) was thrilled to announce two new additions to her Washington, D.C. office: Casey Davison, who joined the team as the Congresswoman's Legislative Aide and Press Assistant, and Cierra Smith, who will serve as her Digital Press Assistant. Both staffers will be supporting the Congresswoman's communications objectives as well as her constituent outreach program.

"I'm incredibly proud to welcome the newest members of Team Clark who will help expand our outreach to Massachusetts families and the entire Democratic Caucus," said Vice Chair Clark. "House Democrats are making a real difference for the American people by raising wages, protecting the right to vote, tackling gun violence, combating climate change, and holding this president accountable.



Casey Davison

This team will help elevate that work and ensure that District 5 residents are getting the information and resources that they deserve."

Casey Davison most recently served as the Legislative Correspondent for Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (CA-19). Prior to his service as a Congressional staffer, he worked on multiple electoral campaigns, including the successful elections of Congressman Jimmy Gomez (CA-34) and California State Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo.

Although Davison hails from Los Angeles, his family's immigrant experience began in Congresswoman Clark's district when his great grandparents moved to Watertown, Massachusetts from Armenia in the early 20th century. Davison graduated with First Class Honors from the University of Warwick in Coventry, England. He currently serves as the Membership and Outreach Chair for the Congressional Armenian Staff Association, an organization aimed at recruiting and facilitating the professional development of Armenian American staff members in Congress.

Cierra Smith joins the Clark team from the House Democratic Caucus where she previously worked as a Digital Fellow. Cierra has previously worked as a producer for CNN, NowThis News, and as a digital manager on behalf of international correspondent Michelle Caruso-Cabrera. Originally from New York, Cierra graduated from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University with a Bachelor's Degree in Broadcast and Digital Journalism in 2017. She is a member of the Congressional Black Association, a staff association dedicated to empowering Black Staffers on Capitol Hill.



Children outside the Shogh Center

## AMAA's Vanadzor Shogh Day Center Moves to New Location

PARAMUS, N.J. – Earlier this year, Armenian Missionary Association of America's (AMAA) Shogh Children's Day Center in Vanadzor, Armenia, moved to its new location. The AMAA bought the building last year, renovated and furnished it as the new "Shogh" Center. The children, who attended the Center since 2013 when the Center first opened, cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony, held on February 4. The staff welcomed the children to the new Center with applause, smiles and exclaiming "Welcome to the Shogh Center."

Following the opening ceremony, the staff and families toured the Center where they were delighted to see the new furnishings in the classrooms.

In the new Center, the bee serves as a symbol of diligence, production and punctuality. The staff welcomed the children to the new Center with images of the bee family. The children were happy to learn that they were also members of that bee family. The many types of flowers in their imaginary fairytale garden had conventional names such as a flower of kindness, responsibility and care. They chose the flower nectar from which they will receive and bring their drop of honey into the Center, filling it with a symbolic honeycomb. Each made his/her own contribution by saying: "A drop of righteousness, kindness, faithfulness ..." and they posted their bees on the wall as a promise to obey the Center's rules, each repeating, "I am the Shogh."

A reception held following the opening ceremony was also a reminder of a hive – organized work of bees, its efficiency and usefulness.

"Each AMAA Shogh center is a bee hive



Children at the Shogh Center in Vanadzor

where children are cared for, nurtured, educated and prepared to be productive citizens in society collectively contributing to structure a honeycomb state," said Zaven Khanjian, AMAA Executive Director/CEO.

AMAA's "Shogh" Day Centers, located in Gyumri, Vanadzor and Yerevan in Armenia and Askeran and Shushi in Artsakh, aim to support children 6-12 years old, who are living in socially underserved families. The main objective of the Centers is to help children overcome edu-

cational difficulties, grow personally, and become part of an educated and healthy society. Highly qualified and experienced professionals such as tutors, social workers and psychologists provide social, educational, psychological, and recreational activities to nearly 290 school-age children. The centers also provide for children's safety during parents' working hours preventing children's involvement in dangerous situations, associated with accidents or violence.

## Applications Accepted for AIWA Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles Affiliate of the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) announces that applications are now being accepted for the Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships.

The Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships were established in 2011 to annually award scholarships to female university students. Thanks to her continued generosity, each year \$5,000 is awarded to five students from California. Applications are now available on line.

## Criteria:

- Female California Resident of Armenian Descent
- Financial verification (First 2 pages of 2019 income tax returns. If not available, provide first 2 pages of 2018 tax returns.)
- Full-time student at accredited

University/College (Sophomore, Junior or Senior Status or Graduate Student, 2020-2021)

- 3.2 Minimum GPA, with certified copy of transcripts

- Two letters of Recommendation, one from an academic instructor/advisor, one from a community representative

- Passport Sized-Photograph

Applicants may submit a scholarship application annually, and former scholarship recipients also may reapply.

Applications will not be considered unless all required information is mailed by April 17, 2020 to: Scholarship Committee, Armenian International Women's Assn., LA, 2311 Roscomare Road, #10, Los Angeles, CA 90077.

Nicole Nishanian, president of AIWA-LA, stated "Our scholarship program was created by Hasmik

Mgrdichian, one of the founders of the Los Angeles Affiliate. The scholarships are a tribute to her memory and continue to recognize her legacy to assist in the education of young Armenian women. She would be proud of the young women her scholarship awards have assisted through the years to accomplish their goals."

The Scholarship Committee, chaired by Lily Balian with committee members Hermine Janoyan, Cindy Norian, Diane Cabraloff, Diana Hekimian, Houry Aposhian and Lysa Gregorian, granddaughter of Hasmik Mgrdichian. They are committed to reaching out to all California universities and colleges to inform women students of the opportunity to submit an application for the scholarship awards. Flyers and notices are being sent to Armenian schools, organizations and churches.

In addition to the Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarship Awards from the Los Angeles Affiliate, other scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 are available through the AIWA International Board in the names of Olga Proudian, Ethel Jaffarian Duffett, Agnes Missirian, Lucy Kasparian Aharonian, Hripsime Parsekian, Dr. Carolann S. Najarian, Rose A. Hovanessian and others. The application may be located and downloaded at: [www.aiwainternational.org](http://www.aiwainternational.org). For further information, email: [scholarships@aiwainternational.org](mailto:scholarships@aiwainternational.org).

Applications for all AIWA scholarships for the 2020-2021 academic year can be downloaded from the AIWA Website: [www.aiwainternational.org](http://www.aiwainternational.org). Young women are urged to apply for both scholarships.

Winners will be announced in June 2020.

# Arts & Living

## Is Coffee Good for You?

By Dawn MacKeen

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) – Is coffee good for me?

Yes.

In moderation, coffee seems to be good for most people – that's 3 to 5 cups, or up to 400 milligrams of caffeine.

"The evidence is pretty consistent that coffee is associated with a lower risk of mortality," said Erikka Loftfield, a research fellow at the National Cancer Institute who has studied the beverage.

For years, coffee was believed to be a possible carcinogen, but the 2015 Dietary Guidelines helped to change perception. For the first time, moderate coffee drinking was included as part of a healthy diet. When researchers controlled for lifestyle factors, like how many heavy coffee drinkers also smoked, the data tipped in coffee's favor.

A large 2017 review on coffee consumption and human health in the *British Medical Journal* also found that most of the time, coffee was associated with a benefit, rather than a harm. In examining more than 200 reviews of previous studies, the authors observed that moderate coffee drinkers had less cardiovascular disease, and premature death from all causes, including heart attacks and stroke, than those skipping the beverage.

In addition, experts say some of the strongest protective effects may be with Type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and liver conditions such as cirrhosis, liver cancer and chronic liver disease. For example, having about five cups of coffee a day, instead of none, is correlated with a 30 percent decreased risk of Type 2 diabetes, according to a meta-analysis of 30 studies.

The potential benefit from coffee might be from the polyphenols, which are plant compounds that have antioxidant properties, according to Dr. Giuseppe Grosso, an assistant professor in human nutrition at University of Catania in Italy and the lead author of an umbrella review in the *Annual Review of Nutrition*.

However, coffee isn't for everyone. There are concerns about overconsumption. This is especially true for expecting mothers because the safety of caffeine during pregnancy is unclear. While the research into coffee's impact on health is ongoing, most of the work in this field is observational.

"We don't know for sure if coffee is the cause of the health benefits," said Jonathan Fallowfield, a professor at the University of Edinburgh, and co-author of the *British Medical Journal* review. "These findings could be due to other factors of behaviors present in coffee drinkers."

### Does the way coffee is prepared matter?

Yes. Do you prefer a dark or light roast? Course grinding or fine? Arabica or robusta?

"All of these different aspects affect the taste, but also affect the compounds within the coffees," said Neal Freedman, a senior investigator with the National Cancer Institute. "But it's not clear at all how these different levels of compounds may be related to health."

Roasting, for example, reduces the amount of chlorogenic acids, but other antioxidant compounds are formed. Espresso has the highest concentration of many compounds because it has less water than drip coffee.

see COFFEE, page 14



Alain Altinoglu

## Alain Altinoglu Comes to Frankfurt

FRANKFURT – The Frankfurt Radio Symphony orchestra (hr-Sinfonieorchester) will welcome Alain Altinoglu as its new music director, beginning with the 2021-2022 season. The French-Armenian musician was born in Paris in 1975 and, since completion of studies at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, has taught there, leading instruction in conducting since 2014. He has been music director of the Brussels Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie since 2016 and in 2017 had a successful debut at the Berlin Philharmonic.

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

A frequent guest at several opera houses worldwide, he has performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London, the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Bavarian State Opera in Munich and the three Parisian opera houses. He has appeared regularly at renowned music festivals in Salzburg, Bayreuth, Aix-en-Provence, and has performed with famous American orchestras, in Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia and Chicago. He is admired for his versatility, as proficient in opera as in symphonic music.

Prior to assuming his new position, he directed the Frankfurt Radio Symphony orchestra at the Alter Oper in Frankfurt on February 12, 13 and 14, and was joined by French cellist Gautier Capuçon. Among the works performed were Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* and the *Cello Concerto Number 1* by Saint-Saens.

In an interview with the Hesse Radio hr2 cultural program on February 13, Altinoglu talked about his early education in music, which began at home. The family had lived in Turkey for generations; his father was a math professor, his mother a musician. Life for Armenians in Turkey was not easy, he said, and they moved from Istanbul to France. The name Altunyan had been Turkified to become Altinoglu. But his Armenian heritage, including the church, played an important role in his childhood and development. He related how his mother had played the organ in church, and how he continued after her death.

At the age of 6 or 7, he had his first encounter with symphonic music, marveling at the scores for all of Beethoven's symphonies which his grandfather had collected. At 5, he had begun to play the violin, but "it was a catastrophe," he said. "Everyone suffered, my family, our neighbors and I." Then he started playing the piano, under the guidance of his mother, a professional, and the instrument became very special for him. At the age of 11 or 12, he said, he realized the power of music – "more music means less stupidity," he quipped. He continued his studies at the conservatory, and became an accomplished pianist.

He was still a youth when he discovered the power of the human voice, through his encounter with the mezzo-soprano Nora Gubisch, who would become his wife. He began to accompany her and the two have performed together and issued recordings. He stressed the fact that each voice is unique, a "direct way to the soul." In his career, he has worked with vocalists both in opera and in the solo (Lied, chanson) repertoire.

Although he never studied conducting formally, he read a great about it, observed

see FRANKFURT, page 15

## Fresno State Hosts Armenian-American Musical Heritage of San Joaquin Valley Program

FRESNO – The Armenian Studies Program will hold a special event, "Armenian-American Musical Heritage of the San Joaquin Valley," on Saturday, February 29, 1-5 p.m., in the University Business Center on the Fresno State campus.

The Armenian Studies Program was recently awarded a California Humanities grant of nearly \$5,000 for "Amplifying Community: Recording the History of the San Joaquin Valley Armenian Music Production," which is dedicated to recovering the history of Armenian-American music production in the San Joaquin Valley during the first half of the 20th century. Drawing upon the reminiscences and expertise of local musicians, "Armenian-American Musical Heritage of the San Joaquin Valley" will provide a forum for the community to contribute their own recollections, contextualizing and bringing to life the little-studied early musicians, recording labels, and venues in California's San Joaquin Valley.

The event will have two segments; the first, from 1-3 p.m., where participants will bring historic photographs, sheet music, promotional materials and ephemera relating to Armenian music production for scanning. The digitized files will be added to the Armenian Studies Program Music Archive which will eventually be available to the public.

From 3:30-5 p.m., oud master Richard Hagopian and Dr. Yektan Türkyilmaz will have a discussion about the Armenian music of the San Joaquin Valley, which will include



Dr. Yektan Türkyilmaz, Richard Hagopian

a performance of traditional Armenian music by Hagopian.

This project was made possible with support from California Humanities, a non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

After a highly competitive process, California Humanities announced that \$397,496 in awards to 37 new projects through the final round of 2019 and Humanities for All Quick Grant and Humanities for All Project Grant programs. The 20 Humanities for All Quick Grants, totaling \$98,239, include a range of locally-initiated public humanities projects, from a teen-focused writing workshop series that will share speculative writing and reading techniques and help catalyze supportive and creative teen communities in the San Diego area, to a month-long presentation of multimedia arts celebrating Black empowerment and possibility in San Luis Obispo for Black History Month.

This Saturday event is free and open to the public.

For more information about the presentation visit [www.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies](http://www.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies).



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Is Coffee Good for You?

COFFEE, from page 13

A study in JAMA Internal Medicine examined the coffee habits of nearly 500,000 people in the U.K. and found that it didn't matter if they drank one cup or chain-drunk eight – regular or decaf – or whether they were fast metabolizers of coffee or slow. They were linked to a lower risk of death from all causes, except with instant coffee, the evidence was weaker.

The way you prepare your cup of joe may influence your cholesterol levels, too. “The one coffee we know not suitable to be drinking is the boiled coffee,” said Marilyn C. Cornelis, an assistant professor in preventive medicine at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and co-author of the JAMA Internal Medicine study.

Examples of this include the plunge-happy French press, Scandinavian coffee, or Greek and Turkish coffee – the kind commonly consumed in the Middle East. (When poured, the unfiltered grounds settle on the tiny cup's bottom like sludge. To peek into the future, elders in the region have a tradition of reading the sediment of an overturned cup, like a crystal ball.)

However, the oil in boiled coffee has cafestol and kahweol, compounds called diterpenes. They are shown to raise LDL, the bad cholesterol, and slightly lower HDL, what's known as the good kind.

“If you filter the coffee, then it's no issue at all,” said Rob van Dam, a professor at Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at National University of Singapore. “For people with cholesterol issues, it's better to switch to other types of coffee.” He's been studying coffee for two decades. (And, yes, he's had a lot of coffee in that time.)

However, other researchers say not to throw out the boiled coffee just yet. The clinical significance of such small increases in cholesterol may be questionable, given that it's not associated with an increase in cardiovascular deaths.

Many consumers have also swapped loose grounds for coffee pods. While there are environmental concerns with single use pods, researchers believe them to hold the same benefits as, say, drip coffee. The latter applies to cold brew, too, but more research is needed.

**Do all kinds of coffee have the same amount of caffeine?**

No. Espresso has the highest concentration of caffeine, packing about 70 milligrams into a one-ounce shot, but is consumed in less quantities. By comparison, a typical 12-ounce serving of drip coffee has 200 milligrams of caffeine, more than instant's 140. And, yes, brewed decaf has caffeine, too – 8 milligrams – which can add up.

When buying coffee, you never really know what you're going to get. At one Florida coffee house, over a six-day period, the same 16-ounce breakfast blend fluctuated from 259 milligrams all the way up to 564 – which goes beyond federal recommendations.

But for some of us, knowing how much caffeine is in our coffee can be especially important. You've probably noticed it before. How a friend can pound quadruple espresso shots at 10 p.m. and sleep afterward, while you can't have any past noon, or you'll be watching “Seinfeld” reruns until dawn. Some of us have a polymorphism, a genetic variant that slows our metabolism for caffeine. It's these individuals that Dr. Grosso recommends limit their refills. “They take a coffee, and then they have the second and the third, and they still have the caffeine of the first,” he said.

You can even find out whether you are a fast or slow metabolizer through a variety of direct-to-consumer testing services, including 23andMe.

**Is coffee addictive?**

Evidence suggests there can be a reliance on the drink, and tolerance builds over time.

Withdrawal symptoms include a headache, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and depressed mood.

Indeed, caffeine is a psychoactive drug, and coffee is its biggest dietary source. About a half-hour after sipping a cup of joe, the caffeine kicks in, and is quickly absorbed. Blood vessels constrict. Blood pressure increases. A moderate amount of caffeine can wake you up, boost your mood, energy, alertness, concentration and even athletic performance. On average, it takes four to six hours to metabolize half the caffeine.

For those knocking back more than 400 milligrams of caffeine a day, there's not enough evidence to assess the safety, according to the Dietary Guidelines. Higher doses can lead to caffeine intoxication, with its shakiness, nervousness, and irregular heartbeat. Caffeine is also linked with delaying the time it takes for you fall asleep, how long you stay there, and the reported quality of that shut eye.

“I think that caffeine is so common and so ingrained in our culture, and daily habits, that we often don't think about it as a potential source of problems,” said Mary M. Sweeney, an assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Cutting down coffee may help with gastroesophageal reflux, too. A new study found that women drinking caffeinated beverages – coffee, tea, or soda – were associated with a small but increased risk of symptoms, like heartburn. The study's authors predicted fewer symptoms when substituting two servings of the drinks with water.

Current available research hasn't determined what amount of caffeine can be safely consumed during pregnancy, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Caffeine does cross the placenta so some doctors may recommend pregnant women stay below 200 milligrams of coffee daily.

Extremely high doses of caffeine can be fatal. But researchers say that's more likely to occur accidentally with caffeine powder or pills. “You don't see a lot of people going into the emergency room because they accidentally drank too much coffee,” said Dr. van Dam.

**What is a coffee bean?**

Inside the red fruit of coffee lie two coffee beans. Green in color, the duo spoon together, the rich brown hue to appear only after roasting. In fact, they aren't beans at all. “It's like a cherry, you pick off the tree,” said Patrick Brown, a professor of plant sciences at University of California, Davis. Unlike the cherry, though, the seed is the prize, and the flesh is discarded.

In addition to caffeine, coffee is a dark brew of a thousand chemical compounds that could have potential therapeutic effects on the body. One key component, chlorogenic acid, is a polyphenol found in many fruits and vegetables. Coffee is also a good dietary source of vitamin B3, magnesium and potassium.

“People often see coffee just as a vehicle for caffeine, but, of course, it's a very complex plant beverage,” said Dr. van Dam.

With coffee's estimated 124 species, most of flavors remain untapped; and perhaps will be forever, with an estimated 60 percent under threat of extinction, largely from climate change, disease, pests and deforestation. What fills our mugs at cafes, the office, and on road trips are from two species: arabica and canephora,



## Ayanian Named Miss Boston

BOSTON – On February 9, Kristina Ayanian was named Miss Boston 2020 at the Omni Parker House Hotel.

Ayanian, 22, is a graduate of St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School, Burlington High School and Bentley College. She is a correspondent for the Armenian Weekly newspaper.

She is now eligible to compete in the Miss Massachusetts competition later this year.

Above, Miss Boston 2020 Kristina Ayanian, fourth from left, with Miss Cambridge 2020 Elizabeth Pierre, 1st runner up Aleksandra Bettencourt, 2nd Runner up Sarah Bui, 3rd Runner up Jordan St. Onge, 4th Runner up Maria Tramontozzi and friends.

ra, known as robusta. Arabica fills specialty cafes, and costs more than robusta, which fuels instant coffees and some espressos.

For all of the pomp swirling around arabica, the fact remains it is an extremely homogeneous little seed. Almost all of the world's arabica coffee progeny traces itself back a few plants from Ethiopia, coffee's birthplace, or Yemen.

**Does adding milk or sugar cancel out benefits?**

Doctors don't know. One 2015 study found that those adding sugar, cream or milk had the same associated benefit as those who preferred it black. But the coffee industry has exploded since the '90s when the older adults in the study filled out their dietary history. “It was only about a tablespoon of cream or milk, and a teaspoon of sugar,” said the study's lead author, Dr. Loftfield, with the National Cancer Institute. “This is very different, potentially, than some of these coffee beverages you see on the market today.”

Sweet coffee and tea are the fourth largest source of sugar in the diets of adults, according to the October survey from the U.S.D.A. That includes dessert-like beverages, like Dunkin' Donuts' 860-calorie creamy frozen coconut caramel coffee drink, with 17 grams of saturated fat, and 129 grams of total sugars. Experts say some of these drinks bear little relation to the 2-calorie cup of black coffee of the past, worrying health officials.

“When you talk about a drink that has that load of unhealthy fats and that much sugar, can't possibly be a healthy beverage on balance,” Dr. Jim Krieger, a clinical professor of medicine and health services at the University of Washington. “That amount of sugar alone is

astronomical compared to the current recommendations of U.S. Dietary Guidelines of 50 grams of sugar a day.”

The concern is heightened, experts say, especially because an estimated 43 percent of teens are now drinking coffee – nearly doubling since 2003 – according to the research firm Kantar, driven partly by sweet drinks.

“People should worry a lot about what they put in the coffee and what the food and beverage industry puts in it,” said Laura Schmidt, a professor at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine. “And sweetened coffee is one of the things that the beverage industry is pushing on the public now that consumers have turned away from soda for health reasons.”

**Should I start pounding down more coffee?**

Depends on your goals in life.

If you are enjoying the drink in moderation, doctors say continue onward, and savor those sips. And for those patients with a sensitivity to the beverage, Dr. Sophie Balzora, a gastroenterologist, weighs the benefits and risks very carefully. The clinical associate professor of medicine at N.Y.U. School of Medicine understands its cultural significance, and knows to tread lightly. As she put it: “Robbing people of their coffee seems cruel.”

(This piece was originally published in the *New York Times* on February 13. Dawn MacKeen is an award-winning investigative journalist who spent nearly a decade on her grandfather's story, *The Hundred-Year Walk: An Armenian Odyssey*. Previously she was a staff writer at *Salon*, *Newsday*, and *Smart Money*. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Elle*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and elsewhere.)

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## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Karen Samunjan: 'The Mosaic of Armenia's Soul Is Larger than Armenia'

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/CLOSTER, N.J. — Karen Samundjian (Garry Samunjan) was born in 1967 in Tbilisi and living in the US. In 1985 he entered the Faculty of Architecture of the Georgian Polytechnic Institute. In 1990 he emigrated to the United States. He is the author of *The Gardener* and *The Case of Taste*; his poetry has been published in litprichal.ru and other Russian literature web sites.



Karen Samunjan

Dear Karen, at first, I learned about you as a poet, but it turned out you are involved also in design, architecture, painting and photography. What profession is more characteristic for you?

Architecture projecting and design is more characteristic for me. Although partially, fine art is my profession as well. Most of my paintings are

for sale. Photography is solely a passion and necessity for when I travel. My cell phone is my only camera... that seems a little far from a profession, doesn't it?

Yes, it is... You were born in Tbilisi, a city with rich Armenian past. Tell us please about your family and what Tbilisi gave to you.

I was raised in a diverse Armenian-Russian family. Both my parents (Rafael Samunjan and Lilia Samunjan, nee Gavrin) were born in Tbilisi. My father studied at the Georgian Academy of arts. My grandfather, Hakop Samunjan, was born in Akhalkalaki. This makes me a third-generation Georgian.

I have a vast understanding of the Georgian culture and accept the nation as my own. Tbilisi gave me a lot but the most important thing would be gratitude. To appreciate all the little things, enjoying a piece of bread or a glass of wine, spending quality time with friends and sharing good will with one another. Life's simple pleasures.

You write in Russian, which is your native language. It has been 30 years that you live in the US. You also write in English. Do you occupy a certain place in contemporary Russian and American poetry?

Fluently, I speak in three languages - Russian,

Georgian and English. Unfortunately, I understand very little Armenian. Russian is my native tongue and most of my followers speak the Russian language. I have written over 1,000 poems which I find to be enough seeds planted. I guess now all we need is time to harvest. Right now, it is difficult to say which exact place my poetry will occupy other than in the hearts of my readers. The sky is the limit.

You are interested in religious philosophy, esoteric teachings and the phenomenon of time. In another context I would like to talk to you especially about the last one, but here I will ask you only that now even children complain about the fast passage of time — how you can explain this?

My favorite conversation piece! I believe time is a conflict between our eternal soul and temporary ego. Which perspective does one choose? There is no tool one can use to measure time. The depth of an existing second is far too vast to be restrained. The second before one dies... the second after one is born... cannot be compared.

Russian-speaking Armenians in the US usually do not have contacts with local Armenian communities. What about you?

Around here in North Jersey we have a few Armenian churches. It is a large community that

I became part of when I was younger. Like in Tbilisi, my relationships here are very friendly and casual.

What is your view of Armenian culture?

The prodigious Armenian culture has a great history. The nation's antiquity heavily influenced the Armenian art community around the world. The mosaic of Armenia's soul is larger than Armenia. As an artist, as a poet and as an individual... I am one piece out of thousands in this puzzle.

You have put together the photographic albums "My Italy" and "My Argentina." What about "My Armenia?"

Unfortunately, I did not visit Armenia properly. Last year, my trip was far too short for me to do what I wanted. I would like to explore Armenia how I see fit next time. Usually after my journeys, I am inspired. I start writing with the images in mind. My photo album being attached to my poems has the purpose to attract fellow explorers. Armenia is special. I need to plan the right time to visit her the right way.

You have several poems dedicated to Armenia. Please share one of them with us.

With pleasure. This piece is translated by our compatriot Estella Dadasieva-Mina, a native of Baku and currently living in Cyprus.

Ararat...

There - in circles of Ararat Highlands  
The Sunrise sparkles, splashes like the wave....

And Gopher's Spirit in the Noah's garments,  
And olive's branch with vernal foliage....  
Survivors sing a hymn to blissful land,  
Birds happy circles, snarls the animals;  
Into the sweated land of former waters  
Are entering the human being's souls...  
And by the valley of the Holy bible,  
Amidst the flows of waterfalls and winds,  
For happiness' blossoming sprouts,  
Seeks to the Life the Hope of Universe...  
And reveling with Glory of Sunrise,  
Getting drunk from Divinely Bliss...  
Sings Love;

## Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian Datian

### Farro and Pine Nut Salad

Farro is an ancient wheat grain that originated in Mesopotamia. Farro is loved for its nutty flavor and unique, chewy texture. It's a great alternative to other popular grains, such as rice, quinoa, buckwheat and barley, among others. Popular in Italy, this healthy grain is gaining favor in the US for its versatility and health benefits.

This versatile recipe is courtesy of Robyn Kalajian at thearmeniankitchen.com, the popular Armenian cooking and cuisine website. While doing an inventory in her pantry recently, Robyn noticed a partial bag of farro and was inspired. "Farro is similar to barley," Robyn says, "but it is harder to find in stores, and usually costlier."

"While trying to figure out what to make with the remaining farro," Robyn adds, "it occurred to me that a hearty salad with pine nuts I had in the freezer would do nicely. Rummaging through the vegetable drawer of the refrigerator, I found a little of this and a little of that, and finally put together a farro and pine nut salad worthy of company fare."

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup uncooked farro\*
- 2 medium tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup seedless cucumber, peeled, coarsely chopped
- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- 1/4 cup sweet onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup canned chickpeas, rinsed, drained
- 1/2 cup flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- 3-4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon za'taar, optional
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 3 tablespoons toasted pine nuts

#### PREPARATION:

In a large pot, stir in 1 cup farro, 2 1/2 cups water, and 1 teaspoon salt, and bring to a full boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 15 to 25 minutes or until tender. Drain off any excess liquid. Set farro aside to cool.

Place the chopped tomatoes, cucumber, garlic, onion, chickpeas, parsley, and cooled farro in a large bowl. Gently toss together.

In a small bowl, whisk together the oil, lemon juice, za'taar (if using), and salt and pepper. Pour dressing over the salad ingredients and toss to coat.

Just before serving, toast pine nuts in a dry non-stick skillet until slightly browned (about 3 to 4 minutes); stir occasionally and allow to cool. Sprinkle toasted pine nuts on the top of the salad at the last minute. (This recipe may be made one day in advance up to this point. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Bring to room temperature before serving. If serving immediately, allow salad to sit at room temperature 10-15 minutes before serving.)

\*Farro is an excellent source of protein, fiber and nutrients like magnesium, zinc and some B vitamins. Farro can be found in most grocery stores, Italian markets or gourmet stores. For this recipe, go to: <https://www.thearmeniankitchen.com/2012/05/farro-and-pine-nut-salad.html>.



### Alain Altinoglu Comes to Frankfurt

FRANKFURT, from page 13

conductors at work and talked to them about the art. When he was engaged with an orchestra, one day the conductor suddenly fell ill. This was the chance to try his hand at conducting, and, since he knew the score inside out, he was able to perform. Now he is a world class conductor as well as a teacher. He emphasized the importance of winning over youth to music, as the concert public is aging. He encourages school children to attend rehearsals, also with their parents, and to talk to musicians, so they can become acquainted with compositions and performance.

Altinoglu visited Armenia in 2015 and conducted the philharmonic orchestra in Yerevan, where he was impressed by the musical culture and the commitment of the musicians, who often worked under difficult conditions. Armenian is one of his several languages. He speaks it with his young son, who understands perfectly, even though he answers in French. Now, with his new position, Altinoglu will have to learn German, "perhaps with a French accent, he quipped.

Learning languages is very important, he noted. When asked whether he thought each language culture had a particular "sound in its orchestras, he said he was absolutely convinced this is the case, that there is a "French sound and a "German sound. In French, he finds that the strings are very transparent, and the music is more melodic, horizontal; whereas in German music the influence of Bach is most profound. He criticized the tendency in a globalized world to have all orchestras sound alike, insisting that each country, each culture, has its own characteristic sound.

Altinoglu is looking forward to his new engagement in Germany, the land of Goethe and Schiller. And, of course, Beethoven, whose 250th birthday is being celebrated throughout this year, with thousands of concerts, lectures, exhibitions, and new publications.



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# New Egoyan Movie again Mines Troubled Relationships

EGOYAN, from page 1

The psychological family thriller starring David Thewlis, Laysla De Oliveira and Luke Wilson, kicked off the Canada Now series, a four-day traveling film festival geared towards highlighting the foremost cinema from the country. The film, which marked its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival last September, revolves around a father-daughter relationship over a 15-year period that explores trauma, memory and forgiveness.

When Veronica (Laysla De Oliveira) is asked by Father Greg (Luke Wilson) about her father, Jim (David Thewlis) so he can write a proper eulogy for his funeral, the film flashes back to their troubled relationship that was one of secrecy and deception. A restaurant health food inspector by profession, Jim tries to make amends with his daughter, a high school music teacher, who is in prison for inappropriate behavior with her students.

According to Egoyan, the origin of the story traced back to his son's experience at an esteemed French restaurant in Toronto a decade ago, where the chef was tormented by a food inspector. That anecdote, along with a New York Times article about the downward spiral of a chef after the closing of a well-known brasserie due to negative reports, formed the core of the film's plot.

Egoyan spoke about the occupations that characters hold in his films, from a customs agent ("Ararat") to a bus driver ("The Sweet Hereafter") to an insurance adjuster ("The Adjuster") and how their trades affect their personas.

"These characters choose these jobs because they have access to issues they otherwise don't in real life," said Egoyan. "Jim hasn't been able to resolve his problems in his personal life but in his job as a restaurant health inspector there is purpose and consequence."

Known for depicting interesting portraits of characters, Egoyan, who was born in Cairo, Egypt and raised in Victoria, British Columbia, has always been driven by his "fascination and mystery of humans" while purposefully creating "vagueness and ambiguity" in his films.

By connecting the past and the present, Egoyan explores how childhood traumas can ultimately mold contemporary circumstances.



Venice: At the Venice Film Festival (l-r) Laysla De Oliveira, Rossif Sutherland, Arsinée Khanjian and Atom Egoyan.

While Jim is convinced his daughter is innocent and works to get her a reduced sentence, Veronica refuses to cooperate and is steadfast in her desire to remain in prison. In the present day, Father Greg, who at first doesn't seem to know Jim since he wasn't a churchgoer, reveals to Veronica that he did indeed have a previous encounter with him after she confides in him about her family's secrets.

"These three characters all break code in order to find resolutions," said Egoyan about the film which was an official selection in Venice, Toronto, Vancouver, London and Busan. "The characters, who find themselves trapped and self-medicated, think they can create therapeutic solutions for themselves."

The film is structured in a non-linear fashion with two framing devices, that of the priest and the daughter and the other of the father and the daughter, while still making it accessible for the viewer. Egoyan noted that his films are inspired by "extraordinary transference," such as how Father Greg makes a public statement on Jim's life through the



Tom McSorley, curator of the Canada Now festival, filmmaker Atom Egoyan and actress Arsinée Khanjian.

eulogy, basing it only on what his daughter shares with him.

The idea for the storyline of Father Greg was rooted in Khanjian's experience when her father passed away and their local parish priest asked her about him for the eulogy.

"It was unexpected because my father had a history with that church and I thought the priest would know more about my father socially," said Khanjian, an Armenian-Canadian actress and producer who is a regular figure in Egoyan's films. "I was confused at first about where to start, but Atom was more excited about the question than me."

From there they veered deeper into the plot and included a pivotal thread of Jim inspecting an Armenian restaurant, owned by Khanjian's character, who evades a citation from the inspector through her quick thinking. The restaurant is also the setting for Jim's catharsis during a private Armenian family gathering, where he refers to the red wine as "His Blood," which according to Egoyan meant to convey that "religion means something to this character."

Regarding their professional and personal partnership, Egoyan said his wife of 35 years is always the first to read his scripts, which are a "valuable and an important part of how the films are shaped."

"I've learned how to read his scripts and ask the real questions but I don't let it go if I'm not convinced of the answers," said Khanjian.

Egoyan gives credit to the performers who deliver his lines and are able to maintain the audience's attention by "breathing life into it."

"As a writer you're grateful the actors can pull it off because it's a tall order. Otherwise all of your writing insecurities and vulnerability come out," said Egoyan. "It's up to the performer and that's the magic of cinema."

The film was further enhanced by the musical score, composed by Mychael Danna, who Egoyan referred to as a "storyteller with brilliant visual composition." Danna, who won the Academy Award for Best Original Score for "Life of Pi," composed the scores motifs to complement the character of Veronica, her musical profession and how she comes to

terms with incarcerating herself.

One of Egoyan's main influences in cinema has been Sergei Paradjanov, the imaginative Soviet-Armenian filmmaker known for his bold use of colors and stylistic departure from cinematic realism.

"In my past films, Paradjanov has been very influential, especially with his use of tableaux," said Egoyan. "When an artist leaves an impression on you, it's always there."

Regarding his writing process, Egoyan acknowledged that he has an "antenna" up, noticing many things he wouldn't usually be sensitive to when writing a script. He also touched upon how to communicate a story and present the exposition of plot through characters such as the priest, Father Greg, who asks about Jim's life in a way that can access a lot of history. Overall, Egoyan ties together various components to create his own visual and narrative style.

"I find an element of absurdity in my films and elements of humor," said Egoyan. "Films are a dream state and they don't have to be held by a conventional linearity in terms of how a story can be told."

Spearheaded by Telefilm Canada and the Consulate General of Canada in New York City, with the support of Air Canada, Canada Now features both veteran and emerging filmmakers who tackle a range of themes from the immigrant experience to race relations to personal dramas to documentaries, all the while highlighting the independent, diverse and creative spirit that is the hallmark of Canadian cinema.

In his opening remarks, Tom McSorley, curator of Canada Now, welcomed everyone and noted that "a lot of Canadian love has come from the North for this amazing celebration of Canadian filmmaking."

Khawar Nasim, deputy consul general, said his office was honored to be involved in the Canada Now festival as it's an "appealing way for us to show our stories through award-winning filmmakers like Atom Egoyan."

René Bourdages, senior director Cultural Portfolio Management at Telefilm Canada recognized the fourth edition of Canada Now, where "Canada is vibrantly showcased from sea to sea to sea."

"Telefilm is a longtime supporter of Atom's work and 'Guest of Honour' is a twisted and provocative tale that keeps you guessing," said Bourdages. "The brilliant performances from the stellar cast reminds us why Atom is the premier foremost filmmaker in Canada today."

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## ARTS &amp; LIVING

## CALENDAR

## CALIFORNIA

**APRIL 4** — Boston Court Pasadena presents a concert reading of Joyce Van Dyke's play **Daybreak**, inspired by the true stories of her Armenian ancestors, and featuring the original Off-Broadway cast. Saturday, April 4, at 4:00 p.m. Tickets \$10 (free to subscribers), with Armenian refreshments included in the price of the ticket. Boston Court Pasadena, 70 N. Mentor Ave., Pasadena. For tickets, visit <https://bostoncourtpasadena.org/events/daybreak/>, or call the box office at 626-683-6801, 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m, Tues. - Fri.

## MASSACHUSETTS

**FEBRUARY 21-23** — **Shadow Puppet Workshop at the Armenian Museum of America**, Adele & Haig Der Manuelian Galleries, 3rd Floor, 65 Main St., Watertown. Friday, 3-5 p.m., Saturday, 1-3 p.m., Sunday, 1-2 p.m., Sunday, 2 p.m. Performance & Reception: complimentary admission to family, friends. During students' February Vacation, kids will enjoy a fun 3-day workshop making and playing with shadow puppets. Their puppet show will be based on an endearing traditional Armenian folk tale, "The Tailless Fox," which we will read together. The workshop will close with a student performance and reception. Make sure to save the date! Members \$32, Non-members \$40. The Museum's elevator is in the process of being upgraded and is currently out of service. For more information visit: <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/events/shadow-puppet-workshop>

**FEBRUARY 22** — **Poon Parentantz Dinner Dance - Family Kef Night, Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church**, 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. Featuring the Fabulous Ani Ensemble: Art Chingris - Dumbeg, Ara Jeknavorian - Clarinet, Dave Anisbigian - Vocals/Guitar, and Brian Anisbigian - Oud. Surprise DJ for modern Armenian and non-Armenian music. Complimentary Armenian Dance Class - 5:00 pm. Dinner and Dancing at 6:00 pm. Paid in advance tickets must be received by February 15: Adults \$25, Students \$10, and 5 & under Free. At the door: Adults \$35 and Students \$15. For reservations, please contact Maria Kazanjian (617) 240-3686 or [Ria.tk@verizon.net](mailto:Ria.tk@verizon.net). Tables of 8 can be reserved in advance with full payment. Checks made payable to: Sts Vartanantz Armenian Church.

**FEBRUARY 27: "The Ruins of Ani: From Sacred Landscape to Political Soil": Presented by Peter Balakian and Aram Arkun**, translators of *The Ruins of Ani* by Krikor Balakian. Sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR)/Calouste Gulbenkian Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues at the Batmasian Auditorium at NAASR, 395 Concord Avenue, Belmont, 7:30 p.m. Free admission. For more information, email [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com) or [marc@naasr.org](mailto:marc@naasr.org).

**FEBRUARY 29** — **30th Commemoration of the Baku Pogrom. Dinner and Program featuring** a biographical Presentation on Zabel Yesayan, Armenian novelist, translator, and professor of literature by Judith Saryan. St. Gregory Armenian Church, 158 Main St., No. Andover. 6 p.m. Adults - \$20. Students - \$10. For reservations, please contact Armen at 978-256-2538, [armenjeknavorian@gmail.com](mailto:armenjeknavorian@gmail.com); or Ara, 978-251-4845, [ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com](mailto:ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com). Merrimack Valley Armenian National Committee of the Merrimack Valley.

**MARCH 2** — **St. James Men's Club Dinner Meeting - social hour and mezza at 6:15 p.m.** and dinner at 7 p.m., St. James Armenian Church Charles Mosesian Cultural and Youth Center - Keljik Hall, 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown. Guest speaker will be Stewart R. Goff, RN, MS, who is the new C.E.O of the Armenian Women's Welfare Association and the Armenian Nursing & Rehabilitation Center (ANRC) in Jamaica Plain. He assumed his new role on May 8, 2019. The presentation is titled "The ANRC, Is it Armenian Enough?" Mezza and a Losh Kebab & Kheyra Dinner \$17/person. Ladies invited. For additional information call the St. James Church office at 617-923-8860 or call Hapet Berberian at 781-367-6598.

**MARCH 28** — **Sayat Nova Dance Company invites you to an evening of fun and laughter.** Back by popular demand, world-renowned comedian and pianist Kev Orkian returns to Boston during his 2020 World Tour! Get ready for a fun-filled night of laughs as KEV entertains the audience with his brand new show "SUPARMENIAN"! To be held at



**On February 27, Peter Balakian and Aram Arkun will present "The Ruins of Ani: From Sacred Landscape to Political Soil," based on the book of the same name by Krikor Balakian which the two have translated. The program will take place at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, 395 Concord Ave., Belmont, MA at 7.30 p.m. Admission free.**

Newton North High School Auditorium, 457 Walnut Street, Newton, at 7:30 pm. Reserve your tickets today! Tickets: \$60 (\$60 tickets include a pre-show meet & greet reception with KEV from 6-7pm). \$45 (General Admission). Tickets may be reserved: Online at [itsmyseat.com/KeVInBoston](https://itsmyseat.com/KeVInBoston) (online fees apply) Or by calling: Alina (617) 852-1816 or Shant (781) 879-8102. Flyer and seating chart available at <http://www.sayatnova.com/kevorkian.htm> All tickets are final sale.

**MARCH 28** — **Songs of the Other with Daniela Totic, voice;** Sylvie Zakarian, marimba; Nikola Radan, flute. Works by Komitas, A. Hovhaness, N. Grover, N. Radan, V. Srvandztiants. Armenian Cultural Foundation, Arlington. Saturday, 7 p.m. Open to the public. Admission Free.

**MARCH 29** — **Sunday, Music of Violinist Levon Chilingirian and Pianist Lilit Karapetian-Shougarian.** 2 p.m. The Sanctuary at Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston. 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge. Everyone is welcome to attend; this concert is a gift to the community. The duo will offer a rich and colorful program of works. Levon Chilingirian is Professor of Violin and Chamber Music Artist in Residence at the Royal Academy of Music (London) as well as Professor of Violin and Chamber Music at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (London). Lilit Karapetian-Shougarian has performed extensively in her native Armenia and the former Soviet Union, as well as internationally. Her solo appearances and collaborations with various ensembles have won acclaim from renowned authorities in the musical world. Contact Holy Trinity Church Office, 617.354.0632 or [office@htaac.org](mailto:office@htaac.org) for more information.

**APRIL 19** — **Annual Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture at the Armenian Heritage Park** on The Greenway, Boston. Sunday beginning at 7:00 am. Coffee, hosted by Starbucks & Conversation from 8:30am -9:30am. The annual reconfiguration is supported by the Park's Charles and Doreen Bilezikian Endowed Fund. A crane lifts and pulls apart the two halves of the split rhomboid dodecahedron, made of stainless steel and aluminum, to create a new sculptural shape. The annual reconfiguration is under the direction of A&A Industries, Inc., Peabody, who fabricated the Abstract Sculpture, the generous gift-in-kind of owners Aurelian and Anahid Mardiros and their family. Rain date: April 26 RSVP appreciated at [hello@armenianheritagepark.org](mailto:hello@armenianheritagepark.org)

**MAY 2** — **Celebrate Public Art two-part program during ARTWEEK BOSTON. Armenian Heritage Park** on The Greenway, Boston. Saturday at 1:00pm. WORLD LABYRINTH DAY: WALK AS ONE, join people in cities and towns in 35 countries world-wide walking in peace and harmony including Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Romania, Russia, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay and USA followed by RECEPTION TO VIEW THE 2020 RECONFIGURATION

OF THE ABSTRACT SCULPTURE, hosted by Eastern Lamejun Bakers and MEM Tea Imports. RSVP appreciated [hello@armenianheritagepark.org](mailto:hello@armenianheritagepark.org)

**May 9** — **Spring Dinner/Dance featuring Barteve Garyan of Istanbul**, Saturday 7:30 p.m., St. James Armenian Church, Watertown. Sponsored by the Society of Istanbul Armenians of Boston, Inc. to aid all Armenian schools in Istanbul. For info or donations, call Krikor Shaboian at 617 489-0346 or email [prsoiab@gmail.com](mailto:prsoiab@gmail.com)

**MAY 28** — **Friends of Armenian Culture Society (FACS) presents the 69th annual Armenian Night at the Pops**, featuring the young and talented violinist Diana Adamyan as soloist with the Boston Pops Orchestra. Symphony Hall, Boston. 8 p.m. For tickets and information, please visit [FACSBoston.org](https://FACSBoston.org)

**JUNE 17** — **Tea & Tranquility. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston.** Wednesday from 4:30 pm - 6 p.m. Late afternoon to meet and greet, walk the labyrinth, enjoy refreshing ice teas, hosted by MEM Tea Imports ,and desserts. RSVP appreciated [hello@armenianheritagepark.org](mailto:hello@armenianheritagepark.org)

**JUNE 25** — **Under A Strawberry Moon. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston.** Thursday at 8:30pm. Evening to meet & greet, tie a ribbon on the Wishing Tree. Enjoy a moonlit labyrinth walk, luscious chocolate dipped strawberries, hosted by vicki lee's and refreshing ice teas, hosted by MEM Tea Imports RSVP appreciated [hello@armenianheritagepark.org](mailto:hello@armenianheritagepark.org)

## NEW JERSEY

**SEPTEMBER 17-19, 2021** — **Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA) 75th Alumni Anniversary Weekend** in Northern NJ. More details to follow. Questions? Email: [ACYOA75@gmail.com](mailto:ACYOA75@gmail.com)

## NEW YORK

**MARCH 1** — **The Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York presents "Charles,"** a bio-musical on the life and art of the legendary Charles Aznavour, by playwright Taleen Babayan. Featuring Maurice Soudjian, Bernard C. Bayer and Mariette Soudjian. Music: Harout Soghomonian. Sunday, 5.30 p.m. at 2537 Broadway, New York, NY. Tickets \$45. [www.symphonyspace.org /events](http://www.symphonyspace.org/events). Text or call Sheela at 201-218-6726. Program in English.

**APRIL 23** — **Thursday 7 p.m. Armenian Genocide Commemoration featuring the acclaimed documentary "The Stateless Diplomat: Diana Aparcar's Heroic Life."** Presented by producer Mimi Malayan. Sponsored by CHHANGE at Brookdale Community College, Student Life Center, Navesink Rooms (Parking Lot 7), 765 Newman Springs Road, Lincroft, NJ. Free Admission. 732-224-1889 or [contact@chchange.org](mailto:contact@chchange.org)

## PENNSYLVANIA

**MARCH 25** — **The Armenian Student Organization of Villanova University Hosts Book Presentation** by Adrienne G. Alexanian of her father's memoir *Forced into Genocide*, Wednesday, 7-9 p.m., Villanova University, 800 E Lancaster Ave Villanova, Falvey Library - Building # 18 - Room 205 ( parking on West Campus in the S4 / S5 lots) . Contact information: Kallie Stahl (610) 519-4458 / [kallie.stahl@villanova.edu](mailto:kallie.stahl@villanova.edu). Book sale/signing during reception ( cash only). All proceeds donated to the Armenian Student Organization

## RHODE ISLAND

**MARCH 14** — **The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church Presents** its "Music Appreciation Series" Featuring Talented Performers Knarik Nerkararian, Soprano, Dalita Getzoyan, Flute, Nune Hakobyan, Piano, Gregory Ayriyan, Violin. Andrei Sobchenko, Saxophone. Book Presentation "Haykakan taraz - Armenian Costumes" By Artist Gourgen Manoukian. Saturday, at 7 p.m. Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence. Donation \$15 Refreshments.

**MARCH 22** — **The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church Presents "Meet The Doctors 2020 - Questions & Answers."** We invite everyone to avail themselves of this opportunity and "Meet with our Armenian Doctors" Dr. Beverly Serabian, PhD, clinical psychologist Topic: Healthy Lifestyle Practices and Psychological Well Being Sunday, at 12:30 p.m. Hanoian Hall, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence.



## COMMENTARY

## COMMENTARY

# Armenia Emerges from Political Isolation

By Edmond Y. Azadian

Ever since gaining its independence, Armenia has been struggling to form a modern democratic society, while trying to improve the economic plight of its citizens. The concentration on domestic issues had left Armenia with a two-dimensional foreign policy, mostly dealing with a hostile neighbor, Azerbaijan.

A major asset of Armenia's foreign policy was its close relationship with Russia, leading Yerevan to complacency.

This state of affairs turned to be handy for Azerbaijan, which, with its older brother, Turkey, began to isolate Armenia in the region, enlisting in the process the help of Georgia.

Former Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili's administration represented the height of Georgia's pro-Azeri and pro-Turkey policy. The Turkish-Azeri blockade of Armenia has been exacerbated by Georgia's collusion to this day.

Armenia only has two narrow borders through which to access the outside world: Georgia and Iran.

Despite friendly rhetoric between Georgia and Armenia, their economic cooperation has failed to reach its full potential.

Turkey and Azerbaijan took full advantage of Armenia's predicament to tighten the noose of isolation around its neck.

Following the Velvet Revolution, Armenia has exerted determined efforts to emerge from its political isolation. The revolution initially startled Moscow into believing that Yerevan was spinning out of its zone of control, but gradually, a balance has been struck.

Armenia's democratic reforms have been hailed in European capitals. Armenia has taken advantage of that good will and has been actively cultivating its relations with Europe, with France and Germany being at the forefront, with the Council of Europe in the background.

One sticking point at this time is the new administration's referendum on an amendment to get rid of the Constitutional Court set up during the previous regime. The referendum is set to take place in April and is expected to win with an overwhelming majority.

However, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, the advisory body tasked with tackling constitutional law questions, has expressed its reservations about the drive, believing that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, after gaining control of the executive and legislative branches of the government, is trying to bring the judiciary under his sway as well.

Beside the above problem, relations with Europe have been developing robustly. To date, Pashinyan has met with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany three times. Her visit to Yerevan was very warm and it heated up diplomatic relations. Germany is interested in developing the corridor between the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea, which can bring that region closer to Europe.

During his visit to Germany, Pashinyan met with Secretary General of the Council of Europe (CoE) Marija Pejcinovic Buric, who said to him, "We have already started intensive cooperation between Armenia and the Council of Europe after the visit of the CoE high-level working group last May. I know that you asked the CoE to engage in this process. And the CoE started closely following what is taking place."

One factor which has contributed to Armenia's rapprochement with Europe has been the cooling off of relations between Turkey and Europe, and more generally with the entire West.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, however, announced recently that Turkey will explore new avenues to enhance its chances of joining the European Union.

By the same token, Syria's standoff with Turkey moved Damascus to recognize the Armenian Genocide. It is worth mentioning that President Bashar al-Assad was one of the few heads of state (alongside President Ahmadinejad of Iran) in the past who avoided visiting the Armenian Genocide Martyr's Memorial

in Armenia for fear of alienating Ankara.

During his recent visit to Germany, Pashinyan announced that he had invited President Hassan Rouhani of Iran to visit Armenia. This seems to be a counterbalance to the recent productive visit of King Abdullah II of Jordan, who is an ally of NATO and the US.

King Abdullah's visit was significant for renewing old ties with that friendly Arab country that has played a historic role in sheltering Armenians post-Genocide and now seeks a new conduit towards the West.

Armenia has also been credited with enticing Iran to cooperate with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union.

With these multi-directional relations, Armenia is gradually shedding the label of simply being Russia's outpost in the region, without alienating Moscow to the point of irritation.

Before moving to another dimension of Armenia's foreign policy, it is worth mentioning that Armenia's prime minister met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the Munich World Peace and Security Conference last week.

Hopefully, something positive was achieved during their one-on-one meeting. But their public debate was an embarrassment. Pashinyan was ill-prepared and what made matters worse was his use of the English language of which he has poor command. Anyone who tries to convince the prime minister that he had a stellar performance is no friend to him nor Armenia.

The only saving grace was that Aliyev performed no better.

In October, Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan's interview on the BBC's "HardTalk" was also heavily criticized.

These two performances pale in comparison to former foreign ministers Vartan Oskanian's and Eduard Nalbandyan's public appearances. Their linguistic proficiency matched the excellence of their diplomatic skills. This new administration sorely needs cadres who can represent Armenia in a better light on the world stage.

In line with Armenia's developing foreign relations is the forthcoming summit with Greece and Cyprus. Again, this is a factor of Turkey's bullying. The latter occupies a large chunk of Cyprus and has been challenging Greece over the Aegean Sea. But the recent discovery of oil and gas deposits in the eastern Mediterranean has galvanized the situation even more. Based

on its occupation of Cyprus, Ankara is trying to make good on non-existent mining rights of the so-called Turkish Republic of Cyprus. While initiating its own explorations in the region, Turkey has threatened other parties which have legal rights to the underwater wealth.

Greece and Cyprus have reached out to Israel and Egypt to form consortiums. When Israel's interests are threatened, the world knows where Washington stands. Despite the US's implied threats, Turkey is continuing making mischief in the region.

It is a foregone conclusion that those parties facing Turkish bullying need to cooperate with other regional powers. Greece and Cyprus are no match for Turkey. But an international consensus may curb Turkey's actions. This is how Armenia has been finding its niche in this configuration.

Foreign Minister Mnatsakanyan just met with Cypriot Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides. Earlier, he called his Greek counterpart, Nikos Dendias. All these contacts are in preparation for a trilateral summit to be convened this spring in Yerevan. The summit intends to expand the scope of cooperation between these three countries and it will help Armenia to consolidate its firm foothold in the European Union.

Bringing the countries even closer, a contingent of Armenian cadets are already being trained in Greek military schools.

Despite the inexperience of the new revolutionary government, its policy is moving in the right direction, to bring the country out of its political isolation.

It is ironic that Turkey is also contributing to that development, albeit inadvertently.



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## COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## Finally, After 105 Years, Syria Recognizes the Armenian Genocide

The Syrian people were the first to be aware of the Armenian Genocide as tens of thousands of Armenians were deported by Ottoman Turkey to the killing fields of the Syrian Desert at the beginning of the 20th century. A large number of Armenian orphans were adopted by local Arabs who raised them as their children. The surviving Armenians in Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Zor, Damascus and elsewhere were welcome by the local population. Armenians settled in their new homeland, rebuilt their lives, reestablished their cultural structures, including churches, schools, and societies and gradually prospered.

I was born in Aleppo, Syria, as some of my grandparents' family had survived the Genocide. I had a happy childhood and had not experienced any prejudice or discrimination, despite the religious differences. Syria had its own dispute with the Republic of Turkey, such as the annexation of Iskenderun (Alexandretta) to Turkey in 1939, after an illegitimate referendum. Nevertheless, the Syrian government, in an Islamic solidarity with Turkey and unwilling to antagonize its more powerful Northern neighbor, had declined to raise the issue of the Armenian Genocide.

I recall that during the deliberations of the United Nations' Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1985, the Syrian human rights

member told me that even though he was aware of the Armenian Genocide, he could not vote to adopt the report that recognized it, as he would be dismissed from his job. Under the circumstances, I asked him to be absent from the hall during the voting. He did, and the UN report was adopted by an overwhelming majority.

In the years prior to the 2011 civil war in Syria, the relationship between Syria and Turkey had improved to the point that the presidents of the two countries met often and went on vacation together. The Syrian government even banned the sale of books on the Armenian Genocide in Syrian bookstores. During those honeymoon years, I was informed that during the visit of Catholicos Aram I to Damascus, President Bashar al-Assad had told him that Armenians should forget about the Armenian Genocide, open the border and establish friendly relations with Turkey.

When I visited Damascus in 2009, an Armenian friend with access to the Presidential Palace, tried to arrange a meeting for me with President Assad. I wanted to warn President Assad that his honeymoon with the Turkish President could come to an abrupt end and Erdogan, as an untrustworthy ally, could betray him. Of course, I had no idea that two years after my visit to Syria, there would be a massive invasion of Syria by radical Islamic terrorists armed and supported by Turkey. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to meet President Assad. His Chief of Staff refused to arrange the meeting, telling my Armenian friend that he could not allow such a meeting given my many critical writings of Turkey. He said that Turkey would cut off its friendly relations with Syria if Erdogan found out that President Assad had met with me!

Edmon Marukyan, head of the Bright Armenia opposition party in the Armenian Parliament, told reporters last week that when he met President Assad in Damascus during his trip to Syria in 2014, Assad said: "I was being told in Armenia that I shouldn't trust Erdogan so much, I didn't listen to you." President Assad made an official trip to Armenia in June 2009. However, violating Armenian protocol, he refused to visit the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan to pay

homage to the Genocide victims out of concern for Turkish criticism.

President Assad told Agence France Presse (AFP) in January 2014 that the brutal attacks on Syria reminded him of "the massacres perpetrated by the Ottomans against the Armenians, when they killed a million and a half Armenians, and half a million Orthodox Syrians in Syria and in Turkish territory."

The unanimous decision by the Syrian Parliament on February 13, 2020 is the first official recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Syria. The text of the parliament's resolution also referred to the genocide of Assyrians and Syrians. Some have expressed their unhappiness that the Syrian government finally recognized the Armenian Genocide only when it suited its own political interests. While that is true, Armenians have to be realistic. No country is going to adopt a decision that is contrary to its national interests. It is true that the Syrian Parliament's decision is mostly due to the recent Turkish invasion of Northern Syria. However, the decision is not wrong. It is the right thing to do. It is never the wrong time to do the right thing. The wrong was not recognizing the Armenian Genocide for all those years. Thus Syria became the second Arab country after Lebanon to have recognized the Armenian Genocide. We hope other Arab countries, such as Egypt, Iraq and Jordan, will follow suit.

Two immediate benefits of the Syrian Parliament's recognition of the Armenian Genocide are:

1) The mass media once again reminded the world's public opinion about the dastardly act of the Armenian Genocide committed by Ottoman Turkey, putting one more nail on the coffin of Turkish denial.

2) The Turkish government issued a statement denying the Armenian Genocide and condemning the Syrian government which further publicized the Turkish genocide of the Armenians.

Armenians around the world welcomed Syria's recognition of the Armenian Genocide, further squeezing the noose around Turkish denialism. As the saying goes, "Better late than Never!"

## New Encroachment By Antelias within The Armenian Diocese of Canada

### The Dissident Church Splits the Windsor Community

In the midst of all the different problems that Armenia and its diaspora must confront today, it is inconceivable and unforgivable that the representative of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia (Antelias) in Canada, Archbishop Babgen Tcharian, acting contrary to the accepted canonical order, established a separatist parish in Windsor, Ontario. This action was taken despite the knowledge that 27 years ago a parish had already been created there by the legitimate Diocese of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church of Canada.

It is heartbreaking for any Armenian, but especially for Canadian Armenians, to have to face such an artificially-created crisis.

The destructive scission perpetrated by Antelias within the Armenian Apostolic Church some 70 years ago unfortunately has already caused immeasurable damage to the Armenians of the diaspora.

The division of forces within our communities, which weaken them through the inevitable creation of a hostile internal environment, is against the vital interests of the Armenian people and only benefits our enemies.

In past years, numerous unsuccessful attempts were initiated to correct this unhealthy situation.

The harmful consequences of the festering division within our Church were felt even more intensely in 2015, on the occasion of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. This prompted Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia Aram I to accept the problem of divided dioceses as a most pressing matter which needed to be solved.

On that occasion, one of the proposals made by Antelias was that efforts at unification should be encouraged, starting at the local level of parishes and dioceses.

Instead, see what is happening today...in Windsor, where no division existed, Antelias initiates the creation of a new, separatist parish. This is reprehensible and should be condemned.

Providing some of the details behind this sad situation will help the reader judge the seriousness of this issue and demand an immediate rectification.

As mentioned above, 27 years ago the Armenian Diocese of

Canada with its then Primate Archbishop Hovnan Derderian duly established a parish in Windsor. Due to the limited financial resources of this small community, the Primate periodically arranged for a clergyman to visit on certain Sundays to celebrate the liturgy and conduct other religious services as needed.

Some months ago, a post appeared suddenly on Facebook mentioning that Archbishop Tcharian had paid a visit to this community several months prior to the post, and "upon locals' demand," initiated the creation of a new parish in Windsor.

The current Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Canada, Bishop Abgar Hovakimyan, immediately took the initiative of contacting Archbishop Tcharian. He informed the latter of the seriousness of the situation and invited him to an informal meeting to prevent the foreseeable adverse consequences and turmoil that could result within the relatively calm Canadian-Armenian community.

Reason appears to have prevailed at the meeting, where Bishop Hovakimyan honestly shared with Archbishop Tcharian all the relevant facts and concerns. It is commendable that Archbishop Tcharian accepted the arguments presented with understanding and promised that the creation of a "new parish" in Windsor would not be pursued.

In our turn, we too would have been appreciative that a sense of responsibility had prevailed to prevent a seriously disturbing act which may have been instigated by the thoughtless and unwarranted enthusiasm of some local community members.

However, to the great dismay and frustration of Bishop Hovakimyan, the Armenian Diocese of Canada, and no doubt of all the faithful of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church, it became evident a few weeks ago that the activities of the separatist parish in Windsor are most irresponsibly still being pursued.

Clearly, the abovementioned pledge has been broken.

This amounts to an uncalled for, uncanonical and destructive act of encroachment by Antelias within the Armenian Diocese of Canada.

We have been informed that Bishop Hovakimyan has requested in writing the immediate involvement of the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia himself in the resolution of this matter.

We too call upon Catholicos Aram I of Antelias to intervene immediately and instruct his representative in Canada to put an end to this divisive action in Windsor for the sake of maintaining a calm and constructive atmosphere within the Canadian-Armenian community.

We would like to believe that during these days, when it is necessary to unite all the forces of the Armenian community to counter the many challenges faced by our people, that the Armenian Revolutionary Federation should also be interested in discouraging actions which lead to senseless internal community distress.

We expect and look forward to positive and responsible steps taken for the sake of our centuries-old traditions and for the benefit of our supreme national interests.

(A version of the above editorial was first published in *Abaka* on February 17, 2020)

## Turkey's Main Opposition Boycotts CNN Turk in Protest of Press Censorship

ISTANBUL (Al-Monitor) – CNN Turk – a franchise of CNN, the US broadcasting giant owned by Warner Media – has been plunged into the spotlight in the media freedom controversy in Turkey as the main opposition decided to boycott the channel over its support of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government.

In a February 6 press release to announce the boycott, Tuncay Ozkan, deputy chairman in charge of media relations at the Republican People's

Party (CHP), likened the station to an advertising agency that promotes the narratives of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), while "covering up the realities." The channel's biased coverage, he stressed, has reached an "intolerable level" since the local elections last spring that saw the CHP defeat the AKP in major urban centers. In the parliamentary elections in 2018, the CHP had mustered 22.6 percent of the vote, winning 146 seats in the 600-member parliament.

According to Ozkan, the boycott decision was made at a February 3 meeting of the CHP central executive board on the grounds that CNN Turk "had been setting traps for the party and party members, villainizing them and distorting the realities." CHP members, from party leaders to regular members, "will no longer appear on CNN Turk and take part in their programs," Ozkan said. The CHP, he added, "advises citizens to not watch this channel and not let their children watch it to protect themselves from the harms of CNN Turk."

It is the first time that the CHP has boycotted a pro-Erdogan media outlet since the AKP came to power more than 17 years ago.

CNN Turk was born in 1999 as a joint venture between the Atlanta-based CNN and Dogan, Turkey's biggest media group at the time. The deal required CNN to provide know-how to its sister channel in return for a license payment and entitled CNN Turk to exclusive broadcasting rights on all original CNN footage in Turkey, sources who had closely followed the conclusion of the deal told Al-Monitor. Also, the partnership required a CNN representative to sit on the executive board of CNN Turk's owner company.

see CENSORSHIP, page 20



## Panel on Challenges and Benefits of Bilingualism to Be Held at Harvard

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — A panel discussion titled “Bilingualism: Challenges and Benefits of Learning and Living in Multiple Worlds,” on Thursday, March 5, at 7:30 p.m. at Harvard University, Science Center, Auditorium A, 1 Oxford St.

This program is presented by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR)/Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues and is co-sponsored by St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School and the Harvard Armenian Student Association. It is free and open to the public.

Parents in diasporic communities routinely grapple with the challenge of carving out time for their children to engage with and experience their ancestral cultures. This panel discussion will discuss the value of bilingual education, looking at experiences of other ethnic communities in the U.S. and around the world, with a particular focus on the specificities of the Armenian experience, including the special challenges facing Western Armenian, which has been classified as an “endangered language,” the fruitful cohabitation of Western and Eastern Armenian, and the spe-

cific challenges of researching and teaching the Armenian language.

The discussion will be led by moderator Dr. Anna Ohanyan (Richard B. Finnegan Distinguished Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Stonehill College) and will feature Dr. Lisa Gulesserian (preceptor on Armenian Studies, Harvard University), Dr. Vartan Matiossian (executive director, Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Church), and Dr. María Luisa Parra-Velasco (senior preceptor in Romance Languages and Literatures, Harvard University).

In recognition of the increased attention to these and related issues, portions of the St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School documentary, “Armenian Bilingualism in America: Preserving Language & Identity,” will be shown and copies of the volume *Western Armenian in the 21st Century: Challenges and New Approaches*, edited by Bedross Der Matossian and Barlow Der Mugrdchian, published by the Society for Armenian Studies, will be available for purchase.

For more information about this program, contact NAASR.

## Armenian Community of China Releases Video of Support for China in Fight against Coronavirus

Hong Kong — The Armenian Community of Hong Kong and China released a touching video to show its support for China in its battle against the Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia (NCP). The video showcases Armenian community members, including numerous children, living in various cities in China sending their encouragements to the Chinese people and authorities, who have taken unprecedented steps to stop the virus. The video, produced in Armenia, also features Armenian students studying Chinese at the Confucius Institute in Yerevan.

Henri Arslanian, President of the Armenian Community of Hong Kong and China said: “We want to show to our Chinese friends that the Armenian nation is always here to support them, not only in good times but in more challenging times as well.”

The video titled “#ArmeniansWithChina—Armenians Supporting China in its Fight

against the Coronavirus” is available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0ACyTaRato>) and will be shared across Chinese and Western social media with the hashtags #ArmeniansWithChina and #WeAreChina

The Armenian community has been helping China in various ways since the start of the NCP outbreak. For example, a group of volunteers, including students at the Confucius Institute in Yerevan, collected and donated over 10,000 face masks and gloves to China that were sent from Yerevan last week.

The Armenian Community of China, also known as ChinaHay, has been growing tremendously in recent years. Its members mainly live in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Hong Kong. Anyone interested in learning more about the community can do so by visiting the community's Facebook page.



## Armenia Pastry Chefs Win Medals at Stuttgart Fair

STUTT GART, Germany (Armenpress) — Armenian pastry chefs have won 6 medals at the Culinary Olympics during the ongoing Intergastra International Trade Fair here.

Pastry chefs Iskuhi Hambarzumyan, Marine Khalatyan, Karine Harutyunyan, Seda Mazmanyan and Melanya Simonyan are presenting their work on a single stand.

Iskuhi Hambarzumyan said in an interview the team has already won 2 gold, 1 silver and 3 bronze medals.

The competition runs through February 15-19.

“We've presented very interesting works made from sugar flowers. Our work gained attention from the very beginning and received appreciation, for which we are very happy,” she said.

Intergastra is a trade fair for the hotel and gastronomy business.

## Turkey's Main Opposition Boycotts CNN Turk in Protest of Press Censorship

CENSORSHIP, from page 19

In terms of editorial guidelines, the deal remarkably emphasized that CNN Turk would shape its editorial policy in line with Turkey's conditions, independently from CNN. And in the years under Erdogan, Turkey's conditions changed for the worse, spawning the compelling reasons for the CHP boycott.

The state of media freedoms in Turkey deteriorated as well. In 2008, Turkey ranked 102nd among 173 countries on the World Press Freedom Index, issued yearly by the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders. By 2018, Turkey qualified as an “authoritarian” country on the index, dropping 55 pegs over a decade to hit 157th place among 180 countries.

In retrospect, the Turkish government itself mounted a multi-faceted boycott against the opposition, independent journalism and the mainstream media outlets during that decade. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Turkey held the title of “the world's worst jailer of journalists” for three years in a row before “conceding” it to China last year. Turkey kept 47 journalists in prison at the end of 2019, one less than China.

As the government pressure on the media intensified, CNN Turk, which had earned itself a reputable name among the news channels in the mainstream media, felt the heat as well. In the memorable evening of May 31, 2013, during the Gezi Park resistance, the channel chose to not switch to live coverage as police responded violently to tens of thousands of anti-government protesters flocking to Taksim Square in the heart of Istanbul, airing instead a documentary about

penguins. Since then, it has been derided as “the penguin channel” by government opponents.

The channel also terminated a number of political debate programs, which were widely watched but annoyed the government. It grew even more docile after the November 1, 2015 elections, in which the AKP restored its parliamentary majority. Commentators disliked by the government faced a screen embargo as part of the channel's measures to avoid Erdogan's ire. The Dogan group's most drastic measure was to appoint Erdogan Aktas, the founding director of A Haber, a channel known as the trumpet of the government, to the helm of CNN Turk.

In 2018, CNN Turk's story reached a turning point. Aydin Dogan, the boss of the Dogan group, realized he could no longer hold out against the government's pressure and threats, which grew both in severity and variety, including mammoth tax fines totaling \$2.5 billion since 2008 and the targeting of journalists for sacking. In March 2018, he was forced to sell all his media assets to the Demiroren business group, one of the closest to the government.

The handover marked the demise of Turkey's mainstream media after years of agony, as almost the entire media industry, including printing facilities, distribution companies and nationwide news agencies, was now under government control.

Government pressure had already forced Dogan to sell two of his newspapers — Milliyet, one of the deepest-rooted members of the Turkish press, and the relatively younger Vatan — to Demiroren in 2011. The 2018 sell-off, which included Hurriyet, considered the flagship of

what was once Turkey's mainstream media, came shortly before the presidential and parliamentary elections in June that year. The timing, of course, was significant.

Of note, Demiroren Holding grew remarkably after entering the media sector. In 2015, it acquired the fuel distribution network of France's Total in Turkey. In February 2019, it won a tender to operate the sports betting company Iddaa. In August, a joint venture in which Demiroren is the major stakeholder, acquired the operating rights of the National Lottery, an asset of Turkey's sovereign wealth fund.

After changing hands, CNN Turk adopted an openly pro-government attitude in the election campaign for the June 24 polls that year. In its live broadcasts from April 30 to May 24, the channel accorded the AKP nearly 31 hours of air time, compared to only 11.5 hours for the CHP.

Yet what really fueled the CHP's boycott decision was a series of incidents in the run-up to the March 31 local polls last year. Scheduled live studio interviews with CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu were cancelled twice at the last minute, irritating the party management, CHP sources familiar with the events told Al-Monitor.

Also, the CHP's Ekrem Imamoglu, who would win the race for Istanbul mayor, had two live interviews with the channel cut short — in other words, censored. One of the interviews was cut after Imamoglu began to speak about corruption at the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, then controlled by the AKP, while the other was terminated to air a live speech Erdogan was making at an award ceremony. Of note, almost all of Erdogan's speeches are broadcast live on

Turkey's TV channels, which, barring a few exceptions, are controlled directly or indirectly by the government.

Ahead of the local polls, CNN Turk featured claims that the CHP had placed “many terrorists” on its candidate lists for municipal assemblies, but chose to omit the CHP's denials, which the party leadership saw as another element of the channel's editorial policy vis-à-vis the main opposition.

The claims, which associated CHP candidates with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), led the CHP to complain to the CNN headquarters in the United States. In a letter to CNN management, the party's US representative Yurter Ozcan wrote, “CNN Turk, which holds the franchising rights of CNN in Turkey, has made it a habit to deliberately report disinformation.”

Commenting on the party's boycott decision last week, CNN Turk General Manager Murat Yanci rejected the accusations, insisting the channel's journalism was “impartial and objective.”

CHP sources told Al-Monitor that the boycott would not bar CNN Turk from covering the party's press conferences, rallies and other activities. The party does not intend to extend the boycott to other pro-government channels for now.

The CHP's boycott will further erode the influence of CNN Turk, which is already snubbed by opposition voters, who no longer see it as a credible broadcaster. At the same time, however, the boycott will compound the echo-chamber effect that has come to dominate conventional and social media in Turkey.