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Armenian, Azeri FMs End Two-Day 'Intensive' Talks

GENEVA (RFE/RL) – The foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan concluded on Thursday, January 30, two days of fresh negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which official Baku said were the “most intensive” in years. (See related editorial on Page 18.)

Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Elmar Mammadyarov met in Geneva for two

consecutive days in the presence of the U.S., Russian and French diplomats co-heading the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. The two ministers and the mediators shed little light on the talks in an ensuing joint statement issued there.

The statement said that 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.”

The mediators again stressed the importance of “confidentiality in the settlement process” and “the need for creativity and a spirit of compromise,” it said.

see TALKS, page 3

Macron Attends French-Armenian Gala

Praises Taner Akçam

PARIS (Armenpress) – President of France Emmanuel Macron on January 30 attended the annual gala dinner of the Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations of France (CCAF) in France and delivered remarks.

Macron spoke about the recognition process of the Armenian Genocide internationally, and emphasized that France has been engaged in the process for 19 years. Macron said he was pleased to note that it has already been a year that his promise on declaring April 24 as the National Commemoration Day of the Armenian Genocide in France has been fulfilled.

“The struggle that the Armenians are carrying out for the recognition of the genocide is also a struggle against silence, against forgetting. As for the issue of truth, there is brotherhood between the Armenian and French peoples,” Macron said.

Macron underscored that Turkey has based its policy on revisionism. “No great



French President Emmanuel Macron with Prof. Taner Akçam

history is shaped on lies, denial and revisionism,” Macron said.

At the beginning of the event, those in

attendance observed a minute of silence in honor of former French President Jacques Chirac’s memory, who died in September 2019.

Turkish historian Prof. Taner Akçam, a see MACRON, page 4

Peter Balakian, Aram Arkun to Present ‘The Ruins of Ani: From Sacred Landscape to Political Soil’

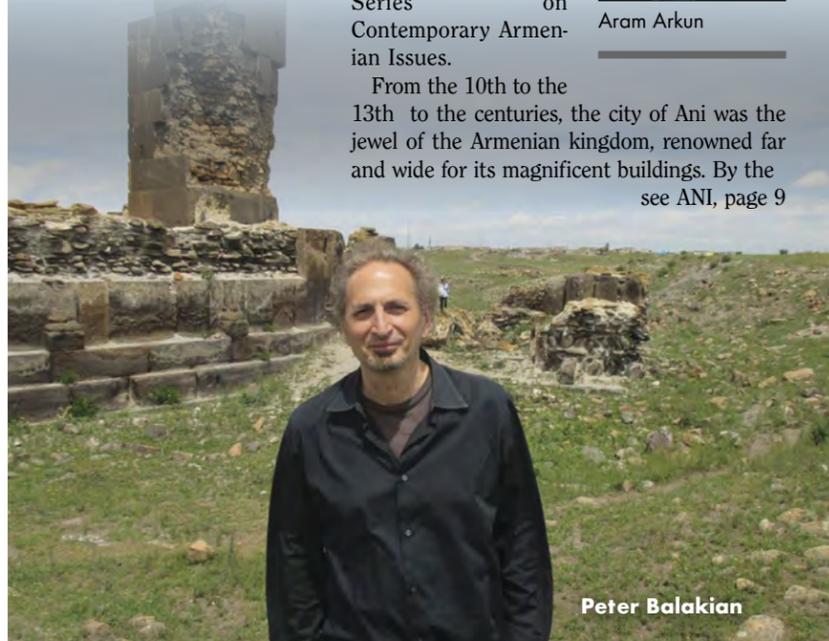
BELMONT, Mass. – The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will present a talk by Dr. Peter Balakian and Aram Arkun titled “The Ruins of Ani: From Sacred Landscape to Political Soil,” on Thursday, February 27, at 7:30 p.m., in Batmasian Hall on the third floor of the new NAASR Vartan Gregorian Building, 395 Concord Ave. The program is co-sponsored by the NAASR/Calouste Gulbenkian



Aram Arkun

Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues.

From the 10th to the 13th to the centuries, the city of Ani was the jewel of the Armenian kingdom, renowned far and wide for its magnificent buildings. By the see ANI, page 9



Peter Balakian

German-Armenian Forum Marks Anniversary as Azeri Lobbyists Face Legal Trouble

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN – On January 29, members of the German-Armenian Forum gathered in a room at the Bundestag (Parliament) for their annual meeting. The Forum, which will celebrate its fifth birthday in May, was founded upon the initiative of Bundestag member Albert Weiler (CDU), as a vehicle to promote dialogue between Germany and the Republic of Armenia at all levels. This includes exchange programs and visits of persons active in the political and economic realm, as well as teachers, academics and students. The aim is to increase knowledge and understanding about the two nations, their history, culture and current political activities.

In response to requests by members to know more about the relations between Armenia and the European Union, President Weiler dedicated his keynote see GERMANY, page 5

NEWS IN BRIEF

PACE Concerned about Tension between Court, PM Office

STRASBOURG (PanArmenian.am) – The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has expressed concern over “the high level of tension” between the Armenian Prime Minister’s Office and the Presidency of the Constitutional Court.

“We are very concerned by the high level of tension between two State institutions in Armenia, the Prime Minister’s Office and the Presidency of the Constitutional Court,” said the co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the monitoring of Armenia, Andrej Sircelj (Slovenia, EPP/CD) and Kimmo Kiljunen (Finland, SOC) on February 1.

“Checks and balances are essential in any democratic system. This implies that all institutional powers must act according to the rule of law, and respect it in their deeds and words, including with regard to the principle of the presumption of innocence. If they fail to interact according to these principles, they undermine and damage each other. We are therefore worried about the long-term damage these tensions, that have reached an unprecedented level, could inflict on the judiciary as a whole, in which trust is already very low,” they said.

Azerbaijan Responsible For Armenian Man’s Death, ECHR Rules

STRASBOURG (Panorama.am) – The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on January 30 ruled that Azerbaijani authorities had been responsible for the torture and death of Manvel Saribekyan, an Armenian national who had been locked up in a military police cell in Baku.

The court held unanimously that there had been violations of Article 2 (right to life) and Article 3 (prohibition of torture and ill-treatment) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The court found in particular that applicants Mamikon Saribekyan and Siranush Balyan had made a prima facie case that their son, Manvel Saribekyan, had died as a result of the violent actions of others, notably personnel at the Military Police Department in Baku, where he was being held. It could not accept the Azerbaijani authorities’ version of events that he had hanged himself.

ECHR obliged Azerbaijan to pay the applicants 60,000 euros in respect of non-pecuniary damage and 2,200 euros in respect of costs and expenses.

Manvel Saribekyan, 20, who resided in the Armenian village of Ttujur, inadvertently strayed into Azerbaijani territory due to bad weather conditions on September 11, 2010 and was taken captive by Azerbaijani officials. He died in the Baku military police cell on October 5.

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Let’s Meet Ardy Kassakhian

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ARMENIA

News From Armenia

Violinist Sergey Khachatryan Recognized As World's Best Young Musician

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Prominent Armenian violinist Sergey Khachatryan has won the annual award of Credit Swiss Bank for “The Best Young Musician of the World.” The awards ceremony was held in Vienna on January 18.

Lucerne Festival artistic director Michael Haefliger headed the jury.

Khachatryan received 75,000 Swiss Francs, which is among the “most expansive” prizes in the world music. It also implies that the Armenian musician will participate in a concert with Gustavo Dudamel and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, which will be held on September 13.

Born in Yerevan, Khachatryan won the First Prize in the VIII International Jean Sibelius Competition in Helsinki in 2000, becoming the youngest ever winner in the history of the competition. In 2005 he claimed the First Prize at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels.

He has performed with orchestras such as the Berliner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Orchestre de Paris, London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, NHK Symphony, Munich Philharmonic and the Tonhalle Orchestra in Zurich.

He performs on a 1740 ‘Ysaye’ Guarneri violin on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation.

Caucasian Leopard Caught on Camera in Arevik National Park

YEREVAN (Panorama) – The trap cameras located in Arevik National Park have spotted another Caucasian Leopard in south of Armenia. The footage of the leopard were shown by “Zangezur” Biosphere Complex. For the first time the trap cameras of the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) fixed the presence of the Caucasian Leopard in the country in 2015. Later in 2019, rangers from Arpa Protected Landscape of Armenia’s Vayots Dzor province spotted the rare leopard during their regular observation and recorded a video of him.

The Caucasian or Persian leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*), is one of the most endangered species living in the Caucasus. This leopard subspecies can be found in the South Caucasus countries, Turkey, Iran, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Some experts estimate there are less than 1300 leopards left in wild.

Last year was declared the Year of the Caucasian Leopard in Armenia aimed at contributing to the broader coverage of the leopard which is on the verge of extinction through the organization of assemblies, films and exhibitions as well as raising the public awareness. According to 2018 data, around 7-9 leopards are registered in Armenia, their habitats being Ararat, Vayots Dzor and Syunik regions.

EBRD Plans to Invest About \$100,000,000 in Armenia in 2020

YEREVAN (news.am) – The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) plans to invest nearly 100,000,000 Euros in Armenia this year, the head of EBRD in Armenia Dimitri Gvindadze told reporters on January 30.

“A lot depends on our opportunities in the financial sector and the real sectors of economy, as well as sustainable investments,” Gvindadze said.

According to the EBRD’s strategy on cooperation with Armenia, in addition to the conventional spheres such as finance and energy, the Bank will actively explore the opportunities for cooperation in the sectors of transport and infrastructures, tourism and real estate, trade and agriculture, as well as information and telecommunication technologies.

Armenians in Coronavirus-Hit China Plead for Evacuation

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Armenians stranded in China appealed to Armenia’s government on Tuesday, February 4, to help evacuate them from the country coping with a new coronavirus that has killed more than 400 people.

According to the Foreign Ministry in Yerevan, an estimated 400 Armenian nationals lived in China before the outbreak of the deadly disease last month. Many of them taught English in Chinese schools and universities.

Ministry officials say that around 200 Armenians have returned home in the last 10 days. Others have trouble following suit due to the absence of direct flights between the two countries and the dwindling number of Western, Russian and other airlines flying to China.

Several of them said that with classes and commercial activity in the country increasingly brought to a halt as part of Chinese government efforts to stop the spread of the coronavirus, their employers have terminated their work contracts.

“The roads are blocked,” said Tatevik Martirosyan, who has lived and worked in China’s eastern Shandong province in the last few years. “When we get to the airport we don’t know whether or not we’ll be able to board a plane. While

staying here, we are spending our money and may end up having no money to fly back to Armenia.”

“Dear compatriots, we want to return home and are asking you to take measures to repatriate us,” she added, speaking via a video link.

“I want to return to Armenia but am unable to do that as there is no transport” said Naira Grigoryan, a teacher of

and out of work, then I think we will have a serious problem.”

Anzhela Mikaelyan, a resident of the central Chinese city of Xian, told a similar story. “Many Armenian citizens are deciding to leave China without anyone’s advice ... They are just unable to do that because many airlines have cancelled flights to China or reduced them to a minimum,” she said.



Armenian women living in China speak to RFE/RL, on February 4

a school in another eastern province, Jiangsu. “The school management has told me to wait until February 15. But if this situation continues unabated after February 15 and we remain locked

“Right now the only realistic way to get out of China is the Russian Aeroflot [airline] but there are problems with that as well,” added the young woman. “Not to mention the fact that air ticket prices are skyrocketing each day.”

The Armenian Foreign Ministry said it is now exploring ways of evacuating these and other citizens. It urged the remaining Armenians to contact the Armenian Embassy in Beijing and check flight information before heading to nearby airports.

Former Security Chief Questioned by Investigators

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Artur Vanetsyan, the former National Security Service (NSS) chief increasingly at loggerheads with Armenia’s political leadership, has been summoned for questioning in two criminal investigations, it emerged on Friday, January 31.

The Investigative Committee said it questioned Vanetsyan on Thursday, January 30, as a witness in the ongoing inquiries into his leaked phone conver-

sations and alleged corrupt practices in the Football Federation of Armenia (FFA).



Artur Vanetsyan

sations and alleged corrupt practices in the Football Federation of Armenia (FFA).

Vanetsyan’s sensitive phone calls with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Sasun Khachatryan, the head of the Special Investigative Service (SIS), were secretly recorded in July 2018 and posted on the Internet in the following months. The then NSS director discussed with them coup charges brought against former President Robert Kocharyan and retired General Yuri Khachaturov.

Vanetsyan could be heard saying that he pressured a judge to sanction Kocharian’s arrest. He at the same time urged the SIS not to arrest Khachaturov, who was the secretary general of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) at

the time, warning of a negative reaction from Russia.

“As part of the wiretapping investigation, Mr. Vanetsyan’s [mobile] phone was subjected to an examination,” Naira Harutiunyan, the Investigative Committee spokeswoman, told RFE/RL’s Armenian service. She also said that nobody has been indicted in that probe yet.

The other case stems from financial abuses allegedly committed Ruben Hayrapetyan, the controversial former head of the FFA, and individuals linked to him. Vanetsyan succeeded Hayrapetyan as FFA president following the 2018 “Velvet Revolution” in Armenia. He resigned from that post last November two months after being sacked as NSS director for still unclear reasons.

Vanetsyan on Friday declined to comment on his interrogations, referring all inquiries to his lawyer Lusine Sahakyan. “We decided not to make comments for now,” Sahakyan said for her part.

Vanetsyan has repeatedly traded bitter recriminations with Pashinyan since his sacking. In a January 11 article, the Haykakan Zhamanak daily controlled by Pashinyan’s family accused him of organizing a smear campaign against the family. Hrachya Hakobyan, a pro-government parliamentarian and Pashinyan’s brother-in-law, alleged afterwards that Vanetsyan was fired in September because he was plotting a coup.

Vanetsyan, who has not been charged with any crimes so far, denounced the Haykakan Zhamanak article as slanderous and threatened to file a libel suit against the paper.

The former NSS chief also scoffed at Pashinyan’s weekend allegations that Armenian security services have thwarted a “hybrid” anti-government conspiracy hatched by current and former officials. He said Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party should consider replacing the prime minister. Senior party figures hit back at Vanetsyan.

Case Against Former President Moving Forward

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – By a decision of Vahe Misakyan, Judge of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Avan and Nor Nork Administrative District of Yerevan City, the criminal case against former President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan and others has entered the stage of arraignment, it was reported on February 3.

Sargsyan is accused of organizing embezzlement 489 million drams (more than \$1 million) with the help of other officials through misuse of his official position in the period of January 25 to February 7, 2013.

According to the charges, on January 24, 2013, the Government of Armenia confirmed the state assistance program for providing farmers with cheap diesel fuel. A number of companies, including Maxhur and Flash, expressed readiness to provide the fuel.

The officials of the Ministry of Agriculture of Armenia decided to introduce Maxhur, which presented the cheapest price for the fuel, for the confirmation of the cabinet.

Sargsyan, being aware of the cheaper offer for the supply, demanded a number of officials to choose Flash as the supplier of the fuel, ensuring personal profits for himself.

As a result, the Government paid over 1.2 billion drams to Flash as a subsidy, while it would only have to pay 846 million drams to Maxhur.



ARMENIA

President Hosts Family of Cancer Survivors

YEREVAN – President Armen Sarkissian hosted on February 4 at the Presidential Palace the Arshakian family.

Residents of Aparan town of Aragatsotn marz Samvel and Arpik Arshakians' son, the 10-year-old Romik has been diagnosed with leukemia and poliovirus. Currently, the boy is in the remission stage.

February 4 is marked as World Cancer Day, while February 15 is the International Childhood Cancer Day and is aimed at bringing attention to children who have problems associated with this disease.

Sarkissian conversed with little Romik and his parents and inquired about the child's medical treatment. The president said that it is very important not to despair and take all treatment phases with hope and faith.

Romik said that on March 6 he will turn 11 years old. He goes to school, has friends and hobbies. Sarkissian encouraged him, told that he too, went down that difficult and tough road. "You are not the only one in the world and you have to endure, be strong. Later, God knows, maybe 20 years from now, you will be president. You want to be the president or a football player?"

When little Romik responded that he would rather become president, President Sarkissian said, "All right, it's a deal, you will get well to become president. It will be tough, unpleasant, but it will pass. Be strong. See, your mother and your father are strong, you too, be a strong boy. What you love to do, what else you would like to do beside becoming president?"

Romik told the president that he would also like to become a rescuer, just like his father. "Because they save people. Doctors heal people but rescuers save them."

The boy's attending physician, who was also present at the meeting, informed that Romik



President Armen Sarkissian with Romik Arshakian

was undergoing conservative treatment which would last for another year. At the moment, the cancer is in remission. "You get better, then you visit my every year. I will teach to how to become president," President

Sarkissian said and urged Romik to smile. "You must smile, show that you are strong, that you will overcome this illness," he noted. "You are first and foremost your own doctor. No matter how your parents and doctors

try, it is you who must not stop believing that you will overcome all this. Life is beautiful and it is beautiful first of all because of kids like you," Sarkissian told Romik.

Former 'Oligarch' Hayrapetyan Detained

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Ruben Hayrapetyan, a wealthy businessman linked to Armenia's former leadership, accused the authorities of harassing him for political reasons after being briefly detained by police in Yerevan on Tuesday, February 4.

The police said Hayrapetyan was taken in for questioning on suspicion of illegal arms possession. He was released without charge three hours later.

Hayrapetyan mocked the police action when he spoke to journalists after his release. "I think they looked for a Su-30 [fighter jet], a T-90 tank and BTR and BMP [armored personnel carriers] in my pockets. You obviously understand who ordered that," he said in an apparent reference to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

"A person who legally owns three guns will never possess weapons illegally and they know this very well," he said. "This is yet another [political] show."

The once-powerful businessman also warned: "Even if they made me lie on the ground, I want to stress that there is nothing shameful about being forced by policemen to lie on the ground. But you can be sure that one day I will make them lie on the ground and wipe my feet on

them."

According to one of Hayrapetyan's lawyers, Amram Makinyan, the police also detained several of his friends and impounded two cars belonging to him. Both vehicles were returned to their owner later in the day.

The detention came one day after Hayrapetyan was questioned as a witness in a criminal investigation into alleged corruption in the Football Federation of Armenia (FFA) which the tycoon headed from 2002-2018. Police searched his Yerevan villa in December as part of the same probe. He was not charged as a result.

Hayrapetyan, 56, has long supported former President Serzh Sargsyan and remains affiliated with the latter's Republican Party, which he used to represent in the Armenian parliament. He had to resign from the parliament in 2012 following a brutal attack on several army medics who dined at his Yerevan restaurant. One of them died while two others were seriously injured after arguing with men working at the restaurant.

Hayrapetyan, who is commonly known as "Nemets Rubo," was also dogged by other controversies resulting from his reportedly violent conduct.



Ruben Hayrapetyan speaks to journalists after being released by police, Yerevan, February 4.



Foreign Ministers Zohrab Mnatsakanyan of Armenia, third from left, and Elmar Mammadyarov of Azerbaijan, fourth from left, and international mediators meet in Geneva, January 30.

Armenian, Azeri FMs End Two-Day 'Intensive' Talks

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"The ministers agreed to meet again in the near future under co-chair auspices," added the statement. It gave no further details.

The Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministries also issued separate and largely identical statements.

The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Leyla Abdullayeva, described the Geneva talks as "the most intensive discussions between the sides over the last years." "The sides held thorough discussions over agenda items presented by the OSCE [Minsk Group] co-chairs," she tweeted in English.

Both parties to the Karabakh conflict support the "intensification of negotiations," Abdullayeva wrote after Wednesday's meeting which she said lasted for seven hours.

Mnatsakanyan and Mammadyarov previously met in Slovakia's capital Bratislava on December 4. Mammadyarov described those talks as "tough." The mediators said, for their part, that the two ministers will meet again in early 2020 "to intensify negotiations on the core issues of a peaceful settlement."

Mammadyarov claimed later in December that the Bratislava meeting touched on the most recent version of a framework peace accord originally drafted by the mediators in 2007. He said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov presented it to the conflicting parties two years ago.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry insisted, however, that "no document is being discussed" by the parties at present.



INTERNATIONAL

International News

Vietnam's PM Meets with Armenia Ambassador

HANOI (Armenpress) – Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc met on February 3 with Ambassador of Armenia to Vietnam Vahram Kazhoyan.

Phuc noted that there is a positive atmosphere of mutual understanding between the two countries and particularly emphasized the importance of the development of cooperation in the spheres of trade, economy and investments.

Kazhoyan congratulated Phuc on the 90th anniversary of the establishment of Communist Party of Vietnam and assumption of the chairmanship over the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) by Vietnam.

Kazhoyan discussed the priorities of the Armenian-Vietnamese cooperation. He added that the Armenian companies show great interest in participating in “Vietnam Expo” 2020.

Russia to Drop Murder Charge against Khachaturyan Sisters

MOSCOW (Panorama.am) – Investigators in the case of three sisters accused of killing their abusive father have been ordered by Russia's Prosecutor General's office to drop the murder charge against them and instead classify their actions as self-defense, their lawyer said Friday, January 31, according to the Associated Press.

The case elicited widespread outcry after reports emerged that the sisters – 17, 18 and 19 years old at the time – acted after years of being beaten and raped. In December, Russia's Investigative Committee charged Maria, Angelina and Krestina Khachaturyan with premeditated murder, despite their lawyers arguing that young women acted in self-defense.

On Friday, their lawyer, Alexei Parshin, was quoted by the TASS news agency as saying that the Prosecutor General's office refused to support the Investigative Committee's case and ordered the murder charged to be dropped.

Prosecutors concluded the sisters' actions were “carried out within the legal limits of the necessary self-defense,” Parshin said and suggested the case against the sisters might be closed altogether.

More than 350,000 people signed a petition this year demanding the sisters' release. Women's rights activists rallied in their support both in Russia and abroad.

The case prompted Russian lawmakers this year to start working on a law against domestic violence, something women's rights advocates have been unsuccessfully fighting for since 2016.

Foreign Minister Receives New Iran Ambassador

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Foreign minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan received on February 3 the newly appointed Ambassador of Iran to Armenia Abbas Zohouri, who presented his credentials to the former.

Mnatsakanyan congratulated Zohouri on assuming the responsible mission and hoped that the newly appointed Ambassador will foster the strengthening and deepening of the Armenian-Iranian friendly relations.

The sides exchanged views on expanding the existing bilateral agenda between Armenia and Iran.

During the meeting the sides referred to a number of urgent regional and international issues. Mnatsakanyan and Zohouri highlighted the joint efforts aimed at the maintenance of regional stability and security.

The sides highly assessed the importance of the Armenian community in the social-political life of Iran and the role of the community as a bridge for the relations of the two countries.



French President Emmanuel Macron

Macron Attends French-Armenian Gala

MACRON, from page 1 renowned advocate for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, participated in the event a guest of honor.

Macron congratulated Akçam for his continued efforts.

“You denounced the denial,” Macron told Akçam, author of the book *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and Armenian Genocide*. He said the book constitutes “the scientific establishment of clear intentionality of an organized crime.”

“You brought out what some wanted to plunge into oblivion, Genocide denial,” said Macron. “It is an essential stone in this deeply political debate with the Turkish leaders.”

“We don't build any great story on a lie, on the policy on a revisionism or a negationism,” he insisted in allusion to Turkey, denouncing

“the shadow cast by a strategy which aims at a new expansionism in the Middle East, deny the crimes and strive to regain the strength of the past, a fantasized past, very largely.”

The French translation of the book was published in late January. This

book provides a major clarification of the often blurred lines between facts and truth in regard to these events. The authenticity of the killing orders

The book once and for all put a stop to that fallacy.

Settling Karabakh Conflict



Guests surround French President Emmanuel Macron at the Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations of France program.

signed by Ottoman Interior Minister Talat Pasha and the memoirs of the Ottoman bureaucrat Naim Efendi have been two of the most contested topics in this regard. The denialist school long argued that these documents and memoirs were all forgeries.

France has been one of the main guarantors for the continuation of peaceful negotiations on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, Macron added.

“In the settlement process of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict France plays its role within the frames of the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship and is one of the main guarantors for the continuation of peaceful negotiations,” President Macron said.

He noted that he is in contact with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as well as Azeri President Ilham Aliyev.

“France stands with Armenia, taking into account the democracy created by the efforts of a very young state of a millennia-old nation, as well as the achievements that are now being recorded thanks to the recent revolution,” the French President said.

Chinese Tourists in Turkey Quarantined

ISTANBUL (Armenpress) – A group of 12 people, 10 of whom are Chinese tourists, were placed under quarantine on January 28 in a Turkish hospital in the Aksaray province on suspicions of having contracted coronavirus, local media reported.

Aksaray Governor Ali Mantı has said one of the tourists developed symptoms of the disease and the rest of the passengers and the driver of the bus they were traveling in have been quarantined and are being monitored as a precaution.

The death toll in China from the coronavirus reached 106. More than 4,500 people are currently confirmed to be infected. More than a dozen countries have reported confirmed cases.



INTERNATIONAL

German-Armenian Forum Marks Anniversary as Azeri Lobbyists Face Legal Trouble

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speech to this theme. Reporting on the advantages of the EU-Armenia Partnership Agreement, Weiler said the dynamic was definitely positive. In April and May 2018

he said, the peaceful protests had led to a new government, which received a mandate “to shape the present and future of the country for the well-being of the Armenian people.” Germans have displayed special interest in the foreign policy course the new regime would follow and are pleased to see “the enormous value placed on cooperation with the EU.” Weiler expressed his conviction that support for Armenia’s reform course will continue.

Reviewing the past years’ progress, Weiler noted that “on November 24, 2017 the in-depth and comprehensive Partnership Agreement between Armenia and the European Union was signed in Brussels, a document that defines the future of our cooperation.” The Bundestag presented a bill for its ratification, which was debated and passed by a vast majority on April 4, 2019. After President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas signed the bill, it was officially ratified in August.

Weiler characterized the agreement as a “complex document,” in that it maintains the substance of an earlier association agreement, but excludes a free trade zone, due to Armenia’s membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. And yet a closer relationship to the EU’s system of norms and regulations should ensue in the interest of enhancing trade and investments. Fundamentally, Weiler said, it is a matter of providing support for Armenia’s sovereignty, its economic and social transformation and new political orientation based on democratic values, “securing universal human rights and individual freedom, supporting civil society, and strengthening the rule of law, separation of powers and representative democracy.”

Closer relations with the EU “means at the same time stable and peaceful regional cooper-

ation.” Weiler noted Germany’s efforts at enhancing preconditions for this, by demanding open borders and good neighborly relations. He placed special emphasis on the commitment shared by Germany and Armenia to upholding



Albert Weiler (Photo from www.albert-weiler.de)

existing formats for conflict resolution; for the EU these are the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the co-chairmen of the Minsk Group, dealing with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Another important point he made was that the EU can intensify collaboration with countries that have strong economic and political ties to the Russian Federation; nations have the sovereign right to shape their relations to the EU, and regional associations are not aimed against any other country.

It is in economic and trade relations that Germany and Armenia have made significant

progress. As Weiler reported, bilateral trade in 2018 grew 30 percent over the previous year, to 344.5 million euros. The Armenian government’s pledge to introduce economic reforms and fight corruption will further this positive trend.

Weiler concluded his remarks on an optimistic note; having seen how the Forum has succeeded in facilitating dialogue, not only to enhance economic ties, but also to make “Armenia better known and beloved in Germany,” he expressed his confidence that the EU-Armenia relationship will prosper.

Azerbaijan Agent in the Bundestag?

It was certainly a coincidence, but not without irony. Just as members of the German-Armenian Forum were discussing ways and means of building more bridges to Armenia, another political figure, this one a dedicated adversary of Armenia, was coming under legal pressure on suspicion of corruption. Karin Strenz has been a member of the Bundestag for the CDU since 2009 and chaired the German-South Caucasus Parliamentary Group, a group whose deputy chairman is Albert Weiler. When Chancellor Angela Merkel toured the Caucasus in 2018, visiting Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, she had a delegation including parliamentarians with her. Weiler was one of them, but Azerbaijan refused him a visa, as an “undesirable person.”

Karin Strenz has been a most desirable person, working indefatigably as a pro-Azerbaijan lobbyist in the German Bundestag as well as in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). In that body, she was the only German representative in 2015 to vote against a resolution demanding the liberation of political prisoners in Azerbaijan. Serving on a commission of election observers, she issued her judgment that they were democratic. And she neglected to report that in 2014 and 2015 she received funds from Azerbaijan through a company Line M-Trade, a financial front for paying lobbyists. In 2017 her party pulled her out of

the Council of Europe and she was banned for life from PACE. In 2019 the Bundestag issued an official reprimand because she had failed to report the outside income, and calls for her resignation became louder.

The Armenische-Deutsche-Korrespondenz, the journal of the German-Armenian Society (DAG), published several reports documenting her shady dealings with Baku. Among them was her curious initiative in 2017 to bring together three parliamentarians each from Armenia, Azerbaijan and then-Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) chair Austria, on neutral ground, to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenia was not informed, nor was the German government or Bundestag, nor were the competent authorities in the Minsk Group! (In this light, one realizes better why Albert Weiler underlined the importance of the established formats for conflict resolution.)

Now it appears Strenz may be in serious trouble. On January 30 (a day after the German-Armenian Forum’s membership meeting), the Bundestag voted to lift her parliamentary immunity on request of the Frankfurt state attorney’s office, on suspicion of corruption in connection with Azerbaijan. According to wire reports, a hundred police and federal criminal police (BKA) conducted raids on her Bundestag office, her home, as well as other residences, offices and legal practices in three German federal states as well as a locality in Belgium. The second prime suspect, whose residence and office were raided, is former CSU Parliamentarian Eduard Lintner, a lobbyist for Azerbaijan. The Line M-Trade firm belongs to Lintner. The suspicion against Lintner is that he received about 4 million euros from Azerbaijan between 2008 and 2016, through fake firms, and paid off PACE politicians to do pro-Azerbaijan lobby work. A third suspect may be charged with money laundering.

It was a coincidence, but indeed, with a touch of irony.

Pashinyan Meets New Russian Counterpart

ALMATY, Kazakhstan (RFE/RL)

– Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his new Russian counterpart Mikhail Mishustin hailed growing trade between their countries and pledged to further deepen Russian-Armenian commercial ties when they met for the first time on January 31.

The two held talks on the sidelines of a meeting in Almaty of the prime ministers of the five ex-Soviet states making up the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

“Relations between our countries, governments have always been and will be good and warm,” Pashinyan said in his opening remarks at the talks.

Mishustin assured him that Russia’s newly reshuffled government is “intent on continuing constructive relations and working contacts with our Armenian colleagues.” He said that Russian-Armenian trade soared by nearly 18 percent in January-November 2018, solidifying Russia’s status as Armenia’s top trading partner.

“We should cement this positive trend and look for new fields of cooperation,” he said.

Pashinyan noted that bilateral trade was on track to approach the \$2 billion mark last year. He said this is one of the reasons why economic growth in Armenia accelerated to over 7 percent.

The two premiers then discussed a “wide range of issues pertaining to Russian-Armenian economic relations.” The statement cited Mishustin as proposing that Moscow and Yerevan explore possibilities of launching “concrete projects in the information technology sector.” Pashinyan welcomed the idea, it said.

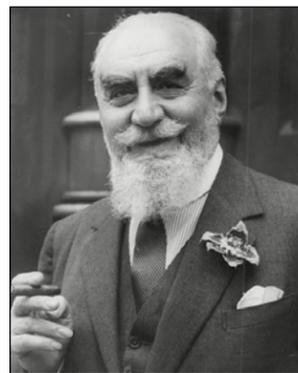
Mishustin attended a global IT forum held in Yerevan in October. The 53-year-old technocrat headed Russia’s Federal Tax Service at the time.

Eccentric Tycoon Gulbenkian’s 1947 Rolls Royce up for Auction

LONDON (*Daily Mail*/Historics Auctioneers)

– A highly unusual and eccentric 1947 Rolls Royce Silver Wraith designed by Armenian business tycoon Nubar Gulbenkian is expected to fetch £30,000 at an auction, despite undergoing a £200,000 restoration by the current owner of the vehicle.

Gulbenkian was born in the Ottoman Empire and at just a few weeks old was brought to UK. He was educated at Harrow and then Cambridge, as a consequence of his background, Gulbenkian saw himself as British and strove to live up to the model of the English gentleman.



Nubar Gulbenkian

He began as an unpaid worker for his father, who was as noted for his frugal tendencies as his son would be for his spending,

but later sued his father, bizarrely after a refusal by the company to allow him \$4.50 for lunch. Overreacting to his father’s anger Gulbenkian took him to court to claim his share of the profits of a Gulbenkian subsidiary in Canada. By the time the argument was settled the court costs amounted to \$84,000 which Gulbenkian’s father paid; Nubar stating “that was surely the most expensive chicken in history”. Gulbenkian did however inherit \$2.5 million from his father and he also became extremely wealthy through his own oil dealings, allowing him to live a highly extravagant lifestyle. He was reported to be one of the wealthiest men in the world.

As a regular customer of Hoopers, the

renowned Rolls-Royce and Bentley coach-builders, he would often design a car himself and ask Hoopers to build it. This Silver Wraith falls into that category, having been designed by Gulbenkian with lots of drawings and requests from him, often challenging the talented workforce of Hoopers to the extreme. Extensive restoration work has been carried out to the



And today

vehicle including a new ash frame and comprehensive fabrication work. It is estimated the work, to date, has cost circa £200,000. The current vendor is sadly not in a position to complete the works and has offered this unique vehicle for sale without reserve. The styling is a little unorthodox, as with most things designed by Nubar Gulbenkian, his influence has often caused a stir within the motor industry and his cars are always highly sought after. The registration number of JLK 290 appears still to be allocated to the car according to the DVLA although we are not in possession of a V5 reg-

This Rolls-Royce with its Sedanca bodywork needs finishing although it is thought the necessary parts are supplied to complete the project. This is a fabulous opportunity to purchase a piece of British motoring history designed by an eccentric who rode around in a custom made car, equipped with a Rolls Royce engine and a body, trimmed in gold plate, designed to look like a London taxicab. “I like to travel in a gold plated taxi that can turn on a sixpence - whatever that is,” he once said.

The auction through Historics will take place on March 7 at the Ascot Racecourse.

The Rolls Royce during its heyday

istration document Any new keeper will have to apply for one. Accompanying this Rolls-Royce is an extensive history file comprised of three comprehensive box folders which contain a number of letters dating back to 1947 from Mr. Gulbenkian to Hoopers along with many other documents.

Community News

Senator Anthony J. Portantino Delivers Invitation of Pashinyan To Governor Newsom

SACRAMENTO – State Senator Anthony J. Portantino (D - La Cañada Flintridge) personally delivered an invitation from Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to Governor Gavin Newsom to visit Armenia. In September, Newsom and Pashinyan met in New York to formalize the historic trade Memorandum of Understanding between California and Armenia. At the meeting they appeared to develop a positive relationship with each other. Glendale based Consul General Armen Baibourtian recognized the strong relationship Portantino has engendered both in Yerevan and in Sacramento and asked Portantino to personally deliver the invitation to the governor.

Portantino had accompanied Pashinyan and Newsom to New York for the event. Included in the comprehensive MOU is the formal establishment of the California International Trade Desk in Yerevan. The Trade Desk was a proposal championed by Portantino.

Following the signing of the MOU, Portantino and Newsom met privately with Pashinyan to discuss increased cooperation between California and Armenia.

The productive establishment of the Trade Desk was the result of a year-long effort by Portantino to formalize trade relations between California and Armenia. The fact that Yerevan is the first California International Trade Desk to be established is a recognition of the impact of the Velvet Revolution, the importance of the California/Armenia relationship and the significant presence Diaspora Armenians have in California.

“It was a tremendous honor to have had the opportunity to deliver a personal invitation



Senator Anthony J. Portantino and California Governor Gavin Newsom

from Prime Minister Pashinyan to Governor Newsom. I was pleased to have first met the Prime Minister in Yerevan last year, in Los Angeles and again in New York. Watching and listening to the genuine, warm conversation between the governor and the prime minister has been one of the highlights of my time in office. Having a front row seat for these important economic and historic events is a privilege. I am very grateful to Governor Newsom for his commitment to strengthening our ties with Armenia and I hope he will one day take up the offer to visit Armenia in person like I have,” commented Portantino.

In addition to representing a large and vibrant Armenian-American Community, Portantino is the chair of the State Senate Select Committee on California Armenia Artsakh Art, Trade and Cultural Exchange. He has long-standing positive ties to the Armenian community.

The governor has also enjoyed a very positive relationship with the Armenian community dating back to his time as the mayor of San Francisco.

“California and Armenia have so much in common and we should be doing everything we can to foster this connection. The Governor has a long and positive relationship with the Armenian American Community and his efforts to negotiate the MOU are to be commended. I was very honored that the Consul General asked me to deliver the invitation,” concluded Portantino.



US Ambassador Lynne Tracy, Major General Lee Tafanelli, and Babken Vartanian at the Republic of Armenia's Defense Ministry for the opening of the ANI exhibit

ANI Exhibit Opens at Armenia's Ministry of Defense

WASHINGTON/YEREVAN – United States Ambassador to Armenia Lynne Tracy and Kansas Army National Guard Adjutant-General, Major General Lee Tafanelli, joined Armenia's Minister of Defense Davit Tonoyan for the opening of the exhibit “The United States Military in the First Republic of Armenia 1919-1920” on January 27 at the Republic of Armenia's Ministry of Defense in Yerevan.

Created by the Washington, D.C.-based Armenian National Institute, the exhibit focuses on the enormous extent of humanitarian assistance rendered by the United States to Armenia in the aftermath of World War I through the services of American military missions sent to Armenia.

In his opening remarks, Tonoyan thanked Tracy for the support extended by the United States in recent years to Armenia. Reflecting on the historical exhibit, Tonoyan noted that: “For many, US assistance during those years was critical, especially the new opportunities created to provide education thanks to which many Armenians received schooling during that difficult time and went on to make impressive achievements.”

Ambassador Tracy delivered welcoming remarks congratulating those present on the occasion of the 28th anniversary of the Armenian Army and spoke about the important work done over the past 100 years.

US General Tafanelli along with his delegation of officers viewed the exhibit and are in Yerevan as part of the US-Armenia military partnership program.

Regional Director Arpi Vartanian, speaking on behalf of the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Institute, pointed out the importance of the high level military mission that US President Woodrow Wilson dispatched to Armenia and stressed their effective intervention in stabilizing the humanitarian crisis in the country despite the small size of the American contingents. She thanked as well Armenia's servicemen on the occasion of the 28th anniversary of the founding of Armenia's modern-day army.

see EXHIBIT, page 9



Major General Lee Tafanelli of the Kansas Army National Guard with US military delegation, US Ambassador Lynne Tracy, Dr. Ashot Melkonian of the Armenian Academy of Sciences, and Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan at the Republic of Armenia's Defense Ministry for the opening of the ANI exhibit

Anoush'ella Brings the Love, and Killer Eastern Mediterranean Eats, to Boston

By Eric Grossman

BOSTON (*Time Out Boston*) – We all know Boston's dining scene is booming, and perhaps no cuisine type has seen such growth in recent years as the traditional, colorful fare of the Eastern Mediterranean region and the Middle East. It seems like every corner offers a spot for nourishing and reasonably-priced bowls and wraps, and with this many options, it can be hard to determine which is the best of the best.

As the South End's top-rated destination for fresh, healthful bites, anoush'ella flew under the radar for some time, but that has changed thanks to its prominent role as one of the 15 best-in-the-city vendors at Time Out Market Boston.

To truly appreciate this family-owned operation, it helps to get to know Nina and Raffi Festekjian, the couple behind Boston's premier fast-casual Eastern Mediterranean eatery. Nina – born in Beirut, Lebanon to an Armenian family – first met her husband-to-be Raffi when he was visiting his family in Beirut. The two were engaged to be married within two weeks, and they've now been married for 25 years.

Nina – whose passions include interior design and fashion–got her culinary training from her mother, and has developed her



A bowl at anoush'ella

recipes and techniques through cooking for her family. “I always had a fascination with the restaurant industry and always wanted to make luxurious, good food affordable and available to everyone,” explains Nina. “It allows me to meet people from all cultures and backgrounds.” Having hosted countless dinner gatherings for friends and family, not to mention fundraiser events where she acted as the event planner and cook, Nina “embarked on the crazy idea of starting a new restaurant where I would be able to replicate the quality, the quantity and the experience of dining at home with friends and family.”

Having settled on an approach to bring Eastern Mediterranean street food into a casually elegant atmosphere, the Festekjians opened anoush'ella in the South End in 2017. Since then, local residents and workers have been flocking to the welcoming eatery to devour tasty wraps filled with overnight-braised beef or Bell & Evans za'atar chicken. Savory mezze run the gamut from walnut harissa and baked chickpea fritters to grilled halloumi.

“Our name anoush'ella means ‘may it be sweet.’ It's an expression of the love, pride and enjoyment that goes into serving someone who enjoys your food and thanks you,” explains Nina. “Our name reflects our belief that part of the joy of living lies within the food we eat and share with loved ones. We believe that when food is prepared with passion and love as the key ingredients, it awakens the palate, enriches the mind and satisfies the soul.”



COMMUNITY NEWS

Kassakhian Runs for Glendale City Council

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

GLENDALÉ — Ardashes “Ardy” Kassakhian, who has served as Glendale City Clerk from 2005 (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2018/12/19/glendale-city-clerk-strives-to-increase-voter-involvement/>), is making his bid for one of the three seats available on Glendale City Council.

He is running in a full field for the March 3 election. Not surprisingly, due to the large Armenian population of Glendale, five out of the eight candidates are of Armenian background, while two are incumbents.

When asked what distinguishes him from the other candidates, including the incumbents, he argued that it was greater pertinent experience, declaring: “First of all, no one has attended more City Council meetings than I have. As city clerk, I have been to practically every single City Council meeting in the last 14 years so I understand where Glendale was, where it is today as a city, and where it is headed, if we have the right leadership and work with different parts of our community in a collaborative way.” Added to this, he sits as a state commissioner on the New Motor Vehicle Board, which hears disputes between new automobile salesmen and automobile manufacturers, and teaches political science and government as an adjunct instructor at Glendale Community College.

He has been involved in various local organizations. He is a member of the Glendale YMCA Board and former board member of Glendale Character and Ethics Project, Friends of the Glendale Public Library, and Co-Chair of the Glendale Youth Leadership Conference. He has also been involved in Armenian community politics.

Kassakhian said, “I am the only candidate in this election who has actually written a law and helped craft legislation that was signed by the governor.” This was a recent law that reversed the ballot order for elections to place local races such as for city council, school boards or college boards prior to federal ones, which draws more attention to these sometimes neglected but important positions.

The Campaign

Kassakhian is still working fulltime as city clerk (in between sections of the *Mirror-Spectator* interview, he was giving an explanation about how the new electronic voting machines in Los Angeles County work to an Armenian cable television show), so he must do his campaigning on weekends and nights. This is why he has volunteers and staff. He has a campaign manager and campaign consultant running the volunteers, whose numbers, he said, may fluctuate daily from 10 to over 30.

Most of the work is done from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., in order to catch people in their homes in the evenings. The volunteers make telephone calls, walk through neighborhoods and knock on doors. Kassakhian himself does this, and said, “I find that to be the most rewarding and exciting part of the campaign.”

The digital era has made it more difficult to make this type of personal connection, Kassakhian said. People usually expect a call or text on their cell phone before accepting visitors and are more reluctant to open the door after a random knock. Presumably, some also screen out calls from people they do not know personally.

The campaign does do digital marketing and place advertisements with Armenian cable television stations. For the broader electorate, Kassakhian said, “With music streaming and an a la carte way of consuming news, music or any type of entertainment, it has become harder and harder to figure out where you go, how you determine who your audience is, in order to get the most out of your investment in this.” Nonetheless, social media is more likely to reach people, he said, than print newspapers, perhaps with the exception of Armenian newspapers, though the latter tend to reach an older demographic group.

One lesson that his campaign has drawn from the last presidential election, Kassakhian said, is not to take the youth for granted. The Bernie Sanders campaign awakened great interest in this group of voters that no one had expected.



ARAM ARKUN PHOTOS

Issues, Ideology and Organized Interest Groups

The main issues of the campaign, Kassakhian said, are those that concern voters: “traffic congestion, the overdevelopment of the downtown and the fear that it will spread to other parts of the city, and neighborhood safety. That is the meat and potatoes of local government. People want to make sure their trash gets picked up, that their water and electricity bills do not spike. So those are the issues that come up.” Nonetheless, he said that during this contentious time in national American politics, broader issues and ideology do come up too. Kassakhian noted, “Inevitably, when I talk to voters, I have people who bring up their concerns about climate change and environmental policies, and what the city will do about them.” Gun control and public vs. private education are other such issues.

In fact, when asked whether there are PACs or outside funding groups involved in this municipal campaign, Kassakhian replied affirmatively. He said, “There are groups that are making endorsements and that are spending money. What those are yet is still not 100 percent clear. It will be clear as the reporting deadlines come around.”

He gave as examples the Sierra Club, which has endorsed several candidates and will probably work to increase awareness of this among their members, realtor associations, and various unions. Kassakhian has benefitted from the endorsement of the Sierra Club Angeles chapter and the Glendale Environmental Coalition.

The last time Kassakhian attempted to run for an office at a “higher” level, it was for State Assembly in 2016. He lost that race and one reason was that supporters of charter schools aggressively supported his opponent, while he came down on the side of public education. The general atmosphere on this topic changed to greater support for public school teachers. In the current city council election this does not seem to be a significant issue of contention, but the Glendale Teachers Association did endorse Kassakhian’s campaign in January. Kassakhian said he has made support for public schools a priority because of their impact on the quality of life. He added, “One of my main platform issues for this cycle is bringing our police school resource officers into all of our middle schools and high schools, particularly in the wake of a lot of incidents of violence in various schools in various communities across the country. When I was young, we had a full-time school resource officer on campus and now we have a few that rotate between all the schools. They are not really on campus all the time.”

American political party clubs and organizations are active in local elections like this one. Kassakhian said that in Glendale it is primarily Democratic Party groups that are active. Not coincidentally, he said that, “Overwhelmingly my support comes from Democratic organizations and institutions because I have been active in those institutions and they now me. Certainly they are taking a more active role in these races. In Los Angeles, where the local elections were consolidated with the bigger elections, long before Glendale, that has always been the case. There has always been a partisan tinge to it. In Glendale we are just seeing

that right now in this cycle, and we will see how it works out in the future.”

The majority of voters in Glendale seem to be Democrats, and Kassakhian said that the majority of candidates for city council also appear to be registered Democrats. The LA County Democratic Party has endorsed Kassakhian and two other city council candidates at present, but Kassakhian said, “An endorsement is only as good as the way you use it.” By law, the party cannot coordinate its activity with these candidates, but Kassakhian said that his campaign is using the endorsements to its best advantage.

Kassakhian has also garnered the endorsements of many prominent politicians, including Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA), former Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, and California State Senator Anthony Portantino.

Housing and Real Estate Issues

Real estate interests play a significant role in the election. Kassakhian said that this is “because of the homelessness crisis, the great attention placed on housing and affordable housing, and the rising cost of housing, whether in renting or owning a home. Certainly people in the real estate industry are watching all races very closely and look at local races as places where they need to make their voices heard. Similarly, in Glendale some of the tenants have organized into a tenants union.”

In the 2016 race, Kassakhian received financial support from realtors, but in this election they chose to go with the incumbents and someone who was the former chairman of their local organization. Kassakhian commented that he still has a lot of support among the realtor community. At the same time the Glendale Tenants Union rates Kassakhian “A,” which is the highest rating of all city council candidates.

He said that support from realtors and tenants is not mutually exclusive. He said he believed one reason why the tenants rated him so highly was his help in explaining how to pass an initiative in Glendale, though their two attempts did not succeed.

At the same time, he said, “The realtors supported me because, look, I understand economics. I understand that a healthy real estate market is good for cities, communities and families. Quite honestly, it is in our best interest to have more homes built in California. Those two things are not opposed to one another and I do not think those two groups are opposed. I think people want to pit them one against the other, but where would landlords be without tenants and where would tenants be without landlords.”

Kassakhian feels that after a period of growth in the real estate field, it is time to put the breaks on development and deal with the impact of what has happened, such as heavy traffic in downtown during rush hour. Just building more, he said, is not a solution to the housing need because without coordination with neighboring areas this would just attract more people while prices remain high. Aside from taking a regional approach, he said, it is necessary to build more workforce housing for police, firefighters, nurses, and teachers, people who provide essential services to Glendale but who are priced out of renting in the city at present.

He said, “I don’t see the need for massive developments. I think we need to focus more on affordable housing and that has to be done with public-private partnership between the city and nonprofits and any of those private companies that work in this arena.” He gave as an example the Ace 121 affordable housing project for artists who live and work in Glendale which the YMCA built while Kassakhian was on its board.

Rent subsidies, he said, would only be “a band-aid on a bullet wound,” since they would be based on sales tax revenue. When the retail market goes down, this money would go away. The state of California did, he pointed out, recently pass a law placing limits on annual rent increases.

Aside from grappling directly with development and housing strategies, Kassakhian has proposed a way to deal with conflicts between landlords and tenants. While this on the surface appears to be an issue for the courts, in Glendale in practice the city council has to deal with it because tenants, and, less frequently, landlords, appeal to the city council on such matters. Kassakhian said that “the perception of the city

council and the role that a city council member plays has not fully matured in the minds of many voters who think that anyone in any government position has access to making and influencing any government policy. Especially for minorities who come from countries and communities where the government was not very structured, authority was spread out and corruption was widespread, there is the perception that, well, the city clerk can help me with my Section 8 housing or the council member should be able to get my son or daughter a job...This is on a weekly basis the type of concerns and questions we get.”

The court system can take a long time to resolve tenant-landlord disputes. Consequently, Kassakhian has proposed a tenant-landlord commission, composed of members of both groups, to mediate in such disputes and save the city council from delving into minutia.

The Armenian Factor

Kassakhian faced xenophobia and even threats in his 2016 run for the State Assembly as an Armenian American. In this campaign, this seems to have decreased despite the rise in incidents in various other parts of the country. Kassakhian said, “This has been around for as long as there have been minority groups here in Glendale, whether it was African American, Hispanic, Armenian, or Asian. I believe that there is xenophobia, but I believe the vast majority of Glendale residents all want the same thing and are not looking to pick a side or divide themselves along ethnic-racial lines.”

At the most, Kassakhian reported, there are people who say there are too many Armenians in Glendale or on the council, or that if someone is Armenian, he does not have my vote. These make up a very small percentage of the responses his campaign has been receiving. He speculated that in his prior race, he was running in a much wider area, including Glendale, Burbank, Hollywood, Silverlake, La Cañada, and La Crescenta. In the Glendale city election, he said, “I think that if you have lived in Glendale and you don’t realize there are Armenians and Armenians are an active voice here, you have had blinders on for the last 30 years.”

While Kassakhian feels most Armenians care about the same everyday issues as other Glendale residents, there is one issue that Kassakhian is promoting which specifically concerns Armenians. He said, “I think one of the most important issues for the community as a whole is the construction and completion of the Armenian American Museum in downtown Glendale...I believe that it needs to be a priority, it needs to be built soon and the city should take an active role in its completion.”

He finds it important, he said, “not just so that other individuals who are not Armenian can learn about our heritage, but Armenians who are here and have been here for multiple generations have something with which to culturally tether themselves to their past, and learn about where Armenians have come from, so we do not become an assimilated footnote in the history of the American melting pot.” Of course the Armenian immigrant experience is part of the broader American immigrant experience, so it will be relevant to all peoples.

A plus, in Kassakhian’s eyes, is that the committee organizing the museum is very inclusive of different segments of the Armenian community.

To the Finish Line

Kassakhian said that after his 2016 Assembly loss, “One of the things I have learned is that you have to be honest and sincere about what you believe and what you want to do, and if people agree with those views and it happens to be your time, then you will succeed. I am not someone who will change my views and my principles because I lost one election and I want to win the next one.”

At present, he said, the campaign for city council is going well but he does not want to take anything for granted. Kassakhian said, “Being a father of a young child and having the duties that I have at City Hall and my family, it takes a certain amount of effort to try to balance everything to do it well. So far, it has been fine. It will get more difficult as we get close to election day, but I am happy with what we are doing and I expect good results. What really matters most is that our community, especially Armenian-American voters, realize the importance of this election and go out and vote.”



COMMUNITY NEWS

Consul General in Los Angeles Meets With ARF Armenia Leadership

GLENDALÉ – On January 29, Consul General of Armenia in Los Angeles Ambassador Armen Baibourtian received Ishkhan Saghatelian, chairman of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Supreme Council of Armenia, accompanied by Avedik Izmirlian, chairman of the ARF Western U.S. Central Committee.

Welcoming the visiting guest, Baibourtian presented multifaceted activities of the Consulate General, touched upon a number of core items relating to the cooperation with the Armenian community. In his turn, chairman of the ARF Supreme Council Ishkhan Saghatelian presented his

party's activities in Armenia. He highlighted that while the ARF is an opposition party within Armenia's political landscape, it will continue supporting the Armenian diplomatic missions abroad as well as contributing to the strengthening of the Armenian state and advancement of Armenia and Artsakh. The interlocutors exchanged ideas about enhancing the Armenia-Diaspora bond.

Counselors of the Consulate General of Armenia Varazdat Pahlavuni and Edgar Grigoryan attended the meeting.

St. James Armenian Church Men's Club Dinner Meeting on March 2

WATERTOWN – On Monday, March 2, there will be a St. James Armenian Church Men's Club dinner meeting at the St James Charles Mosesian Cultural and Youth Center. The 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.

Goff has worked in elder care for over 25 years. His wife Carolyn is Armenian, and it's interesting to note that her grandmother appears in the 1948 black & white photo of AWWA members standing on the front porch of the original nursing home in Jamaica Plain. Stewart's presentation is titled "The ANRC, Is it Armenian Enough?"

This St. James Men's Club dinner meeting will begin with a social hour and *mezza* at 6:15 p.m. and dinner at 7 p.m. *Mezza* and *Losh Kebab* and *Kheyra* Dinner \$17/person. Ladies are invited. The program will take place at Charles Mosesian Cultural and Youth Center - Keljik Hall, 465 Mt. Auburn St.



Stewart R. Goff

OBITUARY

Albert Aghazarian

Towering Figure in Jerusalem, West Bank

JERUSALEM – Birzeit University in the West Bank mourns the death of historian, politician, and storyteller Albert Aghazarian, a professor of history and former director of the university's Public Relations Office, who passed away on January 30.

Aghazarian was a fluent speaker of Arabic, English, French, Armenian, Hebrew, Turkish, and some Spanish. He graduated from Birzeit College in 1970 and took on the leadership of

issued by Israel, placing institutions of higher education under the command of the Israeli military governor. Aghazarian stood up against this decision. He defended the right of academic freedom that includes the right of international academics to obtain working visas in Palestine. Aghazarian, with the university's team under the guidance of the late Gabi Baramki, played a significant role in efforts to uplift the educational system under occupation, defying curfews and closures imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities.

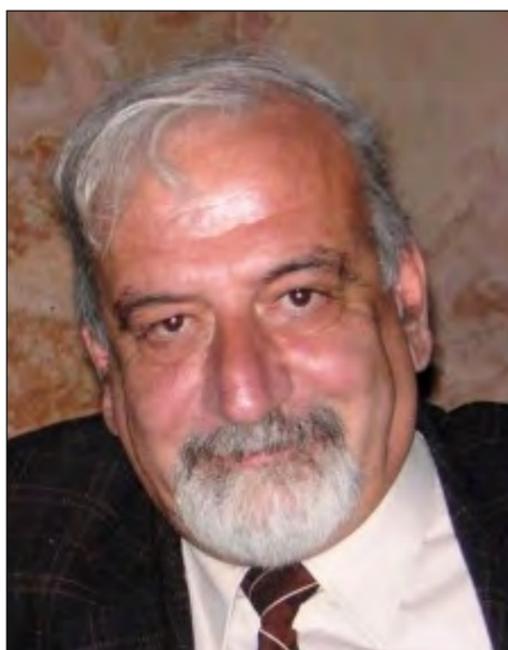
Knowing the history of every corner in Jerusalem, Aghazarian also led international tourists on tours through the city, telling its stories, teaching them about its significance, and reinforcing the national identity and culture of Palestinians.

Aghazarian was an active student at Birzeit University before he went on to earn a BA in political science at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1972 and obtain his master's degree in Arab and Islamic studies at Georgetown University. In 1979, upon his return from Washington, D.C., he joined Birzeit University as a lecturer in cultural studies and was soon assigned director of public relations.

Aghazarian was awarded a medal by King Albert II of Belgium, taking his place among the 50 highly influential people honored by the king. After his retirement from the university,

Aghazarian conducted research, delivered lectures, and provided simultaneous translation for conferences, symposiums, and high-level political meetings.

With charisma, a solid understanding of the importance of communication, and his ability to deliver effectively relevant information and messages, Aghazarian has contributed greatly to the evolution of Birzeit University. His readiness to share his vast knowledge and witty sense of humor will be missed greatly.



the university's Public Relations Office in 1979, holding this position until 2002.

Aghazarian stood out when he coordinated the Palestinian delegation's media efforts at the 1991 Madrid Conference alongside Dr. Hanan Ashrawi. Always ready to address and face great challenges, especially at Birzeit University, he defended the Palestinian cause and Palestinians' rights also at international conferences and on trips around the world.

When in 1980 Military Order 854 had been

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- **Alin K. Gregorian** (Editor, *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*)
- **Stephen Kurkjian** (Pulitzer Prize winner, *Boston Globe*, and NAASR Board Member)

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COMMUNITY NEWS

ANI Exhibit Opens at Armenia's Ministry of Defense

EXHIBIT, from page 6

The 27-panel exhibit documents the tremendous importance of the US humanitarian intervention during the most difficult years in the life of the newly-formed Armenian state. Based

breadth of measures taken by US military personnel to stabilize the humanitarian crisis in Armenia, and especially the caretaking of the most vulnerable part of the population through hospitals, orphanages, food distribution points,

Army Medical Corps," the exhibit reveals how in 1919, US military personnel and civilian aid workers cared for tens of thousands of children. As Dr. Davenport reported: "At the present time we are furnishing food and medical relief to 75,000 children daily, this work being done through the medium of orphanages, orphanage hospitals, soup kitchens, cocoa kitchens, milk stations, bread distributing points, orphanage infirmaries, and public dispensaries."

The Davenport collection of photographs not only documents the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Armenia, but also the measurable difference American relief efforts made in the span of only a few months. The exhibit displays official and personal records related to Davenport's activities in Armenia, which he subsequently reported in *The Military Surgeon* journal. With 103 photographs, 3 maps, 14 documents, and several newspaper articles, the exhibit pictorially reconstructs the conditions that US military personnel witnessed in Armenia.

The digital version of the ANI exhibit is available on online and free to download from the ANI website where five other exhibits may be viewed. Designed for instructional purposes, the exhibits explain several aspects of the Armenian Genocide that were well documented photographically.

* The United States Military in the First Republic of Armenia digital exhibit

* American Relief in the First Republic of Armenia 1918-1920 (about the role of the YMCA)

* Iconic Images of the Armenian Genocide (also available as a slideshow)

* The First Deportation: The German Railroad, The American Hospital, and the Armenian Genocide

* The First Refuge and the Last Defense: The Armenian Church, Echmiadzin, and the Armenian Genocide

* Witness to the Armenian Genocide: Photographs by the Perpetrators' German and Austro-Hungarian Allies

* Survivors of the Armenian Genocide



Dr. Walter P. Davenport with local Armenian medical staff

upon the photographic collection of an American medical officer, Dr. Walter P. Davenport, the exhibit reveals the depth and

and other facilities.

Subtitled "The American Relief Administration and Walter Davenport of the US

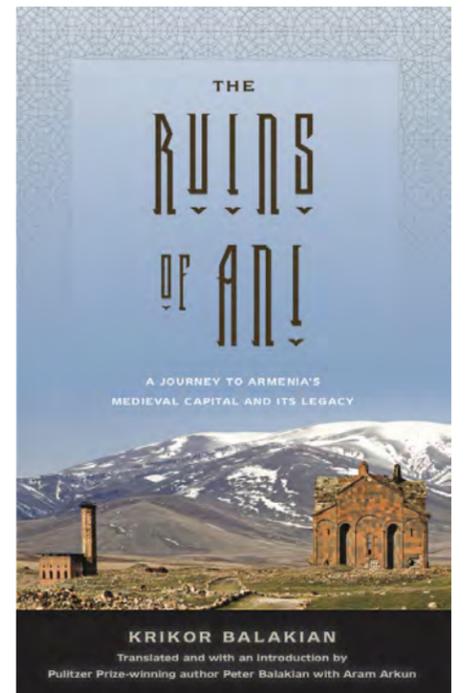
Peter Balakian, Aram Arkun to Present 'The Ruins of Ani: From Sacred Landscape to Political Soil'

ANI, from page 1

15th century, Ani was virtually abandoned, its stunning buildings left to crumble. Yet its ruins have remained a symbol of cultural accomplishment that looms large in the Armenian imagination.

Today, Ani is a popular tourist site in Turkey, but the city has been falsified in its presentation by the Turkish government in order to erase Armenian history in the wake of the Armenian Genocide. Krikor Balakian's *The Ruins of Ani*, first published in Armenian in 1910 as *Nkaragrut'iw n Anii aweraknerun* and now available in English, is a unique combination of history, art criticism and travel memoir. This timely publication and program raise important questions about the preservation of major historic monuments in the face of post atrocity campaigns of cultural erasure. Balakian and Arkun served as editor and translator, respectively, of *The Ruins of Ani* (Rutgers Univ. Press).

Dr. Peter Balakian is the Donald M. and Constance H. Rebar Professor of the Humanities in the department of English at Colgate University in Hamilton, NY. He is the author of many books, including *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's*



Response, winner of the Raphael Lemkin Prize; *Black Dog of Fate*, winner of the PEN/Albrand Award for Memoir; and *Ozone Journal*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.

Aram Arkun is the executive director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada and assistant editor at the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*. He is the author of numerous academic articles and book chapters and translations, and has served as Director of the Zohrab Center in New York City and as editor of *Ararat* quarterly.

For more information about this program, contact NAASR at hq@naasr.org or the Tekeyan Cultural Association at tcadirector@aol.com.

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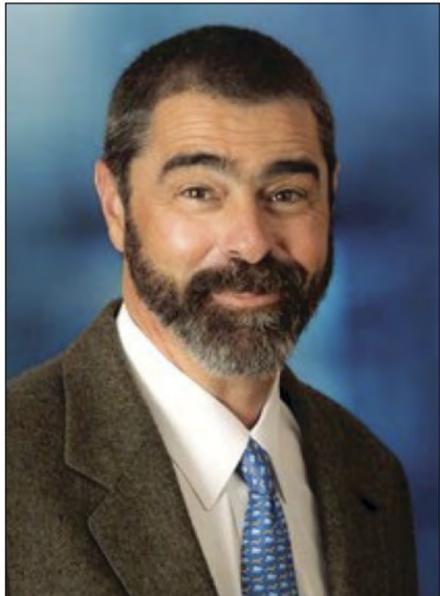
COMMUNITY NEWS

Good Intentions Collide When Renewable Energy Efforts Run Afoul of Wildlife Conservation

By Kelcie Grega

LAS VEGAS (*Las Vegas Weekly*) — The Trump administration is on track this year to approve a number of large-scale renewable energy projects on public lands, some of which are proposed for Nevada.

The state has already been a leader in renewable energy efforts, with Gov. Steve Sisolak signing a bill in 2019 to more than double the



Mark Boyadjian of Arevia

amount of renewable energy provided by Nevada's electric companies. But there's growing concern among Nevada environmental proponents about the impact some of the new developments will have on public lands, particularly in Southern Nevada.

As the scramble to find renewable alterna-

tives to fossil fuels peaks, the path toward renewable energy can be problematic in its own right. Lithium, for example, is crucial in batteries for its ability to store large amounts of energy when wind or sunshine isn't readily available. But the process of cultivating that rare metal can wreak havoc on ecosystems and threaten rare species, says Patrick Donnelly, state director of the Center for Biological Diversity.

The issue came up regarding the Silver Peak Range in Esmeralda County, where wildlife conservation groups feared a proposed lithium mining pit would decimate the world's only population of Tiehm's buckwheat, a small perennial wildflower. A proposed geothermal plant in Dixie Valley was also of concern because of its proximity to a rare Nevada species known as the Dixie Valley toad.

"The Dixie Valley toad is an utterly unique species, and its habitat is unique in the Dixie Valley springs," Donnelly said. "There are many places to develop geothermal energy that don't have [threatened species]. So why should we choose to prioritize developments next to its habitat?"

Ormat Technologies, the company that plans to build the geothermal energy plant, has proposed mitigation strategies to protect the toad's habitat. But Donnelly says he's wary of any development nearby. When it comes to renewable energy, he says, "there's no such thing as a free lunch," referring to one of ecologist Barry Commoner's four laws of ecology.

"Every energy source we utilize is going to have some cost," Donnelly says. "It's about understanding these costs ahead of time and making calculated decisions."

Can renewable energy projects and wildlife coexist?

A massive solar energy project proposed 30 miles north of Las Vegas has caused some division between renewable energy proponents and wildlife conservation groups. If approved, the Gemini Solar Project would generate 690 megawatts of electricity across 7,100 acres in

the Mojave Desert just south of the Moapa River Indian Reservation. It would send power to cities in Nevada, Arizona and California, making it the largest solar array in the nation.

Mark Boyadjian, a managing partner at Arevia Power, the developer behind the project, says large-scale renewable energy projects are key in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, leading causes of wildlife habitat destruction.

"Renewable energy developers play a key role in combating climate change while also developing projects in a way that preserves as much habitat as possible," he says.

Kevin Emmerich, co-founder of the Basin and Range Watch, has been critical of the Gemini Solar Project from the beginning, arguing that it would damage the desert tortoise population and threaten rare desert plants that inhabit the 11-square-mile site.

Boyadjian says his team at Arevia Power analyzed more than a dozen potential sites before concluding that Gemini's proposed location is among the best in the state because of its proximity to existing infrastructure and Las Vegas' population.

"Avoiding development on Southern Nevada public lands and land completely free of wildlife habitat would make it [virtually impossible] for the region to develop cleaner sources of energy," he says.

He added that developers considered the desert tortoise population while designing the project and plan to implement "innovative measures" that will both minimize the impact to the tortoises and "provide valuable information about the coexistence of solar energy projects and desert tortoises."

One mitigation proposal involves a "mowing method" during construction, with vegetation being mowed in development areas rather than completely removed through more traditional methods such as disking and compacting.

Such "coexistence" happened on a much smaller scale when Bombard Electric con-

structed a solar plant in Pahrump. Developers implemented a partial reintroduction of desert tortoises on the project site.

But Emmerich says the mitigation proposal will not only be ineffective, but harmful to the wildlife in the area, since mowing would still dramatically alter the tortoises' habitat. He says reintroducing desert tortoises disorients them, making them more vulnerable to exposure and predators.

"With solar energy, you open a Pandora's box of issues," he says. "There are good-intentioned people who want to see solar energy and habitat coexist in the same area. All that's going to do is create another set of issues."

But some desert tortoise advocates, like Kobbe Shaw of the Nevada-based nonprofit Tortoise Group, take a more nuanced perspective. Shaw says that while any massive development would affect the tortoise population, from a conservation standpoint, renewable energy should be looked at more holistically, and what's better for the greater good should be weighed.

Emmerich emphasizes that he's not opposed to solar energy, but finds large-scale projects to be problematic, and would prefer to see more rooftop and community solar options.

"Large-scale solar is a sloppy way to do it," he says. "It takes up and alters habitat, destroys archaeology and bums people out."

Donnelly, meanwhile, says he finds it more useful to prioritize his efforts elsewhere toward areas like Dixie Valley or the Silver Peak Range, where a recent lawsuit by the Center led to an agreement by an Australian lithium mining company to temporarily protect the Tiehm's buckwheat.

Part of the equation involves educating people to reduce electricity consumption, he added. "We use electricity as if it were not a limited resource," he says. "We have a nearly unlimited demand juxtaposed with limited resources capable of producing limited supply. Transitioning to a less energy-intensive lifestyle may need to be part of our response to climate change."

Sen. Collins Challenger Sara Gideon Raises \$3.5 million in Fourth Quarter of 2019

By Max Greenwood

AUGUSTA, Maine (*The Hill*) — Maine state House Speaker Sara Gideon (D) on Tuesday, January 28, announced that she raised \$3.5 million in the fourth quarter of 2019 in her bid to oust Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), a sum that puts her among the top Democratic Senate fundraisers.

The multimillion fundraising haul was powered by nearly 4,200 Maine residents, her campaign said, adding that 95 percent of the individual donations to Gideon's Senate bid were under \$100.

Year-end campaign finance reports for 2019 aren't due to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) until Jan. 31, so it's unclear how much of Gideon's \$3.5 million haul came from out-of-state donors, though it's expected to be a substantial amount. Democrats across the country are eager to unseat Collins, especially after her 2018 vote to confirm Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, and have poured money into Maine to oppose her.

Still, Gideon will have to make it through a primary in June. She faces challenges from a handful of Democrats, including Betsy Sweet, who unsuccessfully sought her party's nomination for governor in 2018.

Gideon has largely emerged as the front-runner in the primary, out-raising her Democratic opponents and picking up several key endorsements, including one



Sara Gideon

from Planned Parenthood.

But Collins is expected to put up a stiff challenge in this year's general election. The four-term senator has won reelection by ever-increasing margins over the years and is a known political brand in Maine. Polling in the Senate race has been sparse, though surveys suggest a close race.

An October poll from the left-leaning firm Public Policy Polling showed Collins narrowly trailing a generic Democratic candidate by only 3 points.

The Cook Political Report ranks the race as a toss-up.

Gideon is the daughter of a second-generation Armenian. Her father is Indian.

Sheriff Koutoujian Welcomes Chief Justices to Middlesex House of Correction for Listening Session

BILLERICA, Mass. — Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian recently welcomed Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants and Trial Court Chief Justice Paula M. Carey for a listening session with individuals currently incarcerated at the Middlesex Jail and House of Correction.

The event, held Wednesday, January, 22, was organized by the Massachusetts Trial Court in conjunction with the Middlesex Sheriff's Office. This is part of a continuing effort by the Trial Court to gather feedback from a diverse range of court users to better understand how the court can best serve the people of the Commonwealth.

The session at the Middlesex Jail and House of Correction allowed a half-dozen incarcerated individuals to voice constructive thoughts and concerns to judicial leaders, pose general questions about processes, and discuss community-based resources. The feedback gathered will be reviewed along with that gathered during other listening sessions to identify ways to improve communications and services.

"It was an honor to welcome Chief Justice Gants,

Chief Justice Carey and all those who participated in the listening session," said Koutoujian. "This was an unprecedented opportunity for those in my custody to ask questions and provide thoughtful input that will help countless individuals across the Commonwealth as they interact with the court and criminal justice systems."

"This was an opportunity to hear directly from incarcerated individuals about their experiences and their needs and concerns as they plan to return to their communities so we can better help them to navigate a successful transition," said Chief Justice Gants.

"Our listening sessions at correctional facilities is part of a larger effort by the Judiciary to hear from a wide range of court users learn about their court experiences. These sessions help us better meet the needs of the people we serve," said Chief Justice Carey.

In addition to Chief Justices Gants and Carey, other participants included Judge Kathe M. Tuttmann, as well as probation and court security officials.



Judge Kathe M. Tuttmann (from left), Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants, Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian and Trial Court Chief Justice Paula M. Carey listen to an incarcerated individual speak during a recent court listening session at the Middlesex Jail & House of Correction.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Khachigian Reflects On Working Behind the Scenes With President Reagan

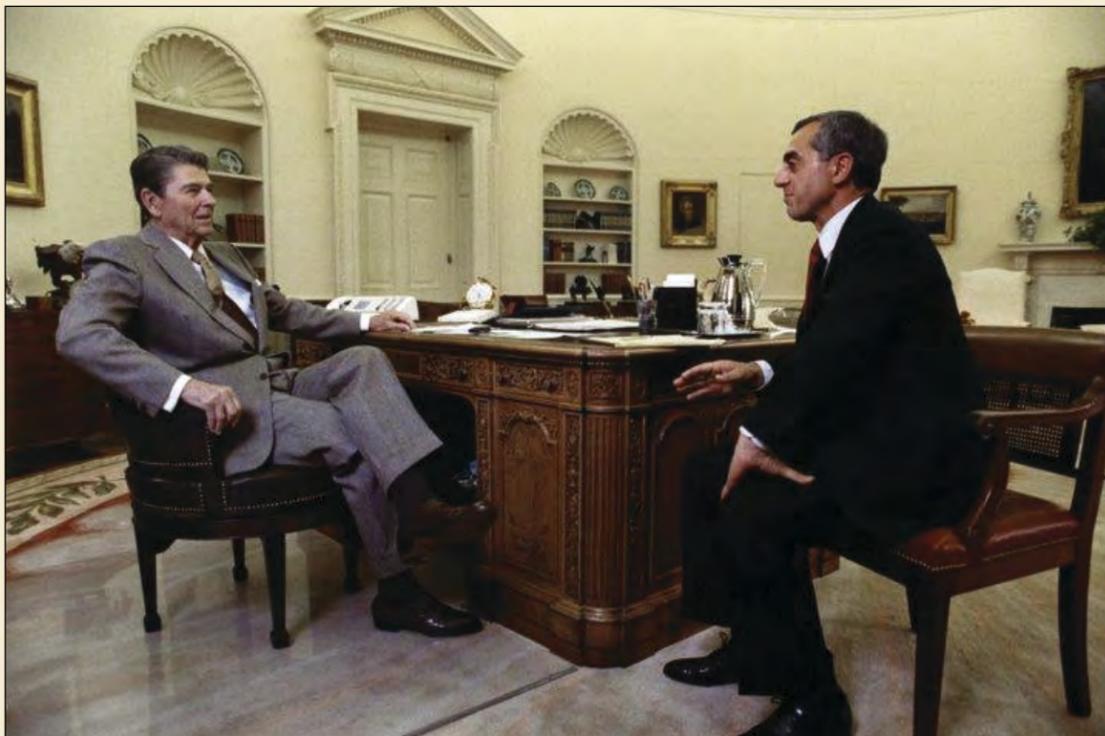
By Kevork Keushkerian

PASADENA, Calif. – The Men's Forum of St. Gregory Armenian Apostolic Church in Pasadena had invited presidential speech writer Ken Khachigian as its guest speaker on Thursday, January 30. Father Sarkis Petoyan blessed the food, then a buffet dinner was served before Khachigian was invited to the podium.

There were around 300 people in the audience, among whom were notable people, such as Michael Antonovich, the former LA County Supervisor, Randy Swan, the curator of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Museum and his wife Dana, political activist Greg Kahwajian, and publishers/editors Harout Sassounian and Osheen Keshishian.

The Men's Forum Chairman Berj Gourdikian presented a biographical sketch of Ken Khachigian and then invited Osheen Keshishian to narrate a few cordial encounters with Khachigian over the years that he had known him.

Before Khachigian's lecture, he was presented with a



With President Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office

commendation by Kathryn Barger, LA County District 5 Supervisor, and a US flag that had flown over the Capital for a full day by House Minority leader Kevin McCarthy. He was also presented with a lifetime achievement award by the Men's Forum.

Khachigian's topic was titled "Behind the Scenes with President Reagan," and was presented with a slide show. First and foremost, Khachigian said that he was not a speech writer, rather a speech collaborator, as the drafts that he presented to the president were edited before a final draft was prepared.

He said that his involvement with politics and political campaigns had started with a letter sent to Presidential candidate Richard Nixon in 1967, requesting to volunteer in his campaign, and the rest is history. His experience working for Nixon then led to his career work in nine presi-

dential campaigns. He served three presidents and was instrumental in guiding George Deukmejian to victory as governor of the state of California.

One of Khachigian's most memorable achievements, as a chief speech writer, senior political advisor, and special consultant to President Reagan, was the "Holocaust Proclamation," signed by the President on April 22, 1981. It says, "Like the Genocide of the Armenians before it, and the Genocide of the Cambodians which followed it – and the too many other such persecutions of too many other people – the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten."

Khachigian admitted that he had cleared this speech with two senior members of the National Security Agency before presenting it to Reagan. Such measures were necessary, he noted, to make sure that there were no international political repercussions harmful to the United States.

In the course of his professional work with President Reagan, Khachigian was a frequent visitor of Camp David. He also once visited the president's Santa Barbara ranch, which President Reagan used for rest and relaxation.

During the question-and-answer session that followed the lecture, Khachigian anticipated one question raised by a member of the audience and answered right away, saying, no, I was not the author of the famous line "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall."



Aboard Air Force 1 with President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan

Hamazaryan, Segawa Fight to Controversial 'ShoBox' Draw

By Keith Idec

SHREVEPORT, La. (Boxing Scene) – Another "ShoBox" appearance, another controversial result for Zhora Hamazaryan.

The Armenian boxer secured a split draw with Sulaiman Segawa on Friday, January 31 in what was a difficult fight for Hamazaryan against an opponent who took their eight-round on less than one week's notice. Judge Keith Thibadeaux scored six of the eight rounds for Segawa (78-74), but Todd Singletary scored the action for Hamazaryan (77-75) and Micky Lofton had it even (76-76).

Their draw opened Showtime's "ShoBox: The New Generation" telecast from Hirsch Coliseum in Shreveport. It was the second straight "ShoBox" draw for Hamazaryan (9-1-2, 6 KOs), who had difficulty dealing with the Ugandan-born Segawa's straight left hand.

A straight left by Segawa got Hamazaryan's attention very early in the eighth round. By then, Segawa (13-2-1, 4 KOs) seemed to be on his way to scoring an upset.

Segawa's left-right combination rocked Hamazaryan 15 seconds into the seventh round. A straight left by Segawa punctuated a dominant round for him just before the bell sounded to end the seventh.

A right hand by Hamazaryan snapped back



Zhora Hamazaryan and Sulaiman Segawa

Segawa's head 1:15 into the sixth round. Hamazaryan oddly began gesturing to the crowd toward the end of the sixth round, which limited his punch output.

Hamazaryan went down 19 seconds into the fifth round, but referee Mark Nelson ruled that it was the result of a slip. Segawa's straight left

hand stopped Hamazaryan in his tracks just after the midway mark of the fifth.

A right hook by Segawa landed flush later in the fifth round. Hamazaryan's right hand backed up Segawa just before the fifth round ended.

Hamazaryan landed two straight right hands within a 10-second span in the final minute of

the fourth round. Segawa was able to sneak in a left uppercut several seconds later.

Segawa landed several left hands as Hamazaryan pressed forward in the third round.

Hamazaryan's counter left connected as Segawa came in with his hands down 30 seconds into the second round. A straight right by Hamazaryan knocked Segawa off balance with just under a minute to go in the second.

A stiff jab by Hamazaryan and then a right hand backed Segawa into the ropes in the final 30 seconds of the second round.

Segawa landed a right hand from a far distance 1:20 into the opening round. Segawa also caught Hamazaryan with a left-right combination with just under a minute remaining in the first round and a three-punch combination later in the first.

Before Friday night, Hamazaryan hadn't fought in the 16 months since settling for an eight-round split draw with Thomas Mattice in September 2018. Hamazaryan's immediate rematch with Mattice took place just months following his highly controversial, split-decision defeat to Mattice in an eight-round bout.

Both Hamazaryan-Mattice matches were televised as part of the "ShoBox" series.

Segawa took this fight on four days' notice because Hamazaryan's original opponent, Jerry Perez, withdrew. The contract weight for this fight was moved up from 130 to 137 pounds to accommodate Segawa taking it on such short notice.

Arts & Living

Celebrating 35 Years of Immersive Lessons in Armenian in Venice

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN – The new year, 2020, will mark the 35th year that Venice, the city of doges, canals, bridges, masks and renowned blown glass, will breathe with Armenian language and culture in August. This will happen again thanks to the Summer Intensive Course of Armenian Language and Culture, organized by the Cultural Association Padus-Araxes of Venice.

The association, founded in 1987 as a charitable non-profit organization for preserving Armenian language, notably its Western form, bears the Latin names of two main rivers of Italy (Po) and Armenia (Arax). Previously it worked under the auspices of the Eurasian Department of the Ca' Foscari University in Venice, and now independently. It was established by Archbishop Levon Zekiyian, the founder of the Armenian Studies Chair of Ca' Foscari University, an academician, Armenologist, and philosopher, leader of the Catholic Armenians of Turkey and Papal representative of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice.

Mgr. Levon Zekiyian considers Mkhitar Sebastatsi, “a greatness of universal standard” to be the true founder and inspirer of this summer course. The Mekhitarist Congregation of Venice and Moorat Raphael College of Venice (Collegio Armeno) are no longer teaching; however, this intensive summer course continues the Mekhitarists' message of passing the Armenian spirit and culture to following generations.

The ideology behind this unique course first and foremost is the transfer of Western Armenian language and culture to the new generations of Diaspora Armenians who have often lost their national language. However, the number of non-Armenians attending the course is also not negligible; in fact, some have become academic Armenologists.

For 34 years, from 1986 to 2009, more than 1,400 participants from 36 different countries, of 40 different nationalities, over three quarters of whom were of Armenian descent, have attended this Venetian Course.

The course is divided into four levels, from absolute beginners to native-speakers. The three-week course offers 65 classes which are held in the historical building of the Patriarchate of Venice, where participants receive their basic knowledge of Armenian language, history and culture, or expand and strengthen what they already know.

Many ask: Why go to Venice in order to study Armenian? No one goes to, let us say, Finland, for studying, let us say, Farsi. But we should bear in mind that the Venetian course teaches the main language of the Diaspora – Western Armenian. Moreover, Venice is geographically convenient, situated in the heart of Europe, being the European city possessing the most Armenian historical traces and a continuous Armenian presence.

see VENICE, page 16



Maurice Soudjian & Mariette Soudjian

‘Charles’ Arrives in New York with Timeless Music

NEW YORK— Following its debut performances in Los Angeles, a bio-musical on legendary world singer Charles Aznavour will mark its New York City presentation on Sunday, March 1, at Symphony Space, in an event hosted by the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York.

“Charles” fuses the extraordinary life story of Aznavour with the live performances of his most famous songs, from *La Boheme* to *Hier Encore* to *Les Deux Guitares*. The production, written and directed by Taleen Babayan, highlights the professional and personal challenges of the acclaimed and beloved entertainer throughout his storied career, while showcasing the musical talents of Los Angeles-based performers Maurice Soudjian, Bernard C. Bayer, Mariette Soudjian, Harout Soghomonian and Levon Ghanimian.



Bernard C. Bayer

“Charles” is based on Aznavour’s two autobiographies that comes to life on stage and recounts the influence his rich heritage had on him as he grew up in Paris, France, the son of Armenian Genocide survivors. His song dedicated to the 1.5 million martyrs, *Ils Sont Tombes*, is one

of the 15 compositions that are part of the production.

Austrian-born pianist and actor Bernard C. Bayer listened to Aznavour with his father as a youngster and was enthusiastic to “embody him and explore his life, artistry and music more in depth.”

“During our previous performances at The Hotel Café and El Portal Theatre, I see CHARLES, page 15



(l-r) Harout Soghomonian, Levon Ghanimian, Maurice Soudjian, Mariette Soudjian, Taleen Babayan & Bernard C. Bayer

Anahid Literary Award Celebration At Columbia University on March 5

NEW YORK – Poet Susan Barba, the recent Anahid Literary Award winner, will be honored at the Anahid Literary Awards celebration on Thursday, March 5, at 6:30 p.m., at Columbia University. The award is given by the Armenian Center.

Barba was the 2018 recipient of the award for her book of poems, *Fair Sun*. The prize is given to the best literary work in English by a writer of Armenian descent, and is made possible by a generous gift from an anonymous donor.

Barba was born in Morristown, N.J. and educated at Dartmouth College. She earned an MFA from Boston University, and a PhD in comparative literature from Harvard University. Her first book of poems, *Fair Sun*, was published in 2017 by David R. Godine Publishers. She is also a co-editor of *I Want to Live: Poems of Shushanik Kurghinian* (2005). Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Yale Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Raritan* and other journals, and her translations



Susan Barba

from Armenian have appeared in *Words Without Borders* and *Ararat*. She is a senior editor for the *New York Review Books*.

“The Anahid Award has been an occasion for the Armenian community to be self-aware, to take note of the works of literature that are being written now, to celebrate those works, and to affirm the horizons they open up for each writer and for the broader Armenian community and culture,” said Peter Balakian, the chair of the committee, who will serve as the evening’s master of ceremonies. The Anahid Award was founded in 1988 to honor emerging Armenian-American writers. The prize is given by the Armenian Center at Columbia University and comes with an award of \$5,000. Since its founding, there have been more than a dozen winners in poetry, fiction, playwrighting, and screenwriting, including Leslie Ayvazian, Peter Balakian, Eric Bogosian, Atom Egoyan, Diana Der Hovanesian, Aris Janigian, Micheline Aharonian Marcom, Arthur Nersesian, and Patricia Sarrafian Ward.

The celebration will be held at the Faculty House, Presidential Rooms 2 and 3, located at 64 Morningside Drive on Columbia University’s campus. A reception will follow the program. This event is free and open to the public.

RSVPs should be directed to Dr. Khatchig Mouradian, lecturer in Armenian Studies, at km3253@columbia.edu.



ARTS & LIVING

On New Album Wartanian's Experiment Goes the Distance

By Taleen Babayan

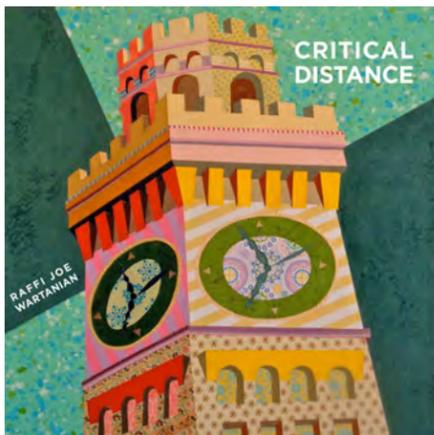
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

NEW YORK — From the high plains of Anatolia to the smoky mountains of Appalachia, Raffi Joe Wartanian's second album, "Critical Distance," captures the spirit of these two symbolic regions — and all the rich forces of nature in between.

The independent artist's layered and distinct life experiences contributed to the uniqueness of Wartanian's instrumental album that features him playing the oud, mandolin and guitar, tying together fragments from memorable chapters, such as a cross-country trek across the United States to bus rides through Western Armenia to volunteering on a farm in Portugal.

While many music producers assert that a second album is harder than the first, Wartanian had no trouble coming up with ideas for his follow-up to "Pushkin Street," accumulating a "big bank of ideas" during his travels that ultimately became a part of "Critical Distance." He drew upon the diverse locales he spent time in, serving the homeland, digging deep into his ancestral roots, spending time with his family in Lebanon and living with gypsy jazz musicians in San Francisco.

"The album features various styles, such as blues, Armenian, tango, bluegrass and rock," said Wartanian, regarding the 10 original compositions. "I think it has all that because of the



distance my family traveled, which ties into this idea of migration and cultural interactions that arose from that."

A native of Baltimore, Md., Wartanian hails from a musically-inclined family, particularly his aunt, who is a classical pianist. He grew up hearing her tackle ambitious pieces and followed in the footsteps of his siblings when they too began taking piano lessons at a young age. Raffi, however, realized that he preferred to learn by ear, earning warm encouragement from his grandparents.

"My grandfather lived with us and whenever I practiced he would sit and listen and clap," said Wartanian. "It was a way for us to bond."

In high school he switched to guitar and continued to learn by ear training and tablature. Wartanian began to transcribe music and experimented with all kinds of musical genres, from joining a funk band to playing jazz and bluegrass, a genre well-known to Baltimore.

"Every step I've taken, I always look at the music around me," said Wartanian, who also reflects on the past by exploring, honoring and transcribing preceding musicians, including John Berberian's music from the late 1960s, to which he refers as "psychedelic rock meets Armenian kef music."

The compositions on "Critical Distance," ranging from *Blues in O* to *A Whisper in the Desert* to *El Molino Viejo*, were impacted by all the stages of the musician's growth and the destinations he voyaged to, opening himself up to the people, the cultures and the artistic com-

munities. His album cover art is a testament to the hybrid of influences — a Baltimore-based painter of Greek descent, Minás Konsolas, who painted the Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower, an icon in the city. All of it came together, however, quite organically.

"I composed the music without an agenda or thematic purpose," said Wartanian. "Only afterwards did I reflect and see where it all emerged from."

Nature is one motif that's prevalent in "Critical Distance" and rooted in Wartanian's appreciation of the outdoors, from camping in the San Gabriel mountains to walking across Spain's historic Camino de Santiago. The peacefulness and solitude gave him the space to create and compose novel compositions.

"My road trips in California particularly reminded me of biking across the country, with the scenery of deserts, mountains and the hypnotic conversations with nature," he said. "Nature has an endless supply of lessons to teach us when we are willing to listen."

The core of his influences, however, lies in being Armenian, an element that is "inextricable" from Wartanian's art and creativity.

"After living in Armenia, I accepted that my culture is naturally a part of what I do and something I'm always thinking about," said Wartanian. "It's always there, no matter how conscious or unconscious, by virtue of the way I was raised."

Specifically within the album, there are tracks inspired by the Armenian music Wartanian studied that he tried to put into conversation with different cultural idioms, such as a blues on the oud played with Armenian inflections.

"This music is like a melting pot and Armenian music is one ingredient as well as Greek," said Wartanian. "I like to describe it as Armenian folk meets Appalachian bluegrass in a Brooklyn tango bar."

The guitar-like, pear-shaped *oud* has a significant presence on the album. Wartanian has been playing the traditional Armenian instrument since he bought his first one in Lebanon in 2009 and subsequently studied in the homeland. His technique, however, greatly improved under the guidance of maestro musician Ara Dinkjian.

"Ara is fabulous and so generous with his time and knowledge," said Wartanian. "He promotes a healthy and inspiring method for his students."

During their sessions, Wartanian learned pieces by Sayat Nova as well as Ottoman Armenian composers and classical Ottoman music. They dedicated ample time to listen and study old recordings and value their historic legacy.

"As a musician, composer and multi-instrumentalist, Raffi has understood that the most valuable contribution an artist can offer his cul-



Raffi Joe Wartanian

ture is not in trying to recreate something of the past, but rather to offer his own unique, and thus new impression of his heritage," said Dinkjian. "With his new recording, 'Critical Distance,' Raffi composes and performs with an obvious knowledge of both Armenian and American music, but in an absolutely fresh way."

Focusing more on instrumental and acoustic music, a "complete stylistic departure" from his first album that featured original lyrics, Wartanian enlisted the musical prowess of bassist Jake K. Leckie and Grammy-award winning percussionist M.B. Gordy on bass. While he had many months to work on "Pushkin Street," he only had two days in a Los Angeles recording studio to complete the 40-minute album.

"I've never worked in an environment as fast-paced, so I knew I had to bring my 'A' game with Jake and M.B.," said Raffi, recalling that it was Dinkjian who advised him to surround himself with musicians more skilled than himself.

"Raffi has always been a great storyteller and musician," said Leckie. "His music to me is very narrative because even though the music is instrumental, I find myself visualizing the places he has traveled when I listen, making it universal as anyone can interpret it despite what language they speak."

The title of the album comes from writing, another passion of Raffi's, which he says is applicable to music.

"If we are writing personal pieces, we have to have a certain distance from it and share it with others so we can see it more objectively," said Wartanian, who recently completed the course-

work for an MFA in nonfiction writing at Columbia University where he currently teaches undergraduate writing.

Looking ahead, Wartanian plans to take his music from the studio out to the public by organizing a number of summer performances.

"Conventional music wisdom states that albums are dead and the goal is to release singles," said Wartanian. "Maybe I'm too young to say I'm old fashioned, but I don't get satisfaction from releasing just a single because it only reveals a part of what I want to say through music."

As he continues to forge uncharted paths with his music, Wartanian is appreciative of the positive response he received from his crowdfunding campaign that brought in 209 contributions from 15 different countries, along with support from AGBU Performing Arts Department, Creative Armenia and La Bella Strings, a string manufacturer in Newburgh, NY. He emphasizes the importance of "supporting people who create new cultural material because the arts are so underfunded and expensive."

"Armenian culture isn't a museum piece that lives in the past," said Wartanian. "It's alive today and there's always an opportunity to encourage and cultivate new frontiers while putting it in conversation with other traditions and societies."

"Critical Distance" is available on Spotify, Soundcloud, and YouTube. For a full list of streaming options and more information, listeners can visit <https://www.raffiJoeWartanian.com/music>.

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ARTS & LIVING

Chris McCormick Wrestles with Family History in Latest Book, *The Gimmicks*

By Mary Ann Grossmann

ST. PAUL, Minn. (*Dispatch-Pioneer Press*) – When Chris McCormick was growing up in California, his mother's large Armenian family passed down a story about how his great-grandfather hid in a tree and watched his father beheaded by Turks in western Armenia.

"This story was a very specific personal anecdote, the nitty-gritty of history," McCormick said, explaining one of the inspirations for his widely praised novel, *The Gimmicks*.

McCormick, an assistant professor of creative writing at Minnesota State University, Mankato, has successfully pulled off the feat of pairing the Armenian Genocide that began in 1915 with – wrestling.

If this sounds grim, it isn't. His story of two men who love the same woman, set against the backdrop of memories of the genocide, is sometimes funny and always heartfelt in its themes of brotherly love and love between men and women, injustice, personal and national identity and what happens to unrequited pain. His sprawling cast of characters range from old Armenians to traveling wrestlers who all have a "gimmick," a persona that dictates how they dress and behave in their roles as good guys or baddies.

The novel's intricate plot bounces from Kirovakan, Soviet Armenia, in 1973, to California during the Cold War, to the 1988 earthquake that devastated Armenia.

We follow Arvo and Ruben, cousins who are close as brothers. Arvo is huge, good-natured and joyous, a man to whom people are drawn. Ruben is a backgammon whiz, thin, serious, bespectacled, reminding people of a little old man. Both boys love Mina, a backgammon champ who's slated to compete in a major tournament. Before that happens, Arvo does something that will haunt the trio for years.



Author Chris McCormick

Ruben joins the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, a political extremist group that wants to punish Turks for massacring between 600,000 and 1.5 million Armenians in the last days of the Ottoman Empire. To this day, the government of Turkey denies the killings amounted to genocide and it is illegal in

Turkey to talk about what happened to Armenians during that era. (Last December the U.S. Congress recognized the massacres as genocide but President Trump refused to use that word, instead referring to the deaths as "mass atrocities.")

Arvo spends time in the Armenian Secret Army but revenge isn't his thing, and he heads to California where he becomes a wrestler known as The Brow Beater for his unibrow. He's managed by an old former wrestler, Terry "Angel Hair" Krill, a delightful character who narrates parts of the story after Mina seeks him out to learn what happened to the cousins.

This book didn't come easily for McCormick.

"I had to constantly revise, write and rewrite for five years to understand exactly what happens and then, the big revelation as storyteller, the introduction of Angel Hair as the reluctant narrator," he said. "His voice helps me create momentum and suspense."

McCormick graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in creative writing. His story collection, *Desert Boys*, won the 2017 American Library Association's Stonewall Book Award. While he was at the university he met poet/essayist Mairead Small Staid, who works at the Mankato public library. They will be married in May in Ann Arbor.

When McCormick finally began *The Gimmicks*, he knew he wanted to write about

the Genocide.

"I grew up with that legacy as a huge part of my understanding of lack of justice in the world, the cruelty," he says. "But I didn't want to write about the genocide directly. Even the best fiction about the topic has this explanatory tone, where they want to prove it happened. I wanted more exploratory than explanatory, allowing the reader to participate rather than just receive information. I set the story generations after the genocide to show the legacy of its denial. I wanted it to be tonally complex, raising the question of what happens to pain when it is denied for generations, when your pain is called fake."

And that's where the wrestling theme came to him: "I was thinking about how to get into the question of denied pain in a way that was not so direct and suddenly had the idea to put professional wrestling in the mix."

Here's how he explains linking genocide and wrestling:

"Turkey's denialism – its accusation that Armenians are lying about how our families died – is a fiction built to protect itself from a painful shame. It's that element of performance – creating a fiction to avoid dealing with the painful truth – that interested me, and I got to thinking about different kinds of pain and performance. It occurred to me that professional wrestling – which I'd grown up watching at the same time I was learning about my family's history with the genocide – could be connected to this question. Wrestling makes explicit what we're all doing, all the time: telling stories about ourselves. The performed pain in wrestling is played big for the back rows to see, and so it's easily dismissed as 'fake,' but I was curious about what happens to the real pain lying beneath the performance, the pain of slowly losing sight of the line between the fictions we put on and the reasons we start believing in those fictions in the first place."

Setting the novel two generations after the genocide allows McCormick to explore the characters' different feelings about the deaths of thousands.

"How much do we owe the past and how much to balance the future is the central tension in the book," he says.

Ruben does horrible things for the extremist group in his unrelenting need for revenge. Mina believes "Dwelling on history was a luxury reserved for people who didn't have present demands. ... She never said it, for fear of causing further pain, but she wanted – very badly wanted – to move forward already."

And big, friendly Arvo, McCormick says, "is a little bit cowardly" in his inability to choose between Ruben's and Mina's paths. "He sees both sides as having valuable points."

McCormick has had several events promoting *The Gimmicks*, and he enjoys seeing audiences that are split 50/50, some interested in the Armenian side of his story and some the wrestling side.

"The book feels like a mirror of my own split identity," he says, recalling his childhood. "It was surprising to people that I was Armenian. I looked like friends who never heard of Armenia. I had this entire culture at home, different food, language, music, but nobody had known that. As a kid I didn't know where I belonged. As I've gotten older I'm trying to think of it as less split and more duality of spirit."

McCormick frequently had to explain the Armenian Genocide to American friends, which isn't surprising given how little history of other countries is taught in American schools.

"I didn't learn about it in school myself," he admits. "It's interesting to think about what we do learn in history. What is framed as relevant and what irrelevant changes over time. To quantify which tragedies are more important than others is a crass and sad thing to do. The genocide was a huge news story in the U.S. when it was happening. It was the central story as President (Woodrow) Wilson began our life as international world leader in World War I. "Don't leave food on your plate because Armenians are starving" was a colloquialism."

McCormick tries not to be annoyed at people who don't know about the Armenian Genocide.

"To some degree it's not their fault. There is so much suffering it's not possible to expect people to know everything. I hope my book will lead some readers to at least understand what happened."

Recipe Corner

Guest Recipe

by Christine Vartanian Dalian



The Vintage Press Chocolate Walnut Tart



Created by Chef David Vartanian at the esteemed Vintage Press Restaurant in downtown Visalia, California, this tempting chocolate walnut tart is perfect for Valentine's Day, holidays or any special occasion.



CRUST:

1 egg
1/4 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 2/3 cups all-purpose flour
1/8 teaspoon salt
8 oz. unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

Caramel Filling:

1 cup heavy cream
1 1/2 cups walnut pieces
1 3/4 cups sugar
5 tablespoons cold sweet butter, cut into pieces
1/8 teaspoon salt

Chocolate Topping:

1 cup heavy cream
4 oz. bittersweet chocolate, broken into small pieces

PREPARATION

Crust: In a bowl, whisk together egg, sugar and vanilla; set aside. In a bowl of an electric mixer, combine flour and salt. Make a well in the center. Place butter pieces in well; pour egg mixture over it. Mix on low speed until dough comes together. Remove dough and divide in 2 pieces. Refrigerate for 45 minutes. Roll out 1 piece of dough to fit a 9" tart ring. Roll out the other piece of dough for the top of tart.

Topping: Heat cream in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat until it simmers. Remove from heat. Add chocolate and stir until melted. Let cool.

Filling: In a small saucepan, scald cream. Combine sugar with 1/2 cup water in a 3-quart saucepan. Stir to moisten all of sugar. Bring to a simmer, cook until syrup turns a medium amber color. Turn off heat; add cream in a steady stream. Cream will bubble and steam dramatically so be careful. Whisk sauce together; add walnut pieces. Add butter pieces and whisk together. Chill for 1 hour. Put walnut filling in tart ring. Fit and cut top piece onto tart. Seal edges with fingers. Bake at 350° for 25 minutes. Let cool. Glaze tart with chocolate topping.

Menus: <http://www.thevintagepress.com/menus.html>
<http://www.thevintagepress.com/index.html>



ARTS & LIVING

'Charles' Arrives in New York

CHARLES, from page 12

could feel the audience's love of Aznavour radiating towards me," said Bayer. "It's an honor to carry on his legacy."

Opening up Aznavour's music to a new generation, singer and actress Mariette Soudjian performs a Franco-English duet for *Take Me Away (Emmenez-Moi)* and *She*, while making a guest appearance as Edith Piaf, who was an early supporter of Aznavour, and singing her signature song, *La Vie En Rose*.

"This bio-musical is well-suited and enjoyable for all ages and backgrounds," said Harout Soghomonian, who plays the accordion and guitar. "Aznavour, like his groundbreaking music, was a far-reaching and memorable artist and we look forward to performing his music for the New York metro area this spring."

The live theatrical performance serves as an homage to the golden age of music while linking generations and cultures in a city Aznavour sought to conquer early on in his career.

"The mission of the Tekeyan Cultural Association since its founding almost 75 years ago is to champion the arts in our community and we continue to uphold this worthwhile mission by encouraging and preserving our culture

in the Diaspora and homeland," said Chair Hilda Hartounian. "We're thrilled to host this bio-musical performance on Charles Aznavour, who was an incredibly important figure around the world, and to welcome the Los Angeles-based performers to New York City in a unique production written and directed by Taleen Babayan, who is a legacy member of the Tekeyan Cultural Association."

"The Tekeyan Cultural Association was a part of my life before I was even born," said Taleen Babayan, whose grandfather Yervant Babayan served as principal of the TCA's Vahan Tekeyan School in Beirut, Lebanon and as chair of the organization for decades. "I'm sure my grandfather would be very proud of our collaboration here in the U.S., where TCA continues to be a strong cultural force in the community."

"Charles: A Bio-Musical on the Life and Songs of Charles Aznavour," will be performed at the Leonard Nimoy Thalia at Peter Norton Symphony Space, located at 2537 Broadway in New York City. For tickets visit www.symphonyspace.org/events or call Sheela at 201.218.6726. To view the trailer, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAMq9iRtKNI>.



(l-r) Levon Ghanimian, Harout Soghomonian, Maurice Soudjian & Bernard C. Bayer

THE TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
OF GREATER NEW YORK PRESENTS:

Charles

by Taleen Babayan

A bio-musical on the life and art of the legendary singer Charles Aznavour

SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2020

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AT PETER NORTON SYMPHONY SPACE
NEW YORK CITY

featuring:
Maurice Soudjian
Bernard C. Bayer

with:
Mariette Soudjian

music:
Harout Soghomonian

5:30 p.m.
2537 Broadway, New York, NY 10025
tickets: \$45
<https://www.symphonyspace.org/events>
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Text or call Sheela
201.218.6726

*PLEASE NOTE THIS PERFORMANCE IS IN ENGLISH



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present

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

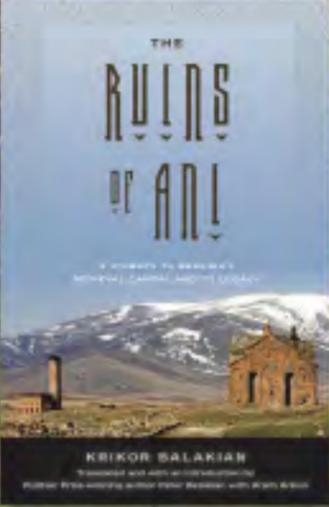
Presentation by Peter Balakian, editor, and Aram Arkun, translator, of *The Ruins of Ani* by Krikor Balakian

February 27

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

Admission free.

For more information, email tcadirector@aol.com or marc@naasr.org





ARTS & LIVING

Celebrating 35 Years of Armenian Lessons in Venice

VENICE, from page 12

The Founder of the Course

The Venice Intensive Summer Course of Armenian Language and Culture is one of the few institutions in the Armenian Diaspora today that, in its mission and commitment, is comparable to the Goethe-Institute in promoting the study of the German language abroad and encouraging international cultural exchange and relations.

However, unlike the Goethe-Institute, the Venetian course is not supported by any governmental agency and does not have branches in different countries; its teaching staff and participants become a kind of missionaries of the course in their own countries.

Many students come back again and again to strengthen what they have already achieved and to live in a miraculous place such as Venice.

Zekiyani's charisma is no less important. Besides carrying on this difficult organizational work on his shoulders already for 35 years, he manages to produce works in six languages (his scholarly interests include Armenian studies, particularly literature, philology, history, identity, as well as philosophical and theological issues) and participating in international conferences and in almost every Armenian event in Italy (and not only). And every August, his burden increases, as his efforts to improve the course year after year are often compounded by far-reaching educational and sometimes domestic concerns. But Zekiyani succeeds in finding the best solution for every issue. There is always something interesting that he recounts; one always learns something useful from him, as he often lectures especially on the aspects of Armenian identity, an important subject for the Diaspora (and not only), as any Diasporan Armenian sooner or later poses the question: "Who am I?"

The Teachers

Monsignor Zekiyani and many regular attendees attribute a big portion of the course's success to the teaching staff. Over the past 20 years, the total number of teachers has been around 60 (15 of whom were there only for one year), but in recent years there has been a main core of teaching staff.

Teacher Bared Manok from France, a native of Istanbul, a specialist in Eastern languages, has been teaching in the program for 33 years. Manok conducts classes in Western Armenian, and, when appropriate, also utilizes French, Italian, Turkish, or English for expanded explanations.

Raffi Setian from the US, a veteran teacher of English with several master's degrees and a broad experience in teaching in Europe, Asia, and Africa, is also a poet and translator, and teaches Diasporan-Armenian literature in Armenian and Armenian history in English.

Two teachers, natives of Syria, teach at the first, second, and third levels: Rosine Tachjian-Atamian from France, a teacher in Parisian Armenian schools, is also a soloist at the Armenian Church in Paris and an interpreter of Armenian folk songs; and Sossi Sossanian from Hungary, a graduate of the Department of Armenian Language and Literature at Yerevan State University, teaches Armenian in Budapest and works for the Armenian hour on local radio.

Benedetta Contin Ipekjdjian, who currently works in Vienna, impresses all of us with her fluent Armenian. She has been a teacher of classical Armenian for several years and also is the vice-president and treasurer of Padus-Araxes. The teaching of Grabar by an Italian is not something unusual. Benedetta wrote and defended her PhD dissertation on the great Armenian philosopher of the early Middle Ages, David the Invincible.

In addition to teaching the history of Armenian theater, choreography, and cinema at the fourth level, philologist Artsvi Bakhchinyan from Armenia conducts a number of weekly classes for those wishing to learn traditional Armenian dances. Sometimes he also teaches Armenian songs and poems to the third level. Additionally, he also presents feature or documentary films on Armenian topics during the course.

Linguist and Orientalist Tork Dalalyan, also

from Yerevan, teaches several subjects: Grabar, Armenian language history, and the methodology of language teaching (Eastern and Western Armenian, correlations between classical and so-called Soviet orthography).

Avedis Hadjian, originally from Syria, a long-time citizen of Argentina, currently residing in Venice, is a teacher of the history of the Armenian press.

Musician Aram Ipekjdjian, a native of Aleppo, who studied at the Yerevan State Conservatory,

program with their knowledge of Armenian language and family roots. In addition, the newly-ordained candidates for the Mekhitarist Congregation, originally from the Republic of Armenia and Javakhk, have participated in the course twice.

Of course, one does not learn a language in only three weeks. However, the participants lay the foundation for language proficiency, which can be increased by ongoing self-improvement. At the end of the intensive course, participants

national pavilion went to Republic of Armenia's pavilion named "Armenity," based on Diasporan artists' works...

It has become a beautiful tradition to compose a choir of teachers and students of the course and sing Holy Mass in the Holy Cross Armenian Church and on the feast of the Assumption of Mary in the Armenian Cathedral of St. Lazar (San Lazzaro) Island. After the feast of the Assumption and traditional blessing of grapes, the Mekhitarist fathers hold a recep-



A group of students and teachers in Venice, with the author, Artsvi Bakhchinyan, on the first row, fourth from right

and currently lives between Italy and Austria, offers extracurricular duduk lessons. His exquisite performances on the duduk are enjoyed during the Armenian liturgies and traditional evening parties.

The course has also an administrative staff: the secretary of Padus-Araxes for a long time was Daniela Reato Schiavo. During more recent years, Evelyn Korsch, Nora Elbe, Isabella Abbate, Yesayi Nahapetyan, Husik Hambardzumyan, Eleonora Forte, and Anna Maria Mandracchia have patiently carried out administrative work, taking care of requests of both teachers and attendees.

The Attendees

Among the course participants, aged 18 to 80, the majority are Diasporans; there are also non-Armenians, who just want to learn some Armenian because of personal and professional motivations. Going through the pages of the course's Commemorative Book, among its participants can find the names of academicians, nowadays playing an important role in Armenian Studies, including Theo Van Lint, Head of the Department of Armenian Studies at Oxford University; Valentina Calzolari, head of the Department of Armenian Studies at the University of Geneva; American linguist Virgil Strohmeier, who taught at the American University of Armenia for a while, as well as Italian Armenologists Giusto Traina, Andrea Scala and others.

Fortunately, many in the diaspora choose an institutionalized way for the Armenian education of new generations, thus cooperating with Venetian Course. For several years the board of the Romanian-Armenian community has sent its most active youth to Venice, while the Bureau of Armenian Teachers of Istanbul, for the sixth consecutive year, has sent young teachers for increasing their knowledge. The former principal of the Kololian Armenian College of Toronto, Armen Martirosian, brought a dozen of the school's graduating students seven consecutive years to Venice; those students always made a happy addition to our

not knowing any Armenian three weeks before, are quite delighted because they already understand simple Armenian sentences and can express thoughts of their own in simple sentences.

In addition to learning a language, many Armenians are driven by the desire to live in an Armenian environment. For an Armenian, isolated from a native context year round, the program provides an opportunity to speak, read, write, breathe, laugh in Armenian for about 20 days. Almost everyone's lives and personal experiences are interesting to hear about. These people of Armenian origin, often born of non-Armenian fathers or mothers, having double or triple identities, remember and embrace their roots.

In recent years, the Venice courses have also been attended by Armenians from Armenia. I should explain to those who are skeptical of this fact: most Armenians in Armenia today are unfamiliar with the Western Armenian language and literature, not to mention classical orthography and Grabar or the history of Armenian art. It is also an exceptional opportunity to meet many Diasporan Armenians in one place.

Various Activities

The program is, in fact, quite full. In addition to extracurricular dance and duduk classes and film screenings, various lectures are presented by participants or guest lecturers. A valuable experience is visiting the Armenian sites of Venice, which number more than 50! In addition to the Mekhitarist-related sights, one can see in San Salvador church the tomb of the Venetian princess Catherine Cornaro, who was the last person to bear the title of Queen of Armenia; one can stroll along the Ruga Giuffa (Julfa Street); and one can view the bronze statues of four horses on the roof of St Mark's Basilica, which are traditionally considered as presents from the Armenian King Trdat I to the Roman Emperor Nero... Let's add the Armenian pavilions of Venice Biennale and remember again that in 2015 the Golden Lion for the

tion for the guests in the adjacent garden; and Armenian songs, dances, and games make the monastery lively for a couple of hours.

And once each week there are evening parties, which take place in the dormitory's yard, during which many of the participants show off their artistic skills - singing and reciting in different languages, dancing, playing instruments, telling jokes or performing small sketches in Armenian.

On the last days of the course most of the attendees prepare for the exams with diligence and commitment. Those who succeed in the oral and written exams later receive a certificate.

'Strengthened Armenian identity...'

A unique atmosphere, warm relations, enthusiasm for the Armenian language and culture, are created during those three weeks. The attendees not only lay a foundation for their Armenian or improve their language and cultural knowledge, but also gain an unparalleled experience of human and intercultural communication in an aesthetic Italian reality. As a participant once observed: "At first we were acquaintances, then we became friends, and at the end we became a family."

The days fly by very fast, and the moment of farewell arrives too soon. It is not easy to take leave from the people with whom you shared a wonderful experience in a fabulous atmosphere. Some people cannot hold back their tears, and some joke: "Never mind, one year until we meet again..." And, indeed, many know that they will return to continue and develop what they have achieved, or reappear in that unique and unusual ambiance. Some say they are leaving with a strengthened Armenian identity and are more determined to devote themselves to everything Armenian, while others say they will correspond with each other only in Armenian, meet in Armenia or in an Armenian-populated place. In our age of fast communication, in a "reduced" planet, keeping up precious friendships is not difficult if there is a will - especially if that

continued on next page



ARTS & LIVING

CALENDAR

MASSACHUSETTS

FEBRUARY 9 — A cappella concert by Boston Jazz Voices to Benefit the Armenia Tree Project. 5 pm at the Jenks Center, 109 Skillings Road, Winchester, MA. The venue has plenty of free parking. Event will feature an a cappella performance, refreshments, raffle, and silent auction. Tickets are \$30 each and a family four-pack of tickets is available for \$100. Tickets available via Eventbrite at www.armeniatree.org/acappella

FEBRUARY 13 — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research/Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues presents a public forum on “The Armenian-American Press in Perspective: Its Purposes, Challenges, and Future Prospects.” Lively discussion on issues of immigration, history, and the 125-year-old history of the Armenian-American press. Panel featuring Leeza Arakelian, assistant editor of the *Armenian Weekly*, Alin K. Gregorian, editor of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* and Stephen Kurkjian, Pulitzer Prize winner reporter retired from the *Boston Globe*, and NAASR Board Member. Moderated by NAASR Board Member and *Armenian Weekly* columnist Stepan Piligian. Thursday, 7.30 to 9.30 p.m. Batmasian Hall, NAASR Vartan Gregorian Building, 395 Concord Ave., Belmont. A reception will follow in the Shahinian Solarium. Contact NAASR at 617-489-1610 or hq@naasr.org.

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 Pargentan 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. 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 or 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; or Ara, 978-251-4845, ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com. Merrimack Valley Armenian National Committee of the Merrimack Valley.

MARCH 28 — Songs of the Other with Daniela Tosic, voice; Sylvie Zakarian, marimba; Nikola Radan, flute.

Works by Komitas, A. Hovhanness, N. Grover, N. Radan, V. Srvandztiants. Armenian Cultural Foundation, Arlington. Saturday, 7 p.m. Open to the public. Admission Free.

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

NEW JERSEY

FEBRUARY 8 — Valentine's Dinner Dance. Sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association — Greater New York Chapter and the Hovnanian School PTO. 7 pm. Magic show for children to begin at 7.30 pm. Mezze and dinner included. Cash bar. \$60 adults, \$30 kids under 13. RSVP to Nanor at mrsnanor@gmail.com. Payment required upon reservation. \$75 at the door. Hovnanian School, 817 River Road, New Milford.

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. Text or call Sheela at 201-218-6726. Program in English.

Calendar items are free. Entries should not be longer than 5 lines. Listings should include contact information. Items will be edited to fit the space, if need be. A photo may be sent with the listing no later than Mondays at noon.

from previous page

friendship is bound by the common interest and love that is called the Armenian language and Armenian culture.

Thus, such initiatives make it possible to preserve our identity and to maintain the “Armenian drop” in the whirlpool of mankind's deepest ocean.

But the lessons go beyond of Armenian interests... As Mgr Zekiyani once said: “Last year, when I asked one of our participants, a young Polish lady, what she learned here besides Armenian, she answered: ‘Humanity.’ This is an exciting and important assessment, indeed...”

Former Venice Course Attendees Speak

Dr. Vartan Matiossian (Argentina, currently in the US, participant in 1987): “Thirty-three years ago, my attendance in the course had a formative impact on me, since it was my first trip abroad and my first living contact with Armenian Studies, especially history and literature, with scholars like Raymond Kevorkian and Marc Nichanian as my teachers, and the continuous presence and talks with Mgr. Zekiyani. I was also fortunate enough to share my days with a wonderful group, still remembered as the ‘group of ‘87’ many years later. Above all, it was Venice...”

Karen Hamada (Japan, participant in 2012): “On my arrival at Venice in the year 1816, I found my mind in a state which required study,” as Lord Byron writes in his memoirs, the summer I spent in Venice made up my mind to study more about Armenian culture and history. For me, a non-Armenian Armenologist, it was really a valuable opportunity to learn Western Armenian with skilled teachers, visit the Armenian heritages of the city. And, the thing that motivated me most was the people I met there — teachers, staffs, participants, and

monks of the San Lazzaro, who welcomed and helped my research. I still remember and will never forget the days that changed my life.”

Arif Tapan (Turkey, participant in 2015-2016): “I attended the course in Venice twice since I am an academic researching on Ottoman-Armenian literature and especially Armeno-Turkish literary texts. My aim was to improve my Western Armenian. But within a few days I realized that this course gives the participants more opportunities than learning Armenian. I had the opportunity to exchange ideas with participants from all over the world, and to meet very competent and sincere instructors in teaching Armenian. In addition to learning Armenian, I had the opportunity to get to know Armenian culture and history more closely. It was a great experience for me to attend this course in Venice, a city that is unique in terms of culture, art and history.”

Polina Ivanova (Russia, currently in Armenia, participant in 2013): “The program, which brought together teachers and students from Armenia, Turkey, the US, France, and many other places, was like a microcosm of the Armenian-speaking world itself with its diversity and paradoxes. And there is nothing like studying Armenian in Venice — perhaps the most important center of Armenian scholarship. It gives every participant a subtle link to the great tradition established by the Mekhitarists three centuries ago.”

Vahan Saghdejian (Syria, currently in Lebanon, participant in 2019): “I feel so blessed that I had the chance to join the Padus-Araxes Cultural Association summer intensive course. It was one of my best experiences. There are so many social, cultural and academic benefits that I gained from this course. I also had the chance to see world's most artistic and unusual place — The city of dreams, Venice...”

Sharneil Laureen Lewis (Caribbean Islands,

Pianist Nara Avetisyan in Concert at Fresno State

FRESNO — Nara Avetisyan will perform in concert as part of the “Young Armenian Talent” series of the Philip Lorenz Memorial Keyboard Concert Series at Fresno State. The performance will take place on Friday, February 28, at 7:30 p.m., in the Concert Hall on the Fresno State campus. Avetisyan will be performing works by Händel, Zakarian, Granados, Babadjanian and Prokofiev.



Nara Avetisyan

The concert is co-sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program of Fresno State and the Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation.

Born in Yerevan into an artistic family, Avetisyan is currently completing her Doctorate in Piano Performance at Stony Brook University in New York. A prize winner at competitions in the United States, Armenia, Italy, Greece, and Lithuania, she has garnered accolades for her performances as recitalist, soloist with orchestras, and chamber music partner at concert halls in Vienna, Munich, Geneva, London, Monaco, São Paulo, Sochi, Boston, and Los Angeles.

General tickets for the Concert are available for \$25 per person, for seniors at \$18 per person, and students \$5 per person. Tickets may also be purchased online at the following website: <http://www.keyboardconcerts.com/events/season-48/michael-krikorian/>.

currently in Italy, participant in 2019): “I found the Venice Armenian Studies program to be a real insight into the culture and language of Armenia with an authentic and hands on experience second to no other program. The classes are very informative, well structured and student friendly, also the program was very vibrant and fun catering to our younger generation in the sense that, the language courses, were always organized with extracurricular activities including music, dance and excursions, which never left you bored; there was always somewhere to see and to go. It was definitely always fun to converse with the ever-friendly and vibrant Armenian students and teachers, from

all over the world and get hands on experience of their culture. The teachers were some of the most professional and experienced that I have ever met, they definitely made the classes easier by their patience and dedication to their students, and ways of making the language more at ease, and readily learnable to everyone with a variety of interesting and fun teaching strategies. In all, I found the program to be a very good experience, and I hope to continue learning Armenian.”

For those interested to attend the Summer Intensive Course of Armenian Language and Culture can visit <http://www.podus-araxes.com/en/press-release/>



COMMENTARY

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EDITOR
Alin K. Gregorian

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR
Marc Mgrditchian

SENIOR EDITORIAL COLUMNIST:
Edmond Y. Azadian

CONTRIBUTORS:
Florence Avakian, Dr. Haroutiun Arzoumanian, Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, Philip Ketchian, Kevork Keushkerian, Harut Sassounian, Hagop Vartivarian, Naomi Zeytoonian

CORRESPONDENTS:
Armenia - Hagop Avedikian
Boston - Nancy Kalajian
Los Angeles - Taleen Babayan
Berlin - Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Contributing Photographers:
Jirair Hovsepian

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FAX: 617-924-2887

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E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

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755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472-1509

COMMENTARY

Karabakh Negotiations Revisited: Can Perpetual Motion Lead Anywhere?

By Edmond Y. Azadian

For international observers, the Karabakh conflict is viewed within the perspective of the Kashmir and Korean issues, where militarized camps are always on the brink of war.

After meeting five times in 2019, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan met again in Geneva January 28-30 for a total of 12 hours. The intensive pace of negotiations and the fact that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk group co-chairs, who have sponsored those negotiations, have issued the code words "preparing the two nations for peace," indicate some kind of compromise is in the offing. (See related story on Page 1.)

However, the details of the negotiations are being kept under wraps, leaving pundits and analysts in complete limbo to reach their own interpretations of the developments.

Some domestic and international issues always impact on the course of the talks. The fact that the peoples of Karabakh and Azerbaijan are in the process of preparing for elections rule out the potential for imminent escalation.

Another factor is a departure from the rhetoric of the previous administration in Armenia, which always avoided a war of words, or, at the very least, kept it to a minimum.

This time around, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan himself has announced that Armenia has recently acquired large quantities of sophisticated military hardware. The military brass in its turn has announced that it was in the process of revising its military doctrine to wage war on the enemy's territory.

Pashinyan, who has long insisted on the participation of Karabakh representatives in the negotiation process, has challenged all the presidential candidates to come up with their platforms for the resolution of the conflict, and to no one's surprise,

Turkey is sending forces to that war-torn country to support the competing Tripoli government. Last but not least, Russia and Turkey have landed in opposing camps with regards to Trump's "deal of the century" dealing with the Palestinian question.

All these issues will be factored into Russian-Turkish relations in dealing with all regional issues.

Since the negotiators hold their agendas so close to their vests, the media and the politicians have been left with only the option of speculation.

Most of the speculations revolve around the Madrid Principles. When asked about that plan, Pashinyan answered with his own question as to what Azerbaijanis themselves think about it. At this point, no one is aware whether Pashinyan has his own plan or what he thinks about the other plans under discussion. Critics question his capacity to encapsulate the entire range of issues, while others believe that his keeping quiet and letting the advisors guessing, is sound policy.

After the Madrid meeting in 2007, other documents were also produced at subsequent meetings in St. Petersburg and Kazan. Even the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov floated his own eponymous plan, which constitutes a derivation of the Madrid one.

The reason that there is so much persistence about the Madrid Principles is that many parts of it have been discussed and have even enjoyed acceptance by both sides. Yet, the parties remain estranged from embracing the entirety of the plan, which is the comprehensive total of its different components.

The Madrid Principles were drafted in November 2007 by the OSCE Ministerial Council. The plan's preamble is based on the Helsinki Final Act of 1975: refraining from the use of force, the concepts of territorial integrity and equal rights and self-determination of peoples. Although the last two concepts are contradictory in and of themselves, the remaining political statements are even more challenging. "The final legal status of Nagorno Karabakh will be determined through a plebiscite allowing the free and genuine expression of the people of NK." In the meantime, the region will enjoy an "interim status."

In return, the Azerbaijani territories around Nagorno Karabakh will be returned to Azerbaijani control, with special provisions for Kelbajar and Lachin.

Although Armenian political rhetoric excludes any territorial concessions, all successive administrations have agreed to the principle. But the question is the application of the plan, which also calls for peacekeeping forces to avoid clashes with the returning refugees.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan refuse to allow Russian peacekeepers, in deference to the West, so as not to allow another foothold for Moscow in the region. Had Armenia had agreed to Russian peacekeepers, Moscow could tilt towards Armenia but the current policy keeps the parties at loggerheads, which is also reflected on the co-chair level.

Armenia's reluctance to bet on a future plebiscite emanates from the fear of the shrinking Armenian



they have responded with belligerent statements, particularly on the issue of territorial concessions.

Turkey, which drives Azerbaijan's foreign policy, is in the process of recalibrating its own direction; after the purchase of Russian S-400 missiles, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan felt that the US meant business when it opposed the deal and he was not able to cajole President Donald Trump to look the other way. Therefore, he has come up with some anti-Russian remarks and statements. On his recent trip to Ukraine, he announced that Turkey does not recognize Crimea's annexation by Russia and is still concerned with the plight of the Tatars in that territory. Next, he was worried that Syrian forces, which have been carrying out the major job in Idlib of liquidating all Islamic State fighters, are sponsored by Turkey. Russia is in a joint operation in that campaign with Turkish forces. Therefore, Erdogan's warning is also directed toward Moscow.

On the Libyan war theater, Russia, along with Egypt and the other Arab countries, is supporting Marshal Haftar, while

demographic.

Thus far, Baku has never signed off on the plan, at least publicly, only offering to the people of Karabakh the "highest level of autonomy" under Azerbaijani rule.

After the pogroms of 1905-7, 1920 and 1988, Armenians will never offer their necks willingly to the Azeri sword.

Armenia's silent partner in refusing territorial concession to Azerbaijan is Iran. Tehran can rely on the Iranian-Armenian border as a peaceful one. Shortening that border to the benefit of Azerbaijan will impose more military tensions on Tehran, because the Aliyev dynasty has turned its country's territory into a proving ground for the Israeli military and a potential launchpad in case Israel decides to strike Iran's nuclear facilities. Therefore, Tehran must tacitly approve any deal at which Armenia arrives with Azerbaijan, to say nothing of all other interested parties.

From all appearances, it looks like some agreement has already been achieved. Or could it be a temporary lull, due to wariness and the busy involvements of the regional forces?



COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Trump's Israeli-Palestinian 'Peace Plan' Is Recipe for a Prolonged War

President Trump unveiled in the White House on January 28, 2020 his long-awaited "peace plan" between Israelis and Palestinians. The architect of the plan is the President's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner.

The "peace plan" had several drawbacks even before it was announced. To begin with neither President Trump nor his son-in-law had any clue about the complexity of the Arab-Israeli conflict. From the start of his Presidency, displaying his ignorance, Trump kept saying that this is an easy problem to resolve. His son-in-law, an Orthodox Jew, is just as ignorant about the Middle East conflict. If the problem was so easy to resolve, it would have been solved a long time ago.

Trump's "peace plan" is nothing but a ploy to distract attention from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's indictment on corruption charges and President Trump's impeachment proceedings. A good faith mediator between Israelis and Palestinians must be objective and neutral. President Trump is far from fulfilling this basic requirement, not after moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognizing the disputed Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and announcing that Syria's Golan Heights, occupied by Israel in the 1967 war, is Israeli territory. These are matters of complicated international law and subject to extensive negotiations. These are the reasons why the conflict has not yet been solved. Only someone who is ignorant of these complexities would opine that this is an easy issue to resolve and come up with a plan that is completely one-sided and meets all of Israel's demands, but none of the Palestinians.

The proposed "peace plan" actually promotes neither the interests of Israelis nor Palestinians. The terms of President Trump's plan is dictated by Israel under the guise of preserving its security. It 'legitimizes' the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and prolongs their existence. These settlements inside the borders of a future Palestinian state create a considerable risk to the security of Israeli settlers, continuing the conflict and bloodshed. The proposed Palestinian state is surrounded on all four sides by Israel maintaining total military control over Palestinians. Furthermore, the status of Jerusalem remains unresolved. Israel is supposed to take over the entirety of Jerusalem, restricting Palestine's capital to a village in the outskirts of the city. This is totally unacceptable not only to Palestinians, but all Arabs and Muslims in the world, as well as all those who believe in peaceful settlement through international law.

Trump's "peace plan" provides a window of four years for negotiations between the two parties. However, right at the bat, the plan places Palestinians in a losing situation depriving them of their sovereign rights in a weak and diminished area, as Israel will shortly declare the Jewish settlements in the West Bank as Israeli territory.

No Palestinian leader attended the January 28 White House ceremony. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas rejected the "deal of the century," calling it the "slap of the century." He also refused to accept the \$50 billion investment plan offered by the White House. Abbas said: "Trump, Jerusalem is not for sale. Our rights are not for sale." Out of 22 Arab States, only the Ambassadors of Bahrain, Oman, and United Arab Emirates attended the White House ceremony.

On February 1, the foreign ministers of the Arab League's member states unanimously adopted a resolution rejecting the Trump Israeli-Palestinian 'peace plan,' stating that "it does not satisfy the minimum of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people."

In a rare sign of unity, Abbas met last Tuesday with the leaders of Hamas, Palestine Liberation Organization and Islamic Jihad to form a common stand against Trump's "peace plan." If anything, this "peace plan" has served to unite the diverse and often conflicting Palestinian groups.

At the conclusion of the White House ceremony last week, Mosques in the West Bank and East Jerusalem began broad-

casting a verse from the Koran that warns, "Do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites."

Twelve Democratic Senators signed a joint letter to the White House criticizing the "peace plan" as "one-sided [and] not a legitimate attempt to advance peace. It is a recipe for renewed division and conflict in the region." All Democratic Presidential candidates objected to President Trump's 'peace plan,' criticizing it as being a 'unilateral move' leaving out the Palestinians. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter also denounced the "peace plan": "the unilateral annexation to Israel of a large piece of the occupied Palestinian territories offers the Palestinians fragmented statehood, without control of their borders.... The plan violates the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders...."

The "peace plan" is actually contrary to Israel's national interests, according to many American Jews and Israelis who were harshly critical of Trump's plan. Israel's leaders do not seem to understand that the more they antagonize the Palestinians, the more they prolong the hostilities and continue to live under a state of war and terror.

"Peace Now," Israel's largest and longest-standing movement advocating for peace through public pressure, announced on its website that Trump's "peace plan" "not only neglects to advance peace, but also has the potential to severely harm prospects for a genuine peace plan for both parties."

The American Jewish liberal advocacy group "J Street" denounced the peace deal as having "zero chance of serving as the basis for renewed diplomacy.... It was the logical culmination of repeated bad-faith steps this administration has taken to validate the agenda of the Israeli right."

The Jewish-led "Americans for Peace Now" declared the "peace plan" "a recipe for disaster, for annexation, for the perpetuation of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, for the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, [and] for misery and bloodshed."

President Trump's "peace plan" will hopefully never see the light of day. Both Israelis and Palestinians should denounce violence and sit at the negotiating table to find a peaceful solution to their long-standing conflict. They should both avoid the intervention of mediators who are more interested in their own self-interest than the interests of Arabs or Israelis.

What a Modernized Hellenic Air Force with F-35s Could Mean for Turkey

By Paul Iddon

Greece has announced plans to upgrade its existing fleet of fighter jets as well as acquire new U.S.-built fifth-generation F-35 Lightning II aircraft in a move that might give its military a technological edge over neighbouring Turkey.

Greek Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos said this month that Greece plans to buy a squadron of 24 F-35s.

Athens presently possesses approximately 150 fourth-generation F-16 Fighting Falcons.

In December, Panagiotopoulos announced that 84 of them would be upgraded to the advanced Viper class by Lockheed Martin by 2027, at a total cost of approximately \$1.5 billion for Athens.

Additionally, Greece plans to upgrade its smaller fleet of French-made Mirage 2000 multirole fighters, also over the next seven years.

According to the 2019 Military Strength Ranking, which utilizes more than 55 individual factors to determine the strength of a nation, Greece has the 28th most powerful military in the world while Turkey has the ninth.

Analysts consulted by Ahval News outlined the likely significance of Greece fielding F-35s.

Levent Özgül, a Turkish defense analyst for Blue Melange Consultancy, said a purchase of F-35s "will be the most important milestone and capability jump for Greece and the Hellenic Air Force (HAF)."

This is because of the F-35's advanced capabilities, such as its long-range, networking and stealth features.

Greece's intended purchase of F-35s and plans to modernize its existing fighter jets came amid a period of rising tensions with Turkey. On December 17, Turkish jets violated disputed airspace over the Aegean Sea 40 times, resulting in 16 "mock dogfights" between the two NATO members that day. The simmering tensions in the Aegean came at the same time as Turkey and Greece sparred over competing claims to areas of the eastern Mediterranean, where both countries seek a share of lucrative hydrocarbon discoveries.

While the stealth features of the F-35s will likely give Greece an advantage over Turkey's larger air force, Özgül noted that the aircraft is neither a dogfighter nor nearly as maneuverable as advanced Russian Sukhoi fighters, but is an "ultra-intelligence stealth aircraft."

"Therefore, we cannot see F-35 dogfights over the Aegean because Turkey probably cannot see or trace them," he said.

Sebastien Roblin, a writer on military aviation for The National Interest, noted that, to date, air forces "have tried to keep their F-35s out of circumstances in which they could be studied by potential adversaries or even neutral third parties."

"The more information they collect on the stealth aircraft's tiny radar signature, the more easily it could be detected and identified in the future," he said.

"So, if Greece gets F-35s, and I think it's likely such a sale would be authorized if the finances can be squared, the HAF might hesitate to use them in its confrontations with Turkish fighters."

However, Roblin recalled an incident in which US Air Force F-22 Raptor stealth fighters surprised Iranian F-4 Phantoms in the past by coming within visual range of them.

While Greek fighters attempting a similar stunt to surprise Turkish aircraft over the Aegean "is not unimaginable, it just might come with the tradeoff of allowing Turkey to learn more about the F-35's characteristics," he said.

Turkey was a member of the F-35 manufacturing program and ordered 100 of the fighters from the United States, but Washington suspended its participation in the program and cancelled this order following Ankara's purchase of sophisticated Russian S-400 air defense systems.

The United States had warned Turkey against purchasing that system, repeatedly insisting that the F-35 cannot coexist with the S-400.

Özgül also noted that upgraded F-16s and Mirage 2000s would give the HAF "greater air superiority, an improved ability to carry out combat air patrols, close air defense, maritime strikes, suppression and destruction of enemy air defense, along with greater precision and deep strike capabilities over the Aegean Sea and the Central and Eastern Mediterranean basins."

With these warplanes we could potentially see "huge Greek dominance over the Aegean and Mediterranean," he said.

This isn't, he added, "only due to the capabilities of these jets, but also since NATO, the EU, U.N., United States and Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum all support Greece legally and diplomatically," in its disputes with Turkey in these areas.

George Tzogopoulos, a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre International de Formation Européenne (CIFE) and Research Associate at the Begin Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), is unsure if "the National Defense Authorization Act for 2020 that blocks Turkey's participation in the F-35 program will not be reversed."

"More importantly, I cannot anticipate how Ankara will react if this Authorization Act isn't reversed and only Greece possesses F-35s in the future," he said.

"It will definitely look for serious alternatives, possibly from Russia, to empower its position."

In recent months, Turkey suggested it might acquire super-maneuverable Russian Sukhoi Su-35 and possibly fifth-generation Su-57s over the next decade following its removal from the F-35 program.

"Turkey also needs time to compensate for its removal from

the F-35 (program)," Özgül said, pointing out that Turkey's planned fifth-generation TF-X fighter project will likely be delayed for at least another decade and its F-16 fleet, the backbone of its air force, is ageing.

Furthermore, the Turkish Air Force has also been affected by a severe shortage of F-16 pilots since the July 2016 coup attempt.

In addition to possibly buying Su-35s or Su-57s, Özgül also anticipates Ankara will respond to a Greek purchase of F-35s by deploying "the two Russian S-400 batteries of its second squadron on its Aegean and Mediterranean coasts rather than in Malatya Airport" in eastern Anatolia.

Tzogopoulos argued that while "deterrence matters" the mock dogfights over the Aegean "lead nowhere."

"Both Greek and Turkish pilots are risking their lives every day," he said. "New accidents will impact on the Greek and Turkish public and media debates, making a potential reconciliation process hard."

He pointed out that "positive political consultations are continuing between the Greek and Turkish foreign ministries" with the Secretary-General of the Greek Foreign Minister Themistoklis Demiris and Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Önal holding a meeting in Ankara earlier this month.

Washington's "new foothold in Greece reflects its interest in restraining Russia's influence," he said.

It is against this backdrop that Washington may sell F-35s and also allow Greece to participate in the program's development.

Özgül said that the Hellenic Aerospace Industry was interested in participating in the F-35 production program. The United States is program - which would have given Ankara a lucrative role in manufacturing approximately 1,000 parts for F-35 operators worldwide - over its aforementioned purchase of S-400s.

"The extension of the defense cooperation between the United States and Greece, stamped during the visit of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Athens in October 2019, paves the way for such an enriched military cooperation between the two countries that can also include the fifth-generation stealth fighters," Tzogopoulos said.

He said he considered a new Greek-Turkish crisis likely in the future, and stressed that this would not be in the interests of the United States. However, at present, this is "an issue of minor importance for American foreign policy," he said.

"The question for Washington is whether the excellent status of the Turkish-Russian partnership will acquire a strategic depth," Tzogopoulos said. "This will be the catalytic factor for US decisions in the long-term."

(This analysis originally ran in Ahvalnews.com on February 4.)



Syrian Children Labor to Support Families Torn apart by War

By Rana al-Ahmde

AL-SHADDADI, Syria – Nine years into the Syrian war, child labor has seriously increased in al-Shaddadi in northeastern Syria, as well as in several other cities of Al-Jazira region, where children work long hours amid miserable and exploitative conditions.

Sohaib Jaber, 13, sets up his spices in the early morning hours on the sidewalk in front of a barbershop. He'll stay there for around 10 hours straight, selling bags of the seasonings to feed his family.

He tells Al-Monitor he became the sole bread-

winner for his mother and three brothers after his father was killed by the Islamic State (IS) when it occupied the city in May 2014. Jaber is one of hundreds of Syrian children who lost parents during the Syrian conflict; many were forced to drop out of school and look for jobs so they and their families could survive.

Two streets down from where Jaber works, Mohammed Hussein, 14, stands behind a grill in a restaurant. He's held several jobs over the past five years. Working for long hours at the restaurant is exhausting, he tells Al-Monitor. His shift begins at 8 in the morning and ends at 7 in the evening.

He spends his days behind the grill, in addition to washing the dishes and cleaning, earn-

ing 5,000 Syrian pounds (roughly \$5) a week.

Ounoud, his grandmother, tells Al-Monitor she feels sorry that Hussein has to support her and his brothers. IS kidnapped his father, who is still missing, and his mother married another man and left the family, she says.

"I don't know what I would have done if it were not for the money my grandson brings home. Although it might seem like nothing, it covers some of our basic needs, and he gets some meals from the restaurant so we save on food," she says.

Hussein misses going to school but feels it's impossible for him to go back again after dropping out. He didn't even finish primary school, and students his age are now in middle school.

An activist in the Doz children's organization in the city of Hasakah told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity that the percentage of children working jobs beyond their physical strength is high. Employers exploit them in the absence of child care from any official or charitable body, the activist said, and there are no specific statistics on the number of underage children currently working in the area.

"The repercussions of war, particularly the economic conditions, play a major role" in the increase in child labor, she said, adding, "So did IS' control of the area and the educational process."

She said some parents tell their children to work instead of going to school. The majority of jobs are tiring and arduous and don't suit the children's weak physiques. Some work in car repair or in transporting and unloading goods, all jobs that require great physical strength. This affects their health and education, costing them their futures.

Although schools have reopened since the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces expelled IS from the area in August 2018, the illiteracy rate among children has increased.

Khalil Khodr, a member of al-Shaddadi's city council, told Al-Monitor that when IS controlled the city, it arrested and killed civilians and closed down civil schools to open ones serving its extremist ideology.

"Many families lost their sole breadwinner, some of whom were arrested or executed by IS. Others are still unaccounted for to this day. Children had to bear the responsibility of caring

for the family," he said.

"Some families were so afraid their children would learn IS' extremist ideology, since the group controlled the educational process, that they prevented them from attending school. Instead, they preferred that their children work in jobs that exceed their physical abilities or kept them at home, which increased the rate of child labor in the city, so the illiteracy rate increased with it. We still have no accurate numbers in this regard," he added.

Speaking about the difficulty in dealing with these problems, Khodr said, "We can't prevent children from working. Those whose families depend on them to secure their livelihoods can't be forced to attend school, and many of them are late in the educational stages compared to their peers who are still studying."

In a mid-January report, the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic warned of the horrific situation in education. The report, titled "They Have Erased the Dreams of My Children," highlighted the flagrant violations of the Syrian war against the basic rights of children. The report revealed that thousands of schools were destroyed or used for military purposes, and more than 2.1 million children of both genders were deprived of school.

Meanwhile, psychological consultant Mohammed Ali Othman warned against the growing phenomenon of child labor.

"Working children are exposed to danger and to physical, psychological and financial exploitation, among other [difficulties], as they acquire bad habits and behaviors, and uncommon relationships," he told Al-Monitor, noting the impact of their work on their social and health status, as their situation could turn into a real catastrophe in the near future.

Othman stressed the need for all sectors to design joint programs aimed at reducing this phenomenon.

(Rana al-Ahmde is a Syrian journalist and civil activist who has worked for relief organizations and as a correspondent for local newspapers including Vedeng News, Shafaq News and Al-Ittihad Press. This piece originally appeared in Al-Monitor on February 2.)



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II lay flowers at the Yerablur Military Pantheon.

Army Day Commemorated by Government

YEREVAN –On the occasion of Army Day, on January 28, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, members of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan and members of the National Security Council, accompanied by the leadership of the Ministry of Defense and the Armed Forces, visited the Yerablur Military Pantheon to pay tribute to the memory of the Armenian Genocide victims.

The Prime Minister laid a wreath at the tombs of the heroes of the April Four-Day War in April 2016, Sparapet Vazgen Sargsyan, Andranik Ozanyan and a wreath at the memorial to the fallen freedom fighters.

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