

## Cautionary Note about Opportunists Using the Name of the A.D.L. Party

BOSTON (Armenian Democratic Liberal Party Supreme Council) – An irresponsible communication has been reproduced in the press and social media in Armenia and the diaspora under the name and coat of arms of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party. The Supreme Council of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) alerts the public that the May 15, 2020 Armenian-language communique published under the title “Concerning the Armenian Apostolic Church’s Splendor,” does not represent the position of the ADL.

The authors are the same individuals who sowed divisions in the ranks of the ADL and who now try to do the same



thing in the life of the church.

The ADL traditionally has stood steadfastly at the side of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin for decades to resist any and all attacks upon the latter. Like any other Armenian national organization, the church naturally has issues that must be addressed, but the aforementioned discredited opportunists are the last ones who should speak about the church or any serious national matter.

The Supreme Council proudly reaffirms its traditional loyalty to the Mother See and warns the public against the declarations of these elements who have left the ADL.

## Decennial Census Efforts Continue in Southern California, with Much at Stake

By Aram Arkun  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

GLENDALE, Calif. – Despite the restrictions on movement required to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the work



American community organizations.

The census is treated very seriously in California. Like other states, its Congressional representation, state legislative boundaries, and the amount of federal money it receives for Medicaid funds, student loans, special education support, and many other items, are at stake. Consequently the state of California allocated \$187.2 million for an outreach and communication campaign to get people to send in their information. It created the California Complete Count – Census 2020 Office, also known as the California Census Office, to coordinate its strategy and complement the national work of the US Census Bureau, along with a California Complete Count Committee, which is an advisory panel of appointed members.

see CENSUS, page 8

of the 2020 US national census continues in Southern California, as well as throughout the nation. Armenians have the option of writing Armenian in one of two different places for their identity or origin, which may help in better identifying the Armenian population and increase its official numbers. Outreach efforts to Armenians in places of dense Armenian population like Glendale are taking place through federal census officials, local governmental bodies and even specially formed Armenian-



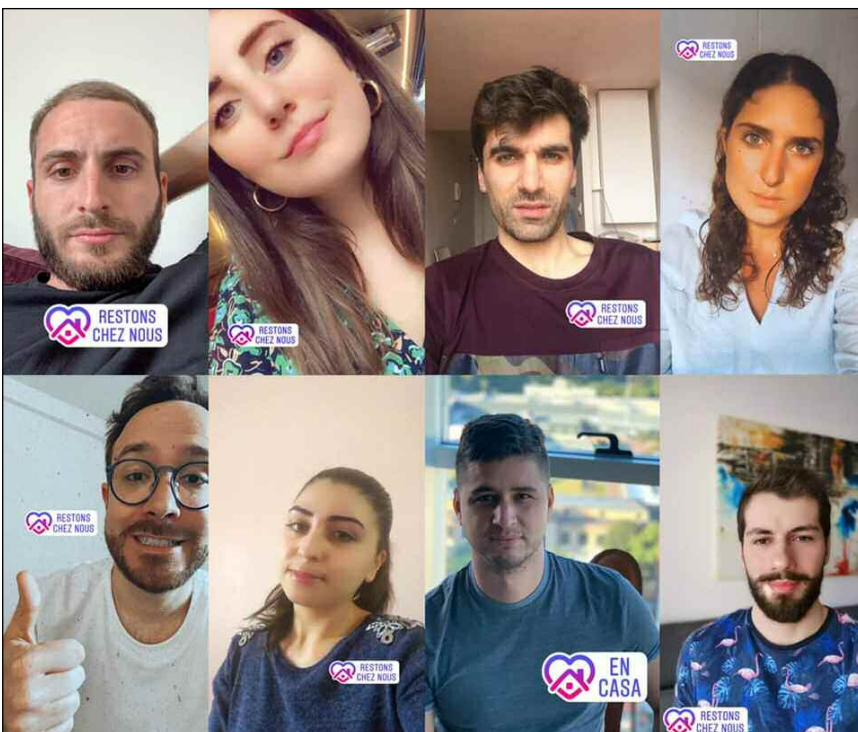
## Parisian Armenians Struggle To Maintain *Joie de Vivre*

By Taleen Babayan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PARIS, FRANCE - While the footprint of Armenians in France can be traced back to the Middle Ages, it wasn't until the mid-20th century that they made an indelible mark on the country. When the pandemic began circulating throughout Western Europe earlier this year, France took strict measures, including closing travel borders, shutting down nonessential businesses and

restricting travel to within 60 miles of a citizen's home. Although the *restez chez vous* [stay at home] orders, which have been in place since March 15, have been challenging for the people and the economy, which have not faced a crisis of this magnitude since World War II, infections have slowed. The current estimate in the country stands at 145,000 confirmed cases and 30,000 deaths among the population of 67 million. To ease the economic and social implications, see PARIS, page 4



YP Paris: Members of the YP Paris chapter connecting virtually

## New College Graduates Take Uncertain Paths In COVID-19 Era

By Serena Hajjar

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BOSTON – Which demographic has most innately felt the chaos wreaked by COVID-19? While the virus has certainly unsettled everyone's lives in a multitude of ways, it appears the youth have been uniquely impacted by the quarantines and shutdowns. The healthy dose of uncertainty which college graduates typically experience during these times under normal circumstances has now been amplified by an increasingly ambiguous future. Speaking to an assortment of graduates from the local Armenian community, I was struck not just by the distinct ways in which the pandemic has disrupted their lives, but also by their maturity and temperance regarding the difficult situation.

All three individuals – David Babikian, Antranig Kechejian, and Ani Chobanian – found themselves living at home with their parents after the outbreak of the virus and see GRADUATES, page 10

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine Shows Promise

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (BusinessWire, CNN, NYT, Businessinsider.com) – Moderna Therapeutics, the Cambridge-based biotechnology company cofounded and chaired by Dr. Nour Afeyan, announced positive interim data about the Phase I clinical trial of its vaccine candidate for COVID-19. The trial showed the vaccine appeared safe and produced an immune response. In the trial on 45 patients, 8 showed neutralizing antibodies which bind to the virus and prevent it from attacking human cells.

Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel told investors on May 18 that the vaccine, mRNA-1273, has a “high probability to provide protection from COVID-19 disease in humans.” Moderna chief medical officer Dr. Tal Zaks told CNN that if future studies go well, the company's vaccine could be available to the public as early as January. However, it is still not completely clear whether the vaccination, or even natural infection, can provide immunity.

Meanwhile, Moncef Slaoui, a former Moderna board member appointed to lead White House efforts to develop a COVID-19 vaccine, is divesting himself of \$10 million in Moderna stock options to avoid conflict of interest.

### Armenians Deliver Medical Supplies to Aleppo Hospitals

ALEPPO (Public Radio of Armenia) – An Armenian humanitarian mission, in cooperation with the Consulate General of Armenia in Aleppo, has provided a new batch of medical supplies to the Aleppo Military Hospital and other medical institutions.

The heads of the medical centers expressed their gratitude to the Armenian doctors for providing necessary medical supplies and for their daily service at medical institutions.

The head of the Aleppo Military Hospital, General Fayeze al-Ayubi, praised the joint efforts of Armenian and Syrian doctors, their unwavering commitment to their work and thanked the Armenian Humanitarian Mission for its continued support.

### Artsakh Reports 120 Ceasefire Violations

STEPANAKERT (Public Radio of Armenia) – Artsakh's Defense Ministry has reported 120 cases of ceasefire violation by the Azerbaijani side over the week ending on May 16.

According to the Ministry, about 1,500 shots have been fired in the direction of the Armenian forces.

The military units of the Defense Army continue to control the operative-tactical situation and confidently carry out their combat duty.

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## ARMENIA

## News From Armenia

## Artsakh Prolongs COVID-19 State of Emergency

STEPANAKERT (Information Center of the Government of Artsakh Republic) – On May 11, Artsakh Republic President Bako Sahakyan signed a decree on prolonging the term of the state of emergency declared in the Artsakh Republic on April 12 and introducing a change in the Artsakh Republic President's decree of that date.

Considering the fact that the emergency situation caused by the novel coronavirus continues to threaten the life and health of the population and may lead to the violation of people's normal living conditions, the term of the emergency situation declared in the Artsakh Republic on April 12 was extended for 30 days from May 12 till June 11.

The Information Center reported on May 15 that 4 new COVID-19 cases have been registered in Artsakh, which received “27 out of the 57 tests sent to Armenia for examination, and the 4 new COVID-19 positive cases are family members of a known infected person from the Shahumyan region and have been self-isolated.” By May 15, a total of 24 cases were registered by Artsakh's Ministry of Health, 62 individuals were in quarantine or isolation, and a total of 554 COVID-19 tests had been administered in Artsakh.

## Pashinyan to Attend Inauguration of New Artsakh President

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) – Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan will attend the inauguration of newly elected President of the Republic of Artsakh Arayik Harutyunyan, the PM's Office said. The Parliament of Artsakh will hold a special session for Harutyun's swearing-in on May 21, which will be broadcast live.

Harutyunyan, chairman of the Free Fatherland party, was elected president of Artsakh based on the results of the voting in the second round of the presidential election on April 15.

## Yerevan Nursing Home Hit by Coronavirus

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – At least 45 elderly residents and personnel of a nursing home in Yerevan's Nork district were hospitalized or isolated at the weekend after testing positive for coronavirus. According to the Armenian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 3 of its 17 hospitalized residents remained in a critical condition on May 18. The 28 others infected are homecare personnel. A spokeswoman for the ministry, Sona Martirosyan, said they are kept in isolated hotels because they show no symptoms of the disease.

Some 200 elderly people lived in the nursing home until the outbreak. Martirosyan said that they all underwent coronavirus tests immediately after the health authorities detected the first infections there late last week.

Martirosyan said that those residents whose test results were negative will be tested again later this month. She said the authorities have deployed additional medical workers to monitor their condition around the clock.

Armenia has only 3 nursing homes where a total of 580 retirees live and receive care and, if necessary, medical assistance. All were placed in strict lockdown in late February even before the authorities registered the first coronavirus case in the country. So far COVID-19 infections have been reported only at the Nork home. The primary source of those infections is not yet known.

Vahan Zurabyan, the director of another Yerevan-based care home, confirmed that there have been no coronavirus cases among its 210 residents. He said that his employees looking after them have strictly observed the confinement rules. “The personnel also don't go home [after finishing their daily work,]” said Zurabian. “There have been no visits or physical contacts [with outsiders.]”

–Susan Badalyan

# Bridging Social Distancing For People with Autism

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN – If you think teaching music, dance and art online is a challenge, consider what faces educators whose students are children and youngsters with autism. The My Way Socio-Rehabilitation Center for Children and Teenagers with Autism in Yerevan provides education and therapy for such pupils with special needs, usually with a full week's schedule of classes in their spacious buildings. When the pandemic crisis hit Armenia in March, the center was functioning, but soon had to close, like other schools, first for a brief pause, then for an indefinite period of time.

“We immediately started to brainstorm,” Sona Petrosyan, co-founder and board member, explained, “and came up with online ideas.” The staff had to take into consideration the individual capabilities of each pupil, and to expect an uneven performance. This meant, they had to come up with “custom-tailored assignments,” Petrosyan said, “short and realistic, taking into account all the peculiarities and limitations, and, most importantly, the interests of our students.” They came up with a plan which provides almost all the students with 3-4 assignments per day, “through videos and audios, calls and materials, offline and online, even individuals and in groups using various applications.”

Music plays a very important role in My Way's curriculum, and is a central feature of this new online learning project. The music therapists are recording videos for their pupils, selecting materi-



Edwin Hovsepyan at work

and try to reproduce them. This is called “modeling.”

Raphael and his piano partner Vardan played a duet at a distance, on video. Or, Vardan would play the Armenian song Araks, while Raphael would sing, and others, also connected by video, could join in vocally or on the piano. With the help of a Zoom application, they can have several cameras switched on and off for several participants at any one time. They also introduce third parties into the process; for example, one stu-

the pandemic crisis, instructors tell the children social stories that illustrate public health measures, for example, about staying home to avoid infection, washing hands, etc.

Artistic activity plays a very important role at My Way, not only in the ceramics and souvenirs that the pupils make, but in drawing and painting. Again, to cope with the new circumstances, videos make it possible for the youngsters to present their works to their friends. And in a cooperative effort with the National Gallery, the students are able to access works from their collection to copy, and then exhibit.

Until the center can open again and return to normal functioning, staff and students focus on maintaining close contact through visual means. A youngster out for a bike ride will receive the assignment to take photos and send them around. Even practical tasks, like cooking (with the help of recipes and video demonstrations by the teachers) or washing the dishes, can be shared by video, and generate excitement and encouragement from the others.

The board members and specialists in the staff have organized some time in their new schedule to conduct seminars, both internal and external. Some of these deal with professional issues, others are designed for the parents, to help them deal with the special challenges of the situation, suggesting ideas for activities, to keep the students' spirits and motivation high. “Anything that keeps people happy!” says Sona Petrosyan.

One positive by-product of the online learning program is that former students from abroad, who have returned to their homes in Europe of the USA, have been able to participate again with the center and its staff. Those living in Yerevan are looking forward to returning to the classrooms, to spend time in person. “We have accumulated birthdays to celebrate,” Petrosyan reports, “have selected places to visit within our socialization projects, and cannot wait to return.” She called it an “amazing phenomenon ... if treated the right way and with love, people with autism need and love their warm environment not less, but more than ‘neuro-typical’ people! This is our victory and we cannot wait for the situation to return to normal, to be again with people we love, doing things we love, interact and socialize.”



Vardan and Raphael perform their piano duet at a distance

al appropriate for the age and individual interests of the students. They are using not only material the students are familiar with, but new pieces, and are engaging students in the teaching process. “My son Raphael,” Petrosyan said, “sang along with music therapist Marine Meliqsetyan; they selected songs for smaller classes with younger children, announcing the subject of the video in advance.” Another therapist Nara Sargsyan, organized a video with musical and physical therapy assignments, in which she engaged her daughter to sing and to demonstrate the movements. Children watching the video, either in small groups or singly, will follow the music and movements,

dent, Vanik, sang for a professional musician, who then gave him feedback in the form of coaching and evaluation.

Music is just one of many activities engaging the students at My Way. The center's trained psychologists help the youngsters develop their capacity for logical thinking, they learn to recognize musical works or instruments, and also develop skills in more academic areas, like math and geography. While in the center, they would work together to make various objects, like toys, ceramics, decorative candles and souvenirs; now, at home, they are following the instruction of ergo therapists, doing it all by video. And, to help them cope with the new circumstances created by





## INTERNATIONAL

# Turkey's Heavy 'Tiger' Rocket Spotted In Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Exclave

By Can Kasapoglu

NAKHCHIVAN (Eurasia Daily Monitor 17:69, Jamestown Foundation) - Baku has initiated large-scale weapons readiness efforts in Nakhchivan. The official YouTube channel of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense features a video showing Turkish-manufactured multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) stationed in the strategic western exclave (YouTube, May 2). Of these arms, the 300-millimeter TRG-300 Kaplan (Tiger) deserves special attention, particularly in light of the delicate regional military balance between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Produced by Roketsan, the TRG-300 Tiger is the latest variant of Turkey's 300-millimeter-class MLRS. It fires a fairly accurate rocket with a circular error probable (CEP) of less than ten meters thanks to its global positioning (GPS)- and inertial navigation system (INS)-supported guidance features. With a 105-kilogram warhead configuration, the Tiger has up to 120 kilometers of range and effective radius of some 70 meters; while the heavier, 190-kilogram warhead option (Block-2) has a range of 90 kilometers and around 80 meters of effective radius, prioritizing overwhelming firepower. Both warhead configurations enable high-explosive and steel ball variations (Roketsan.com.tr, May 12).

The TRG-300 Tiger is designed to annihilate a broad array of critical target types, including troop concentrations, high-importance facilities, command-and-control (C2) and radar sites, as well as artillery and air-defense systems (Roketsan.com.tr, May 12). During the February 2020 escalation with the Syrian Arab Army in Idlib, the Turkish military deployed the Tiger MLRS to the front lines (*Aksam*, February 21).

Azerbaijani-Armenian clashes mostly revolve around Karabakh; yet, geo-strategically, heavy deployments in Nakhchivan offer Azerbaijani defense planners some valuable opportunities

for outflanking their regional rival. Notably, in December 2013, President Ilham Aliyev issued a decree establishing the Special Combined Arms Army (Elahidde Ümumqosun Ordusu) in the strategic western exclave (Mod.gov.az, 2014). Moreover, the new combat formation has close ties with Turkey's formidable 3rd Field Army (3. Ordu), overlooking the Caucasus frontier.

Militarily, Nakhchivan enables a second offensive route in addition to the Line of Contact around Karabakh, which has the potential to overstretch the Armenian forces in a multi-front war (see EDM, August 3, 2017, June 4, 2018, June 12, 2018, July 11, 2019; Bellingcat.com, October 4, 2017). Such an assault could unfold in one of two ways. Azerbaijan's SCAA can opt to launch an offensive directed at Armenia's capital, Yerevan, in an effort to distract the Armenian formations. Or it might cut into the critical lines of communications between Armenia and the Armenian forces in Karabakh. Until 2016, such scenarios were deemed rather improbable. However, following the serious April 2016 clashes, known as the Four Day War (see EDM, April 6, 2016 and May 5, 2016), the Azerbaijani forces proved that their newly gained capabilities could deliver a much more effective assault compared to their unsatisfactory showing during the 1990s (Chathamhouse.org, July 2016).

In tandem with the abovementioned scenarios, the heavy firepower delivered by Turkey's combat-proven MLRS promises to be a gamechanger when it comes to Azerbaijani-Armenian correlation of forces along the Nakhchivan front. Available Azerbaijani military writings attach utmost importance to deep-strike capabilities offered by rocket-artillery systems (T. Mikayilov et al., "Müasir Emeliyyatlarda Atesle Zerervurmanin Xüsusiyyətləri," Vol. 2, No. 1, 2016). Modern MLRS doctrines, unlike the unguided "rain of steel" Soviet tactics of the bygone Cold War era, stress combining destructive high-precision firepower with rapid mobility.

That is, today's mobile rocket launchers are designed to shoot, move to a new firing position, and keep shooting. Turkey's 122-millimeter and 300-millimeter MLRSs also depend on this design philosophy. Furthermore, Turkey's 300-millimeter-class MLRS baseline represents perhaps the longest-range and heaviest warhead combination among the Western arsenals of the same type (Roketsan.com, May 14, 2020; *The National Interest*, September 17, 2019). From their combat deployment positions, Azerbaijan's Turkish-manufactured heavy rockets can be used either for attacking the outskirts of the Armenian capital or, in a more calculated concept of operations, to hit Armenia's strategic highway along the north-south axis, disrupting its logistics routes (see EDM, August 3, 2017).

Meanwhile, the bilateral defense ties between Ankara and Baku have scaled up to a new level over the past decade, becoming a genuine military alliance, thanks to the 2010 Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support (ASPMS). Referring to Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, the ASPMS's Article 2 elucidates a *casus foederis*, obligating the parties to cooperate against any aggression faced by either country, to the extent each deems necessary. Furthermore, the agreement's Article 7 underlines that the two states shall coordinate their C2 and force structures, including during peacetime (Resmigazete.gov.tr, May 2011). Since then, joint exercises between the two militaries have been shaped accordingly.

Starting in 2019, two major joint exercises with pronounced land warfare components—"Mustafa Kemal Atatürk" and "Sarsilmaz Kardeslik" ("Steadfast Brotherhood")—showcased mechanized breakthrough offensives, overwhelming land-based fire support, and accompanying army aviation (*Yeni Safak*, May 3, 2019; YouTube, June 11, 2019). When looked at in total, these drills conspicuously resembled the Azerbaijani order of battle during the April 2016 Four Day War.

## International News

### New Ecumenical Website Memorial to Genocide Victims in the Ottoman Empire

BERLIN (FÖGG/VGM) - The Association for the Promotion of an Ecumenical Memorial to Genocide Victims in the Ottoman Empire (FÖGG) has created a memorial for the more than three million Christians - Armenians, Greek Orthodox as well as Aramaic, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians - who were victims of death marches, forced labor and massacres during the last decade of Ottoman rule (1912-1922) in Berlin-Charlottenburg between 2014 and 2018: <http://www.ge-nozid-gedenkstaette.de/impression/index.html>

As far as we know, this is the first memory-cultural project with such an inclusive approach, even in international comparison. In addition to this, its website Virtual Genocide Memorial (VGM) has now gone online: <https://virtual-genocide-memorial.de/>. The website provides information about the demographic, socioeconomic and cultural local and regional specifics of the Armenian, Greek and Aramaic/Assyrian/Chaldean communities in the Ottoman Empire and in the 1914 and 1918 Ottoman-occupied territories in Northwest Iran. VGM includes texts - memoirs of those affected and third contemporary witnesses, information on the history of Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire - as well as visual material for currently two of a total of 17 Ottoman provinces, namely the provinces of Van and Bursa/Prousa. The remaining 15 provinces will be added over the coming years.

Anastasia Kasapidou-Dick presents the intergenerational consequences of genocide in her essay "Patrida - The Lasting Pain of the Lost Homeland" using the example of Koronixa (Sancak Güümü hane, Vilayet Trabzon/Trapezunta).

The board of FÖGG e.V. and the editorial staff of VGM under Prof. h.c. Dr. Tessa Hofmann look forward to contributions on family and individual fates, historical photographic material, land maps and postcards, as well as suggestions. The English website is hierarchically structured and searchable according to Ottoman administrative division.

### South Korean Assembly Plant Comes to Armenia

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) - A bus manufacturing plant will be established in Armenia within the framework of a joint project by the South Korean Youngsan corporation and the Armenian National Interests Fund (ANIF).

"The buses are intended for the Eurasian Economic Union market. We have a very concrete targeting. Armenia is becoming a convenient country for international enterprises," said ANIF CEO David Papazyan.

Youngsan was working with the Armenian Ministry of Economy and the Investment Support Center initially. The ANIF will finance a part of the plant and will become a shareholder of less than 50%, somewhere between 40-49%, Papazyan said. The project is worth 4.4 million dollars, 1 million of which will be financed by ANIF, a bit over 1 million by the company itself, and nearly 2.3 million will be loaned from an Armenian commercial bank by the company.

Youngsan's 2019 sales totaled over half a billion dollars, and the company usually also works on orders from other brands. Most likely the Armenia plant will produce three different types of buses, with a length of up to 10 meters. The company will launch production of raw materials in Armenia sometime after starting the project.

The launch has been delayed a bit due to the coronavirus pandemic, but Papazyan said he hopes the South Korean businessmen will be able to arrive in July to finalize the deal.

-Anna Grigoryan  
(Stepan Kocharyan editor/translator)

## Istanbul Armenian Schools in Serious Financial Crisis

ISTANBUL (*NorMarmara, Jamanak, Agos*, Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul) - The coronavirus epidemic has shaken the Istanbul-Armenian community and especially its educational institutions, which have limited revenues and whose budget deficits are reaching significant proportions. The Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul issued a directive concerning those schools which have applied to the Patriarchate for help.

The Patriarchate brought this situation to the attention of the Turkish-Armenian Association of Vakıfs [Religious Foundations] on April 30, stressing that immediate joint action is necessary. In connection with this communication from the Patriarchate, Bedros Shirinoghlu, the chairman of the association, appealed to the leaders of all these Armenian institutions. The importance of having detailed financial reports from the schools requiring assistance was noted.

The chairmen of the parish councils of four schools which require immediate aid, those of the Kumkapi Cathedral and the Samatya, Ferikoy and Topkapi churches, held a meeting at the Patriarchate on May 7 to develop a common plan.

They will submit reports of their financial situation as quickly as possi-

ble to the Patriarchate and the Vakıfs Association. Then the latter's executive council will hold a meeting conforming to the requirements of COVID-19 social distancing to discuss these reports. The council is composed of 21 members. A committee will be formed to evaluate the reports.

All community and parish bodies will be asked to present statements of their revenues so that it can be determined what resources are available.

A working committee will be formed to determine, based on the economic situation, whether to join the schools together, close them or keep them in equilibrium. This committee will be formed of experts and philanthropists. It will conduct its investigations on open platforms accessible to the public and present its results to the executive of the Vakıfs Association.

The agenda will include the unemployment and economic issues created



Sahakyan Nunyan Armenian School of Samatya (Fatih), Istanbul

by the coronavirus epidemic as well as other community matters. In addition, work will be conducted to form an economic aid committee.

Turkish-Armenian journalist and editor of the Istanbul-Armenian newspaper *Jamanak* Ara Kochunyan wrote on March 16 that it is worrisome that the Patriarchate is publicly writing about the possibility of school closures.

He pointed out that the schools had been in poor shape for some time, and individuals had suggested various solutions, but no action had been taken. The epidemic merely brought this crisis to a head.





# Parisian Armenians Struggle

PARIS, from page 1

preexisting government-funded programs, like food vouchers, have increased and a plan is in place to ease lockdowns starting in mid-May.

The estimated 100,000 Armenians who live in Paris perpetuate their heritage with pride and protect their history with vigor, flourishing particularly in the artistic, academic, journalistic and cultural sectors, despite the deadlock caused by the pandemic.

■ Editor-in-Chief of the *Nouvelles d'Arménie* and Co-President of the Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations of France (CCAF), Ara Toranian has been a vigorous figure of the French-Armenian scene and reflects the gumption of Armenians who continue to carry out their work in a society that has been shut down.

"As everywhere in the world, the pandemic has impacted community life," said Toranian. "All activities have been stopped, masses were celebrated behind closed doors, and many media, especially print, have had to stop production."

On his end, Toranian was able to publish the April and May issues of *Armenian News (Nouvelles d'Arménie)* and is currently laying out the June issue with his editorial staff. He acknowledges that the paper's financial situation is "very difficult since the advertising budget has collapsed." A burglary in their office premises last October contributed to the uncertain future of the newspaper, which continues to report, despite the dismal updates.

"The pandemic has resulted in the death of many association leaders and it's been a real slaughter," said Toranian, who notes that the community section has been replaced by obituaries. "We regret the death of Patrick Devedjian, president of the departmental council of Hauts-de-Seine, and a former minister and lawyer who was very involved in the defense of the Armenian cause."

Just two months prior to his death, Devedjian was in attendance at the CCAF's annual dinner in January, sitting between France's President Emmanuel Macron and Turkish historian Taner Akçam.

"Patrick Devedjian was in great shape that night," said Toranian, who highlighted that the CCAF awarded him with a medal of courage in 2016, which took place in the presence of then-President François Hollande. "He seemed happy and proud to see the progress made by the Armenian community in France, which is the only one, along with the Jewish community, to be able to organize this type of event."

Thanks to the staunch efforts of committed individuals like Devedjian, the Armenian Genocide is officially recognized by France and the nation continuously advocates for awareness and justice. But for the first time since the 1970s, the April 24 commemorations were cancelled because of the pandemic, a contrast to last year, when several thousand people attended the commemoration, during which Prime Minister Edouard Philippe "made a speech of exceptional strength."

"Although the commemoration came at the hardest time of confinement, we still got it done," said Toranian, who noted that their organization respected the limit of no more than six people present at a gathering.

The ceremony took place on April 24 in front of the poignant Gomidas memorial statue, dedicated to the 1.5 million martyrs who perished in the Armenian Genocide. Those in attendance included Nicole Belloubet, Minister of Justice, who represented the French government, Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris, Hasmik Tolmadjian, Ambassador of Armenia to France, Mourad Papazian, co-president of the CCAF and Toranian.

"The protocol manager for the Orsay wharf, Hélène Stein, read a short text paying tribute to the victims and we observed a moment of silence before concluding the ceremony," said Toranian, who, along with CCAF focused on bolstering virtual commemorations with the campaign slogan, "I stay at home, but I don't forget." They also included genocide-related publications in the press, including the daily *Le Figaro*, the leading newspaper of France.

■ Creatives Aram and Virginia Kerovpyan have forged artistic lives in Paris since the late 1970s, making the enriching past accessible to current and future generations. They both serve on the board of the *Péniche Anako*, a cultural mainstay on a canal barge on La Villette Basin, that once symbolized Armenian Genocide survivors and now serves as a center of music and multi-cultural performances on a boat formerly owned by the Armenian Red Cross. Since its founding 10 years ago, Virginia and her husband have organized concerts, from jazz to folk to bluegrass, along with lectures, screenings and dramatic readings, among many other imaginative endeavors. The open-door policy enhances the cultural exchange and dialogue.

"It's an amazing project that exists with a shoestring budget and where many artists, young and old, have met, some of whom have continued together to form their own groups," said Virginia, who serves as director of programming of *Péniche Anako*, which has been dubbed "Paris's alternative cultural scene."

She said people of all nations come together, especially from places that are "community centered," like South Americans,



Collectif Medz Bazar

Middle Easterners and Africans, linking all kinds of artistry and ideas.

The music and programming, however, has been interrupted. "There has been a loss of cultural life during the pandemic," said Virginia. "We are encouraged to do things online, but it doesn't take the place of human interaction."

Professionally trained musicians, the Kerovpyans are entrenched in the Armenian cultural life and generously share their knowledge through workshops, performances and presentations, and tours in and out of France - but now find themselves communicating and teaching virtually.

They teach modal music digitally to their students, three-fourths of whom are not Armenian, and they continue to collaborate with the Paris-based Polish theater group Teatr Zar, which asked the couple to create recorded audio listening lessons.

"It's demanding to prepare but it's very interesting for us too because there is learning on both ends as we figure out virtual techniques like sound engineering," said Virginia, a soloist and concert artist originally from Washington D.C. "It's definitely a challenge and you can say it's satisfying in a different way since we can continue our work."

Aram and Virginia founded the folk and troubadour music ensemble, Kotchnak, close to 40 years ago, as well as the Centre

ing songs from the region of Akn to be featured by Houshamadyan, a nonprofit founded in Berlin, Germany that reconstructs and preserves the memory of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire through research.

"It has been fruitful and we appreciate the time we have," said Aram. His wife notes they have "projects galore" and find inventive ways to keep themselves productive. Their three children, Shushan, Vahan and Maral, have also embarked on creative paths.

The Kerovpyans observe that the situation in Paris is slowly improving, though the abundant cultural life of the city is still on pause.

"The coronavirus has pretty much put a stop to the gatherings so only people who have the means and ideas to do things online have continued to share their music," said Virginia. "We're continuing with our projects as much as we can but we are in an artistic community where most of our work has to do with gatherings, so we are all at a standstill."

■ The pandemic hit just as Collectif Medz Bazar, an urban Diaspora band, was entering an extensive world touring schedule, inspired by the release of their third album, "O." [SEE <https://mirrorspectator.com/2020/04/23/two-new-albums-in-modern-armenian-folk-music-o-and-acoustic-armenia/>] Influenced by their own musical traditions, the group invigorates traditional classics while collectively composing arrangements of folk music and original compositions. Within their layered songs they share inflections of bountiful genres and sounds, from Middle Eastern percussion to Iranian folk music to hip hop, with a strong message of upholding equality and addressing social and political issues.

While their plans to perform their cross-cultural and unique blend of music in countries such as Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey, Georgia, France and the US have been put on hold, the ethnically mixed six member band - Shushan Kerovpyan, Vahan Kerovpyan, Elâ Nuro lu, Marius Pibart, Ezgi Sevgi Can, and Sevana Tchakerian - are not sitting idly by, even as their bandmates are living in different countries.

"However difficult it is for everybody, we try to live the present situation in a constructive and uplifting way, using the overwhelming time at home to write, create, practice, observe the world around us and take care of ourselves," said the Portugal-based Vahan Kerovpyan, who is a co-founder of Collectif Medz Bazar and plays the percussion and piano.

"Seeing our musician friends and inspiring artists responding to the pandemic in such creative ways gave us ideas to keep on creating and producing music for our audience," said singer and accordionist Tchakerian, a co-founder of the band, who normally lives in Armenia but is stuck in Paris because of the lockdown.

Before the pandemic struck, the band enjoyed a full week of rehearsals in Paris in mid-February, leaving the musicians with a lot of material to work on independently. Their first confinement video, filmed from each band member's home, was the Kurdish song *Min Digo Melê*.

Collectif Medz Bazar, which formed in 2012, is open to livestreaming a concert in the near future if they can find a way to synchronize their microphones live - but they miss the synergy of a live concert.

"During these last few weeks musicians coped, sometimes through silence, sometimes through home recordings and live concerts, but at the end of the day, the emotions shared by an audience experiencing a concert can't be delivered digitally or replaced with technological tools," said Tchakerian, who acknowledged unease about the unpredictable future of the culture and the arts during this time of crisis.

The tightknit group draws from its strong foundation of friendship and respect as they weather current challenges and collaborate to create new musical works while sharing it with



Virginia and Aram Kerovpyan

for Armenian Modal Chant Studies - Akn, originated in 1998, which specializes in liturgical chant and where Aram serves as Director of Armenian Liturgical Chant. Virginia is a soloist of both professional ensembles that attract French and Armenian audiences. They have also shifted their ensemble's activities to the online platform.

"It certainly does not replace face to face teaching," said Virginia. "When we are physically together, we live and feel the music, and that's something that can't be replaced by the internet."

But "the show must go on" according to Aram Kerovpyan, who is originally from Istanbul and holds a PhD in musicology. A source of frustration has been the postponement of a CD recording project with Akn that was originally slated for the last week of April.

"We had people coming from different countries, like Poland and Belgium, to complete this project and everything was arranged until the lockdown went into effect," said Aram, who served as the Master Singer of the Armenian Cathedral in Paris for 30 years, noting the importance of being "alert and inventive every second."

During their time indoors, Aram posts videos on their YouTube channel, including excerpts from Lenten and Easter chants. They are also working on musical programs and prepar-





## INTERNATIONAL

# To Maintain *Joie de Vivre*

their audience.

“The music world, like all others, is somehow adapting to the situation,” said Kerovpyan. “But even when isolated, we tend to gather, in a different way, through social media, posting music and videos, and other means of exchange, and above all, we take the time to question what seemed obvious or unquestionable.”

“Most of us will be much more socially conscious, change our way of consumption, and we won’t take little things for granted anymore,” said Tchakerian. “I think this has been a humbling experience for us humans, because it touches all of us, regardless of our socioeconomic situation.”

For Kerovpyan, he vacillates between the impression that things will change and that not much will be affected in the long run. What is clear, however, is that the pandemic has shown cracks in society that have been ignored.

“Even the established discourses and ways of life have been exposed to the public in all their fragility, giving an opportunity to question the systems we live in and the authority of those in power,” said Kerovpyan. “Many people have opened their eyes and witnessed things that were conveniently denied. There is a lot to think about, a lot to change by our own will.”

Collectif Medz Bazar has come far since their first gatherings almost a decade ago where they simply had the desire to “jam and share music we loved with each other.”

“As we grew, the band gained different meanings for each of the members,” said Tchakerian. “When performing in Turkey, I personally feel it as an act of activism and that we contribute to the reviving, even slightly, of our indigenous cultures, languages, songs in our ancestral lands.”

Living in Armenia for the past five years, Tchakerian has witnessed transformation in the homeland, the power of the youth and the encouragement of free thinking, uniting those who strive for “tolerance, openness and love.”

“I hope that the arts will find their essential role in motivating people, defending freedom and expressing love and fraternity,” said Kerovpyan. “We in Medz Bazar are certainly determined to pursue this mission.”

■ Right before the pandemic became headline-making news, Armenian youth were enjoying each other’s company in a cocktail bar in Paris’ city center, organized by the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Young Professionals Paris Chapter, where a hundred young Armenian professionals came together for social and networking purposes. As of now, the chapter’s programming has been canceled through the summer, including their popular annual outdoor event, according to Robin Koulaksezian, a member of the YP Paris Committee.

The leadership and members remain connected mostly through their Whatsapp group and partake in virtual events with fellow chapters.

“We are participating in the YP Live events, organized by different YP chapters each week, which have been very popular during the lockdown,” said Koulaksezian. They are also coordinating with AGBU France to bring attention to AGBU’s humanitarian relief aid related to COVID-19.

The Paris YP Chapter focuses on two main activities - conferences with entrepreneurs, such as Armenians who have founded their own startups, or young Armenians in the fashion industry in Paris; and Afterworks, which encourages French-Armenians to come together and support one another’s professional ambitions and cultural traditions.

“Afterworks are organized every two months and we plan various activities such as Armenian cooking workshops, wine tasting and yoga classes among others,” said Koulaksezian, who recently published a travel guide book, *Little Armenias*, about the Armenian Diaspora in the French and English languages. “Our group is composed of French-Armenians of all backgrounds including some who grew up with AGBU’s activities, others who are second and third generation, as well as those who came from Armenia to study and work in Paris.”

Jirair Jolakian, Director and Editor of *Nor Haratch Weekly*, which is published three times a week in Armenian and once a week in French, describes the Paris Armenian community as fruitful and productive, particularly in regards to cultural life.

“Though the population is spread out and there is no centralized body, it is a colorful and active community,” said Jolakian. “The April 24 commemorations unite Armenians as well as the annual telethon and fundraisers that benefit the homeland.”

The activities that contribute to the richness of the community, however, have come to a halt since the pandemic penetrated the country and particularly the capital city, where *Nor Haratch* is published.

“The pandemic brought with it new challenges, including a disruption in postal services that didn’t allow the print copies to reach the homes of subscribers,” said Jolakian, who increasingly turned his attention to the newspaper’s website where the news was updated daily, with a special focus on COVID-19 and how it has affected France, Armenia, Artsakh and the world at large. Articles closely followed the uptick in cases, new scientific discoveries and government responses. The site, which is in both French and Armenian, also reports on the political news

of Armenia and those related to Armenians.

“Our digital site and our newsletter filled in the role of the print paper so we could still deliver the news every day,” said Jolakian. “We were able to keep our audience informed digitally of the ongoing in our community, Armenia and Europe.”

*Nor Haratch* comes on the heels of the historic independent daily *Haratch*, founded in 1925 by Schavarsh Missakian, that served as the longest-running French-Armenian publication until it ceased operations in 2009. In order to uphold the journalistic tradition of the French-Armenian community, Jolakian, alongside other noted intellectuals, reignited the newspaper. As it ushers in a new chapter of growth and readership, *Nor Haratch* provides much-needed dissemination of the news during these turbulent times.

“The pandemic caused significant changes in our community but we tried to find local solutions,” said Jolakian. “News shifted more towards digital, classes were taught virtually and workshops were done online, showing us that from now on we should all be more prepared for what’s to come.”

Jolakian’s service to the community expands beyond the world of journalism. Before his commitment to *Nor Haratch*, he formed deep roots in the Armenian theater scene in Paris over the last three decades, and with a close collaboration with metteur en scène Arby Ovanessian, he helped stage close to 150 plays independently, without the support of an established organization.

He looks towards the future generations to continue their

Boghos Nubar Pasha, was a “major cultural center for the post-genocide Armenian diaspora,” according to director and historian Dr. Boris Adjemian, who asserts that the library has long been among the “pillars of Armenian cultural life in Paris” and the only one that exists today.

“In the last decades, the role of the Nubar Library has changed a lot,” said Dr. Adjemian. “It strengthened its role in scholarship, developed partnerships and co-sponsored activities with many universities, research centers and other Armenian, French or foreign institutions, and its audience became more international, affecting the Armenian diaspora and beyond.”

The doors to the major research center, with over 43,000 books in its library, have been sealed for over two months.

“Since the lockdown was implemented, travels in and out of Paris were drastically limited, and all the cultural institutions were closed,” said Dr. Adjemian. “However the activity of the Nubar Library does not only depend on its visitors, since it acts like a research center on the genocide, diaspora and other related topics so this activity was not interrupted.”

Some of these projects included teaching a class on the history of the Armenian Genocide to international students at the American University of Paris, which was taught online, and several research projects such as the publishing of a book on the history of Armenian immigration to France, that will be released later this year. The Nubar Library continues its editorial activity and has published, on a regular basis since 2013, the bilingual (French and English) multidisciplinary journal *Études*



AGBU Nubar Library

involvement in the Armenian cultural life in Paris and perhaps place more of an onus on sharpening the Armenian language skills.

“Paris, and France in general, have had challenges in preparing the upcoming generations to speak the language,” said Jolakian, who directed an educational theatre workshop in Armenian at MGNIG organization. “In the past, the Armenians from the West brought in new forces to strengthen the teaching of the language, but now it’s been replaced with Eastern Armenian and there is no language unification.”

One place for the youth to be exposed to the Armenian cultural life is Péniche Anako, which Jolakian, one of the founders, describes as a vibrant gathering place, allowing participants to “engage in Armenian cultural events, enjoy Armenian food and mingle with people of all backgrounds in one of the most important centers for world music.”

■ Dr. Dickran Kouymjian, who established the Armenian Studies Program at California State University, Fresno, currently resides in Paris, a city he has spent a considerable amount of time in during his productive career, which includes teaching at the Sorbonne. He continues to partake in the academic and day-to-day life in Paris, which he says “has been impacted by the pandemic in the same way as it has around the world.”

“Nearly all programs have been cancelled, including the annual April 24 march that leads to the Turkish Embassy, and was instead replaced by a virtual program,” said Dr. Kouymjian, Emeritus Professor of The Berberian Chair of Armenian Studies. “Most gatherings, Armenian or not, have been forbidden by the French government. As in the US, there is a thawing out of confinement, but it is fortunately not as chaotic.”

He notes that the presence of the Armenian community is “quite large” and permeates into the academic fields, including the Chair of Armenian Studies at Inalco: Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales and at the Institut Catholique. At the latter there are “vast Armenian holdings in its library.”

Dr. Kouymjian also cites the Bibliothèque Nubar (AGBU Nubar Library) as a significant resource that is “very rich” and open daily to the general public.

Founded in 1928, the Nubar Library, named after its founder,

arméniennes contemporaines, which is accessible online.

As weeks of the lockdown stretch into months, people at home are turning to more lighthearted outlets that also help entertainers muster through the cancellation of live performances. Pop rock musician Mika Apamian utilized his YouTube Channel to share “Le Grand Confinement” parody videos and songs with his audience - maintaining his creative spirit while offering a moment of escape for his listeners. The covers, which range from Lady Gaga’s *Shallow* to Queen’s *Don’t Stop Me Now* along with French singers Johnny Hallyday, Patrick Bruel and Charles Aznavour, offer levity during the unlikely times of the pandemic, which forced his tour with French singer Clarika to be cut short.

“The first day of the quarantine in Paris, I was singing Charles Aznavour’s song *Hier Encore* and it became clear to me that there will be a big difference between yesterday, today and tomorrow,” said Apamian, a self-proclaimed fan of Aznavour who he has imitated for years. “So I had the idea of rewriting the lyrics and making my first video.”

In just a couple of days, the video reached 5,000 views and he decided to continue the “Le Grand Confinement” series after receiving favorable feedback. Apamian harnesses a positive view of the situation, looking at the lockdown as time to create.

“People thanked me for giving them happiness and joy during these difficult times,” said Apamian. “They also congratulated me for my voice and my energy in the videos.”

Apamian, who composes his own music and plays guitar, cello and duduk, released his debut album “L’Année Du Taureau” while performing as a regular at the historical landmark Maxim’s de Paris. The comedian-singer keeps himself busy through the production of his parody videos, practicing instruments for hours on end, and teaming up with other artists virtually - he recently played the duduk in an online collaboration with Clarika.

“This particular period allows me to think about my role in society,” said Apamian. “I know that I don’t want to live like I did and that I want to build something new. I hope a lot of people found the time to think about themselves and what they really want for our world.”



# Community News

## 'In the Beginning Was Armenia'

Review of Arabic Language Documentary

By **Maydaa Nadar**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, countless events are suspended worldwide. However, before the partial lockdown in Egypt, a very important celebration took place. In the presence of the Armenian community in Cairo and the Egyptians interested in Armenia, the documentary "In the Beginning Was Armenia" was screened on March 7, 2020.

The story started when the Egyptian photographer Essam Nagy held the first piece, a photomacrograph, which he bought from Levon, an Armenian who had a photography shop and lived in Egypt. Levon deeply loved his homeland and used to talk about it proudly. Before the latter passed away, he gave the former a valuable present. A khachkar [cross-stone] was the gift and was the key that opened to us the gate to discover Armenia and enjoy its endless treasure.

### Armenians and the Church

The documentary is divided into three parts: "The Khachkar Maker," "Sons of Fire and Roses" and "Return and Rebirth." After Essam lands in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, he spends time at the Vernissage market and visits several places, such as Tatev Monastery. We then understand the significance of this beautifully carved cross-stone in the Armenian heritage.

Also, we comprehend the strong bond between Armenians and their church and how religion was a key factor that helped them overcome the unfortunate incidents the country went through, bearing in mind that the First Republic of Armenia only enjoyed independence for two years (1918-1920). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that up until now, Armenian clergymen remain positively present in the life of Armenians, whether those living in Armenia or in the diaspora. We see them warmly interacting with their community and attending the multiple events held in Egypt, for instance.

### Coexistence with Minorities

Despite the Armenian Genocide and the attempts to obscure the Christian identity of Armenia, in the course of three interviews in the documentary, we see that the minorities in Armenia harmonize with the Christian majority. For example, Chief Rabbi of Armenia Gershon Burstein declared: "A very important matter that distinguished Armenia from other countries during the era of the Soviet Union is that, here, there wasn't any anti-Semitism. Here in Armenia we freely mention that we are Jews and we can live."

Also, Said Avdalyan mentions on behalf of the Association of Young Yezidis of Armenia: "We live here peacefully, without any threat. We were never subjected to pressure or discrimination. Our history, literature, and culture even grew here." In the Blue Mosque, Shiite Imam Mohamed Aly Shadegan added: "We enjoy a good relationship with the Christian Armenians."

### Historic Facts

While Essam narrates the history of Armenia from the very beginning, going over the changes that occurred in Greater Armenia, the genocide, the Battle of Sardarabad, the establishment of Armenia's First Republic, and the period when the country, which was the first one to adopt Christianity as the state religion (301 A.D.), was under the communist regime, crucial historical and geographic facts about Armenia are revealed to us.

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Dr. Shant Shekherdian with medical residents from Armenia (Photo courtesy of Dr. Shekherdian)

## UCLA Faculty Providing Covid-19 Expertise to Armenia in Real Time

WESTWOOD, Calif. (The Promise Armenian Institute) – Funded by the Promise Armenian Institute (PAI) at UCLA, two University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) faculty are working tirelessly to provide real-time Covid-19 assistance to medical and public health professionals in the Republic of Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Caucasus. Associate Dean Alina Dorian of the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and Dr. Shant

By **Peggy McInerny**

Shekherdian of the Geffen School of Medicine and UCLA Health have long histories of working with medical and public health experts in both places.

The "day" jobs of these two Bruin faculty are extraordinarily demanding, spanning teaching, administrative, research and clinical work (and in Dorian's case, a second job as a Los Angeles Public Health Commissioner). Factor in the first global pandemic in a century, and their workloads are staggering. Yet Shekherdian and Dorian are also devoting precious free time (and countless hours of lost sleep) to coordinate with experts worldwide to identify and deliver medical equipment to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as share the latest Covid-19 knowledge and practices with health professionals. In so doing, they draw on a long history of collaboration in medical research between UCLA faculty and health and university professionals in Armenia, their own professional and personal networks and the global Armenian diaspora. (The Fielding School even has an Armenian-language fact page on Covid-19; see <https://ucla.in/3cwtrnn>.)

An undergraduate alumna of UCLA, Dorian is an expert in public health disaster planning and response, with experience working in Armenia, Georgia, Eritrea, the Dominican Republic, Macedonia, Kosovo, Haiti and Peru. She joined the faculty of the Fielding School in 2004, where she is currently associate dean for public health practice and for diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as adjunct assistant professor in the department of community health sciences. Previously, she served as associate director of the school's Master of Public Health for Health Professionals Program and its Center for Public Health and Disasters, as well as field studies director of the community health sciences department.

Shekherdian is assistant professor at the Geffen School of Medicine and a pediatric surgeon at UCLA Health specializing in neonatal and minimally invasive surgery and surgical management of inflammatory bowel disease. Also an undergraduate Bruin alumnus, Shekherdian completed his surgical residency and an executive M.P.H. at UCLA before joining the faculty in 2014. He has longstanding research interests in global health and is currently conducting a study of cancer screening in Armenia, with support from a Fulbright Scholarship and the assistance of UCLA medical students and residents. Rapid Response Planning Gives Way to Real-time Technical Assistance

In early 2020, PAI awarded financial support to a project proposed by Dorian and Shekherdian that would provide expertise on the novel coronavirus pandemic to the Armenian government. Created in late 2019 with a generous gift from the estate of Kirk Kerkorian, PAI seeks to advance scholarship on Armenia and its diaspora, as well as to leverage UCLA's expertise to support the work of Armenian communities in Los Angeles, Armenia and throughout the world.

Based on her previous experience of rapid response teams, Dorian assembled a team of public health and medical experts (including many UCLA faculty and UCLA Health practitioners) with the goal of embedding them in the Armenian Ministry of Health as a mobile operational unit. Shekherdian, who was scheduled to conduct research in Armenia in early March 2020, refocused his

*continued on next page*

## Treasured Place in The Heart of the City, Celebrating What Unites Us!: Armenian Heritage Park

BOSTON – "Armenian Heritage Park is a treasured place in the heart of the city" is often heard. During these many weeks of isolation during this COVID-19 pandemic, many are commenting on social media what Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston means to them.

"One of the things I miss most is spending time in Armenian Heritage Park," comments Steve Vilkas, who writes for NorthEndWaterfront.com, "whether walking the labyrinth or reading on a bench- reconnecting, whether at dawn or dusk, with the beauty of nature and the peace of this special place. We'll return to the oasis eventually!"

Vicki Adjami, Principal and Creative Director, Communication via Design, recently shared, "The Park means so very much to me and my own heritage. And it's so very relevant to our world today - a unique place of peace and representation of inclusion and togetherness during this current time on earth."

Many commented that they missed not coming together at the park on April 24 this year for the annual Genocide Remembrance and placing flowers on the rim of the Reflecting Pool. An annual program of the Massachusetts Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee, this year's virtual recognition was thoughtfully planned by Anais Astarjian, committee chair, with Lauren Piligian and others.

While all programs at the park are on hold due to COVID-19, the Celebrating What Unites Us! series, a program of Friends of Armenian Heritage Park in collaboration with Age-Friendly Boston, will be connecting many virtually Fridays at 10 a.m., May 8-June 5, for this special at-home series via Zoom.

The five-week special series is being generously offered by Oldways, a "food and nutrition nonprofit helping people live healthier, happier lives." Each week an instructor from Oldways shows how to prepare a delicious meal celebrating the cultural heritage of the many residents of the City of Boston and Commonwealth. To register, please visit <https://www.armenianheritagepark.org/event-s-2>.

The Celebrating What Unites Us! series, inspired by the park's design and its key features, celebrates the immigrant experience while building community and cross-cultural understanding and promoting healthy and active living. Initially the two-part program, developed by Friends of Heritage Park in collaboration with Age-Friendly Boston and The KITCHEN at Boston Public Market, and supported by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, was held monthly, May-November. Each month highlighted the cultural heritage of many of the residents of the City of Boston and Commonwealth. Participants first met at Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway where a community leader shared his/her immigrant experience. Many walked the labyrinth, symbolic of life's journey. Then walked to The KITCHEN at the Boston Public Market where a chef prepared a signature dish for all to enjoy for lunch and conversation.

Now, as The KITCHEN at the Boston Public Market is permanently closed, possible venues near the Park are being explored to continue the two-part series, which was so well received and attended.

Each monthly program began at the park with a leader sharing his/her immigrant experience, while standing in front of the Park's Abstract Sculpture. Annually, the Abstract Sculpture, a split rhomboid dodecahedron made of stainless steel and aluminum, is reconfigured - its two halves pulled apart and reassembled to create a new sculptural shape, symbolic of the immigrant experience.

see PARK, page 11





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# UCLA Faculty Providing Covid-19 Expertise to Armenia in Real Time

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trip instead to work on the details of how to embed the team at the ministry of health. Rapid developments soon derailed their initial plans. Travel restrictions implemented by the U.S. administration made it impossible for the experts to go to Armenia and forced Shekherdian to return home almost as soon as he arrived in Yerevan, the country's capital. As Covid-19 infections began to rise in Los Angeles, moreover, the experts slated to travel — who included a senior emergency medical services and health disaster management officer for Orange County — were soon overwhelmed with local responsibilities.

Dorian herself is one of five public health commissioners in Los Angeles County who meet regularly with Dr. Barbara Ferrer, director of the LA County Department of Public Health, to work through the issues of the county's pandemic response. She is also a member of the Covid-19 task force for the Fielding School.

In the face of a rapidly changing developments, the two UCLA faculty members shifted gears. Shekherdian, who has longstanding relationships with the medical community in Armenia, is now concentrating on helping organize deliveries of medical equipment and PPE for the country, organizing a webinar series on Covid-19 for Armenian medical professionals and directly advising both the country's ministry of health and High Commissioner's Office for Diaspora Affairs on Armenia's response to the pandemic.

"I am thrilled that the Promise Armenian Institute is able to support this critical technical assistance at a time of urgent need," says Ann Karagozian, PAI director and distinguished professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering at UCLA. "We are fortunate to have the flexibility to act quickly, enabling us to leverage the work of multiple individuals and organizations helping Armenia prepare and respond to the novel coronavirus pandemic." "This type of collaborative work, in which UCLA experts cooperate with their counterparts in Armenia as well as community and international organizations of the global Armenian diaspora, will be a hallmark of the Promise Armenian Institute going forward," says Dr. Eric Esrailian, chief of UCLA Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Division of Digestive Diseases, a producer of the film "The Promise" and the driving force behind the creation of

PAI. "I am very proud that PAI is able to support this project." Comments Shekherdian, "We have a great working relationship with the Armenian government, which has been incredibly transparent. They have been very open in terms of daily lines of communications with stakeholders there." On the procurement side, he continues, "We have been trying to tap into the resources of the diaspora, reaching out to Armenians all over the world who either have the financial resources and/or access to medical supplies, trying to figure out contributions and the logistics of deliveries. "Certainly, global shortages have complicated things, but it's amazing how active and ready the diaspora is to step up in this time of need. There are many good stories of much-needed supplies making it Armenia because of people in the diaspora. "The webinar series," notes Shekherdian, "is an inter-organizational and inter-institutional effort." Collaborators in the effort include the Los Angeles-based Armenian American Medical Society, the Armenian Medical International Committee, the National Institute of Health in Armenia, the High Commissioner's Office on Diaspora Affairs and individual Armenian Americans and Armenians living in other countries. The online seminars share the latest knowledge and literature on Covid-19 patient care in a wide spectrum of medical fields (i.e., critical care, infectious diseases, radiology, nursing, etc.). "Some of the speakers are UCLA faculty and practitioners, and we hope to eventually incorporate our residents as well," he adds. Apart from the pandemic, Shekherdian has been engaged for several years in helping the Armenian NIH redesign the country's residency programs to bring their content and teaching methods into line with those of Western countries. He is also a member of two Armenian Ministry of Health committees: one on the quality of health care and the other on human resources (whose task is to develop the healthcare professionals needed by the Armenian health care system).

Dorian, meanwhile, has remained in contact with the team of experts that she originally put together to visit Armenia. The team continues to meet electronically and receive updates on the situations in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, Dorian has also been working with organizations such as the Armenian National Committee of America to reallocate part of an existing Congressional appropriation for Armenian foreign aid toward

Covid-19 work.

"Most of my work has been in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK)," she explains. "I first went there in 1995 — I helped write the region's first national health plan in 1996 — and have been working very closely with their ministry of health ever since on many different projects, including a national breastfeeding program and the building of a national hospital." Dorian is also working with Shekherdian and the Armenian diaspora to have scarce equipment and PPE delivered there. "Up until April 7," she recounts, "there were no confirmed Covid-19 cases in NK and I was working to provide technical assistance on health system preparation and response." That process is now squarely focused on Covid-19 public health measures and patient care, with Dorian directly advising the region's health minister.

The public health professor draws on colleagues at the Fielding School of Public Health and the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University (her alma mater), as

infrastructure; it's work leave policies, housing policies, health insurance, food security policy, mental health services and access. You need to really think about these things without silos." Pandemic Reveals Systemic Weaknesses in Health Care Systems Worldwide

Public health emergencies quickly reveal the systemic problems of any health care system. In the U.S., the coronavirus pandemic has thrown a glaring spotlight on inequities in health care. "It is showing all the problems we already had: underfunding, emergency rooms that were already at capacity, lack of access, etc.," notes Dorian. "We are looking at structural decisions and budgets that were already in place that didn't allow our healthcare system to function well during a pandemic," she says. "Ideally, you should support the health care system to provide daily health care, including such things as work leave policies. We should have had those policies in place before the start of the pandemic in this country — it's one of the reasons why we are so



Professor Alina Dorian (left) of the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and Dr. Shant Shekherdian of the Geffen School of Medicine and UCLA Health (Photos provided by Professors Dorian and Shekherdian)

well as other contacts, to provide the expertise needed by NK health professionals at any given moment, primarily by video conferencing. "The problem is that most people in NK don't speak English, so I am frequently serving as translator on those video calls," says the Fielding School associate dean. Evaluating the Pandemic Response in Armenia From the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, Dorian and Shekherdian — with help from the American University of Armenia — have been collecting as much data as possible on Armenia's experience of and response to the pandemic. "Epidemiologically," says Dorian, "there will be a quiet period after the first wave of the pandemic, then a resurgence. Many infectious diseases of this type have three waves, but every day we are finding out just how Covid-19 will roll out." PAI is funding data collection and analysis so that the two UCLA faculty members can help their Armenian peers use the coming quiet period to think ahead, anticipate the equipment and testing conditions that will prevail in several months' time and plan what they can do better during the next wave. "We are working with PAI to build this analytical capability and identify all the assistance UCLA can offer Armenia on the pandemic," says Dorian. "We also need to plan for everything else needed in the health care system," she continues, starting with how hospitals and providers will start to provide services that have been put on hold, such as elective surgeries and cancer screenings. "There is an avalanche of deferred medical services, as well as social services and needs (including food security issues), during a lockdown," she remarks. Dorian and Shekherdian also intend to use data analysis to help their Armenian colleagues continue long-range planning efforts. "The silver lining of every disaster is that you can plan to build everything in a better way. You look at what you have and ask what did we do right, what did we do wrong, where do we go from here?" asks Dorian. "Health is not just the absence of disease," she observes. "Public health goes beyond medicine, clinical expertise and funding hospitals: it's everything that goes into enabling people to be healthy. It's access to healthy foods and evaluating how to strengthen

overwhelmed. "Data from this pandemic will show the impacts of inequities and lack of inclusion and highlight the social determinants of health in our country," she continues. "We are seeing this in real time with African American deaths from Covid-19. It is a moment to examine and rethink the whole idea of 'haves' and 'have nots' in our health system." "Your health care budget is your value statement," she adds. "What you invest in on an everyday basis counts because when a disaster strikes, it's too late. Look at Singapore: it has a fluid, flexible, capable health care system that can expand and contract as needed." Shekherdian concurs. "What really matters is not the decisions we are making today or over the past month," he says. "Some 80 to 90 percent relies on how robust a health system is going into a pandemic."

And those are things we cannot change overnight." In Armenia, he notes that the Soviet system left the legacy of an over-specialized health care system that lacks primary healthcare providers and has historically prioritized numbers of medical professionals and infrastructure over quality of care.

The Armenian public health care system is also severely underfinanced (receiving just 1.6 percent of national GDP) and its fragmented delivery of health care services creates significant resource inefficiencies and outright waste. "All of this ultimately contributes to less-than-ideal outcomes in health care and it all plays into the current pandemic," says Shekherdian. Up to their ears in work in all directions, Dorian and Shekherdian are nevertheless heartened by the contributions they are able to make to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh at this time of crisis. "UCLA has been a great conduit for all of us to do better in the world. I believe we all feel that very deeply at UCLA," comments Dorian. "I feel blessed to be under the UCLA umbrella and that all of these relationships mean something in this world. "I consider myself an expert in disasters, but boy, have I learned a lot. We are all learning and helping each other at the same time. I feel those are the shining moments in all of this," she concludes.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Decennial Census Efforts Continue in Southern California, with Much at Stake

CENSUS, from page 1

Armenian National Committee of America Western Region (ANCA-WR) Government Affairs Director Arsen Shirvanyan, who is also director of HyeCount, an organization created to promote Armenian participation in the census, speculated that the state is motivated by the need to accurately count the immigrant population. There is a danger that it may lose delegates from its Congressional representation if its numbers go down. With the tension between the Republican executive government and the Democratic state executive, this becomes more important, he said.

In March of this year, all households received by postal mail the request to fill out the decennial census form via telephone, and, for the first time, Internet. Paper questionnaires were sent out in April only to those households which did not respond. All fieldwork, such as the personal delivery of census forms to unverifiable addresses, was halted on March 18 due to the pandemic, but will restart as soon as restrictions are lifted. No physical community outreach events have been possible in this period.

Some concerns have been raised about lower response rates in California (<https://www.caprдио.org/articles/2020/05/01/how-coronavirus-is-busting-californias-187-million-census-campaign/>). Jeffrey Enos, Deputy Regional Director of the Los Angeles Region (encompassing 7 western states in the US) for the national US Census Bureau, countered on May 6 that “We are actually ahead of the projections nationwide and for the state of California for the number of households that have responded. This is very encouraging. For example, statewide for California 58.5 percent of the population have self-responded to the census.”

Enos said that the census bureau was working closely with state and local government and health officials to preserve the health of census



Jeffrey Enos, Deputy Regional Director of the Los Angeles Region for the national US Census Bureau

employees and the American public at large and to determine when field operations might be able to resume. Field operations were to be completed by July 31, but this deadline has been extended three months to October 31. The realistic goal for the census in California, Enos said, is an approximately 65 percent self-response rate.

## Los Angeles County

As far as is known, the only place in the United States where Armenian employees have been hired specifically for federal outreach to the Armenian-American community is in Los Angeles County. These are all temporary employees for the duration of the current census effort. Here, there are three staff of Armenian-American background hired for this purpose, along with a fourth who initially was



Anahit Tovmasyan, US Census Bureau Senior Partnership Specialist at far right, with Beland Huang, Partnership Specialist and Lydia Scott, Recruitment Assistant

hired as a veteran. The four all report to an Armenian-American, Anahit Tovmasyan, who is called a senior partnership specialist or partnership specialist team leader. At present she has ten partnership specialists in her team.

Tovmasyan supervises specialists working with other communities too, including Chinese, Koreans, and African-Americans. The overall numbers of such specialists are based on the results of the 2010 census.

The outreach work starts first but Armenians have also been hired for what is called field work in the later stages of the census. They include field supervisors or managers as well as enumerators who will get information door-to-door from late August to October 31 about people who do not self-respond. Their language skills are important for communicating with Armenian-speakers as well as gaining their trust, according to Tovmasyan.

All of these positions are temporary during the census process. There are also permanent positions, but these are hired from communities which have larger numbers than the Armenians, such as Latinos.

Tovmasyan was a partnership specialist in 2009 for the 2010 census and now is in a supervisory position. She said that she manages her team and provides them with any help they need. This takes a lot of time so that she is not able to be in the field herself.

Many types of organizations, schools, churches and businesses can become partners with the US Census Bureau and work with its teams in conducting outreach on the 2020 census.



Anahit Tovmasyan making a “Road to 2020 Census” presentation at a Tekeyan Cultural Association Pasadena-Glendale Chapter book event (January 26, 2020)

Tovmasyan said that there are at least fifty such Armenian-American partners in Los Angeles County working with her specialists.

One important arena which allows census staff to reach as much as half of a city's population in places like Glendale is through the public schools. Tovmasyan noted that even during COVID-19 restrictions, grab-and-go lunches allow the distribution of printed flyers.

It should be noted that while there are Armenians in Ventura County, not that far from Los Angeles County, there is no Armenian specialist like Tovmasyan there. The same holds true for other centers of Armenian population in California or the West in general.

## Funding

There is a hierarchy of languages in the census. Aside from English, which is of course the official language of the US and the census, there are 12 other top languages into which everything is translated, including the census questionnaire itself. These 13 languages were chosen at the federal level. The most federal funds go to media in these languages in order to advertise about the census.

However, Armenian was identified as one of 59 non-English secondary languages to which supporting materials will be translated. These include an explanatory website which in turn gives links to a guide to filling out the census form, an explanatory video or public service announcement with a voice-over in Armenian, and a glossary of words concerning the census. Eastern Armenian is the dialect used.

The federal US Census Bureau gave funds to a large public relations firm, VMLYR to handle outreach in general on the 2020 census and to allocate to state, county and local ethnic groups as part of this work. It in turn formed “Team Y & R” (Young & Rubicam), composed of 17 agencies, to do spread awareness of the census, promote participation and follow-up in cases of no response. Several hundred million dollars are to be spent.

The Armenian community did not benefit from any of the spending on a national media level. However, outreach efforts exist on the state and local levels too. In California, part of the sum alluded to above was given to various counties, and in turn, cities and other bodies applied to these counties for a share of this money. Los Angeles County received \$9,393,090 from the state.

In Los Angeles County, among other bodies, the cities of Los Angeles, Glendale and Pasadena, and an organization created to coordinate efforts of the Armenian community, the Armenian American Complete Count Committee (AACCC), applied for grants from the county, and all three received them. The city of Los Angeles was allocated \$2,950,115,

Glendale received \$147,789 and Pasadena received \$73,895.

In general, outreach efforts for Armenians do occur in municipalities with large Armenian populations, such as Glendale, Burbank and Pasadena. Apart from the census, many other things about local government and health are already translated by municipalities and Los Angeles County into Armenian and other languages not included as part of the top 13.

Outreach in the city of Los Angeles is done by the municipality. Armenians who live in neighborhoods like Van Nuys, North Hollywood or Sherman Oaks in the San Fernando Valley are subject to the municipality. Furthermore, Los Angeles City Council member Paul Krekorian (<https://www.paulkrekorian.org/>), an Armenian-American himself, does outreach in the Armenian language.

## Glendale Census Efforts

The US Census Bureau has a program to get communities more engaged in the census process through the creation of outreach bodies called Complete Count Committees (CCC), which can be at the state level, as seen above, and county and city levels. A CCC could be created for many other types of groupings, such as ethnic, religious or even business. Cities like Glendale, Pasadena and Burbank, all with substantial Armenian populations, each created a CCC, which included Armenian representatives.

The Glendale Complete Count Committee began meeting in October 2019. Its coordinator is Christine Baboombian Powers, an Armenian by background. She is a Senior Executive Analyst for the city of Glendale who has been working for the City Manager's office for 12 years and regularly serves as the city's legislative analyst. She works on public relations and handles special projects. This is the first time, she said, that she has been involved in the census.

Powers said her role is to promote census awareness and make sure as many people participate as possible. She also is the city liaison with US Census Bureau partnership specialists like Tovmasyan, who work closely with municipal bodies like the Glendale CCC.

Staff from the city of Glendale participate in Los Angeles County CCC and California CCC meetings and webinars, and obtain resource materials from them. Powers said that if they have campaigns, the Glendale CCC piggybacks off of them.

Powers pointed out that outreach on the census began in Glendale even before the creation of its CCC. She said that the city had been talking about it and making community presentations through the city council as early as January 2019 in public spaces about its importance. For example, the then mayor, Zareh Sinanyan, in March of 2019 held the first non-profit summit for the city of Glendale, which Powers worked with him closely to organize. He spoke there about the importance of the census and US census representatives were present.

When the Glendale CCC was being organized, a lot of different organizations from Armenian, Korean, Hispanic, Filipino and other ethnic groups living in the municipality were invited to participate in this CCC. There were also hospitals, the school district, the college district, a multitude of local nonprofits and cultural groups, service and volunteer organizations, and even banks, according to Powers.

Powers said that some 40-50 people were invited to the first meeting, and by January 2020 people were invested and really ready to work, though the pandemic changed the situation.

Meetings were not held since the stay-at-home order in March until the second week of May, when a virtual meeting took place, with some 12-15 people participating, Powers said.

The Armenians are solely represented at the Glendale CCC by the AACCC. Powers said that since the AACCC does significant outreach to the Armenian community, making sure the city's CCC knows what it is doing, and the AACCC knows what the city is doing, elimi-





## COMMUNITY NEWS

nates duplication of efforts, confusion and waste of resources.

COVID-19 led to a pivoting of outreach efforts by the Glendale CCC and the city. One advantage of the 2020 census is the use of the Internet, which makes online response easier despite the pandemic.

Powers related that many planned events in which city staff would promote the census had to be cancelled. Questionnaire assistance kiosks in which staff could provide laptops or phones to fill out the forms could not be formed. It was no longer possible to reach seniors who could no longer go to their adult daycare or health-care centers but instead were shuttered at home.

Instead, the city increased advertising with media, Powers said, along with phone banking and text messaging campaigns, after permission to do this was received from Los Angeles County (the provider of grant money to support the CCC's activities).

All seniors who receive meal assistance through delivery or pickup are sent multilingual messaging encouraging census participation. City case managers are made available to seniors as translators for census purposes. The managers of all affordable housing buildings in Glendale are being contacted, Powers said, to find out what is needed to allow them to reach their different tenants.

In a city program to give 500 cooling fans to those without air conditioning who are stuck at home, city workers call those who register to make sure they are aware of the census and participate.

Glendale city initiated a volunteer campaign in which members of the community were asked to commit to tell 20 people about the census. The city sent them an information sheet to help them answer questions that people may have.

The city promotes the census on its various social media channels – Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and Powers said that lately it has been translating its social media posts into Spanish and Armenian. It is also doing translating of materials on its website.

It has done direct mailings about the census which include a condensed version of the information translated into Spanish, Armenian, Korean and Tagalog.

Homeless in Glendale do not seem to be a major issue for the census, as it is small enough to be successfully counted, according to Powers. She said that the annual homeless counts, which are done in January, are in the range of 200 people, and there have been

accepted.

Powers said, “We felt like we know better how to use that funding since we do similar outreach for elections and various types of educational efforts.” It is extra work, but the city wants to reach the various newspapers and media outlets in different languages which in turn will hopefully reach its residents.

In the 2010 census, the Glendale self-response rate was 73 percent. On May 14 of this year, the response rate in Glendale to the census was about 64.2 percent and in California overall 60.4 percent, while the US overall was just under 60 percent. While there are tracts in Glendale with response rates as high as 76.8 percent (La Crescenta), there are also pockets



HyeCount poster at a Los Angeles region business

with rates as low as 48.3 percent, which require extra work to reach.

Powers said, “We have a good figure but we are not satisfied with it. We want to get that self-response rate as high as possible.” One further concern is that as it is unclear what the overall effect of COVID-19 restrictions will be on the final census follow-up process and how long deadlines might be extended, getting as many people as possible to respond online can help obviate some of this uncertainty.

Cities like Glendale suspect their populations are being undercounted, based on their own data and analysis. For example, Powers pointed out that in the last census, the city's population went down but household size increased. It might be assumed that since Glendale was a fairly family-friendly city, this points to population not being counted properly. The federal census information from the continually renewed and more detailed but small sample based American Community Survey can also point to such problems.

The causes are varied. Sometimes, people do not report the correct number of people living in a household and this cannot be checked easily, Tovmasyan said. If they write 3 people, it is possible that 7 people are living in a crowded basement or garage. Fear or mistrust of the government, especially for those without legal immigration status, motivates some to avoid giving correct information. Concerns about anti-immigrant sentiment might also be a problem, Powers said.

Shirvanyan of HyeCount added that language barriers contribute to undercounts in Glendale, as relatively new immigrant Armenians don't speak English and cannot fill out the questionnaire. They are not familiar with a census since in their countries of origin, Syria, Lebanon, Armenia etc, they did not take place in the same comprehensive manner. They might be afraid that their immigration status will be impacted.

Shirvanyan said that any response rate below 70 is considered by the federal census a hard-to-count area, and parts of Glendale, Burbank, Tujunga, and Little Armenia are among them. There is further evidence for an Armenian undercount. First, many of the areas deemed hard-to-count in the Los Angeles area have large Armenian populations. Second, Shirvanyan pointed out that it is estimated that 166,000 Armenians marched during the commemoration of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide in 2015. The vast majority were from Los Angeles, and not everyone went. The 2010 census listed 194,000 Armenians in Los Angeles, so the total population must be larger. Third, in Los Angeles County public schools,

Angeles County for grassroots operations. It came in installments and was a substantial amount, but an exact figure was not available at the time of publication from AACCC. AACCC in turn offered to regrant money to other Armenian organizations which presented a plan of action. It could include holding town hall meetings, helping elderly fill out the census questionnaire, or other promotions. The maximum regrant offered was \$7,500. Schools were among the applicants.

The way canvassing was to be carried out, messaging, how to hire people, and who to hire, were all discussed at the AACCC meetings. In December 2019, HyeCount was started as a way of doing grassroots work and spreading the AACCC messaging, Shirvanyan said.

Its two fulltime staff members are Shirvanyan, serving as director, and Alexander Galitsky, communications director, who also happens to be ANCA-WR Communications Director. Their salaries are paid by ANCA, not HyeCount. Two additional people have been hired as HyeCount coordinators of canvassing. There are eight canvassers. Shirvanyan said that 2/3 of the latter are full time and the rest part time.

At the AACCC meetings, candidates for coordinators or media work were proposed and most who were hired were not ANCA-affiliated people, Shirvanyan said. He stressed that the census was an Armenian community issue, and said, “Every organization has to put its differences aside...I understand differences with other organizations but there is something special about being united. 2015 was the best example of that. Different organizations united to hold the rally; then the Pan Armenian Council came about. We want to work with that and not a partisan message.”

The two HyeCount leaders began doing interviews with various Armenian and non-Armenian television channels and stations. HyeCount placed ads to encourage filling out the census questionnaire and noting Armenian as ethnic background on all four major Armenian channels, ARTN, USArmenia, Pan Armenian and Horizon. Advertisements were placed in a number of Armenian print newspapers such as Asbarez and Nor Or.

A number of local Armenian public figures recorded videos, including news anchor Araksya Karapetyan and comedian Mary Basmadjian, and more are forthcoming. On social media, a movement called #BigFatArmenianFamily was launched, but, Shirvanyan explained, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with it garnering much attention.

Prior to the COVID-19 era, HyeCount used a list of registered Armenian voters bought from a political software platform to begin house to house canvassing. Canvassers were sent to Armenian-owned businesses to put up posters. In Glendale all big businesses in general were visited because the Armenian population was so extensive, whereas in other areas, lists of Armenian businesses were used.

Texting to phone numbers from the political list as well as from an ANCA list was done. Shirvanyan said that the canvassers sent a total of 60,000 text messages through a texting software.

A lot of presentations were made at different university campuses to Armenian student associations, Armenian Youth Federation chapters, churches, and Armenian organizations. If they had their own buildings, posters on the census were given to them to hang.

While the government grants could only be used in Los Angeles County, the ANCA used its resources to send flyers and posters to other states in the western part of the US as far away as Texas.

Tovmasyan estimated that if all the organizations, businesses and media working with HyeCount and AACCC were added to those working directly with the US Census, there might be over 100 partners in the Armenian community.

With the onset of the coronavirus epidemic, face to face contact, meetings in person, and canvassing halted, but Shirvanyan said phone banking was intensively conducted from late March, with around 20,000 numbers called by early May. Telephone assistance was provided when people, especially the elderly, had difficulties in filling out the census questionnaire.



Alex Galitsky, third from left, working with HyeCount organizers

efforts to house them in hotels and motels through a California state program developed in response to COVID-19 called Project Roomkey.

Since the Armenians compose almost half of the city population, Glendale spends almost half of its census funding on Armenian media and outreach, Tovmasyan estimated. Powers said that the money allotted from Los Angeles County for the census appeared to be a “fair and reasonable amount” with which to do outreach. She explained that the amount of money received from Los Angeles County for the census was based on the analysis of tracts, areas of 10,000 population, that were statistically considered hard to count. Some cities like Burbank, according to Powers, declined to accept the money from the county, which meant they allowed the county to do census outreach for them. Glendale, on the other hand,

there are at least 133,000 students of Armenian origin, implying many more parents. Finally, Armenian cable television channels have used viewership data to estimate at least ½ million Armenians in Los Angeles County.

It won't be possible to see whether Armenians are actually responding in higher numbers than before until the results of the census are all calculated, and this will take a few years, Tovmasyan said.

### Armenian Community Efforts

When Tovmasyan began her work on the 2020 census, one of the first things she did was to encourage the creation of a lot of committees in different ethnic groups. These committees were to bring many organizations under one umbrella to promote the census. Among the Armenians in Los Angeles County, this took the form of the Armenian American Complete Count Committee (AACCC), which was formed in July 2019. This was the first time that a CCC was formed specifically to work with Armenian Americans.

The ANCA-WR took the initiative to apply to the Census Bureau to form the AACCC and assemble many other organizations. Shirvanyan explained, “In a lot of ways, it is a community issue so there should not be any partisanship in this, and no one organization can do it on its own.”

Its first meeting in August 2019 was attended by representatives of approximately 17 different Armenian organizations and churches of various denominations and affiliations. The Pan Armenian Council of [the] Western USA provided many of the contacts, Shirvanyan said. Tovmasyan made a presentation. The goal, said Shirvanyan, was to create a unified message for the Armenian community, instead of each organization using its own information and approach. Four more meetings were held.

Shirvanyan explained that the AACCC was a council without a formal leader. He and the ANCA-WR facilitated the meetings, preparing a general agenda, and did the messaging and outreach to the various organizations. However, he said, “we did not want to come off as the one leading the campaign, so that other organizations could be involved as much as possible.” After presenting some ways to do outreach, Shirvanyan said that a dialogue would ensue about what the various organizations thought was best. At most of the meetings, Tovmasyan was invited to answer questions about the census and provide updates.

The AACCC received a grant from Los





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# New College Graduates Take Uncertain Paths In COVID-19 Era

GRADUATES, from page 1

the resultant transition to online classes. This has certainly posed a stark change of scenery for these young adults who have grown accustomed to the independence of college life.

"We have an interesting experience now moving back in with our families at a time when we didn't think we were going to," said Babikian, a graduate of Princeton University. "We were just about to arrive at what we thought was more independence, and instead it turns out we're back in the rooms we lived in during high school. I think that's a strange feeling, maybe of regression and uncertainty about where we stand."

Indeed, this unique situation has encouraged these youths to spend more quality time with their families, especially with siblings who similarly would not be living at home otherwise.

"One of the silver linings is that my sister is working from home," said Kechejian, a graduate of Boston University. "She works as an engineer for Philips in Cambridge, and she usually lives in her apartment and works a lot so I don't really get to see her too often. Now she's home all the time, which is nice."

This arrangement has also prompted some reflection on the nature of their relationships with their parents.

"I think it accelerates the process of change that naturally happens with 20-year-olds and their parents, where we really want to be seen and validated as adults and our parents still think of us the same way they used to," said Babikian.

In an effort to maintain relationships with their peers during this socially distant time, the three have relied primarily on apps like HouseParty, FaceTime, and, of course, Zoom.

"I'm fortunate that my high school friends and I communicate frequently through Zoom, Discord, and voice chat," said Kechejian. "I have scheduled Zoom times with one of my best friends from college. Sometimes on weekends, even some weeknights, we'll get together on voice chat, have a couple of drinks, play a game we can all play together online."

However, these apps are certainly no substitute for face-to-face interaction.

"As fun as voice chatting and playing games online is, I do miss going out for real," he said.

The hassle of using apps to facilitate communication has also illuminated dynamics within friendships which might not have been apparent under the status quo.

"My friendships have been an interesting test of 'who do you want to Facetime?'" said Babikian. It's not just people that are around you at college anymore, it's people for whom you have to make a conscious effort. It's a lot more one-on-ones, and you have to be comfortable navigating that environment. You're not drinking with your friends, you're not doing activities with them, you have to be able to just sit and talk to your friends about things."

Despite the disruption in routine, these graduates are nevertheless determined to continue learning and building their skillset. Babikian, for example, has decided to teach himself French, while Kechejian has opted to tackle math and programming classes.

"A big part of this for me is recognizing that this situation will end at some point and that I have the time and capability to take action now to prepare and equip myself with the skills I need to create the best possible future," said Kechejian.

Likewise, Chobanian, a graduate of the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, has been utilizing this time to hone her teaching talents. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree in education, with the goal to become an elementary school teacher.

"I've been using this situation to try to teach my little cousin Tiffany everything I can," she said. "For example, her teacher told me that they would've been learning fractions now, so I'm trying to teach her fractions. There's no Armenian school now, so I'll practice reading Armenian with her more often and teach her spelling."

Chobanian has also been busy working at CVS Pharmacy, an experience which can be daunting at times due to the possibility of exposure to the virus. The company has indeed adopted several precautions to mitigate the risk, including gloves, N-95 masks, sneeze guards, and increased cleanings.

"On one hand, it's kind of exciting to go to work because I get to leave the house and have a

change of scenery, instead of being home all day, and it gives me the opportunity to get away from everything," she said. "But it's also scary because I'm going to work and I don't know what I'm going to be facing, since we get exposed to people coming from the hospitals, or just people in general."

Home delivery of prescriptions has also grown in popularity, which aids greatly in reducing exposure.

"I think that's positive because people are avoiding coming to the pharmacy, avoiding personal contact, but it does create a lot of work on us," said Chobanian. "The pharmacy is already a busy area, and now it's on overload because of the virus."

Asked whether he thinks this period has been more difficult for him and his peers as youths than for adults, Babikian remarked on the stark difference in lifestyle which the coronavirus has necessitated for his age group.

"It's strange because the workplace lends itself to being done virtually," said Babikian. "The workplace doesn't necessitate social interaction all the time, whereas getting an education does. As college-age and school-age kids, a lot of what we're learning is in the classroom, but a lot of it is also at lunch tables, in athletic facilities, in other places outside the classroom. So it's a bigger adjustment period, because it's a bigger change from what your life was beforehand."

These disparities naturally extend into home life as well.

"For our age group in particular - college students - you are used to a dorm, which is so different from living at home; you're used to not having parental supervision, which is so different from this situation; and your whole life has been upended," said Babikian.

The three graduates also expressed a marked sense of disappointment about the reality of missing out on some of the most pivotal and defining moments of their lives.

"I think a lot of young people are anxious about that because we're not getting these years back," said Kechejian. "It'll never be Senior Spring again, that's just gone. If you're a young person, you're thinking, 'How many more things will be gone?' You can be the most positive, grounded, productive person, and it's nevertheless really challenging to mentally overcome the fact that we're missing out. You can't shake the feeling that this was supposed to be such a big milestone."

Babikian concurred on the adaptable nature of humans, especially the youth, while lamenting the loss of experiences so unique to these specific moments in time that they simply cannot be replicated in the future.

"We find ways to make it work, because that's just how life goes - a situation happens to you, and you need to find a way to adapt, to make it work," he said. "But it was a loss. You didn't get closure with college or with people with whom you thought you'd have a few more months and memories. It's done before you had the chance to say goodbye. It's disappointing that there will be no 'recompense' for that. This time is unique to the moment, it's not something we can make up for or substitute in the future, even with postponed real-life graduations."

Chobanian also noted the diverging effects of the quarantine on not only generational differences, but also personality types.

"Another factor that might play a role here is whether someone is an introvert or an extrovert," she said. "For example, my boyfriend is an introvert. He's working at the frontlines at the hospital, seeing patients, so he's been by himself in his apartment in Worcester for the past two months, no physical contact with anyone. But he's more of an introvert, so he's handling it OK, whereas me on the other hand, I'm more of an extrovert. I like social situations, I like seeing my friends, going to parties, seeing people on a day-to-day basis, so if I was in his position, all by myself, in my own apartment, I would go insane and lose my mind."

The coronavirus has also forced Chobanian and her boyfriend into a long-distance relationship of sorts.

"It's definitely difficult," she said. "It's like we're in a long-distance relationship now because of the virus, even though he lives an hour away. We talk every day on the phone, we pray together, I always message him."

Despite deep uncertainty regarding the months to come, Babikian and Chobanian maintain that their plans remain largely the same. Babikian's job in New York will proceed with a postponed start date, while Chobanian has just started her graduate school classes at Lesley University remotely.

Beyond these immediate plans, the graduates foresee a tremendous amount of change when the pandemic draws to a close.

"Once this does go away, it's going to take a good amount of time, at least two to three months, for people to return to their old mindset and be able to spend time with each other without being scared if someone coughs, or having a birthday party and not worrying about someone blowing the candles on the cake," said Chobanian. "It's definitely going to take a lot of time for people to get into their old habits again. But I know that we'll get through it and we're going to recover from it no matter what."

For Babikian, the potential aftereffects of the pandemic evoke those of 9/11.

"After 9/11, the United States experienced a 'post-9/11 era,' a period of time where decisions made by the government were reactionary to 9/11 specifically. For many years afterwards, people tied decisions that were made within companies and even in households back to 9/11. I think it's going to be the same situation for the coronavirus. People in the future are going to alter how workplaces and social gatherings operate, how all

sorts of human interactions are conducted."

Kechejian concurred, remarking on the myriad changes to come in the near future.

"A big part of this is thinking about the ways in which the world is going to be different afterwards," said Kechejian. "I think people need to keep in mind that even when this is over, there are going to be even more changes to adapt to. This whole thing is really only getting started, and we need to find the mental fortitude to hunker down, because things are not going to be normal any time soon."

Indeed, the coronavirus has prompted a veritable paradigm shift with regards to the kind of future that awaits.

"By no means will it be the future that I thought I could predict, in the past," said Babikian. "My own goals will have to cede to and change according to what's about to happen at a national and global level. I don't know what those changes are yet, and I can try to predict them and account for them, but when it comes to making plans for my future, I'm now realizing just how little is in my control."

Despite the uncertainty, the graduates remain optimistic.

"I think once this ends, we're all going to come out of it stronger," said Chobanian. "It's kind of like the Boston Marathon. In the immediate, it was a terrible event, but afterwards, the phrase 'Boston Strong' emerged and we all came together as a community and rose above it."

**Tekeyan Cultural Association**

A Virtual Lecture Organized by the  
Tekeyan Cultural Association

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COMMUNITY NEWS

# ‘In the Beginning Was Armenia’

DOCUMENTARY, from page 6

**Significant Locations**

Throughout the 130-minute film, based on their historical/chronological sequence, Essam takes us to various locations across Armenia, such as the Republic Square, Tsitsernakaberd, the Mother Armenia Statue, Tospia Restaurant, Moscow Cinema, Noraduz (the largest monumental site of khachkars), the Armenian Genocide Museum, Lake Sevan, Sardarabad Memorial Complex, the Word of Life Church, Naregatsi Orchestra, Tavern Yerevan, and the small village Lernamedz nicknamed Red Cuba/Small Cuba. In other words, the places are the protagonists which chronicle precious stories of Armenia.

**The Documentary’s Protagonists**

The champions are also the Armenians interviewed in the documentary. They succeed in revealing interesting details about their beloved nation. We get absorbed in Essam’s conversations with Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, the former Minister of the Diaspora Hranush Hakobyan, the former Chairperson of the State Tourism Committee Zara Zeitountsian, Archbishop Raphael Minassian (Archbishop of Armenian Catholics of Armenia, Georgia, Russia and Eastern Europe, and basketball coach Vicken Eskedjian and Pastor Hany Boghossian (two Armenians living abroad and who were on a visit to their motherland), among others.

**Importance of Music**

But are the places visited and the persons interviewed the only heroes of the documen-



Nagy in front of Mount Ararat

tary? Well, music is also one of the film’s main components that make us joyfully delve into the Armenian heritage. Parallel to the film’s sequence, our ears delight in hearing an expressive variety of Armenian music and Christian chants. In addition, we understand the importance of music, among other forms of arts, to Armenians.

**The Narrator’s Presence**

A flashy point about the factual film is Essam’s active participation. In essence, he interacts with the public at the religious sites, on various occasions including reviving the anniversary of the genocide, Republic Day

(coincides with founding the First Republic), Independence Day, etc. We see his face and hear his voice also in some of the interviews. So, Essam’s continuous appearance not only gives us the opportunity to perceive the whole colorful picture but to catch the sight of the artist while painting it as well.

**Cultural Aspects**

Throughout Essam’s travel, the beauty of Armenia is shown in the adherence of its peo-

Leon meant when he talked about his connection with his homeland and about the khachkar, this cross-stone engraved in the heart of all Armenians,” he pronounces. A letter of two phrases, “In the Beginning Was Armenia” and “Thanks to Levon,” with the signature Essam Nagy, framed alongside a photograph of the khachkar was a perfect closure for our exciting and pleasant journey across the Land of Apricots.

## Treasured Place in the Heart of the City

PARK, from page 6

Among those who shared their immigrant experiences during the two year series were Consul General of Ireland Laoise Moore, Councilor Lydia Edwards, Boston City Council; Tania Del Rio, Executive Director, Mayor’s Office of Women’s Advancement; Nicola Orichula, Founder, I Am Books; Ronnie Millar, Executive Director, Rian Immigration Center (formerly Irish International Immigration Center; Emmanuel Owusu, Executive Director, African Bridge Network among others.

The notable Boston chefs who prepared a signature dish for all to enjoy for lunch and conversation included Chef Nina Festekjian with Raffi Festekjian, anoush’ella; Chef Leo Romero, Casa Romero; Chef Tony Barros, Cesaria; Chef Hector Pina, Merengue; Chef Carlos Rodriquez, Orinco and chefs from Oldways.

Programs at the park, planned for this year, are now on hold.

Gratitude is expressed to so many – the park’s benefactors and supporters, partners and collaborators, friends and greeters. Their ongoing generosity and commitment are just extraordinary.

To receive updates and announcements about programs and events, please email [info@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:info@ArmenianHeritagePark.org) or visit the park’s website – [ArmenianHeritagePark.org](http://ArmenianHeritagePark.org).



Visiting the small village of Lernamedz

ple to the nation’s culture and language. The musical instrument duduk, the lavash bread, and the traditional clothes, are some of the cultural items included to enrich the film.

**The Finale**

At the end of the documentary, Essam arrives from Armenia. “I left Armenia, but it did not leave me. I then understood what

The documentary’s three parts are available in Arabic:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FCQaYRav7E&t=27s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YBZbBxMous&t=5s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5W6dPYLmvg&t=2s>

# Thank You



**Mrs. Makrouhi Kuredjian, Mayda Kuredjian, Arsen and Marina Sarafian, Saro and Hilda Hartounian and their families.**

The family of late Krikor Kuredjian would like to thank you for your heartfelt condolences on the passing of our beloved husband, father and grandfather. We convey our deepest gratitude to all the relatives, friends and organizations that shared our pain, as well as those who donated to the “Krikor and Makrouhi Kuredjian Educational Fund” of Vahan Tekeyan School in Beirut, Lebanon.

Your love and support during this difficult time is greatly appreciated.



## Donations

The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Krikor and Makrouhi Kuredjian Educational Fund

- Edmond Y. Azadian \$100
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- Peter A. and Sharon Chipolone \$100
- Sean and Sandra L. Fales \$100
- Nazareth A. and Nila Festekjian \$250
- Ruby Gulian \$100
- Talia Jebejian and Agop Bouloudoukian \$100
- Van Z. and Priscilla D. Krikorian \$100
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- Mihran Minassian \$250
- Harout and Lisa L. Moumdjian \$100
- Laura S. Rensel \$100
- Hagop and Maria L. Vartivarian \$100



# Arts & Living

## Comedian Kev Orkian to Star In SOAR Virtual Fundraiser

RADNOR, Penn.—Keeping up with the times, the Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) has announced its next virtual fundraiser showcasing comedian Kev Orkian live from the United Kingdom on Sunday, May 31, 2020.

An internationally acclaimed, award-winning performer, Orkian has honed his art to perfection from his days as a classical concert pianist to performing stand-up comedy and supporting some of the biggest names in British comedy. Blending his offbeat humor with sensational performances on the piano, Orkian has been dubbed one of the world's finest comedy pianists entertaining royals and worldwide audiences.



Kev Orkian

Since COVID-19 lockdowns swept the world in March, SOAR has remained responsive to the emergent needs of the Armenian orphanages it supports. In April, SOAR sent emergency funding to orphanages in Lebanon and Armenia experiencing reduced resources to ensure continuity of care for their children.

Proceeds from the upcoming Virtual Comedy Show will be directed to fund food distribution to needy families in Armenia impacted by COVID-19. Since the lockdown in Armenia, social orphans receiving care and services from Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) facilities in Gyumri and Tashir were ordered by the government to return to their food-insecure families who live in extreme poverty.

No longer receiving institutional care, OLA



has instead delivered food on a weekly basis to 55 families with 275 adults and children. While previously OLA was responsible for feeding only the children, they are now providing enough food for all members of the families.

"Laughter is food for the soul," says SOAR Executive Board Chairman George S. Yacoubian Jr. "We know this has been a challenging time for all Armenian families, and we hope our upcoming comedy show with Kev will bring laughter into your homes, while helping to support the most vulnerable. The needs of Armenian orphans haven't stopped and neither has SOAR."

To purchase your household ticket to this performance created exclusively for SOAR, visit [soar-us.org](http://soar-us.org) or email [info@soar-us.org](mailto:info@soar-us.org) for more information.



Aerial shot of Republic Square from "Bloodless"

## 'Bloodless The Path to Democracy'

*A Film by Bared Maronian and Silva Basmajian*

Bared Maronian's "Bloodless" (<http://bloodless-film.com/>) relates the gripping story of the 2018 Velvet Revolution, which saw the overthrow of Serzh Sargsyan's oligarchic regime in Yerevan. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Velvet Revolution, which brought to power the tech-savvy and democratic leader Nikol Pashinyan in unprecedented circumstances. Using social media to mobilize a citizenry at first

made up almost entirely of the country's youth, Pashinyan was able to force the existing prime minister to resign and after two votes in parliament was elected de facto prime minister on May 8.

The Lebanese-born Maronian is an experienced filmmaker and four-time Regional Emmy Award winner. Previous works include "Orphans of the Genocide" (2013) and "Women of 1915" (2016), which examined the plight of Armenian women during and after the Armenian Genocide.

Maronian's newest effort is commendable given the fact that he didn't originally plan to make a documentary about Pashinyan and the Velvet Revolution. Rather, his project took form organically during a visit to Armenia that happened to coincide with the events that he so ably describes in "Bloodless": "One beautiful spring morning, while resting in my hotel room in Yerevan, Armenia, I heard a

see BLOODLESS, page 13



Nikol Pashinyan being interviewed by Bared Maronian (courtesy Bardig Kouyoumdjian)

## Sebough Aslanian Appointed Director of UCLA Armenian Studies Center

WESTWOOD, Calif. – Sebough Aslanian, Professor of History and holder of the Richard Hovannisian Chair in Modern Armenian History, was appointed the inaugural director of the Armenian Studies Center at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

The announcement was made on May 7 by two officials of UCLA's International Institute: Prof. Cindy Fan, Vice Provost for International Studies and Global Engagement in a message to colleagues, and Christopher L. Erikson, Senior Associate Vice Provost.

The Armenian Studies Center is housed within the Promise Armenian Institute (PAI), and Professor Aslanian will work closely with PAI inaugural director Professor Ann Karagozian. PAI is a groundbreaking new entity within the UCLA International Institute. Made possible with a \$20 million gift from the estate of Kirk Kerkorian, the largest gift that the International Institute has received, the Promise Armenian Institute positions UCLA to build significantly upon its more than 50 years of history of Armenian Studies.

This new institute is the hub for world-class research and teaching on Armenian Studies including the Armenian Studies Center, and for coordinating new and ongoing research and public impact programs across UCLA, from social sciences to health sciences, from



Professor Sebough Aslanian

humanities to music, the arts, to engineering, and from public policy to management. The Promise Armenian Institute's size, scope, and interdisciplinary approach make it the first of its kind in the world.

Professor Aslanian is author of the award-winning book *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (University of California Press, 2011) as well as numerous scholarly articles on Armenian history and Armenian Studies. His recent articles include "Many have come here and have deceived us: Some Notes on Asateur Vardapet (1644-1728), An Itinerant Armenian Monk in Europe," *Handes Amsorya, Zeitschrift Fur Armenische Philologie* (2019); "Une vie sur plusieurs continents: Microhistoire globale d'un agent arménien de la Compagnie des Indes orientales, 1666-1688," *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* (2018); "From 'Autonomous' to 'Interactive' Histories: World History's Challenge to Armenian Studies," *An Armenian Mediterranean, Words and Worlds in Motion* (2018); and "The Great Schism of 1773: Venice and the Founding of the Armenian Community of Trieste," *Reflections of Armenian Identity in History and Historiography* (2018).

Aslanian is currently working on two book projects. The first is a history of early modern global Armenian print culture and is provisionally titled *Early Modernity and Mobility: Port Cities and Printers Across the Armenian Diaspora, 1512-1800*. Under contract with Yale University Press, the book rethinks in novel and insightful ways both the role of mobility in the early modern period in global history and the rise and development in that history of Gutenberg print culture across the early modern diasporic Armenian communities in the port cities of the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Indian Ocean world.

The second book project is provisionally titled *Signed, Sealed, and Undelivered: The* see ASLANIAN, page 13





COMMUNITY NEWS

# ‘Bloodless: The Path to Democracy’

BLOODLESS, from page 12  
commotion coming from outside. I opened the window and saw thousands of young men and women chanting while marching. I immediately grabbed my camera, ran down to the street and followed the march capturing the sights and sounds of what I was experiencing.” Over the coming month, his camera recorded what is undoubtedly one of the most successful peaceful revolutions in recent history, along with Czechoslovakia’s Gentle Revolution of 1989 and the 2005 Cedar Revolution in Lebanon.

Maronian’s film intercuts found footage and his own shots of the revolution with interviews of government officials, United Nations Resident Coordinator Shombi Sharp as well as local media personalities such as EVN report’s Maria Titizian. At times his reliance on their opinions to push forth the narration makes his film feel more like a “Frontline” television report than a documentary film, but it works nevertheless.

To my mind, Maronian’s great strength in the documentary is to emphasize and give voice to people who have found themselves silenced in traditional Armenian patriarchy, most noticeably women. From diasporans such as Arsinée Khanjian who flew to Armenia to lend her support to the revolution, to the nameless women who shook pots and pans outside their windows in support, to the young girls who risked their lives by lying down in front of buses and cars in order to send a message to then Prime Minister Sargsyan, Maronian shows in no uncertain terms the link between the peaceful nature of the revolution and the relatively large number of women who participated in the April events.

He highlights the relationship between the April 24th genocide commemoration and the Velvet Revolution’s success, both in steeling the youth’s resolve and in weakening the government’s desire to use force on its own people. The protagonists on both sides, after all, are the grandchildren of the Medz Yeghern.

Maronian also draws attention to President Armen Sarkissian’s judicious decision to go down into the streets and later skillfully



Children of repatriated Armenians join the peaceful civil disobedience movement (Photo courtesy Bared Maronian)

Technically, the film could benefit from some more judicious editing—at 94 minutes it goes on a bit too long for this reviewer’s taste. And given Maronian’s astute gender analysis of the events in question, it would have been nice to hear more about Anna Hakobyan, Pashinyan’s clever activist wife

who stood steadfastly at his side throughout. That being said, anyone interested in Armenian affairs or pro-Democracy movements will benefit from learning about the remarkable events that seemingly out of nowhere shook this small Caucasian Republic to its foundations.

## Sebouh Aslanian Appointed Director of UCLA Armenian Studies Center

ASLANIAN, from page 12  
*Voyage of the Santa Catharina and a Global Microhistory of the Indian Ocean, c. 1738-1756.* A narrative microhistory of trade and politics in the early modern Indian Ocean, the book relies on 2,000 pieces of mercantile and family correspondence, commercial contracts, and other papers stored on an Armenian-freighted ship, the Santa Catharina and seized by the British navy in 1748. The book unpacks these letters, now stored at the High Court of Admiralty, and probes them to understand economic, cultural, and political histories of Indian Ocean arena and emerging commercial and contractual isomorphism in the age of Empire.

Aslanian manages the academic activities of his chair and teaches courses in the department of history on such topics as the three-part “Armenia and Armenians in World History,” graduate seminars such as “Port Cities and Printers: An Introduction to Early Modern World and Armenian History,” and the survey class “The Middle East, 1100-1700: From the Crusades and Mamluks to the Age of the Gunpowder Empires.”

# Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian

## New Armenian Manhattan Cocktail

Family gatherings are important, especially when loved ones live far apart. This past Christmas was significant for Robyn Kalajian’s family because it was the first time her daughter, Mandy, and son-in-law, Ron visited Robyn and husband Doug in their new home in South Carolina – together. Before they arrived, Robyn asked what family dishes they wanted her to prepare. Their list was long, and included recipes Mandy and Ron love, but do not have time to prepare. Robyn’s menu included Armenian lule kebab, pilaf, lahmajoun, yalanchi, sarma gurgood, to zucchini caviar, basturma, string cheese, boregs and kadaif, to list a few. Once cooking began, Robyn turned her efforts into a party so friends and neighbors could meet Mandy and Ron. Robyn reports an Armenian priest was also in attendance from a nearby church. The Kalajian Christmas and Armenian-themed party was born. Before the party, Doug asked Ron to create a Manhattan cocktail, “but Armenian style with a twist.”

“Sitting atop Doug’s large, swing-open bar in the living room was a bottle of Ararat Brandy,” Ron reports. “The label read, ‘The legendary Armenian brandy since 1887.’ I remembered that New York barkeeps often use brandy as the secondary ingredient in a Manhattan cocktail, in lieu of sweet vermouth, so the ‘Armenian style with a twist’ problem was solved.” Ron says his new cocktail was made in large batches for the party guests, and went down “very smoothly.”

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup (8 oz.) bourbon (Suggestion: Russell’s Reserve 10-Year Old)
- 1/2 cup (4 oz.) brandy (Ararat 3-Year-Old Armenian Brandy or use older vintage)
- 8 dashes Angostura bitters
- 12 bourbon cherries (such as Stonewall Bourbon Bada Bing Cherries)
- 4 teaspoons cherry juice (use juice from jar of cherries)
- 12 cubes of ice or 4 single-block cubes (Use regular cubes or make it fancy with a single-block cube)

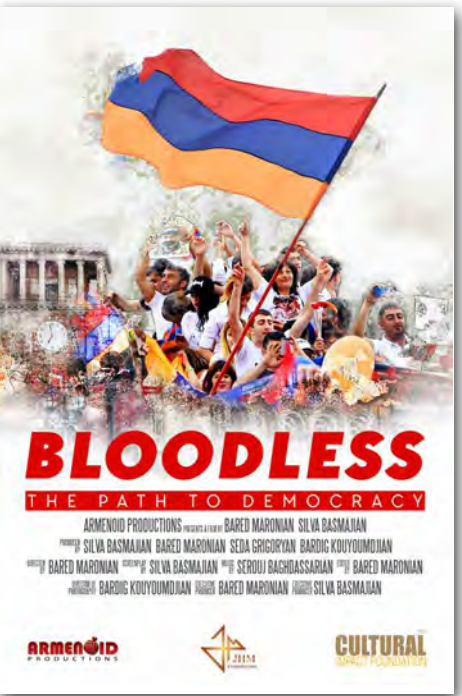
### PREPARATION:

Start by adding one cup of ice to a cocktail shaker. Slowly add the bourbon, brandy, cherry juice, and dashes of bitters. Prepare 4 cocktail glasses (rocks glasses work nicely) by adding 3 regular cubes (or 1 single-block cube). Gently shake mixture for 15 to 30 seconds. Pour about 3 ounces (or 2 fingers) of the mixture into each glass. Garnish each glass by adding 3 bourbon cherries.

\*The Manhattan is a classic cocktail believed to date to the late 1800s that is customarily made with whiskey, sweet vermouth, and bitters. While rye is the traditional whiskey of choice, other commonly used whiskeys include Canadian whiskey, bourbon, blended whiskey, and Tennessee whiskey. Ararat is a brand of Armenian brandy produced by the Yerevan Brandy Company since 1887. The current owner is French Pernod Ricard. In 1999, the government of independent Armenia sold the factory to the French Pernod Ricard company for distilled beverages. The variety of the company’s cognac products are labeled and publicized as ArArAt. Made from Armenian white grapes and spring water, according to a traditional method, the brand’s “ordinary brandies” are aged between 3 and 6 years. “Aged brandies” are between 10 and 30 years old.

Serves 4.

Go to: <https://www.thearmeniankitchen.com/>  
<https://en.araratbrandy.com/>



negotiate Sargsyan’s resignation. It would of course have been interesting to hear the voice of the previous government: we encounter a resolute but ultimately resigned Chief of Police Valery Osipyan and then Sargsyan himself – but only briefly.

Maronian might have explained what opposed the two parties, apart from general discontent with the existing stagnant economy and unease at oligarchic rule. Non-Armenian viewers in particular may have a hard time judging everything that was at stake and what the former regime represented: apart from the opening credits, Sargsyan and his allies exist as a mostly ghost-like presence.

There is also little exposition of Pashinyan himself: his childhood and formative years, his career in journalism, or his political views.





COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

Paul Goble Is for Real

By Edmond Y. Azadian

Mirror-Spectator Senior Editorial Columnist

Along with the recognition of the genocide by Turkey, Armenians entertain the dream of recovering historic Armenia, based on the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920 and the pledge made by President Woodrow Wilson on behalf of the international community. At this point, the achievement of that dream does not seem realistic, because it depends mostly on the relative military power and political clout of Armenia and Turkey.

While Armenians dream of the emancipation of Western Armenian territories, unbeknownst to them a plan is shaping up about the very territory of the current Republic of Armenia itself.

Indeed, a plan has been hatched in Turkey by some Azerbaijanis to liberate the current territory of the Republic of Armenia to establish there a new country and government called the Republic of Western Azerbaijan. The news may raise some eyebrows and cause disbelief, but if we analyze the political crosscurrents in the region and reveal the source of the news, it becomes deadly serious.

The source of the news is Paul Goble, whose name is associated with an outrageous political plan which was floated first as a trial balloon, only to become eventually a major issue in a deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

This was the Meghri plan, which at first was not taken seriously, but when Presidents Robert Kocharyan and Heydar Aliyev met in Key West, it was almost a done deal. When Aliyev senior returned home, he refused to finalize it. Had they signed the agreement for a territorial swap, it would have been a blunder of historic proportions for Armenia. It would have been a strategic nightmare both for Armenia and its neighbors, particularly Iran.

The plan called for Armenia to cede Meghri to Azerbaijan in exchange for Azerbaijan's acknowledgment of Nagorno Karabakh as part of Armenia. Had the plan been carried out, Azerbaijan would have possessed contiguous territory around Armenia after absorbing the autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan, a territory historically claimed by Armenia. Additionally, Armenia would lose its borders with Iran, the only reliable country through which Armenia could communicate with the outside world. And finally, the deal would have gifted an open door to Pan-Turkic designs of Turkish leaders.

That was the unbelievable plan put forward by Paul Goble which almost became a reality.

Based on the veracity of that plan, we can ignore or take lightly this new plan at our peril.

In an op-ed in the May 12, 2020 issue of the Eurasia Review, Mr. Goble has presented the outline of a plan by a Turkish professor teaching at the University of Kayseri named Gafar Chahmagli. The professor purportedly is the descendant of Azerbaijanis deported from Western Azerbaijan, and therefore he has undertaken to organize a group and form a government of Western Azerbaijan in exile.

He states in a blog, "The main goal of the Republic of Western Azerbaijan (Irevan), which is dominated by the intelligentsia, is to return all historic lands, including Yerevan, Zangebasar, Goichu, Zangezur, Gyumri, Drlayza [Daralageaz?], and all remaining historical lands within the borders of Armenia."

Then, the professor continues in his blog to justify his claim: "there is nothing bad in this initiative, and if affairs are correctly carried out, if the Azerbaijan republic supports them and defends the interests of the Republic of Iravan, then in the foreseeable future, under incredible conditions and perhaps even blood, those who have been driven out can become a real power of a genuinely liberated Azerbaijani land."

Since Paul Goble had broken the news of the Meghri deal by creating a rare precedent, the revelation of this new project becomes more believable. He is not a mere journalist, or a scholar, but a political messenger with visible and clandestine ties, viz., his involvement in the CIA and State Department and his activities in Baltic states where the US has been implementing plans to contain Russia. His message has to be taken seriously and viewed within the context of politics in the Caucasus.

Ahmet Davutoglu, at one time Turkey's foreign minister and

ideolog of President Erdogan's AK Party, has theorized in a study that the West is in decline and it is time for Turkey to rise to the occasion by expanding to the East and building a Turkic empire, using religion, demographic and linguistic paradigms. President Erdogan himself has argued that Armenia is an impediment. One would ask, impediment to what? Certainly it is a roadblock to Turkey's drive to the East. In his turn, President Aliyev has repeated many times that Zangezur and Yerevan are Azerbaijani territories, echoing this good professor in Turkey.

Historians believe that this kind of masterplan can lead to tectonic changes in world politics. In that sense, the Nixon-Kissinger plan to open up China drove a wedge between the Soviet Union and China and led to the collapse of the USSR without using a single bullet. Therefore, we have to factor in the interest of the West, and in particular the US, in a powerful Azerbaijan. This is not necessarily for the latter's energy sources, but rather for its strategic location next to Iran and its ethnic makeup, which could lure ethnic Azeris to an eventual breakup of Iran along ethnic fault lines.

Iran has long been on the State Department's butcher block, like Iraq, Syria and Libya, to pave the way for unrivaled Israeli hegemony over the Middle East. Israel has already set up shop in Azerbaijan. President Aliyev has repeated many times that only ten percent of Azerbaijani-Israeli relations are visible.



In this heyday of territorial usurpation, no country should feel its territory is immune. Turkey has seized territories from Cyprus, Iraq and Syria. President Trump has gifted Syria's Golan Heights to Israel and has further given the green light for confiscations of land on the West Bank. Russia has amputated Georgia and Ukraine, and the list goes on and on.

Many people in Armenia believe that eventually the territories around Karabakh which are under Armenian control should be ceded to achieve peace. No way, says General Vagharshak Harutyunyan, who had negotiated the ceasefire in 1994 with Azerbaijani generals. First, because Armenia's lines of defense begin in Karabagh, and second, because Azerbaijani logic does not work that way. As President Aliyev has made clear many times, next he will lay claim to Zangezur and Yerevan. That is why, Harutyunyan concluded, there is no solution to the Karabakh conflict.

Turkey has made several attempts at inroads in Central Asia. After the religious factor proved ineffective in the atheistic societies of Central Asia, Turkey took the leadership in organizing an alliance of Turkic-language speaking nations, imitating the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. Its drive into Central Asia has irritated China, which has already resorted to defensive measures. Turkey has been agitating the Uyghur ethnic population in China's Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, where 23 million irredentist Muslims of Turkic origin live. Turkey has accused Beijing of committing genocide against the Uyghurs.

This is not the first attempt of Turkey or its predecessor state to project its power in Central Asia. Even when the Ottoman Empire was falling apart, a member of the ruling triumvirate of the Committee of Union and Progress was on a mission there. During the war of communism, the Bolshevik government was desperate to find allies. That is how Mustafa Kemal duped Lenin that he was leading a national liberation movement and headed towards socialism. He received arms, food supplies and money to chase the Armenians out of Cilicia and the Greeks out of Smyrna.

The Ottoman Empire's minister of war, Ismail Enver Pasha, was in Central Asia and tried to use the same ruse to convince  
*continued on next page*

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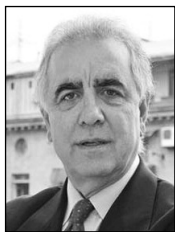
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## COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## Turmoil in Turkey on Letter by Gulen Recognizing the Armenian Genocide

A major controversy erupted in Turkey last week after a pro-Erdogan Turkish Islamist magazine *Gerçek Hayat* (Real Life) claimed that the controversial Turkish Imam Fethullah Gulen had written a letter on May 6, 1965 acknowledging the Armenian Genocide. The letter is included in a special 176-page edition of the magazine which belongs to the editorial group of the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Safak*, owned by the family of the Turkish president's son-in-law.

*Gerçek Hayat's* article also accused of collaborating with Gulen, the Chief Rabbi of Istanbul Isahak Kahleva, Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, former Armenian Patriarch of Turkey Shnorhik Kaloustian, the CIA, NATO, Zionists, Hillary Clinton, Pope John Paul II, and former Turkish leaders Ismet Inonu, Bulent Ecevit and Suleyman Demirel.

Gulen escaped to the United States in 1999. Later on, he and President Erdogan became antagonists after a lengthy collaboration during which Erdogan had used Gulen's contacts and resources to come to power. In 2016, after the attempted coup d'état in Turkey, Erdogan accused Gulen of being the mastermind of the coup. Erdogan jailed and fired tens of thousands of Gulen's followers. Since then Erdogan has made repeated requests to the U.S. Government to have Gulen extradited to Turkey, where he faces certain death. The United States rejected Erdogan's requests. Even those accused of associating with Gulen, who were living outside of Turkey, were kidnapped by Erdogan's secret agents and brought back to Turkey to face harsh charges.

Under these circumstances, when a pro-Erdogan magazine accused the leaders of religious minorities and others in Turkey of associating with Gulen, they became rightly concerned about their physical well-being and possible attacks on their religious and cultural institutions.

Regarding Gulen's letter, published by the Turkish magazine, addressed to the former Armenian Patriarch, it has been published several times before by the Turkish media.

Here are excerpts of Gulen's May 6, 1965 letter: "I have known Armenian families and individuals during my childhood and working positions. I will not stop cursing the Great Genocide committed against Armenians in 1915. I know that among the people killed and massacred were many highly respected individuals, for whose memory I bow with respect. I curse with great grief the massacre of the sons of the Great Prophet Christ by ignorant individuals who call themselves Muslims."

The Turkish magazine reported that in response Shnorhik Patriarch thanked Gulen, stating that the country needs preachers like him: "We believe that the fraternal ties will remain intact in our sacred country where there are valuable and fair-minded preachers like you."

Gulen's purported 1965 letter is typed on a paper that appears yellowish, making it look authentic. In 2013, while in the U.S., Gulen issued another statement which said: "The Ittihadists committed the wrong policy. It is up to us to correct the wrong policy of the Ittihadists. That is why we should be in a very good dialog with Armenians and other nations. For the sake of a dialog, we should use every opportunity in the best possible way."

The good news is that the religious leaders of minority communities in Turkey had the courage to harshly criticize the Turkish magazine. The Armenian Patriarchate issued a statement in which it "regretted the false accusations against Shnorhik Patriarch. Such writings under the umbrella of freedom of the press cause pain to us and can lead to horrible consequences. These falsehoods are worrisome to the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey and the Armenian community. Racist manifestations, as elsewhere, also seen in this country, make it impossible to escape from their consequences.... Such baseless mud-slinging is unacceptable to us. We believe that the relevant authorities will stop this injustice and hope that the rules will be enforced, taking the necessary

steps against the authors."

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate also condemned the Turkish magazine calling the published information "completely false and biased.... The publication of these claims cause distress among Christians, Jews and Muslims and are particularly serious and irresponsible, because they undermine the unity of our people.... Such information is extremely dangerous and could be the cause of dangerous acts of racism and intolerance. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew feels very bitter and resentful for the accusations that have been made against him, despite his efforts for the good of our country."

The Jewish community in Istanbul also criticized the Turkish magazine: "We condemn the discrimination and provocation caused by these publications, with baseless accusations against our Chief Rabbi. These hate publications are damaging Turkey. For our part, we hope for an immediate restoration of the truth against these publications of hate — through correct information and legal means — as they influence our Turkey, of which we are an integral part."

Meanwhile, the Armenian member of the Turkish Parliament, Garo Paylan, referred the controversy to the Parliament by writing to the Vice President of the country, Fuat Oktay: "Can't the expressions of hatred used periodically by the news media close to the Turkish President result in crimes based on hatred?"

I would like to conclude with three key points:

1) Fethullah Gulen was the ally of Erdogan before the latter asserted his dictatorial powers. The publications close to Erdogan, rather than blaming the leaders of minority religions and others, should first of all blame Erdogan for his long years of association with Gulen!

2) If Gulen's letter is authentic, he has done nothing wrong. He has simply acknowledged the truth about the Armenian Genocide. Erdogan is the one to be blamed for lying about the Armenian Genocide!

3) The minority communities in Turkey are terrified by the article in the Turkish magazine because they know that there are plenty of extremists in Turkey who will resort to horrible acts of violence against Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, Jews and Kurds. Their fear is justified. These minority community leaders should be commended for boldly speaking out against the threatening article in the Turkish magazine.

## Paul Goble Is for Real

from previous page

the Bolsheviks that he would unite Turkic nations in alliance with the Soviets. But the latter found out soon that Enver was in pursuit of uniting Turkic nations to form an empire and declare himself caliph.

The Soviets chased after him for a long time in the region until the head of a Soviet military unit, Hagop Melkumyan, tracked him down and killed him in Tajikistan in 1922.

Recently, during a spat with Vladimir Putin, President Erdogan threatened to use the 45 million Muslims living in Russia to blow apart the country. This was not the first time that Erdogan was weaponizing demographics and religion. Earlier, he had called upon Turks living in Germany and the Netherlands to have five children per family to overrun Europe with Turks and Muslims.

With such great odds against Armenia, does it mean that we have a lost cause? Certainly not, if the young leadership can play its hand correctly and align its policies accordingly.

Calls for sympathy for Russia or Europe are sentimental terms which have no place in realpolitik. Since the main thrust of Turkey's policies is moving against Russia and China, it should be axiomatic to align our politics with that of those countries. That does not mean that they will be a perfect match.

China is giving disproportionate attention and support to Armenia to reinforce the very "impediment" which worries Mr. Erdogan. Similarly, Russia is Armenia's strategic ally, but the current anti-Russian rhetoric in Armenia will only hurt the weaker party.

Since Turkey will be hosting the Western Republic of Azerbaijan, with the clear plan of destroying Armenia, that will justify a reciprocal action by the Armenian government to host a Republic of Western Armenia government-in-exile, coinciding with the centennial of the Sèvres Treaty, a document which would serve as the legal basis for that government.

When so much is going on in the region and many threatening situations are brewing, Armenia does not have the luxury to indulge in fistfights in the parliament nor internecine warfare between the old guard and the youthful new government.

It is time for all political parties to get their acts together and place their house in order, because Paul Goble is for real.

## Do Democracies Behave Differently From Non-Democracies When it Comes to Foreign Policy?

By Lori Friedman

BETHLEHEM, Penn. (Lehigh University) – The question of whether democracies behave differently from non-democracies is a central, and intense, debate in the field of international relations. Two intellectual traditions – liberalism and realism – dominate. Liberals argue that democracies do indeed behave differently, while realists insist that regime type and ideology are of little relevance in understanding foreign policy behavior.

Arman Grigoryan, a faculty member in the Department of International Relations at Lehigh University has contributed to this debate with a recent article in a top journal, *International Security*. Grigoryan has focused on a particularly controversial subtopic of this debate, which is whether supporting and spreading democracy is an important priority for democratic states. His answer to that question: No.

Two events have served as triggers for Grigoryan's decision to write the paper.

The first was the democratic mass movement in his native Armenia in 2007-2008, or more accurately, the posture the West adopted toward that movement, which Grigoryan describes as one "between indifference and hostility." The other event was a mass movement in another post-Soviet state—the one in Ukraine in 2013-2014—which the West quickly mobilized to support. Grigoryan found the liberal arguments about the motives for supporting the Ukrainian movement, which were all about supporting a force for democracy, suspect, given what he had observed in Armenia.

"What made the desire to examine this puzzle even more urgent

were the realist criticisms of the policy as driven by 'liberal delusions,'" says Grigoryan. "Realism is the theory which has traditionally dismissed claims about the causal relevance of states' regime types and ideological commitments. Yet now even realists were arguing that the policy was driven by ideology, even if they were criticizing it as wrong-headed. But was it ideology?"

A systematic comparison of the West's reactions to the movements in Ukraine and Armenia provided an opportunity to answer that question. The two cases were very similar on most dimensions, yet the outcomes could not have been more different. Grigoryan wondered, if ideology drove the policy in Ukraine, why did it not do the same in Armenia?

Grigoryan focuses on another motive of the West's behavior to answer the question: the rollback of Russian influence in the post-Soviet space.

In Ukraine the purported liberal motive and the motive to pull Ukraine out of Russia's strategic orbit pulled in the same direction, because the Ukrainian movement was intensely hostile to Russia.

Support for the Ukrainian movement, in other words, was not particularly informative as far as liberal motives were concerned.

"In Armenia these two motives pushed in opposite directions, because the Armenian mass movement did not have an anti-Russian or any other kind of geopolitical coloring," says Grigoryan. "The lack of Western solidarity with the Armenian movement, therefore, was much more informative."

Grigoryan anticipates an important skeptical question in the article: could the finding from the comparative analysis of the

West's reactions to the mass movements in Ukraine and Armenia be nothing more than a strange anomaly, a deviation from an otherwise strict pattern? He dedicates a part of the paper to the examination of the West's overall record in order to answer that question.

He argues that what happened in Ukraine and Armenia is very much in line with the overall pattern.

"Democracy has been supported when such support has dovetailed with certain material interests—geopolitical, economic, or corporate—and never when such interests have diverged from the liberal preference for democracy," says Grigoryan.



A mass movement in Kiev, Ukraine on December 1, 2013. This movement in 2013-2014 was one of two events that served as triggers for Arman Grigoryan's decision to write his new paper





## Armenian Assembly of America Alarmed by Turkish President's Incitement against Minorities

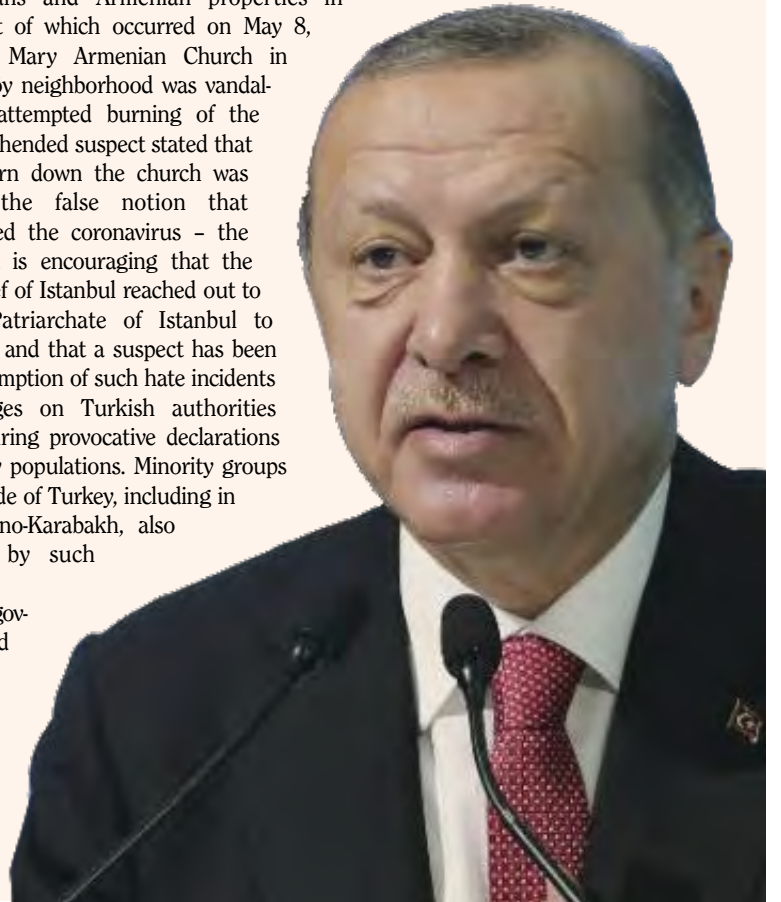
WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Armenian Assembly of America considers the recent rhetoric of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as both a fresh admission of the Armenian Genocide and an early warning sign of immediate threats to Armenians, Greeks, Christians, Kurds, as well as other minorities in the region. We call on the United States government and its NATO allies, and all other concerned governments to counteract these threats and safeguard innocent lives. President Erdogan's actions trigger the activation of the United Nations Genocide Convention, of which Turkey is a signatory party, and obligations to prevent another genocide.

During a May 4, 2020 briefing on COVID-19, Erdogan proclaimed: "We do not allow terrorist leftovers of the sword in our country." The term "leftover of the sword" has been utilized pejoratively by Turkish authorities during the past century to stigmatize its Armenian, Assyrian and Greek populations. During the Armenian Genocide, over 1.5 million Armenians were victims as Turkey not only eliminated its Christian Armenian population but also its Greek, Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac, and other nations in the Ottoman Turkish Empire. The United States Congress passed resolutions in 2019 reaffirming policies to avoid the repetition of genocide. History teaches that, especially in emergency situations, leaders' dog-whistle calls to racism lead to tragic consequences and we are seeing that history repeats itself in the current pandemic crisis, with President Erdogan clearly trying to divert attention from his country's real problems.

President Erdogan's inflammatory language and actions are contributing to the elevation of tensions in Turkish society and inciting some of his countrymen to commit hate crimes

towards Armenians and Armenian properties in Turkey, the latest of which occurred on May 8, 2020, when St. Mary Armenian Church in Istanbul's Bakırköy neighborhood was vandalized during an attempted burning of the church. The apprehended suspect stated that his motive to burn down the church was predicated on the false notion that Armenians "caused the coronavirus – the plague." While it is encouraging that the deputy police chief of Istanbul reached out to the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul to "express sadness" and that a suspect has been detained, the preemption of such hate incidents significantly hinges on Turkish authorities refraining from airing provocative declarations targeting minority populations. Minority groups in countries outside of Turkey, including in Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh, also feel threatened by such statements.

We thank all governments and groups monitoring these threats. Updates will be issued as the situation develops.



## Armenian Government Approves Extending COVID-19 State of Emergency Despite Openings, New Rules on Hospitalization

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia, RFE/RL) – Armenia's government has approved extending the state of emergency declared over the coronavirus outbreak until June 13. The government explained its May 14 decision by saying that "the circumstances that led to the declaration of the state of emergency have not yet been eliminated."

The extension was discussed in parliament later in the day on May 14, but required no vote for approval since it was challenged by no parliamentary faction.

Despite the move, preschools, shopping centers, and gyms will reopen and public transport

will resume starting from May 18, Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan said in parliament, and indeed this did occur on schedule. The wearing of masks will be mandatory in all public spaces beginning on May 25.

Many sectors of the economy reopened in early May to allow people to return to work, but Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told a government session on May 14 that a nationwide lockdown could be reintroduced if the outbreak develops further and threatens to overwhelm the health-care system.

Armenia has registered 5,041 confirmed coronavirus cases and 64 deaths as of May 19,

according to its Ministry of Health. Health Minister Arsen Torosyan announced that from this date, patients positive for COVID-19 exhibiting mild or no symptoms will not be hospitalized.

"In a few days, hundreds of our citizens, who have no or mild symptoms, will return home from isolation, and the newly diagnosed citizens will not be isolated in hotels or hospitals," the Minister said in a Facebook post.

He said the change is connected with two factors, declaring: "The first is the growing number of citizens with a positive diagnosis, and the second is the change in the strategy for han-

dling the asymptomatic cases from the point of view of optimal use of beds and other resources."

To implement the change smoothly, the National Health Institute will hold distance-learning courses for surveillance of coronavirus-positive patients at home. The Minister urges medical staff of city polyclinics, rural dispensaries and health centers to actively participate in the courses. A call center for doctors will be established at St. Grigor Lusavorich Medical Center, where physicians with more experience in treating the coronavirus disease will advise their colleagues.

## Armenian Constitutional Referendum Delayed Indefinitely

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan confirmed over the May 17-18 weekend that due to the coronavirus pandemic his administration will not hold anytime soon a planned referendum on its controversial bid to oust most members of Armenia's Constitutional Court. Pashinyan said that they might be replaced instead by the Armenian parliament dominated by his loyalists.

Armenians were scheduled to vote on April 5 on draft constitutional amendments ending the powers of seven of the nine Constitutional Court judges who had for months been under strong government pressure to resign. Pashinyan has repeatedly accused them – and Constitutional Court Chairman Hrayr Tovmasyan in particular – of maintaining ties to the "corrupt former regime" and impeding judicial reforms.

Tovmasyan and opposition figures have dismissed these claims, saying that Pashinyan is simply seeking to gain control over Armenia's highest court. They also believe that the proposed amendments run counter to other articles of the Armenian constitution.

The referendum was postponed on March 16 when the Armenian government declared a state of emergency to deal with the coronavirus outbreak in the country. The government last week extended it by another month, until June 14. Under Armenian law, no elections or referendums can be held during emergency rule.

In a relevant development, Justice Minister

Rustam Badasyan on May 14 asked the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe to advise the government the "resolution of the ongoing crisis over the Armenian Constitutional Court."

The government had previously declined to send its constitutional changes to the Strasbourg-based commission for examination. Badasyan's move was a further indica-

tion that the referendum has been postponed indefinitely.

Pashinyan said that the vote cannot be held at least before May 2021, implying that it has been effectively cancelled.

"We were thinking that we will hold this referendum this year and hold another referendum [on amending the constitution] during the

next parliamentary elections in 2023," he told a weekend news conference. "But this timetable is not quite working out because of this epidemic."

"We therefore appealed to the Venice Commission, and are now discussing ways of partly or fully resolving the Constitutional Court issue in the parliament," he said.

## IMF Approves Release of \$280M to Address the Impact of COVID-19

WASHINGTON (IMF) – The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed the second review of the Republic of Armenia's performance under the program supported by the Stand-By Arrangement (SBA), it announced on May 19, 2020. Armenia's three-year SBA of SDR 180 million (about US\$248 million), equivalent to 139.75 percent of Armenia's quota in the IMF, was approved by the IMF's Board a year earlier, on May 17, 2019.

The Executive Board also approved the authorities' request to augment access under Armenia's SBA arrangement by 100 percent of quota (SDR 128.80 million or about US\$175 million), bringing overall access under the SBA arrangement to SDR 308.8 million (around 240 percent of Armenia's quota). The augmentation and completion of the review will make SDR205.94 million (about US\$280 million) immediately available.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the tightening of global financial conditions have disrupted Armenia's above-trend growth

and favorable economic conditions. The near-term outlook has significantly weakened, with fiscal and current account deficits widening considerably this year. The Fund's financial support will help Armenia meet these challenges, including the urgent social and economic implications of COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the Executive Board discussion, Mr. Tao Zhang, Deputy Managing Director and Chair, made the following statement:

"Following a strong performance in 2019, the Armenian economy was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has proactively responded to the crisis, adopting widespread containment measures while supporting vulnerable individuals and firms in the most affected sectors.

The fiscal deficit is projected to widen considerably in 2020, reflecting the impact of the cycle on revenues and higher current spending for healthcare and economic support to vulnerable households and firms. The authorities are committed to pursuing their medium-term goal

of debt sustainability once the crisis abates, and public debt is expected to decline over the medium-term in line with Armenia's fiscal rule, while maintaining space for investment and social spending.

The Central Bank of Armenia responded to the crisis by balancing its mandates for price and financial stability. To support the economy, the central bank lowered its policy rate and ensured ample market liquidity. It also intervened to limit excessive exchange rate volatility.

Implementation of the authorities' reform agenda will bolster sustainable and inclusive growth. This includes efforts to establish a holistic anti-corruption framework, improve the business climate and support small and medium-sized enterprises, and strengthen the health and education sectors.

The augmentation of access under the Stand-by Arrangement will provide much needed support, allowing the authorities to mitigate the pandemic and support affected households and businesses."