

## First Responders of St. John's Church Community of Metro Detroit Lead COVID-19 Battle

By Harry Kezelian III  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

DETROIT — As the COVID-19 crisis has wreaked havoc on the nation and particularly the state of Michigan, the Metro Detroit Armenian community and the St. John's Armenian Church parish have been feeling the wide-ranging effects of this epidemic. Everyone is familiar with quarantining as well as the restrictions that have been placed on meeting for Badarak and fellowship. Not everyone may be as familiar with the full picture of this pandemic from the health care perspective, however. Fortunately, the St. John's community is home to numerous health care professionals who have been heroically doing their part to fight the virus. Although we were not able to speak to every single health care worker for this article, we present here six different perspectives on the COVID crisis in Southeast Michigan.

Dr. Neshan Ohanian is an anesthesiologist at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. As head of the anesthesiology response team he is certainly one of the most integral doctors in the fight against COVID in the local area. Beaumont has had more COVID patients than anywhere else in Metro Detroit. There have been more than 840 patients at Beaumont so far, and tragically, about 75 percent have died. Ohanian says that as head of the anesthesiology unit he formed



Dr. Neshan Ohanian



Destruction in Nerkin Karmiraghbyur village of Armenia

## Ambassador Nersesyan Comments On the Recent Border Crisis

By Aram Arkun  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WASHINGTON — Ambassador Varuzhan Nersesyan, the representative of the Republic of Armenia to the United States, in a recent interview discussed the incidents of Azerbaijani aggression which began on July 12 at the border of the north-eastern Armenian province of Tavush.

The attacks began on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border on Sunday, July 12, at 12:30 p.m., the ambassador said, when an Azerbaijani military vehicle suddenly approached military positions on the territory of Armenia. After receiving warnings, the soldiers in this vehicle left to return to Azerbaijan, after which bombing and shelling with artillery of Armenian positions began. At least 16 were left dead during the first three days of fighting, including 4 Armenian military men and 12 Azerbaijanis (as officially confirmed by the Ministry of Defense of

Azerbaijan; unofficial Azerbaijani sources indicate a higher number of losses).

After several days, a ceasefire was arranged for Wednesday, July 15, through the mediation of the Russian, American and French co-chairs of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which allowed the Azerbaijani side to remove the bodies of dead soldiers for burial, but this arrangement was breached only hours later, in the predawn hours of Thursday, July 16, by the Azerbaijani side, the ambassador said

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## Border Seems Calm after Turbulent Week of Azeri Attacks on Armenia

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — The Armenian and Russia militaries have communicated with each other in connection with deadly clashes that broke out on Armenia's border with Azerbaijan on July 12, official Yerevan said on Monday, July 20.

The hostilities, which left at least 12 Azerbaijani and 4 Armenian soldiers dead, largely ground to a halt on July 16. The two conflicting sides have reported no serious ceasefire violations along the heavily fortified border since then. (See related editorial on Page 17.)

The Armenian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Anna Naghdalyan, said the American, French and especially Russian co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group have been "actively involved" in efforts to restore the ceasefire in Armenia's Tavush province.

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## Lebanese-Armenian TV Host to Stand Trial for Insulting Erdogan

BEIRUT (Arab Weekly) — Lebanese-Armenian TV host Neshan Der Haroutiounian will stand trial for "insulting" the Turkish president and the Turkish people, the Arab Weekly reports.

Der Haroutiounian will be tried in court in October for "publicly and directly offending" Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Turkish people on his talk show 'Ana Hek' on Al Jadeed TV.

Responding to a message from a viewer who called the host a refugee and accused him of racism for calling Erdogan evil, Der Haroutiounian confirmed "... [he is] evil and the son of a million evil men" before clarifying his attack was directed at "Erdogan, the [Turkish] regime, the Ottomans and the Turks."

"If you consider me a refugee, then I am more Lebanese than you, and I am proud of my country, Lebanon, more than you are," he added.

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Armenian Couple Marries in Village Shelled by Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — A couple was married at a church in an Armenian village on July 20, which came under fire by the Azerbaijani troops from across the border during the recent escalation, Armenian Minister of Education Arayik Harutyunyan revealed in a Facebook post.

The village of Movses was among around a dozen Armenian villages were shelled by Azerbaijani troops amid renewed unrest between July 12 and 16.

The Azerbaijani military also used large caliber grenade launchers and combat drones to target civilian homes in several border settlements in Armenia. Four servicemen of the Armenian army were killed, while Azerbaijan reported 12 deaths.

### Soccer Star Mkhitaryan Dedicates Goal to Armenia

ROME (Panorama.am) — Armenian national team captain and AS Roma midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan dedicated his goal on July 20 to Armenia in the match against Inter amid the recent escalation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

"My goal ...for my country," Mkhitaryan wrote on Facebook.

In the 56th minute of Roma's big Serie A clash against Inter Milan, Henrikh Mkhitaryan picked up the ball just past the halfway line and embarked on a run that led to a goal.

### Three Armenian Politicians Elected to Syrian Parliament

DAMASCUS (Armenpress) — Three Armenian politicians from Syria have been elected members of the parliament, Aleppo's 'Gandzasar' periodical reported on July 21.

The Armenian MPs are Nora Arisian from Damascus, lawyer Lusi Iskanian and Jirair Reisian from Aleppo. Nora Arisian and Jirair Reisian had been elected also during the previous election.

The parliamentary elections in Syria were held on July 19.

The Syrian parliament unanimously adopted the resolution recognizing and condemning the Armenian Genocide on February 13, 2020.

## INSIDE

### Maine's Sara Gideon

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## ARMENIA

## News From Armenia

## Police Arrest Azeri Man For Alleged Drug Trafficking

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — In early July Armenian police obtained information on planned drug trafficking from Iran, the police press service reported.

Police launched a large-scale investigative operation in Syunik Province where they were joined by officers of the Kapan Police Department.

They were stationed near the area where the suspect was expected to pass. On the evening of July 10 police spotted an armed man wearing a military uniform and a backpack was moving through the forest towards the village of Srashen.

Thanks to the operative actions of the police officers, the man was neutralized after coming out of the forest.

The man has been arrested on suspicion of illegally crossing the border and transporting drugs. He is a 24-year-old citizen of Iran with Azerbaijani nationality. Four kilograms of heroin was found in his backpack.

A criminal case has been launched.

## Mnatsakanyan: Turkey Has No Role in Karabakh Peace Process

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Turkey has no role in the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan said in an interview with France 24 on July 21.

Since the first day of the escalation on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey has expressed support for Azerbaijan, which Mnatsakanyan said is particularly concerning: “We have been observing a very destabilizing role of Turkey in its other neighborhoods — the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East.”

“Now what we are observing is an attempt to export this factor of instability in our region, in the South Caucasus. This attempt has been also laced with a notion of ‘historical mission’ of Turkey in the South Caucasus,” he said.

“Now you understand that for Armenia such a ‘historical mission’ revives very sad memories of the Armenian Genocide at the beginning of last century, and of course, we received this with serious concern. We also observe that the impunity for these atrocities against the Armenians is also the reason in which Turkey decisively claims any role in the South Caucasus,” he added.

## Tobacco Firm Remains Armenia’s Top Taxpayer

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — A tobacco company remained the country’s number one corporate taxpayer in the first half of this year, the State Revenue Committee (SRC) said on July 20.

The government agency comprising the national tax and customs services reported that the company, Grand Tobacco, paid 26.3 billion drams (\$54 million) in various taxes in January-June.

The national gas distribution company owned by Russia’s Gazprom giant was the second biggest tax payer, followed by the country’s largest mining company, the Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine (ZCMC). The SRC collected 26 billion drams and 21.6 billion drams, respectively, from these companies.

Armenia’s 20 leading businesses also include other tobacco and mining firms, fuel importers, telecommunication operators, a supermarket chain, two banks and the Metsamor nuclear plant. The SRC detailed their fiscal payments in a quarterly report listing the country’s 1,000 largest corporate taxpayers. The latter paid a combined 492.7 billion drams (just over \$1 billion) in taxes in the six-month period, according to the report.

The figure accounted for more than 72 percent of all taxes and other duties collected by the SRC. Grand Tobacco and two other local tobacco firms are part of the Grand Holding group, founded by Hrant Vartanyan, who died in 2014.

# Border Seems Calm after Turbulent Week of Azeri Attacks on Armenia

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“The Armenian foreign minister [Zohrab Mnatsakanyan] has been in constant contact with his Russian counterpart,” Naghdalyan said. “There have also been contacts at the level of military officials of the two countries.”

Naghdalyan did not give details of the Russian-Armenian military contacts.

The Armenian and Azerbaijani militaries established a new direct channel of communication after Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev agreed in 2018 to boost the ceasefire regime along the internationally recognized border between their countries and “the line of contact” around Karabakh. Truce violations there decreased significantly as a result.

In a weekend interview with the Sky News Arabia TV channel, Mnatsakanyan said that last week’s hostilities demonstrated that “there can be no military solution to the conflict” and that continued negotiations are the only viable option.

Pashinyan on Saturday, July 18, called for a new international mechanism to maintain the ceasefire in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone and said Armenia and Azerbaijani should continue peace talks after the latest deadly clashes on their border.

Pashinyan met with Armenia’s Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan and top army generals to discuss the situation at a volatile border section where at least 16 Azerbaijani and Armenian soldiers were killed in heavy fighting that broke out on July 12. The military authorities in Yerevan and Baku reported no serious ceasefire violations there for the second consecutive day.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Pashinyan blamed Azerbaijan for what was the worst escalation of the Karabakh conflict since 2016, saying that it was sparked by a failed Azerbaijani attempt to seize an Armenian border post.

Pashinyan noted that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stepped up his “bellicose rhetoric” and threatened to pull out of Karabakh peace talks in the weeks leading up to the flare-up. The Armenian army proved this week that Azerbaijan cannot resolve the long-running conflict militarily, he said.

Pashinyan also condemned as a “crime against humanity” an Azerbaijani threat to launch a missile attack on Armenia’s Metsamor nuclear power plant.

“We all must finally get out of the whirlwind of continuous statements about ceasefire violations and create an international system of credible monitoring of the ceasefire regime,” said the Armenian premier. “Also, the negotiating process within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group presidency should continue, and Azerbaijan should at last adopt a constructive position.”

On Thursday, Aliyev again threatened to withdraw from peace talks with Armenia, saying that they have been “meaningless” so far. He said the US, Russian and French mediators co-heading the OSCE Minsk Group should do more to make the talks “substantive” in addition to trying to prevent truce violations.

In a joint statement issued on Wednesday, the mediators stressed the “importance of returning OSCE monitors to the region as soon as circumstances allow.”

Aliyev and Armenia’s former President Serzh Sargsyan reached agreements on bolstering the shaky ceasefire regime during a series of face-

to-face meetings held after the April 2016 hostilities in Karabakh. They specifically agreed to allow the OSCE to deploy more field observers in the conflict zone and investigate truce violations occurring there.

Baku subsequently refused to implement these safeguards against deadly fighting, however, saying that they could cement the status quo. Pashinyan did not clarify whether he now wants to revive Aliyev’s confidence-building agreements with Sargsyan brokered by the mediators.

An Armenian military spokesman, Artsrun Hovannisyan, said Azerbaijani forces “sporadically” fired small arms overnight. He spoke of a lingering “potential” for renewed attacks on Armenian troops deployed in the mountainous area.

“If they resort to large-scale provocations they will get an adequate answer,” Hovannisyan warned at a news conference.

Meanwhile, Karabakh’s army claimed to have shot down an Azerbaijani military drone early on Saturday. It released photographs of what it described as an Israeli-made Orbiter-3 drone lying in a field.

Hovannisyan said that the reported destruction of the unmanned aerial vehicle does not necessarily mean that fighting could also break out soon at the Armenian-Azerbaijani “line of contact” around Karabakh. No major ceasefire violations have been reported from there in recent weeks.

Four Armenian soldiers died during the attack last week. Hovannisyan said 36 other Armenian soldiers were wounded in the clashes.

### International Concern

President Vladimir Putin and other top Russian officials on Friday voiced serious concerns over deadly hostilities on Armenia’s border with Azerbaijan and offered to help ease tensions between the two South Caucasus states.

They discussed the latest flare-up in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone during a session of Russia’s Security Council headed by Putin.

A statement by the Kremlin said participants of the meeting engaged in a “detailed exchange of views regarding the situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border” and expressed “deep concern” over heavy fighting that broke out there on July 12.

They stressed the “urgent need” for Armenia and Azerbaijan to respect the ceasefire and expressed Moscow’s “readiness for mediation activities,” added the statement. It did not give further details.

Putin’s press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, made identical comments to the Russian press after the meeting attended by the speakers of both houses of Russia’s parliament, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Federal Security Service Director Aleksandr Bortnikov, Foreign Intelligence Service Director Sergey Naryshkin and other officials.

Lavrov already telephoned his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts on Monday to call for an immediate end to the skirmishes involving artillery fire and drone attacks. The fighting continued in the following days, however, with the conflicting parties putting the blame on each other.

By contrast, Turkey, Azerbaijan’s closest ally, has blamed the Armenian side and promised military aid to Baku, raising the prospect of a more direct Turkish involvement in the Karabakh conflict.

“Our armed unmanned aerial vehicles, ammunition and missiles are at

Azerbaijan’s service along with our experience, technology and capabilities,” Ismail Demir, the head of a state body overseeing the Turkish defense industry, tweeted after meeting with a high-ranking military delegation from Azerbaijan in Ankara on Friday.

For his part, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Thursday that Armenia will be “brought to account” for its “attack” on Azerbaijan.

By contrast, Pope Francis on Sunday, July 19 said he is praying for the families of victims of clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and hopes differences can be resolved peacefully, the Catholic News Agency reports.

“I am following with concern the recovery in recent days of armed tensions in the Caucasus region, between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” the pope said after leading the Angelus prayer July 19.

“In particular, while I assure you of my prayers for the families of those who lost their lives during the clashes, I hope that, with the commitment of the international community and through dialogue and the goodwill of the parties, a lasting peaceful solution can be reached, which has at heart the good of those beloved populations,” he continued.

“I wish to assure my closeness to those who are facing the disease and its economic and social consequences,” he stated, adding that he is especially thinking of those people whose suffering is “aggravated by situations of conflict.”

(Stories from RFE/RL and Panarmenian.net were used in this report.)

## Prof. Sakapetoyan Passes Away

YEREVAN — Ruben Karapeti Sakapetoyan, Yerevan State University (YSU) Armenian Language Chair professor, and doctor of philology, passed away on July 21. He was 76.

He worked for over half a century at YSU, and educated many



generations of students. He was considered one of the best teachers of western Armenian in the faculty, and authored many monographs, dictionaries, and textbooks. A number of students defended their theses under his guidance.

He was fluent in Russian, French and Turkish, in addition to Armenian.

He was the recipient of the Vahan Tekeyan Award for his linguistic publications, sponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada.

He was a beloved lecturer, faithful friend, an intellectual, as well as a dedicated father.





## ARMENIA

# Las Vegas Firm Brings Apparel Jobs To Armenian Villages and Yerevan

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

LAS VEGAS – Arsenal Inc. is a manufacturer of rifles and pistols based in Las Vegas owned and run by Armenian Americans. It has an apparel line which is providing employment for Armenians both in Yerevan and in several Armenian villages, and it actively attempts to inspire others to follow its example. At present, according to Arsenal's Marketing Director Sevag Sagherian, the Arsenal Apparel clothing line "offers fine-quality European-styled shirts, sweatshirts, caps and hoodies in a variety of designs" ([www.Arsenal-Apparel.com](http://www.Arsenal-Apparel.com)). As these all are produced in Armenia, Sagherian said, "This allows Armenians in Armenia to support their families and take pride every time they see 'Made in Armenia' stitched onto the items that they produce."

Harry Pakhanyan, vice president for operations of Arsenal, related that Arsenal is the exclusive representative in the United States of a 200-year-old Bulgarian arms manufacturer,



The Voske Kar production site in Yerevan

The two executives and other Armenians in the company have helped their local Armenian community as individuals, such as using by their business connections and financially supporting the groundbreaking of the Armenian Genocide monument in Las Vegas.

## Doing Business in Armenia

Barsoumian and Pakhanyan would go to Armenia frequently for personal reasons on their own over the years. "As we got comfortable in our business," Pakhanyan related, "we looked to see what we could do to do business there and at the same time benefit Armenia." Barsoumian and he spent a lot of time in Armenia together over the past 5 or 6 years. They went at least several times a year to explore and talk to local businessmen, as they wanted to establish a side business.

They decided to create an apparel line for marketing purposes for their brand. Pakhanyan said, "Apparel is a huge thing in our industry." So they did a lot of research, he said. They already had a few people in their firm who were familiar with this industry. It turned out that one of the first things that people do to go into

and through family and friends got introduced to a group of young people who had started a new textile company there. For Armenia, it is considered a mid-sized company, with about 500 employees. Pakhanyan said that it was clear they really wanted to do international business, so they began to work together in 2019 and the first shipment of clothing from Armenia arrived in the US in January 2020. The company is called Voske Kar LLC, and Artur Frangyan is its founding director.

Arsenal came up with some of the designs in the US, while others were prepared by the design team in Armenia. The products were made in Armenia and Arsenal took it from there.

Voske Kar has a small factory in Yerevan and a few satellite locations in Armenian villages. Voske Kar does outsourcing work for various European and other overseas designers and manufacturers. Arsenal is just one of its clients. It doesn't make its own brand of products. An attractive aspect of this firm for Arsenal's executives was that Voske Kar was a community leader, helping bring jobs to the Armenian provinces. This helps local villagers, as well as is a good business practice, Pakhanyan remarked.

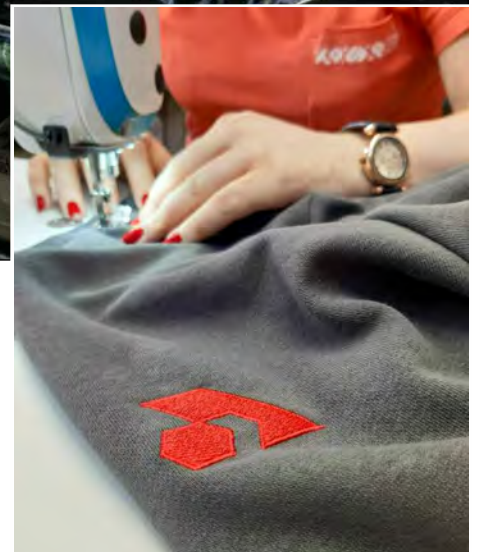
One of the satellite locations is a village called Khachik at the border in Vayots Tzor Province. Until the foundation of a small site there, not much besides agricultural work was available in Khachik. Arsenal's products are folded or packaged there.

While transportation of products abroad is a challenge, Pakhanyan said, there are ways to accomplish this. Initially various routes were used to export products via air, but just before the novel coronavirus crisis struck Arsenal was going to try a different method. It planned to buy containers, bring them from Georgia through Europe via truck to Germany.

Unfortunately, the virus temporarily halted this plan to export more economically and increase the volume of business. COVID-19 has also required new safety measures in the Armenian factory, which temporarily was shut down and then allowed to work through a "non-essential" business. Apparel and clothing also is not considered an "essential" business field in the US too, hampering distribution further.

Pakhanyan said that nevertheless, with the designs, quality and brand name, Arsenal still intends to expand into other markets, with Canada perhaps being the first new country. He said, "Hopefully we can make this a global brand which we can sell in as many places as possible."

The first line of products made in Armenia were geared towards the tactical and outdoorsmen market segments, which is where Arsenal's main business operates. However, Pakhanyan said, "We have a whole line of other designs in the works where we go completely outside of



Working on Arsenal clothing in Yerevan

our main existing market. Some use Armenian elements in the prototypes, like the pomegranate or Mt. Ararat (Masis), or combine elements of Armenian military uniforms. We don't have any specific product like this yet but it is on our drawing board."

## Promoting Armenia

While Arsenal began its explorations into commerce in Armenia some years ago, it did not actually begin this project until after the Velvet Revolution. Pakhanyan said, "I don't want to say we were lucky, but we had no issues. It has not been any worse or better than any other overseas country in Europe or Asia. It has been really smooth sailing for us with the company we worked with. They were young professional guys, and because they were excited, we were excited. We came with open mind and open heart."

There were no customs or transportation issues, Pakhanyan said, until COVID-19 struck throughout the world. Armenia, they found, is a good source for textile manufacturing.

"We are not only going there, buying products, and feeling good and happy about it," he said. "We are also trying to promote Armenia as a source for a lot of different things here. We don't hide the fact that our products are made in Armenia. We do the opposite—we mention it any time we can."

Pakhanyan said that if other companies in their own industry or the broader apparel industry can think about Armenia as a source for t-shirts or jeans, and if Arsenal can help steer them to Armenia, that is a win for everybody. He stressed, "This is a part of this process that you can do for the apparel, food, service industry and IT. We are actively trying to work with the IT industry over there and outsource as much IT work as possible from our companies and other projects we get involved with on the side to Armenia."

Pakhanyan declared to businessmen and investors in the US and elsewhere, "We want to show you that you can do a successful and profitable business in Armenia. We want to go both to the Armenian community and outside the Armenian community. We want to show that though we are a small business here in the US, we can do great things over there—and you can too!"

For more information on Arsenal see its website, <https://www.arsenalinc.com/>.



The Arsenal logo

and is licensed to use its name. It also makes other products in the US, and has its own manufacturing plant. Pakhanyan said that Arsenal's top management is primarily Armenian. Its founder Vartan Barsoumian, like Pakhanyan, was born in Armenia. Barsoumian came to the US with his family in 1971 and grew up here. He, like many other Armenians in Las Vegas, moved to this city from the Los Angeles area.

Barsoumian started the business in 1999, and through word of mouth and recommendations, other Armenians joined. Pakhanyan said that it was not initially established as an Armenocentric business, but turned out that way. Barsoumian and Pakhanyan set up, manage and own a conglomerate or family of companies which include distribution and importing companies under different brand names. For example, K-Var Corporation (<https://www.k-var.com/>) is an online retail shop for a variety of products, while FIME Group (<https://fimegroup.com/>) offers products similar to those of Arsenal.



An Arsenal cap being manufactured in Yerevan

the generic apparel business is to buy from China. Arsenal initially explored that option but realized that this type of business would be a good one for Armenia. Although Armenia is not as cheap as China for textile manufacturing, it is not that much more expensive, and, importantly, the quality is good, Pakhanyan stressed.

They decided that this would be a good way to start their business relationships in Armenia





## INTERNATIONAL

## International News

## Artsakh Helps Lebanese Armenians

BEIRUT (Armenpress) – The Permanent Representation of the Republic of Artsakh to the Middle East organized meetings on July 16 in Beirut with the spiritual leaders of the Armenian community to transfer the financial assistance rendered to the Lebanese-Armenians by the Government of Artsakh on the instruction of President of the Republic of Artsakh Arayik Harutyunian.

In his message to the spiritual leaders, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Artsakh Karapet Kebabjiannoted, “It is the moral duty of all Armenians to keep strong the Armenian community of Lebanon, a community that has always been supportive of the Armenian people. The people of Artsakh is always grateful to the Lebanese-Armenians and does not forget the great assistance that the Armenian community of Lebanon rendered to Artsakh during the difficult times. I wish that Lebanon overcomes this crisis as soon as possible and we meet in Artsakh in the nearest future.”

The spiritual leaders of the Armenian community of Lebanon thanked Artsakh for the assistance rendered, noting that it had a great symbolic and moral value.

## IAEA Closely Following Armenia Nuke Plant Amid Threats of Attack

VIENNA, Austria (PanARMENIAN.Net) – The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is aware of media reports referring to a “threat of use of force against a peaceful nuclear installation,” the agency wrote on July 21, in response to questions regarding the threats to Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant.

“We follow this matter closely,” the IAEA announced in response to an request for comment on a statement made by Azerbaijan’s Defense Ministry threatening a strike on Metsamor.

In an interview with France 24, Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan said that Azerbaijan’s threat “is a threat to the broader region, a threat in fact to their own people.”

## Lavrov Meets with Armenian, Azeri Ambassadors

YEREVAN, JULY 21, ARMENPRESS. Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov met with Ambassador of Armenia to Russia Vardan Toghanyan and Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Russia Polad Bülbüloğlu to discuss stabilization of the situation on the Armenia-Azerbaijani border on July 21, the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced.

The meeting between the minister and ambassadors took place at the private house of Lavrov on the sidelines of a working lunch.

During the meeting issues related to the security in the Transcaucasus region, stabilization of the situation on Armenia-Azerbaijan border and activation of efforts aimed at Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-chairs were discussed.

## Russian Expert Offered Payment for Pro-Azerbaijani Comments

MOSCOW (Panorama.am) – Editor-in-Chief of *Free Mind* journal Mikhail Delyagin said on July 21 he was offered payment for pro-Azerbaijani comments over the recent escalation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

As Delyagin wrote on his Telegram channel, he had received a call from one of Russian media outlets and was offered money to claim that Armenia had launched an offensive against Azerbaijan, targeting the country’s oil infrastructure.

# Azerbaijan Fires Foreign Minister

BAKU (Eurasianet) – President Ilham Aliyev fired his top diplomat, Elmar Mammadyarov, on July 16 and replaced him with Ceyhun Bayramov, who had been Azerbaijan’s minister of education.

Asadov continued: “I called Elmar Mammadyarov. I passed on your words and asked, when he heard about this event where was he? He answered that he was working from home. I said, can you report back on

approve access for officials from the World Health Organization to Nagorno-Karabakh to help the territory – internationally recognized as Azerbaijani territory but de facto controlled by Armenian forces – deal with its coronavirus outbreak.

“Unfortunately, recently our diplomacy has been involved in some useless negotiations,” he said. “What kind of negotiations over COVID can we be carrying out with an enemy country, and country at war with us? It’s absurd. It means we are going to start cooperating with Armenia?!”

The selection of Bayramov is a surprise, as he has no diplomatic experience. And combined with Aliyev’s recent scorn toward the negotiations with Armenia, and even more the heavy fighting that has spoiled any appetite there may have been for compromise, the selection of a relatively powerless foreign minister would seem to bode ill for the diplomatic process.

“Mammadyarov was only ever the executor of policy, not the source of it,” wrote Tom de Waal, an analyst of the Caucasus at Carnegie Europe, on Twitter. “He was a figure of continuity and common sense on the whole. Not good, not good at all.”

In his July 15 comments, Aliyev gave some hints as to what he now expected out of Azerbaijani diplomacy.

“Our diplomatic activity could be more effective,” he said. “I have spoken many times about how our diplomacy needs to be more assertive, rather than passive and defensive. It shouldn’t be a diplomacy taking positions and expressing some positions for the sake of pleasing others. He



Elmar Mammadyarov, the former foreign minister

The firing came the day after Aliyev issued a brutal public attack on Mammadyarov, who had been in the post since 2004 but who has for several months appeared to be in danger of losing his job. Mammadyarov already had effectively been sidelined by Hikmet Hajiyev, Aliyev’s top foreign policy adviser. Since the outbreak of fighting on July 12, which has returned the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict to the eyes of the world’s policymakers and media, Hajiyev has been Baku’s international face and Mammadyarov nowhere to be seen.

Mammadyarov’s ouster became all but inevitable after Aliyev accused him sleeping on the job in extensive comments on July 15.

“The last few days, everything has been undertaken only by my command. I am speaking with my assistant Hikmet Hajiyev probably 10 times a day – do this this way, do this that way, tell this to this person, give these instructions to this person,” Aliyev said at a cabinet meeting.

Then he went in for the kill: “What has the foreign minister been doing? Where has he been? On the 12th, as soon as everything started happening, we were in our offices. The prime minister was at work, I was working until the morning. The minister of defense, the chief of general staff, the head of national security, the interior minister, the head of the intelligence service, the secretary of the security council were in the office until morning. I couldn’t find the foreign minister. I asked [Prime Minister] Ali Asadov: where is he?”

He then turned to Asadov: “What did he tell you? Tell us.”

Asadov answered: “Mister president, I asked, and he said that he is working from home.” Aliyev followed up: “What does it mean, working from home?”

the hour where you’re located? He again answered that he is working from home. ... I passed on your instructions and said that he can’t do that. We are all at the office. The president is managing the affairs. As foreign minister, he should be doing what you tell him. I asked him why he was working from home? Come to the office.”

Mammadyarov has long been seen as ineffective and a poor communicator, but the public campaign against him really took off in April, when he



Ceyhun Bayramov, the new foreign minister

was the subject of a series of critical pieces in government-friendly media. The noose seemed to be tightening earlier this month, when Aliyev criticized the diplomatic negotiations with Armenia as “meaningless” and three senior foreign ministry officials were arrested on corruption charges.

In his broadside, Aliyev again criticized negotiations with Armenia, but specifically some abortive discussions at the foreign ministry level to

mentioned in particular promoting Azerbaijan economically, dealing with foreign press, how to work better with diaspora organizations, and responding to “unfounded accusations voiced at international organizations against Azerbaijan” as some priority areas.

Meanwhile, fighting between the two sides resumed on the morning of July 16 after a respite the day before. No casualties were reported on either side.

## Lebanese-Armenian TV Host to Stand Trial for Insulting Erdogan

TRIAL, from page 1

The remarks prompted a swift response from Turkish authorities who contacted the Lebanese foreign ministry and demanded the state institution take “necessary measures” against the media personality.

The Turkish Embassy mobilized dozens of protesters to demonstrate in front of the Al Jadeed TV station against “insulting the Ottoman state and Turkish

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.”

Lebanese National News Agency (NNA) said that “according to information provided to the Public Prosecution Office, Der Haroutiounian will be referred to trial before the Court of Publications Chamber in Beirut.”

However, the Arab Weekly quoted a Lebanese journalist, who spoke on condition of anonymity, as saying that there were no grounds for the judicial charges

against Der Haroutiounian.

“This is a matter of a historical dispute that has no prospect, knowing that it is about a great crime against the Armenian people – a crime that Turkey refuses to recognize. This in itself continues to provoke Armenians wherever they are,” the journalist said.

Colleagues from different media outlets have been showing solidarity with Neshan Der Haroutiounian on Twitter.

# Turkish Defense Minister Vows to ‘Avenge’ Azerbaijanis Killed in Armenian Attacks

By Amberin Zaman

ISTANBUL (AI-Monitor) – Turkey warned its eastern neighbor Armenia on July 16 that it would bear the consequences for its attacks against its ethnic Turkic kin in Azerbaijan that have killed 16 people on both sides since border clashes flared up between the former Soviet states on July 12.

At least 11 of them were Azerbaijanis, including a major general and a colonel in the country's defense forces. It was the worst outbreak of hostilities since April 2016, when scores were killed in four days of fighting.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said Armenia would “definitely pay” for its actions following talks in Ankara with Azerbaijan’s Deputy Defense Minister Ramiz Tahirov, who is also the oil-rich republic’s air force chief. Akar said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was in touch with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev and that the Turkish leader was “following developments very closely.”

“The pain of the Azerbaijani Turk is our pain. We want you to know that any kind of difficulties that you feel there [in Azerbaijan] are felt here [in Turkey] very deeply. The blood of our Azerbaijani brothers will not remain unavenged,” Akar added.

Clashes between the sides in the Tavush region resumed today after a brief pause. A spokesperson for Armenia's Defense Ministry, Sushan Stepanyan, said Azerbaijani forces were shelling Armenian villages with mortars and howitzers and using Azerbaijani villagers in the hilly region as “human shields.” Azerbaijan blamed Armenia for today’s attacks.

Azerbaijan and Armenia have been locked in a bitter dispute over the predominantly Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The mountainous region fell to Armenia, which was backed by Iran. Turkey backed Azerbaijan while Russia supplied weapons to both sides. Turkey has kept its borders with Armenia sealed and has no diplomatic relations with Yerevan. Years of mediation by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to end the conflict have failed. Russia has called for an immediate cease-fire and Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Moscow was “deeply

worried” about the fighting. On Wednesday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called for “an immediate de-escalation” and resumption of the peace talks.

The steady stream of hawkish comments from Ankara have prompted fevered speculation that a newly assertive Turkey, which has been flexing its muscles in Syria and Libya, might intervene on the side of Azerbaijan again. Erdogan and Aliyev have very close ties that are greased by a web of energy deals. The recent arrest of Turkish Azeri oil billionaire Mubariz Mansimov Gurbanoglu, who has been indicted on dubious terror charges by a Turkish court, is thought to be linked to his falling out with Aliyev and Azerbaijan’s state oil company, SOCAR.

Getting tough with Armenia also plays to Erdogan’s nationalist base as he seeks to revive his sagging poll numbers amid the country’s worst economic downturn since his Justice and Development Party came to power 18 years ago.

Garó Paylan, an ethnic Armenian member of the Turkish Parliament, told AI-Monitor in an interview this week, “Turkey is engulfed in a nationalist wave that harks back to the days of Talat and Enver Pasha.” Paylan was referring to the so-called Young Turk leaders who recklessly plunged Turkey into the First World War on the side of the Axis powers. Talat is regarded as one of the chief architects of the genocide of over a million Ottoman Armenians in 1915.

The prevailing consensus among analysts is, however, that Turkey has no interest in another hot war on its borders. Thomas de Waal, a senior fellow at Carnegie Europe and the author of "Black Garden," one of the most authoritative books on the Karabakh conflict, told AI-Monitor that while Erdogan is “interested in exploiting any situation he can, [he] is more interested in a war of words than a war of guns” and that “Azerbaijan doesn’t really want a war either.”

Zaur Shiriyev, a South Caucasus analyst for the International Crisis Group, concurred.

“I don’t believe that Turkey will intervene militarily,” he told AI-Monitor in a telephone interview from Baku. “There is already military cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan. What Azerbaijan expects from Turkey is its continued diplomatic support on the world stage.”

Moreover, while Karabakh stirs nationalist

passions in both Azerbaijan and Turkey, the recent spate of clashes is taking place on the largely uncontested international border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. When some 30,000 Azerbaijani demonstrators took to the streets in Baku Tuesday, the largest protest of its kind, they were demanding the government take action in Karabakh.

In any case, contends Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Turkey director for the German Marshall Fund of the United States, “The Caucasus is Russia’s backyard and Turkey is unlikely to cross Moscow there in the way it does sometimes in Syria and now in Libya,” he told AI-Monitor.

## At Least 60 Migrants Killed in Boat Disaster on Lake Van

ISTANBUL (*New York Times*) – Turkish rescue teams have retrieved the bodies of 60 migrants after their boat sank in a lake in the east of the country, Turkish media reported on Monday, July 20, in one of the worst disasters involving migrants in Turkey in recent years.

The boat capsized late at night on June 27 with as many as 80 people on board, and the confirmed death toll has climbed steadily since then. At least two children were reported to be among the dead.

The accident occurred on Lake Van. The migrants were crossing the lake on a fishing boat in an apparent attempt to avoid police checkpoints on the highways, on their journey toward western Turkey.

Early reports indicated some of the dead may have been Afghans and Pakistanis. Families from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran have started reaching out for information, said Mahmut Kacan, a lawyer who heads the migrant committee at the Van Bar Association.

For more than a year, migration officials have been reporting unusually large numbers of people crossing undocumented into Turkey and trying to reach Europe, warning that the figures are creeping back toward the levels seen at the height of the migration crisis in 2015.

Turkey apprehended 60,000 illegal migrants last year, double the number in 2018. The numbers kept climbing early this year, then fell in April and May, when the country was largely under lockdown because of the coronavirus pandemic, and only authorized motorists were allowed on the roads.

But as the lockdown was lifted in June, the numbers began to rise again.

Turkey’s interior minister, Suleyman Soyulu, said more than 4,500 migrants had been apprehended already this year in the eastern Van region, and thousands more had been stopped at the border with Iran. Most came from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and African countries, he said earlier this month.

The Turkish Coast Guard reported intercepting more than 9,000 illegal migrants at sea in the first three months of this year – nearly three times as many as the same period last year. In January alone, 4,000 migrants were found, compared with 1,000 in January 2019.

“People are still trying, and they always will whether there is a pandemic or not,” said Lanna Walsh, spokesperson for the International Organization for Migration in Turkey.

But even as the flow of people into Turkey grows, the number of migrants crossing from there into Europe has fallen dramatically, largely thanks to aggressive pushbacks by Greece.

In the first six months of this year, 11,900 illegal crossings by migrants were detected in the eastern Mediterranean region, barely half the number detected in the same period

That isn’t to say that things couldn’t escalate. De Waal said, “I am not expecting a massive war like we had in the 1990s but we could have a chain reaction that could take us back to April 2016.” It will not have helped that Aliyev sacked his foreign minister of 14 years, Elmar Mammadyarov, today, accusing him of slacking on the job. “He has an institutional memory [of peace talks]. He’s a source of continuity, not of policy,” De Waal observed. “Aliyev feels besieged and blaming the foreign minister is implausible. It’s a signal that he’s almost giving up on negotiations.” If true, Ankara retains enough influence to change his mind.

last year, Frontex, the European border and coast guard agency, reported last week. Only 200 were detected in June, one of the lowest totals recorded for that month since 2009.

There were 70 to 80 people aboard the ill-fated boat on Lake Van, according to a statement given to the military police by one of the men accused of trying to ferry them across the water. The statement, attributed to Medeni Akbas and seen in written form by The New York Times, said the group included one or two children and five or six women.

Akbas is the only survivor found so far. A relative of his, Servet Akbas, is still among the missing.

Akbas has been arrested, along with four others, and arrest warrants have been issued for 17 more people. His statement says his relative asked him to join him in smuggling the migrants across the lake, and offered him \$110 to mind the boat’s engine and help if fights broke out among the passengers.

His relative was steering the boat when a wave hit it from the side and overturned it, throwing half the passengers into the water and trapping others under the hull, he said.

He held on to one of the migrant’s bags and managed to stay afloat until the early hours of the next day. Servet Akbas was with him in the water but died, and Medeni Akbas said he could not hold on to his body and had to let him go. He called his family when he reached the shore.

Thirteen bodies were found in the lake soon after the accident, before the wreckage was located. Since then, Turkish officials have been using a submersible device to retrieve bodies from the wreck, which is lying at a depth of about 350 feet, the Demiroren news agency reported.

Twenty-five of the dead are Afghan, according to an Afghan embassy official, the BBC reported. The lawyer in Van, Mr. Kacan, said that families in touch with him had given him names of people thought to be on the boat.

“So far names of nine refugees were transmitted to us,” he said by telephone. “We will be presenting them to the prosecutor’s office.”

Van province has long been known as a crossing point for refugees from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Mr. Kacan said that recently a small number of African migrants have been using the same routes. Known for its harsh winter season, it sometimes features in the news when bodies of migrants emerge on the mountains as the snows melt in the spring.

Seven migrants drowned in a similar accident last December on the lake, Mr. Kacan said.

“That’s how we learned about this route,” he said. “When we talk to locals, fishermen, we understand that this has been done for a long time and the law enforcement has been just looking the other way.”

## How Azerbaijan Deployed Islamist Mercenaries during Karabakh War

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – There is an age-old practice of governments outsourcing certain combat duties to mercenaries, without much international oversight. Modern historians believe that private militaries did not really go away at any point in history, but have experienced a resurgence in the past 25 years.

A striking example is the Nagorno-Karabakh War of 1988 – 1994, when Azerbaijan involved foreign Islamist mercenaries to fight against the Armenian side, in a gross violation of international law.

Throughout 1992-1994, in particular, thousands, mostly Afghan and Chechen mercenaries fought alongside the Azerbaijani army against Karabakh.

Azerbaijan began to develop relations with Chechnya in the early 1990s. As of July 1992, hundreds of Chechen militants had joined the Azerbaijani forces on the Karabakh front. However, after only several months of fighting against the Karabakh Defense Army and suffering major losses, the majority of Chechen detachments left the theater of military operations and returned to Chechnya.

The impunity of its first experience of hiring “freelance soldiers” encouraged the Azerbaijani authorities to recruit more groups, this time from among the Afghan mujahideen. According to various sources, in different periods between 1993 and 1994, the

number of Afghan mercenaries among the Azerbaijani forces ranged from 1000 to 3000.

The involvement of Afghan militants from the Azerbaijani side has been confirmed by ample evidence. The Karabakh army, in particular, obtained literature, notebooks, maps, drawings, personal letters in Dari and Pashto – the official languages of Afghanistan – with Pakistani and Afghan addresses, as well as photographs of Afghan militants in Azerbaijan.

In a 1994 report, the Human Rights Watch cites informed sources to claim Afghan mercenaries reportedly numbered from 1,500-2,500: “Afghan mujahideen soldiers, well-trained and acquainted with Soviet weapons, were recruited by the Azerbaijani Government and are involved in the fighting.”

According to an article published by the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1993, “the decision of the government of [Azerbaijani] President Geidar Aliyev to involve the Afghans is widely believed to reflect their desperation after a string of military defeats at Armenian hands.”

Since the end of the war in 1994, the Armenian side has been in full control of Nagorno-Karabakh (with the exception of a part of the Shahumyan Region), in addition to surrounding areas, most notably the Lachin Corridor, a mountain pass that links Nagorno-Karabakh with mainland Armenia.



# Community News

## Sara Gideon Wins Nomination to Challenge Susan Collins in Maine

WASHINGTON (*New York Times*) – Sara Gideon, the speaker of the Maine House of Representatives, on Tuesday, July 14, formally became the Democratic nominee to challenge Senator Susan Collins of Maine, wielding a formidable war chest in a race that could determine whether Republicans retain control of the Senate in November.

Gideon, who is half Indian and half Armenian, is backed by the Senate Democratic campaign arm and a number of outside political groups. She had long been the favorite to challenge Ms. Collins, the sole remaining New England Republican in Congress. The nonpartisan Cook Political Report has rated the race a tossup, and the election has already become the most expensive in Maine history.

“This campaign is about all of us, and about how we can build a stronger future together,” Senator Collins has become part of that broken system, putting special interests and her political party first, and Mainers know it and feel it.”

“Senator Collins has changed, and Mainers deserve better,” Gideon added. “Mainers deserve a senator who will bring people together to overcome the challenges we face.”

While Collins coasted to a fourth term in 2014 with 69 percent of the vote, her reputa-



Sara Gideon

tion for independence and bipartisanship has suffered under the Trump administration, and her approval ratings have plummeted at home. Though she has split with President Trump on a number of issues, she faced a significant backlash after supporting the \$1.5 trillion tax-cut package in 2017 and voting to confirm Brett M. Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in 2018.

Millions of dollars have flooded the race and the airwaves in Maine, with Ms. Gideon raising \$23 million from both voters in Maine and national Democratic donors eager to flip the seat and secure control of the Senate.

Having defeated two progressives – Betsy Sweet, a lobbyist, and Bre Kidman, a lawyer – Gideon is set to receive another windfall: at least \$3.5 million raised by a crowdfunding campaign during and after the confirmation of Justice Kavanaugh. (Because organizers vowed to return the donations if Ms. Collins voted against his confirmation, the senator has condemned the money as a bribe seeking to influence an official act.)

“Our State Legislature has been out of session for 120 days as Maine’s unemployment system cratered and thousands of workers who lost their jobs in the pandemic still can’t get the help they need,” said Kevin Kelley, a spokesman for the senator’s campaign. “Meantime, Speaker Gideon is about to take \$4 million from people who tried to buy Senator Collins’s vote.”

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Washington D.C. protestors, separated only by police, facing each other in front of Azerbaijani embassy on July 19, 2020

## Armenian and Azerbaijani/Turkish Protestors Face Off in Front of Azerbaijani Embassy in Washington

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

WASHINGTON – Tensions were high in front of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Washington, D.C. on Sunday, July 19. The Armenian Youth Federation arranged an early afternoon protest to call for the end of attacks against Armenia's Tavush region by Azerbaijani troops. Dozens of Turkish and Azerbaijani people took the Embassy side, chanting anti-Armenian slogans. As the traffic was shut down by police, the protestors took over the street, with often only a few feet separating one group from the other, and US law enforcement members standing in-between.

Both sides assigned a participant to insure that their protestors do not cross the middle line of the road. The Armenians chanted “Artsakh is Armenia,” and slogans like “Yerevan wants peace, Baku wants Yerevan” and #Artsakhstrong were written on posters held in hands. An Azerbaijani woman was heard screaming that historically there had been no Armenian statehood on the map - leaving an impression of someone with highly dubious knowledge of the very basics of the history of the region. Other Azerbaijani/Turkish participants were flashing the Gray Wolf signs, as can be noticed in the accompanying video on our website. Unlike the protest in the United Kingdom, which resulted in violence, there were no physical clashes in D.C.



Protestors outside the Azerbaijan embassy in Washington

## LA Nursing Homes New Reality

LOS ANGELES (KCRW) – Denise Hovsepien says she is not sure if she will ever be able to hold her mother’s hand again. Her mother lives at the Ararat Nursing Facility in Mission Hills.

“Mom is 99 [years old]. She’ll be 100 next March,” Hovsepien says. “I just don’t know. Maybe I’ll never be able to touch her again ... so it is difficult.”

Hovsepien is one of about 220 families that currently have loved ones staying at the Ararat Home of Los Angeles, a multicare facility that caters to Armenian families. The center has managed, for the most part, to avoid the tragedy that has befallen other assisted living and nursing homes across the LA area. Only about a dozen residents and staff have contracted COVID-19.

Ararat’s executive director Margarita Kechichian credits that success to taking preventative measures early, even before state and local mandates.

“We shut our doors on March 6, before there were any requirements for nursing homes to shut their doors,” Kechichian says. “We started wearing masks in our facility before many others. That helped keep our residents and staff safe.”

The facility remains off-limits to outsiders. Visits with loved ones are carried out through window glass or smartphone video calls, a stark reminder of the dangers the novel coronavirus poses to the sick and elderly. A CDC study found the median age of people who died from the virus during a three month period was 78.

Elsewhere, however, the damage has already been done. Dozens of nursing homes across the LA area have not been lucky or as diligent. At one point during the pandemic, places like nurs-

“WE STARTED WEARING MASKS IN OUR FACILITY BEFORE MANY OTHERS. THAT HELPED KEEP OUR RESIDENTS AND STAFF SAFE.”

MARGARITA KECHICHIAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARARAT NURSING HOME

ing homes made up more than 50 percent of all coronavirus-related deaths.

“If we look at what’s happening now, the deaths in nursing homes have gone down dramatically. That’s because the nursing homes were forced, as a result of what’s happened with all the deaths, to actually be proactive and take appropriate measures to protect the residents,” says Scott Glovsky, an attorney who is suing Glenhaven Healthcare in Glendale for willful neglect, among other allegations, in connection with the death of Ricardo Saldana, a 77-year-old resident. He died due to complications from COVID-19.

Glenhaven did not respond to repeated requests for comment from KCRW.

Saldana’s daughter Jackie says she hopes her family’s lawsuit will bring change to other care facilities for LA’s elderly.

“My father was a great person. He was a great family man,” she says. “And my dad didn’t even know what hit him. He passed away alone and without his family there.”

For now, in-person visits are not allowed in LA County.

Earlier this week, Governor Gavin Newsom’s office released guidelines for how such facilities could offer outside visits. But few are making these visits. And in LA County, where infection rates are up, it is unclear when local public health officials will allow families to visit.





COMMUNITY NEWS

# As Public School Questions Loom, Parents Consider Options That Could Leave Districts Scrambling

By Jodie Fleischer, Rick Yarborough and Jeff Piper

WASHINGTON (NBC) — This week, school districts across D.C., Maryland and Virginia committed to plans for the coming school year with a variety of online and in-person options. But the News4 I-Team found some parents lacking confidence in whether public schools can deliver a smooth start to the year, and they're looking elsewhere.

"I mean, pretty much everybody I know is considering it," said Colleen Ganjian, an education consultant who just enrolled her third grader in private school.

The family is opting to leave behind Colvin Run Elementary in Fairfax County, where 8-year-old Caroline loves her teachers and friends.

"She was not happy about it," said Ganjian. "But what breaks my heart is that I don't think she can conceptualize that the school she left is not the school she'd be coming back to."

For school districts trying to plan an online platform or in-person learning, the number of students is critically important. How many teachers are willing to work in a traditional classroom? How many students will fit with social distancing? How many students will actually show up?

"I think that my biggest fear is that they are not agile enough to make the right decisions at the right times and to move things around and make sure that these kids are actually learning," said Ganjian.

Through her job, Ganjian had the opportunity to watch how public and private schools in various areas handled online classes at the end of the last school year. Some were plagued with technical problems and learning loss.

"Just from a parent's perspective, it was hard to watch this happening and then go home and say, you know, what is Fairfax doing and why are we a part of this?" Ganjian said, adding that even when Fairfax County got its online system working, teacher instruction was minimal.

She said she found her daughter's assignments to be largely remedial, likely because of the size and bureaucracy of the public school district. She found some private schools to be more agile and attentive.

"There was a teacher on the other end of the screen providing live instruction to students," Ganjian said. "And kids couldn't fall behind."

After a national review of remote learning, the Center on Reinventing Public Education issued

a report stating too many schools were leaving learning to chance during the pandemic.

"The bottom line was they're doing very different things," said CRPE Director Robin Lake, pointing out that only one in three districts they studied kept up with basic things like attendance and student progress.

One in five mandated face-to-face interaction between student and teacher, which Lake calls critical.

"That's pretty disheartening," Lake said. "And on the other hand, it's not all that surprising; this is all brand new."

Lake said some school districts proved seamless learning possible and can be an example for others that struggled. She says there can be flexibility in how students learn, but not in what they learn.

"I'm worried about that for a lot of school districts. I'm not seeing a lot of reflection on what worked well, what didn't over the spring, and then figuring out how they're going to change things up for the fall," said Lake.

CRPE is continuing to study how schools are responding to the pandemic and what their plans are for the coming year. She is not surprised by parents seeking other options.

"I think there are a lot of really interesting kind of hybrid homeschool models that families are playing with, where a small group of families join together as a co-op," she said.

Ganjian says many private schools she con-

tacted were already full. The National Association of Independent Schools says enrollment is usually set by summer, but many private schools have made exceptions to add students now. Some have also increased financial aid to help struggling families.

Fairfax County says more than 400 students have already withdrawn this summer, heading to home school or private schools options within Virginia.

"I feel very privileged that we're able to consider it," Ganjian said. "And I really do, I feel like it's a major equity issue for the people who can't."

The News4 I-Team found another possible differentiator. More than 460 private, religious and charter schools across D.C., Maryland and Virginia got at least \$245 million from the federal government's Payroll Protection Program. The low-interest loans will be forgiven if the schools comply with the program and retain their employees.

The prestigious Sidwell Friends in D.C. and McDonogh School in Maryland got about \$5 million each.

"Budgets will be very tight next year," said Lake. "I think most states are expecting to have to make cuts to education budgets, and that can't be an excuse."

Lake says independent schools are used to innovating and adapting quickly; students are paying customers who could go elsewhere. She worries the pandemic will widen an existing financial disparity in education.

"I guarantee you, a lot of families were hiring private tutors and doing virtual tutoring, finding ways to get online and get accelerated instruction for their kid," Lake said.

Ganjian hasn't withdrawn Caroline from public school yet. She's waiting to see what the district delivers.

A Fairfax County Public Schools spokesperson said accurate counts are important for student schedules, staffing and bus routes. The district is constantly reviewing those numbers and making adjustments as needed but would like to know about student withdrawals as soon as possible.

"If they get their act together and turn things around and make parents feel confident, then maybe everybody will go back," Ganjian said.

## Tekeyan Cultural Association, Inc.

### Dr. Nubar Berberian Annual 2020 Awards

Dr. Nubar Berberian, intellectual, journalist, activist and editor of many ADL daily newspapers for more than 50 years, passed away at the age of 94 on November 23, 2016. In his will, Dr. Berberian directed his Trust Fund managers to appropriate awards every year to college students of Armenian descent worldwide who major in either International Law or Political Science.

#### ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Eligible recipients are college students of Armenian descent who major in either International Law or Political Science.
- 2) Applicant must be enrolled in a full-time graduate program in a fully accredited college or university in the world.
- 3) Applicant must provide all of the information requested on the application form.
- 4) Applicant must submit a copy of his or her most recent college transcript.
- 5) Applicant is to include a small head and shoulders self-portrait.
- 6) Application could be received by requesting from [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com).
- 7) Applicants should submit applications electronically (via email) to: [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com). Paper submissions will be accepted by the deadline at:

Tekeyan Cultural Association, Inc.  
Dr. Nubar Berberian Trust Fund  
755 Mt. Auburn Street  
Watertown, MA 02472  
(Electronic application is preferred.)

- 8) The deadline of receiving the applications is **September 15, 2020**.
- 9) The administrators and managers of the fund will vote the qualified winners in **October 2020** based on the merits of each applicant.
- 10) The winner or winners will receive their awards in **November, 2020**
- 11) Winning applicants are not eligible to apply again.
- 12) This announcement is published in Armenian, English, French and Spanish.

Watertown, MA, July 15, 2020

## Sara Gideon Wins Nomination to Challenge Susan Collins in Maine

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But Senator Collins can't be bribed — and she remains solely focused on providing assistance to cities, towns, small businesses, and workers who need her help now more than ever."

When Gideon announced her campaign in June 2019, she said her candidacy was in part influenced by the senator's decisive vote in Justice Kavanaugh's confirmation. After Justice Kavanaugh dissented from a decision that would uphold precedent to preserve abortion rights, Gideon and other advocacy groups that favor abortion rights were quick to renew attacks against Collins, who is also favors those rights and said she believed Justice Kavanaugh would support the precedent to preserve them.

In interviews this month as she traveled across the state for Fourth of July festivities, Ms. Collins acknowledged that Ms. Gideon's war chest, coupled with the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, had made the race particularly challenging. Her campaign schedule has been limited to virtual meetings and fund-raisers and the few remaining outdoor events.

"That's what's frustrating to me in this pandemic, because I can do this in a rural area, at an outside event, but the vast majority of fairs and festivals in our state have been canceled," Ms. Collins said. "I think that's a huge loss for me, because people know that I'm there because I want to be there, and it energizes me."



COMMUNITY NEWS

# Pallone Amendment on Azerbaijan Human Rights Abuses Is Adopted

WASHINGTON – An amendment offered by Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ-06) to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) was adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives on July 20.

The amendment would enhance protections for human rights around the world. It requires the Department of Defense to explicitly report any foreign military units that have received financial assistance from the United States through security cooperation programs and are determined to have committed gross human rights violations before or during their participation in the programs. The report will also include recommendations to improve human rights training and additional measures that can be adopted to prevent human rights violations in the future.

“The United States has long stood as a beacon for the rights of every person, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or nationality. We must continue to lead by example and ensure that American foreign aid does not contradict our values at home or abroad,” Pallone said. “This amendment is especially important now as Azerbaijan threatens Armenia’s safety and sovereignty with offensive attacks staged by Azeri armed forces in Armenia’s Tavush region. The United States should not be aiding and abetting reckless, autocratic states with appalling human rights records for any reason.”

This amendment is an important first step in creating oversight for the Defense Department’s Section 333 Building Partner Capacity Program that has sent enormous sums of money to regimes and dictators, including Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, which have documented human rights violations. The Department has spent more than a billion dollars for each of the last two years on Section 333. Even though the State Department has

singled out Azerbaijani units for committing human rights violations, these units have received over \$100 million in security assistance in fiscal years 2018 and 2019 through the program.

Pallone’s amendment was cosponsored in the House Committee on Rules by Representatives Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), Adam Schiff (D-CA), Brad Sherman (D-CA), and Jackie Speier (D-CA).

During the April 2016 Four-Day War against Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh Republic) initiated by Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani military committed ISIS-style atrocities killing a 12-year-old boy, beheading a soldier, and mutilating an elderly Armenian couple. In addition, the latest and deadly attack against Armenia, which began last week on July 12 targeted civilian areas - the city of Berd and the villages of Aygepar, Chinari, Movses, Nerkin Karmiraghbyur, and Norashen - in Armenia’s Tavush Province. Azerbaijan also inexplicably threatened to target Armenia’s Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant.

The Pallone amendment, which the Armenian Assembly strongly supported, including in its letter to the House Committee on Rules, was adopted as part of an en bloc package of amendments to the NDAA by voice vote. During consideration of the NDAA on the House floor, Rep. Brad Sherman expressed his support for the Pallone amendment.

“The United States has long stood as a beacon for the rights of every person, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or nationality. We must continue to lead by example and ensure that American foreign aid does not contradict our values at home or abroad,” Congressman Pallone said. “This amendment is especially important now as Azerbaijan threatens Armenia’s safety and sovereignty with offensive attacks staged by Azeri armed forces in Armenia’s Tavush region. The United States

should not be aiding and abetting reckless, autocratic states with appalling human rights records for any reason.”

“Given Azerbaijan’s \$3 billion scandalous Laundromat scheme to whitewash its human rights record, as well as its continued attacks against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, we commend Representative Pallone for this timely amendment,” stated Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan.

Last month, Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in a letter to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) requested an assessment regarding the amount and nature of U.S. assistance provided to Azerbaijan, including if any assistance “was used for offensive purposes against Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh, or may have enabled such offensive

## Donations Continue to *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* to Face COVID-19 Crisis

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator received the following donations between June 27 and July 20, 2020 (listed by state), from subscribers, friends and supporters to maintain the publication of the first English-language Armenian weekly in the US. The first list of the donors was published in the June 27, 2020 issue of the newspaper.

We sincerely appreciate all the contributors.  
The fund raising continues.

- Sarkis M and Marita Q. Nazarian \$50.00 Little Rock, AR
- David and Margaret Mgrublian \$500.00 Pasadena, CA
- Dr. Heratch O. Doumanian \$200.00 Chicago, IL
- Joanne Peterson \$1,000.00 Brookline, MA
- Edward R. Bedrosian, Boston, MA \$500
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- Dr. Berdj and Margaret Kiladjian \$200.00 Winchester, MA
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- Gerald and Lucille Ajemian \$50.00, Dover MA
- Dorothy S Piranian \$20.00 Boston, MA
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- Edward H and Yvonne Korkoian \$200.00 Farmington Hills, MI
- Martin and Sherley Aaronian \$80.00 Atkinson, NH
- Vicki Hovanessian, In Memory of Dr. Raffy Hovanessian, \$500.00 Fort Lee, NJ
- Sophie Garvanian \$25.00 Albuquerque, NM
- Hagop and Sonia Ergenian \$50.00 Philadelphia, PA
- Ruth and Jacob Harpootian \$100 East Providence, RI
- Sirop and Maro Bedrosian \$500.00 Houston, TX

# Fresno Church Vandalized

FRESNO – According to the Facebook page of St. Paul Armenian Church of Fresno, on Friday, July 17, the church was vandalized. Upon arrival to work at 9 a.m. the staff noticed suspicious activity inside the church courtyard.

The memorial garden statue, built in Memory of Norma Der Mugerdechian, had been vandalized. The statue’s praying hands were wrapped with yellow tape and a few knots, removed from its place, unattached from the concrete and placed at an angle.

The round concentrate outdoor ashtray receptacle was also removed from its place, the sand was poured out, and receptacle was placed sideways on the ground by the removed memorial garden statue.

Lastly, several security signs that were by the side of the church were removed and brought inside the courtyard.

The gates surrounding the church and courtyard always remain locked, therefore the church officials suggested that the guilty individuals had come inside the church property by jumping over the gates to access the courtyard. No windows were broken and no one had entered inside the church, office, classrooms, or hall.



The memorial statue tipped over

## OBITUARY

### Lucy Jamie Dedicated Member of Holy Martyrs Church

TAMARAC, Fla. – Lucy Jamie of Tamarac, Fla. died

She is survived by daughter Juliet Jamie Gregorio, son Leon E. Jamie; grandchildren: Emily, Gregory, Julien, Abi, Marissa, and six great-grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her husband

Edward D. Jamie, son Edward D. Jamie Jr., grandson Christopher Jamie.

Funeral Services were held at the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs, Bayside, NY on Saturday, July 18. Graveside services followed at the Ferncliff Cemetery.

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COMMUNITY NEWS



Leaders of the Oriental Orthodox churches gathered for a joint prayer session.

# Oriental Orthodox Church Leaders Offer Prayers for Peace and Justice

PARAMUS, N.J. – Leaders of the Oriental Orthodox family of churches gathered to offer prayers for peace and justice in a troubled world.

The service organized by the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches (SCOOC) took place on the evening of Friday, July 17, at St. Mark's Syriac Orthodox Cathedral in Paramus, NJ. It was hosted by the leader of the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of the Eastern U.S.A., Mor Dionysios John Kawak.

Assembled at the altar were other Oriental Orthodox leaders: Bishop David of the Coptic Church (who also serves as the president of SCOOC), Archbishop Titus Yeldho of the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Church, and Bishop Daniel of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Clergy of the Armenian, Coptic, Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Syriac Orthodox churches also took part in the service, all suitably separated throughout St. Mark's impressive sanctuary as per current practice during the pandemic.

Bishop Daniel delivered the homily after a vespers service in the Syriac Orthodox rite, in which he said that the true peace and justice the world clearly needs cannot be found apart from the faithful embrace of Jesus Christ. He made note of the numerous crises ravaging the world – the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest in the U.S., deep issues of racial injustice across the world, and the recent military aggression of Azerbaijan against Armenia, as indicative of the desperate need for healing that only Christ can deliver to the world and its people.

He also offered the experience of the Oriental Orthodox—whose diversity of origins is no impediment to a sense of common mission, family solidarity, and mutual love—as an example that holds needful lessons for the rest of the world. He stressed that the example is not merely one of unity, but of genuine Communion in the sacramental sense.

The service was broadcast on the Facebook and YouTube channels of the Syriac Archdiocese. Click the link to view the recorded broadcast.

# Thank You for Donations, Support to Kuredjian Family

Makrouhi Takessian Kuredjian was born in Beirut on March 28, 1931 to Sarkis Takessian and Mary Hamparsoumian. Both survivors of the Armenian Genocide, the young couple settled in New Hadjin, an Armenian district in Beirut. Sarkis, a master baker, established a pastry shop serving his community until his sudden death at the age of 56.

Mary took over and supported the family. A few years later, Makrouhi and her sister Nvair joined their mother by expanding the business; they founded the first mini market in their community. Makrouhi was well respected as a young businesswoman.

Makrouhi met and married Krikor Kuredjian, a hard-working businessman and a young Ramgavar man on August 2, 1959. She also joined the Ramgavar Party and soon became an active member of the Shushanig Ladies Chapter. They were blessed with three daughters Mayda, Marina and Hilda. Krikor and Makrouhi instilled Armenian culture and heritage in their daughters who later became active members in their communities.

Makrouhi was a long-time active member of the AGBU- Antelias Ladies Chapter and a fifty-year member of the Etchmiadzin Ladies Auxiliary. This golden anniversary was to be noted with a medal bestowing ceremony for Makrouhi last year. Unfortunately, the event was postponed due to the unrest in Lebanon.

One of Makrouhi's passions was the TCA Vahan Tekeyan School. She was an avid supporter, tirelessly fundraising and assisting alongside her husband, who was the treasurer of the school for many years.

She was a loving and dedicated mother to her daughters, son in laws Arsen and Saro, a devoted grandmother to her seven grandchildren Nairi, Armen, Nanor, Raffi, Aram, Lori and Perla. Makrouhi passed suddenly on June 8th, just after two months of losing her husband of 61 years. The funeral services were held on June 10th at the St. Gregory Illuminator Church in Antelias attended by many friends, relatives, community members and leaders.

May she rest in eternal peace.

The family of late Makrouhi Kuredjian would like to thank everyone for their heartfelt condolences on the passing of our beloved mother and grandmother. We convey our deepest gratitude to all who shared our pain, as well as those who donated to the "Krikor and Makrouhi Kuredjian Educational Fund" of the Vahan Tekeyan School.

Thank you for the love and support you have extended to our family during this difficult time.



Mayda Kuredjian, Arsen and Marina Sarafian, Saro and Hilda Hartounian and their families



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

- Edmond Y. Azadian \$100
- Jerry and Annie Balikian \$200
- Haig and Katia Buchakjian \$100
- Peter A. and Sharon Chipolone \$100
- Hagop and Serda Beledanian \$75
- Lynn and Haroton Arthur Beylerian \$100
- Ruby Gulian \$100
- Talia Jebejian and Agop Bouldoukian \$100
- Linda and Ardo Keshishian \$100
- Van Z. and Priscilla D. Krikorian \$100
- George and Lorraine Marootian \$300
- Peter S. and Garine Merguerian \$100
- Mihran Minassian \$250
- Harout and Lisa L. Moumdjian \$100
- Gregory and Berdjouhi Parseghian \$50
- Berge and Vera Lynn Setrakian \$1,000
- Varouj Jirair, Ara Varouj, Asdrig Vehian \$200





COMMUNITY NEWS

# First Responders of St. John's Community of Metro Detroit Lead COVID-19 Battle

DETROIT, from page 1

"airway" teams to intubate COVID patients, and personally designed all the protocols for the ORs in relation to the pandemic. On some days he would intubate as many as 14 people.

He says that after being put on a ventilator, 60 percent of the patients ended up dying.

"I've never come across anything like this in my career," he stated. "It has been an incredibly intense emotional experience for all of us who were on the Airway team. It's tough to go into a room and talk to someone, and then you hear that afternoon or the next day that they've passed away."

Ohanian shared a story of a particularly emotional experience where he went into a room to intubate a 52-year-old woman. The patient said she hoped she could get stabilized as she was supposed to get married in 10 days. Ohanian promised to do the best he could but due to the overwhelming number of patients and records, he doesn't know if this individual even survived.

Ohanian said there seems to be an idea that this is a disease predominantly affecting African-Americans. While African-Americans seem to not be doing as well as others once infected, all ethnicities are contracting the virus and the patients being seen are about equivalent percentagewise to the racial makeup of the region. He added that many of the patients were young, contrary to popular belief, though it's certainly true that people in their

70s or 80s usually are not surviving.

Currently, Ohanian is preparing for the second surge. While he said he hopes that it doesn't happen, all the studies he has seen lead him to believe that another surge will indeed come, probably in September or October. "Sometimes you go home at night and put your head between your legs, and say 'My God, I can't believe this.' Nothing like this has ever happened before," Ohanian shared.

When asked how he was dealing with the situation he said, "One of my best therapies was my wife. She tells me 'they are so lucky to have you doing this job.'" He also warned of the dangers of spreading the virus. "I was driving through downtown Birmingham the other day, and saw clumps of young people together, and just thought 'what a perfect petrie dish for this virus,'" he said, audibly emotional. "We have to socially distance and we have to wear masks," he stressed.

**St. Mary-Mercy Hospital**

Alec Kurjian is a family medicine resident at St. Mary-Mercy Hospital in Livonia. He has been there for one year. When he first heard about the novel coronavirus, it did not come across as a big deal, but as the weeks progressed, he realized pretty quickly that it was going to be serious. He thinks the public didn't take it seriously until the NBA season was cancelled, but at that point he already knew what was happening. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), which

governs medical residents, has declared a state of emergency. There are certain rules about how residents are supposed to operate in the hospitals, but these rules were pushed aside — it was all hands on deck.

Kurjian worked directly with COVID patients. Residents typically work as a team; 2 residents and an attending physician, seeing 15-18 patients at a time. When the pandemic broke out, all teams became COVID teams. His day started at 7 a.m., signing out the night residents, then doing rounds with his attending, interviews and making sure imaging studies were getting out. Patients were waiting for several days while they were being treated. The ICU was busy as well. Typically older patients had a lot of medical problems and they didn't do as well. Kurjian shared they did the best they could. Kurjian added he feels that the majority of people that they could save, they did save. He added that the local community in Livonia has been great. Restaurants have been donating lunch, water bottles, cookies, and so on to



Alec Kurjian

the health care workers. Fr. Aren Jebejian also reached out to him.

Kurjian believes that there will in fact be a second wave of Covid. It would be great to get a vaccine — there are promising studies with an antiviral agent called remdesivir, but studies are limited. He added that the lockdown has been effective and they saw drops in cases a couple weeks ago, which made their job easier. With fewer cases, they are better able to care of patients. In reference to the lockdown, Kurjian states, "I would lose my mind too" (from having to stay at home), but that people should be more open to continue lockdown because we don't know what the fall is going to look like. We need to get some data and more time to make the right choices.

Dr. Rita Akaraz-Avedissian works at St. Joseph's in Ann Arbor and St. Mary-Mercy in Livonia. Most of her COVID involvement has been at St. Mary-Mercy. When it started, it wasn't that many cases, but soon they were slammed and they were out of room in the ICU, and out of ventilators and personal protection equipment, as was also the case in many other hospitals. She states that everyone in the southeast Michigan area was in the same boat.

Akaraz-Avedissian's life has significantly changed. She has a whole different process for how she gets up and goes home, including decontamination, before seeing family, because she has two children, Armen, 6, and Aren, 3. She has been working 10-12 hour days, with patients that are confirmed or suspected to have coronavirus. Many patients have died.

Akaraz-Avedissian said that typically in her field she might lose 2 people a month, but during the pandemic people have been dying almost daily. St. Mary's was the hardest hit hos-



Dr. Rita Akaraz-Avedissian

**Tekeyan Cultural Association**

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# ANNIVERSARY

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pital outside of Detroit proper, she said. They had to reorganize how they operated in the hospital. "Everything changed about how we practiced medicine. For the first month or month and a half I wouldn't even let the kids hug me. I haven't seen my 92-year-old grandmother since March."

Akaraz-Avedissian stated at the time of the interview (on June 24) that "we are seeing a spike right now, it's controlled but hopefully it doesn't get worse." She predicted that things will continue this way until there is a vaccine and/or the people gain herd immunity. Herd immunity happens when enough of the general population, around 70 percent, becomes immune through vaccination or previous infection. At that point most people can't pass it or get it.

Until that time, we will be dealing with these disease surges, she said.

The treatment has also been difficult as this disease was previously unknown. "We are learning as we go," she said, and recommended practices were changing weekly or daily. She added that the medical profession was looking to Italy for the most accurate data as the data being given out by China may not be entirely truthful. In the beginning there was a lot of response from the community in terms of donating PPE. Women were sewing masks, restaurants were donating food, but a lot

*continued on next page*





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Study First to Show Tiger Sharks' Travels and Hangouts in Gulf of Mexico

MIAMI — Like other highly migratory sharks, tiger sharks (*Galeocerdo cuvier*) often traverse regional, national and international boundaries where they encounter various environmental and human-made stressors. Their range and habitat use in the Gulf of Mexico, a complex marine environment significantly impacted by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010, has been understudied and remains unknown.

Using sophisticated satellite telemetry, a study is the first to provide unique insights into how tiger sharks move and use habitats in the Gulf of Mexico across life-stages. Data from the study, just published in PLOS ONE, provide an important baseline for comparison against, and/or predicting their vulnerability to future environmental change such as climate variability or oil spills.

For the study, Matt Ajemian, PhD, lead author and an assistant research professor at Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, and a team of scientists examined size and sex-related movement and distribution patterns of tiger sharks in the Gulf of Mexico. They fitted 56 tiger sharks with Smart Position and temperature transmitting tags

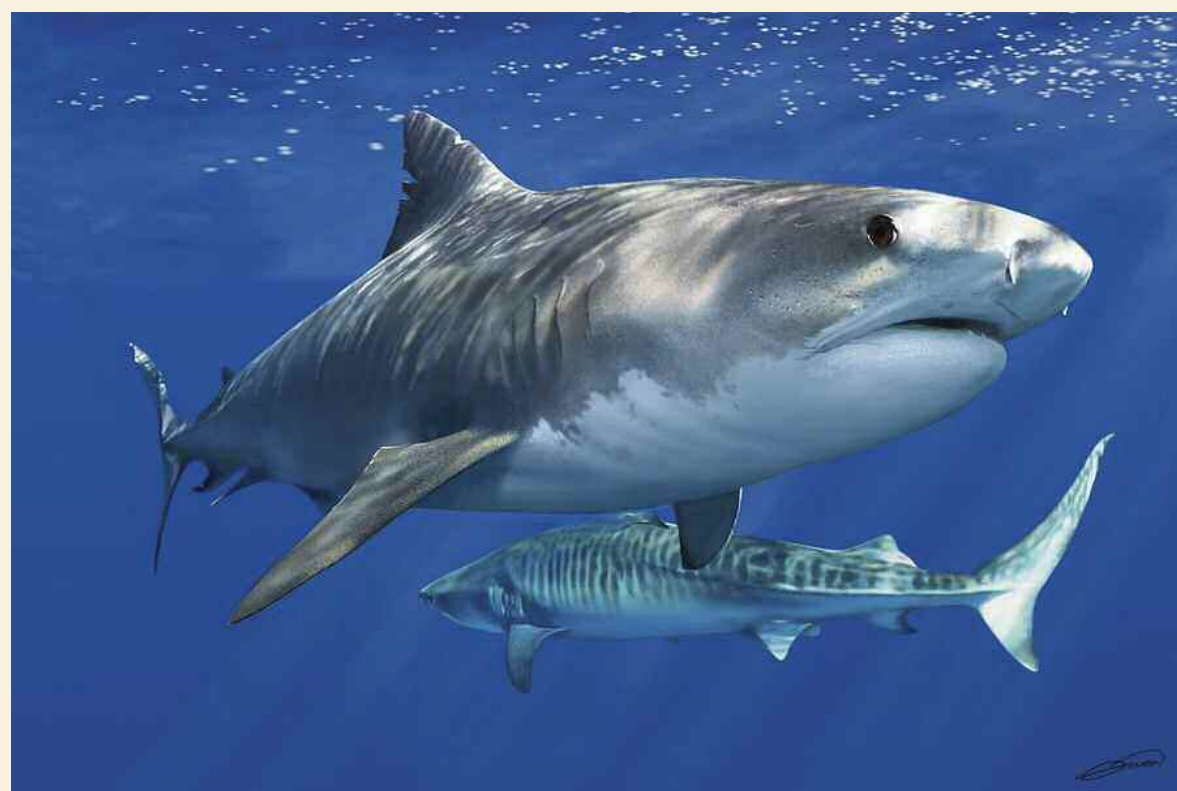


Matt Ajemian, PhD

between 2010 — following the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill — and 2018 — spanning shelf waters from south Texas to south Florida and examined seasonal and spatial distribution patterns across the Gulf of Mexico. The tags transmitted whenever the fin-mounted tags broke the sea surface, with orbiting satellites

estimating shark positions based on these transmissions. Ajemian also analyzed overlap of core habitats among individuals relative to large benthic features including oil and gas platforms, natural banks, and bathymetric breaks.

"While all life stages of tiger sharks are known to occur in the Gulf of Mexico, detailed habitat use has never been quantified," said Ajemian. "This is rather striking as this marine system faces numerous human-



made stressors, complex tri-national management, and indications of size reductions in recreational landings for large sharks."

Results showed significant ontogenetic and seasonal differences in distribution patterns as well as across-shelf (i.e., regional) and sex-linked variability in movement rates. Prior studies into tiger shark horizontal movements in the western North Atlantic Ocean have been restricted primarily to males or females separately, in disparate locations. By simultaneously tracking many males and females of varying life stages within the same region, the researchers observed sex and size-specific differences in distribution and movement rates, as well as associations with large-scale habitat features. For example, researchers found evidence of tiger shark core regions encompassing the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration designated Habitat Areas

of Particular Concern during cooler months, particularly by females. These are specifically bottom features of the Gulf that rise up from the edges of the continental shelf, and include places like the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. Additionally, shark core regions intersected with 2,504 oil and gas platforms, where previous researchers have observed them along the bottom.

The scientists note that future research may benefit from combining alternative tracking tools, such as acoustic telemetry and genetic approaches, which can facilitate long-term assessment of tiger shark movement dynamics and help identify the role of the core habitats identified in this study.

"This research is just a first glimpse into how these iconic predators use the Gulf of Mexico's large marine ecosystem," said Ajemian.

from previous page

of that has fizzled out. Akaraz-Avedissian wanted to debunk some of the conspiracy theories she has seen circulating about this virus. For example, physicians do not "get paid more by listing COVID as the cause of death." Such conspiracy theories are incredibly frustrating to doctors like Akaraz-Avedissian because they are risking their lives to take care of patients. It is physically exhausting but also mentally exhausting, because people are dying left and right, she said.

Amanda Banks is a hardworking nurse who has a less direct, yet critical role in the battle against COVID. She has an MSN (Masters' of Science in Nursing) and her title at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak is "Operational Improvement Black Belt." She works on the administrative side of the hospital's operations. When the pandemic started she was immediately brought in to be a part of the emergency response center, which is a crisis management team for Beaumont. They conducted all changes that needed to take place, such as allocation of resources, overseeing the labor pool, etc. They also had to make sure all exits were covered with screeners and everyone had hand sanitizer and masks. Another task was to allocate unit as to who would take care of patients. Everyone was scared, she says, and it was her department whose job it was to help ease everyone and make them feel confident in their role.

Banks stated that personally things have been challenging. She has been strongly practicing social distancing, and continues to support local businesses and restaurants but only in the form of take-out. She always wears a mask in public, and keeps her hands clean. She believes in being extremely careful not just for her protection but because she works in a hospital. She was happy to be asked to be part of the healthcare professionals' committee to assist with the reopening of St. John's Armenian Church. She has been volunteering to work any shift needed at the hospital, days, afternoons, and midnights for about 3 and a

half months. And, as stated, she has helped to manage logistics, operation, documentation, and planning during crisis management.

Banks stated that she has seen a lot of support for healthcare workers. There is even a mental health hotline for healthcare workers to help them deal with a sort of PTSD from what they've experienced, as well as financial assistance programs for people that have been furloughed. She applauded St. John's "Sirov Jash" program as well as stores that are giving out masks and have hand sanitizing stations. Banks says that there will continue to be waves of this disease until a vaccine comes out. She stated that it is something we are going to have to live with, while we continue to work together as a community.

Lynne Kojamanian is a nurse practitioner at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak and works in critical care. Her position is as a member of a team that responds to anything critical in the hospital, and they are there acting on behalf of the physician. In mid-March she was placed on a COVID unit where they were intubating patients. At first, they weren't really thinking about masks other than for patient care, she says. Later wearing masks everywhere became



Lynne Kojamanian

the recommendation. The surge at Beaumont was so fast and furious that nobody knew what was happening at the time, Kojamanian stated. More than 30 nurses, a dozen practitioners and some residents also got the virus. The hospital was taken over by the pandemic, with something like 600 COVID patients at one time.

Kojamanian was taking care of critical care patients and three weeks later she came down with COVID herself, and her husband also contracted the virus and was doing worse than her. The couple was sick for about 12 days. Kojamanian stated that the virus "is very weird" because her son and daughter were both in the house taking care of them, yet they did not get the sick nor did they get antibodies. When asked how the virus affects a person, she stated "both of us thought we were going to die," and that it took her about 4 weeks to get back to something like normal. She stated that people don't realize the side effects. She is a member of a Facebook group for COVID survivors and people report hair loss, joint pain, shortness of breath, some foggy in the brain, and other side effects. Kojamanian says that she herself is experiencing joint pain as well as fatigue. She still doesn't have her sense of smell back and only 50% of her sense of taste. "It's ten times worse than pneumonia, and zaps every bit of energy out of your body," she says. On the positive side she said that the community rallied together behind health care workers, with local restaurants sending food to the nurses on all different floors. She stresses that mitigation with masks is important, and hopes for a vaccine, or for people to develop herd immunity. "It's a beast of a virus, and is mindboggling," she concluded.

Anahit Movsesyan, recently former chairwoman of the St. John's Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA), returned from graduate school in Cleveland and is now a physician's assistant and works in hospital medicine service at Ascension Providence Hospital. She stated that she was in a unique situation because she had newly graduated and was look-

ing for a job when the pandemic hit. She was part of a team taking care of hospitalized COVID patients and continues with that today.

She noted, "Before I started working, I was starting to get really worried about COVID numbers in Michigan. It wasn't until I began to work with these patients that I realized COVID is bigger than us and there is still so much we don't know going forward."

Movsesyan works the night shift with a team of PAs. They are the hospitalist team on nights along with 1-2 hospitalist physicians covering the hospital calls as well as admissions. She admits 5-6 patients on a busy night. She states that "I've been lucky to work with such a supportive and hard-working team."

On a personal level, Movsesyan added that she feels COVID has not affected her as much because she is a young professional, but she has done her part to be careful coming home after the hospital and making sure not to expose others further due to the nature of her job. "Some days are more difficult than others," she says. "It is definitely difficult to see so many patients being admitted with COVID continue to have worsening progression of their illness, and at times not even making it out of the hospital. This takes a mental toll on healthcare professionals, myself included, working in these environments." On a positive note, family and friends have been extremely supporting, constantly checking in to see how she is doing. The Farm Grill, the restaurant owned and operated by her mother, Hasmik Movsesyan's, has not only fed her but provided catering to her colleagues.

Movsesyan seemed cautiously optimistic about the future. She stated: "In all honesty, it is hard to predict what will happen, and we're figuring it out as we go. I can definitely say we've had a significant decrease in COVID cases, and Michigan did a wonderful job in preventing further hospitalizations/deaths. I know the medical/scientific community will learn from all of this and we will continue to be more innovative going forward."





COMMUNITY NEWS

# Ambassador Nersesyan Comments on the Recent Border Crisis

CRISIS, from page 1  
ador said, and artillery fire resumed.

Armenian forces were able to destroy two tanks firing mortars toward Tavush, shoot down 13 drones, and kill many members of the Azerbaijani special forces unit attempting to advance to Armenian territory, while an Azerbaijani drone struck an Armenian truck on a humanitarian mission. No Armenians were killed.

By July 20, there was relative calm and the ambassador expressed his hope that this would turn into a more solid ceasefire.

The Background

Nersesyan stated that Armenia did not start the recent clash, despite Azerbaijani claims to the contrary. He declared that to understand this incident, the broader context must be examined. He said, “It happened as part of an entire campaign from Azerbaijan—bellicose rhetoric, attempted blackmail of Armenia and propaganda. This is not a one-time occurrence.” Most significantly, on July 6, less than a week prior to the start of the attacks, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan proclaimed on television that the Minsk Group’s activities were meaningless and threatened to resolve the Karabakh issue militarily. Nersesyan said, “So what happened was the direct responsibility of the Azerbaijani authorities.”

Nersesyan pointed out that Azerbaijan consistently has refused the proposal of the Minsk Group co-chairs to establish a mechanism of detection of ceasefire violations, which was proposed in 2016 in Vienna. If adopted, the number of monitors would have been increased along with the use of electronic devices to monitor ceasefire violations and determine the party responsible.

Armenia had supported this idea in order to stop the periodic shooting taking place on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, Nersesyan said, but Azerbaijan evidently “was afraid that it would be caught.” The lack of such a mechanism makes it difficult to provide direct proof about any particular incident.

Azerbaijan in general has been promoting a belligerent approach in the region, Nersesyan said, and even ignored the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’s call for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 crisis. It carried out a large-scale military exercise with 10,000 military personnel and hundreds of tanks and combat artillery this May.

Furthermore, Nersesyan said, in the aftermath of the original incident, attacks were undertaken by Azerbaijan against various civilian infrastructures, including a factory producing masks which are necessary during the COVID-19 crisis. Buildings in several Armenian villages near the border were damaged, including a kindergarten in Aygepar village. Nersesyan said that luckily so far only one Armenian civilian has been wounded but much physical damage has occurred. The full evaluation of the damage will be completed within a week’s time. Restoration of 12 houses has already started, he added.

Nersesyan said that while in the Artsakh Republic the terrain gives Armenians the advantage of higher positions versus the Azerbaijanis, in Tavush, the geographic range is varied and does not give an advantage to either side.

The spread of COVID-19, Nersesyan said, was a factor of course in the current situation. On the one hand, the situation in Armenia was under control as the health care system was able to cope with it both in the general population and the army. Thus, he said, “It does not create obstacles for the armed forces to work for the defense of Armenia.” On the other hand, he remarked, “Neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan need a war under COVID.”

Nersesyan said, “What we need is a responsible partner, one who can uphold its own positions and commitments. We have seen that Azerbaijan is noncommittal with respect to its own agreements.”

He pointed to the breach of the arrangement for a ceasefire on July 16 and exclaimed, “How can you consider it a reliable partner when only a few hours after the ceasefire was arranged it breached it again? It dispatched a group of 100 special forces soldiers toward the position

called Anvakh (“Fearless”) position in Tavush, though it was repulsed, with heavy losses. This is not good for anyone.”

He also observed that on July 16, a spokesman of the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry threatened to bomb the Metsamor Nuclear Plant in Armenia. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia stated in this regard, “With such statements the leadership of Azerbaijan acts as a menace to all the peoples of the region, including its own people,” he noted.

The good news, Nersesyan said, is that the

no longer able to target Armenian and Nagorno Karabakh soldiers because the latter already possess certain types of surveillance equipment.

While regretting all loss of life, Nersesyan said, “What happened is the consequence of Azerbaijan’s own actions. The Republic of Armenia is ready to immediately defend and use proportionate force to counter any encroachments on the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh. The losses Azerbaijan suffered are the results of Azerbaijan’s own aggression.”

He concluded, “I am proud that the armed

Lebanon and North Africa, he continued. “We have seen what Turkey is doing in other regions and now it is playing destructive role in the South Caucasus. This is a serious threat to international peace and security. The international community should not turn a blind eye to Turkey’s conduct. This is once again proof that Turkey cannot play any mediation role in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict whatsoever.”

Nersesyan remarked that the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the US House of Representatives and the Senate last year has a



Destruction in Nerkin Karmiraghbyur village of Armenia

fighting was still localized. He said, “We are cautious and watching carefully. We don’t need a local provocation to turn into a major fire. That is why we are calling upon the international community and the co-chairs of the Minsk Group to take decisive steps to restrain Azerbaijani aggression and force Azerbaijan to return to the negotiating table. We are not interested in an escalation of the conflict.”

Armenia Continues to Defend Itself

Until the ceasefire is consolidated, the ambassador declared, Armenia is ready to defend itself resolutely. He said, “Our intention is not to escalate and continue the spiral of this vicious circle, but it takes two to tango. We cannot deescalate unilaterally. We need to deescalate together. We hope that the international community will take the appropriate measures.”

He said that it may be true that Azerbaijan has much greater numbers of military personnel and equipment. “But,” he emphasized, “this fight is not about the size of military forces. It is about effectiveness, quality, professionalism and determination. As the recent fighting demonstrated, and also the April 2016 war, despite this enormous accumulation of military equipment and manpower, Azerbaijan was not able to utilize it to achieve success. The armed forces of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh have learned through the decades of this ongoing confrontation to fight in this asymmetric warfare and have the necessary skills, knowledge and strategy to fight and defend their land.”

He also pointed to the reforms and modernization that Armenia conducted after the April 2016 war, which intensified after the Velvet Revolution. Armenia obtained, for example, certain types of combat aircraft and antimissile defense systems which allowed it to shoot down drones in the recent fighting. A couple of weeks ago, even the Defense Minister of Azerbaijan complained in an interview that Azerbaijan was

forces of the Republic of Armenia were able to fulfill their duty 100 percent.”

International Relations

When asked whether Armenian-Russian relations remain strong after the Velvet Revolution, Nersesyan replied that “Armenian-Russian relations are developing according to their normal dynamic nature and I don’t think they have deteriorated whatsoever.” On the other hand, he said that Azerbaijan is disseminating false propaganda when it claims that Armenia is trying to deliberately get Russian intervention (just as with the case of the CSTO).

Nersesyan said that Russia plays an important role in the resolution process along with the US and France as Minsk Group co-chairs, and Armenia fully supports this format of negotiations. Armenia continues to develop relations equally with the European Union, Russia the United States, and all other partners.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a statement on July 15 urging a ceasefire, just like the Russian Federation or the Minsk Group collectively. There is one general concern with the international response in this situation. Nersesyan said, “We would have preferred that the international community call things by their own names—namely, that they hold accountable the party responsible for violations.”

There is also a neighboring state which is a destabilizing regional power. “Since the outbreak of this violence by Azerbaijan,” said Nersesyan, “Turkey has issued extremely unhelpful rhetoric and statements. This was at all levels, president, minister of defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and others. The bottom line for all these statements is that Turkey threatens to intervene on behalf of Azerbaijan directly and indirectly.”

This is similar to Turkey’s destabilizing role in the Eastern Mediterranean, in Libya, Syria,

modern day significance for the regional security because Turkey continues to pursue the same hostile intentions and policies toward Armenia as in the past. When Turkey’s leaders declare readiness to sacrifice their lives for Azerbaijan and support for whatever decisions their Azerbaijani brothers will take, Nersesyan wondered, “How should one read those statements?”

Tavush and the Diaspora

Nersesyan said that the people of Tavush Province are the real heroes of the current situation. He said, “They are themselves the defenders of their land. They are so confident that they will continue their lives there and develop their lands, though Azerbaijanis constantly shoot at them when they go out to do agricultural work.”

The provincial governor of Tavush announced that the government will immediately work to restore the houses damaged in the bombings and shootings. Those which cannot be repaired will be replaced by new houses. Nersesyan said that this shows the top priority given by the Armenian government to the development of border provinces like Tavush.

In the short-term, Nersesyan reassured American Armenians, the Armenian government is able to provide its population with all the necessary assistance under the current circumstances. However, for the mid- to long-term, he said, it is very important for the Armenian diaspora to invest in Tavush and other border regions to develop infrastructure and create jobs so that the people can continue to live on their lands and peacefully progress.

Nersesyan also praised the ongoing lobbying activities of the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America in Washington.



# Arts & Living

## NAASR to Stream lecture On Photography, the Ottoman State, and Armenian Immigration

BELMONT, Mass. — The Ararat-Eskijian Museum, Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will present an online lecture on Sunday, July 26, at 5 p.m. (Eastern U.S. time) by Prof. Zeynep Devrim Gursel titled “Portraits of Unbelonging: Photography, the Ottoman State, and the Making of Armenian Emigrants, 1896-1908.” This event will be held live on



Prof. Zeynep Devrim Gursel

Zoom (registration required) and streaming on NAASR's YouTube channel.

“Portraits of Unbelonging” investigates the history of Ottoman Armenian emigration from the Ottoman east to the United States

from the politically fraught and often violent 1890s to the end of Abdülhamid II's reign in 1909. Between 1896 and 1909, Ottoman Armenian subjects could emigrate legally only if they renounced their nationality and promised to never return to the empire. Having their photograph taken was a key step in the process. These photos recorded their “renunciation of nationality” and became one of the first uses of photography to police borders anywhere in the world.

The goal of “Portraits of Unbelonging” is to link an Ottoman Armenian past to an American future to create a double-sided history of migration. Gursel follows the stories of emigrant families over a century through official documents, ship manifests, and family photo albums. This involves traveling all



One of the photographs of Prof. Zeynep Devrim Gursel

around the United States to meet with descendants of those photographed and hear what became of the families first encountered in the Ottoman archives.

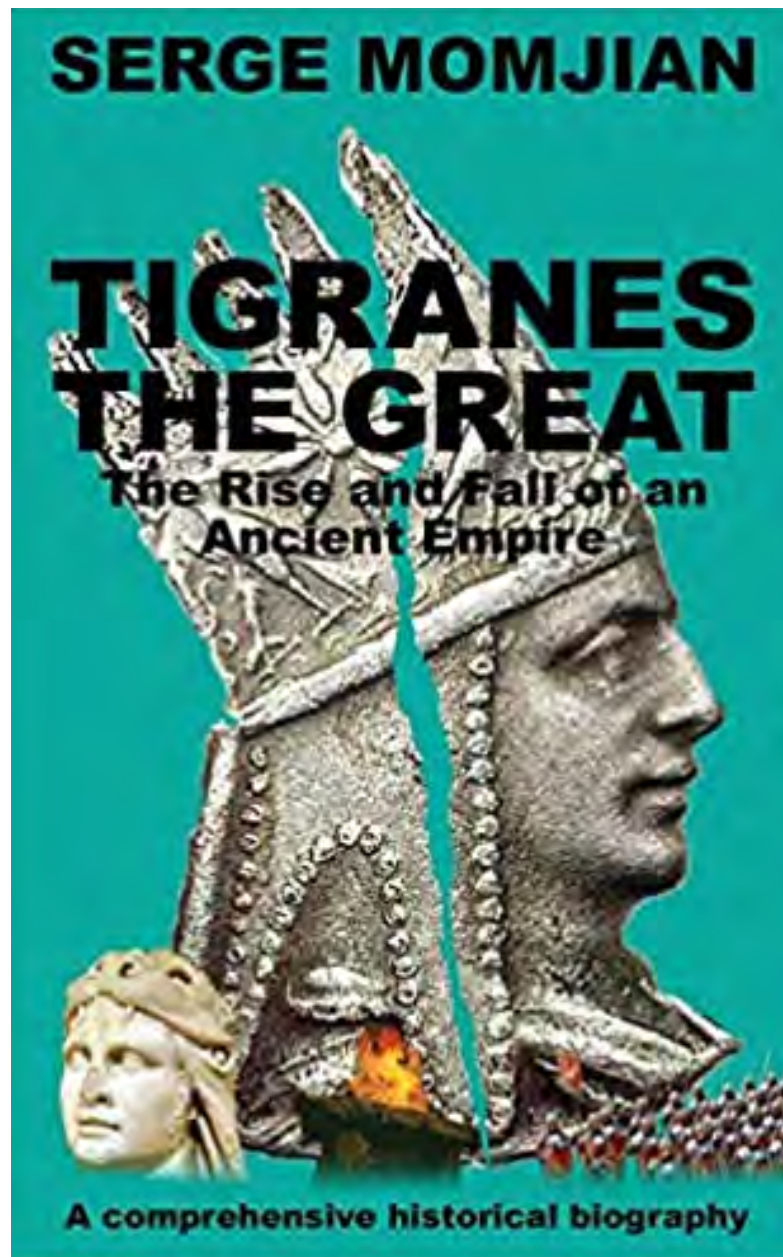
Gursel is a media anthropologist and associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers University. For more than a decade she has been researching photography in the late Ottoman period. She is the author of *Image Brokers: Visualizing World News in the Age of Digital Circulation* (Univ. of California Press, 2016) and the director of the award-winning ethnographic film *Coffee Futures*.

Zoom Registration Link:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_oLkAvrJxQDGiaV8l\\_AZAnA](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_oLkAvrJxQDGiaV8l_AZAnA)

NAASR YouTube Channel Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies>



## New Book Published On Tigran the Great

LONDON — Author Serge Momjian in June released his most recent book, titled *Tigranes the Great: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Empire*.

Tigranes the Great ruled the Kingdom of Armenia from 95 to 55 BC. He formed a close alliance with Mithridates VI, Eupator and King of Pontus, to secure each other's flanks from the expansion of Rome.

Tigranes' troops, commanded by his generals, entered Mesopotamia and annexed the northern dynastic kingdoms under Parthian rule, turning them into his vassals. One invasion was followed by another in what became a growing imperial war of conquests. Those victories enabled him to take the Achaemenid proud title of “King of Kings,” after which he conquered the crumbling Seleucid kingdom and lands as far south as Phoenicia.

Around 70 BC, Tigranes reached the summit of his fame and glory as his kingdom was transformed into an empire, stretching from the Caspian Sea in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. It was only a matter of time before Lucullus, followed by Pompey, marched their legions into Tigranes' dominion and reduced it to its original borders.

This book is a gripping account of the royal life and fate of this audacious Hellenistic king, who has left an everlasting mark in the annals of history. It provides valuable and crucial insights into the motivations leading up to the invasion of his empire and some corroborated dialogue that brings the main characters to life.]

Serge Momjian was born in Beirut in 1946. He moved to London in the 1970s and studied journalism then took a degree course in creative writing. He has worked as a reporter, covering arts and culture for major publications, including Beirut's *Daily Star* (the Middle East's leading English-language newspaper) and London's *Events* magazine. His feature articles have been translated and published in the Armenian press. By the time he reached his forties, he was devoting his time to writing novels. His works, all published in the United Kingdom, include *Conflicting Motives*, *The Invisible Line*, *The Singer of the Opera*, *Memories of the Past*, *Komitas: The Artist and The Martyr*, and *Gateway to Armenia*. In recognition of his biographical Komitas book, which included dialogue for the first time and was written in commemoration of the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, he was awarded the William Saroyan medal in 2015 by the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia. During his literary career his innovative writings have brought him praise.

*Tigranes the Great* is released by Heddon Publishing. It is available from: Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Ingram Spark and many online retailers.

## Armenian Cultural Hour of Providence Holds Series of Online Events

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The program Armenian Cultural Hour has been held every Friday by the Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian church's Cultural Committee over the past two months, and more than 10,000 people have tuned in.

Every Friday, cultural and educational programs are presented, including concerts by noted Armenian performers from around the world, documentaries about Armenia, as well as monthly on-line meetings with Armenian doctors who deliver lectures and answer questions to an online audience.

The program has become very popular not only in America, but also in other countries of the world. Many famous Armenian singers and musicians have expressed a desire to perform at these programs. In this difficult time the program is available for viewing for free and for everyone.

To watch, a few minutes before the start of the next program, just click on the link, which is placed on the poster for each event. The information is also published on the sites of MENK, Easter Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, or Facebook of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, Providence, RI.

Konstantin Petrossian, the director of cultural and musical programs of the church, announced the following upcoming programs:

July 24 - “Meet with Armenian Doctors” - Dr. Vatche Seraderian, Dentist: “Implant Solutions in Dentistry”

July 31 - Superstars Inga & Anush Arshakyan's Concert “Menk Enk Mer Sarere”



Singers Anush and Inga Arshakyan

August 7 - Popular singer Papin Poghosyan “My Songs for You”

August 14 - Concert, featuring Joanne Mouradjian, soprano, Mari Panosian, piano

August 21 - “Meet with Armenian Doctors” - Dr. Gaiane Martirosian, Acupuncture

August 28 - Concert “Zepyoori Nman” - Janet Khalarian, popular singer

September 4 - Selected Armenian Songs by “Yerevan” Chorale & Orchestra

September 11 - Komitas Vardapet “Berlinskyan Badarak,” Premier presentation in US

September 18 - “Salute to Armenia,” Concert dedicated to Independence of Armenia, from Peter & Paul Cathedral, RI

September 25 - “Meet with Armenian Doctors” - Dr. Ara Sadaniantz, cardiologist

All programs start Friday at 7.30 pm. Those who cannot watch the program live will be able to view it on the same site on other days.





## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# The American Who Restored Hagia Sophia's Ancient Mosaics to their Former Glory

By Philip Chrysopoulos

BOSTON (*Greek Reporter*) – The mosaics of Hagia Sophia are world-renowned priceless artifacts not only of Greek Orthodoxy but also of Byzantine Civilization and Hellenism. What is lesser known is that the hagiographies inside the cathedral were restored by an American man



Whittemore at Mount Athos (back row, on the left), c. 1923

before it was turned into a museum in 1935.

The name Thomas Whittemore may not mean much to many, but the American academic and amateur archaeologist and restoration expert is the man responsible for the restoration of the Byzantine mosaics that adorn Hagia Sophia.

While the fascinating mosaics were covered and uncovered multiple times throughout its

1,500-year history, their present state owes a great deal to Whittemore.

In 1930, Whittemore founded the Byzantine Institute and in 1931 took over the responsibility of recovering the mosaics of Hagia Sophia after receiving the approval of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Ataturk, who turned Hagia Sophia into a museum four years later.

The arduous and painstaking work of restoring the historic Byzantine mosaics began in 1932 continued for about 18 years, long after the cathedral reopened as a museum.

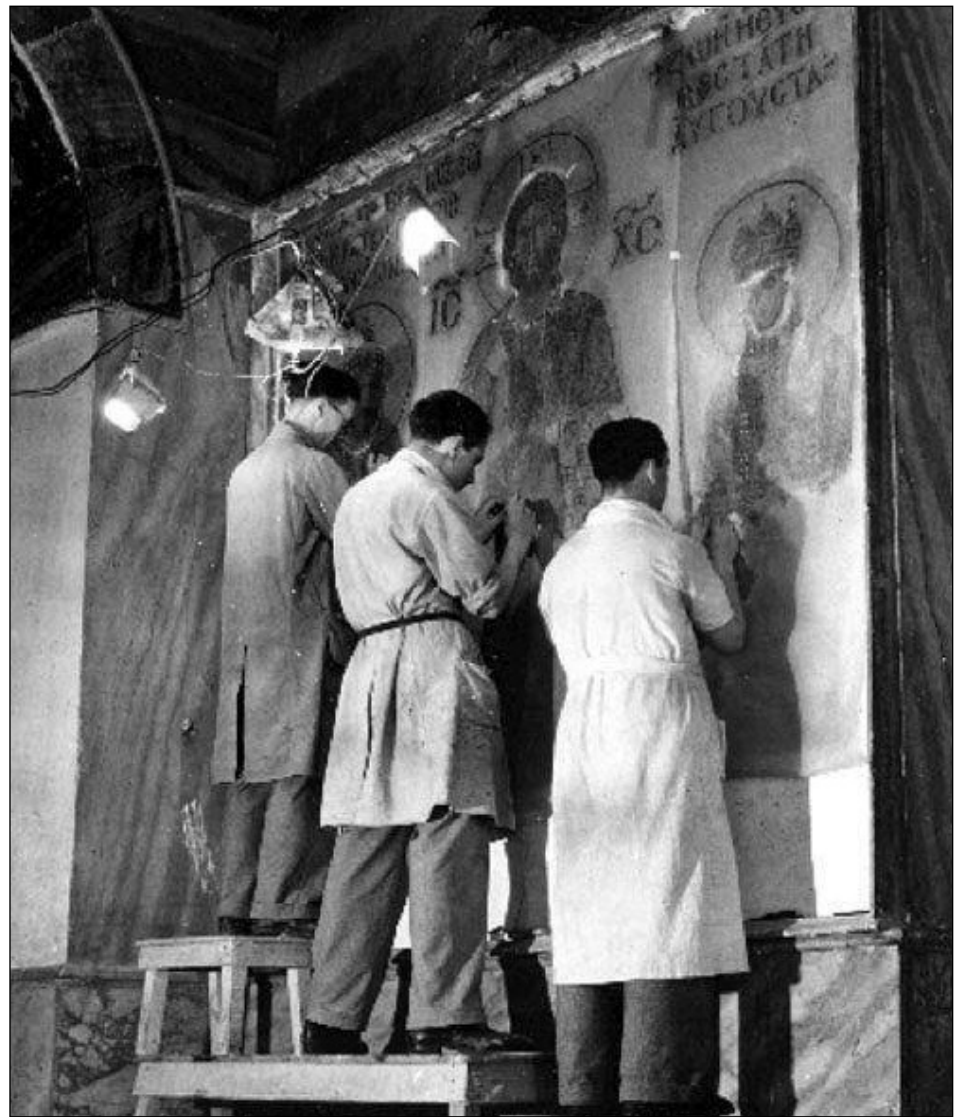
Born on January 2, 1871, Whittemore was the only child of real estate and insurance broker Joseph Whittemore and Elizabeth St. Clair Whittemore. He was named after his grandfather, the Reverend Thomas Whittemore, who had been a prominent minister and a co-founder of Tufts College in Boston.

Whittemore began his studies at Tufts in 1889, graduating in 1894 with a bachelor's degree in English Literature, whereupon he

was hired by the Tufts English Department. He enrolled in Harvard University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences to study fine arts. He introduced art, history and culture of ancient civilizations into the Tufts curriculum in the early 1900s.

While Whittemore never graduated from Harvard, his fascination with antiquity only

*continued on next page*



Whittemore's team works to restore Hagia Sophia mosaics and icons



Hagia Sophia's mosaic of Christ Pantocrator





ARTS & LIVING

from previous page  
grew. He made several trips overseas, taking a leave of absence from Tufts in 1908 to study architecture at the Sorbonne in Paris. He visited several countries in Europe, including England, Italy, Russia, Bulgaria, and Germany. Several scholars believe that he was influenced by Byzantine enthusiast Matthew S. Prichard, who was at the time an affiliate of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. In 1908, Whittemore was invited to teach a course on ancient Egypt and Greece as part of a summer program at Columbia University. In the spring of 1910, he became a docent in the Egyptian Department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. In 1911 he was named the American Representative for the British-run Egypt Exploration Society, and he then traveled to Egypt in order to assist with ongoing excavations. His new assignment forced him to resign

from Tufts. Whittemore returned to academia in 1927 when New York University invited him to teach a course on Byzantine art, making him an Assistant Professor. He remained at the University through 1930, the year he founded the Byzantine Institute. In 1931 he made the agreement with Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to restore the precious hagiographies of Hagia Sophia, the project turning into one of the most important restoration works not only for the Byzantine Civilization but World Civilization as well. In his own words, “Santa Sophia was a mosque the day that I talked to him. The next morning, when I went to the mosque, there was a sign on the door written in Ataturk’s own hand. It said: “The museum is closed for repairs.” Whittemore’s invaluable work was recognized by not only academia but the U.S. gov-



Mosaic of John Komnenos – Eirene – Alexios, 13th century

# Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian



## Cheese Beureks

Original recipe and photos are courtesy of Salpy Rozario at Salpy's International Kitchen food blog launched in 2013. Salpy regularly posts an amazing array of recipes at her international food blog like this special recipe for Cheese Beureks.

**BASIC DOUGH INGREDIENTS:**

- 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon fast-acting yeast (proofed with 1 teaspoon sugar and 1/4 cup of lukewarm water)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons powdered milk (optional)
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 large egg, beaten
- Enough water to make a soft, pliable dough
- 1 teaspoon sugar

**PREPARATION:**

Mix dry ingredients with the exception of the yeast in a mixer fitted with the paddle attachment; while mixing, add the proofed yeast, egg, oil and water until ingredients come together and form a lump, change the attachment to the dough hook, and continue mixing until you have a soft dough. Lightly rub the dough with some oil. Place dough in a large bowl, cover, and let it proof in a draft-free area until double in size; punch down the dough, cover and place in a draft-free place until doubled again.

**INGREDIENTS FOR CHEESE FILLING:**

- 2 lbs. white cheese, such as Panela or Queso Fresco or 1 lb. of each mixed together
- 1/2 lb. feta cheese (optional)
- 3 or 4 green onions, chopped
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons Italian parsley leaves, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon Aleppo pepper or smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

**EGG WASH:**

- 2 egg yolks beaten with 1 teaspoon sour cream to give beureks a golden color.

**PREPARATION:**

Break off a piece of dough depending on how big you want your beureks to be. Roll out on a floured surface. Place a good amount of the filling in the center of the dough, following the Illustrations in the photo if you wish to make a braided beurek, or you can just close the edges to form a triangle shape. Brush the surface with egg wash mixture. Bake in a pre-heated 375 degree oven until golden in color.

**Cheese Beurek:**

<https://www.facebook.com/SalpysInternationalKitchen/photos/cheese-beureksoriginal-recipe-by-salpys-international-kitchenmy-basic-dough-recipe/576617809157000/>

**Fried Cheese Beurek:**

<https://www.facebook.com/SalpysInternationalKitchen/photos/a.193881417430643/478032209015561/?type=3&theater>  
<https://www.facebook.com/SalpysInternationalKitchen/photos/cheese-beureksoriginal-recipe-by-salpys-international-kitchenmy-basic-dough-recipe/576617809157000/>  
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<https://www.thearmeniankitchen.com/search?q=salpy>



Thomas Whittemore supervising the restoration works at Hagia Sophia

ernment as well. In 1934, Harvard University appointed him keeper of Byzantine coins and seals at the Fogg Art Museum for one year. He was also appointed by president Franklin D. Roosevelt to represent the United States at the Byzantine Conference in Sofia in September of that year. In 1942, the *New York Times* noted Whittemore’s return to Istanbul for his “ninth year in uncovering Byzantine mosaics in the St. Sophia Museum”. In 1953, after Whittemore’s death, on June 8, 1950, the archives of his brainchild, the Byzantine Institute, were handed over to the Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database. (To see the original article, visit <https://usa.greekreporter.com/2020/07/14/the-american-who-restored-hagia-sophias-ancient-mosaics-to-their-former-glory/>)

# Calendar

## MASSACHUSETTS

**JULY 25 — Saturday, 9 a.m., “Labyrinth Walking: The Power and Health Benefits of Active Meditation.”** Facilitator: Armineh Mirzabegian, M.D., Internal Medicine, Reliant Medical Group, part of OptumCare; UMass Memorial Health Care. Virtual program of Friends of Armenian Heritage Park in collaboration with The Greenway Fitness Program. For link, email [hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)  
**AUGUST 22 — Saturday, at 9 a.m. “Labyrinth Walking: Connection between Movement and Wisdom.”** Facilitator: Kristin Asadourian, founder, KA Coaching. Virtual program of Friends of Armenian Heritage Park in collaboration with The Greenway Fitness Program. For link, email [hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)





## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Thelma Emen

## ‘We Armenians Must Learn to Support Each Other!’

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/STOCKHOLM – I first met the artist Thelma Emen in 1997, during the months I lived in Sweden, and then twice in Istanbul and Stockholm.

She was born in 1945 in Istanbul. There were remarkable people in her family: her grandfather’s uncle, Archimandrite Serabion Eminian (1823-1854), was a member of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Vienna, who published the French-Armenian-Turkish Trilingual Dictionary in 1853. Thelma’s father, Leon André Emen, a native of Constantinople, received his education as an architect and lawyer, but worked all his life in a medical lab. Her paternal grandmother, Araksi Kuchukian-Eminian, was a high fashion designer, while her mother, Sona Emen (née Puskulian), originally from Trabzon, was a cosmetologist, who played piano professionally, being a student of Istanbul’s prominent Armenian pianist Stepan Papelian.

Thelma Emen received her secondary education at the Pangaltı Mkhitarian School and the Austrian Lyceum in Istanbul. From 1970 to 1973 she studied at the School of Fine Arts in Istanbul. She has lived in Sweden since 1973. For many years, she worked as an sty teacher in two schools, and at the same time she taught in the evening classes of the adult school. She has regularly participated in exhibitions of Swedish artists, and has had solo exhibitions in Stockholm, Istanbul, Paris and Florida (USA). Her works are in the private collections of Sweden, Armenia, France, Switzerland, Austria, Norway, the Netherlands, the US, Canada, Egypt, Turkey, Kuwait.

“Thelma’s art is a game of flame, a game of imagination, color and motive. She presents her paintings as poetic surrealism. Thelma’s main motives are humanity, its life and destiny. Her paintings evoke a sense of freedom and irony in

father called the Armenian monastery on St. Lazar Island in Venice for an exhibition. And so I went to Venice and then to Vienna. On October 3, 1973, I had an exhibition at the Vienna Academy of Sciences with the help of a monk of Mekhitarist Monastery. I had three free months to stay in Europe. My most modern school friend, who had moved to Halmstad, Sweden, invited me to join her, and then persuaded me to do an exhibition in Halmstad. I set aside 43 paintings and opened an exhibition with the most important gallery manager of Halmstad. However, on the second day of the opening, when I went to the exhibition hall, I was greeted by the empty walls. They said a Dutch art dealer had bought all my paintings, but in the end I saw neither my 43 paintings, nor the money. With these expectations I stayed in Sweden. and I am still here.

**And it seemed to us that such things do not happen in the West. What can you say about today’s Swedish painting style?**

They have a very dark style and are always under the shadow of other great artists. As in the West in general, there is no painting in Sweden in the pure, true sense of the word. Modern Swedish drawing is an impulse. The artists do not have a path in their minds: they draw without any idea about the result. If they manage to paint something, it will be ok, if not, they paint a new one on the old one. And continue to do so. If a painting fails to sell for a long time, a new one is drawn on it, and if it will not be sold, another one will be drawn on it and all the time like this.

**And what does Thelma Emen express in her paintings?**

Different things. For example, my irreconcilability toward acts against human freedom. I am a person of my century, so in my art I want people know what kind of problems the artist’s contemporaries have had during that period. Thus, I make my own philosophy, my own policy in my four walls: if the others accept, it is ok, if not, it is their business. The painting is a part of me, something that walks with me since my childhood. I love life, I love people, I cannot remain indifferent to the injustices of the world, and my motives come from that.

**And how does a painting come to be?**

For me, first the idea is born, then the title, and then the painting. Many times an idea can stay in my mind for a long time, it will mature, and suddenly I start working. At the same time, I should have mental harmony in my life to create a painting, big or small. Of course, I make sketches for my big paintings.

Only the abstract paintings are born spontaneously: you cannot draw sketches for abstracts. The human impulse is abstract itself.

**As a teacher, when did you experience the greatest satisfaction?**

In 2001 schools all over the world were given the task of building “The Ship of the Future.” Everyone would make an installation about what is important for the future. Rågsved’s school in Stockholm gave me the assignment to do this installation. I think that cooperation is one of most important things for us. I presented my idea, which was to paint a blue ribbon around our municipality of Vantör. First we presented the project at Älvsjö Mässan exhibition center. My colleague Kjell Olsson and I painted on the ground a 15-km-long blue ribbon around Vantör municipality. At the inauguration, all students from Vantör schools came and stood hand in hand on the blue band on the ground.



Thelma Emen painting featuring Rouben Mamoulian and Greta Garbo

Finally, from many countries, including Armenia, people gathered at Ericsson Globe in Stockholm. Everyone built their own installation in 48 hours. When they finished building, I knit around everyone’s works a 15-km-long band. At the same time, upstairs of the Globe arena, my students exhibited their oil paintings. Over 1,000 oil paintings were made by my students from Rågsved and Snösätra schools, from the first and ninth grade.

**In 1984, you painted your “Mona Lisa,” proposing before American researcher Lillian Schwartz the hypothesis that it might be Leonardo’s self-portrait.**

Back in 1978, I drew a “Mona Lisa” where the landscape behind the woman was assimilated, as if it was passing through her. One day it was semi-dark in the room, and there were only bright colors in my picture. Under this chiaroscuro I saw that the bright colors represent Leonardo da Vinci’s famous self-portrait. It was just astonishing, so I began to wonder if Leonardo had painted himself in the image of Mona Lisa. And I soon found a way to prove my point. I painted Leonardo’s self-portrait on a piece of paper, then turned the paper over and after drawing a few lines on the face, Mona Lisa’s familiar features came in. After that Swedish television came and shot this story, but later they told me that they should not show it, as the value of the Mona Lisa supposedly would fall. A year later, all the Swedish newspapers wrote that an American woman had tried to prove with a computer that “Mona Lisa” was Leonardo’s self-portrait, something that I had already thought about without computers.

**Can you say what place Thelma Emen occupies in today’s Swedish painting?**

I joined the Swedish Artists’ Union after passing the jury. And I am the only non-Swedish artist in the Union. A circle of Swedish artists and art lovers know Thelma Emen as a unique black-hair lady, a kind of eastern touch. The same can be said about my paintings. My drawing style is Oriental, the Swedes consider my painting is totally differs from theirs. As you can see, the colors I use are not very bright, but in the eyes of Swedes they are very bright, that’s why they “stamp” me as Oriental. In Swedish painting they use cold colors widely: gray, white. but for me, neither white or black are colors – they are just the absence of a color. I am often misunderstood, the Swedes give wrong interpretations of my paintings. I will under-

stand that a Swede would never make a subject of painting, for example, marital infidelity. At the same time, I am indifferent to, let say, Viking mythology; I am not interested to draw its motives.

**Do you or the critics see anything Armenian in your paintings?**

They are not directly Armenian; I draw the difficulty of the whole world with a humanistic spirit, however, in the origin of my colors, the Armenian temperament emerges.

**An exception is, perhaps, your painting, “Tribute to Greta Garbo and Rouben Mamoulian,” which depicts these Hollywood legends in the background of the banners of Sweden and Armenia. Thelma, the Eminian family has an interesting history; there are famous Eminians in Malta.**

With my daughter, Medi, we contacted the Eminians of Malta. In the 1960s, a man named Eminian from Venezuela visited Istanbul and gave him documents about their family tree, reaching back to the Armenian kingdom. My great-great-grandparents were knights. They later moved to Malta, and then a branch of the family moved to Turkey. My father kept all these documents, but they have been lost after his death in 1978. Many in my family have been mathematicians or painters. My sister is a mathematician and I am an artist. Now the only people that have survived from the Turkey branch of Eminian family are me, my daughter and her daughter. And although my granddaughter’s father is Swede, we wrote her surname Emen to extend the name of our family a little more.

**When you first came to Sweden in 1973, there were very few Armenians. Their number have increased in the last 50 years. Do Armenians living in Sweden know you?**

Some people do. For instance, years ago I designed the cover of a book of poetry by Garo Hakopian. A few years ago, I had an exhibition at the Armenian Embassy. Ambassador Artak Apitonyan greeted me very warmly, and several Armenians came. I gave an invitation to the new ambassador for my exhibition this year, but unfortunately it did not work out. We Armenians must learn to support each other!

**And what are you working now on?**

Now I am writing a book! It will be a fiction book in Swedish about my life story. It begins from the 19th century. How World I controls the families of World II.



Thelma Emen

the world around him,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of Sweden’s leading newspapers, wrote in 1984.

**Dear Thelma, how did you become an artist?**

I started drawing when I was six years old. In the beginning, I drew watercolors. Then my father showed my watercolors to a well-known Turkish painter, who did not believe that I had drawn them on my own. Later, I learned the technique of oil painting from Anahid Apkaryan, a graduate of Istanbul Art Academy. My first participation in a group exhibition was at the Getronagan Armenian High School of Istanbul in 1969, then next year – at Istanbul Modern Gallery, where I met Professor Serif Akdik.

**How did you find yourself in Sweden?**

Professor Akdik would come to my house and watch what I drew. One day he said: “My daughter, you have to go to Europe.” On it, my





## COMMENTARY

## EDITORIAL

# The Media War after the War

By Edmond Y. Azadian

After Azerbaijan was dealt a defeat by Armenian forces following the former's surprise attack on Armenia, it dealt itself another self-inflicted wound by threatening to bomb the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant in Armenia.

That statement put a severe dent in its media campaign machinery in defense of its aggression against Armenia's Tavush region.

There is much speculation in global media outlets about the cause of this flare-up at this particular junction. Many analysts believe that the Azerbaijani attack was an initiative to test Armenia's military treaty with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) countries, whose signatories are Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

However, there are also indications that Azerbaijan is experiencing painful domestic unrest, which has forced President Ilham Aliyev to direct public discourse toward the enemy outside its borders. (See related stories on Page 1.)

Whatever the reason for the unprovoked attack on July 12, Azerbaijan suffered a setback and a humiliation which it is trying to neutralize through a media war, combined with political actions.

On the Armenian side, this unwelcome war boosted the morale of the people and its armed forces, along the awakening

of worldwide diasporan solidarity which was expressed through political demonstrations, media coverage and push for legislative actions.

The collective movement came to disprove the self-defeating belief that Armenians are not capable of mobilizing and politicizing their worldwide forces.

If the intent of the war planners in Ankara and Baku was to probe the validity of the CSTO, they failed in their attempt, because Armenia did not appeal to Russia nor to the CSTO for help. It retaliated against the aggression through its own armed forces and even managed to improve its strategic position on the line of contact.

On the contrary, Azerbaijan cried uncle and sent a delegation to Ankara for consultations.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, whose name had already made headlines across the world last week when he led Turkish expedition forces into Libya, received Azerbaijani Defense Minister Ramiz Tahirov, who is also the country's air force chief.

Akar assured the Azerbaijani delegation that "the pain of the Azerbaijani Turk is our pain. We want you to know that any kind of difficulties that you feel there are also felt here very deeply. The blood of our Azerbaijani bothers will not remain unavenged."

The meaning of that warning is not lost on anyone. However, the international community is aware who owes blood to whom and in what quantity.

In an article published in Al-Monitor, journalist Amberin Zaman states: "Getting tough with Armenia also plays to [Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan's nationalist base as he seeks to revive his sagging poll numbers amid the country's worst economic downturn since his Justice and Development Party came to power 18 years ago."

To the question of whether Turkey will make good on its threats by its military involvement in the conflict, Zaman responds: "The prevailing consensus among analysts is however, that Turkey has no interest in another hot war on its borders."

Thomas de Waal, a senior fellow at Carnegie Europe and the author of the 2003 book Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War, one of the most authoritative books on the conflict, told Al-Monitor that Erdogan is "interested in exploiting any situation he can, [he] is more interested in a war of words than a war of guns" and that "Azerbaijan doesn't really want a war either."

These predictions may hold true for the short term. Perhaps Azerbaijan sincerely wishes to avoid a full-scale war, particularly after its recent experience. But, Erdogan's ambitions for a new Turkish-centric empire may not recognize any limits. Many of his acts of aggression toward neighboring countries were once thought to be impossible but Erdogan achieved them and there has been no stopping him.

When war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan, most of

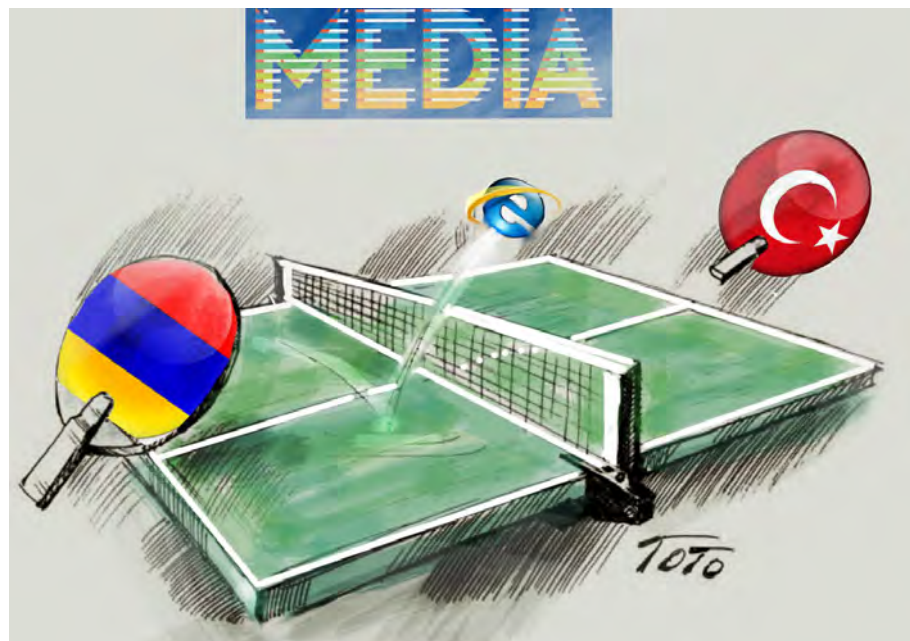
those in other major capitals called for restraint on both sides. However, after Erdogan publicly lent his support to Azerbaijan, both Moscow and Washington, as fellow members of OSCE, called for negotiations instead. Even Iran, which publicly maintains a neutral stance toward the warring parties, allowed some criticism of Turkey in its state-controlled press. It is in Iran's interest to have Armenian forces on its border rather than Azeri ones.

When the Karabakh defense forces took control of territories outside Karabakh in 1994, the Armenian-Iranian borders were extended at the expense of the Azerbaijani territory, from where the Israeli spying network operates.

The spontaneous reaction of the diaspora Armenians revealed the potential – whether or not fully used – of Armenians to sensitize or impress world public opinion. That is an untapped resource which needs further cultivation to become a political force.

Kim Kardashian, who has begun to use her incredibly popular social media presence to support social justice in the US, in recent years, has thrown her full support behind Armenian causes. This time around, she informed her 179 million Instagram followers that Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense is threatening to bomb her father's ancestral homeland. She further underscored in her message that "Congressional amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act will be voted on next week to ensure that the US does not enable Azerbaijan with military aid that would be used against Armenia and Artsakh."

She added, "I stand with my fellow Armenians."



No less supportive was another celebrity, Cher, who commented in her Twitter feed on a post about Azerbaijani threats to strike Armenia's nuclear power plant. They have been killing Armenians since before I went there. We turn a blind eye. They have oil."

Unfortunately, the Armenians did not have the same success with another noted Armenian, media giant Margarita Simonian, head of the Russian RT network, and one of the closest confidants of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A person so close to the center of power had to be won over at any price. Instead, the social networks were full of rude and crude insults, to the point of aggravating her into an ugly reaction on her television channel. Admitting to be a part of the Armenian nation, she criticized those close to the ruling elite for their unsavory behavior and anti-Russian rhetoric. There are very few levelheaded people who do not believe that such a powerful resource should have been handled with kid gloves. Yet the barrage of insults continues, costing us a valuable asset.

Another heartening event was the reaction of Moscow Armenians to the war of apricots. The apricot is Armenia's national fruit. It is in our art, history and gastronomy. It is practically a symbol of national pride, and known in Latin as *prunus armenicus*.

The apricot is one of the major exports of Armenia to Russia. Following the Tavush war, when the Armenian trucks arrived on July 16, Moscow's Food City Market for distribution, they were not allowed to be unloaded. It is believed that the market is partially owned by an ethnic Azeri.

To add insult to injury, Azerbaijani youth bought a few pallets of apricots and began to stomp on them publicly. The news raced through Moscow and nearby cities. The Armenian-owned Tashir market welcomed the trucks as Armenians waited in line to buy the apricots for their own consumption and to donate to Russian charities. Then a festival ensued in front of the Armenian supermarket, on a Moscow street close to the Kremlin.

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# Mirror Spectator

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## COMMENTARY

# Armenian Americans and the Construction of Whiteness



**Janice Okoomian**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

As people who once suffered genocidal racism, Armenian Americans are ethically obligated to oppose racism wherever we find it. Anaïs DerSimonian made a strong case for why Armenian Americans should support the Black Lives Matter movement in the June 4th issue of the Mirror-Spectator as did Razmig Sarkissian and Alik Ourfalian in the June 1 edition of Asbarez (<http://asbarez.com/194482/why-we-should-support-black-lives-matter/>). We are living through an extraordinary era, in which members of the public are becoming better informed about systemic racism, and it is heartening to see so many Armenian Americans taking an interest. In order to fight racism we must understand how racism functions in the US and how each of us is positioned in relation to it.

It remains to be seen whether the current Black Lives Matter demonstrations will result in meaningful reform, not only of policing, but of all the other systems and structures that sustain and reproduce racist domination in our country. In order for us to understand the relevance of Black Lives Matter to our lives, it is essential for Armenian Americans to understand the history of our own racial status in the United States. When in 2002 I published an academic article on this topic (<https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/facultypublications/437/>), it did not make much of a splash. All these years later, however, when Armenian Americans are becoming interested in our racial status, my article has become salient, as indicated by the number of requests I am receiving for copies of it.

What is race, anyhow? Most people think that race is an objective or essential trait that we were born with, so when we identify our race (on a government or employment form, for instance) we are merely stating a preexisting truth. But in fact, it works the other way around. Multiple social institutions (governmental, educational, business, entertainment media) “construct” your racial status. Scholars from multiple fields (including evolutionary biology, anthropology, and sociology, to name a few) have demonstrated that it is a total fiction. Common sense understandings of racial categories, based on physical features, language, or culture, simply do not have any grounding in objective or scientific fact.

Scholar Ian F. Haney-Lopez uses the term “fabrication” to indicate just how artificial racial constructions are. And yet, even though they are fabrications, racial categories are powerful indexes of social power, almost always involving domination of some racialized groups by others. It is important to understand that racism is woven into our social structures. What that means is that racism resides not only in the attitudes, beliefs, or intentions of individuals but also, and more subtly, in social structures themselves, which function to perpetuate white supremacy and privilege. Even if we as individuals oppose racism in our minds, we end up contributing to systemic racism by interacting with everyday institutions.

It is also important to understand that most of us have little or no ability to choose our racial status ourselves. Especially for marginalized peoples, race is determined from the outside. You cannot put your race on and take it off at will, as you would a hat or a garment. Instead, racial categories are created and constantly reaffirmed by the legal, judicial, educational, and other social structures and processes that we encounter every day. Those structures and processes shape or influence the consciousness of individual people, who then ascribe race to others based on the way they look, talk, behave, or worship.

It is easy to determine which racial category most Americans fall into. But for some of us – Armenian Americans as well as a number of other groups – it is not so clear. We seem to be not really people of color, but also not quite white, at least not in the way that most people mean when they refer to racial whiteness. Consequently, it is not easy to understand how we fit into the racial economy of the US.

I became interested in thinking about Armenian Americans and race while I was a doctoral student in American Civilization at Brown University in the 1990s. Amongst a cohort of students and faculty who were thinking deeply about race and its complexities in the US, I began to interrogate my own racial position. We were also beginning to think about whiteness as a racial category (rather than a neutral or non-category), but what we understood about whiteness was entirely based on characteristics of Euro-Americans and reflected only parts of my experience. I wanted to understand how Armenian whiteness is different from Euro-American whiteness, and to do that I dove into the legal history to discover how and when Armenians came to be considered white.

The first big wave of Armenian immigration to the United States took place during the first two decades of the twentieth century, which coincided with the period of the Asian Exclusion Acts. Beginning in the 1880s, the United States passed a series of laws whose intent was to exclude or limit the immigration and naturalization as citizens of “Asiatic race.” These laws were aimed mainly at the Chinese, who had worked on the transcontinental railroads as laborers but whom the US did not want to settle permanently on American soil, thinking them “unassimilable.” Because Armenians (along with Lebanese, Syrians, and others) came from the continent of Asia and were generally darker-skinned than Americans of European descent, some argued that they too should be considered part of the “Asiatic race” and thus excluded from

immigration and/or naturalized citizenship.

The claim that these Asian immigrants were not white resulted in a number of lawsuits in which the legal racial status of each group was adjudicated. Two of these cases concerned Armenian Americans, in re Halladjian (1909) and U.S. v. Cartozian (1925). Interestingly, in Cartozian Harvard anthropologist Franz Boas took the stand as an expert witness, testifying that race is entirely a social construct and that, therefore, there was no such thing as an “Asiatic race.” Had the judge accepted Boas’ argument, it could have led to the abolition of all racial designations under US law. But of course, this did not happen. In both cases, the judge found that Armenians were white, but their logic still relied on “common sense” understandings of race. The reasons Armenians were deemed white were that a) Armenians were thought to be more like Europeans than Turks were; and b) it was thought that they would assimilate into US culture, i.e. lose the marks of difference that make them look and behave like non-Europeans, through intermarriage, learning English, etc. This logic was based on the idea of the “melting pot,” the conception, popular in much of the early- to mid-twentieth century, that immigrants’ differences (in foodways, dress, speech, etc.) would melt away over time. In other words, you can be accepted here, as long as you agree to give up the distinctive practices of your culture. Religion and skin color were considered aspects of a person that would not melt, and so Muslims and people with very dark skin were considered unassimilable. The bottom line is this: the very discourse (the cases, the logic used in the cases) that granted Armenians legal whiteness was part of the discourse that excluded other Asian immigrants. Although we did not ask for this, our whiteness was established on the backs of others who were deemed not white.

So Armenian Americans are fully implicated in the politics of race in the US. The fact that our ancestors were not slaveholders, that most of our families weren’t even here until after Reconstruction, or that we are not descended from those who colonized this continent by committing genocide of its indigenous peoples, does not absolve us from responsibility for the privilege conferred by our legal whiteness.

In recent years I have seen some lively and sometimes heated discussions in online forums about whether Armenians are white in the US. Legal status meant that Armenians could immigrate and naturalize, but it did not guarantee that they would not be subject to racist behavior, as many other white immigrant groups (the Irish, the Italians, etc.) have experienced. In the 1930s, Armenian

American raisin growers in California were called “raisin n—s” by white raisin growers who resorted to violent harassment to prevent the Armenians from participating in the raisin business. When I was young and growing up in a very white town, I was made to feel how different I was and those experiences had a lasting negative effect on me. I have heard convincing testimonies from some recent Armenian Americans that they have sometimes been treated like people of color. However, many Armenian Americans have been able to be accepted as white, through dress and behavior, which means that most of us are treated as white, with most of the attendant privilege whiteness confers. By contrast, most people of color are never able to pass as white, and thus race affects almost every area of their lives.

It is equally important to be mindful that for people of color, race is not chosen. We Armenians might indeed want to call ourselves people of color out of a desire not to be aligned with white racism; we might feel a connection and desire for solidarity with the struggles of people of color based on some parallel elements of the Armenian experience in our homeland; we might want to reject Eurocentric cultural imperialism. But these perceptions are internal. If you are able to choose what race you identify with, you have an important element of white privilege and you are probably white.

And yet in the end, things are not all that black and white. Armenian Americans inhabit a racial borderland – not Euro-white, not African-descended, not “Asian” in the sense most people think of it (East Asian or South Asian), despite the fact that our ancestral origins are in Asia; and not quite “Middle-Eastern” (if we are Middle-Eastern, then who is Near-Eastern?). The borderland can be a frustrating place to be, neither one nor the other; but it can also be a fertile ground which can lead us to develop a more complicated understanding of race. Precisely because we do not neatly fit into the racial calculus of the US, Armenian Americans can help to expose the arbitrariness of racial fabrication, as well as the problems of binary, black-white thinking.

We must not pretend that we can make race go away – we cannot wish it out of existence with claims like “I do not see race.” But the long road to racial justice can and should engage Armenian Americans who, from the vantage point of the racial borderland, can help ourselves and others to see race in more nuanced ways and ultimately to eradicate racism altogether.

Dr. Janice Okoomian is Assistant Professor of English/Gender and Women’s Studies at Rhode Island College.

## It's Not Safe to Insult Erdogan, Even from Lebanon

Ankara has successfully pressured Beirut into prosecuting a Lebanese talk show host for criticizing Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in his own country.

Criticizing Turkey’s famously thin skinned President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is a risky business.

More than 100,000 people have been investigated and at least 30,000 others have been prosecuted for “insulting the president” since Erdogan rose to the presidency in 2014.

The crime carries a penalty of at least four years in prison under Article 299 of Turkey’s penal code.

Veteran Turkish comedians Mujdat Gezen and Metin Akpinar are among the most recent targets for airing disapproval over Erdogan’s autocratic behavior in a 2018 television appearance.

Prosecutors sought up to four years and eight months in prison for the pair, who have entertained generations of Turks with their jibes at successive governments.

Now an ethnic Armenian Lebanese show host is to appear in court on Oct. 8 on similar charges, albeit in Lebanon, following pressure by Ankara on Lebanese authorities, in a further sign of how Turkey’s domestic fault lines are spilling beyond its borders and how Erdogan’s government is exploiting the divides to shore up support.

Nishan Der-Haroutounian, the host of a popular live program on Lebanon’s Al Jadeed TV, will face charges of “insulting Turkey” before the Court of Publications Chamber in Beirut.

Der-Haroutounian’s travails with Turkey began on June 10 when a caller dialed into his show and made derogatory comments about the TV personality’s Armenian roots.

The caller then went on to berate Der-Haroutounian for labeling Erdogan “an obnoxious Ottoman.” Der-Haroutounian retorted, “I am at complete liberty to call Erdogan and his regime obnoxious. A million and a half Armenians were killed.” He was referring to the mass slaughter of Ottoman Armenians in 1915, a massacre that for all of Turkey’s ferocious rebuttals is widely acknowledged as one of the earliest genocides of the 20th century. Lebanon’s estimated 150,000 ethnic Armenians are mostly descended from survivors of the genocide.

Soon after Der-Haroutounian’s outburst, a small but rowdy group that claims ancestry from Turkey’s southeastern province of Mardin gathered outside the station and began chanting anti-Armenian slogans. Lebanese pro-Turkish activist Mounir Hassan simultaneously posted a video online calling Der-Haroutounian an “idiotic dog” and “gay.” Hassan said, “We and our Turkish and Ottoman ancestors are proud of the massacre that our Ottoman ancestors carried out against the Armenians, because you deserve it.” The video went viral.

The Turkish Embassy sent a formal note of protest to the Lebanese Foreign Ministry saying Der-Haroutounian had exceeded the limits of free expression and demanded that the Lebanese media display the requisite respect for Turkey’s president and people. The ministry lobbed the ball into the Information Ministry’s court, saying that when professional ethics are overstepped and relations with foreign countries based on common interest are negatively impacted, steps in keeping with the relevant laws need to be taken. Prosecutors then accepted a criminal complaint filed by a local lawyer against Der-Haroutounian for insulting Turkey.

“That the Turkish government is attempting to export its policies of suppression and silencing to other countries is not new,” said Khatchig Mouradian, a lecturer in Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies at Columbia University. “What is new,” Mouradian told Al-Monitor, “is the zeal with which this is being pursued in Lebanon in recent months, at a time when the Lebanese people are facing a severe economic and political crisis and battling a pandemic.” “A century ago, the Ottoman Turkish state implemented a policy of exclusion – and genocide – against its own Armenian citizens. Today, Erdogan’s government is trying to label Armenians as ‘the other’ in Lebanon, one of the bright loci of Armenian revival after the genocide,” he added.

Lebanon was ruled by the Ottomans from the 16th century until the empire’s collapse in 1918.

Erdogan’s unabashed campaign to assume the mantle of sultan double turbaned as caliph is resonating among Sunni Arabs in Lebanon as well. When street protests broke out last year, some protesters were seen waving the Turkish flag and chanting “Our soul, our blood, we will sacrifice it to you oh Erdogan.” Sunnis worldwide were delighted by Friday’s news that the Hagia Sophia, the iconic Byzantine cathedral-turned-mosque-then-museum, has become a mosque again. Erdogan is expected to oversee inaugural prayers to mark the event on July 24.

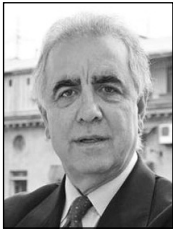
Garo Paylan, an ethnic Armenian lawmaker for the opposition Peoples’ Democratic Party, believes that the Der-Haroutounian saga mirrors Turkey’s own internal tensions, “which are reflected in its hinterland.” The difference, he noted in a telephone interview

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## COMMENTARY



## My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## Turkish Intellectuals Acknowledge The Armenian Genocide on TV Program

## Part II

Last week, I transcribed the first portion of a lengthy video in which two Turkish Intellectuals are advocating the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the Republic of Turkey. The discussion took place in 2015 on the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The conversation between Erdogan Aydin and Aydin Chubukchu is in Turkish with English subtitles on the video. The name of the one hour and 37 minute-long program is Tower of Babel. The title of the program is “Facing the Genocide.” The Turkish discussion was translated and subtitled in English by Ohannes Kilicdagi, PhD.

Aydin Chubukchu: “Of course it [the Genocide] did not start in 1915. First of all, the Ottomans had an unjust order on the basis of nations and faiths. There was a dominating nation and several others that were dominated. The dominating nation [millet], which denoted religious groups at older times rather than ethnicities, was the Muslims. So, the dominating nation was Sunni Muslims. All the rest, Armenian and Greek, in the first place, were the dominated nations. This is the language of the state. It is not something that we make up today to defame the Ottomans. This is the description used by the official literature of the time. Moreover, there was a distinct term used only for Armenians, loyal nation (milleti sadika). So, Armenians, who had a privilege among other dominated nations, stood very loyal to the sovereign system. They were unarmed, providing all services for the state, etc. They had such fame. In fact, this is an unpleasant situation

for a nation. No nation should be loyal; subservient to or dominant over another one. For us justice should be founded on equality be it yesterday or today. Equal citizenship, equal nations, fraternity of people.... There was a different standard; Ottoman standard. States like the Ottomans have such characteristics. They invade the land of others when they are strong. When invaded people awakened and the Ottoman state got weaker, they started to demand independence. Indeed, every Turk in Turkey should appreciate this. Turkey was founded by a struggle for independence. So demanding independence is a legitimate right for every nation: Greek, Bulgarian, Arab and Armenian.... These were wars of independence for sovereignty....”

Moderator: “Let us follow this line: the 1853-56 Crimean War, the 1839 Tanzimat Edict, the 1856 Reform Edict, the 1876 Constitution – the zenith of reform. Where were the Armenians at those dates?”

Aydin Chubukchu: “Those dates made it impossible for Ottomans to retain the old order based on the dominant-subservient nations. They had to issue Tanzimat and Reform edicts to be able to take credits from abroad. This is the critical point: after these edicts they would not call *giavours* [infidels] *giavour*. *Giavour* and Muslim would be tried in the same court. Sure, *giavour* is a bad word, we should not use it, but they called them so and this is the language that the ordinary man understands. Properties of those called *giavours* would not be confiscated. Accordingly, a relaxation came. But, this relaxation, instead of bringing peace to Armenians, unfortunately, exacerbated the tension. Why? Because the local power holders of the old, the dominant nation, started to provoke the Muslim people by saying: ‘what is happening? We are losing the sharia. Will the *giavour* be equal with us?’ Indeed, the state also connived these provocations. After a while, assaults against Armenians, especially by Kurdish, Islamists, Circassian organizations started. Upon this, Article 61 of the 1878 Berlin Treaty states that Armenians had been attacked and held the Ottoman state responsible for their protection. The Ottomans signed this. Moreover, let’s remember, against nationalist and Islamist prejudices. That the Berlin Treaty was prepared to protect the Ottomans. Otherwise, the Russians, who came until Yeshilkoy [Aya Stefanos], 20 kilometers near the center of Istanbul, would invade it. The Ottomans signed this, but, leaving aside informing [the Great

Powers], they continued to let the attacks by mentioned groups. They did not implement the reforms either. Let us imagine ourselves for a minute as Turks in Bulgaria, Uyghurs or Muslims in Bosnia. What would we want, if we were there? Security of life and property. Nobody should attack or harass us. So, the state assured the Armenians of the time the same thing that we would want in Bosnia, but did not keep its promise. The Ottoman rulers, Abdulhamid being in the first place, did not want to acknowledge the rights of citizens as such. Moreover, they did not want to give anything to non-Muslims. This is the essence of the problem. ...In fact, a just mind should defend the resistance of a people when their rights are attacked. Since we are captured by the mentality of slavery and an ideology that continuously exalts the state, we expect people to say nothing when the state does whatever it wants. But we do not follow the same logic for Bulgaria. If the victims are Turks and the oppressors are Bulgarians or Greeks then we do not accept it and defend resistance. We defend Bosnians against Serbs, rightfully, of course. But, likewise, when Armenians and Greeks demand their rights from the state, we say, ‘you rebels! You rebel against the state!’ Although this is a medical term and maybe should not be used in politics, but, it shows a schizophrenic, double personality. Justice necessitates that we should give people from different faiths and mother tongues what we want for those whom we associate with ourselves, in Bulgaria, Bosnia, Uyghur, Cyprus. Justice requires this. Kurds were used. But let us divide Kurds into two. One is the ordinary Kurds. The other is the lords, Kurdish powerholders, who aimed to get rich by extorting Armenian properties. Circassians were also used. They were driven from Russia by genocide. They lived through a heavy victimhood. The Ottoman state provoked Circassians against the Armenians in Turkey. It led them to take their revenge from the Armenians. In fact, we have numerous documents showing that some Circassians were used in this way. We should not praise or curse a people as a whole. This is what is called essentialism. All people have their good and evil, victims and oppressors. Collaborationists, disgraceful ones, exist in every people. We have to be sensitive to differentiate those among Kurds, Armenians Circassians and Kurds. Especially, we, who have a leftist worldview, should make this distinction more carefully.”

(Part III to be continued next week)

## The Media War after the War

MEDIA, from page 17

Russian Armenians, who number more than two million, have seldom shown organized political activity. If in this way they upheld the honor of apricots, Moscow Armenians can rally around an abstract idea or political cause, and we will have grassroots power on Russia’s political spectrum.

Protest rallies took place throughout Europe during which Armenian youth clashed with Azerbaijani demonstrators in front of Azerbaijani embassies in London and Washington.

Along with public demonstrations, legislative action also took place, particularly in the US Congress.

When legislators, governors or mayors are approached, these politicians have a way of resorting to political expediency by issuing generic statements.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti’s statement, however, broke from that anodyne mode. Perhaps the clout of a million-plus Armenians had weighed in so that he came up with a straightforward position, stating: “We stand with the Armenian community against violence. Azerbaijan must end its provocative and dangerous threats to strike Armenia’s civilian nuclear power plant and must admit international monitors.”

Also active were Armenian advocacy groups seeking political action. The Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America in Washington spearheaded the campaign to support an amendment by the Armenian Caucus in Congress to bring focus to Azerbaijani human rights violations. The amendment was included as part of a bloc package of over 100 amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act, requiring a report regarding Internally Displaced People in Ukraine. Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan, since 1991, ignoring atrocities in Baku and Sumgait, which resulted in mass deportations of some 300,000 Armenians. A statement released by the Armenians Assembly reads: “Given Azerbaijan’s \$3 billion Laundromat scheme to white wash its human rights record, as well as continue attacks against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, we commend Representative [Frank] Pallone for this timely amendment.”

As the threat of hot war looms over Armenia, the war of words continues in the news media and corridors of power in major capitals.

Turkey’s Pan-Turanic plans do not offer any hope for peace in the region. Azerbaijan is also dragged into adventures it can ill handle by its elder, reckless brother to play its part in mischief.

The retaliation against Baku’s aggression has angered both “brothers” to plan new attacks on Armenia. It is reported that Aliyev has dispatched Gen. Kerem Mustafayov, commander of forces in Nakhichevan, to Ankara for consultations, while Turkey has begun recruiting jihadists in Afrin, Syria, for renewed attacks on Armenia.

War is there for the long haul and it behooves Armenian soldiers on the front line to guard our historic homeland vigilantly, in lock-step with the youth around the world to win the war of words.

‘We Raise Our Eyes to Heaven;’  
A Message on Attack against Armenia

By Bishop Daniel Findikyan

Bishop Daniel Findikyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, issued this message on the assaults against Armenia’s northern border on July 16.

Beloved Faithful:

We have all been moved this week by the terrible news of the assault on Armenia’s northern border by the military of Azerbaijan, resuming their decades-long aggression against our homeland and its people.

The soldiers of the Armenian Armed Forces who risk their lives in defense of our independent nation have been valiant in their repulse of the border incursion. But tragically, four of their number – Junior Sergeants Grisha Matevosyan and Smbat Gabrielyan, Captain Sos Elbakyan, and Major Garush Hambardzumyan – lost their lives in the fighting. Armenia’s government has awarded them posthumous medals.

Our Catholicos, His Holiness Karekin II, in a touching expression of his role as father of all our people, traveled to the Tavush region where the incursion occurred, to meet in person with the troops, encourage their hearts, and preside over the funeral of Major Hambardzumyan.

In his message on that sorrowful occasion, His Holiness affirmed that we Armenians “are a people of peace; but we will forever reject any offense against our freedom and identity. We know that peace is secured and sanctified by the blood of our countrymen, who have sacrificed their lives for our holy homeland and our independence. In loving gratitude, we bow to the memory of those children who gave up their lives to protect our own.”

To those sentiments, one can only say, “Amen.” Today we as a Diocese, along with fellow Armenians throughout the world, stand with our Catholicos in his humane expression of consolation and resolve. We stand with our homeland in denouncing this week’s outrage against Armenian sovereignty and security. And we stand with all our countrymen in our grief over the loss of life, and the continuing endangerment of our peace-loving people.

We all know that Armenia has had to turn away such

attacks before—and by God’s grace our people have been more than a match to that heavy task. But the present attack reveals a new dimension in the enemy’s cruelty, as it comes during a time of universal hardship under a global pandemic. When the entire world is focusing its full attention on combatting a deadly virus, Azerbaijan has chosen to exploit this moment to afflict further pain and suffering on innocent people.

I would add, having journeyed to Tavush—where our Fund for Armenian Relief maintains many critical projects to relieve the burdensome poverty of the region—that its good people are especially vulnerable at this time. That they are now being subjected to assault, with their civilian centers targeted by Azeri rocket fire, is truly unconscionable. But though poor, the people of Tavush are strong and capable, as they have proven during earlier attacks. God grant them additional strength and protection in these times.

My dear people, let us offer that prayer together in these days of trial. Let us pray that our victorious Lord will bestow his protection on our homeland, and inspire even greater fortitude in our people. Let us pray for His Holiness Karekin II, the government authorities of Armenia, the men-at-arms who defend our country, and the citizens they serve.

Let us also support the cause in ways we can, by contacting our own political representatives, and insisting that the U.S. government should condemn the attack on Armenia, promote peace in the region, and withdraw support that would enable Azerbaijan to pursue its intolerant aims. (Below you will find links to further information and action.)

The events of the past days—adding to those of the past months—illustrate as never before the deep need humanity has for a heavenly Savior. For centuries, our people have recognized and embraced that Savior in the person of Jesus Christ, and he is with us now and always. We raise our eyes and voices to heaven to seek his will. As we approach the inspirational feast day of Vartavar, let all Armenian Christians, united in spirit, more fully open our hearts to the transfiguring power of God.

With my prayers,  
Bishop Daniel Findikyan  
Primate

July 16, 2020





COMMENTARY

# Israel Should Rethink Its Relationship with Azerbaijan

By Alex Galitsky

Azerbaijan’s burgeoning relationship with Israel has long been predicated on the false narrative that Azerbaijan is a “country of tolerance.” Azerbaijan has often paraded the existence of a small, but vibrant, Jewish community in the country as a testament to its commitment to diversity and tolerance.

However, Azerbaijan, a dictatorship based on petrodollars that has been ruled by the same family for over a half-century, is anything but that.

Azerbaijan, a close ally of Turkey and fellow denier of the Armenian Genocide, has actively sought the eradication of the region’s indigenous Armenian inhabitants and traces of their millennia-old civilization.

Throughout Soviet occupation, the Azerbaijani SSR denied cultural, political, linguistic and economic rights to the Armenians of Artsakh (also known as the Nagorno-Karabakh) and Nakhijevan, and in the late 80s and early 90s, Azerbaijani authorities started to engage in government-backed pogroms and massacres of Armenians in Azerbaijan to suppress calls for Artsakh’s independence. These pogroms also targeted Jewish communities, which began to flee Baku en masse in response to the increasing incidents of harassment.

Azerbaijan’s assault on the region’s Armenians ultimately culminated in a full-scale war which ended with a ceasefire that effectively secured the establishment of an independent and democratic Artsakh.

For the last 30 years, the Azerbaijani government has frequently deployed rhetoric advocating for the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Artsakh and the Republic of Armenia itself – regularly referring to Armenians as enemies of the state – and denying the thousands of years of Armenian civilization in the region.

Throughout the early 2000s, some 28,000 Armenian cultural monuments in Nakhijevan were destroyed by Azerbaijan as part of an unprecedented cultural genocide. Independent reports have also found that Armenophobia – or anti-Armenian sentiment – has become so entrenched in government, media, and state institutions that an entire generation of Azerbaijanis have grown up listening only to hate speech towards Armenians.

This dissemination and inculcation of hatred has incited shocking incidents of violence against

Armenians, including that of Ramil Safarov, an Azerbaijani soldier who murdered a sleeping Armenian soldier during a NATO English-language training program in Hungary.

Safarov was extradited to Azerbaijan six years into a life sentence handed down by Hungarian courts – but upon his arrival was pardoned, promoted in rank and lauded by the media as a national hero for doing his Azerbaijani patriotic duty by killing an Armenian.

Over the course of this week, Azerbaijan has engaged in major acts of aggression against the Republic of Armenia itself, targeting civilian populations with heavy artillery and drones. In Azerbaijan, tens of thousands came to the streets chanting “Death to Armenia” and calling for a war with Armenia. These scenes, the result of the Azerbaijani government’s decades of propagating Armenophobia, are all too reminiscent of the virulent antisemitism expressed in neighboring Iran.

The institutionalization of state-sponsored racism towards Armenians should be an immediate cause of concern for any nation that has not only experienced genocide, but continues to struggle against the promulgation of racist and discriminatory rhetoric by those who deny it its fundamental right to exist. But in addition to Azerbaijan’s flagrant disregard for minority rights, the country has also long worked against the strategic interests of Israel.

Azerbaijan has been found to have funneled substantial amounts of money into sanctioned Iranian businesses as part of the “Azerbaijani Laundromat” corruption scandal.

Similarly, Azerbaijan’s major oil pipeline is 10% owned by Iran – allowing the country to bypass international sanctions and to profit from

Azerbaijan’s oil industry.

Additionally, despite its overtures to Israel with respect to weapons contracts, oil supply and the monitoring of Iran, Azerbaijan has succumbed to regional pressure when it comes to issuing political support for Israel – particularly in the forum of the UN.

Azerbaijan has also refused to open an embassy in Israel due to regional pressure. On the other hand, Armenia has consistently taken tangible steps towards good faith relations with Israel – including a commitment to establish an embassy in Tel Aviv.

Given that Armenia has been made partially reliant on Iran due to the fact that 80 percent of its borders are under illegal blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan, it is clear that – unlike Azerbaijan – Armenia will not succumb to the pressure of malign regional actors when it comes to building relations with Israel.

Armenia, like Israel, has long fought for its very right to exist in a hostile region of states that would revel in its destruction, and has – against all odds – established vibrant democratic states in a sea of dictatorships.

The nations share a history dating back millennia, with Jerusalem being home to the first Armenian diaspora. So integral to the cultural milieu of Jerusalem, the Armenians occupy their own quarter of the Old City, separate from the Christian Quarter. Both nations are bound by the tragedy of genocide and survived its unimaginable horrors.

And it was thanks in large part to the contributions of prominent members of the Jewish diaspora that the world became aware of the torment inflicted upon Armenian people; from former US

ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau’s eyewitness accounts, Raphael Lemkin’s coining of the term “genocide” in reference to the Armenian Genocide and Holocaust, to the outspoken advocacy of Elie Wiesel and the monumental academic contributions of Israel Charny, Yair Auron and many others. Israel and Armenia are bound in many intangible, human ways that have prospered despite Israel’s refusal to recognize the Armenian Genocide, and its partnership with Azerbaijan.

Israel has chosen to take Azerbaijan at face value, accepting its oil in exchange for arms that have been deployed against Armenian civilians in ongoing border confrontations.

Peer beyond the facade Azerbaijan presents, and Israel will find a regime that has consistently supported its adversaries, and is hellbent on eradicating the region’s native Armenian population – a clear affront to what the promise of Israel represents; self-determination and sanctuary for the persecuted and marginalized.

Israel knows first-hand the challenges Armenia faces, and has long fought against the type of state-sponsored racism Azerbaijan propagates.

The two nations share an ancient history, and are bound by their experiences as long-stateless diasporic people whose resilience has allowed them to not merely survive, but to prosper. In light of this, it’s time for Israel to rethink its relationship with Azerbaijan.

(The writer is communications director of the Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region, the largest Armenian-American grassroots advocacy organization in the United States. This commentary originally appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* on July 21.)

## Would the Prophet Muhammad Convert Hagia Sophia?

By Mustafa Akyol

The recent decision by the Turkish government to reconvert the majestic Hagia Sophia, which was once the world’s greatest cathedral, from a museum back to a mosque has been bad news for Christians around the world. They include Pope Francis, who said he was “pained” by the move, and the spiritual leader of Eastern Christianity, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who said he was “saddened and shaken.” When contrasted with the joy of Turkey’s conservative Muslims, all this may seem like a new episode in an old story: Islam vs. Christianity.

But some Muslims, including myself, are not fully comfortable with this historic step, and for a good reason: forced conversion of shrines, which has occurred too many times in human history in all directions, can be questioned even from a purely Islamic point of view.

To see why, look closely into early Islam, which was born in seventh century Arabia as a monotheist campaign against polytheism. The Prophet Muhammad and his small group of believers saw the earlier monotheists – Jews and Christians – as allies. So when those first Muslims were persecuted in pagan Mecca, some found asylum in the Christian kingdom in Ethiopia. Years later, when the Prophet ruled Medina, he welcomed a group of Christians from the city of Najran to worship in his own mosque. He also signed a treaty with them, which read:

“There shall be no interference with the practice of their faith. ... No bishop will be removed from his bishopric, no monk from his monastery, no priest from his parish.”

This religious pluralism was also reflected in the Quran, when it said God protects “monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of God is much mentioned.” (22:40) It is the only verse in the Quran that mentions churches – and only in a reverential tone.

To be sure, these theological affinities did not prevent political conflicts. Nor did they prevent Muslims, right after the Prophet’s passing, from conquering Christian lands, from Syria to Spain. Yet still, the early Muslim conquerors did something uncommon at the time: They did not touch the shrines of the subjugated peoples.

The Prophet’s spirit was best exemplified by his second successor, or caliph, Umar ibn Al-Khattab, soon after his conquest of Jerusalem in the year

637. The city, which had been ruled by Roman Christians for centuries, had been taken by Muslims after a long and bloody siege. Christians feared a massacre, but instead found aman, or safety. Caliph Umar, “the servant of God” and “the commander of the faithful,” gave them security “for their possessions, their churches and crosses.” He further assured:

“Their churches shall not be taken for residence and shall not be demolished ... nor shall their crosses be removed.”

The Christian historian Eutychius even tells us that when Caliph Umar entered the city, the patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius, invited him to pray at the holiest of all Christian shrines: the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Umar politely declined, saying that Muslims might later take this as a reason to convert the church into a mosque. He instead prayed at an empty area that Christians ignored but Jews honored, then as now, as their holiest site, the Temple Mount, where today the Western Wall, the last remnant of that ancient Jewish temple, rises to the top of the Mount, on which the Mosque of Umar and the Dome of the Rock were built.

In other words, Islam entered Jerusalem without really converting it. Even “four centuries after the Muslim conquest,” as the Israeli historian Oded Peri observes, “the urban landscape of Jerusalem was still dominated by Christian public and religious buildings.”

Yet Islam was becoming the religion of an empire, which, like all empires, had to justify its appetite for hegemony. Soon, some jurists found an excuse to overcome the Jerusalem model: There, Christians were given full security, because they had ultimately agreed on a peaceful surrender. The cities that resisted Muslim conquerors, however, were fair game for plunder, enslavement, and conversion of their churches.

In the words of the Turkish scholar Necmeddin Guney, this legitimatization of conversion of churches came from not the Quran nor the Prophetic example, but rather “administrative regulation.” The jurists who made this case, he adds, “were probably trying to create a society that makes manifest the supremacy of Islam in an age of religion wars.”

Another scholar, Fred Donner, an expert on early Islam, argues that this political drive even distorted records of the earlier state of affairs. For example, later versions of the aman given to the Christians of Damascus allotted Muslims “half of their homes and churches.” In the earlier version of the document, there was no such clause.

When the Ottomans reached the gates of Constantinople in 1453, Islamic attitudes had long been imperialized, and also toughened in the face of endless conflicts with the Crusaders. Using a disputed license of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence they followed, they converted Hagia Sophia and a few other major churches. But they also did other things that represent the better values of Islam: They gave full protection to not only Greek but also Armenian Christians, rebuilt Istanbul as a cosmopolitan city, and soon also welcomed the Spanish Jews who were fleeing the Catholic Inquisition.

Today, centuries later, the question for Turkey is what aspect of this complex Ottoman heritage is really more valuable.

For the religious conservatives who have rallied behind President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the past two decades, the main answer seems to be imperial glory embodied in an absolute ruler.

For other Turks, however, the greatness of the Ottomans lies in their pluralism, rooted at the very heart of Islam, and it would inspire different moves today – perhaps opening Hagia Sophia to both Muslim and Christian worship, as I have advised for years. Another would be reopening the Halki Seminary, a Christian school of theology that opened in 1844 under Ottoman auspices, went victim to secular nationalism in 1971, but is still closed despite all the calls from advocates for religious freedom.

For the broader Muslim world, Hagia Sophia is a reminder that our tradition includes both our everlasting faith and values, as well as a legacy of imperialism. The latter is a bitter fact of history, like Christian imperialism or nationalism, which have targeted our mosques and even lives as well – from Cordoba to Srebrenica. But today, we should try to heal such wounds of the past, not open new ones.

So, if we Muslims really want to revive something from the past, let’s focus on the model initiated by the Prophet and implemented by Caliph Umar. That means no shrines should be converted – or reconverted. All religious traditions should be respected. And the magnanimity of tolerance should overcome the pettiness of supremacism.

(Mustafa Akyol is a senior fellow on Islam and modernity at the Cato Institute and the author of the forthcoming book *Reopening Muslim Minds: A Return to Reason, Freedom, and Tolerance*. This commentary originally appeared in the *New York Times* on July 20.)

## It’s Not Safe to Insult Erdogan

INSULT, from page 18with Al-Monitor, is that while in Turkey, those targeted cannot hit back at the government and its supporters “because of the climate of fear,” in places like Lebanon especially, “where you have communities from Turkey who bear the scars and traumas of generations past,” the fight “gets ugly on both sides.”

Erdogan and his far-right nationalist allies thrive on stirring such divisions to consolidate their base. The cynical exercise in vote peddling was on full display in the run-up to the 2017 referendum on switching Turkey’s long running parliamentary system for its current superpresidency, concentrating power in Erdogan’s hands. Violence erupted as Erdogan’s lieutenants toured EU countries delivering incendiary speeches before large Turkish communities to drum up support.

Erdogan’s unremitting campaign against Kurdish groups at home and in neighboring Iraq and Syria has escalated tensions between diaspora Turks and Kurds. In late June, Kurdish and Turkish protesters clashed in Vienna for three days. Austria’s Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg accused Turkey of “pouring fuel on the fire.” Further confrontations between the sides erupted again last week.

Austria’s conservative Prime Minister Sebastian Kurtz seized on the “imported conflict” to justify his clampdown on immigration. “We see in France where it can lead if integration policy goes wrong,” he said.

(The above analysis originally appeared on the news website Al-Monitor on July 7.)