

# THE ARMENIAN Mirror-Spectator

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## NASA's Sarah Hovsepian Brings Out-of-This-World Ideas to Help COVID-19 Patients

By Alin K. Gregorian  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

IRVINE, Calif. – Talking with Sarah Hovsepian can give one whiplash – in the best possible sense of the word. After all, here is a woman whose ideas and scientific learning weave together space design, origami, ants and ventilators.

Hovsepian is a project manager at the National Aerospace and Science Administration's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

She recently made news because her division came up with blueprints for ventilators that could be built quickly and inexpensively for COVID-19 patients. Titled Project Vital, Hovsepian and her team built the prototype in 37 days,

all while working from home. According to the KRQE

story, the prototype is made of about 80 parts and was designed to deliver more oxygen at higher pressure, something doctors say is needed for many COVID-19 patients. Testing at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York has so far proven the project a success.

In the past month since the group made the news, Hovsepian said that her group's two designs got the approval of the Food and Drug Administration, one at the end of April and another more recently.

The next step, she said, is manufacturing them.

Hovsepian said that more than 330 companies had reached out, of which 24 were handpicked to receive

see HOVSEPIAN, page 10



Hovsepian and colleagues with a prototype of their ventilator

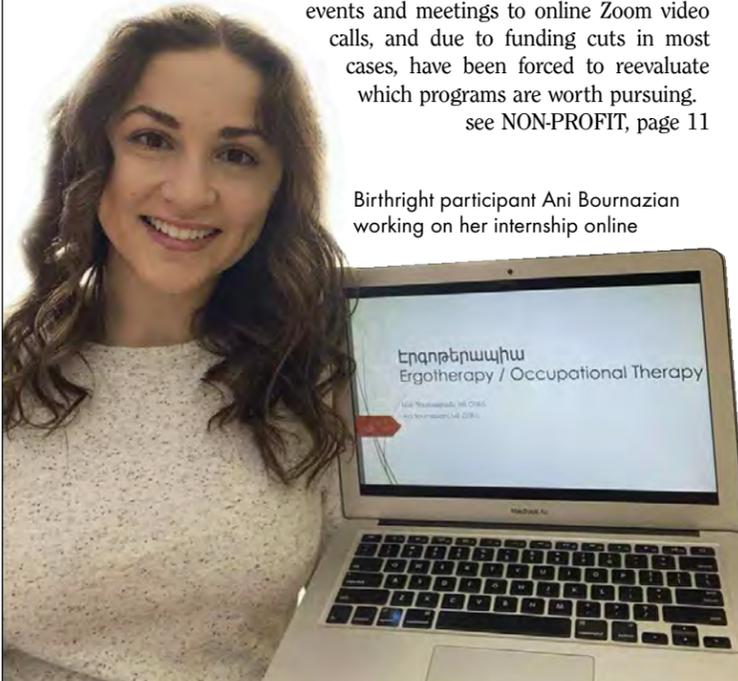
## How Has COVID-19 Changed The Non-Profit Landscape?

By Anais DerSimonian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BOSTON – Diasporan-Armenian organizations – like their counterparts the world over during the COVID-19 era – have been forced to radically alter their practices to meet social distancing guidelines and travel restrictions. To continue operating at a limited capacity over the last few months, Armenian organizations

have moved the majority of their in-person events and meetings to online Zoom video calls, and due to funding cuts in most cases, have been forced to reevaluate which programs are worth pursuing.

see NON-PROFIT, page 11



Birthright participant Ani Bournazian working on her internship online

## Instagram Memes Find the Funny Side Of Being Armenian

By Serena Hajjar

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BOSTON – “See if the race will not live again when two of them meet in a beer parlor, twenty years after, and laugh, and speak in their tongue.”

When William Saroyan penned these famous words in 1936, he was writing for an analog world, one unaware of the massive technological revolution which would transpire over the course of the next century. Yet, the advent of the internet and the explosion of social media have done nothing if not reinforce his message and proven its endurance.

Nestled within the infinite universe of these ubiquitous online platforms is a budding Armenian community, one whose membership transcends borders, dialects and politics.

see INSTAGRAM, page 7



## Beirut's Vahan Tekeyan School Faces a Crisis

TCA of US and Canada Allocates \$60,000

WATERTOWN – The one-time flourishing Lebanese-Armenian community today faces a serious crisis of survival. Our communities are duty-bound to help the Lebanese-Armenians, based on the principle of mutual assistance of Armenian diasporan communities, especially since the latter for decades provided intellectual and educational sustenance and leadership to the communities of the West facing assimilation.

see SCHOOL, page 11



Vahan Tekeyan School's new building to which students moved in 1965

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Mirror-Spectator Annual Summer Break

WATERTOWN – The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* will close for two weeks for its annual summer break at the end of June. The last issue before the break will be that of June 27. The first issue back will be that of July 18.

Our offices have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic; our staff has been working from their homes and will continue to do so.

Emails and messages will be checked regularly.

### UN Human Rights Council Adopts Armenia-Sponsored Resolution on Genocide Prevention

NEW YORK (Arka) – The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted by consensus a Resolution on Prevention of Genocide, sponsored by Armenia, the press office of the Armenian foreign ministry reported on Monday, June 22. The document, which is traditionally presented by Armenia, is based on the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and confirms its position that genocide has caused great losses to humanity at all times.

The resolution draws the attention of the world community to the threat of genocide and to the idea of eliminating the recurrence of this crime in the modern world, emphasizing the need for joint efforts by states to eliminate this terrible crime.

The resolution, introduced in 2020 by Armenia, reaffirms the idea that the justification of past genocides or their denial can lead to new violence.

The updated text of the document includes many new provisions: it emphasizes that the threat of genocide looms in countries where fundamental human rights and freedoms are massively violated, including ethnic, racial, national or religious minorities. In this context, attention is drawn to early signs of genocide, such as the spread of the word of hatred by politicians towards these groups and the distortion of their real image. The importance of preserving the spiritual heritage and historical monuments of national, religious and ethnic minorities was also noted.

The resolution confirms that the main elements of the prevention of genocide are the study of past genocides and respect for the memory of victims. The need for preserving evidence and archival evidence related to past genocides is also indicated.

Armenia is an elected member of the UN Human Rights Council for 2020-2022 and, as a member of the Council, noted among its priorities that it will contribute to international efforts to prevent genocides and other mass crimes by strengthening national and international mechanisms.

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## News From Armenia

### PM Tours Streets of Yerevan, Distributes Face Masks

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan toured the streets of Yerevan on June 18 and thanked the citizens for wearing face masks to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The PM also distributed face masks to the citizens for free.

During the tour the PM visited the Armenian state institute of physical culture to see how the anti-coronavirus rules are maintained in the educational facility.

Reporting by Lilit Demuryan; Editing and Translating by Aneta

“We have 665 new cases of coronavirus. We continue not wearing face masks in a massive way. What do we do wrong that our dear compatriots treat themselves and the health of the others with such an ignorance? Should our government, which was formed through a dialogue with the citizen, talk to its citizen in the language of enforcement for increasing his own responsibility to keep his health?” the PM said.

On June 12 Armenia extended the coronavirus-related state of emergency for another month, until July 13.

### New Group of French Doctors Arrive

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – A second group of French doctors arrived in Armenia on June 24 together with the representatives of the Armenian Diaspora, Head of the French medical team Alexandre Mignon said at an online briefing in Yerevan.

“It was a great honor to be hosted in Armenia and be able to assist Armenia in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. We managed to assist as much as possible, help and share our knowledge, and to what extent it was appropriate, we are very satisfied for that. Moreover, in my delegation, which consisted of 10 people, no one was Armenian, but I think that all approached the issue in an Armenian way. The next mission will arrive in Yerevan on Wednesday. This time the mission will include representatives from the Diaspora who were very happy for coming to Armenia to provide support,” he said.

The first group of French doctors arrived in Armenia via a special flight on June 15 to help the healthcare system to battle the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The French doctors conduct their mission in the St. Gregory the Illuminator hospital, the Scientific Center for Traumatology and Orthopedics and the infection department of the St. Mary medical center.

### Defense Minister to Go To Russia for WWII Commemorations

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Armenia will participate in the military parade dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War in Moscow headed by Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan.

Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin informing that he cannot take part in the celebrations in Moscow dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War.

“I regret to inform you that I will not be able to participate in the celebrations dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War. As you know, I accepted your invitation to attend the ceremonies with pleasure. However, as later was revealed, the current coronavirus-related situation doesn’t allow me to carry out that trip. Based on this I decided to refrain from my visit to Moscow, which, as you know, has been discussed in detail and agreed upon between our administrations,” Pashinyan wrote to Putin.

## Court Rejects Arrest Warrant Request For Armenian Opposition Leader

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – A court in Yerevan on Sunday, June 21, refused to allow law-enforcement authorities to arrest Gagik Tsarukyan, a wealthy businessman leading the main opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK), on charges strongly denied by him.

The National Security Service (NSS) charged Tsarukyan with vote buying and moved to arrest him after the Armenian parliament lifted his immunity from prosecution on June 16.

The NSS says that Tsarukyan “created and led an organized group” that bought more than 17,000 votes for the BHK during parliamentary elections held in 2017. It claims to have collected documents and testimony showing that the vote bribes were handed out to residents of the Gegharkunik province.

Tsarukyan and his political allies reject the accusations as politically motivated. They say that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan ordered the criminal proceedings in response to the BHK leader’s recent calls for the Armenian government’s resignation.

Pashinyan flatly denied that and any other political motives when he spoke in the parliament controlled by his My Step bloc on June 17. “We don’t need to turn criminal cases into subjects of political horse-trading so that they make fewer [anti-government] statements or watch their language,” he said.

The district court in the Armenian capital rejected the arrest warrant request for Tsarukyan following three-



Gagik Tsarukyan

day hearings that ended on Friday. It did not immediately publicize its reasons for the decision.

Tsarukyan refused to talk to journalists when he came out of the court building in Yerevan moments after the announcement of the decision. “Ask my lawyers,” he said before get-

ting in his car.

“I am happy that the court proved strong enough to stay away from political processes,” said one of the lawyers, Yerem Sargsyan. He suggested that during the hearings the court found his and his colleagues’ arguments against Tsarukyan’s arrest convincing.

The defense lawyers said earlier that the NSS failed to come up with any compelling evidence of Tsarukyan’s involvement in the alleged distribution of vote bribes. They also accused the investigators of serious procedural violations of the due process.

Armenian prosecutors condemned the court’s refusal to sanction Tsarukyan’s pre-trial arrest as “baseless and illegal” and said they will appeal against the ruling.

A spokesman for Prosecutor-General Artur Davtian said that the court “ignored” legitimate justifications of the arrest presented by the investigators. The official, Gor Abrahamyan, said that Tsarukyan could obstruct the investigation and exert “illegal influence” on other suspects in the case if he is not placed under arrest.

The BHK has the second largest group in the Armenian parliament, having finished second in the last general elections held in December 2018. Tsarukyan’s party had joined Pashinyan’s first cabinet formed following “Velvet Revolution” of April-May 2018. Pashinyan fired his BHK-affiliated ministers in October, accusing Tsarukyan of secretly collaborating with the country’s former leadership toppled in the revolution.

Addressing senior BHK members on June 5, Tsarukyan accused the government of mishandling Armenia’s coronavirus crisis and failing to mitigate its socioeconomic consequences. Pashinyan and his loyalists reacted angrily to that speech.

Tsarukyan again linked the criminal case against him to the speech when he spoke to reporters on Friday. “If I am to blame for this situation in the country, the spread of the [coronavirus] epidemic, this poverty and economic decline, I am ready to go [to jail,]” he said.



### Marukyan Says Discussions with Prosperous Armenia Underway to Challenge Constitutional Amendments

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) – Edmon Marukyan, a lawmaker from the opposition Bright Armenia Party, says his party has started joint debates with the Prosperous Armenia Party, the largest opposition group in the Armenian parliament, to challenge the constitutional amendments approved by the parliamentary majority to the Constitutional Court.

“We are holding discussions; there are several appeals that may be lodged,” the PM told reporters in the National Assembly on Tuesday, June 23, adding after the debates are over they will provide the necessary information to the public.

Marukyan refrained from making further comments, explaining only the “first round” of discussions has been held between the opposition forces.

Touching upon the controversial constitutional changes allowing for the immediate replacement of three Constitutional Court judges and its chairman, the lawmaker said they have already given their evaluation on the matter both during the parliamentary debates on a constitutional referendum earlier in 2020 and Monday’s briefing in the parliament.

Marukyan stressed instead of dealing with the coronavirus crisis in the country the authorities “are busy with such things.”

“If they are generating a political agenda, it cannot go unanswered; it will definitely have a counteraction,” he stated.



## ARMENIA

# President Sarkissian Hopes to Bridge Armenia And Diaspora, Advance Post-COVID Armenia

SPECIAL TO THE MIRROR-SPECTATOR,  
BAIKAR AND AZG

YEREVAN – President Armen Sarkissian of Armenia gave a wide-ranging Armenian-language interview jointly to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, Baikar and Azg newspapers on June 17, which here is presented in edited translation.

Sarkissian expressed his deep concern about the spread of COVID-19 and the loss of lives in Armenia. “I tell everyone to be extremely prudent. The coronavirus will continue to be with us.” As to why there were so many cases in Armenia compared to its neighbors, he merely responded that each country uses different methods of combatting the virus and so the results are different.

Meanwhile, Armenia must deal with the potential negative economic consequences of COVID-19 on tourism, international trade and the economy.

Last year, Sarkissian requested that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) prepare an “Investment Policy Review” on Armenia, which was published in November 2019

([https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/di\\_aepcb2019d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/di_aepcb2019d3_en.pdf)). The study identified several export and efficiency-seeking industries which could obtain billions of dollars of investments in the next 10-20 years and presented ways to remove the fundamental obstacles to these investments. The staff of the president’s office and UNCTAD, based on this report, Sarkissian said, have made proposals utilizing investment tools which can help neutralize certain threats posed by the COVID-19 crisis to Armenia, assuaging its effect on the flow of investments into Armenia and on its economy.

For this purpose, he said, they suggested the creation of a body provisionally called the Investor Quick Response Working Group (QIRT), which would complement the actions of the government to assist businesses. This body would also help make Armenia better known throughout the world.

Sarkissian said the advance of technology will have a huge influence on everything, including basic social behavior, values and human behavior. Everything from tourism, agriculture, and banking to contemporary technology must advance in Armenia, he said, through a clear vision which must be consonant with the world’s progress.

For example, he said, after the end of the coronavirus crisis, it will be necessary to work industriously in the spheres of electronic government (eGovernment), electronic health (eH) and electronic education (EdTech).

Furthermore, after the coronavirus crisis ends, the president said that he intended to return to his ATOM (Advanced Tomorrow) presidential initiative on technology and science development in Armenia, which has the goal of bringing international organizations to Armenia and establishing laboratories for the development of artificial intelligence.

As president, Sarkissian summarized, “I would like to see Armenia as one of the advanced countries, in the ranks of those developing systems, and being investment leaders, based on the application of [the principles of] biology, health, and artificial intelligence. This path, in my opinion, will allow Armenia to find its new place in the world and prove that a small country can be ‘successful’. The presidential initiatives are aimed precisely at that.”

## Domestic Politics and the Role of the President

Sarkissian noted that classical political behavior has changed throughout the world, including the logic and form of the battle between regimes and their opposition. He said, “Polarization is the result also of the influence of the virtual world on people’s minds and behavior. Today, the virtual world, social networks, are flooded with hate, curses, [and] calls to violence, and there is no law or norm which can keep them in check. The virtual world is becoming more real than the real world. It is not only with us but everywhere that it shapes public opinion and influences the



President Armen Sarkissian

behavior and decisions of the authorities and opposition.”

He called upon political forces to be extremely responsible under such circumstances in their own conduct, speech and work, in order not to permit the domestic situation to become extremely tense and to leave room for dialogue.

He declined to comment on the trials of former high-level Armenian officials concerning the events of March 1-2, 2008, stating that it would be improper to intervene in the jurisdiction of other government institutions, but that he was certain justice would prevail.

He was asked about his treatment in the Armenian press, with the opposition media critical and dissatisfied and the pro-government or official media somewhat “cold” toward him, and in response turned the question to what he saw as the fundamental role of the press in contemporary democratic society. He said, “The experience of the last three decades has shown that the press by itself cannot fully exist solely on the basis of ‘free market’ rules. The state, political forces, businesses and society itself must be interested in having a truly free and independent press. How? That is the topic of a long discussion.”

What is initially important, he continued, is the state formulating the issue and being aware of its necessity. He said, “I consider the establishment of a professional, impartial press a matter of national security both from an internal and external point of view.”

He concluded on the topic, “As far as I am concerned, I work within the bounds of the president’s constitutional powers, and I do not prepare to violate them in order to please any individual or group in domestic political life.”

Sarkissian said his mission, is “first of all, to take steps to establish and strengthen the situation of the presidency, which after crossing to a parliamentary governmental system, in fact must be rebuilt in such a way that, independent of individuals, is able to assure the stability of the state and internal equilibrium – our people’s unity.”

## Diasporan and Foreign Relations

Sarkissian said he envisaged an important role for the presidency in maintaining relations with the Armenian diaspora and the world, in which his own background could be helpful. He said: “We are a survivor people and as a developing country with a strategic location and a global nation, we have something to say to the world. In that sense, I see myself as an intermediary, as an ambassador between Armenia and the world. My life has turned out so that I have had the possibility of seeing Armenia from both the outside and the inside. The same [is true] for the diaspora. I am the child of immigrants. My ancestors immigrated from Erzerum, Bitlis and Alashgerd to Russia, from there to Persia, and my father and mother in 1946 repatriated to Armenia. I was born and raised, educated, and formed in the homeland. Thereupon I lived for many years abroad due to work, and I can say that I know equally well our country and the diaspora and its people. Being conscious of all this and the challenges standing before Armenia and the Armenian people, I attempt and will attempt in consultation with the capable forces of Armenia and the diaspora to compose a pan-national agenda through a systematic approach.”

He said that Armenia as a state must take the initiative in relations with the diaspora, as the challenges to the Armenian people and state require uniting all national resources, and the

diaspora is an important resource with 4-5 times more population than the homeland.

Sarkissian said, “I think that in order to most productively use the potential of the diasporan Armenians, especially their knowledge and experience, it is indispensable to have an institutional approach, by combining legislative and practical measures, which will be directed at broadening their participation in social [and] political life and, especially, in the scientific, cultural and economic progress of the country. Unfortunately, due to different objective and subjective reasons, we have not succeeded yet in finding the necessary contemporary model for the establishment of systematic long-term strategic relations with the diaspora.”

He did have a model in mind, and explained that 24 years ago, while he was prime minister, he foresaw creating a National Affairs Agency composed of competent specialists from both Armenia and the diaspora, either in the place of or parallel to a ministry of the diaspora which is a state body only representing one side. An independent agency would permit formulating a joint agenda with priorities and could turn into a bridge or mediator between state and diasporan structures and individuals, particularly the latter, since 80-90 percent are not part of the traditional structures of the diaspora. Creating a global network model for the Armenian nation through a strong state aside from helping achieve national goals could also give much to the world at large, he noted.

A major issue for all Armenians is the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Sarkissian said that the prime minister and minister of foreign affairs deal with its settlement through negotiations led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. Therefore he did not wish to discuss this except to note that though it had peaceful intentions, Armenia was ready to defend the rights of the people of Artsakh and its security in the case of the use of military force by Azerbaijan, which would be unacceptable and must be severely condemned by the international community.

“As far as the provocative statements by Azerbaijan concerning Armenia,” he said, “I think that they must not be left unanswered.”

He pointed out that in addition to the direct settlement of the conflict, it was just as important to develop the Artsakh Republic in all ways, first of all economically and demographically, through urgent and practical steps. Pan-Armenian investments, both of finances and intellect, were necessary. Sarkissian said he often visits Artsakh, and each time with wonder mixed with pain observes that we leave the Artsakh Armenians alone with their daily cares and issues.

He asked that we imagine how much revenue internal tourism, i.e. from Armenia, could alone bring Artsakh. Similarly, he said, seasonal work could be offered to Armenia’s able-bodied village population in Artsakh. Economic calculations, and various tax, credit and financial arrangements would be necessary for all this, so the governments of Armenia and Artsakh must prepare an appropriate plan together, he said.

Developing the Artsakh economy will not only raise the standard of living there, but also strengthen the position of the Republic of Artsakh during negotiations, the president said. There have always been possibilities in Artsakh and around it, but, he underlined, “The matter is to see and correctly take advantage of them.”

On a more general topic, the president stressed the importance of Russian-Armenian relations, declaring: “Russia is Armenia’s strategic partner and ally. We are connected by shared experiences and successes fortified by many centuries of relations, as well as by the natural desire to help one another in complicated situations. For this very reason, these relations today have turned into an inviolable friendship.”

He said that that bilateral relations could also turn into an important factor in the two countries’ multilateral ties, stating: “Armenia can serve as a bridge between different integration projects and regions, such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union.”

This year is the centennial of the Treaty of

Sèvres and next year of the Treaties of Moscow and Kars. The president commented that if the former gave the possibility to Armenia of establishing a viable state with natural boundaries, the latter two treaties ignored the interests of the Armenian people to the maximum and turned the country vulnerable. He said, “Therefore Armenia with its current problems is the direct result of the Armenian Genocide and the treaties which followed it.”

The complex geopolitical situation in the region was established by these treaties, and this came to the fore after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sarkissian said that as a consequence, Turkey carries out a denialist policy concerning the Armenian Genocide, while it stands by Azerbaijan concerning Artsakh and therefore keeps its border with Armenia closed. This, he said, is a matter of security for Armenia and the Armenian people.

## Bolton Says Trump Proposal to Intervene in SDNY Investigation of Turkish Bank Felt ‘Like Obstruction of Justice to Me’

By Justine Coleman

WASHINGTON (*The Hill*) – Former national security adviser John Bolton said in an interview on Sunday that President Trump proposed intervening in the Southern District of New York’s (SDNY) investigation of a state-owned Turkish bank.

Bolton told ABC’s Martha Raddatz last week that Trump’s suggestion of getting involved in the investigation felt like “obstruction of justice to me.” The December 2018 episode is detailed in Bolton’s forthcoming book entitled *The Room Where It Happened*.

The SDNY had been examining the Turkish bank Halkbank for allegedly violating U.S. sanctions against Iran. Bolton asserted that Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had discussed the investigation several times, with the Turkish president wanting a settlement for Halkbank.

“And the president said to Erdogan at one point, ‘Look, those prosecutors in New York are Obama people. Wait till I get my people in, and then we’ll take care of this,’” Bolton said.

“And I thought to myself – and I’m a Department of Justice alumnus myself,” he added. “I’ve never heard any president say anything like that. Ever.”

The former national security adviser pointed out that if a U.S. bank had violated the sanctions against Iran “we would have toasted them and quite properly so.” He said Attorney General William Barr allowed for the appropriate prosecution of the bank after Turkey wouldn’t agree to a “reasonable settlement.”

Raddatz asked Bolton if he thought the incident qualified as “criminal” or “high crimes and misdemeanors,” which is required to impeach the president.

“I don’t think I know enough about all the circumstances, but I tell ya, it did feel like obstruction of justice to me,” Bolton said.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Bolton’s interview was recorded before Trump fired former SDNY U.S. Attorney Geoff Berman on Saturday, raising questions about the president’s involvement in the Justice Department.

The Justice Department initially announced Berman would be “stepping down” from his position on Friday, but the attorney refuted saying he would not resign without a Senate approved replacement. On Saturday, Barr asked Trump to officially fire him.

Berman’s office has been investigating Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and had prosecuted his former lawyer Michael Cohen, among other associates.



## ARMENIA

# Armenian Parliament Votes to Replace Constitutional Court Judges

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Amid strong opposition objections, the Armenian parliament approved on Monday, June 22, constitutional changes calling for the immediate dismissal of three of the nine members of the country's Constitutional Court.

The amendments drafted by the ruling My Step bloc would also require the court to elect a new chairman. Hrayr Tovmasyan, the current chairman who has been at loggerheads with the Armenian government for the past year, would not have to resign from the court altogether.

Tovmasyan and six other judges have been under strong government pressure to step down, with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan accusing them of maintaining close ties to the country's former government and impeding judicial reforms. Tovmasyan and opposition figures have dismissed these claims, saying that Pashinyan is simply seeking to gain control over the Constitutional Court.

With all seven judges refusing to quit, the ruling political team decided in February to hold a referendum on its bid to oust them. The referendum slated for April 5 was subsequently postponed and then cancelled altogether because of the coronavirus pandemic.

In May, Pashinyan's administration opted for a less radical solution to the "constitutional crisis" which would bar all high court judges from serving for more than 12 years.

Such term limits were already set by amendments to the Armenian constitution which took effect in April 2018. However, the country's former leadership made sure that they do not apply to those judges who were installed prior to that. A clause in the amended constitution allowed them to retain their positions until reaching retirement age.

The changes approved by the government-controlled parliament would eliminate this clause. This would lead to the immediate resignation of three judges who had taken the bench in the mid-1990s. Two other Constitutional Court members would have to resign in 2022. Tovmasyan would have to quit as court chairman but would remain one of the nine justices.

Also in May, the government asked the Venice Commission for an advisory opinion on this solution.

In its opinion publicized on Monday, the



Constitutional Court Chairman Hrayr Tovmasyan reads out a court ruling, Yerevan, March 17, 2020.

Venice Commission largely backed the proposed formula. Still, it also called for a "transitional period which would allow for a gradual change in the composition of the Court in order to avoid any abrupt and immediate change endangering the independence of this institution."

The commission said the Armenian authorities should also not rush to have Tovmasyan replaced by another court chairman.

The draft constitutional amendments unveiled by Pashinyan's bloc on Friday do not envisage any transitional periods. The Venice Commission said it "regrets" this fact and believes that it is "not in line with the recommendations in this Opinion."

Justice Minister Rustam Badasyan and senior pro-government lawmakers downplayed the commission's objections as the National Assembly swiftly passed the amendments in

both the first and second readings.

They said that the Strasbourg-based body agreed with the main thrust of the constitutional changes planned by the Armenian authorities. One of those lawmakers, Vahagn Hovakimyan, insisted that the changes will eventually result in a Constitutional Court "enjoying the public's trust."

The amendments were backed by 89 members of the 132-seat National Assembly. Virtually all of those deputies are affiliated with My Step.

The Venice Commission also noted that under Armenian law the court has to review and validate constitutional changes before they are passed in the second and final reading.

Backed by the government, the parliament's pro-government majority decided not to seek such judgment. "I think there is a conflict of interest," Badasyan said, referring to the

Constitutional Court judges affected by the amendments.

Hovakimyan likewise claimed that the court cannot objectively determine the amendments' conformity with other articles of the constitution for that reason.

The two opposition parties represented in the parliament boycotted the votes and short debates that preceded them. One of them, the Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK), condemned the amendments as unconstitutional. It said that the parliamentary majority's decision to bypass the Constitutional Court is also illegal.

Accordingly, the BHK said it will try to challenge the amendments in the Constitutional Court before they can take effect. It urged the other parliamentary opposition party, Bright Armenia (LHK), to join it in appealing to the court and thus "preventing the overthrow of the constitutional order."

## Aurora to Honor International Humanitarians and COVID-19 Heroes in October

YEREVAN – The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is glad to announce this week that on October 19, 2020, a special Gratitude in Action luncheon will be organized in New York City to celebrate Aurora's fifth anniversary by honoring the five Aurora Prize Laureates and paying tribute to New York City COVID-19 heroes.

A hundred years ago, \$200 million (over \$2 billion in the modern world) was raised to help the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and other persecuted communities. New Yorkers were among the most ardent supporters whose benevolence helped to save a generation of the oppressed. It was also in New York City that the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative was launched in 2015. It is therefore symbolic that the Gratitude in Action luncheon marking Aurora's fifth anniversary will be held in the same city. This fundraising event will bring the Aurora community together in solidarity and allow the Initiative to continue its efforts.

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, founded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors, seeks to empower modern-day heroes who offer humanitarian assistance to those who urgently need it. Aurora's five-year mission has been to spotlight global humanitarians through the Aurora Prize of Awakening Humanity and support people in need through educational, health, and skills development programs promoted by the Laureates. The Prize Laureate receives a US \$1,000,000 award which gives the Laureate a unique opportunity to continue the cycle of giving and support the organizations that have inspired the humanitarian action.

"For the last five years, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative has been reminding us of our common humanity, uniting people, and transforming the way we deliver humanitarian aid to those in need across the globe. To

date, it has supported 28 projects in 16 countries, benefiting almost a million vulnerable people. As we celebrate this fifth anniversary, I urge everyone to join and empower this movement in these trying times when we need more heroes," said Lord Ara Darzi, director of the Institute of Global Health Innovation at Imperial College London and Chair of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee.

Today, when the world deals with the grave challenges of COVID-19, refugees and other vulnerable communities supported by Aurora continue to suffer and grow in numbers under the added pressures caused by the pandemic. The Aurora movement encourages those fortunate enough to have been rescued and given a new chance on life to express their own gratitude by becoming the next generation of saviors, continuing the cycle of giving.

"Aurora stands for Gratitude in Action. It provides a universal message and concept that resonates with people around the world. Its message and platform evoke human solidarity. Today, when humanity confronts the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic, we all seek human solidarity, cooperation, and inspiration to bring us together, to allow us to transcend our differences and provide us with a common platform for action. During the past four years, Aurora has provided us with such an international platform that embodies solidarity, hope and action. We are proud to celebrate our 5th anniversary in New York where we began. We are honored to be in New York where hundreds of new heroes have emerged during this pandemic bearing witness to courage, self-sacrifice, integrity and human solidarity," said Vartan Gregorian, President of Carnegie Corporation of New York and Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

To make a contribution or purchase tickets to the lun-

cheon in New York City visit [events@auroraprize.com](mailto:events@auroraprize.com).

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### About the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative

Founded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative seeks to empower modern-day saviors to offer life and hope to those in urgent need of basic humanitarian aid anywhere in the world and thus continue the cycle of giving internationally. The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is Gratitude in Action. It is an eight-year commitment (2015 to 2023, in remembrance of the eight years of the Armenian Genocide 1915-1923) to support people and promote global projects that tackle the needs of the most helpless and destitute and do so at great risk. This is achieved through the Initiative's various programs: The Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity, the Aurora Dialogues, the Aurora Humanitarian Index, the Gratitude Projects and the 100 LIVES Initiative. The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is the vision of philanthropists Vartan Gregorian, Nubar Afeyan and Ruben Vardanyan who have been joined by thousands of supporters and partners. Our Chair, Dr. Tom Catena, draws on his experience as a surgeon, veteran, humanitarian and the 2017 Aurora Prize laureate to spread the message of Gratitude in Action to a global audience. The Initiative welcomes all who embrace a commitment to our shared humanity.

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is represented by three organizations – Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Foundation, Inc. (New York, USA), the 100 Lives Foundation (Geneva, Switzerland) and the IDEA Foundation (Yerevan, Armenia).

Further information is available at [www.auroraprize.com](http://www.auroraprize.com)



## INTERNATIONAL

# More Foreign Doctors Arrive In Coronavirus-Hit Armenia

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Teams of Russian and Lithuanian medics have arrived in Armenia to help their Armenian colleagues increasingly struggling to cope with the coronavirus crisis.

The Armenian Ministry of Health released on Monday, June 22, photographs of the “first group of Russian doctors” who arrived in Yerevan on Sunday.

It said that they are among about 50 healthcare workers in Russia who have expressed readiness to treat COVID-19 patients kept in Armenian hospitals. “The arrival of the next group is expected in early July,” the ministry added in a statement.

About a dozen other medics arrived in Armenia from Lithuania on Friday night. The Lithuanian Embassy in Yerevan said their two-week mission is financed by the European Union and Sweden’s government. The Lithuanian medics were deployed to two Yerevan-based hospitals that were reconfigured in April to treat only people infected with the coronavirus.

The Russian and Lithuanian teams also brought with them medical equipment and supplies donated to the Armenian health authorities.

Seven other, French doctors travelled to Armenia on June 14 on a similar 10-day mission supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development. They are expected to be replaced by

another French medical team later this week.

Armenia is one of the worst hit countries in the region, having registered 20,588 coronavirus cases as of Monday morning. The authorities in the country

funded healthcare system. Health Minister Arsen Torosyan warned last week that Armenian hospitals are struggling to keep up with the continuing spread of the disease.

Torosyan argued that the number of



Members of a Russian medical team that arrived in Armenia to help their Armenian colleagues fighting COVID-19, June 21, 2020

of about 3 million have reported the deaths of 477 people infected with COVID-19. They say that 117 of those deaths were primarily caused by other, pre-existing diseases.

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting a growing strain on Armenia’s under-

new coronavirus infections is growing faster than that of new hospital beds made available for COVID-19 patients. In particular, he said, although the total number of intensive-care beds has risen by over 30 percent in the last two weeks virtually all of them are occupied now.

## Turkey Continues Airstrikes in Kurdistan

By **Zhelwan Z. Wali**

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region (Rudaw) — Turkish aircraft have resumed airstrikes on the Kurdistan Region’s Duhok province earlier on Tuesday, June 23, against suspected Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) targets, forcing locals from two villages to flee their homes.

“Since 5 am in the morning, Turkey has been bombing Mount Khamter and its surrounding areas [in Darkare] with their artillery and airstrikes,” Zervan Musa, mayor of Darkare, told Rudaw Tuesday afternoon, adding that “23 missiles and mortars have landed in the region.”

“The roaring and hovering of warplanes and mortars have terrified the people of the region,” Musa added.

The Kurdistan Region’s border areas have come under fire from both Turkish and Iranian strikes over the past eight days, as part of a military offensive with the stated aim of targeting suspected PKK positions in the region. Turkey’s Operation Claw-Eagle aerial assault began on June 15, while an accompanying ground campaign, Operation Claw-Tiger, began on June 17.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the massive Turkish offensive. Since June 15, five locals have been killed by the Turkish airstrikes, including four civilians in Shiladze and Kani Masi towns in Duhok and one in Erbil province’s Sidakan region, bordering Iran.

Dilsher Abdulsatar, mayor of Batifa sub-district, said Tuesday’s bombings have resulted in locals from the two villages of Kashane and Shilame fleeing out of fear for their lives.

“There are 15 families from Kashane, and nine families from

Shilame. They have taken shelter in the house of their relatives in Batifa center and other surrounding villages,” he added.

Darkare and Batifa are small sub-districts located in the Sinat-Haftanin area, which lay along the Qandil mountains near the Turkish border. The PKK, an armed group that has fought a decades-long battle with Ankara for greater political rights for Kurds in Turkey, is currently based in the mountain range that spans across the Turkey-Kurdistan Region-Iran border. Ankara regularly carries out airstrikes and ground operations against suspected PKK positions inside the Kurdistan Region.

The residents of a total of ten villages in Zakho have now fled the Turkish military operation over the past eight days.

The PKK’s acting leader since Ocalan’s arrest, Murat Karayilan, a member of the group’s executive body, told the party-affiliated Sterk TV on Monday, that the armed group will not be withdrawing from Haftanin.

“The enemy has its techniques and may possibly capture certain locations in Haftanin, but they cannot control everywhere. Wherever they capture, they must pay the price and they must die with it. We will show resistance in any place they go to... We will show them a historical resistance and our comrades have vowed for that end,” said Karayilan.

Batifa mayor Abdulsatar added that locals from a third village, Banka, are believed to have fled as well, fearing the constant bombings.

Turkey has defended its past operations in the Kurdistan Region and northern Iraq, saying neither the Iraqi government nor the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have

acted to remove PKK insurgents from the area.

On Monday, a high-level Iraqi military delegation visited the site of the Turkish bombings in Duhok province to investigate the aftermath of the week-long Turkish military operations in the area.

The delegation, which is working in coordination with the KRG’s interior ministry, is to provide Iraqi premier Mustafa al-Kadhimi with a report detailing its findings.

Details of “all the losses and impact of the Turkish operation’s bombings on locals will be handed over to the delegation,” Botan Muhsin, Mayor of Zakho in northern Duhok province told Rudaw on Monday.

## Serbia Sends Humanitarian Supplies

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Serbia has sent humanitarian aid to Armenia by a special flight of Air Serbia carrying medical supplies and equipment. The second airplane will arrive on June 19.

Days before President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian had a telephone conversation with the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, during which the agreement on the humanitarian aid was reached.

Serbia provides Armenia with 10 artificial respiration devices, 10 monitors monitoring the patient’s condition, 500 thousand surgical 100 thousand breathing masks, 25,000 glasses, 25,000 pieces of medical protective clothing and other necessary items.

## International News

### Turkey Planning Agency To Promote Armenian Genocide Denial

ISTANBUL (PanArmenian.net) — Turkey is planning to set up an independent civilian agency to promote the denial of the Armenian Genocide, during which the Ottoman empire killed more than 1.5 million Armenians between 1915 and 1923.

The decision to establish such a body was made at the High Advisory Board meeting at the Presidential Complex last week, according to Turkish media reports.

The new approach to address the Genocide had been on the Turkish government’s agenda since the U.S. Senate passed a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide, Daily Sabah reports.

### Australian Lawmaker With Ties to Grey Wolves Fired from Posts

CANBERRA, Australia (PanArmenian.net) — Member of Parliament Adem Somyurek has been fired from the Victoria Ministry in Australia and expelled from the Australian Labor Party — including from its National Executive. The Armenian National Committee of Australia welcomed the move, especially given his connection and support to ultranationalist Turkish organization “Ulku Ocaklari” — better known as the Grey Wolves.

A “60 Minutes” report last Sunday exposed Somyurek’s industrial-level branch-stacking of Australian Labor Party branches in Victoria. Videos and recordings during a year-long investigation unveiled Somyurek allegedly signing up ethnic community representatives to branches, paying their membership fees, requesting the forging of signatures, using misogynistic and homophobic comments, among other offences currently being investigated.

What the report did not reveal is Somyurek’s support for the Australian branch of the Turkish ultranationalist political organization, the Grey Wolves, who espouse the same pan-Turkism ideology of their Ottoman Young Turk forebears.

In June 2014, Izmir-born Somyurek inaugurated the Grey Wolves’ offices in Melbourne, as revealed in a report by Greek-Australian newspaper Neos Kosmos.

The Grey Wolves rose to international prominence following the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in 1981 by one its members, Mehmet Ali Agca.

Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews expelled Somyurek from his Cabinet, where he served as Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Small Business.

Later, the Australian Labor Party’s National Executive accepted Somyurek’s resignation from the party.

### Parliamentarians Prevent Inclusion of Anti-Armenian Rhetoric

STRASBOURG (Armenpress) — The members of the Armenian delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly prevented the inclusion of anti-Armenian formulations in the statement of the PA’s Bureau, MP Gayane Abrahamyan said on Facebook this week.

“After difficult and tense negotiations we had a balanced document — the statement of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly’s Bureau. We managed not only to remove the formulations from the preliminary text of the statement which greatly were damaging the interests of Armenia and Artsakh, but also prevented the Azerbaijani delegation’s attempts to include unilateral formulations over the NK conflict”, the lawmaker said.

She added the first provision of that document reaffirms the Eastern Partnership countries’ commitment to the values the initiative is based on and also highlights the right to self-determination in addition to others.

# Community News

## SOAR Commits Month of June to Fundraise to Save Life of Baby Ada Keshishyants

PHILADELPHIA – In rapid response to the family's appeal, the Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) is devoting the month of June to fundraise to help save the life of eight-month old Ada Keshishyants.

From Kislovodsk, Russia, Ada is suffering from Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type 1, a rare, life-threatening genetic disease. Children with Type 1 SMA die slowly, rarely reaching age 2. SMA attacks the nervous system, causes muscle atrophy, and as a result, the spine curves causing severe restrictions with breathing. Ada is currently in intensive care and as the disease progresses, her health is quickly declining.

Novartis, the manufacturer of Zolgensma which would help treat if not cure Ada, has



Ada Keshishyants

refused to reduce the exorbitant \$2 million price tag on the gene therapy drug despite the pleas of the family. Russian government health organizations have also rejected the family's requests for financial assistance.

The family has raised over \$1.1 million for Ada, however a \$1 million gap still exists to deliver the treatment she desperately needs. Setting an ambitious goal of \$1 million to close the gap, SOAR has launched an emergency, global fundraising campaign to rally its donor base and all Armenian supporters to help this child.

Continuing its good work of supporting Armenian children with severe disabilities, SOAR will earmark any surplus donations to establish the Ada Keshishyants Fund to benefit special needs children housed in Armenia's orphanages.

To help Ada by making a life-saving donation to SOAR at [soar-us.org](http://soar-us.org) and raising awareness about SOAR's campaign for Ada. Direct all inquiries to SOAR Executive Chairman, George S. Yacoubian Jr. at [gyacoubian@soar-us.org](mailto:gyacoubian@soar-us.org).

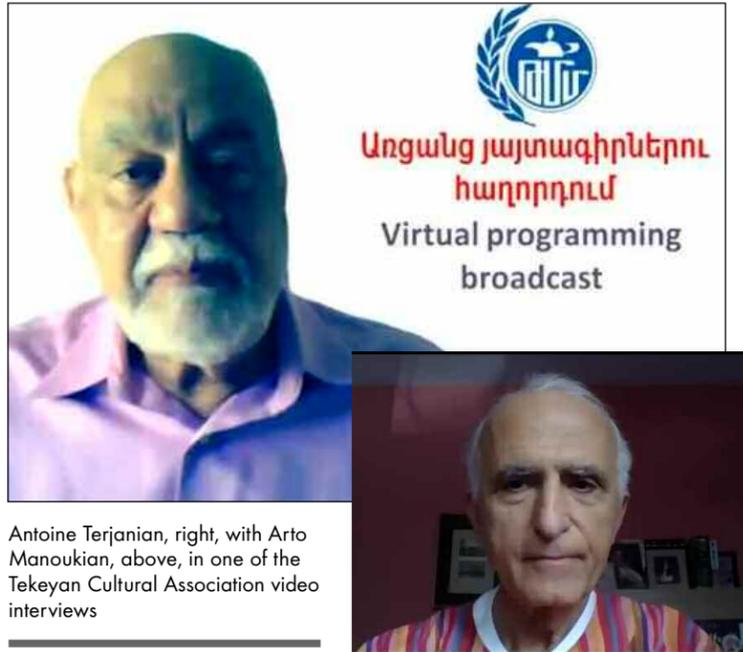
## Glendale City Council Member Kassakhian Joins Metropolitan Water Board

GLENDALE – Glendale City Councilmember Ardy Kassakhian joined the board of directors of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California on June 9 as the city's representative.

Kassakhian, who took his seat as Metropolitan's board continues meeting online amid the COVID-19 pandemic, succeeds Vartan Gharpetian, who was appointed to the Metropolitan board in October 2019.

A Glendale resident since 1986, Kassakhian served as elected city clerk for 15 years before his successful city council bid in March. He also is vice chair of the Glendale Housing Authority and the city's representative to the California Contract Cities Association.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-established cooperative that, along with its 26 cities and retail suppliers, provide water for 19 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.



Antoine Terjanian, right, with Arto Manoukian, above, in one of the Tekeyan Cultural Association video interviews

## TCA's Ongoing Armenian Language Video Series Available on YouTube

MONTREAL – While it has not been possible for the chapters of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA) to hold physical events over the last few months due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, they have begun to shift their activities to the virtual realm. Some chapters, like that of Metro Los Angeles, have been organizing lectures via Zoom. TCA Central Board member Arto Manoukian has been busy preparing a series of video podcasts, all in the Armenian language, of interviews with various interesting Armenians.

The initial and still growing list of podcasts are listed below by name of each guest speaker. They may be viewed on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/artomanouk>) or on the Facebook page of TCA Montreal (<https://www.facebook.com/Tekeyan-Cultural-Association-Montreal-303091173093256/>).

1. Gerald Papasian: This is the story of how and why Papasian chose the field of theatrical acting and producing as his career, as well as his activities in Armenia.

2. Gerald Papasian in his second video talks further about theater in Armenia in this period of COVID-19 pandemic and his career.

3. Raffi Elliott is interviewed about his life in Armenia and the latest coronavirus situation in the country.

4. Antoine Terjanian: This video is with Armenian patriot from Ottawa Antoine Stépan Terjanian, a consultant working internationally in the fields of sustainable economic and social development, information systems, statistics and geomatics/GIS. He has been working with the Atken Armenian Foundation, a Canadian Registered Charity for more than 10 years. Terjanian has supported the implementation of a number of development projects in the Vayots Dzor region. In the past, he has worked as a Director of Business Planning and Development, (DMR Quebec), Manager of Business Development (Geomatics Canada) and Senior Regional Program Officer at the International Development Research Centre, Cairo and Dakar. Terjanian has a bachelor's degree in Agriculture, and a master's degree in Rural Economics from the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies Paris, France.

5. Gerald Papasian this time talks about some of his onstage comical experiences.

6. Azad Temisjian talks about the Ararat Homes (Résidences Ararat) of Montreal, as its founder, chief executive officer and co-director during these difficult days of pandemic. He talks about their past history, the present situation and the effect of the pandemic.

7. Aram Arkun, executive director of TCA, based in Boston, speaks about Tekeyan's mission and achievements.

8. Nora Armani, a talented actor, producer, voice artist and curator of the Socially Relevant Film Festival joins Arto Manoukian of Tekeyan for the first of a series of interviews. The followers of this podcast will get to know Ms Armani and her great achievements in the film and theater international field.

9. Gerald Papasian recites Vahan Tekeyan's poetry. You will hear sample of poems in Armenian and one special poem in English. This is an exceptional literary podcast.

10. Baydzig Kalaydjian, Armenian Democratic Liberal Party leader, educator and activist of Beirut, speaks about the Lebanon Armenian community and its current hardships.

11. Actress, filmmaker and festival organizer Nora Armani speaks about her film festival, SR Socially Relevant Film Festival 2020, this year online, which includes a selection of films on the impact of climate change and violence on women.

## Western Armenian Renaissance during Pandemic

By Shahen Araboghlian

My colleague put it perfectly on the fourth episode of the "Meet the Revolution" podcast. "When it comes to language, the Armenian language, there's been some sort of online virtual renaissance, almost like a virtual zartokn (renaissance) of Western Armenian, since this pandemic hit," said Rupen Janbazian, the editor of [h-pem.com](http://h-pem.com). And he's right.

Back in February, the Armenian Communities Department of the Gulbenkian Foundation announced the "Creative Culture Program" for Lebanese youth to create in the Western Armenian language. It was the small step that launched a discussion on language revival using innovative methods. What came next was a global pandemic and a boom in Western Armenian content that is creative, vocal, and witty in nature, incentivized by the starving need for daily familial and familiar conversations, online. Not in a textbook, not within the four walls of a classroom, but finally like any other thriving language, alive.

*Aghvor Paner*'s "Nice Things", inspired by poet Zahrad's words, "when nice things happen, [consequently], nice things happen") artsy pages have been sprouting left and right on my Instagram timeline lately, be it either old pages dusting off their creative selves or new ones taking flight into the great Western Armenian virtual unknown, from advocating for feminism, MayDay, and #BlackLivesMatter to making crafty alternatives of dialogue slang and calls to self-isolate.

Western Armenian podcasts are now a thing, mostly thanks to our better-than-ever culturally thriving Armenian community of Istanbul. Heard of Asbantag? What about Anoon, Hatz, Kaghak ("Name dish city")? What about h-pem's audiobook of William Saroyan's short stories? Or the radio-theater of Yervant Odian and Hagop Baronian humor pieces on YouTube by Yeghia Akgun?

Old short films such as Ara Madzounian's award-winning "The Pink Elephant", Tony Partamian's Sunderland-awardee "Hrametsek," and Vatche Boulghourjian's Cannes-awardee "Fifth Column" have resurfaced and are being celebrated by a younger generation; Hamazkayin Lebanon's Kaspar Ipegian Theater Troupe has started uploading its taped theatrical performances on YouTube.

Sebu Simonian giving us a virtual tour of the Dino Hall at the Natural History Museum of LA County in Western Armenian? Yes, please! A *bolsahye* telling me how to bake my Easter *cheureg* on his YouTube channel? Of course! Vahe Berberian and his weekly virtual talk show (which I always manage to tune into)? Also available!

Western Armenian haikus are a thing now, thanks to Garin Bedian, who's also part of a new community on Twitter, sworn to tweet only in Western Armenian, no matter the topic. As an excited member of this community, I texted my long-time friend Sevan Gharibian and new friend Sarin Akbas to found the first and only Western Armenian Telegram channel, which already has an approximate 300 subscribers and serves to send custom-made fun-to-use stickers, tiny quizzes, literary pieces and creative works. Not too far back, Hamazkayin's "Kantsaran" launched an Armenian hashtag which translated into Let's stay home and create online contest to encourage young Armenians to write poetry about the pandemic. The Tekeyan Cultural Association started a new video podcast series and the Aztag Daily newspaper started a Zoom lecture series. The new Gulbenkian "Be Heard" Prize has sparked additional dialogue on how, and why, to discuss non-Armenian topics in Armenian and the importance of it all, pushing my community and

see LANGUAGE, page 8



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Instagram Memes Find the Funny Side of Being Armenian

INSTAGRAM, from page 1

This new virtual community has constructed itself around a handful of Instagram accounts and subsists on a steady diet of memes, jokes and funny videos. Though this form of sustenance may appear trivial – even frivolous – to older generations, the international communion which these pages have engendered is a testament to their remarkable consequence.

## lavashlife

Boasting nearly 38,000 followers, lavashlife was originally conceived to supplement a homonymous blog documenting Aris' experiences with Birthright Armenia. The name was inspired by a pre-departure conversation with his sister in which she remarked on the lavish life he would be living, indulging in the rich food and culture of the motherland. Naturally, this lavish life soon became a lavashlife.

Upon returning to the United States, Aris tried to resume blogging, though this proved difficult given the change in location. Plagued with a drought of inspiration, he diverged from his typical Armenian scenery and decided to post a meme on Instagram.

"I always really enjoyed memes, and I noticed that there were no active meme pages online that were relatable to the Diaspora as a whole," he said. "So, I wanted to make something that everyone could relate to, because we're all so spread out. You know, we have so many things we could be sad about, but there are so many more things we can laugh about and enjoy. We have such a rich culture in which we can all share."

The meme was well-received, encouraging him to revive his page along this comedic vein. His subsequent activity in the spring of 2019 garnered widespread attention, especially considering the lack of competition – a word which he avoids out of appreciation and respect for the assortment of other Armenian accounts which have since surfaced. On average, he adds about 100 followers per day.

"It just goes to show that people want this stuff, they enjoy seeing it," he said. "I think it's a great medium for Armenians to share the great things about the culture, to spread awareness, to have conversations about harder topics. Humor is the best way to do that."

Indeed, lavashlife has fostered meaningful connections with Armenians worldwide, many of whom are eager to correspond with Aris via direct message on the Instagram app. One of his most memorable exchanges was with an Armenian follower based in Italy who wished to communicate a romantic message to her boyfriend in Armenian.

"She reached out to me because she didn't know any other Armenians to ask, and she wanted to tell her boyfriend 'I love you' in Armenian," Aris recounted. "So, we started sending each other voice messages. So back and forth, back and forth, we were telling each other 'I love you.' It was so funny."

These interactions are not purely limited to Armenians, however. "What I always find interesting is the Americans who follow me saying, 'Oh I love Armenian culture!'" he remarked. "There are so many Americans with Armenian friends who have told them about the page, so each of those Armenians becomes like an ambassador. The American friends will send their Armenian friends a meme and ask for an explanation, then they'll talk about it. It's a beautiful process of sharing our culture. That's really made me happy, hearing about some of those experiences. I also have a couple of people who have reached out saying that their partner is Armenian, and they follow the page to learn more about them. I think that's really cute."

Perhaps most poignant are the conversations he has had with Turkish followers in Turkey.

"The vast majority of them are very nice," Aris said. "They strictly want to learn more about Armenian culture. I have a few that have reached out and said, 'Your page has taught us stuff about the Armenian Genocide that we didn't learn in school. We came here to follow your page because it related to our culture.' In a way, to some people who maybe didn't like us before, it's shown them Armenians' humanity and humor."

Representing all Armenians in their various iterations, and thereby building an inclusive community is paramount to Aris, which is why he strives to maintain a low profile.

"I use 'we' a lot when I'm responding to people and commenting, because I feel like I can't take credit for what this page has become, since probably 50 percent of the content that I post belongs to other people," he explained. "It's not fair for me to make it about myself."

By remaining relatively incognito, especially with regards to his family background, Aris aims to avoid falling into the all-too-common trap of embodying the voice of only one specific subgroup of Armenians: everyone from barsgahyehs to amerigahyehs can find something relatable on lavashlife.

"I want to represent all Armenians, that's the goal, and I don't want to pigeonhole myself to only representing the type of Armenian that I am," he said. "I think that the more people know about me, on a personal level, the less they will be able to relate to the content. The page is all about breaking down borders and finding things on which people can connect."

He added, "When I was a kid, I'd wonder, 'Why are there so many Armenian camps? Why do my family members go to that one and I go to this one?'" Aris recalled. "It makes me really happy to see Armenians coming together and finding things we can connect on rather than things that can divide us. Humor is a great way to accomplish that."

## moods.pokhe

If you've recently heard anyone emphatically exclaim "Yev bang" or "Pari yegadzek sireliner," [Welcome my dears] you can thank Haig Injejikian. Hailing from Syria and currently based in Australia, Injejikian is the founder of Western Armenian commentary videos on Instagram, which he posts under his moods.pokhe (translation: change my mood) account. These hysterical, sidesplitting videos are best described by example. This was the first one to go viral (even appearing in the WhatsApp group chats of my own social media-less father).

Injejikian's intentions for the page are modest and self-evident, as the name indicates. When I responded that I indeed turn to his page for a morale boost, he replied with a pleased, "Moodut guh pokhvi gor? [Your mood changes?] That's it! That's why, I hit the nail on the head with the name!"

The majority of the interview with Injejikian proceeded in his native Armenian, wherein I was privy to his naturally lighthearted and humorous way of speaking, consistent with the witty dialogue in his commentary videos. In fact, he originally created his account in November of last year with the intention of simply posting amusing videos for his own friends.

"Ever since I was a teenager, I used to do commentary like this and everyone would encourage me," he said. "So, I figured I would make a page, you know, just for my friends, since they always wanted me to make such videos. Everyone liked it, and somehow more people started following it! I wasn't intending for this to become an international page, but somehow it happened, and I'm thankful for that because people are happy as a result of it."

Injejikian revealed that he spends a minimal amount of time maintaining moods.pokhe, which he views purely as a hobby to lift people's spirits and divert their attentions from their concerns.

"An episode of Pari Yegadzek Sireliner – it's literally 5 minutes of work," he explained. "What I do is when I see a video on YouTube or social media that I think is funny and that I want to comment on, I save it and I think of things I want to say. Later, I play it, I speak, and I post it straightaway. I don't think about it; I just post it, because if you go over it, you don't want to post

Hi. Aristakes 🇺🇸 🇷🇺  
@Aris\_Karakash

Otar friends: "How do I say thank you in Armenian?"

Me:



5,596 likes

lavashlife Why did we make it so difficult? 😂

"Many people will send me a video and a recording of themselves saying 'Pari yegadzek sireliner, as you can see here, there is a man...'" he said.

The humorist, who cites Vahe Berberian as his ultimate inspiration and teacher, has even begun enjoying a mild level of local celebrity.

"The last time I was in a shopping center, someone yelled, 'Moods pokhe!' from behind me, and I turned around to see who it was, but I didn't know them," he recounted. "It happened often, and I would feel bad because I didn't know them."

Despite the unexpected popularity of his account, Injejikian repeatedly emphasized the importance of remaining grounded and candid in his content.

"I discovered that the more genuine someone is, the more honest someone is, the more success he will find in life, because if you're genuine, then you can correctly convey your root message to your audience," he said. "Especially in comedy, you have to be honest."

This perspective has allowed Injejikian to avoid turning moods.pokhe into a chore.

"If it was difficult, I wouldn't work on it," he said. "It's something that comes from within; it's something that comes naturally to someone. It happens automatically, unconsciously."

Echoing comments made by Aris, Injejikian believes that moods.pokhe, along with other Armenian meme accounts, have enabled Armenians to connect through new online platforms.

"It's through these pages that people are coming closer together: they mention each other in comments, they send the posts to each other, which is good because it's Armenian content, it's something which helps us keep our culture and traditions," he said.

## armo\_tweets

London-native Sipan Petrosyan originally created his armo\_tweets Instagram account as part of a challenge in November of last year.

"My friend started a meme page himself, and I'm really, really competitive, so I told him 'I'm going to make a page, too, and let's see who can get 2,000 followers first.'"

Thanks to a shout-out from lavashlife just three days into this contest, armo\_tweets gained a whopping one thousand followers overnight, with a steady increase over the ensuing weeks. The swift popularity Petrosyan's page has enjoyed is only fitting considering his childhood affection for the online Armenian comedy scene.

"I literally grew up watching Armenian internet content, especially Antic, AndyK comedy, and Armo\_Memes, who was really popular back in the day," he said. "I just love the old-school Vine comedians as well. Growing up watching Moot.com along with My Big Fat Armenian Family – there was so much content, and I found them so hilarious. I always thought it would be cool if I could contribute something to that as well."

Petrosyan's account procures content from Twitter – which is similarly home to a budding "Armo Twitter" community – and spotlights it on his armo\_tweets page.

"I wanted to create an Instagram page specifically for people to know that if they post something and it gets attention on Twitter, they will also have a voice on a bigger platform, on Instagram. It's a more visible way to put that content out there," he explained. "I really would encourage more young people to see FUNNY SIDE, page 8



3,795 likes

armo\_tweets "Tell me a bit about yourself" and we tell them our whole history 🇺🇸 🇷🇺 🇯🇵

it anymore. You start thinking, 'Oh, why did I say this? Why did I say that?' So, what I do is just post the video, because I have a message."

Indeed, devoted fans and acute observers may have noticed that animals make a frequent appearance in the videos featured on his page.

"Since I arrived in Australia, I became a vegetarian," he said. "I love animals, so I want to impart a message to people to care for animals. The message of the Pari Yegadzek Sireliner videos is 'Why are the people always bothering the animals? Why are they treating the animals like this?' Using humor, I can deliver a message to these people, so that they stop treating animals badly. That's the best part!"

The page has received widespread support, including that of his own twin brother, Hagop, who occasionally joins Haig for skits. With a now international following, Injejikian has succeeded in popularizing his two pet phrases.

"I have a friend in Lebanon who called me and said, 'Haig, what's going on? Everyone is saying, 'Yev bang, yev bang!'" he laughed.

Through moods.pokhe, Injejikian has inadvertently sparked memes of his own, as his followers are inspired to mimic his content.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# The Funny Side of Being Armenian

FUNNY SIDE from page 7

get on Twitter and just try putting content out, because it's such an impartial platform. The Armenian community on Twitter is nowhere near as big as it is on Instagram."

The name is in large part an homage to the comedians Petrosyan admired in his youth.

"For me, I associated the word 'Armo' with the younger Armenian diaspora and the people who grew up watching Armenian internet content," he said.

armo\_tweets has quickly garnered support from not only Petrosyan's Armenian friends and family, but also his non-Armenian friends. This broad audience inspired Petrosyan to start adding English translations to his posts, which frequently feature content in transliterated Armenian.

"I initially started that because one of my friends messaged me saying, 'Sipan, I don't understand anything you're saying in these tweets. I don't get it,'" he recalled. "I realized that for a lot of Armenians who don't understand the memes or don't really speak as well, it could help them slowly start learning some Armenian words, too."

Throughout the eight months that Petrosyan's account has been active, it has caught the attention of certain popular Armenian figures, from 2016 Armenian Olympic gymnast Houry Gebeshian to Super Sako, who started following armo\_tweets after Petrosyan tagged the singer in a meme. However, this attention is not something Petrosyan takes lightly.

"Knowing that I have direct access to some of these more famous and influential Armenians, I feel some sort of responsibility to make sure I post content which they can also use and put out in their communities and create awareness and discussion," he said. "While I've got the opportunity, while I've got the platform, I might as well maximize it and use it to the best of my ability."

Petrosyan has acted on this sense of obligation by leveraging his page to raise awareness about issues affecting contemporary Armenian society both domestically and internationally. Earlier this month, both armo\_tweets and lavashlife promoted fundraisers for Armenian businesses damaged during riots in the United States.

On the domestic Armenian front, Petrosyan hopes to spark conversation among Diasporan Armenians about how to resolve ongoing questions facing Armenia.

"I think a lot of people associate Armenia with the Armenia of 20 or 30 years ago, and a lot of people think Armenia is still like that now," he noted. "I want current issues, current

topics which are trending in Armenia, to trend within the diaspora as well."

Noting the lack of engagement with Armenian news organizations on social media, Petrosyan strives to compensate for this deficit by weaving the news into his humorous content.

"I think people are more likely to follow a comedy page," he remarked. "I'm surprised that the meme pages hit these big numbers within several months. It dawned on me that many people don't really care to follow the news; they just want something that's funny, quick, and short. But we can capitalize on that to promote Armenian issues in this format as well. So, in the future, if people want to find ways to help Armenia, they can draw upon issues they've seen within these meme pages and see what they can do."

Petrosyan also spoke enthusiastically and hopefully about the prospects of taking this budding virtual community offline.

"I don't want to just have a meme page, and that's it," he said. "I think we can use this foundation to do so much. A lot of our content is about going back to Armenia, returning to Armenia, missing Armenia. I think it encourages the younger generation to visit Armenia. If I go back to Armenia next year, I'm going to try my best to organize events there for the diaspora and use the profits to give back to the community."

The spirit of giving back is ingrained in Petrosyan's outlook regarding the monetization of his account.

"It was important for me to consider that if I am putting out sponsored content, it's something that I believe in, something that also abides by the good of the general community, and it's not one person advertising something which is completely random and unrelated to the community," he said. "I'm currently in the process of making a deal with a company. Once it's complete, we're going to donate 50 percent to charity and do five different giveaways, giving the money back to people who've contributed to the page. I think that's also a good incentive for people to level up the content, which will get more engagement in the community as well."

While armo\_tweets has encouraged its followers to become more engaged with Armenian culture, Petrosyan himself has learned just as much from his followers and fellow meme accounts.

"In London, we don't have a lot of manti, so I had never tried it before – I was so ignorant!" he laughed.

In line with the camaraderie and Armenian solidarity championed by their respective Instagram accounts, all three of my interviewees expressed, unprompted, resounding respect and admiration for each other.



wees expressed, unprompted, resounding respect and admiration for each other.

"I've had the pleasure of interacting with the admins of a lot of the other Armo meme pages," explained Aris. "We try not to tread on each other's space, and I think everyone's doing really well with that. I love the growing Armenian memes community and being able to connect with all of them on that level as we try to achieve this goal of enriching Armenian culture, together. It's cool to see. Everyone's really supportive of each other."

Petrosyan agreed, adding, "We are aligned, we all have a similar mindset and intention for the Armenian community."

For Injejkian, his counterparts have provided inspiration for his own content, just as he inspires theirs. He closed with a call for each individual to similarly contribute their talents to the Armenian community.

"If every single one of us finds some avenue through which to contribute to the Armenian culture, I'm sure it will bring our people to a great place."

## Western Armenian Renaissance During Pandemic

LANGUAGE, from page 6

above to create in a language that is too-familiar but only used to discuss the same few limited topics in an everlasting loop.

The education sector is also digitally thriving. Alik Arzoumanian from Watertown, Mass., narrated a Dr. Seuss classic for her students which soon became a YouTube sensation and opened a whole new world for teachers in the diaspora to make the much-needed virtual move. From elementary math to anything and everything, these creators were extra encouraged by initiatives like Gulbenkian's "Prizes for Teaching in Armenian Online".

From Hamazkayin Canada's children's story-time Facebook live sessions, to Pevv Arev's now frequently-uploaded quirky rhymes; animated classic fairy tales by Pokrig; Lala and Ara encouraging kids to create and posting them for everyone to see; AGBU starting a free-of-charge Learning Zone initiative on their Armenian Virtual College; quality-dubbed Treasure Island; TUMO's recent comic; my friend Sarin's independent YouTube grammar classes; even storytelling in the Hamshen

dialect; the list goes on... Soon, Nayiri.com will release a smartphone autocorrect and a group of international youngsters will publish fictional novels. I'm confident I missed out on so many more online content I might've come across. A few valid concerns brought to my attention by friends are worth noting, though. My friend Kourken Papazian pointed out how all this is "still a drop in the ocean of needed reforms", and Kayane Madzounian was worried about how the abstract online presence of content would be treated once lockdown measures were lifted and physical presence of such content is nonexistent.

Maybe UNESCO was wrong all along and we're simply too lazy to keep the language alive, and that's on us.

Maybe we're on the right track, and maybe we're too hesitant to use the wrong words, verbs, spelling, or grammar, but enough. My generation is often credited for impressing the older ones when given the appropriate time, space, and resources. So, give us exactly that, the benefit of the doubt, and we might prove UNESCO wrong.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

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The management of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* received the following state by state donations as of June 22, 2020, from subscribers, friends and supporters to maintain the publication of the first English language Armenian weekly in the US.

We sincerely appreciate all the contributors. Acknowledgment letters will follow. The fundraising continues.

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# NASA's Sarah Hovsepien Brings Out-of-This-World Ideas to Help COVID-19 Patients

HOVSEPIAN, from page 1

licenses to produce and later sell them. One, Yea Engineering, happens to be based in Yerevan. The California Institute of Technology, which is home to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), will be the license holder for the ventilators. They are selling the license for free.

Asked just how she and her team came up with the design, she replied, "I really do love a challenge. I trained as an architect. I never trained in the field of space, but my philosophy is always to ask questions. When you ask questions in different disciplines, you come up with more interesting solutions."

Many different people and disciplines were involved in the creation of the design for the new ventilator.

Deflecting credit, Hovsepien praised that everyone working on the team had interesting backgrounds. She said, "The data analyst was from JPL who gathered and presented COVID-19 data/cases from all over the world, which helped us understand just how urgent the situation was. It was a perfect storm and all came together," she said, adding, "It was a really fun project."

"Hovsepien said while it has been very hard not to see her colleagues and friends, she has been fascinated by "how much as humans we are able to adapt."

She said she was grateful that she was in a situation that could help those sick with COVID-19 with ventilators and expressed her hope that a vaccine could be developed.

"Everyone deserves to be living in a dignified space. I am just thankful to support in my little way this vital project. It makes any of the difficulties of challenges feel like nothing," she added.

The timetable for production is specific to each company based on their supply chain, Hovsepien said. "It should not take more than a couple of months. We purposely picked components that are not" hard to reproduce or find.

## The Shape of Things

A great adjective to describe Hovsepien is "interesting." After all, her NASA design aesthetic has been influenced by fashion, high-heeled shoes, ants and origami.

And the two-pronged principles guiding her are "helping the community" and "looking at things from a different perspective."

For Hovsepien, nature serves as a great teacher for structures and patterns.

She recalled that as a child, she had been sitting out and looking at "a whole trail of ants" walking to and from their colony, "like a dual-carriage highway. Some were going into the ground and the others were coming out. I was fascinated by that."

In 2009, she worked at the Ant Lab in the University of Bristol, United Kingdom, studying self-organization and self-replication in ant colonies as well as ant tunnel structures underground.

"I thought it was interesting to study at the University of Bristol to see how they create structures below and above ground," she said. She found that much like environmentally sophisticated architecture, many ant colonies feature a design which keeps them cool in the summer and relatively warm in the winter.

Another art form, which one may not connect with NASA, is origami, one she hopes to help with the deployment of a robot for exploring the moon and Mars.

At NASA, Hovsepien is tasked with running technology demos in the robotics field. As she explained, someone comes up with an idea and they want to pitch it to NASA.

"I lead a lot of tech demos, mentor students and interns," she added.

One of the projects she has worked on is designing a swarm of small robots, the size of a typical shoe box. "We work together in a group and help each other and lean on each other."

She is also involved with NASA's Artemis program, initiated in 2017, which seeks to land "the first woman and the next man" on the Moon, specifically at the lunar south pole region, by 2024.

The goal is to deploy a robot or robots from the lander, which will explore and photograph the moon and help draw up a map of the moon. Then, the robot will share that information with other reports so they can create a map of the surface they explored.

She noted, "It's a lot faster than 1 robot trying to map the same area."

The origami inspiration will be used for designing the robot so that it will hold folding solar panels that can pop up.

"It is an interesting field. I have always been very, very interested in pop-up structures," she said. Among the potential benefits of using the structures is to create domiciles that "mitigate homelessness or if there is a natural disaster."

In her professional field, she is going to try to apply it to a small robot that will "eventually go to the moon."

Hovsepien takes delight in her job. "I always feel about whatever job I have that as long as I am contributing and am helping, that is where I thrive. I like posing hard questions and finding solutions to those questions," she added.

"I am interested in the future of space architecture. We are looking at habitats for human survival on the moon or Mars," she said.

Another field fascinating her is our disposable culture. "Everything we create, we throw away," after it's use is done. "There is so much that you can't recycle. We are looking at the future of the lifecycle of product recycling so that we don't produce so much waste," she said.

## MIT Shoes

Hovsepien has both a bachelor's degree as well as a master's in architecture and is currently working on getting her architecture license.

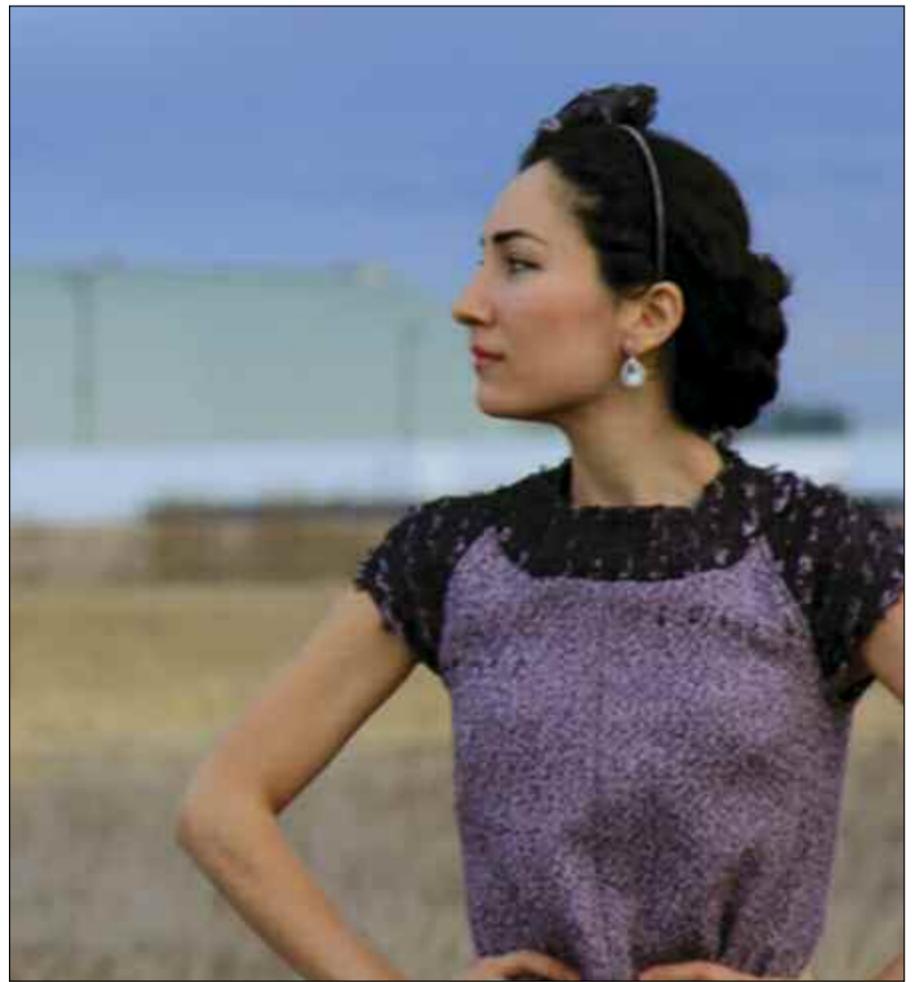
In 2010, Hovsepien received her bachelor's degree in architecture in a five-year program at California Polytechnic University of Pomona. During those years, she studied at the University of Applied Sciences, in Biberach, Germany and worked at several architecture firms, including Frank Gehry's office as project consultant at Gehry Technologies, and KTGy Inc.

Next, Hovsepien obtained her master's degree in 2012, in the Design and Computation Group, Department of Architecture, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At MIT, she worked on projects at the university's famed Media Lab, and also at the Center for Bits & Atoms (CBA) under Neil Gershenfeld. At CBA, she worked on a lightweight, high strength composite aircraft wing structure, using advanced manufacturing technologies for reconfigurable, repairable composite assemblies derived from lattice foam structures found in nature.

By her admission, she has always been fascinated by footwear.

One of the courses she was taking at MIT was called "How to Make (Almost) Anything," and being a fan of footwear, she decided to focus on making a pair of 14-inch-high shoes that light up and take pictures and give the user feedback on the environment.

"At MIT, everyday after school, to blow off steam, I would walk over to a street near Harvard Square," she recalled. By a happy coincidence she saw a shoe repair place, which by another coin-

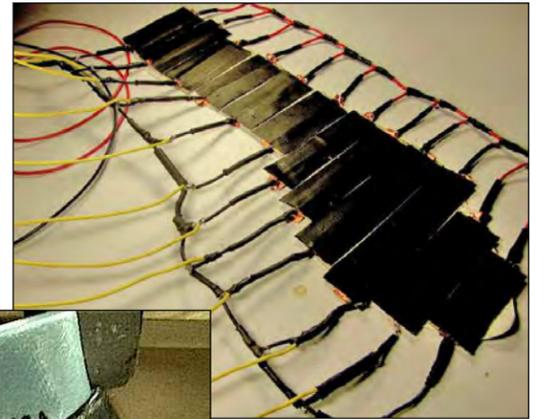


Sarah Hovsepien

idence, turned out to be owned by an Armenian man. "I told him what I was doing and asked him if I could come to his shop twice a week and help" in return for pointers.

He agreed and that is just what they did for a few months. "He would help me and I would help him," she recalled.

While she learned the basics of



Footwear designed by Hovsepien at MIT, with a 3-D printed heel and the electronics and pressure sensors designed to be worn inside the shoe



footwear construction, she taught him to use a three-dimensional printer to produce parts for his clients' shoes, such as custom heels. "He had never used any of them and so we were feeding off each other," she said.

As for the Media Lab, she said, "It was so exciting. I compared it to going to Disney Land when I was a kid. It was an incredibly creative involvement with ultra creative people coming together to solve problems. It is really an incredible place

to be. A lot of people are trying to come up with helpful solutions and innovations for the sake of itself," Hovsepien said. Those solutions, however, "must have a significant impact to better people's lives. I was humbled by the opportunity to be there."

## California Girl

Hovsepien was born and raised in California to Armenian parents. She attended the St. Gregory Alfred & Marguerite Hovsepien School in Pasadena in grades K-4 and the Armenian Mesrobian School in Pico Rivera grades 4-8.

"I was very, very involved in the Armenian community and still have a lot of friends in the community. We keep in touch," she said.

"Without the education and opportunities and the values, I don't think I would be the same person," Hovsepien said of her Armenian education. "It was a very important part."

She has two young half sisters (10 and 15), with whom she is very close.

Her Armenia-born mother, Soseek Der Tavityan, she noted, is her greatest inspiration. "She is responsible for why I went to Armenian school. And she said the sky is the limit. I attribute all this [creativity and courage] to her," she said.

Hovsepien said she wants to inspire people to help others, to ask questions, to always look at problems from various perspectives and empathize. "There can be no greater joy than to help your fellow humans," she added.

Asked what message she has for readers, after a second's thought, she said, "Truly nothing is impossible. Really dream big."



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Beirut's Vahan Tekeyan School Faces a Crisis

SCHOOL, from page 1

The Lebanese Armenians experienced extraordinary crises in recent decades which accelerated emigration and debilitated their community. As a consequence of these crises, their educational system suffered greatly. A number of schools were closed, while the Armenian General Benevolent Union merged its five schools into a single one. The same fate befell the Prelacy schools.

The Vahan Tekeyan School of Beirut, which for 70 years has operated in the heavily Armenian-populated Bourj Hammoud area, in its turn suffered greatly as a result of the decline in its student population. However, thanks to the heroic efforts of parents and its board of trustees, as well as the sponsorship of the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Founders Body in Lebanon, it managed to maintain its existence. The TCA family in North

America also contributed its significant assistance in the preservation of the school, which educated successive generations for the Armenians of the diaspora.

Now, the coronavirus pandemic, combined with the political and economic turmoil in Lebanon, has crippled completely the Armenian community there. Under these serious conditions, the TCA Founders Body has issued an urgent plea for help to the Central Board of the TCA of the United States and Canada, and to all Armenians, to save the school from inevitable closure.

In response, the TCA Central Board is immediately allocating a sum of \$50,000 (US) and had already sent \$10,000 earlier this year to the school. Further assistance is also under consideration as conditions evolve.

This is the time to also call upon the former students and alumni of the Beirut Tekeyan School to remember the

heart and soul of their early education and to rush to help extend the school's existence and carry out its mission for as long as is feasible.

This appeal is equally aimed at all institutions and benefactors who value education, and asks that they stand behind this educational establishment which has served as a pillar of the Lebanese Armenian community for 70 years.

All contributions, tax-free, may be sent to the Tekeyan Cultural Association at the following address: 755 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472. For more information, use this contact information: tekeyan@aol.com or 1-617-924-4455.

All donations will be transmitted in full to the Vahan Tekeyan School of Beirut along with future allocations provided by the Central Board itself.

# How Has COVID-19 Changed the Non-Profit Landscape?

NON-PROFIT, from page 1

## Shifting to Online

"When the state of emergency was declared in Armenia due to COVID-19, we had over 70 participants in-country," says Nelly Poliakov, the marketing creative director of Birthright Armenia, an organization focused on bringing diaspora youth to Armenia to gain professional experience.

nations. This initiative has since been put on hold. "The [Georgian] group came here, our group went to Georgia, and now we're all stuck online, which is very difficult," says Shahinian.

Planned events, seminars and gatherings that would have been near-impossible to bring online in their entirety have been postponed or canceled.

"We had a conference planned for later this month in Armenia, and we made a decision

Janjigian Trifiro.

Populations who live in places where the internet connection may not be as stable, such as those in rural regions, are amongst the most vulnerable. With the pandemic limiting travel, the humanitarian non-profit presence in these regions have been dramatically reduced. Organizations like Armenia Artsakh Fund (AAF) have attempted to fill that void using air shipments. According to a press release,

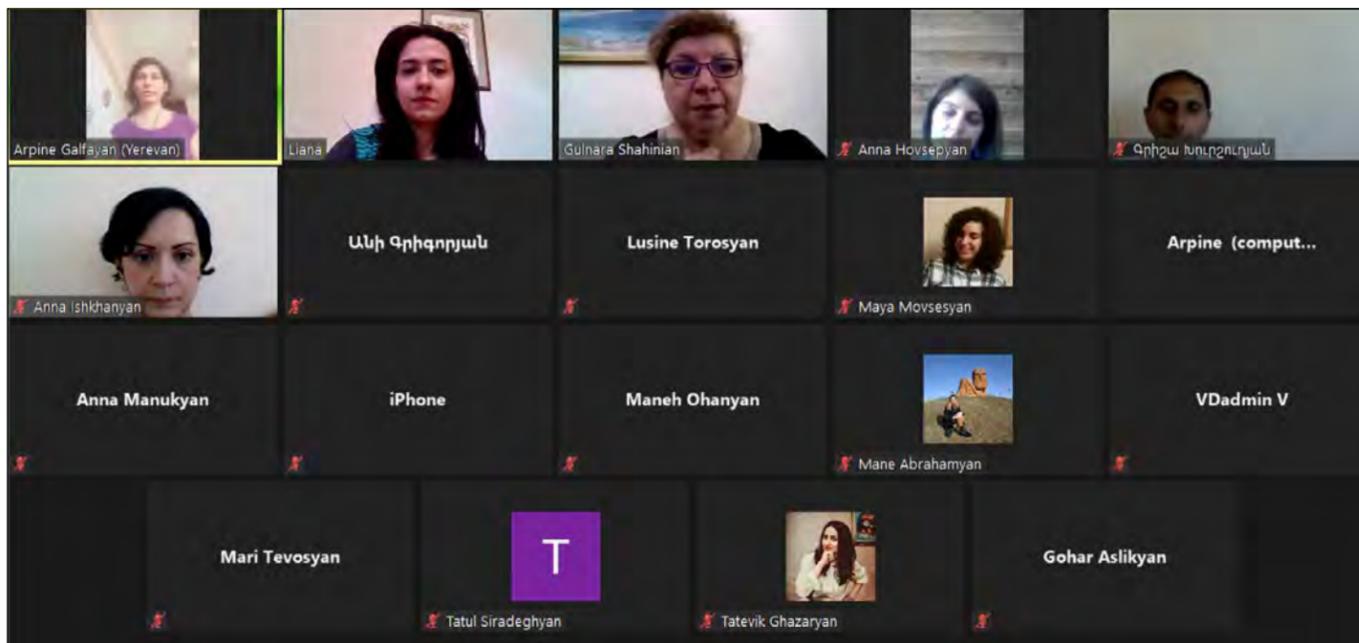
lion) and Direct Relief (\$741,000)." **Economic Impact**

Armenia's economy, like that of many other small countries, is heavily tourism-based (The French magazine, Le Quotidien, mentioned Armenia as the most trending destination of 2020). The travel restrictions – though crucial to upholding public health – will inevitably cause Armenia economic hardship in the months if not years to come.

"This will mean more competition between NGOs," laments Shahinian. "I don't think donors will cover the expenses of people coming to Yerevan from the rural communities for seminars and training because everyone has gotten used to the online discussions. But it's a question of how effective these online discussions are."

An observation that Shahinian made was: "The amount of organization and community engagement from the youth hasn't been as widespread since the [1989] earthquake." It seems that when tragedy strikes in Armenia, the youth have historically been the ones to pick up the pieces and demand change – a clear testament to the nation's fortified resilience over the years.

Though much of the new COVID-era programming is still being developed, the hope is that these initiatives might provide a brighter future for populations whose vulnerability was not previously exposed to this extent before the pandemic. Janjigian Trifiro said of her new online workshops: "When there is this need, it opens the door to creativity. If you can take the fear out of the equation, creativity all of a sudden becomes boundless." It seems that though there might be tough days to come for Armenia, the organizations and youth that make the nation great will not cease in uplifting vulnerable communities and moving the country forward; without hesitation and without fear.



Democracy Today meeting held over Zoom

"While we couldn't host new arrivals we had to quickly adjust to upholding their safety. During these times, as during all times, the well-being of our participants was our highest priority. Our transition to online platforms was done within a week – volunteers continued to work remotely with their job sites, our language learning and lecture series also moved online."

As most professionals have learned during COVID-19, making the shift to working online is rarely convenient. For international human rights organizations that rely on face-to-face meetings, the shift to online has proved additionally challenging.

"It's all online. We have to reschedule all the meetings. We have to do much more to keep processes going," says Gulnara Shahinian of Democracy Today (DT), a Yerevan-based NGO focused on human rights, democratic processes and civil society, as well as supporting women in Armenia's rural regions since the fall of the Soviet Union through micro-lending and empowerment workshops.

Though some of this work can be seamlessly transferred online, other aspects – especially projects in which travel is essential – are more difficult. One of DT's initiatives involves groups of Armenian and Georgian youth interested in political science traveling to each other's country to discuss relations between their two

pretty quickly to postpone that, which was extremely hard after all the work and effort put into it," says Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) Board Member Sara Janjigian Trifiro.

## New Initiatives

In addition to shifting most practices online, many organizations have readjusted their long-term plans to make space for initiatives that have suddenly become more imperative during COVID-19, namely, projects that directly impact vulnerable populations, like migrant workers from Russia, women-run households and the elderly.

Democracy Today has decided to focus on uncovering the truth about how effectively the Armenian government is assisting rural communities during COVID-19, using volunteers who are residents in the rural regions to collect data for analysis. AIWA is developing online programs to assist women with challenges they may be facing during this time, such as managing elders and dealing with domestic violence.

"We were working on a platform to connect women from all over the world in need of mentorship and connection – that is needed more than ever! We had to re-pool the priorities so that they were more focused on this new dynamic. And it took a long time to figure that dynamic out – what works, what doesn't," adds

"During the first five months of 2020, AAF also delivered \$6 million of humanitarian assistance to Armenia and Artsakh. Of this amount, the AAF collected \$5.8 million of medicines and other supplies donated by Americares (\$5 mil-



Armenian lessons over Zoom for Birthright participants

# Arts & Living

## *Journal of Society For Armenian Studies to Be Published by Brill*

FRESNO – The Society for Armenian Studies and Brill have joined forces with regard to the *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, which will be published by Brill from 2020 onwards. The *Journal* also has a new editor-in-chief: Dr. Tamar M. Boyadjian (Michigan State University).

The first volume of the *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* was published in 1984 under the editorship of Prof. Avedis K. Sanjian (1921-1995). Since that time, it has served as the foremost journal for scholarship in the field of Armenian studies in the Western Hemisphere. The purpose of the *Journal*, according to the inaugural editor, was “the dissemination of the best original scholarship in Armenian studies and closely related fields, without any chronological limitations.”

The current editorship and board of the JSAS remain committed to that central principle and continues to publish articles in the fields of History, Archaeology, Religion, Philology, Literature, Art History, Genocide, and Diaspora Studies.

The first issue of 2020 is expected to be published in September, the second issue will follow soon after.

Prof. Bedross Der Matossian said, “The Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) is thrilled about this new partnership with Brill. There is no doubt that the *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* (JSAS) will become a leading journal in the field of Armenian Studies with a new editor, advisory and editorial boards as well as book review editors. We look forward to a fruitful collaboration with Brill with the aim of transforming the *Journal* into a global hub of disseminating knowledge about Armenian Studies.”

“I am both honored and excited to be appointed the new editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies*. I am also equally excited to be working with the prestigious publisher Brill at Leiden in the Netherlands. As editor, one of my goals is to promote global, transnational, and cross-cultural scholarship in the field of Armenian Studies. Working with Brill, the journal will now be able to have rolling submissions, alongside planned thematic volumes, helping to foster new directions in the field of Armenian Studies that align with cutting-edge scholarly research,” said Boyadjian.

“Brill is delighted to be the new publisher of the well-established *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*. The field of Armenian Studies is burgeoning and Brill is very happy to be part of this vibrant community of scholars,” said Maurits van den Boogert.

The JSAS is the foremost peer-reviewed periodical of Armenology in the Western Hemisphere. The *Journal* publishes scholarly articles on diverse topics of Armenian Studies without any chronological limitations. The *Journal* also accepts contributions on related fields addressing the history and culture of the Middle East across all periods. In particular, JSAS’s aim is to promote scholarship that foregrounds the significance of Armenian studies in questioning dominant historical and social narratives—both narrowly within the field and in more broader global and comparative contexts. JSAS accepts submissions in English, Armenian, French, Italian, and German. It does not publish opinion or policy papers.

Editor-in-Chief: Tamar M. Boyadjian, Michigan State University

Advisory Board: Bedross Der Matossian, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Barlow Der Mugrdchian, California State University,

see JOURNAL, page 16



Rita Kevorkian at Fayoum's Caricature Museum in Egypt

## Armenian-Egyptian Artist Rita Kevorkian Truly A Rising Talent

CAIRO – Her father and grandfather were born in Egypt. Her great-grandfather fled to Egypt, escaping the Genocide. She is the fourth generation of her Armenian family. Meet Rita Kevorkian, the Armenian-Egyptian artist whose paintings depict the richness of both countries at their finest.

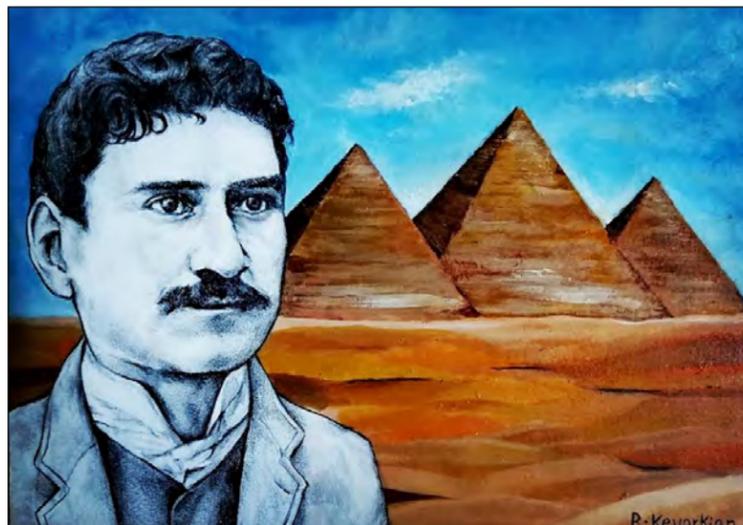
By Maydaa Nadar

“Armenia represents my roots. At the same time, Egypt is my home country, where I was born and raised, and the place where I live and where I wish to spend the rest of my life,” articulated Rita in this regard.

At the age of 8, Rita started painting. Her family and school noticed, and moreover, praised her talent. They have been continuously motivating her to develop. Her paintings relate vividly world events and the topics that affect society.

“My artwork focuses on what serves humanity, what improves society, and on showing the beauty in everything God created. I try my best to spread optimism and hope and to convert negativity to positivity,” says Rita. She recently composed more than 20 paintings that revolve around the COVID-19 topic, for instance.

see TALENT, page 17



Remarkable artist Martiros Saryan depicted by Rita Kevorkian

## ‘Agn Is in Ruins, The Nightingale Doesn’t Sing’

Songs of Pain of Genocide in Turkey

By Harry A. Kezelian III

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

DETROIT – “That generation...” Stephan Karougian, the 80-something-year-old male soloist of St. John’s Armenian Church Komitas Choir in Detroit, was telling me about his parents, as I sat in his living room, interviewing him about his life in Armenian music. He shook his head and sighed. He didn’t really expound upon those two words, but his tone of voice was enough to tell the story.

Karougian’s father had been born in Pingyan, a village in the Province of Sivas in Ottoman Turkey, very close to the large town of Agn in Harput province (the Ottoman borders divided up the Armenian villages of that region, which also included Armdan and Divrig). He told me that when his father would gather with friends, they would sing a song in Turkish beginning with the words “Egin de veran olmush” (“Agn is in ruins”). It was a very sad song about their region. But when Karougian first told me about this song, he didn’t say that it was a song about the Genocide; he simply told me that they sang it.

I recognized the words as a variation of the lyrics of *Egin Havasi*, a well-known Anatolian song which has been performed in both Armenian and Turkish. I played for Karougian my copy of the 1917 New York recording of this song by violinist-singer Kemani Minas [kemani is a title in Turkish given to a violin player, as udi is to an oud player]. It was indescribably sad. Karougian listened silently and began again to tell me about his family story, his life story.

The older Mr. Karougian had been a volunteer soldier who fought under General Antranig in his campaigns against the Turks in the Caucasus, briefly gaining control of Western Armenia just as the Armenians of those regions were being decimated. They didn’t get as far as Pingyan. After the retreat and the Sovietization of Armenia, Mr. Karougian left for America, sailing first into Istanbul, which at the time was under the post-War Allied occupation. He couldn’t bring himself to go any further. “He didn’t want to leave the land where his fathers were buried,” said Stepan. Let it never be said that the Bolsahyees are not patriotic Armenians.

Karougian settled in Bolis, married and raised a family. He had to be careful though, as he had sustained bullet wounds to the chest in battle. He scrupulously avoided allowing his chest to be exposed in the sight of a Turkish official, as it might be revealed he had served in combat against Turkey. Of course, Karougian was not the only Armenian in Istanbul who had to be careful in his comings and goings. They all did. Mention of what the Armenian people had been through during the First World War was not possible in public. Yet the Armenians found ways in which to remember their past, one of which was through music, and perhaps surprisingly to some, in folk songs sung in Turkish.

Armenians singing folk songs in Turkish was nothing new, as many with roots in Anatolia can attest. Musicologist, folklorist, and student of Gomidas’ music, Mihran Toumajan, refers to see SONGS, page 14



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Vera Nazarian

## 'My Armenian Side Emerges in My Fiction!'

YEREVAN/VERMONT – Vera Nazarian is a two-time Nebula Award Finalist, a Dragon Award 2018 Finalist, and a member of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America.

**By Artsvi Bakhchinyan**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

She was born in 1966, in Moscow, immigrated to the US as a kid, sold her first story at 17, and has been

published in numerous anthologies and magazines, honorably mentioned in several volumes, and translated into eight languages.

Vera made her debut with the critically acclaimed *Dreams of the Compass Rose*, followed by *Lords of Rainbow*. Her novella *The Clock King and the Queen of the Hourglass* made the 2005 Locus Recommended Reading List. Her debut collection *Salt of the Air* contains the 2007 Nebula Award-nominated "The Story of Love." Recent work includes the 2008 Nebula Finalist novella *The Duke in His Castle*, science fiction collection *After the Sundial* (2010), *The Perpetual Calendar of Inspiration* (2010), three Jane Austen parodies, *Mansfield Park and Mummies* (2009), *Northanger Abbey and Angels and Dragons* (2010), and *Pride and Platypus: Mr. Darcy's Dreadful Secret* (2012), all part of her *Supernatural Jane Austen Series*, a parody of self-help and supernatural relationships advice, *Vampires are from Venus, Werewolves are from Mars: A Comprehensive Guide to Attracting Supernatural Love* (2012), *Cobweb Bride Trilogy* (2013), and the four books in the best-selling international cross-genre phenomenon series *The Atlantis Grail*, now optioned for development as a feature film and/or TV series, *Qualify* (2014), *Compete* (2015), *Win* (2017), and *Survive* (2020).

After many years in Los Angeles, Vera now lives in a small town in Vermont.

In addition to being a writer, philosopher, and award-winning artist, she is also the publisher of Norilana Books.

**Dear Vera, fantasy writers can be compared to illusionists. Do you agree?**

Yes, absolutely. All writers in general create a world out of nothing, bringing the literary universe into being from a combination of their life experience and a fertile imagination. Fantasy writers take it a step further and create multiple worlds, each with their own unique rules, different laws of nature, and different wonderful realities that do not resemble our own ordinary physical world. And yet, every fantasy world has to feel real and possible, a place the reader can visit and experience the magic. Science fiction is a subset of fantasy, so the worlds we create have to be scientifically plausible in addition to everything else.

**So does it mean that a science fiction writer should follow the progress of science?**

When writing science fiction, you have to do research to avoid stupid mistakes and to make your scientific elements feel true to reality even if they are fabricated constructs proposed by the writer. Science is the logical stepping stone from which you build your imaginary worlds. When I research my science – such as the intensive research on black holes I did for *The Atlantis Grail* series – I try to consult with experts. I was fortunate to have two NASA experts help me with the astrophysical elements of the story. Science fiction writers have an unusual responsibility to the readers and the coming generations – they often predict the future and inspire future technologies, so their science must be as accurate as possible.

**What inspires you as a fantasy writer?**

Inspiration is the spark that makes any story come alive and burn inside you. What inspires me is a sense of wonder found in history, languages, traditions and ancient world cultures, as well as the wonders of nature. I am proud to have included Armenian sensibility and a piece of my Armenian soul in my works, and will always continue to do so, in addition to my Russian half. My characters are usually inspired in some way, they lead others by inspiration.

**My children, as many in the world, are just obsessed with Harry Potter. It will be interesting to know your opinion on this novel – how you explain such excitement around this novel?**

Like most people, I love Harry Potter. No one can deny that J.K. Rowling has created a cultural phenomenon for all ages. I firmly believe that the rich details and world-building of the Harry Potter universe and the many wonderful mysteries based on the elements of magic are at the heart of the appeal. However, the story of a poor orphan boy who has a magical

talent and powers and who must defeat a dark lord is a universally powerful story trope that pulls at all our heartstrings. Everyone can secretly relate and want to live in such an enchanting world and have these adventures with friends. The power of Harry Potter is fundamentally based on love overcoming evil.

**In my life I have had a mystical experience only once. Have you had mystical experiences?**

My grandmother used to tell me a story that that when my grandfather was lowered into his grave, all the windows in our Moscow apartment flew open. I think that in subtle ways magic is all around us and most people never notice. Whether it's a bunch of tiny, seemingly insignificant coincidences that make things come together in certain amazing, positive ways, or what some of us call "luck," there is always something that helps us succeed in life. Belief in wonder, truth, and good, helps us keep going and pursuing our goals and dreams even when life is difficult and obstacles pile around us. Confidence is part of it. But a great deal of the mystery is the courage to discover that which is hidden. Be brave and take chances and mystical things will happen to lend color to your life.

**We know that Chuck Norris recommended your book. How did it happen? Do you keep in touch with him?**

I am very pleased and honored that Chuck Norris and his wife have enjoyed my work, but I have had no personal interaction with him and would not want to impose. My guess is, he simply found my book and enjoyed it. Such is the fun of being a writer – you never know who might be reading your books and stories! I've been fortunate to have been quoted by other famous celebrities such as Sir Richard Branson, Charlamagne Tha God, and others.

**Music is also a wonderland; please tell us about your musical involvements.**

I am a singer, play a number of instruments which I taught myself, adore music of all kinds, especially Classical Baroque and vocal madrigal and medieval a capella and opera. Music plays a huge part in many of my stories. Music, tones, and sound-based technology is the science fictional basis of *The Atlantis Grail* series. I've created characters who wield "power voices" with the most powerful called the Logos Voice – the Voice of Creation.

**How did the change of literary language from Russian to English happen?**

I am a Russian native speaker and speak basic Armenian (but not well). I also studied Spanish, German, and Mandarin Chinese. I started learning English in Moscow as a little girl in school (2nd grade), but of course it was only when we immigrated, that I started to write in it. The passion to write and tell stories was so great that I had to improve my English skills rapidly so that I could express myself. As a result, I worked very hard, and wrote and wrote and wrote (the secret to being a writer is simply writing), and eventually published my first professional fantasy story in English when I was 17 years old, in Los Angeles. The story was "Wound in the Moon" in the anthology *Sword and Sorceress II* (DAW Books, 1985), edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley.

**Would you say your Armenian-Russian background has been reflected in your literature?**

Oh yes, immensely. I was born in Moscow, to an Armenian father and Russian mother, and most of my Armenian relatives come from Tbilisi, Georgia. I've been to Yerevan, Armenia for only a few days, before we left the USSR. Since I started writing, I've written a number of Armenian and Armenia-flavored fantasy characters, including several in my first novel *Dreams of the Compass Rose* that resembles the ancient story cycle *The One Thousand and One Nights*. I like to say that I have inherited an unusual personality combination – an Armenian sense of humor and a Russian sense of suffering. And there are many specific, subtle (and not-so-subtle) elements in all of my work. In my "collage" novel *Dreams of the Compass Rose*, the story of Seert and Ahiron (Heart and Blood) in the story-chapter "Shimmering Scythe" is one such example. And, of course, there is my character Hasmik Tigranian in *The Atlantis Grail* who plays a very important, heroic part in the science fiction series. I also use many Armenian-based terms and words in my fantasy such as *ter*, *taqavor*, and *taquoui*, etc. I am a proud Armenian and that's unavoidable that my Armenian side emerges in my fiction.

**Please tell our readers about the Armenian side of your family.**

My father was born in Tiflis (Tbilisi) in 1917 and they lived there and in Tskneti, a small mountain village. There is a story in my family that we are related to the great Armenian marine painter Aivazovsky (Aivazian), and also the famous Soviet film director Eldar Ryazanov. We lived in Moscow where I was born, and spoke mostly Russian, but when the Armenian family gathered, cousins and uncles, they spoke Armenian and Georgian too. I learned only a few Armenian words and phrases then, but I enjoyed my Armenian grandmother's cooking. And more learning came later when I started to pick up the

Armenian language from living for about a year with the Armenian community in Beirut, Lebanon.

**Beirut? How so?**

I honestly don't remember – I was a little girl, and my parents have now passed away. I remember being in many Armenian churches, seeing many people. We lived near Nar street in a small alley, called something like Nor Hadjin, in an old stone house. Two weeks after we arrived in Beirut, the civil war started, so we lived under siege for some time. We were all refugees too, and the local Armenian organization sent my family and many other families to Greece to escape the war, then we came to America.

**Do you know any Armenian writers?**

Besides William Saroyan and Hovhannes Tumanyan, unfortunately not as many as I would like; I have not kept up. But I have corresponded with American bestselling author Chris Bohjalian who also lives here in Vermont. There is never enough time!

**Are you in touch with Armenians in the US and have you ever traveled to your father's homeland?**

I have not been back to Armenia since we immigrated. One of these days I will go back and visit. It's definitely a dream of mine.



**What was/is the most fantastic thing in your life?**

Probably the act of writing and creating art and music – the act of creativity in all its forms. You make something out of nothing. You bring new things into the world. Permit me to quote my own words from several years ago, from my book *The Perpetual Calendar of Inspiration*:

One of the strangest things is the act of creation.

You are faced with a blank slate – a page, a canvas, a block of stone or wood, a silent musical instrument.

You then look inside yourself. You pull and tug and squeeze and fish around for slippery raw shapeless things that swim like fish made of cloud vapor and fill you with living clamor. You latch onto something. And you bring it forth out of your head like Zeus giving birth to Athena.

And as it comes out, it takes shape and tangible form. It drips on the canvas, and slides through your pen, it springs forth and resonates into the musical strings, and slips along the edge of the sculptor's tool onto the surface of the wood or marble.

You have given it cohesion. You have brought forth something ordered and beautiful out of nothing.

You have glimpsed the divine."

**It is a really fine, high-class literary definition Vera. And how do you spend this quarantine period? Is this something that a fantasy writer would ever have imagined?**

Believe it or not, technically very little has changed for me with the quarantine. A writer is a natural hermit, and I already work at home, so the only difference is the psychological level of anxiety and the constant need to wash hands and everything else. However, on the fine scale of human interaction, it is subtle and profound.

The outside world has become the enemy, the potentially hostile unknown. A fantasy writer's imagination already covers every possibility and visits every contingency, so if you think you've imagined the worst, trust me, I have already been there and back in a blink, imagined even more, and screamed an existential scream in the cavernous recesses of my mind.

I must say that I have the utmost respect and profound gratitude for all the brave souls who must continue to work the essential jobs, such as the heroic medical professionals, delivery people, food service and transportation workers. They inspire me to write a book about a very different kind of superhero. Good thing I am a writer

# Songs of Pain of Genocide in Turkey

SONGS, from page 12

the popular Turkish language songs of Anatolia. “These are those songs, which have been utilized equally by all peoples living in Turkey... composed in a simple popular style, easy to understand, probably by ashoughs [minstrels], of which the number of Armenian ashoughs (as is clear from history) has been sufficiently large.” (*Hayreni Yerk oo Pan*, 1972). 19th century Eastern Armenian writer, folklorist, and children’s author Ghazaros Aghayan also chimed in on this subject: “It is necessary to consider as national-popular [azkayin zhoghovrtagan] those songs and song-mixed tales which although they are not in the Armenian language, but are the compositions of Armenian ashoughs or which are typical of them and are spread among the people...we commit a great error, when we collect and print the Armenian-language ballads of an ashough, but we neglect the Turkish-language songs.” (*Daraz*, 1893).

## Kef Time Music

Not only did the Armenians sing “kef time” songs in the Turkish language, but they also sang of pain of the Armenian Genocide. The once-well-known *Der Zor Cheollerinde* (In the Deserts of Der Zor) describes the suffering that took place during the death marches, and was created and sung by the women and children during their deportation to the Syrian desert. In the 1920s, more than one Armenian recording artist in America made a phonograph disc of this song.

But it is obvious that that song was created by Armenians. And of course, such a song could not openly be sung in Republican Turkey. The words are much too explicit, discussing the fact that Armenians were being deported, the cruelty of the Turkish and Circassian soldiers, the suffering in the desert, and the fact that Armenians had been sent away or were dying (depending on the version of the lyrics) “on account of their religion” and “on account of the nation.”

Yet the Armenians in *Bolis*, and also elsewhere, had other songs that they would sing, songs whose origin was somewhat mysterious, and ought to be the subject of investigation by folklorists and musicologists. Songs whose meaning was not completely obvious, and which perhaps weren’t originally about the Genocide at all, but which were interpreted by Armenians in 20th-century Istanbul, as well as in many parts of the Diaspora, as expressions of their historic pain.

One of those songs seemed to be *Egin Havasi*, the song Karougian was speaking about. The famed Udi Hrant, for example, had recorded this song in both Turkish and Armenian, and the version recorded in 1917 by the mysterious vaghamerig (one who died young) Kemani Minas, apparently an immigrant from Malatya, was a best-seller in the Armenian-

neither Udi Hrant’s, nor Kemani Minas’ recording actually used the words “Agn is in ruins.” Everything about this song was vague.

I had been hearing about other songs like this for some time, though. Deacon Charles Hardy (Kherdian) of Racine, Wis. and currently of the St. James parish in Evanston, Ill., shared with me that his wife, who grew up in Beirut, was the daughter of a survivor from Gesaria (Kayseri, Turkey). Her father used to sing a Turkish song called *Gesi Baghlari* (Vineyards of Gesi) while working or cleaning his store in Beirut. According to Hardy, the song was really about the Armenian Genocide. I had heard of this song before; it was popular among the Armenians of Gesaria and can be seen referenced in survivor memoirs. I didn’t know it was about the Genocide. On the surface it’s a sad love song with references to the Kayseri region – Gesi is a nearby small village whose vineyards were apparently a sort of vacation spot. It has been recorded by many modern Turkish performers and a glance at the lyrics doesn’t really reveal any direct or indirect references to the Genocide. On the surface it is about the vineyards of Gesi and about lost love. While both Armenians and Turks consider it a sort of regional anthem, some Armenians, at least, in addition to Hardy’s father-in-law, attached an

additional meaning to the song. Ethnomusicologist Melissa Bilal, originally of Istanbul, concurs with the opinion that the while the origin of the song may be as yet unclear, Armenians certainly sang it with the intention of expressing their feelings about 1915. She shared with me that she had an aunt who was fond of the song and claimed it was written by an Armenian. Bilal further pointed to the line “there is death, and there is cruelty in this world” as referring to the Armenian experience. Yet it is clear that this song predates the Genocide. I have a recording of it from 1917, that belonged to my great-grandfather Hovhannes Vartoogian, himself a survivor from Fenesse (one of the villages of Gesaria), which was well worn-out and must have been listened to many times. The recording was made at the same session as Kemani Minas’ version of *Egin Havasi*, by a different singer, a *Gesaratsi* vocalist named Garabed Merjanian. Merjanian’s lyrics are incredibly hard to make out, but he seems to be singing the following:

The vineyards of Gesi are a field with roses  
Mother I am going, and you protect your head

The mother-in-law is faithless and the son-in-law is an infidel (gavur)

Don’t send me, mother, beyond those moun-

tains

May others not burn, my mother burns for my pain

Beyond this mountain, choice mint grows  
My tobacco smoldered without my fire being lit [a proverb meaning I didn’t have a chance to enjoy my youth]

A fate happened to me, worse than my death  
Don’t send me, mother, beyond those mountains

May others not burn, my mother burns for my pain

While these lyrics are incredibly vague, and could have come from the pre-Genocide version of the song (Turkish sources claim the song was about a young bride in an unhappy arranged marriage who was sent to a village beyond the mountains to her husband’s family), the words Merjanian chose to sing in 1917 were certainly suggestive of war, forcible conscription of the Armenian men from the villages, and other aspects of the Genocide. The line “a fate happened to me worse than my death” alone is certainly suggestive of something more than just an unfortunate arranged marriage. In the end, the story of this song reminds one of two very

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Udi Hrant

American community for some 15 years. (I would be remiss if I didn’t relay the information given to me by oudist Richard Hagopian that while Minas sang the vocals on that recording, the deeply moving violin was actually played by the master musician Harry Hasekian of Marash, who lived most of his life in Watertown.) But

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## ARTS &amp; LIVING

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

well known Armenian songs *Groong* and *Dle Yaman*, both of which are today often sung in conjunction with Genocide memorials or similar events, but actually long predate the Genocide; *Groong* dates back to the 17th century. But since *Groong* is about the sadness of being away from one's homeland, and *Dle Yaman* is a sad love song with references to the landscape of the Van region, where Armenians no longer live due to 1915, both have been turned into Genocide anthems. It seems that in an unofficial way, this is also what has happened with *Gesi Baghlari* in the minds of some Armenians. In fact, the combination of the sad love theme with references to now-lost homeland geography is extremely similar to *Dle Yaman*.

The song *Chanakkale Ichinde* (Çanakkale İçinde, or "In the Dardanelles") has lyrics that are much less vague, yet I kept coming across strange hints about this tune. While on the surface, and according to Turkish sources, it is a Turkish patriotic song about the Battle of Gallipoli, with the narrator a soldier who is marching off to almost certain death in battle, there seems to be more than meets the eye. First of all, it is the only Turkish patriotic song that is continually played by Armenian folk musicians who sing in Turkish. This is bit weird in and of itself – Armenians in America might play a lot of Turkish "kef time" songs, but you don't see them going around singing the Turkish national anthem. Yet, this song had a degree of popularity in the past, and is still known by many. For one thing, New York oudist Charles "Chick" Ganimian used to play and sing it in his live performances as a wild, heavy kef tune, memorably in a live recording captured on tape in the late 1970s which was later re-released on a CD by Armenian music producer and kanun player Ara Topouzian of Michigan. One might think that Chick simply heard this song on an old Turkish record, didn't know or care what it was about, liked it, and performed it. Those who accuse American-Armenians of cultural illiteracy probably assumed that this was the case.

However, in a paper written in 2010 by oudist Antranig Kzirian (of Philadelphia, now of Los Angeles), an interesting tidbit was mentioned in his interview with fellow Philadelphia oud player David Hoplamagian:

"There were certain songs that they always sang and played – some were Genocide remembrance songs. These were songs sung in the Turkish language that reminded Armenians of pre-Genocide times. One of Chick Ganimian's songs was about the killing and death that occurred during the Genocide. I remember how they would argue on stage about whether it would be appropriate to play the song on one particular occasion. This kind of thing was over my head at the time as I was a youngster. I was just happy to meet Chick who was one of the top oud players that my family always talked about." (Hoplamagian, quoted in Kzirian, *The Oud: Armenian Music as a Means of Identity Preservation, Construction and Formation in Armenian American Diaspora Communities of the Eastern United States*, 2010)

When I asked Hoplamagian personally what song he was talking about, he couldn't recall. But based on what I know of Ganimian's repertoire, the only song he could possibly have been talking about – certainly the only song that has these type of references, which is that popular, and which Ganimian was known for playing on stage, was *Chanakkale Ichinde*.

The "Turkish nationalist" credentials of the song come into even further question when we realize that the first ever recorded version was made by Greek-American singer Marika Papagika in 1924, just after the armistice between the Allies and Mustafa Kemal at Mudanya. Though the song is typically considered a reference to the Battle of Gallipoli that took place in 1915, the lead-up to the 1923 armistice was similarly called the "Chanak Crisis" and was stand-off between Turkish, Greek, and British troops that took place in the same area. The fact that Marika was a well known Greek nationalist with many patriotic songs to her credit, and that her version has the narrating soldier in the song departing "from Edirne" (instead of Istanbul) where the Greek army was stationed at the time, lends a vague pro-Greek meaning to the song.

The Armenian element to the song becomes much more obvious when we consider the recording made by vocalist Boghos Kirechjian, also known as Udi Boghos, brother-in-law to the well known Udi Hrant. In a special recording session that took place in Istanbul in 1951, Boghos made his recording of this song, along with several Armenian-language songs that were sung by both himself and Hrant, who performed on the oud. The rest of the band was composed of Turkish gypsies. These recordings were made by the US-based ethnic record company, Balkan, which was owned by Ajdin Asllan, an Albanian from New York. They were made for distribution in this country, and not in Turkey. One would assume that releasing Armenian-language songs on disc in Turkey was politically impossible in the early 1950s. Similarly, the public would not accept an Armenian singing a tune that was widely perceived as a Turkish patriotic song. But how did Boghos himself perceive it? We don't really know, but we do know that *Chanakkale* was the last major battle where Armenian soldiers serving in the Ottoman Army were armed and allowed to fight in combat alongside their Turkish fellow citizens. After that time, Armenians were sent out of the regular units and formed into labor battalions, where they were used to build roads, and finally dig their own graves, which they were then shot and buried in by their Turkish overseers. In Boghos' version of the song – and Chick Ganimian's – we find the line:

"In Chanakkale they shot me / and they put me in the grave before I was dead / Alas, my youth!"

French-Armenian writer Vazken Shoushanian also recalled singing this verse as an orphan survivor in Aintab during the French occupation, when the "deep and centuries-old Oriental city suddenly belonged to us," and "Like little street heroes we broke through it, chewing and ruminating on some Turkish song, enjoying a sweet freedom, which similarly would come from death:

'In Chanakkale they shot me / and they put me in the grave before I was dead / Alas, my youth!'

Finally, I asked renowned oud player, singer, and expert of Armenian and Turkish music, Richard Hagopian of California, about the *Chanakkale* song. Hagopian would not confirm that it was about the Genocide, but told me a fascinating story. When Hagopian was young, Soghomon Tehlirian, the man who assassinated Talaat Pasha, retired and moved to Fresno, where he is now buried. A banquet was held in Tehlirian's honor, at which young Hagopian was present. Some people approached him and said "You know, Baron Soghomon plays the oud a little, and he likes oud music. Why don't you get up and play something for him." Hagopian got up and took his oud. "He had a face like an angel," he now says of Tehlirian. "You would have never thought he had killed a man." Hagopian, nervous, began to play a bit of a *taksim* (improvisation) but didn't know what to play for Tehlirian. "I mean, here is this man, who killed the top Turk." Since a lot of the music Hagopian played was Turkish, or considered by some to be in a Turkish style, the young musician was nervous and unsure of what piece to perform. Then Tehlirian looked at him and said "*Dughas, 'Chanakkale' kides*" (My son, do you know "*Chanakkale*") "*Anshooshd Baron Soghomon, payts dajgeren eh*" (Of course Mr. Soghomon, but it's Turkish). Tehlirian told him, "It doesn't matter, I told you to play it, so play it."

**Back to Egin Havasi**

To return to the beginning of our article, and the song *Egin Havasi*. Now that we seem to have established the fact that Armenians used Turkish songs with more than one meaning, even if the same songs were sung by the Turks themselves, *Egin Havasi* seems much more obviously, if not blatantly, a reference to the Genocide – though more specifically, the massacres of 1895-1896.

Avedis Messouments, noted Armenian composer and collector of Armenian ethnographic folk songs, who was born in Arabkir and spent most of his life in France after the war, brought attention to the verses, sung in Turkish, "Agn is in ruins / the nightingale doesn't sing / My husband is in a far place / my eyes don't see him." Messouments continues:

"Therefore, Agn is a ruin ... of course, the Armenian didn't destroy it, but rather the Turk, and it is not the Turk who would weave a song about his destroying. And who is the primary emigrant, if not the Armenian? But the Armenian sang in the Turkish language; first, from fear of being punished for the Armenian language, and then, so that the Turk would also hear it, learn it, and sing it. And that is what happened."

These were the same lyrics that Stephan Karougian told me about. Another Armenian writer who remembered his elders singing those lines was Nigoghos Sarafian of Paris, who grew up in Bulgaria. Incidentally, the line "Agn is in ruins" is not in Udi Hrant's published recorded version, though he in the second verse Hrant sings the quite suggestive verses: "Green frogs croak in the ponds / My arms were destroyed, I was left in the desert / Without a mother, without a father, in foreign lands..."

The ethnographer Verjine Svazlian, who wrote a whole book in Armenia about Turkish-language songs of the Genocide survivors (mostly discussing the *Der Zor* song) quotes these lines but beginning with "May I be a sacrifice to the bygone days" rather than the line about the frogs. The same lines turned up in a performance of the *Der Zor* song which I found on YouTube, where an individual named Gabriel Assad changes to *Egin Havasi* halfway through singing *Der Zor*. Kemani Minas, who recorded the song in New York in 1917, as discussed earlier, didn't mention any of these things directly. But the fact that he chose to record it in fall 1917 at the same time and place (New York) that Garabed Merjanian recorded *Gesi Baghlari*, Zabelle Panossian recorded her famous version of *Groong* and Armenag Shah-Mouradian recorded Gomidas' masterpiece *Andouni*, all with similar themes, points to a trend. The fact that he sounds like he's crying when he sings it, randomly



Nigoghos Sarafian



A photo of the Egin Havasi record label

throws the word "mayrig" (Armenian: mother) into an otherwise Turkish song, and – if I've correctly identified him as the violin player Minas Chaghatzbanian of Malatya, who died in Fresno a year later – if we realize that he came to America in 1913 and left his wife Varter behind, and he's now recording this song in 1917, as the Genocide is ongoing, it all starts to add up.

It is unquestionable that the melody and many of the various lyrics of *Egin Havasi* existed before the 1895 massacres. Hovsep Janigian's *Antiquities of Agn*, published in 1895, includes the first mention of this song. Janigian, a 19th century folklorist who collected the history, folklore, songs, wedding traditions, and dialect of Agn in his book, claimed that the original song was related to the *bantoukhd* (migrant worker) movement among Armenians, who would travel to Istanbul or some other far-off urban center to make money for their family who were left behind in the village. The well-known song *Groong* has the same theme. Janigian claimed that what we call *Egin Havasi* (referred to by him as *Ale Geozlu*, Turkish for "Weeping Eyes") was written by an Armenian woman in the 1840s or 1850s, whose husband had gone as a *bantoukhd* to Egypt. Janigian mentions that the song also has Turkish lyrics, but he didn't write them down, instead giving several verses of lyrics in Armenian. The lyrics are almost identical to what Udi Hrant sings in his Armenian-language rendition. Most likely, Hrant learned these from his singing teacher, the well known Istanbul "oriental" singer Yeghiazar Garabedian (known to the Turks as Agyazar Efendi), who was born in Agn, and seems to have left as a child due to the devastation of the city in 1896. The folklorist Mihran Toumajan also collected several Armenian-language verses to the song in his "Hayreni Yerk oo Pan" (volume 2). In a footnote, he tells the reader that he had also heard a Turkish version of the song when he was a child in Sepastia, from a youthful blind minstrel at the Soorp Nshan Monastery. The minstrel's Turkish-language *Egin Havasi*, Toumajan tells us, was "about the events of 1895." It turns out that while the city was spared the initial massacres of 1895 by bribing the government (Agn was a wealthy town, whose compatriots living in Istanbul were mostly moneylenders that at one time controlled the Ottoman financial sector), it was later devastated in 1896 in retaliation for the Bank Ottoman incident, whose leader, Papken Suni, was a native of Agn. Evidently, while the song was written by an Armenian, sung in both Armenian and Turkish, and discussed separation and loss, the lyrics specifically referring to the 1895-96 massacres were added later. However, this soon became the most popular version of the song, as evidenced by Messouments, Sarafian, and others who claimed that the first line of the song was "Agn is in ruins."

As for Stepan Karougian, I finally asked him directly what the song was about. "*Egin de veran olmush*," he told me, "*Agn kantuvadzh eh*." (Agn has been destroyed). I pressed him "what do you mean, destroyed?" "You know, the Genocide..." he responded. Then I asked him, "Didn't you tell me Udi Hrant used to sing this song in the *gazino* [Turkish cabaret]" "Of course, how many times did I go and hear him singing there!" "Well," I asked, "what did the Turks think when he got on stage and started singing about 'Egin veran olmush'?"

"I guess, they didn't know what he was singing about," replied Karougian. But Richard Hagopian had a different response to this. "They know all of it," he told me. Searching my record collection as well as YouTube, the only example I could find of a recording where the singer actually says "*Egin veran olmush*" (Agn is in ruins), was by a Turkish singer, who from what I could tell, was a known nationalist and active politically. There is a lot of talk about cultural appropriation in our day and age, but that takes the cake. Perhaps it is the most correct to say, as with the Genocide in general: they know, but they won't admit it.

# Gorky's Works on Sale at Virtual Art Basel

By Pellegrino D'Acerno

NEW YORK — “When all the world is a virus tumble and the podcasts rumble all around, the work of the 20th century Armenian-American artist Arshile Gorky rises above. Amidst the Armenian Genocide virus of inhumanity and today's pandemic, his art and life story bring meaning to seeking rainbows.” So says composer Michelle Ekizian of the protagonist of her forthcoming “Gorky's Dream Garden,” an opera of love, courage and modern art inspired by Arshile Gorky (b. 1904, Van, Turkey; d. 1948, Sherman, CT).

His art is featured in this year's Art Basel Fair. The fair is now on-line until June 26. Hauser and Wirth's display features a miniature landscape from his seminal “Garden in Sochi” series of the early 1940s. There are, as well, two works of the artist's “Nighttime,” “Enigma” and “Nostalgia” mural series dating from the early 1930's, pastels and drawings of the mid 1940's.

A child survivor of the Armenian Genocide, Gorky witnessed his mother's death by starvation in his arms during the aftermath of the Genocide in Russian occupied Yerevan. His devastations continued upon his coming to America, ultimately leading to suicide. However, as Ekizian empha-

sizes in her spiraling psychodrama, “The artist's courage prevails. A surrealist and a founding father of abstract-expressionism, he created groundbreaking art. He continuously turned to memorializing his martyred mother as in his series, ‘The Portrait of the Artist and his Mother.’ He also turned to themes of the eternal garden stemming from his Ararat homeland and flying. Fortuitously, his early commissions in America's pre-World War II 1930's era of NYC Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and President Roosevelt were assigned to capture the aviation industry in public murals. First, they were for airfields in New York from which his ‘Nighttime,’ ‘Enigma’ and ‘Nostalgia’ pieces derive. These then led to murals for New Jersey's Newark Airport. Subsequently, he was invited to create the murals for the Aviation Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair.”

Last season a reading of a chamber version of “Gorky's Dream Garden” was presented at the Newark Museum of Art which houses the two sole surviving panels of Gorky's Newark Airport Murals.

Ekizian sees a connection between at least two of the sale works. She views them as embracing the flying motif amidst connotations of the Armenian heritage: “The airplane propeller is distinctively shown in both the upcoming sale works of the Sochi miniature and one of the Nighttime studies through Gorky's details of the

pinwheel. It seems to me that the pinwheel à la Miró is not just a modernist gesture, but a carry over from Gorky's early days in Boston shortly after his arrival in America. There he was a parishioner of the Park Street Church where a member was an Armenian, Tegrán Samour (Samourkashian), who had a toy store near by and who is credited with the manufacturing of the traditional whirligig toy known as the pinwheel. Through wonder and progressive thought, Gorky would go on to describe his vision in his aviation proposals as soaring through space yet with the immobility of suspension.”

The Hauser and Wirth on-line exhibit illuminates how the late contemporary African-American artist Jack Whitten was touched by Gorky. Ekizian finds synchronicity: “From the start of my conceiving ‘Gorky's Dream Garden,’ I expanded upon Gorky's infatuation with Chekhov's short story ‘The Black Monk’ that is supposedly the title and basis of his last painting which he created in 1948 on the eve of his suicide. Although Chekhov's Russian portrayal did not literally encompass a character of color, I felt the urge to cast in developmental programs the opera's cameo but definitive role of Gorky's avatar for the outreaching soulful and world-wise voice of my friend, the late legendary “Woodstock” folksinger Richie Havens.

## Globe's Elbakyan Wins Two Emmy Awards

BOSTON — *Boston Globe's* Anush Elbakyan has won two Emmy awards for the documentary “Everything Is Changing: Climate Change On Cape Cod.” She has now received five Emmy awards.

“Beyond excited to win two Emmy Awards last night for the video documentary on climate change in Cape Cod,” she said on Facebook.

Elbakyan is the senior video editor and the video director for the *Boston Globe*. She oversees the production and distribution of the *Globe's* original video content, while also managing video business operations and leading the digital video strategy.

Elbakyan manages a team of video producers and coordinates the daily video news operation. She launched and served as executive producer for the political digital video series “Ground Game,” “Live Political Happy Hour” and the food series “Smart Cooks.”



Anush Elbakyan

# Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian



## Aunt Roza's Tas Kebab

Victoria Kabakian, food writer, recipe developer, travel journalist, and founder of the Mission: Food blog since 2009, has been blogging for over eleven years. A Rhode Island native, she has a particular weakness when it comes to good food and cookbooks; not only does she collect cookbooks (she owns more than 200), but she loves reviewing new cookbook releases, testing new recipes, and commenting on their appeal and practicality.

Victoria's beloved Aunt Roza passed away in September 2018. She was known for her famous rice pilaf, Armenian Baked Macaroni and Cheese, buttery baklava, and her delicious tas kebab recipe that our entire family enjoyed for many years.”

“Tas kebab is a simple spiced stewed beef with Armenian, Persian, and Turkish origins,” Victoria says.

Photos and recipe are courtesy of Mission: Food.



### INGREDIENTS:

3 pounds beef chuck, cubed into 2-inch pieces  
1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns  
1 tablespoon allspice berries  
2 bay leaves  
1/4 cup tomato paste  
3 tablespoons unsalted butter  
2 tablespoons kosher salt  
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
Rice pilaf for serving

### PREPARATION:

Bring 6 cups of water to a boil in a large saucepan. Set aside.

Rinse the beef with cold water. Drain and add to a large pot. Cover with cold water by about 2 inches. Heat over medium-high heat, skimming impurities off the surface. When the water starts to boil, remove from the heat, drain into a colander and rinse the beef with cold water.

Wrap the peppercorns, allspice berries, and bay leaves in a piece of cheesecloth, and tie it with kitchen string.

Wipe the pot clean, add the beef back along with 6 cups of boiled water, the butter, tomato paste, salt, cinnamon, and the spice bundle.

Return to high heat and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to simmer covered for about 2 1/2 hours or until the beef is easily cut with the side of a spoon (Victoria's aunt would cook the meat until it was actually falling apart, so aim for significantly longer than fork tender).

This recipe is best when made a day or more ahead of time and reheated prior to serving, as this allows the flavors to develop. Remove spice bundle, squeeze out excess juices, and discard before serving. Serve tas kebab spooned over rice pilaf in wide serving bowls or plates.

Serves 6-8.

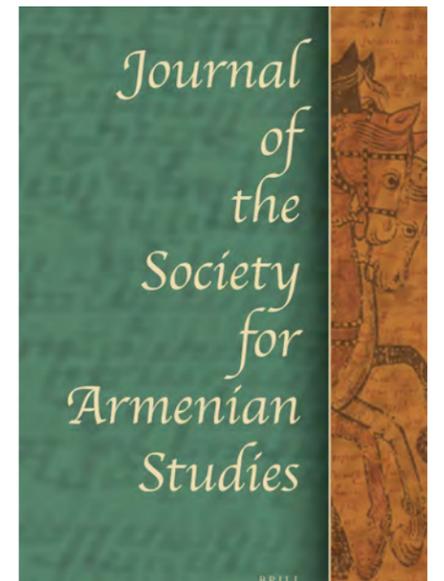
For this recipe, go to: <https://mission-food.com/rozas-tas-kebab/>

## Journal of Society for Armenian Studies to Be Published by Brill

JOURNAL, from page 12

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## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Artist Rita Kevorkian Truly A Rising Talent

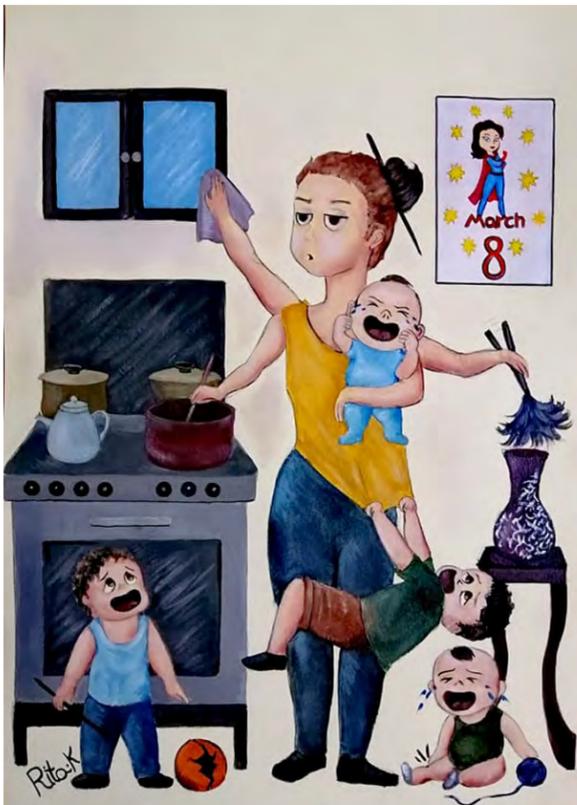
TALENT, from page 12

"I believe that art is a magical weapon, an effective one that is able to battle plenty of dilemmas. It is the soft power of all time," she said. Some of the young artist's paintings address violence against women.

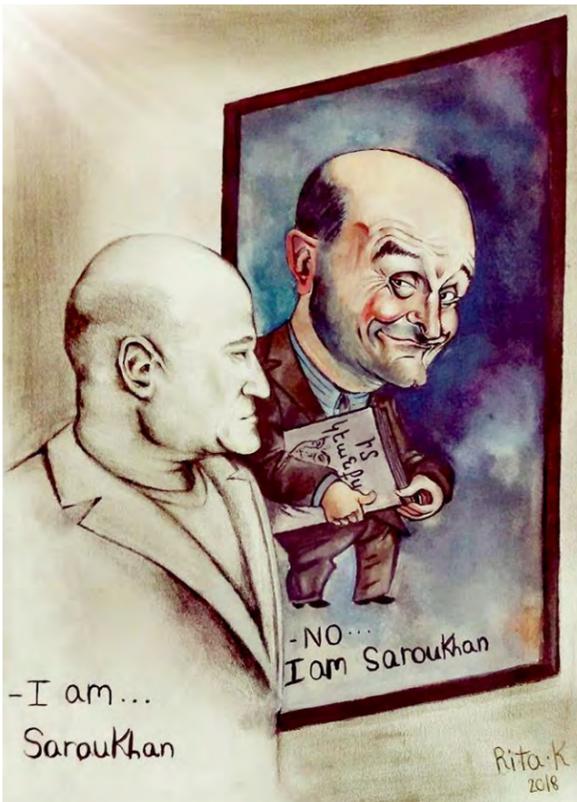
In addition, many of her paintings attest to her passionate attachment to her origins. A vivid example is her desire to depict Armenian musicians, such as Aram Khachaturian, Charles Aznavour, Komitas and Makar Yekmalyan. "I tend more towards Komitas, taking into consideration that he discovered, collected and registered Armenian folk music," she adds.

Speaking about artists, her role model is Michelangelo, who was "so good at painting icons on the walls of the church and his works remained among the best artworks for years." Her Armenian shining examples are the remarkable Martiros Saryan and Armenian-Egyptian cartoonist and caricaturist Alexander Saroukhan.

Rita said she is very influenced by Saroukhan (1898-1977), one of the most distinguished caricaturists in the Arab world.



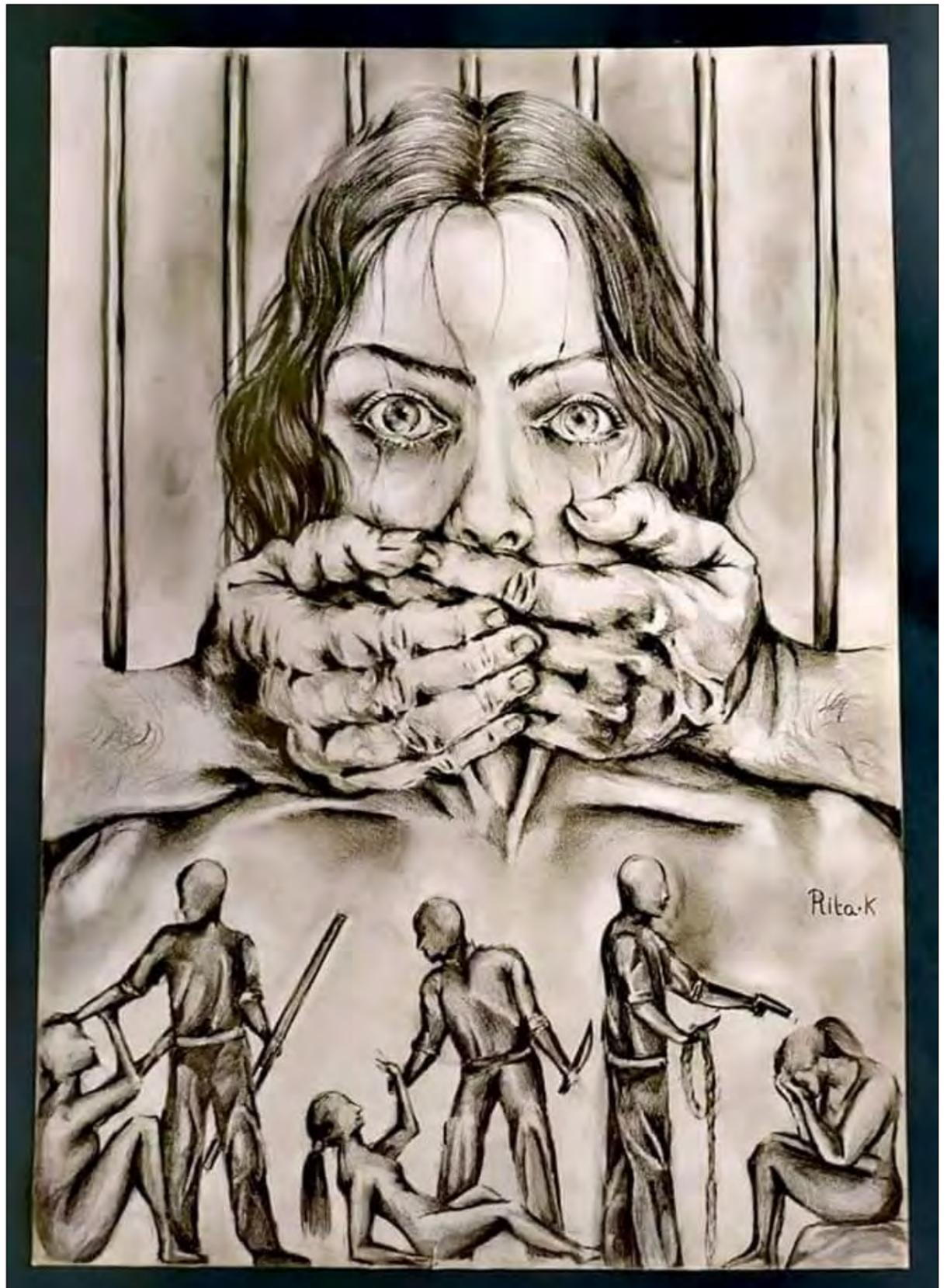
Rita Kevorkian celebrated International Women's Day



Alexander Saroukhan portrayed by Rita Kevorkian

His works were published in Arabic and international newspapers and magazines. "How I wish I had met him, so I would have been able to express how much I admire his intelligence, thoughts, the beauty of his artworks, and his foresight with regard to political events," exclaims Rita, adding that "His family were always generous in providing me with the information that helped me know him closely."

She is keen on participating in Ramadaniat, an annual exhibition that takes place to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan. In this respect, it is worth noting that she magnificently por-



The young artist tackles violence against women

trayed Ramadan's ambiance as well as influential figures of Egypt, such as the Muslim scholar and jurist Muhammad Metwalli Al-Shaarawi and the musician Sayed Mekawy. "I feel delighted to be one of the artists who capture the beauty of the Egyptian heritage," comments Rita.

Her works of art adorn many of the celebrations of the Armenian community in Egypt. Last year for example, Rita took part with ten acrylic paintings in celebrating the 90th anniversary of the founding of Saint Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in Cairo. Her artworks included representations of the church itself, the Holy Family's journey to Egypt, and important figures of the Armenian Church. The young artist also magnificently revived old iconography. "I was very happy with the trust the church and the Armenian community put in me, as they allowed me to play a role in this great event."

Not only did she compete at international contests, but she was actively present as well. A case in point was her winning the first prize at the Tolerance Competition organized by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). "I took part because the contest's theme grabbed my attention, I liked it a lot. I also was eager to do so out of my love for Prince Mohamed bin Rashid as a person and for the UAE."

Singing is Rita's second hobby and she decided to invest her beautiful voice in joining the church's and the school's choirs. "God granted me a sweet voice, a one with which I can serve my church, the place where my love for Saint Gregory the Illuminator commenced. There I also started to

read about the church's history and Saint Gregory's life."

Music serves as a positive inspiration for Rita while she paints. "A habit of mine is listening to classical music before and



Rita Kevorkian

during painting. It inspires me and creates a happy and serene atmosphere."

"I avoid working on meaningless topics," Rita concludes. All the best, and better is yet to come for Rita Kevorkian!

## EDITORIAL

# Armenia: A House Divided

By Edmond Y. Azadian

Armenia attained its independence some three decades ago, and it has yet to find a way to successfully use that independence to further its goals.

Crisis after crisis have upset the country, hindering its economic recovery and forcing mass emigration.

The country is located in a very unstable region, requiring the utmost prudence to navigate through the extant political dangers. Additionally, two hostile neighbors are posing existential threats. Therefore, external dangers would have been enough to keep Armenians alert and ready to fight for their survival, but unfortunately, internal turmoil has come to exacerbate the situation. Currently there is extreme political polarization, in addition to the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic; the two have brought the country to its knees.

The Velvet Revolution, which took place two years ago, promised to end injustice and corruption in the country and to help it develop along modern democratic ideals. My Step, the party of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, which came to power with the support of 70 percent of voters, still enjoys an unchallenged popularity. Pashinyan himself promised to enforce “no vendetta” toward the previous regime. Yet, the momentum of the popular movement that he mobilized and rode to the country’s highest office, seems to have overwhelmed him.

In order to motivate his supporters in the current economic downturn, he has had to demonize the old regime and its leaders.

After assuming power, he could no longer act as the rabble-rouser politician. To run a government apparatus, he was required to demonstrate statesmanship. Similarly, to deal with foreign powers, his journalistic style and populist activism had to be tamed. Therefore, he began to make adjustments in his behavior and policies, but the masses that followed him, continued to seek blood.

For the majority of those people, the former leaders have to be exterminated at any cost and they began showing impatience when their leader was not using all the tools at his disposal to publicly execute them. A segment of the masses was disappointed and began asking how long the velvet part of the revolution would last.

On the other hand, the members of the ousted regime felt threatened and reacted.

The growing discontent contributed to the polarization of the country. Animosity was personalized and that personalization was further aggravated by the rise of new parties that had no specific ideologies or political agendas; at best, they had the personal agendas of their founders. Therefore, what the country needed to do in order to recover was overlooked for the sake of seeking personal retribution.

A convenient target of the ire was the second president, Robert Kocharyan. Kocharyan was certainly no angel, but it is a fallacy that his punishment would help improve the plight of the people one iota.

Another demonized individual has been Hrayr Tovmasyan, the president of the Constitutional Court. The Pashinyan government did not leave any legal stone unturned to oust him from office. Again, was that a matter of bread and butter for the average citizen? Certainly not, but animosity went beyond the national good, just to hurt those who symbolized the old regime.

Robert Kocharyan’s continued pre-trial incarceration on charges of overthrowing the constitutional order of Armenia was beginning to have foreign policy reverberations. President Vladimir Putin of Russia signaled more than once that he wanted to see his old friend released from jail.

With the upcoming World War II 75th anniversary victory celebration in Moscow on the horizon, Mr. Pashinyan felt that further tensions with Moscow would be more than what he could handle. Indeed, one by one, the heads of the former Soviet republics were excusing themselves from participating in the celebrations. Pashinyan also canceled his trip to Moscow.

No matter how much the administration denies that it does not exert any pressure on the courts, only this month the courts agreed to set bail for Kocharyan and the latter’s wealthy friends posted it and thus he was released. Also, the denial of an arrest warrant for opposition leader Gagik Tsarukyan signaled to Moscow that Yerevan will not pile up the cases that anger Russia.

Members of Tsarukyan’s party made a visit to the Russian embassy in Yerevan after he was stripped of his parliamentary

immunity last week.

The focus on Tsarukyan’s misdeeds just surfaced recently. He had been a friend of the revolution and joined Pashinyan and entered the parliament with 25 members of his Prosperous Armenia Party. After his recent fallout with the prime minister, he called for the resignation of the government. He is crying wolf and accusing the government of a political vendetta.

Tsarukyan may have trampled some laws during the previous regime in terms of election fraud and tax evasion, but he employs thousands of people in an economy had pressed for investments. Prosecuting Tsarukyan will discourage other investors and entrepreneurs. But the people who have mobilized to devour the old *talanchis* (looters) as they are called, are blind to the damage they cause to the country and its economy.

Overlooking all the problems facing Armenia, the government was mobilizing all its resources to hold a referendum on a new constitution on April 5, in order to get rid of Tovmasyan. The pandemic put an end to the referendum and they needed to come up with another route.

On June 22, the parliament voted to change the constitution after seeking advice from the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. But that will prove to be a Pyrrhic victory, because



the move will go half way, leaving Tovmasyan still on the bench, only as a judge, not as its president. Indeed, three out of nine members who had served for more than 12 years will resign and be replaced by this new regime. New appointees will certainly refrain from electing Tovmasyan, who is slated to serve out the balance of his 12-year-term as president.

Tovmasyan held a pre-emptive special session of the Constitutional Court on June 22 to discuss the constitutionality of the charges Kocharyan faces.

The tone of the rhetoric in the news media and the vulgar exchanges hurled on social media are beyond comprehension. Polished discourse at this time can be only described as a conversation among people who have stuck their fingers in their ears.

The issue of a truth and reconciliation committee has been raised in this column more than once. Following the collapse of the apartheid system in South Africa, national reconciliation was achieved through that process. At this time, the divide in Armenia is so deep and the rhetoric so incendiary that there seems to be no room for dialogue.

For the government party, unless you express unadulterated adulation for the chief, you are a traitor. And vice versa.

All disenfranchised groups are banding together, without any ideology, to fight the government when Armenia can least afford that kind of instability and partisanship.

Pashinyan himself is trying to steer the country toward the middle of the road, but to no avail. He just recently replaced the police chiefs, heads of security and the army, because there was a rumor of a planned uprising. He has to balance domestic forces and realign the country’s foreign policy.

The members of the new government have been trying to push Armenia away from Russia, with no alternative in place.

Armenia is in a crisis and no peaceful end is in sight. Although President Armen Sarkissian only has a ceremonial role, his presence during the transition of the regime helped to prevent clashes between the two camps. That role today is needed more than ever. It is time for him to emerge as a conciliator.

The country can use some wisdom from President Abraham Lincoln who admonished that “a house divided against itself cannot stand.”

# Mirror Spectator

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EDITOR  
Alin K. Gregorian

ASSISTANT EDITOR  
Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR  
Marc Mgrditchian

SENIOR EDITORIAL COLUMNIST:  
Edmond Y. Azadian

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

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

Contributing Photographers:  
Jirair Hovsepian

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

FAX: 617-924-2887

[www.mirrorspectator.com](http://www.mirrorspectator.com)

E-Mail: [editor@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:editor@mirrorspectator.com)

For advertising: [mirrorads@aol.com](mailto:mirrorads@aol.com)

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## COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## After 105 Years, the Turkish President Still Planning to Cover Up the Genocide

The High Advisory Board of the Turkish Presidency met last Tuesday for five hours to discuss how to respond “to groundless and anti-Turkey allegations” regarding the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The Advisory Board includes President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Ismail Kahraman (former Chairman of Parliament), Bulent Arinch (former Deputy Prime Minister), Cemil Chichak (former Chairman of Parliament), Koksal Toptan (former Chairman of Parliament), Mehmet Ali Shahin (former Chairman of Parliament), Yildirim Akbulut (former Prime Minister), President’s Chief of Staff Metin Kiratli and Presidential Communications Director Fahrettin Altun.

It is very satisfactory to Armenians worldwide that the Turkish government, after lying about the occurrence of the Armenian Genocide for a century, going to extraordinary lengths to blackmail other countries economically and politically, spending hundreds of millions of dollars on hiring lobbying firms and publishing denialist propaganda, is spending long hours wondering how to counter “the Armenian lobby.”

This means that all of the Turkish efforts for 105 years to deny the Armenian Genocide have been in vain. Turkey has wasted a huge amount of resources and time to deny the undeniable! The Turkish government is welcome to try again to convince the world that no such genocide has taken place. Eventually, the Turkish leaders will give up seeing that they cannot persuade anyone to believe their lies. The day will come when the Turkish government will admit that it is much easier

to tell the truth than to continue its useless strategy of distorting a well-established historical fact. It is in Turkey’s best interest to come to terms with the Armenian government and its Diaspora and negotiate a proper compensation and restitution for the damages caused to the Armenian people during the Genocide. Once Turkey acknowledges the historical facts and makes amends, it will no longer have to worry about the world’s reaction to the Armenian Genocide. On the contrary, the Turkish leader will receive accolades from the international community for facing the facts and dealing honestly with its past crimes.

In the meantime, the Turkish government is foolishly continuing its hopeless campaign of denial of the Armenian Genocide. After last week’s five-hour High Advisory Board meeting behind closed doors, President Erdogan’s Communications Director Fahrettin Altun relayed the President’s following statement: “hostility seeds that were tried to be sown through distorted historical events would not be able to find the opportunity to flourish in the land of truth.” He accused the “Armenian lobby” of exploiting the “challenging and painful era endured by all Ottoman citizens for the sake of political calculations through lies and slanders that were invented by various power groups.” Furthermore, he said that during the meeting, “comprehensive steps” were discussed to prevent the Armenian lobby from using the 1915 events to “defame Turkey and our nation and also the propaganda made by countries through unrealistic allegations that manipulate the issue with political calculations.” The Turkish Presidential meeting also deliberated on projects and activities set to “shed light” on the issues with historical and legal aspects, along with “facts for the national and international public,” he added.

This new Turkish Genocide denial plan may have been triggered by the resolutions acknowledging the Armenian Genocide by the U.S. House of Representatives (405-11 votes) and the unanimous vote of the U.S. Senate last fall.

The question is why would Turkey’s leaders spent five hours deliberating on genocide denial at a time when the coronavirus pandemic is raging in the country, its economy is in shambles, the Turkish Lira has collapsed and Erdogan is losing the public’s support. According to some analysts, this is Erdogan’s tactic to deviate the Turkish public’s attention from his misrule and misadventures both within and outside the country.

Last month in a TV speech, Pres. Erdogan, showing his exasperation at the multiple problems of his government, once again lashed out at the “Armenian lobby,” among others. He vowed: “We will not give up before the forces of evil, either FETO, the PKK, the Armenian and Greek lobbies, or centers of hostility in the Persian Gulf.”

The Armenian government quickly reacted to Pres. Erdogan’s lies about the Armenian Genocide. This is a welcome development, as previous Armenian governments ignored all such Turkish outbursts. The Armenian Foreign Ministry’s spokeswoman Anna Naghdalyan responded: “The statements made by the Turkish President on justifying the Armenian Genocide and insulting its victims are not a novelty and are manifestations of hate speech, which have an impact on maintaining and strengthening the atmosphere of xenophobia against Armenians in that country.... Denialism has no future, no matter who and how frames it. Despite the efforts of the authorities of Turkey to suppress the truth, the truth has been prevailing.”

The European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy also issued a statement calling Erdogan’s latest plans to deny the Armenian Genocide a “dangerous xenophobic policy of the Turkish authorities, directed against the activists of the Armenian cause.... Unfortunately, the denial of the Armenian Genocide and the incitement of hatred against Armenians are a state policy in Turkey.”

In addition, the Armenian National Committee of America Western Region along with Assyrian, Greek and Jewish organizations issued a joint statement slamming the Turkish government’s latest announcement on countering the Armenian Genocide: “Understanding that denial is the final stage of genocide, enforcing the erasure of a people’s history and suffering, we call on people of good conscience to bring awareness to the plight of the victims of genocide both past and present, to hold accountable those who seek to distort historical truth, and ensure that never again will the world watch in silence while genocide is perpetrated.”

My advice to President Erdogan and his cronies is to abandon Turkey’s century-long failed efforts at denial of the facts of the Armenian Genocide, acknowledge the truth and embark on a mutually agreed plan to compensate for the losses suffered by the Armenian nation as a result of the Genocide.

# Syrian Kurds Say Turkish Charity Dwarfed by Stolen Produce

By Amberin Zaman

Turkey’s state-run Anadolu news agency reported that on Monday, June 22, two Turkish charities had sent six trucks carrying humanitarian aid to the rebel-held province of Idlib in northwest Syria.

“Truckloads of supplies including flour, clothing and dry food [donated] by the Adana Dosteller and Eskisehir Gunisigi charities entered Idlib through the Yayladagi border crossing in Turkey’s southern Hatay province. The aid will be distributed among families living in tents in Idlib,” Anadolu reported.

Turkey’s generosity to millions of displaced Syrians inside Syria and Turkey alike has been well documented. But critics of Ankara’s Syria policy charge that it’s giving with one hand and stealing with the other.

A report released today by Syrians for Truth and Justice, a non-partisan nonprofit documenting human rights violations in Syria, lays out in exhaustive detail how the Turkish government has facilitated commerce conducted by its Syrian National Army allies in looting grain. The grain is from eight silos that were confiscated in October during Turkey’s Operation Peace Spring, which resulted in Turkey’s occupation of a large swath of territory between the towns of Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ain formerly controlled by the United States’ Syrian Kurdish allies.

Based on interviews with a range of actors including National Army commanders as well as employees at the grain silos, Syrians for Truth and Justice unveiled a network of grain dealings conducted by a Turkish government company – the Turkish Grain Board, known as TMO for short – and “armed groups’ commanders who personally seized amounts of the grain storage” and “then sold them to either local or Turkish merchants” and kept the proceeds for themselves. The theft is documented by satellite imagery showing transportation trucks taking the grain away from the silos.

The allegations will further blot Turkey and the National Army’s image in northeast Syria. Ankara is accused of overseeing or directly par-

ticipating in a panoply of abuses, including summary executions, abductions, looting, crop burning and weaponizing water against the Kurds.

The Kurdish-led administration in northeastern Syria told the authors of the report that it had left behind about 730,000 tons of wheat, barley, fertilizers, cotton and seed as it withdrew in the face of advancing Turkish forces. “This stock is the strategic reserve for the next three years and constitutes 11% of the total stock of Raqqa and Hasakah provinces,” said Salman Baroudo, the co-chair of the commerce committee of the autonomous administration.

A ton of wheat produces around 850 kilograms of flour, and a ton of flour produces 1.2 tons of bread, explained an autonomous administration official to illustrate the scale of the loss.

The Syrian National Army denied that it was engaged in any looting from grain silos but officials from the Istanbul-based Syrian Interim Government and employees of the local councils claimed the opposite.

Syrians for Truth and Justice executive director Bassam al-Ahmad told Al-Monitor in a telephone interview that the looting “fits a broader pattern of abuses as were perpetrated in Turkish-occupied Afrin. Turkey is buying looted wheat.” Afrin is the Kurdish-majority enclave that was occupied by Turkey in 2018. Crimes committed by Turkey’s Sunni rebel allies have been well documented. They include rape, arbitrary detentions and industrial-scale extortion of local olive farmers, with much of their oil finding its way to Turkey and exported to foreign markets under Turkish labels, Germany’s Deutsche Welle reported.

The TMO insists that it only imports surplus barley but no wheat from Syria. But the trade is driving up prices, noted Elizabeth Tsurkov, a Syria expert and fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia. She told Al-Monitor, “It’s absolutely true that wheat and grain is being looted. I’ve confirmed it with the factions. They are selling the wheat and barley that is cultivated in large swaths of land between Ras al-Ain and Tell Abyad and selling it to Turkey.”

Tsurkov added that Turkey was offering more money for the commodities “than any other

actor in Syria is offering to farmers. Therefore there is a clear incentive to sell to Turkey.”

But even as Turkey engages in such transactions, it continues to prevent any flow of humanitarian aid from its borders to the Kurdish-held areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has not softened Turkey’s stance while the collapse of the Syrian currency has compounded people’s misery across the country.

Protests erupted today in Tell Abyad and the town of Suluk, also under Turkish control, over deteriorating living conditions and rising food prices, especially that of bread.

In Suluk, a crowd gathered outside the local Turkish-appointed council and called for its removal, reported the Violation Documentation Centre in North Syria in a tweet. It said in a separate call for action yesterday that Turkish soldiers were targeting farmers on the Turkish-Syrian border. Syrian Kurdish farmer Muhayuddin Abdurazak died after allegedly being shot by a Turkish border guard on May 17.

Thomas McClure, a researcher at the Rojava Information Center, which publishes reports on the Kurdish-controlled region for international audiences, told Al-Monitor that the area affected by Operation Peace Spring encompasses 440,000 hectares of arable land producing up to 763,000 tons of wheat. “Turkey’s instillation of proxy militias in this once productive region has severely impacted the remainder of northeast Syria and those civilians who have remained in the zone of occupation. The loss of vital arable land places further pressure on the remainder of the northeast, where per UN figures 1.94 million people are in need of humanitarian aid,” he noted.

McClure backed up Syrians for Truth and Justice, saying, “Grain silos were rapidly looted, with tens of thousands of tons of wheat transferred to Turkey for sale or sold to local merchants at extortionate prices. Bread, the local staple, doubled in price in the months following the invasion, while other local essentials like cooking gas are now five times as expensive as elsewhere in northeast Syria.”

The governor of Turkey’s Sanliurfa province, where the occupation is administered from, told Anadolu last week that Turkey would be opening

a new gate between Ras al-Ain and the Turkish border town of Ceylanpinar. Abdullah Erin said the gate would be “for both Ras al-Ain and Ceylanpinar,” much as the opening of a gate from Turkey’s nearby border town of Akcakale had been for Tell Abyad. The pro-government Daily Sabah reported, “Citizens frequently voice that daily life is getting better as a result of the reconstruction of infrastructure” in Tell Abyad and in Ras al-Ain. Today’s protest paints a different picture.

(This commentary originally appeared on Al-Monitor website <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/06/turkey-idlib-syrian-kurds-take.html>)

## LETTERS

## Kudos to Antelias Catholicosate

To the Editor:

I agree with Edmond Azadian’s commentary regarding the relevancy and also to some extent his views on the two Catholicosates.

I am an ordained deacon in the Eastern Diocese. I was fortunate enough during this epidemic to listen to the daily reflections from the Eastern Prelacy as well as some of the sermons from Antelias.

Generally speaking, I found the sermons given by the clergy members belonging to the Catholicosate of Antelias very uplifting and refreshing and the dedication of Antelias to preparing such fine clergies quite encouraging. I am convinced that as long as Antelias provides such a quality of clergies, then I would definitely support the mission of the Catholicosate of Antelias.

Roupen Kiredjian



# Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro LA Chapter Hosts Two Successful Educational Programs Online This Spring

By Sevan Boghos-Deirbadrossian

LOS ANGELES – In May and June, during challenging and unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic and after cancelling many events this past Spring, the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Metro Los Angeles Chapter stepped up and took the decision to remain productive and influential in enriching Armenian society with its cultural events.

On May 27, the group organized a Zoom webinar titled “Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turks’ Seizure of Armenian Property,” delivered by Dr. Mehmet Polatel.

The presentation was co-sponsored by several Armenian organizations, which showed interest in unfolding the layers and processes of not only the annihilation of a nation, but also the erasure of its roots, lands and properties. Co-sponsors included the AGBU Western District, Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian Council of America, Armenian Rights Council of America, Armenian Society of Los Angeles, Nor Serount Armenian Cultural Association, and the Organization of Istanbul Armenians, all of which teamed up to help promote the presentation via their respective social media platforms and event calendars.

Mihran Toumajan, Western Region director of the Armenian Assembly of America, and also an active member and ex-officio advisor of the TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter, co-moderated the presentation with Sevan Boghos-Deirbadrossian.

More than 150 spanning six continents and over 18 countries took part in the Zoom webinar. Many attendees of TCA’s first Zoom webinar expressed enthusiasm and keen interest in a serious matter involving the confiscation and destruction of properties owned by Armenians prior to the 1915 genocide. The presentation was also displayed in real time via the Facebook Live platform.

The insightful lecture was conducted by Genocide studies scholar, Dr. Mehmet Polatel, who serves as a junior postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research. Of Turkish heritage. He received his PhD from Bogazici University in Istanbul with his dissertation focusing on the emergence and transformation of the Armenian land question in the late Ottoman Empire. He earned a BA in international relations from the University of Middle East Technical University in 2007, and an MA

in comparative studies in history and society from Koç University, Istanbul in 2009.

After receiving his doctorate, he was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship in Armenian Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His main research interests are state-society relations, socioeconomic history, the Armenian Genocide, and the dispossession of Armenians. He has co-authored a book with Ugur Ü. Üngör titled *Confiscation and Destruction: Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Properties* (Bloomsbury, 2011),



Prof. Polatel, left, Prof. Bert Vaux

and has published several articles and book chapters on the Hamidian massacres, the land question, and the Armenian genocide.

Polatel started his presentation by referencing his early research, which focuses on the processes of property transfer and dispossession during the Armenian Genocide. He provided examples of churches turned into auction sites for the transfer of movable Armenian properties. Further, he touched on his contemporary research about the relationship between the 1894-96 Hamidian Massacres and the Genocide, in terms of local perpetrations and mass violence, by examining the testimonies of Genocide survivors in the archives of the USC Shoah Foundation. Polatel detailed some of the testimonies in his lecture.

He highlighted the fact that, in addition to massive violence, genocides have multiple dimensions, and one such characteristic is the forced transfer and dispossession of properties which unfold unique insights and means of genocidal contexts.

Polatel also explained, in detail, about the Young Turks’ legal framework, and how properties were taken into consideration by the

Ottoman Turkish authorities when they issued the deportation law, and how Armenian properties ought to be used, in order to settle in Muslim immigrants. Moreover, he followed up by providing the layers of property transfers and the practice of dispossession, whether through official channels, corruption, unofficial seizures by officials themselves, pillage, destruction, or unofficial seizures by civilians.

Polatel emphasized that the Armenian Genocide was a complex event with multiple manifestations of death, destruction and property confiscation. He also reminded participants that new findings on the Genocide and its consequences have been revealed by research conducted by contemporary scholars, and that knowledge about various aspects of the genocide continues to expand in academia.

The presentation raised many questions by participants and interesting ideas which were discussed for an extended period of time.

## Dialects by Vaux

On June 17, the organization sponsored a program titled “An Introduction to Modern Armenian Dialects” by Dr. Bert Vaux.

The lecture was organized by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter with the participation of Tekeyan Cultural Association chapters in North America: Detroit, Greater Boston, Greater New York, Los Angeles, Montreal and Pasadena-Glendale.

Vaux currently teaches phonology and morphology at the University of Cambridge. Previously, he taught for nine years at Harvard University and three years at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. He specializes in phonological theory, dialectology, field methodology, and languages of the Caucasus. He was editor of the journal *Annual of Armenian Linguistics* from 2001 to 2006 and is co-editor of the book series *Oxford Surveys in Generative*.

Vaux is primarily interested in phenomena that shed light on the structure and origins of the phonological component of grammar, he also enjoys working with native speakers to document endangered languages, especially dialects of Armenian, Abkhaz, and English.

From the very beginning of the lecture, Vaux captivated the audience with interactive

and interesting recordings, engaging polls and quizzes throughout the presentation. The participants were excited to get virtually involved. The main focus was on the differences between the traditional dialects and the variety of spoken standard Armenian: when did these dialects develop? In addition to a tour of traditional dialects in present tense formation, Dr. Vaux used Toumanian’s “The Liar” and “The Lord’s Prayer” in presenting a variety of dialects, some still alive and some that are not. He mainly explored the significant lexical pronunciations and grammatical differences of the large variety of the traditional dialects in the Armenian world.

Vaux said he believes that the value of preserving a dialect is similar to preserving biodiversity. Every variant found in every different dialect reveals something about the potential and the ability of the human mind and what it can do. In his professional life, Vaux tests theories that are made about how languages can work or not by using evidence from Armenian varieties. Very often things that claim to be impossible in human languages are found in Armenian. “Vive Le Difference,” Dr. Vaux says.

Humans can be different from each other; however, in the Armenian case, the range of the variety that you find is also an important historical demonstration of where Armenians have lived. They may have changed the names of the Armenian villages in Turkey, but you can still infer from the dialects spoken about the Armenian communities that lived there. Linguistic variations are also historically and politically important.

Vaux emphasized the importance of taking advantage of internet resources to keep many dialects alive, to document and revitalize them: whether by performing virtual interviews and recording the last speakers of these dialects, or administer dialect surveys online where the speakers can answer questions directly or with the help of interpreters. The aim is to increase awareness and generate interest to help preserve and document these dialects before it is too late.

During the question-and-answer session a variety of questions about many dialects were posed. The questions were very specific and professional to the point that all agreed to have another lecture in the near future.

## Abdullah the Lizard

By Raffi Bedrosyan

This is a story told by Hrant Dink – undoubtedly, a true story. It can partially explain the deep trauma of the Armenians who survived the 1915 genocide but had nowhere to go and stayed in Turkey. It can partially explain the trauma of the hidden Armenians continuing to live in Turkey. And it can partially explain Hrant’s state of mind in the last few months of his life before he was shot dead – the constant persecutions, prosecutions and threats against him, his wife and his children.

The year was 1918, in a village at the foot of Suphan Mountain (Sipan Ler in Armenian, on the north shore of Lake Van). An Armenian youngster had barely escaped the events in 1915 and had found refuge in this village belonging to the tribal leader Ismail. He had mixed in with the other villagers, trying to eke out a living. He lived in a dark corner of a stable, in a crack between two rocks, just like a lizard that darts into the crack at the first sight and sound of danger. He would come out to help with the harvest or other errands, earn a piece of bread with his honest labour, then rush back into his refuge in the stable.

His name was Abdullah among the villagers, meaning ‘sent by Allah (God)’, but in reality, more like forgotten by God. He kept on living, unnoticed, uneventful – until one day when

teenager Memo, tribal chief Ismail’s third son saw him urinating. Memo sprang up and started screaming while running to the village: “Run, run, come and see Abdullah’s dick. It has a cover on it!” Abdullah’s darting run back into the crack of the rocks in the stable was just like a lizard. Soon the entire village people had gathered in front of the stable, young and old. Stones started raining into the stable: “Come out, you infidel *giavour*. We know who you are, what you are. Come out!” The shouts and insults grew louder, footsteps started coming closer, and the stable door was opened. Chief Ismail tried to protect Abdullah and stopped the mob at the entrance. He talked into the darkness of the crack: “Abdullah, where are you? Come give me your hand. I will save you.” Ismail’s hand touched Abdullah’s hand, or what he thought was Abdullah’s hand, but suddenly he was startled and jumped back. What he touched was a bloody piece of skin. He turned towards the mob and said: “Leave him alone. He is one of us.” Ever since that day, nobody bothered the newly “circumcised” Abdullah.

Perhaps you have hunted lizards as a kid. Just when you think you have grabbed it, it escapes, leaving only his tail in your hands. In the villages and cities of Turkey, there were thousands of orphans and hidden Armenians who felt like lizard Abdullah, on a daily basis. But they learnt how to survive despite the trauma, because they learnt how to be resilient. One hundred years after the Armenian Genocide, their grandchildren are now learning how to claim what is rightfully theirs – their identity, language, culture, and above all, truth and justice.

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