Activists Hope To Put End to Gold Mine

By Mateos Hayes
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — On August 20, a hot Thursday afternoon, scores of demonstrators from the Armenian Environmental Front (AEF) and the Save Amulsar movement assembled in front of the Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. The rally was composed of Yerevan locals and a group of activists and concerned citizens from the southern resort town of Jermuk, who had travelled to Yerevan in a 200-car motorcade organized by Save Amulsar. The goal of the rally was simple: to raise awareness of the environmental threat to Amulsar, and to protest government inaction.

Delivering several speeches over megaphone and leading the crowds in chants of “Amulsar, Miayn Sar” (Amulsar must remain a mountain), the rally’s organizers led demonstrators on a march from the Opera down the sidewalks of Mashtots Avenue and past the shop fronts of Northern Avenue, before bringing the rally to the Armenian government’s front door on Republic Square.

AEF organizers repeatedly reminded attendees of the rally to respect social distancing and wear masks, and these rules were mostly observed.

Over the course of the rally, demonstrators were shadowed by a veritable army of Special Unit police officers who surround- ed the peaceful demonstrators and blocked the entrances to government buildings. Speeches were routinely interrupted by loudspeaker announcements from police patrol cars, reminding demonstrators to maintain social distancing and to don masks in accordance with the law. Rally goers in turn tried to drown out the PA announcements with the chanting of slogans and the sound of drums. Demonstrators from Jermuk were photographed by police officers, and a few individuals were ticketed for not wearing masks. All of this combined to produce a frosty government reception for the environmental activists.

Armenian Art through the Gaze of Western Institutions

By Isabelle Kapoian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BOSTON — Conscientiously attributing artistic and cultural goods to their creator, culture and nation state is dependent on nuanced analyses. Dr. Christina Maranci, Arthur H. Dadian and Ara T. Otemel, Associate Professor of Armenian Art at Tufts University and author of The Art of Armenia: An Introduction, mentions one of the many ways to iden- tify a work is by its provenance: the chronological histo- ry of its ownership which, in some cases, can be traced back to the artist. Another identifi- er is its similarly- monikered provenance, or the geo- graphical and archeological final spot. Key indicators specific to a cultural- al tradition, cre- ative process, artis- tic movement, group of people, or a record of the artist such as their signature can also be used. Visual similarities to other known works, often in

Teens Face Life Issues During Pandemic

By Ani Belorian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BOSTON — For months now, teenagers all over the country have been trying to adapt to a drastic new reality.

Because of their malleable ages, high school students have been uniquely impacted by the pandemic. Moreover, they have had to adapt to the lack of socialization, which is one of their priorities.

Although adults have borne the brunt of the slowing of time, adolescents have also experienced this new situation. With sports, extracurricular activities, homework, and increasingly challenging classes on their minds, until the lockdown, teens rarely had time to spend with family and friends, or just do nothing. It’s a strange feeling, realizing that there is literally nothing to get done by the end of the day. Probably none would have minded the idea of hav- ing nothing to do, but now, the novelty of freedom has passed.

Armenian Soldier Taken Prisoner by Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — An Armenian army offic- er was taken prisoner by Azerbaijani forces over the weekend in disputed circumstances.

Armenia’s Defense Ministry said the junior offi- cer, Gagik Alaverdyan, lost his way due to “extremely unfavorable weather conditions” as he was about to inspect an Armenian frontline position on the evening of August 22. It did not specify whether the position is located on the Armenian- Azerbaijani border or the “line of contact” around Karabakh.

The Azerbaijani military claimed, meanwhile, that its troops deployed in the Goranboy district just north of Karabakh captured Alaverdyan while fight- ing back an Armenian commando attack early on Sunday.

Shushan Stepanyan, the spokeswoman for the Defense Ministry in Yerevan, dismissed the claim as “disinformation.”

“The only reason to pretend that the officer who lost his way as a saboteur,” said Stepanyan. “They are just trying to portray the offi- cers who lost his way as a saboteur.”

As of Monday, August 24, it was not clear whether the Armenian government had asked re- presentatives the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit Alaverdyan in Azerbaijani custody or ascertain his whereabouts. The ICRC has offices in Baku and Yerevan.

Rising Democratic Star Mari Manoogian of Michigan Gets a
Aeroflot to Launch Twice-Weekly Flights

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Aeroflot will start operating flights twice a week, every Thursday and Saturday starting August 27.

Tickets for the flights operated on Thursdays and Saturdays from Yerevan’s Zvartnots Airport to Moscow’s Sheremetyevo Airport can be purchased only by those citizens who will continue their flights from Sheremetyevo Airport to Los Angeles, Shanghai and European counties.

According to a decision of the State of Emergency Commander of Armenia, during the current state, those who arrive in Armenia must self-isolate for 14 days. The isolation period can be reduced with negative test results.

US to Provide Additional $1.43M to Address COVID-19 Impact

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) – The United States Government has committed an additional $1.43 million through the US State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID) to address the impact of COVID-19 in Armenia, USAID Armenia Office reports.

In total, the US government has committed more than $41 million in emergency assistance to Armenia in FY20. The United States is providing support by coordinating with the government of Armenia, international humanitarian partners and other stakeholders to identify priority areas for investment.

In addition to the aforementioned COVID-19 assistance, the United States has invested more than $1.57 billion in total assistance to Armenia over the past 20 years, including nearly $106 million for health, the source said.

Armenia Economic Activity Shrank 10.2 Percent in July

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – Economic activity in Armenia shrank by 10.2 percent in July on-year-on-year, data from the National Statistical Service reveals.

Economic activity in the country has contracted as a result of a lockdown imposed in mid-March in a bid to contain COVID-19 outbreaks. Though the state of emergency has been extended several times, most restrictions have been removed.

In July, construction and trade declined by 19.5 percent and 10.4 percent, respectively, while the industrial sector contracted by 2.3 percent.

Foreign trade turnover decreased by 14.3 percent year-on-year, exports and imports were down by 5.9 percent and 18.6 percent, respectively.

Average salaries, meanwhile, grew by 2.5 percent in the reporting period.

Villagers Block Road Leading to Teghut Copper Mine

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) – Around 100 residents of Teghut village gathered at a checkpoint to Toghtop copper mine on Monday, August 24, presenting their demands to the owners of the copper mine, Hetq.am reports. The residents are demanding to offer job places for the locals or return the lands bough by the operating company.

According to sources, the villagers are also demanding that the owners provide compensation to pensioners from nearby Teghut and Shnogh villages for the damage done to the environment and health problems from Teghut’s operation. An example is their point to financial compensation offered to popula- tion living nearby Artsvanik tailing pond in Syunik province.

According to the report, the Head of Shnogh community Davit Ghumashyan and the head of regional police arrived at the scene to hold talks with protesters.

The mining activities at the Teghut deposit were suspended following the ELARD report, which the Armenian government appeared to side with Lydian. The mining company is considering litigation against Armenia in a $-billion investor state dispute settlement (ISDS). Such corporate court cases are often handled via a process of secret tribunals whose decision cannot be appealed. Since this means that Armenia – whose allotted government budget in 2020 was $4 billion— could face up to 2 billion dollars in fines, this threat has been quite a potent weapon for Lydian.

Government Response/ political division.

Following the 2018 Velvet Revolution, the government was generally uncooperative with Lydian. It refused to remove the blockade and temporarily suspended Lydian’s rights to operate in Armenia, pending an environmental audit of the Amulsar mine by an international consultancy group. The consultancy group hired for this audit, Earth Link and Advanced Resources Development (ELARD), released its report to the public in a live teleconference in August of 2019. In summarising its findings, ELARD found that the data collected by Lydian in surveys of Amulsar was insufficient for a mining project of the proposed size. Furthermore, it found that Lydian had used this incomplete data to make oversimplified and unsupported conclusions.

The report also found that the potential risks of water pollution were small and could be mitigated. In this vein, ELARD issued 16 recommenda- tions for Lydian concerning mitigating measures. Following the release of the ELARD report, the Armenian govern- ment appeared to side with Lydian, as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced his intention later in August to restore rights of operation. Pashinyan argued that the ELARD report proved conclusively that the risks of water contamination were minimal and could be mitigated. To continue on next page
Activists Hope to Put End to Amulsar Gold Mine

New Chapter of International Psychology Honor Society Founded at Yerevan State University

YEREVAN — At Yerevan University (YSU) installed the nation’s first chapter of Psi Chi: the largest honor society, with over 750,000 students as life members of Psi Chi.

Membership Lisa L. Norman (Tennessee), Dr. Ani Kalayjian (New Jersey), Professor Harold Lydian out of the country would reduce the incentive for foreign investment in Armenia. According to a spokesperson of Lydian, the company had already invested more than $1 billion in the project. However, activists argue that continued operations would further harm the environment.

In the final analysis, it was the rally-goers’ determination to maintain democracy and ensure the rule of law that convinced the authorities to issue a statement on Sunday, October 17. The statement stated that Lydian would now become compliant in its mining operations.

Several people interviewed from both sides expressed their opinions on the situation. Anna Nikoghosyan of AEF stated, “the government has all the necessary facts and reports to unconditionally close Lydian’s mine.” Nikoghosyan also pointed to Lydian’s dealings in Georgia and their lack of an established reputation as further red flags.

Prime Minister Pashinyan at one point supported the mine by stating that booting Lydian out of the country would reduce the incentive for foreign investment in Armenia. But the rally-goers were not swayed by this argument. They called for the closure of the mine, saying that it was a real threat to people’s health and to the environment. As one self-proclaimed queer activist named Artak explained, “We all know this mine is a real threat to people’s health and to nature. We must defend our land and our mountains, as we have lost so much [land]. We cannot lose more.”

Intersectionality

An interesting aspect of this rally was that it revealed a wide range of different causes finding common purpose in the Save Amulsar movement. Whilst the most prominent factor of demonstrators was environmentalists, the rally also included a significant number of LGBT activists. This issue resonates with other activist groups due to the common themes it shares. In their minds, the movement to save Amulsar is also a movement to preserve democracy, and to ensure the dignity and health of all human beings.

In other words, the rally-goers seek more than just to save a mountain; they seek to normalize a narrative in Armenian society that values the lives of people over profit, that elevates the voices of the voiceless, and calls to account those that abuse their power. As one self-proclaimed queer activist named Artak explained, “This movement affects all vulnerable people, and all those who oppose a lack of privacy, and police brutality. In the eyes of demonstrators, the post-revolution government had squandered a great deal of good will on this issue, not only by siding with Lydian, but also by remaining generally silent. As Nikoghosyan, an AEF activist, explained, “We are very disappointed with our government; our MPs, and our PM [Pashinyan]. They have had time to see the truth, but they aren’t holding Lydian accountable. This is quite embarrassing, and it shows that real democracy lives in Amulsar, not in Yerevan.”

The rally-goers believe that the time will tell if all that glitters is gold in the outcome of this crisis.

Wings of Tatev to Host Schoolchildren

YEREVAN — Wings of Tatev, the world’s longest reversible aerial tramway (5,752m), announced this week a special offer for schoolchildren and kids from orphanages, who will get free access to the ropeway. The special offer is available from August 25 to September 15, BNK Foundation said in a statement.

Children will get unforgettable memories and experiences from magnificent landscapes, Vorotan Gorge with its panoramic view and the aerial tramway soaring above the Tatev Monastery Complex.

Wings of Tatev, an aerial ropeway included in the Guinness World Records, has been operating since 2010. It is one of the landmarks of Armenia, contributing to development of local infrastructures and boosting domestic and international tourism.

Over the 10 years, it has hosted around 1.1 million visitors.

The abrupt decline in the tourist flow due to this year’s Coronavirus pandemic requires additional funding from the founders to cover operational costs. However, Wings of Tatev continues the flights and offers attractive packages for visitors and guests.

Ahead of the 10th anniversary of Wings of Tatev schoolchildren and kids from orphanages will be able to also visit one of the most famous religious, cultural and enlightenment centers of Armenia, the 9th-century Tatev Monastery Complex. This will not only become an adventurous trip for the little schoolchildren but also a journey into Armenia’s history, culture, religion and educational traditions. To boost domestic tourism, Wings of Tatev has arranged various special offers this year. For instance, in July we announced a special offer for visitors getting 4 tickets at the price of 3. It especially increased family travel to Tatev,” said Director of Wings of Tatev Vahe Baghdasaryan.

And Destructive’

“Destabilizing and Destructive Approaches are causing serious concerns to our partners in the Middle East, the Caucasian region, and the European region. This is an agenda that has already been formed, and our future action should be the subject of our political discussions in the Security Council, the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and today’s session will address the issue among other agenda items,” Pashinyan said.

The most important record we have to make is that the Republic of Armenia is in a position to meet the emerging security challenges. At the same time, we must set ourselves the task of improving the country’s security environment every week, every month and every year,” the Armenian prime minister concludes.

Officials in Armenia and Turkey, the two neighbors with no diplomatic relations and a closed border, have exchanged accusatory statements on a number of regional affairs during the past two weeks.

The most recent statement concerned Ankara’s effort on the search of natural gas and oil in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. The Azerbaijani government views as illegal and hostile.

Intersecting Dimensions

As one self-proclaimed queer activist named Artak explained, “This movement affects all vulnerable people, and all those who oppose a lack of privacy, and police brutality. In the eyes of demonstrators, the post-revolution government had squandered a great deal of good will on this issue, not only by siding with Lydian, but also by remaining generally silent. As Nikoghosyan, an AEF activist, explained, “We are very disappointed with our government; our MPs, and our PM [Pashinyan]. They have had time to see the truth, but they aren’t holding Lydian accountable. This is quite embarrassing, and it shows that real democracy lives in Amulsar, not in Yerevan.”

The rally-goers believe that the time will tell if all that glitters is gold in the outcome of this crisis.

The abrupt decline in the tourist flow due to this year’s Coronavirus pandemic requires additional funding from the founders to cover operational costs. However, Wings of Tatev continues the flights and offers attractive packages for visitors and guests.

Ahead of the 10th anniversary of Wings of Tatev schoolchildren and kids from orphanages will be able to also visit one of the most famous religious, cultural and enlightenment centers of Armenia, the 9th-century Tatev Monastery Complex. This will not only become an adventurous trip for the little schoolchildren but also a journey into Armenia’s history, culture, religion and educational traditions. To boost domestic tourism, Wings of Tatev has arranged various special offers this year. For instance, in July we announced a special offer for visitors getting 4 tickets at the price of 3. It especially increased family travel to Tatev,” said Director of Wings of Tatev Vahe Baghdasaryan.

“Destabilizing and Destructive Approaches are causing serious concerns to our partners in the Middle East, the Caucasian region, and the European region. This is an agenda that has already been formed, and our future action should be the subject of our political discussions in the Security Council, the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and today’s session will address the issue among other agenda items,” Pashinyan said.

The most important record we have to make is that the Republic of Armenia is in a position to meet the emerging security challenges. At the same time, we must set ourselves the task of improving the country’s security environment every week, every month and every year,” the Armenian prime minister concludes.

Officials in Armenia and Turkey, the two neighbors with no diplomatic relations and a closed border, have exchanged accusatory statements on a number of regional affairs during the past two weeks.

The most recent statement concerned Ankara’s effort on the search of natural gas and oil in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. The Azerbaijani government views as illegal and hostile.
Turkey Starsve Syria's Northeast of Water as Tents 300,000

By Amberin Zaman

Turkey – It has once again cut water supplies to the region of northeast Syria, and the autonomous administration says Ankara is taking deliberate action. The decision to cut off the water supply from the Alok pumping station near Ras al-Ain on August 13. The station provides drinking water to around 800,000 residents and is also the main source of water for tankers supplying potable water to a broad area, with the inner displacement of Syrian and Islamic State prisoners and roadblocks, the eighth such stoppage since Turkey invaded Ras al-Ain in the wake of its mil- itary operation against US-backed Kurdish forces controlling the area in October 2019. Alok was rendered inoperable during the Turkish invasion and service has been only partially restored. “Sporadic water force the population of Syria’s northeast to resort to unsafe alternatives, endangering their lives on top of their fight against COVID-19,” the statement read. “Suspending the Alok water station puts the lives of hundreds of thousands of people at risk, according to the Rojava Information Center, a research organization that publishes reports on northeast Syria. There is mounting worry about the pandemic spreading in the area. The local School of Economics predicted in a recent study that the number of cases nationwide could reach two million by the end of August. Nasirin Brahmi, a 22-year-old woman in Hassakeh who contacted Al-Monitor through the Rojava Information Center, said, “We haven’t had water for the past 25 days. In this situation, with the virus spreading and the water cut off, we are unable to take any precautions against the coronavirus. The media tells us that we have to wash our hands every half an hour, but when water is unavailable this makes it very expensive to purchase, and that’s if you actually find someone who is willing to sell it.”

The autonomous administration accuses Turkey of using water as a weapon in its goal of forcing the Kurdish forces to withdraw from its territory covering 1,100 square kilometers (680 square miles) in northeast Syria currently under Turkish control. If Turkey were to have its way, people living under Kurdish rule would continue to face restrictions on water as a means to help Turkey placate Syrians living under its own occupation. The stoppages are seen as part of a broader Turkish effort to suffocate the Kurdish- dominated autonomous administration through a mix of political, economic and military pressure. As it starves the area of water, Turkey has kept its attacks against Syrian opposition groups with artillery and strike drones. Mohammad, the Washington representative of the Syrian Democratic Council, told Al-Monitor that the administration had “an urgent meeting with America and the SDF, they believe something my country is willing to sell.”

Ignatius Aphrem II said, “Using water as a weapon – which is not the first time this happened – is a clear indication of fundamental human rights. Yet, there has been no response from the international community to this atrocity despite the constant appeal of the peo- ple of the region.”

This article by Amberin Zaman orig- inally appeared on the website almoni- tor.com on August 24.

Turkey Re-Converts Istanbul's Church Museum into a Mosque

ISTANBUL (Alhayat) – Turkey has ordered the reconversion of Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia church museum into a mosque. The move comes as a museum since 1935, into a mosque and opened it to worship, to a presidential decree published in the Official Gazette on Friday, August 21. The decree states that the site has been transferred to the administration of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) and will be opened for Muslim worship in accordance with Islamic practice. In the Establishment and Duties of the Presidency of Religious Affairs. The move comes as a similar decision to reconvert Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia into a mosque from a museum, located in Istanbul’s historic Fatih region. The Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora was constructed as part of a monastery complex in the 5th cen- tury during the Byzantine era. It was converted into a mosque around 590 years after the Ottoman conquest of the city in 1453. It was changed into a museum by a Council of Ministers decree in 1935. In November 2020, Turkey’s Council of State – Turkey’s highest administra- tive court – ruled that the 1935 decision to change the status of the museum was unlawful. But the change in its status to a mosque had not been implemented until Friday.

In July, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also announced the opening of the Hagia Sophia as a mosque following the Council of State’s ruling that the building’s conversion to a muse- um by the previous government’s founding state- man was illegal. The Hagia Sophia, originally built as a Byzantine cathedral, then became a mosque following the Ottoman con- quest of Istanbul on May 29, 1453, and then became a museum in 1934 under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s presidency. Over the years, Erdogan has repeatedly lobbied for converting the UNESCO World Heritage Site into a mosque again to ful- fill a longstanding demand by Turkey’s Islamist leadership.

The first Friday prayers were held at the Hagia Sophia on July 24, during which the entrance gates to the complex were covered up in adherence to Islamic practice which bans depictions of non-Jewish and non-Muslim figures.

The decision to change the status of the Hagia Sophia raises questions about what happens to the building’s original art and frescoes. Like the Hagia Sophia, the Hagia Church is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Ottomans hid its artwork under layers of plaster. Following its re-conversion, the frescoes and mosaics were restored and have been on display since 1958.

Turkey has also recently turned other notable church-turned-mosque-turned museums back into mosques including Hagia Sophia in in Istanbul and Trabzon.

Greece and Turkey Carry Out Rival Military Exercises off Crete

ATHENS (PanAthenes) – Greece conducted naval and air force exercises off the northeast Mediterranean on August 25 in a move that drew an angry response from Turkey, which announced it will carry out training exercises of its own, the National reported.

The Greek three-day exercises will take place south-east of the island of Crete, near where Turkey is searching for oil and gas.

The Turkish defense ministry said it would carry out the maritime training to enhance co-ordination. Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan claimed that Greece was endangering the safety of all ships in the region.

Greece announced the exercise after the Turkish research vessel the Oruc Reis – which has been accompanied by the Turkish navy – would continue its work until Thursday. Greece has repeatedly demanded its withdrawal, sent its own warships to the area and placed its armed forces on alert.

The tensions have reverberated across the EU, with France dispatching ships to the area to support Greece’s request.

Germany’s Foreign Minister Heiko Maas was in Athens and Ankara where he will seek to resolve the tensions.

Christie’s Holding Auction to Help Rebuild Beirut’s cultural scene

LONDON (PanARMENIAN.Net) – The British auc- tion house Christie’s announced on August 22 that it will hold a charity auction to support the Beirut community with a charity auction, Grazia reports.

The tragic explosion in Beirut affected local busi- ness from essential services to restaurants, fashion and even the arts – shattering buildings and centers. Dubbed “We Are All Beirut - Art for Beirut: A Charity Auction,” the online auction will take place from late October to the first half of November.

“Seeing the images of devastation on August 4 will always remain in all our collective memory and our thoughts are with all families, friends and artists who have lost so much. We hope to raise enough funds with this initiative to make a significant dif- ference,” Christie’s CEO Guillaume Cerutti, com- menting, continued “we are committed to help and hope that many of our international clients, friends and collectors will follow our call to action.”

According to Caroline Louca-Kirkland, Managing Director at Christie’s Middle East, the initiative will include approximately 40 to 50 lots of international art, regional, jewelry, design and watches. Funds will be allocated to restore the city’s art and cultural heritage, continuing “we are committed to help and support those who have lost so much. We hope to raise enough funds with this initiative to make a significant difference,” Christie’s CEO Guillaume Cerutti, commented, continuing “we are committed to help and support those who have lost so much. We hope to raise enough funds with this initiative to make a significant different.”

By Amberin Zaman

ISTANBUL – Turkey once again cut water supplies to the region of northeast Syria, and the autonomous administration says Ankara is taking deliberate action. The decision to cut off the water supply from the Alok pumping station near Ras al-Ain on August 13. The station provides drinking water to around 800,000 residents and is also the main source of water for tankers supplying potable water to a broad area, with the internal displacement of Syrian and Islamic State prisoners and roadblocks, the eighth such stoppage since Turkey invaded Ras al-Ain in the wake of its military operation against US-backed Kurdish forces controlling the area in October 2019. Alok was rendered inoperable during the Turkish invasion and service has been only partially restored. “Sporadic water force the population of Syria’s northeast to resort to unsafe alternatives, endangering their lives on top of their fight against COVID-19,” the statement read. “Suspending the Alok water station puts the lives of hundreds of thousands of people at risk, according to the Rojava Information Center, a research organization that publishes reports on northeast Syria. There is mounting worry about the pandemic spreading in the area. The local School of Economics predicted in a recent study that the number of cases nationwide could reach two million by the end of August. Nasirin Brahmi, a 22-year-old woman in Hassakeh who contacted Al-Monitor through the Rojava Information Center, said, “We haven’t had water for the past 25 days. In this situation, with the virus spreading and the water cut off, we are unable to take any precautions against the coronavirus. The media tells us that we have to wash our hands every half an hour, but when water is unavailable this makes it very expensive to purchase, and that’s if you actually find someone who is willing to sell it.”

The autonomous administration accuses Turkey of using water as a weapon in its goal of forcing the Kurdish forces to withdraw from its territory covering 1,100 square kilometers (680 square miles) in northeast Syria currently under Turkish control. If Turkey were to have its way, people living under Kurdish rule would continue to face restrictions on water as a means to help Turkey placate Syrians living under its own occupation. The stoppages are seen as part of a broader Turkish effort to suffocate the Kurdish- dominated autonomous administration through a mix of political, economic and military pressure. As it starves the area of water, Turkey has kept its attacks against Syrian opposition groups with artillery and strike drones. Mohammad, the Washington representative of the Syrian Democratic Council, told Al-Monitor that the administration had “an urgent meeting with America and the SDF, they believe something my country is willing to sell.”

Ignatius Aphrem II said, “Using water as a weapon – which is not the first time this happened – is a clear indication of fundamental human rights. Yet, there has been no response from the international community to this atrocity despite the constant appeal of the people of the region.”

(This article by Amberin Zaman originally appeared on the website almonitor.com on August 24.)

Annual Akhtamar Church Mass to Be Held Behind Closed Doors

ISTANBUL (PanAram.Monitor.com) – The annual mass at the Holy Cross Armenian Church on Akhtamar Island in eastern Turkey will be held behind closed doors this year due to safety concerns, Ermenihaber reported on August 24.

The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople said in a statement that it offered every year since 2010 is set to be celebrated at the church on September 6 this year. It is noted that only Archbishop Sahag II Mashalian and the clergymen will be inside the church, while the island will remain closed for tourists and pilgrims.

This year, the Holy Cross Church turned into a museum, and Turkish authorities allowed to have liturgy there once a year. The church is still without a cross.

Archbishop Sahag II Mashalian and the clergymen will be allocated to restore the city's art and cultural heritage, continuing “we are committed to help and support those who have lost so much. We hope to raise enough funds with this initiative to make a significant difference,” Christie’s CEO Guillaume Cerutti, commenting, continued “we are committed to help and support those who have lost so much. We hope to raise enough funds with this initiative to make a significant different.”
**Community News**

**Abril Bookstore’s New Chapter**

Will the Almost Half-Century-Old Cultural Center Survive?

By Ani Dzudabanyan-Manoogian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDALE — Abril Bookstore is moving from its location at 415 East Broadway to Adams Square, an Art Deco shopping center with operating Armenian businesses located in a different part of Glendale. The two-story building covered with bricks was the bookstore’s home for more than 22 years. The green door beyond the two pink trees across the years was the entrance of the busiest Armenian community center in the city. Boxes filled with books and paintings carelessly placed on the floor silently proclaim the end of an era. The last customer of the day hastily rings the doorbell, and Arno Yeretzian, the owner of Abril, realizes that he forgot to lock it. He says “It’s okay,” so he can conduct one more sale before we start the interview.

Arno finds two folding chairs from somewhere in the office full of moving boxes. He is tired, physically and emotionally. It was a difficult month. Arno reopened the bookstore after the forced closure of Covid-19 and now he needs to pack. The landlord of the building, where Abril has been residing for more than 20 years, didn’t make it any easier for one of the last standing Armenian cultural centers to survive. With a government loan, Arno was only able to cover two month rent and some small expenses. Moving seems to be the only way to keep his father’s dream and his own future alive. “The Armenian community was always supportive. A lot of people just came to shop only to help us with the community was always supportive. A lot of people just came to shop only to help us with the community. They don’t want us to close,” Arno explains.

Abril was established in 1977 as the first Armenian-language magazine in Los Angeles in 1977 at the New Chapter Bookstore’s community. They don’t want us to close,” Arno says.

**Rising Democratic Star**

**Mari Manoogian of Michigan Gets a National Stage**

By Harry A. Kezelian III
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WEST BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP, Mich. – State Rep. Mari Manoogian’s star has shone brightly in her home state of Michigan since 2018, when she was elected to the state’s House of Representatives. Her district includes Birmingham, Bloomfield Township, Bloomfield Hills, and half of West Bloomfield Township, all in Oakland County and in the northern suburbs of Detroit. The area is home to a good chunk of Michigan’s Armenian population.

Although she made national news last week and was trending on social media thanks to her presence speaking in the 17-person virtual keynote address at the Democratic National Convention at which former Vice President Joe Biden was officially nominated as the party’s nominee for president. Manoogian agreed to an exclusive interview with the Mirror-Spectator, conducted by correspondent Harry A. Kezelian III, of Bloomfield Township, which is a part of Manoogian’s district.

Manoogian grew up in Birmingham, where she still lives.

HK: How did you get interested in getting involved in politics?

MM: I would say it was more a culmination of experiences. I grew up in a family that was really interested in public service. My dad was a union leader most of my life and my mum is a retired vocational rehab counselor, so my sister and I were raised to be really active in our community and good public stewards. I always thought I was kind of going to be behind the scenes rather than running for office myself. I thought I might be someone’s chief of staff, or do research, but the opportunity presented itself to run for State Rep.

HK: As a member of the House in Michigan, what do you hope to accomplish?

MM: So, we’ve already accomplished a few things, obviously I really want to work on a lot more. I hope to get a bill I introduced in early February of 2019 across the finish line, hopefully this year. It’s regarding distracted driving. I am really passionate about this issue because as a young person I think it’s really important to see MANOOGAN, page 8

**Fallon, Maloney, Bilirakis Lead Bipartisan Condemnation of Reckless Turkish Actions In the Mediterranean**

WASHINGTON – Representatives Frank Pallone, Jr. (NJ-06), Carolyn B. Maloney (NY-14), and Gus Bilirakis (FL-12) on August 21 led a group of 16 bipartisan Members of Congress in condemning the Republic of Turkey’s reckless actions in the Eastern Mediterranean that have increased tensions between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members.

In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, the Members urged the Trump Administration to condemn the actions and work with the United States’ regional partners to de-escalate the tension.

Turkey’s recent actions in the Eastern Mediterranean are part of an unfortunate pattern deliberately designed to destabilize the region and capitalize on the resulting chaos,” Congressman Pallone said. “In this case, Erdogan has ordered Turkish military units to breach the sovereign territories of our NATO allies, including Greece and Cyprus, resulting in a series of near misses between Turkish and Greek, Cypriot, and French navies. The Trump Administration’s diplomatic silence after Erdogan’s consistent saber rattling must end. I thank my colleagues who joined me in this effort to urge the Trump Administration to condemn Turkey’s actions and quickly halt any further provocations in the region.”

“The United States needs to condemn Turkey’s aggressive actions in the Eastern Mediterranean over the past few months have raised tensions in the region to dangerously high levels,” said Congressman Bilirakis.

Turkey’s recent acts of provocations quiddity and without ambiguity. Greece and Cyprus have the absolute right to develop the hydrocarbon resources within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). We cannot let Turkey continue to destabilize the region and threaten the spirit of cooperation and collaboration that has taken hold,” said Congresswoman Maloney.

“Turkey’s aggressive actions in the Eastern Mediterranean over the past few months have raised tensions in the region to dangerously high levels. Turkey’s illegal and repeated violations of Greek and Cypriot sovereignty in pursuit of drilling for natural gas is unacceptable and dangerous. In just the last few weeks, Greece has needed to rapidly mobilize its armed forces in response to threats from Turkey, raising the troubling prospect of a conflict between NATO member countries. Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Esper must publicly condemn Turkey’s actions and make it absolutely clear that the U.S. will not stay silent as Turkey encroaches upon two of our critical allies in the region, Greece and Cyprus,” said Maloney.

Pallone was joined by 15 other Members of Congress, including Helene C. Cochran (GA-05), Brad Sherman (CA-30), and Gus Bilirakis (FL-12) on August 21 led a group of 16 bipartisan Members of Congress in condemning the Republic of Turkey’s reckless actions in the Eastern Mediterranean that have increased tensions between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members.
Abril Bookstore’s New Chapter: Will the Almost Half-Century-Old Cultural Center Survive?

ABRIL, from page 5
authors (based locally and internationally), explains Arno. In 1978, the space next door to Abril Printing and Publishing emptied and the brothers decided to make it into a bookstore. Abril Bookstore was born and it became the first one in Los Angeles to import books from the Soviet Union. Abril soon became a community center where local intellectuals, political and religious leaders started to gather to exchange views, discuss recent events, argue about the new publications or present the book of the month. Many prominent authors like Hamo Sahyan, Silva Kaputikyan, Vardges Petrosyan had their book signings in Abril. “I grew up in that environment. The smell of coffee, cigarette smoke and food spiced up all that unique atmosphere,” remembers Arno.

In 1984, Noubar Veretian was diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig’s disease). In 1989, he passed away, leaving the Abril family in shock. The death of Noubar and the drastic change of the demographics of Hollywood eventually forced Harout to move to Glendale, following most of the Armenian community members, in 1998.

Arno and his cousins were involved in the bookstore all the time. At first, Arno was helping with the website and then started to work as a cashier. When Harout obtained the whole partnership, Arno, whose professional training was in film, made Abril his full time work.

In 2010, Harout was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in a very short time, leaving his wife and son devastated. “I had to learn everything by myself. I was always in the front, never dealt with other stuff. I was going through his papers, calling different people to figure out how to run a bookstore,” Arno admits. One year later Seeroon was diagnosed with ALS. “It took me three years to recover and to rebuild the business,” Arno sighs. Seeroon Veretian owned Roslin Gallery on California Avenue in Glendale since 1995. The gallery presented the works of Armenian artists from all around the world. When the cupcake shop next door to the bookstore emptied, Arno moved the gallery there to extend Abril and to make it a cultural center, just like his father and uncle had done years ago. The new Abril started to be built.

“When Borders closed down, I bought these shelves from them for a very good price. I kept some from the old bookstore as well. I enhanced the old cultural aspect. We started with three events in a month, then it became four or five. With the Armenian movie society, we held the movie nights every first Friday and the music nights every Saturday. It became once again a very busy cultural center,” Arno lists proudly.

Arno realizes the struggles that a small bookstore can go through when some are just closing down (Berj Armenian Bookstore), some minimizing their hours (Sardarabad Book Store) and some book industry giants like Barnes and Noble are closing hundreds of nationwide locations. Last year, Arno started the Siramarg [peacock] Cultural Center Foundation, which includes Abril Bookstore and Roslin Art Gallery, to continue his parents’ legacy.

Reopening Abril after several weeks of COVID-19 closure, Arno welcomed a lot of new customers. “That gives me a hope, a purpose to continue to work. I can still have a healthy business, but not with that rent in this building.”

Abril Bookstore’s new home is only 1100 square feet, less than half its previous size. The new Abril won’t have a gallery, only a bookstore. During the last weeks, Arno was having a clearance sale to “lighten the load and raise some funds.”

Arno is optimistic. It will take some time until customers get used to the new location. He only regrets that his daughter, who is 18-months old, won’t see the old Abril. But she will grow up in Abril without a doubt. “This is a special place,” he says, and raises his hands as if trying to wrap them around the 43 years of existence of the bookstore. “The name itself is very significant for all of us. Abril means to live in Armenian. And after all I met my wife here.”

Arno hopefully exclaims.

Abril Bookstore’s new home is only 1100 square feet, less than half its previous size. The new Abril won’t have a gallery, only a bookstore. During the last weeks, Arno was having a clearance sale to “lighten the load and raise some funds.”

Arno is optimistic. It will take some time until customers get used to the new location. He only regrets that his daughter, who is 18-months old, won’t see the old Abril. But she will grow up in Abril without a doubt. “This is a special place,” he says, and raises his hands as if trying to wrap them around the 43 years of existence of the bookstore. “The name itself is very significant for all of us. Abril means to live in Armenian. And after all I met my wife here.”
Stefan Ihrig to Speak on Armenian Genocide and the 20th Century

BELMONT, Mass. — Dr. Stefan Ihrig will give an online talk titled “The Armenian Genocide and the 20th Century” on Sunday, August 30, at 5 p.m. (Eastern US time). The talk is co-sponsored by the Ararat-Eskijian Museum, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), and the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS).

The Armenian Genocide has long been sidelined in the histories of Europe and the world. This poses a whole series of problems for how we understand the past. In this talk, Ihrig will show how and why the Armenian Genocide was a central event for 20th century world history. Understanding the wider contexts and implications of the Armenian Genocide is key to understanding the dark 20th century. This talk will also underline why the much-nEEDED reevaluation of its role in and for history should not and cannot be a partisan issue. It will also discuss why recognition of the genocide is simply not enough. Recognition is only the first step in reconstructing a new history of the last century.

Ihrig is a professor of history at the University of Haifa and director of the Haifa Center for German and European Studies. For his last book, ‘Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler’ (Harvard Univ. Press, 2016), he received the 2017 Sonia Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies from the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research. He is also the author of ‘Ataturk in the Nazi Imagination’ (Harvard Univ. Press, 2014).

This event will be held live on Zoom (registration required) and streamed on NAASR’s YouTube channel. NAASR YouTube Channel Link: https://www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies

For more information contact NAASR at hq@naasr.org.

Local Armenian Turkish Group Advocates for Dialogue In Response to Recent San Francisco School Vandalism

OAKLAND, Calif. — Opening the Mountain dialogue group condemns the racist graffiti and hate-based vandalism at the Krouzian-Zekarian-Vasbouragan (KZV) Armenian School on July 24, 2020. “We are heartbroken and stand with the school and the community center against any form of violence and discrimination. In the face of dual pandemics – racial prejudice and COVID-19 – we value coming together in recognizing our common humanity,” said founder Ojig Yeretsian, MPH.

Though we don’t know the people who committed this crime, we offer dialogue in response. This path can serve as a way forward to overcome hatred and stop the recurrence of violence. For too long, conflict has scarred the history and relations of Turks, Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

We stand in solidarity with KZV Armenian school and the larger Armenian community of the San Francisco Bay Area. Opening the Mountain encourages Armenian, Azeri and Turkish Bay Area residents to engage in non-violent communication and dialogue. Email OTMdialogue2020@gmail.com for more information.

Opening the Mountain is a living room dialogue group for Armenians and Turks in the San Francisco Bay Area. The group came together as a grassroots effort and not as part of any Turkish or Armenian organization, nor is it affiliated with any government. It was formed in 2007 and members have been meeting monthly in each other’s living rooms and now on virtual platforms. More than ninety people have participated since inception and there are nearly two dozen current members. Sustained dialogue is an alternative model to the message of hate that tends to inundate mainstream media and nationalist narratives. Members are committed to listening to each other’s stories with open minds and hearts, in an intimate, confidential setting. This process promotes understanding and acknowledges wounds of inter-generational conflict and genocide. We believe that the inter-ethnic cycle of violence which has existed for generations can be disrupted with non-violent communication and dialogue.

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.

7) Applicants must submit applications electronically (via email) to: tcadirector@aol.com. Paper submissions will be accepted by the deadline at:

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 winners 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.
Superintendent of Schools. I think it's something that they could do and it's something that would really benefit them.

HK: You've been working on, you know, getting money from the government for transportation for a long time. Is this different? Do you feel like you're making progress?

MM: Yeah, you know, there's definitely been a difference in the work between what I was doing at the time and what I'm doing now. But it's still very important to me, and I think it's something that I can really make a difference in, and it's something that I'm passionate about.

HK: Do you have any political role models when you were getting into politics at a young age, was it like, "oh I want to make a difference like this person."

MM: Yeah, I mean there are certainly figures in politics that I look up to. I've been looking up to Barack Obama, he's been a crucial figure in my life. He's someone who has done so much for the country and has really made a difference. I think it's something that I can really make a difference in, and it's something that I'm passionate about.

HK: What has been your biggest challenge so far in your career?

MM: The biggest challenge has been, I think, staying true to myself and my values. I think sometimes it's hard to stay true to yourself when you're in politics, and I think it's something that I really need to work on.

HK: What has been the biggest change in your career?

MM: I think the biggest change has been the shift in the way that people view the political system. I think people are more engaged in what's happening in politics, and I think that's something that I really need to work on.

HK: What do you think is the biggest issue facing our country today?

MM: I think the biggest issue facing our country today is climate change. I think it's something that we need to address immediately, and I think it's something that we need to take action on.

HK: Do you think that the current state of the country is different?

MM: Yes, I think it's very different. I think that the system has changed a lot, and I think that it's something that we need to address immediately.

HK: What do you think is the biggest issue facing our government today?

MM: I think the biggest issue facing our government today is the lack of accountability. I think that it's something that we need to address immediately, and I think that it's something that we need to take action on.

HK: What do you think is the biggest issue facing our district?

MM: I think the biggest issue facing our district is the lack of investment in our area. I think that it's something that we need to address immediately, and I think that it's something that we need to take action on.

HK: Do you think that the current state of the country is different?

MM: Yes, I think it's very different. I think that the system has changed a lot, and I think that it's something that we need to address immediately.

HK: What do you think is the biggest issue facing our government today?

MM: I think the biggest issue facing our government today is the lack of accountability. I think that it's something that we need to address immediately, and I think that it's something that we need to take action on.

HK: Do you think that the current state of the country is different?

MM: Yes, I think it's very different. I think that the system has changed a lot, and I think that it's something that we need to address immediately.

HK: What do you think is the biggest issue facing our government today?

MM: I think the biggest issue facing our government today is the lack of accountability. I think that it's something that we need to address immediately, and I think that it's something that we need to take action on.
went viral on Instagram because I explained what was going on between Armenia and Azerbaijan. I explained what was going on in Erevan, it and became a thing. Armenians and non-Armenians read it because there was a lot of exposure to it. It was a good way to watch Instagram and Facebook to monitor the comments because we were getting death threats in the office from Azerbaijanis.

HK: So, like a hundred years after we’ve been living in this country still, there’s…

MM: There’s still really gross negative xenophobia and hate that’s out there and I have to educate my staff about how to deal with it, I have non-Armenians on staff for the first time, we’ve talked to them about all of this and sort of explained to them about it all. And that’s the thing, is sort of getting through that, and I don’t mind it, I understand that’s what comes with the territory, but, you know I want folks to understand, yeah we have to work twice as hard because we’re doing our job but also dealing with this on the backburner.

HK: Well, that leads to the next question. Please speak a little bit about your background, family, schooling, previous jobs.

MM: I’m really honored to represent the district I grew up in. I grew up in Birmingham, went to Birmingham Public Schools, graduated from George Washington University, started at Michigan State and transferred so I have the experience of being at an instate school as well. I have a bachelor and master’s degree from the Elliott School of International Affairs at GW, and I ran for Congress and DC Council; it was my first job in politics as an intern, and then I have also worked for Ambassador Samantha Power at the US mission to the UN in 2013, and also worked in a couple different offices at the State Department prior to running for office.

HK: What do you plan when you do it to the Biden campaign in the coming months? The Biden campaign has such a big team. What does it mean for them when they need assistance on social media, or they need someone to write an op-ed or anything like that, I’m assuming it’s amazing, do you have a lot of that? A lot of what I’ve been doing is for their ethnic communities engagement, so helping lead their outreach to the Armenian-American community, also help a lot with young voters as well, and basically helping to rally the troops to get out and vote, and help with their phone bank, email, etc. They also ask my opinion on policy every once in a while, which is nice.

HK: If you could put your personal number and email address, How many calls/messages do you get? Is it unusual to have such openness?

MM: I don’t know that it’s ever been that unusual. We have an outsized role that Armenians are, we have an outsized role that Armenians do it matter to get involved?

HK: Do you speak to young people, both Armenian and non-Armenian, about getting involved with politics?

MM: Frequently. I get over 3,000 emails. And we responded to every single one of those, and I think that’s a huge deal for our community.

HK: Do you speak to young people, both Armenian and non-Armenian, about being involved with politics?

MM: Frequently. Every month I get messages – I’m very frequently active on Instagram, I get tons of DMs from kids who are high school all the time, that went to my high school, asked me to vote, I’d be asked to vote, I’d be on the phone, bank, etc. I also ask my opinion on policy every once in a while, which is nice.

HK: That’s really interesting, so that shows the positive side of the internet, there’s so much more connectivity, and this is something about which we play in politics. We’ve seen Armenians get elected to governorships, we’ve seen them through trải through different posts in the executive branch all the way up through presidential terms, and even the 4th district, I’m not going to say at the national level, I think it’s a great opportunity for us to have Armenian-Americans run for office because that’s truly where we can make a push and have a true Armenian-American agenda, at all levels of government. So they would go to see everything in action. I would show them my notes and how I know how to vote on things, they’d come to committee with me and see me debate bills. One of the things I really wanted to set out to do, which for me, being an elected official is not just about passing legislation, it’s about using the “bully pulpit” of my office to make a difference in the community, and making the office as accessible to the people as possible, and one of these things was making sure our young people had a lot of opportunity to be interacting with their government. With regard to the Armenian-American community, I’ve traveled the country speaking to young Armenians, different groups ranging from AYCOA to AYP have invited me, I spoke at a conference in California a year ago about this in particular, and it’s a wonderful opportunity.

HK: How would you characterize our current era, when we have outspoken demonstrators for human rights as well as COVID and an administration that seems to be ignoring both issues.

MM: I think Joe Biden outlined it probably the clearest I’ve ever seen a politician outline it last night Thursday, August 20th, where he spoke about the big crises that our country is facing. We’re facing a pandemic. We’re facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. We’re dealing with the issue of joblessness as well, and dealing with the issue of climate change, and all of those things sort of created this perfect storm where Americans are sort of led up with the way things have been, and I think that’s why we have to get these issues will be solved overnight. I think that’s something that needs to be really made very clear, but the reality is we’re not very tired and pitched. I was often based on this, are you better off than you were two years ago, or four years ago, and that’s, I think, a really important way to frame the conversation. I was super inspired to see young people who graduated from the same high school I went to, and never in a million years did I think they would be able to shut down Woodward Avenue and have protest for racial justice in Birmingham [Detroit’s northern suburb, Detroit, Michigan, one of the whitest cities in my community, and yet thousands of people showed up. I think it’s just a testament to people being sick and tired of the way that this administration has just bumbled the response to the virus. You know, I had a lot of hope that we’d be able to get it under control. But the unfortunate reality is we don’t have enough testing right now in our country, we’re not able to get the virus under control, and people just want to go back to their regular lives and I’m really hopeful that we’ll be able to get it under control soon.

HK: That leads to the next question, how work,” which I do as an elected official. I’m obligated to be there for votes, and I’m not going to miss a vote, but Manoogian’s parents said “we need you to be protective of us.” And so, I didn’t see my parents for three months. And that was a huge challenge. Because the crisis came in a total wave, our office was inundated with questions. In the first week of the pandemic and schools shutting down, we received 3,000 emails. And we responded to every single one of them. We’ve done town halls on Zoom, have spoken to small business owners in digital round tables, and continue to try to do that kind of outreach that we have been known.

HK: What are your hobbies?

MM: Do I have any hobbies? I mean, I bought a basketball last weekend… I work out a lot actually, it was an investment but I bought a Peloton before Covid hit… I take my aggression on my bike, when I’m stressed out it’s a really good place to escape and I’m glad I made that purchase before things get really shut down, because I’m someone who was a fig- ure skater and a basketball player when I was growing up and really appreciate being active, and truly, being able to stay active even though I had to stay inside was a huge escape. I also read, but who wants to know that?

HK: What is your ultimate goal in terms of politics?

MM: Truthfully I didn’t think I was going to run for office in the first place, so overall. I think what happened this week was an incredible opportunity, and it continues to be an incredible opportunity to, A, talk about the things that are really important to my district and my community, and B, give our district a voice that it’s never had before on the national stage, and so, whatever opportunity arises from it, I am hopeful that we continue to be able to have outside impact on policymaking, and in a way that is meaningful to people here in our district, and so in whatever capacity I can do that, whether it’s as a State Representative or otherwise, is something I’m happy to entertain.

HK: What are your plans for the future decade?

MM: Hopefully I’m finishing up my third and final term in the House, and from there we’ll have to see. We’re excitedly looking towards redistricting, we’re unsure of what that may look like, but at the end of the day I’m just excited to run for reelection and sort of see where things go from there.

Saturday, August 29, 2020 THE ARMENIAN MIRROR-SPECTATOR

COMMUNITY NEWS

of Michigan Shines on National Stage

Stasia Repp. Mari Manoogian on the DNC. She can be seen on the left.

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator 9
Armenian Day Schools in the US Face COVID-19

By Taleen Babayan

NEW YORK – The COVID-19 pandemic upended lives around the world, affecting public health, the economy and the education system. As the school year opens this fall across the United States, institutions are working hand-in-hand with their state governments to devise, adjust and experiment with new approaches and techniques as they face never-before-seen circumstances. Coming off of an online-only spring semester where student engagement came to a halt and family dynamics were altered when schools shut down, administrations are on track and better prepared to meet the needs of their student populations.

While the new school year unfolds, Armenian day schools across the country have adjusted to the challenging situation. Due to the diminishing infection rate numbers in the East Coast, the Armenian schools have adopted a hybrid instruction, in line with state guidelines.

Armenian Sisters Academy

Located in Radnor, Penn., a suburb of Philadelphia, the Armenian Sisters Academy is ready to launch its remote and in-person model when classes begin on September 8.

The school had originally planned to divide the students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade and is led by Principal Sister Emma Mossessian and Vice-Principal Daniel Comalle. Pennsylvania, like its neighboring states, has been able to get a handle on the virus throughout the spring and summer months. Thanks to the progress, faculty and staff look forward to welcoming students back on campus for the first time in six months.

“The adjustment was pretty seamless,” said Comalle of the switch to remote learning. “We had to close on a Thursday afternoon and quickly go into a digital format in order to have everything available online for parents and students by the following Monday.”

Although the remote lessons could have caused more stress to students and families, Comalle noted that some students “excelled” while others still “craved that face-to-face interaction.” A common observation amongst the faculty, however, was that students were not as jovial as they were physically in school.

When school let out in June, the teachers continued to design new lesson plans for the fall and participate in online meetings over Zoom. By early August, many came back to school to set up their classrooms.

“Our priority has always been to prepare a safe, loving and caring environment for our students,” said Sister Mossessian. “Our teachers are prepared and they know the responsibilities expected from them.”

The Armenian Sisters Academy, which offers a bilingu- al curriculum in Armenian and English along with Spanish language lessons for all grades, was founded in 1967 and maintains the Montessori-based philosophy. The school serves 130 students from pre-kindergarten through the eighth grade and is led by Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School

When the doors to Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School in Bayside, Queens, open on September 8, Principal Seta Megherian, alongside her staff, are ready to receive their students with open arms.

“We have missed the children and they, too, want to make that connection,” said Megherian, who noted that students used Zoom throughout the spring semester, where the children received an enriching experience in English and Armenian. “The school is doing everything to ensure a safe return for the kids, families and teachers.”

Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School, which was established in 1967 initially as the Hye Bardez Nursery School, currently has 90 students and emphasizes an Armenian language and cultural education, while focusing on legacy. Megherian credits the school’s setting as a reason why they were able to successfully transition to an online model over the last few months.

“Our wonderful parents saw what our school provided when the pandemic hit and they appreciated that there was no waiting period and no unknown,” said Megherian, herself an alumna of Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School. “The teachers taught on Zoom and classes resumed as normal as normal can be.”

Maintaining a positive and upbeat virtual environment was a priority for Megherian and her faculty, who observed that students were surpassing their curriculum content and moving onto higher levels of reading and science.

“We have been working very tirelessly with our Board and our teachers to welcome our students back into their family home space,” said Megherian. “We want to ensure the safety of our students and make sure everything is ready to go.”

Board Member Natalie Gabrielyan, who is an alumna of Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School, acknowledged that there was “no disruption” to the students’ learning thanks to the “dedicated teachers who went above and beyond with their creativity to bring classrooms to life.”

“These unprecedented times have brought to light so many of our daily heroes, and we owe immense gratitude to our educators and school leaders who have been fighting at the frontlines of education since March, when they were called into action to make a quick transition to remote learning,” said Gabrielyan, who serves as Director of Education at AGIU.

She appreciated the efforts of Megherian and Secretary Maro Jamgotchian, who together with the committed Parent Teacher Organization made sure that the students and families stayed connected with entertaining events, including virtual trips, scavenger hunts, family Bingo night, graduation and the “verchin zank” last bell celebration on the final day of school.

“In its vast history, the unprecedented experiences of the last few months will definitely stand out in our history books,” said Gabrielyan. “As we approach the start of a new school year, we are forever grateful for our dedicated administration and faculty and our community of staunch supporters. Together we can ensure the next chapters tell the story of a much brighter future.”

Hovnanian Armenian School

Across the river in New Milford, NJ, the Hovnanian Armenian Day School has also adopted a 100% in-person model, according to Acting Head of School Chris Sarafian, who set up technology for remote instruction inside the classroom for any students who choose to continue learning from home.

“We’re encouraging everyone to come back to campus, we won’t turn away a family who wants to leave their child at home for the term,” said Sarafian. “We believe it’s better for students to learn in person, particularly for the social and emotional aspects, and we have had open communication about this with our parents.”

Coming off a “challenging spring semester” where teachers had to “reconceptualize their way of teaching with no notice,” Sarafian is optimistic for the fall term. While he talked of the stress that may be anxiety for some who are returning to campus, there is also enthusiasm for physical interaction.

“Our teachers have been creating and recruiting, adopting and adapting to the new environment, as are the students,” said Sarafian. “Some students did very well online and were more productive and focused, whereas others did not do as well with the online component.”

During the months of remote learning when the pandemic forced a lockdown, Sarafian started a volunteer class called “Kicking it with Mr. Chris” to keep students engaged when he heard from a parent that their child was unhappy and hadn’t smiled in a long while.

“Hearing that bothered me,” said Sarafian. “Even though it was by definition a senseless class, the students loved it because they laughed and it was like a once-a-week vent session.”

When students return to school, there will be an in-person counselor to talk to them about their concerns. A wellness class is also on the schedule so students can discuss the impact the pandemic has had on them and their families.

Developed in conjunction with the Hovnanian School Alumni Association, the R.E.A.C.H. Initiative (Readiness for Education, Activities, Care, and Health) will help raise funds for the upcoming school year in terms of acquiring and installing equipment, technology and supplies to ensure a safe and secure opening for the upcoming school year.

“This year there was an increased request for financial aid,” said Sarafian. “Through this initiative, we can award more scholarships and financial aid to encourage families to send their children to Hovnanian School!”

R.E.A.C.H. aims to also offset the increased expenses as a consequence of COVID-19 that were not budgeted into the school year, such as bulk purchases of hand sanitizers, masks, gloves, disinfectants, PPE equipment, added cleaning staff and a Thorax 360 Electrostatic Sprayer, among many other items.

The school, founded in 1916, has an enrollment of 135 students from 3 years old through the eighth grade.

The school will also set up tents and sun shades outside to accommodate outdoor classes and an outdoor dining area, weather permitting. The classrooms will be rotation-based and the school will encourage students to be outdoors as much as possible, where the risk of the virus is less likely to spread.

Looking towards the 2020-2021 school year, Sarafian sees it as a community effort.

“Everyone will have to buy into this year and that includes staff, parents, teachers and students,” he said. “We all have additional responsibilities this year to protect our children and our staff. It’s important everybody works together to achieve that goal to keep everyone safe.”
St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School

The campus, while complying with the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) guidelines and circumstances change during the academic year, said Boyamian. inhabit a hybrid model or remain remote. When they start classes on Tuesday, September 8. St. Stephen’s will offer two operations for its elementary students, including a mix of two days on campus and three days remote, or one hundred percent remote. Faculty and staff will continue to assess the situation and propose to students and parents the hybrid and remote-only plans, as well as monitor the state of the pandemic throughout the school year. "Our detailed planning and preparation will allow us to shift our elementary program to either one hundred percent instruction or one hundred percent remote learning when COVID-19 guidelines and circumstances change during the academic year," said Boyamian. The approach for the preschool and kindergarten students will be different, since they are housed in the newly constructed and spacious Alesian Building, with the school paying special attention and engaged counselors to lend a hand. The administration drew up a 32-point plan for hybrid teaching under Principal Hosep Torossian’s tutelage, the Board ultimately decided to open the school with distance learning for the month of September and assess month by month. "Our decision is common to most Michigan schools with the same dilemma," said Torossian. "We understand face to face teaching is better than online teaching and the students crave being in school together with their teachers, but the Board will continue to evaluate its position." He noted concerns with the quantity of materials presented online, which were particularly challenging for the elementary school students who found it difficult to sit in front of the computer for up to six hours a day. The bilingual curriculum that fosters the Armenian language, mathematics, science, history, language arts, and the encouragement of developing the individual identity, has been easier for the high school students to adjust to remotely. Despite the pandemic’s impact on educational institutions and learning, there has not been a decrease in enrollment. This year, according to principal Stephen Boyamian, the district bridged the gap, technology and equipment-wise, by providing a Chromebook to each student who needs one. The AGBU Alex & Marie Manoogian School is one of the area’s largest employers, with more than 3,000 teachers, administrators, and support staff. Through the months of remote instruction last spring, Nahabedian observed that many students thrived on structure and being present in the classroom with a live teacher giving instructions. The district bridged the gap, technology and equipment-wise, by providing a Chromebook to every student who requested one and hotspots for Internet access. "Our challenge is having the students work with the equipment and understanding that the equipment is the bottom minimal standard and we need to think beyond that," said Nahabedian. If the public health situation does change and students are permitted to receive in-person instruction in the classroom, GUSD will remain committed to maintaining and accommodating a remote option if parents are not ready to send their children back into classrooms. In the meantime, for the families who are essential workers or have special circumstances and must send their children to school this fall, GUSD created technology pods for elementary school students, an initiative that Nahabedian said is "unique and forward-thinking." "Technology pods give students the opportunity to be in their elementary classroom with their teacher, while understanding that the all safety protocols, and do distance learning from inside the school," said Nahabedian, who noted that more than 1,000 elementary-aged students are taking advantage of this option. "Our teachers are teaching from their classroom as well because they have found that the classroom is a safe and a more convenient way for them to conduct distance learning," said Nahabedian, emphasizing that all teachers follow safety protocols and the Board has ensured they have a clean space to work in. "It's challenging for our employees, our parents and our students," said Nahabedian. "But it is the moral responsibility of the adults right now to show up for the children and to care for them and to teach them."

"We will see how we can, as safely as possible under the circumstances, bring our students back to the classroom in the future," she said. Nahabedian acknowledges remote learning relies heavily on family circumstances and children in vulnerable families are "at risk of learning loss." "Public education is supposed to be the great equalizer and bring kids together of all backgrounds to have equal opportunity," said Nahabedian, who noticed that during the pandemic some families have had the means to create learning pods while other children haven’t had that privilege. "There are parents who are capable of sitting with their child and working with them throughout the day on their schoolwork, while other parents don’t have that same capacity or the luxury of working from home, causing those kids to lose out."

Moving forward, the potential plan is to move into a hybrid model later in the fall. State, health and education officials will monitor the caseloads, new infections per capita, test positivity rate and hospitalization rates — but until conditions improve and counties are off the list for at least two weeks — they will continue to teach online. The Glendale Unified School District, which serves preschool through ninth grade in over 30 schools in the region, has earned the National Blue Ribbon honor, the U.S. Department of Education’s highest designation. It’s also one of the area’s largest employers, with more than 3,000 teachers, administrators, and support staff. Throughout the month of remote instruction last spring, Nahabedian observed that many students thrived on structure and being present in the classroom with a live teacher giving instructions. The district bridged the gap, technology and equipment-wise, by providing a Chromebook to every student who requested one and hotspots for Internet access. "Our challenge is having the students work with the equipment and understanding that the equipment is the bottom minimal standard and we need to think beyond that," said Nahabedian. If the public health situation does change and students are permitted to receive in-person instruction in the classroom, GUSD will remain committed to maintaining and accommodating a remote option if parents are not ready to send their children back into classrooms. In the meantime, for the families who are essential workers or have special circumstances and must send their children to school this fall, GUSD created technology pods for elementary school students, an initiative that Nahabedian said is "unique and forward-thinking." "Technology pods give students the opportunity to be in their elementary classroom with their teacher, while understanding that the all safety protocols, and do distance learning from inside the school," said Nahabedian, who noted that more than 1,000 elementary-aged students are taking advantage of this option. "Our teachers are teaching from their classroom as well because they have found that the classroom is a safe and a more convenient way for them to conduct distance learning," said Nahabedian, emphasizing that all teachers follow safety protocols and the Board has ensured they have a clean space to work in. "It's challenging for our employees, our parents and our students," said Nahabedian. "But it is the moral responsibility of the adults right now to show up for the children and to care for them and to teach them."

AGBU Alex & Marie Manoogian School

In the Midwest, the AGBU Alex & Marie Manoogian School evaluated whether they should re-open with a hybrid model or remain remote when they start classes on Tuesday, September 8. While the large classroom spaces were conducive to social distancing and the administration drew up a 32-point plan for hybrid teaching under Principal Hosep Torossian’s tutelage, the Board ultimately decided to open the school with distance learning for the month of September and assess month by month. "Our decision is common to most Michigan schools with the same dilemma," said Torossian. "We understand face to face teaching is better than online teaching and the students crave being in school together with their teachers, but the Board will continue to evaluate its position." He noted concerns with the quantity of materials presented online, which were particularly challenging for the elementary school students who found it difficult to sit in front of the computer for up to six hours a day. The bilingual curriculum that fosters the Armenian language, mathematics, science, history, language arts, and the encouragement of developing the individual identity, has been easier for the high school students to adjust to remotely. Despite the pandemic’s impact on educational institutions and learning, there has not been a decrease in enrollment. This year, according to principal Stephen Boyamian, the district bridged the gap, technology and equipment-wise, by providing a Chromebook to each student who needs one. The AGBU Alex & Marie Manoogian School is one of the area’s largest employers, with more than 3,000 teachers, administrators, and support staff. Throughout the month of remote instruction last spring, Nahabedian observed that many students thrived on structure and being present in the classroom with a live teacher giving instructions. The district bridged the gap, technology and equipment-wise, by providing a Chromebook to every student who requested one and hotspots for Internet access. "Our challenge is having the students work with the equipment and understanding that the equipment is the bottom minimal standard and we need to think beyond that," said Nahabedian. If the public health situation does change and students are permitted to receive in-person instruction in the classroom, GUSD will remain committed to maintaining and accommodating a remote option if parents are not ready to send their children back into classrooms. In the meantime, for the families who are essential workers or have special circumstances and must send their children to school this fall, GUSD created technology pods for elementary school students, an initiative that Nahabedian said is "unique and forward-thinking." "Technology pods give students the opportunity to be in their elementary classroom with their teacher, while understanding that the all safety protocols, and do distance learning from inside the school," said Nahabedian, who noted that more than 1,000 elementary-aged students are taking advantage of this option. "Our teachers are teaching from their classroom as well because they have found that the classroom is a safe and a more convenient way for them to conduct distance learning," said Nahabedian, emphasizing that all teachers follow safety protocols and the Board has ensured they have a clean space to work in. "It's challenging for our employees, our parents and our students," said Nahabedian. "But it is the moral responsibility of the adults right now to show up for the children and to care for them and to teach them."

"We have never experienced anything like this, but given the circumstances, kudos to the Manoogian School for giving two hundred percent during these dire circumstances," said Torossian, who acknowledged that some of the families within the school were impacted by COVID-19 and the school paid special attention and engaged counselors to lend a hand. The administration also offered technology for anyone who needed a computer, hardware or internet access and will continue to do so in the upcoming months in order to help parents and teachers for their resiliency, flexibility and cooperation, and their ability to come back and resume teaching in person. Each student coped differently during the months of online learning and the teachers stayed on task throughout the entire academic year, said Torossian, highlighting the level of devotion of the teachers to ensure their students understood the materials presented virtually. Special counseling was offered to students as well, including ESL teachers and teachers working with special needs students to “minimize the impact on students and parents who needed help the most.”

"It's challenging for our employees, our parents and our students," said Nahabedian. "But it is the moral responsibility of the adults right now to show up for the children and to care for them and to teach them."
Missionaries and Their Efforts to Help Armenians Focus of New Online Project SAVE Database

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Project SAVE is continuing its mission of preserving the past by tapping into the latest technology.

In a recent interview, Tsoleen Sarian, the executive director of the organization, said Project SAVE has just launched its online collections database, with a particular focus on the efforts of missionaries in the Ottoman Empire.

Sarian said that to accomplish the task, the group applied for and received grants from the state of Massachusetts for digitizing and making accessible the images from their archives, as well as donations from the Bilezikian Family Foundation, the Bilezikian Family Foundation, and the Souren Marusian Charitable Trust.

The story of the missionaries is one that is intertwined with the Armenian Genocide. Many of the missionaries and their families, Sarian said, established schools and hospitals in the lands where the Armenians were being slaughtered.

“They were usually highly, highly educated, from Ivy League schools,” she added. “They often went and stayed through the Genocide.”

and the Souren Maruskin Charitable Trust.

The story of the missionaries is one that is intertwined with the Armenian Genocide. Many of the missionaries and their families, Sarian said, established schools and hospitals in the lands where the Armenians were being slaughtered.

“They were usually highly, highly educated, from Ivy League schools,” she added. “They often went and stayed through the Genocide.”

and the Souren Maruskin Charitable Trust.

The story of the missionaries is one that is intertwined with the Armenian Genocide. Many of the missionaries and their families, Sarian said, established schools and hospitals in the lands where the Armenians were being slaughtered.

“They were usually highly, highly educated, from Ivy League schools,” she added. “They often went and stayed through the Genocide.”

and the Souren Maruskin Charitable Trust.
Mariam Pilikian examining the blueprint for the family home in Kars with her daughter Lilit Pilikian

100 Years from Home
Takes Us to Kars and Back

In order to get to Kars to search for the ancestors, family members, they decided the safest way was to take a group tour from Armenia. The trip to Turkey was short but tense and brought up a lot of emotions and anxiety for Pilikian in particular.

White reflected that “I am there with the camera filming her as she is the subject of the film. At the same time, I know that she is going through all of these difficult emotional feelings, and especially when we went into Turkey. I was trying to be there for her and support her as much as I could while filming her with the camera. It was a strange balancing act, but at the end of the day, I think making the film actually brought us closer together.” “Yes,” Pilikian quietly interjected.

White said, “There was a sort of therapeutic aspect to making the film.” Being interviewed, Pilikian helped deal with those emotions, and where I fit in all this.” White added.

Pargev Martinian from Artsakh are just some of the participants. Most importantly, White explained that in the case of cofounder and director of Lily Tatoulian and musician Sebu Simonian will also appear among the speakers. DVDs of the film will be available for sale on the PBS SoCal website, and Armenian subtitles are being added at it presented as an option.

The making of the film and the importance of genocide recognition, among other topics, will be discussed as part of the screening. There is a second Armenian film earlier that night called “What Will Become of Us,” and other prominent Armenians like comedian Lory Armoyan, he just sent a private message via Twitter, was at the same conference, and White was considering having him on the show.

The film presents Pilikian as its protagonist and the first one, and Vahe Tatoulian and musician Sebu Simonian will also appear among the speakers.

Pilikan said, “We didn’t want to do the same thing they did. We didn’t have to do this his- torical retelling in-depth investigation. These things already exist.”

Distribution
The couple offered the film to festivals and pro- duced the first Armenian film at the Asia International Film Festival in Los Angeles in November. They also did a private screening for the cast and crew and others who helped in the US.

They also began submitting the film to various television outlets. White said, “It was the goal from the beginning for me.” Consequently, the couple was very happy that it is showing on September 1 at 8 p.m. at PBS SoCal ROCE in the Los Angeles area.

As it will be during a pledge drive for the station, there will be another pledge breaks during the film. Pilikian and White will be interviewed at the first one, and Vahé Berberian and Carla Garapedian will be interviewed later. The making of the film and the importance of genocide recognition, among other topics, will be discussed as part of the screening. There is a second Armenian film earlier that night called “What Will Become of Us,” and other prominent Armenians like comedian Lory Armoyan, he just sent a private message via Twitter, was at the same conference, and White was considering having him on the show.

The film presents Pilikian as its protagonist and the first one, and Vahe Tatoulian and musician Sebu Simonian will also appear among the speakers.

Pilikan said, “We didn’t want to do the same thing they did. We didn’t have to do this his- torical retelling in-depth investigation. These things already exist.”

Distribution
The couple offered the film to festivals and pro- duced the first Armenian film at the Asia International Film Festival in Los Angeles in November. They also did a private screening for the cast and crew and others who helped in the US.

They also began submitting the film to various television outlets. White said, “It was the goal from the beginning for me.” Consequently, the couple was very happy that it is showing on September 1 at 8 p.m. at PBS SoCal ROCE in the Los Angeles area.

As it will be during a pledge drive for the station, there will be another pledge breaks during the film. Pilikian and White will be interviewed at the first one, and Vahé Berberian and Carla Garapedian will be interviewed later. The making of the film and the importance of genocide recognition, among other topics, will be discussed as part of the screening. There is a second Armenian film earlier that night called “What Will Become of Us,” and other prominent Armenians like comedian Lory Armoyan, he just sent a private message via Twitter, was at the same conference, and White was considering having him on the show.

The film presents Pilikian as its protagonist and the first one, and Vahe Tatoulian and musician Sebu Simonian will also appear among the speakers.
March 13, 2020. Friday the 13th. The day that many teenagers remember as the start of it all. There was talk of the coronavirus in school, but it seemed so distant. Many didn’t see the school closure coming.

Ava Movessian, a rising junior at Westford Academy, remembers feeling up to the cancellation, “It was kind of chaotic in school, and the teachers were just trying to teach and I kind of knew that school was going to be cancelled, and I was kind of the one saying to my friends, ‘Oh, you know, I think school’s going to be cancelled...’

It was something to do in the middle part of the day and then afterwards. I knew that for most of the day if I had school, then I had to make the best of the other part of the day that I did not have school,” said Nathan Kefeyan.

It turned out that just having some sort of activity to accomplish gives value to one’s time and helps spend it.

Additionally, this pandemic hindered many events and opportunities that teenagers were very much anticipating. Simmons and Mahserejian were both planning on taking part in the Belmont Girls Rugby Team. Both were very disappointed upon finding that Camp Haiastan would not be held this summer. They were both planning on taking part in the Armenian summer camp, which had kept teens stabilized, unsettling the structure of daily life.

“Suddenly, I don’t remember what I did in the beginning. Actually, I do,” added Rose Tinkjian, recalling her friend and asking her what was happening at school. Her friend replied that it was all over Instagram that school was out for two weeks. “I was super happy about it,” she stated. “Like it was all excitement at that point.”

Up until the day that school was closed. Narine Mahserejian, a rising junior at Belmont High School, recalls teachers telling their students, “I’m working on the schedule that we’re not shutting down. Everything is normal until we get the word that we’re shutting down.

This is what made us unbelievable to her, because even the teachers didn’t have a clue. Many adults suspected that students would not be going back to school for the rest of the year but many teens were holding out hope.

Nathan Kefeyan, a rising junior at Belmont High School, initially thought it was “a minor race every week. It would have been so fun.”

and I was on the practice squad, so it just sucked because a lot of the players were looking forward to it and it hadn’t happened in a while.”

Simmons was also distressed for her sister, saying, “It was a big thing, like she was an adult now.”

As for sports, Kefeyan, Movessian, and Tinkjian were all saddened to hear that their prospects in hockey, volleyball, and crew, respectively, was under threat.

Kefeyan said, “I was on the JV [hockey] team and I was on the practice squad, so it just sucked because a lot of the players were looking forward to it and it hadn’t happened in a while.”

Movessagean said, “This year, I wasn’t going to be a starter, but I was going to be on varsity for the first time. And now next year, we’re not going to have the experience from this year [because] the freshmen never were taught how to play. I don’t know any of the other girls when I was coming in.

Mahserejian agreed, “It was my second year, and I had become close with the seniors this year. So when I was excluded to play games with them and get better, she said.”

Coincidentally, both girls also have sisters who were seniors. “I wanted to see her graduation because I think it’s insane that I passed or failed this year.”

Simmons reflected on the state of society and how they spend it.

“I think it’s going to take a while for things to get back to normal, told Mahserejian, “so everybody is thinking, I guess, to go back to school, having senior, junior year, education in general, things are going to change.

“Making problems more immediate,” said Simmons, thinking about the implications of the virus.

“Let’s consider certain issues more than they used to because this virus allowed a lot of people to get more involved in their lives where they are discovering who they are and what they want to stand for, in their lives where they are discovering who they are and thinking about what are some things that I would do if life goes back to normal.”

Pertaining to school, Simmons said, “It’s so different online, like we really benefit from person-to-person contact.”

Similarly, Movessagean stated, “It’s really difficult to learn online and I definitely can say that not doing school face-to-face but just a lot of habits of studying,” adding with a laugh, “I also think that it’s insane that I passed or failed my entire third, fourth semesters. In a way also, it means that I’ve made the best of time and it’s been as big if people hadn’t just been on their phones all day. When people are connected because everyone’s posting on Instagram constantly, everyone’s just like it because there’s nothing else to do, which I think probably played a real major part in that.”

Additionally, Mahserejian and Tinkjian both talked about gratitude and actively recognizing all the blessings in one’s life.

“Moresonian said I have to appreciate all the little things in life and all the people that I have in my life that I’m always surrounded by. Like I said, I always dreaded going to church at eight o’clock in the morning on Sundays...and now I realize, ‘Oh my gosh, I would do anything to just go back to church and Armenian and Sunday School’.”

Mahserejian agreed, saying, “Just appreciate what you have because you know, there’s so much out there for granted and now I’m not going to do that. Seeing my friends every day, being able to see family, and go places to do some things that I used to because I make real how life is really short and you have to appreciate things.”

Kefeyan took this opportunity to discuss more about himself and the boundaries that were set for him during the school year, which were a balance of a between school work and sports.

It gave me time to pick up some hobbies and the things that I never did because I didn’t have any time for a virus. High schoolers all around the world, whether they realized it or not, came to learn this lesson. They found things to do, ways to be productive when school was gone. It was a shocking shift in thought, when school and socialization were at the forefront of their daily lives, then suddenly, they were gone. At a time in their lives where they were figuring out who they are and what they want to stand for, life was upended by these challenging and harder questions. Their character will be forever altered by the way they choose to answer these questions that are both internal and external to themselves.

And maybe one day, they’ll look back on March 13, 2020, and say it was the day that changed their lives forever.

“Tasha Simmons is a rising junior at Belmont High School. She enjoys creative writing, singing, and Armenian dance.”

I think that, when college applications start, the coronavirus is going to be a big topic for all the essays because it definitely changed a ton of lives.

In many schools, grades had to be altered in a way in order to be fair to all because of the nature of the pandemic, which I think is a challenge that we have to face and consider certain issues more than they used to because this virus allowed a lot of people to get more involved in their lives where they are discovering who they are and thinking about what are some things that I would do if life goes back to normal.”

Lessons Learned or Time Wasted?

Finally, the million dollar question. Are there any lessons that you will take away from this period in the world’s history? The answers were all very similar yet unique.
Missionaries Helping Armenians Focus of Online Project SAVE Database

PROJECT SAVE, from page 12 their churches with the special offer of education for the children. Then, as new needs appeared, the missionaries set up clinics, hospitals, and orphanages. During the Genocide years (1915-1923), the missionaries provided safe haven for Armenians fleeing the destruction of their homes.

“Missionaries had their feet on the ground and communicated to the world the desperate situation in which Armenians found themselves, living in their own homeland under the brutal rule of the Ottoman Empire.”

The collection will have a little fewer than 2,000 images, she said.

Sarian added that Project SAVE has a total of 15 different collections. The collection of the missionaries, she explained, covers the period between 1900 and 1920. It was chosen because it was the era “most requested” by the greatest number of people, including people in New England, Turkey, Armenia, as well as Assyrians and Greeks, especially because the collection contains a great many street shots.

Many, she said, ask, “Can we see Armenians and their neighbors living together. The street images fulfilled that. They are mostly taken by European or American missionaries.”

Sarian added that as the Armenian Genocide was being waged by the Ottoman authorities, photography was banned. It was therefore only possible for those not citizens of the empire to take photos.

The photos have had a great impact, she said, not only for Armenians descendants, but non-Armenians, and have been used by those who are interested in human rights and refugees.

Sadly, she added, similar crimes are still happening.

One thing that the organization does is not only preserve the photos but try to collect as much information as possible about the photographs as well as who took it and where.

“We make high resolution images available for a small fee for journals, books, scholarly articles and documents,” Sarian said. That side of the business helps bring in a steady income to the organization.

In addition, the Project SAVE photos can be used without fees for exhibitions as well as genealogical searches for regions, family and regions.

Project SAVE has a total of roughly 45,000 photos, of which 11,000 have been digitized. “The majority comes from private family albums. The missionary ones we received from the relatives of those missionaries,” Sarian explained. “They knew we were serving the Armenian community.”

Project SAVE is always looking for old photos and encouraging members of the community to donate old photos. “We prefer to sit down with the photo donor and record the names, dates and places. Often they might not know.” She added that with the wealth of photos Project SAVE has, they might be able to fill in some gaps.

“Our biggest competition by far is people discarding photos. We are able to take them and use them. By cloud sourcing we may be able to know and help,” she noted, adding, “The unknown photographs are just as valuable.”

And it is not just old photographs that they accept. “Even images from 2020 are valuable today,” Sarian said.

Through photographs, the organization can record Armenian life through the decades.

One popular item that Project SAVE issues every year is their themed wall calendars. “It has been very successful for us. It is a way to share the images and they are priced well so they are easy to give as gifts,” she added.

Sarian said that the organization’s staff has pondered issuing a book, however, price wise it might pose a challenge. She didn’t rule it out entirely, however. “A children’s book, maybe,” she added.

The online exhibit was helped by a spring fundraiser.

She praised the donors, saying, “They did so generously.”

As with all organizations, she expressed concern going forward. “How the economy will affect that we don’t know,” she said, adding, “We have had a very robust annual appeal.”

Sarian has been the executive director of Project SAVE for the past three years. Ruth Thomasian founded the organization in 1975. The organization currently has about 45,000 photos.

To see the photos of the missionaries, visit www.projectsave.org.
Armenian Art through the Gaze of Western Institutions

ATTRIBUTION WITHIN WESTERN INSTITUTIONS

In Western institutions, the ramifications of this ignorance is seen in Armenian art often being attributed using regional labels such as Armenian, Turkish, Ottoman, Seljuk, or Persian. Anthony D. Smith notes that Khachkars or Armenian cemeteries are often misattributed, reflecting how Armenian history has not been isolated from the influence of other cultures. Rather, it has actively commingled with them for centuries to the extent that, as Maranci recenters, “through Armenian art, you’re gonna get a glimpse of ancient sculpture, Roman temple architecture, Islamic art, and Byzantine art. You’re going to learn about Western Europe. You’re going to learn about East Asia as well.”

However, Dr. Vazken Davidian, Faculty of Oriental Studies and Calouste Gulbenkian Postdoctoral Fellow in Armenian Studies at Oxford University, acknowledges these labels lack “an understanding of the cultural networks and exchanges that have influenced Armenian artists or craftsmen and women, how these Armenian objects, individuals, and visual vocabularies have influenced and enriched those of the wider region.”

In context, these labels are often encouraged by ignorance and confusion to attribute ignorance concerning Armenian artistic creations rather than appreciation for the various populations which have lived in the region. As Maranci adds, “in terms of Armenian culture, the styles of cultural exchange have been fragmented, and the breadth of ethnically Armenian artists through the periods of the Seljuk, the Ottoman, the Venetians, and the French is of course central to how they are displayed,” he notes— and in the West, institutional mislabeling is endemic of academic whitewashing.

Maranci makes it clear that even where there are numerous indicators which would normally signal a work was being Armenian, if the dealer, seller, or curator have been critically exposed to Armenian culture, it may still be misattributed. This lack of education often leads to instances of unacceptable oversimplification, where “there is this beautiful object that was labeled as ‘Islamic’ with no mention of Armenian maker or origin,” “but there was a lot of interaction with them, and there’s of course central to how they were,” he notes—and in the West, institutional mislabeling is endemic of academic whitewashing.

Maranci states that through Armenians, “…cultural goods—from their significance in relation to neighboring artistic traditions to actually developing a real sense of how these things are connected.”

The Impact of the Western Gaze on Armenian Art

This ignorance and prejudice regarding Armenian art has drastic implications on how it is presented. Dr. Vartanian states that “sometimes, when you’re talking about the arts, it becomes very nuanced, fragmented, and it doesn’t actually take it on its own terms, but often fits it into bigger categories that end up instrumentalizing Armenian and making it all secondary rather than central to the conversation.”

Thus, most of these misattributed Armenian objects remain dephthma, considered to be ‘Armenian art’ but with little or no further Armenian art and any chance it has of being seen publicly— let alone through an Armenian lens. Tucked between the cracks of academic and popular interpretations, much of Armenian art remains buried within the storage of institutions which have fragmented, and it doesn’t actually take it on its own terms, or still, are complex and don’t take place in a vacuum. We must find a way of proposing labeling practices that are inclusive and true of all their components and contexts in which they were created.

In the meantime, Maranci declares that Armenian viewers “may be the closest thing to an expert that these objects have ever seen.” They emphatically recommends pursuing museums’ online catalogs—which have recently expanded largely due to COVID-19—for Armenian art, arguing that Armenian communi- ties have the ability and responsibility to exercise their familiarity with Armenian language and history by educating their local institutions. In this way, Armenian communities have the capacity to, after years apart, reunite these timeless works with the corpus of Armenian art and include them in the legacy of Armenian cultural history.

Isabelle Kapoian is a student of economics, art history, and international affairs in the Class of 2021 at the University of New Hampshire. She holds professional interests in cultural property law and art market economics, plays the harp, and most enjoys reading and contributing to the Arts & Culture section of the Armenian Mirror-Reporter. Isabelle has participated in the Armenian Assembly’s Terminali-Thomas internship program in 2019 in Washington, DC and the AGBU’s Global Leadership Program. She is co-president of her university’s Middle Eastern Cultural Association, and sings in the choir at Sts. Vartanants Church in Chelmsford. She has been the summer intern at the Armenian Mirror-Reporter through the Armenian Students Association Journalism Internship Program.

Dr. Vazken Davidian

Dr. Christina Maranci

ARTS & LIVING

 Armenian Assembly’s Terjenian-Thomas internship program in 2019 in Washington, DC and the AGBU’s Global Leadership Program, is co-president of her university’s Middle Eastern Cultural Association, and sings in the choir at Sts. Vartanants Church in Chelmsford. She has been the summer intern at the Armenian Mirror-Reporter through the Armenian Students Association Journalism Internship Program.

Dr. Vazken Davidian declares, “We are never going to get a full picture of Armenian art when we use Western ideas around art because all the best Armenian art isn’t just oil on canvases or sculptures...” as is often heralded in the Western canon. “Some of it is handcraft. Some of it is dance. So we have to expand our notions of art to incorporate those worlds within those borders.” Mr. Vartanian further expresses that this ‘face-attitude toward an Armenian’ art has “created Armenians that only know little parts of our history and end up feeling like there’s a significant history of Armenian art.”

Even our perception of the function of Armenian art has been harmed by the Western lens: “a lot of the most precious artifacts of Armenian art and art were actually stored and shown only on precious occasions for people as an almost individual relationship (with them) which is very much against the traditional idea of how we see art at least in most American art history...” comments Vartanian.

Cultural and Artistic Reunion

Sometimes, persisting in the correct identification of a work of art pays off...

This past February, five years after the historic settlement between the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church regarding the pro- cedure for归还 of the Keys to the Armenian Churches, “there are still enormous gaps in our knowledge regarding Armenian art and cultural artifacts has affected this ignorance and prejudice regarding Armenian art has dramatically impacted how we understand the context of their creation and the processes and exchanges with cultures near and far which have influence...” Dr. Maranci states. As it stands now, “how can we ever see it in its proper context, fragmented, and it doesn’t actually take it on its own terms, or still, are complex and don’t take place in a vacuum.. We must find a way of proposing labeling practices that are inclusive and true of all their components and contexts in which they were created.”

In the meantime, Maranci declares that Armenian viewers “may be the closest thing to an expert that these objects have ever seen.” She emphatically recommends pursuing museums’ online catalogs—which have recently expanded largely due to COVID-19—for Armenian art, arguing that Armenian commu-

In the meantime, Maranci declares that Armenian viewers “may be the closest thing to an expert that these objects have ever seen.” She emphatically recommends pursuing museums’ online catalogs—which have recently expanded largely due to COVID-19—for Armenian art, arguing that Armenian communities have the ability and responsibility to exercise their familiarity with Armenian language and history by educating their local institutions. In this way, Armenian communities have the capacity to, after years apart, reunite these timeless works with the corpus of Armenian art and include them in the legacy of Armenian cultural history.

Isabelle Kapoian is a student of economics, art history, and international affairs in the Class of 2021 at the University of New Hampshire. She holds professional interests in cultural property law and art market economics, plays the harp, and most enjoys reading and contributing to the Arts & Culture section of the Armenian Mirror-Reporter. Isabelle has participated in the Armenian Assembly’s Terminali-Thomas internship program in 2019 in Washington, DC and the AGBU’s Global Leadership Program. She is co-president of her university’s Middle Eastern Cultural Association, and sings in the choir at Sts. Vartanants Church in Chelmsford. She has been the summer intern at the Armenian Mirror-Reporter through the Armenian Students Association Journalism Internship Program.

Dr. Vazken Davidian declares, “We are never going to get a full picture of Armenian art when we use Western ideas around art because all the best Armenian art isn’t just oil on canvases or sculptures...” as is often heralded in the Western canon. “Some of it is handcraft. Some of it is dance. So we have to expand our notions of art to incorporate those worlds within those borders.” Mr. Vartanian further expresses that this ‘face-attitude toward an Armenian’ art has “created Armenians that only know little parts of our history and end up feeling like there’s a significant history of Armenian art.”

Even our perception of the function of Armenian art has been harmed by the Western lens: “a lot of the most precious artifacts of Armenian art and art were actually stored and shown only on precious occasions for people as an almost individual relationship (with them) which is very much against the traditional idea of how we see art at least in most American art history...” comments Vartanian.

Cultural and Artistic Reunion

Sometimes, persisting in the correct identification of a work of art pays off...

This past February, five years after the historic settlement between the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church regarding the prove-

Armenian Assembly’s Terjenian-Thomas internship program in 2019 in Washington, DC and the AGBU’s Global Leadership Program, is co-president of her university’s Middle Eastern Cultural Association, and sings in the choir at Sts. Vartanants Church in Chelmsford. She has been the summer intern at the Armenian Mirror-Reporter through the Armenian Students Association Journalism Internship Program.

Dr. Vazken Davidian

Dr. Christina Maranci

ARTS & LIVING

 Armenian Assembly’s Terjenian-Thomas internship program in 2019 in Washington, DC and the AGBU’s Global Leadership Program, is co-president of her university’s Middle Eastern Cultural Association, and sings in the choir at Sts. Vartanants Church in Chelmsford. She has been the summer intern at the Armenian Mirror-Reporter through the Armenian Students Association Journalism Internship Program.

Dr. Vazken Davidian

Dr. Christina Maranci

ARTS & LIVING

 Armenian Assembly’s Terjenian-Thomas internship program in 2019 in Washington, DC and the AGBU’s Global Leadership Program, is co-president of her university’s Middle Eastern Cultural Association, and sings in the choir at Sts. Vartanants Church in Chelmsford. She has been the summer intern at the Armenian Mirror-Reporter through the Armenian Students Association Journalism Internship Program.

Dr. Vazken Davidian

Dr. Christina Maranci

ARTS & LIVING

 Armenian Assembly’s Terjenian-Thomas internship program in 2019 in Washington, DC and the AGBU’s Global Leadership Program, is co-president of her university’s Middle Eastern Cultural Association, and sings in the choir at Sts. Vartanants Church in Chelmsford. She has been the summer intern at the Armenian Mirror-Reporter through the Armenian Students Association Journalism Internship Program.

Dr. Vazken Davidian

Dr. Christina Maranci

ARTS & LIVING

 Armenian Assembly’s Terjenian-Thomas internship program in 2019 in Washington, DC and the AGBU’s Global Leadership Program, is co-president of her university’s Middle Eastern Cultural Association, and sings in the choir at Sts. Vartanants Church in Chelmsford. She has been the summer intern at the Armenian Mirror-Reporter through the Armenian Students Association Journalism Internship Program.
Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian

Kharpertsi-style Kufta from Fresno

Recently, the Armenian Cultural Conservancy (ACC) of Fresno hosted its third annual Armenian Cultural Arts Class in the Armenian-American Citizens League Hall (AACL) at the California Armenian Home (CAH). The feature is a representation of the traditional Kharpertsi-style kufta from Fresno—so celebrated, yet made less often in Armenian homes today. There are many versions of stuffed kufta recipes throughout the Middle East, but this is one of the most traditional. Kharpertsi-style kufta is stuffed with ground beef, onions, pine nuts, and spices, and boiled, and is usually served in a bowl with a cooking broth. (These same kufta, made smaller and in the shape of mini-footballs, may be baked or deep fried and served as an appetizer.) Students and guests enjoyed a kufta lunch, including salad, cheese pieh, borun, and paenkimion cookies. Each attendee received a printed recipe and additional kufta to take home, along with memories of a morning of fellowship and learning about Armenian culture and traditional cuisine.

FILLING (“POW”) INGREDIENTS:
4 lbs. ground lean beef
3/4 lb. butter
5 lbs. chopped onions

PREPARATION:
Spray frying pan with oil and add 1/8 cup water. Add 4 lbs. ground lean beef and brown, chopping and stirring until it is the consistency of taco filling (30 minutes). When the liquid has dissipated, place the meat in an 11 x 17 baking pan and bake at 425 degrees uncovered for another 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add 3/4 lb. butter, cut up. When melted, add 5 lbs. chopped onions, and cook about one hour, stirring every 15 minutes. Cook until onions are soft and transparent (no longer crunchy).

Take out of oven and add: 1 bunch chopped parsley, 1 tablespoon salt, 1 tablespoon black pepper (fine), 1 tablespoon sweet basil (rahan), 1 tablespoon white pepper, 2 tablespoons salt, 1 tablespoon black pepper (fine), 1 tablespoon sweet basil (rahan), and a dash of cayenne pepper. Stir and chill overnight.

Break up the filling before using a scoop to make balls of filling the size of a walnut. Place them on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper.

PREPARATION:
Begin with 32 oz. of cool water in mixer. Add 3 lbs. fine bulgur and beat for approximately 20 minutes. Add 1 egg, and beat at least 10 minutes. Gradually add another 32 oz. of cool water and beat another 20-30 minutes. Add more water as needed, until the dough is soft, pliable, and has a smooth consistency. Use 1/4 cup measure for uniform amount for each ball. Make 2 “pinch pot” making walls thin. Place a filling of and closing, shaping into a ball. Place on a tray lined with parchment paper.

To serve, make a broth and salt to taste. Add tomato sauce, if desired. Drop kuftas a few at a time and cover until it comes to a boil. Then take the lid off and continue boiling until kuftas float to the top, about 15-20 minutes. Use a strainer spoon to remove kuftas so it won’t puncture the walls. Serve with or without broth.

Yield: Approximately 75 kuftas or 6 dozen. Freeze overnight, then store in freezer bags.

These kufta are best served with rice or bulgur pilaf, yogurt, Armenian salad, cheese, olives, roasted peppers, and fresh lavash or pita bread.
While Armenia is concerned with Turkish expansion in the Caucasus through its regional satellite, Azerbaijan, and the Europeans are alarmed by Turkey’s mischief in Greek and Cypriot waters, Ankara is extending its tentacles to Lebanon, where a thriving Armenian community has existed for almost a full century. Armenia found a safe haven in Lebanon after the Genocide and through the network of schools, churches, cultural centers, newspapers and sports groups, developed a fully-realized community, which also enhanced its political clout, landing Armenians in state leadership posts.

The Lebanese Armenians have also exported their cultural and educational strength to other Armenian communities in Western countries.

Now, all that is coming to a grinding halt, first because of the destructiveness of that once-pompous country and also because of the ominous shadow that Turkey is casting. To demonstrate how political life has changed in Lebanon, it is sufficient to remember that in earlier years, when the Armenians commemorated the anniversary of the Genocide every April 24, the entire country joined them, shutting down businesses and government offices. Earlier this summer, however, when an Armenian television anchor, Nesan Der Hartosian, criticized President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s nefarious policies in the region, he landed in a courtroom. Even more ominously, immediately after making his comments, his television station offices were surrounded by an angry throng waving Turkish flags and threatening Armenians. They called themselves Murdillis and pledged allegiance to Turkey.

In addition, the Turkish government reacted angrily when the Lebanese President Michel Aoun said that in 1915 the Ottoman rulers had created an artificial famine in Lebanon to kill its citizens. For a long time, Turkey has been infiltrating Lebanese through trade, television programs and so-called charitable activities. Lebanon has always served as an open forum to all Middle Eastern rivalries and political conflicts but the major players had been the Arab countries and since 1982, when Israel occupied southern Lebanon.

One of the major conflicts has been between the Sunni Muslims and the Shiites; it is a dispute the flames of which were particularly fanned by the West to divert the Arab Street's anger from Israel to Iran. The Western media tried to convince the Arabs that Iran was the enemy and not Israel, through the latter occupied the West Bank and Gaza. It was an ironic turnaround when Yossi Cohen, the head of the Israeli secret service, Mossad, according to the Times of London, stated to stymies from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Universal Arab Emirates, that “Iranian power is fragile but the real threat is from Turkey.”

Turkey thus far has benefited from the religious divide between the Sunnis and Shiites, voting for the leadership of the former, which in turn has alarmed Saudi Arabia and Egypt, who seek the same plum prize. Iran, of course, through Hezbollah, has the control of the Shiites.

Since the August 4 explosion at the Beirut harbor, aid flights are arriving from around the world – from Egypt, Morocco, Russia, Saudi Arabia and 30 other countries. French President Emmanuel Macron was the first head of state to arrive, walking the streets of the city surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd. The scene apparently frustrated President Erdogan, who said that he saw his undersecretary, Fatih Oktay, and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, who vowed to rebuild the port and issue citizenship to anyone who has claims to Turkish destruction of that once-prosperous country and also because of the ominous shadow that Turkey is casting.

Turkey has also resorted to all-too-familiar methods to gain influence, ones that it first used in Iraq and to better effect in Syria. It is arming its murderers and mercenaries who have wreaked havoc on Syria and today in Libya. Turkey has built a solid political base in the northern Lebanese cities of Tripoli and Akkar.

Recent photos show that Turkey’s “charitable” hand has been creeping further down all the way to Junieh, where Turkish barges have docked to help with the neglected electricity sector. It does not take too much to ignite a civil war in Lebanon. This has been done time and again, in 1958 and later in the 1970s; the latter lasted for 15 years, to be concluded by the Taif Agreement in 1989. The army, in its turn, will split along religious lines and then you have a civil war.

This is exactly how Turkey started the war in Syria, by irritating that country through its mercenaries and supplying them with weapons. That was a blatant foreign aggression, which the Western media, in collusion with Turkey, branded a “civil war.” It looks like a similar scenario is being drawn up in Lebanon. It does not take too much to ignite a civil war in Lebanon. This has been done time and again, in 1958 and later in the 1970s; the latter lasted for 15 years, to be concluded by the Taif Agreements in 1989. The army, in its turn, will split along religious lines and then you have a perfect storm on your hands.

Armenian American newspapers and sports groups, developed a fully-realized community, which also enhanced its political clout, landing Armenians in state leadership posts.

While Armenia is concerned with Turkish expansion in the Caucasus through its regional satellite, Azerbaijan, and the Europeans are alarmed by Turkey’s mischief in Greek and Cypriot waters, Ankara is extending its tentacles to Lebanon, where a thriving Armenian community has existed for almost a full century. Armenia found a safe haven in Lebanon after the Genocide and through the network of schools, churches, cultural centers, newspapers and sports groups, developed a fully-realized community, which also enhanced its political clout, landing Armenians in state leadership posts.

The Lebanese Armenians have also exported their cultural and educational strength to other Armenian communities in Western countries.

Now, all that is coming to a grinding halt, first because of the destructiveness of that once-pompous country and also because of the ominous shadow that Turkey is casting. To demonstrate how political life has changed in Lebanon, it is sufficient to remember that in earlier years, when the Armenians commemorated the anniversary of the Genocide every April 24, the entire country joined them, shutting down businesses and government offices. Earlier this summer, however, when an Armenian television anchor, Nesan Der Hartosian, criticized President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s nefarious policies in the region, he landed in a courtroom. Even more ominously, immediately after making his comments, his television station offices were surrounded by an angry throng waving Turkish flags and threatening Armenians. They called themselves Murdillis and pledged allegiance to Turkey.

In addition, the Turkish government reacted angrily when the Lebanese President Michel Aoun said that in 1915 the Ottoman rulers had created an artificial famine in Lebanon to kill its citizens. For a long time, Turkey has been infiltrating Lebanese through trade, television programs and so-called charitable activities. Lebanon has always served as an open forum to all Middle Eastern rivalries and political conflicts but the major players had been the Arab countries and since 1982, when Israel occupied southern Lebanon.

One of the major conflicts has been between the Sunni Muslims and the Shiites; it is a dispute the flames of which were particularly fanned by the West to divert the Arab Street’s anger from Israel to Iran. The Western media tried to convince the Arabs that Iran was the enemy and not Israel, through the latter occupied the West Bank and Gaza. It was an ironic turnaround when Yossi Cohen, the head of the Israeli secret service, Mossad, according to the Times of London, stated to stymies from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Universal Arab Emirates, that “Iranian power is fragile but the real threat is from Turkey.”

Turkey thus far has benefited from the religious divide between the Sunnis and Shiites, voting for the leadership of the former, which in turn has alarmed Saudi Arabia and Egypt, who seek the same plum prize. Iran, of course, through Hezbollah, has the control of the Shiites.

Since the August 4 explosion at the Beirut harbor, aid flights are arriving from around the world – from Egypt, Morocco, Russia, Saudi Arabia and 30 other countries. French President Emmanuel Macron was the first head of state to arrive, walking the streets of the city surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd. The scene apparently frustrated President Erdogan, who said that he saw his undersecretary, Fatih Oktay, and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, who vowed to rebuild the port and issue citizenship to anyone who has claims to Turkish destruction of that once-prosperous country and also because of the ominous shadow that Turkey is casting.

Turkey has also resorted to all-too-familiar methods to gain influence, ones that it first used in Iraq and to better effect in Syria. It is arming its murderers and mercenaries who have wreaked havoc on Syria and today in Libya. Turkey has built a solid political base in the northern Lebanese cities of Tripoli and Akkar.

Recent photos show that Turkey’s “charitable” hand has been creeping further down all the way to Junieh, where Turkish barges have docked to help with the neglected electricity sector. It does not take too much to ignite a civil war in Lebanon. This has been done time and again, in 1958 and later in the 1970s; the latter lasted for 15 years, to be concluded by the Taif Agreement in 1989. The army, in its turn, will split along religious lines and then you have a perfect storm on your hands.

A commentary in the Jerusalem Post this week states: “A man who inherited a promising economy that was built with American and European support is now leading a country to the brink of bankruptcy. In his quest to revive the ‘Ottoman Legacy,’ he has brought blood and destruction not only to his own people but also on hundreds of innocent civilians throughout the Arab world. Erdogan, the leader who promised to promote democratic reforms in his country, turned his back on Turkey’s democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip of democratic institutions and placed them under the tight grip...
Turkey’s Leaders Furious at Biden For his Attack on President Erdogan

Democratic Presidential nominee Joe Biden was interviewed by the New York Times editorial board on December 16, 2019. In his interview, Biden called Turkish President Erdogan “an autocrat,” urged his “isolationism” and sought his “defeat” in the next elections.

Even through the interview took place eight months ago and was published by The New York Times on January 17, 2020, the Turkish government and media showed no reaction at the time. A week ago, several months after the interview became public, a series of orchestrated hysterical attacks were launched in Turkey on Biden’s comments to the New York Times.

Let’s look at what Biden told the New York Times last December:

“I’ve spent a lot of time with him [President Erdogan of Turkey]. I’ve had quite a bit of public and private interaction with him about the Kurds, and we’ve got a lot more. What I think should be done is taking a very different approach to him now, making it clear that we support opposition leadership. Making it clear that we are in a position where we have a way which was working for a while to integrate the Kurdish population who wanted to participate in the process in their parliament, etc. Because we have to sort out about what we think is fact and wrong. He has to pay a price. He has to pay a price for whether or not we’re going to continue to sell certain weapons to him. In fact, if he has the [Russian] air defense system that they’re flying F-15s through to see how they can try to figure out how to do it.”

Biden went on: “So I’m very concerned about it. I’m very concerned about it. But I’m still of the view that if we were to engage more directly like I was doing with them, that we can support those elements of the Turkish leadership that still exist and get more from them and embodiments to be able to take on and defeat Erdogan. Not by a coup, not by a coup, but by the electoral process. He got blasted out in Istanbul [during the mayoral elections]. He got blown out in his party. So what do we do now? We just sit there, and yield. And the last thing I would’ve done is yield to him with regard to the Kurds. The absolute last thing!”

Biden concluded: “I had a couple of those meetings with him about the Kurds, and he’s got a lot to clamp down at the time. We have to make it clear that they’re looking to, because at the end of the day, Turkey doesn’t want to have to rely on us. They’ve had a bite out of that apple a long time ago. But they got to understand that we’re not going to continue to play with them the way we have. So I am very concerned. Indeed, I am very concerned about our airfields [in Turkey] and access to them as well. And I think it takes an awful lot of work for us to be able to get the situation with us with our ally to be able to isolate his actions in the region, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean in relating to oil and a whole range of other things which take too long to go into. But the answer is yes, I’m worried.”

On August 16, 2020, in response to Biden’s above comments, the Jerusalem Post reported that Turkish presidential adviser Ibrahim Kalin said: “Speaking about Mr. Biden’s comments, Cavusoglu said: “It’s weird that someone this uninformed [sic] wants to run the country.”

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also attacked Biden after meeting US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, calling the Democratic Presidential nominee an “idiot.” Speaking about Biden’s comments, Cavusoglu said: “It’s weird that someone this uninformed [sic] wants to run the country.”

It is understandable that Turkish leaders would not want to see Trump replaced by Biden. A few days ago, Trump told Fox News that Erdogan listens to him. Erdogan is also relying on the long-standing Turkish hostility to Western Europe, the United States and Christianity. Erdogan is used to whipping up the emotions of his undecided followers to stand by him, regardless of his poor performance. Instead, Erdogan has conveniently pivoted towards Russia and China, despite his country’s economic dependence on Western Europe.

Should Biden win in the Presidential elections, it remains to be seen if he would maintain his hard line approach to Erdogan and Turkey.

Belarusians Can Learn a Lot from Armenia’s Velvet Revolution

By Prof. Anna Ohanyan

In the last two weeks, tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets in Belarus to protest against the widely disputed results of the country’s August 9 election, which handed President Alexander Lukashenko some 80 percent of the votes. In 2000, after a disputed presidential election, opposition leaders were arrested en masse. A police crackdown on peaceful protesters in the days after the vote saw nearly 7,000 demonstrators arrested, and sparked allegations of abuse and torture against the security service. One of the activists sentenced to prison was Svetlana Tihanovskaya, who refused to concede defeat to Lukashenko, was forced to flee the country two days after the election. Lukashenko remained in power for 26 years without facing a significant challenge to his authority by playing the West and Russia against each other. Despite this tactical jockeying, however, Lukashenko always won the support of the regions by appealing to a wide spectrum of political, social, and economic interests. In 1999, when the then Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, was weak and his power was leaking away, Lukashenko even proposed to unify his country with Russia, which would have been a fatal mistake, especially for a man who had managed to stay on in office. After that, the Russian intervention started, and a coup d’état did take place.

The Belarusian protesters are facing unique challenges, not only because they are revolting against a violent and highly authoritarian regime, but also because they are trying to trigger a democratic transition in a country in place firmly in Russia’s authoritarian security orbit. Among those with strong security and economic ties to Russia, Belarus is only the second state, after Armenia, where people have risen against their Kremlin-backed rulers. As such, Armenia’s “Velvet Revolution” in 2018, which saw a peaceful and democratic transition through peaceful disobedience, offers a range of tactical lessons for both the opposition movement and the government in Belarus.

Three key lessons emerged from Armenia’s democratic breakthrough:

First, the protesters in Armenia worked hard to keep the protests strictly non-violent and non-political. That way, they did not cast the protests as another Western-instigated “color revolution”, which would have delegitimized the movement. To achieve a successful democratic breakthrough, the Belarusian opposition should mimic this approach, and capitalize on the grassroots nature of the protests.

Second, the leader of Armenia’s protest movement, current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, signaled early, clearly and consistently that the movement, if successful, would not lead to a shift in foreign policy away from Russia. This messaging played an important role in keeping the Russian soldiers in their bases during the revolution. While Armenia’s security needs are quite different from those of Belarus, protest leaders in Minsk could also benefit from managing Russia’s threat perceptions.

Third, Pashinyan held formal and informal negotiations with international actors. As a result, Armenia’s protest movement unfolded within an imperfect but, nevertheless, constitutionally ordered framework. This allowed the government, the opposition, and the population to try to figure out how to coexist. The Velvet Revolution yielded. And the last thing I would’ve done is yield to him with regard to the Kurds. The absolute last thing!”

In many respects, the movement in Belarus is similar to Armenia’s Velvet revolution of 2018. Just like Armenia, Belarus is a former Soviet state that is currently going through a profound democratic transition. Both countries are members of Russian-centric regional organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union, and they are both economically reliant on Russia. But there are also some significant differences between the ongoing protests in Belarus and the Velvet Revolution that took place in Armenia.

Unlike Armenia, Belarus is not in the post-Soviet era. Belarus has always been under a strict dictatorial regime while Armenia has been led by what could be described as “soft authoritarianism” and only began in the 1990s, and therefore has managed to consolidate a cult of personality around the president. As I have written elsewhere, the extent of regional connectivity in Russia’s vicinities can make or break the Kremlin’s incursions into its “near abroad”, be they military or hybrid. The democratic consolidation in Armenia and regional ties between the Baltic states, therefore, is an obvious political asset for the pro-democracy movement in Belarus.

Furthermore, Belarus also shares a border with Poland, and therefore the European Union as well.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Lukashenko is trying to continue an external threat where there is none. He has claimed, inaccurately, that NATO forces are building up in Eastern Europe, attempting to portray the protest movement in Belarus as a threat to its, and Russia’s, security.

Another advantage the pro-democracy movement in Belarus has over the one in Armenia is the democratic character of its immediate neighboring states. As I have written elsewhere, the extent of regional connectivity in Russia’s vicinities can make or break the Kremlin’s incursions into its “near abroad”, be they military or hybrid. The democratic consolidation in the Baltic states, therefore, is also an obvious political asset for the pro-democracy movement in Belarus.

Furthermore, Belarus also shares a border with Poland, and therefore the European Union as well.

It is this in sharp contrast to Armenia which is surrounded by authoritarian states, the sole exception being Georgia to its north. The Armenian case provides a democratic success story with Georgia, which helped it construe Russian involvement and complete its Velvet Revolution. Intervening in Belarus would be much more costly for Russia: it would lose a regional power in the region, and increase the pressure on Russia’s southern flank. And unlike in Armenia, Putin’s attempt to formally unite Belarus with Russia created a backlash among the populace in Belarus, especially among the regimes strongest supporters.

This commentary originally appeared on Al Jazeera on August 21.
Armenian News From Turkey

Garo Paylan Addresses Questions to the Government of Turkey

Istanbul (Agos) – After the new regime transferred all the powers of government to the president of the Republic, the National Assembly of Turkey to a large extent lost its authority. The representatives of the two political parties that make up the majority within the Assembly generally are satisfied merely to ensure the ratification of the legislation or bills coming from the presidential palace. The members of the opposition parties justify their vocation as representatives by directing official questions to various ministers. In that regard one of the notable opposition politicians is Garo Paylan, who recently directed one question to the Minister of Culture about the looting of the abandoned cemetery in the once-Armenian village of Stanos near Ankara, and another to the Minister of the Interior, about the mayorships his HDP party has won.

The historical village of Stanos is located in the district of Sincan near the capital, Ankara. The people of Stanos had immigrated from Persia in the past and brought with them a developed knowledge of weaving. The famed Angora (Ankara) Wool existed because of them. After the Genocide, the completely abandoned village cemetery was subject to perpetual looting by treasure-hunters.

The second point Paylan turned to is the takeover by the government of 47 out of 65 mayorships that his party won. The members of the opposition parties justify their vocation as representatives by directing official questions to various ministers. In that regard one of the notable opposition politicians is Garo Paylan, who recently directed one question to the Minister of Culture about the looting of the abandoned cemetery in the once-Armenian village of Stanos near Ankara, and another to the Minister of the Interior, about the mayorships his HDP party has won.

The historical village of Stanos is located in the district of Sincan near the capital, Ankara. The people of Stanos had immigrated from Persia in the past and brought with them a developed knowledge of weaving. The famed Angora (Ankara) Wool existed because of them. After the Genocide, the completely abandoned village cemetery was subject to perpetual looting by treasure-hunters.

The second point Paylan turned to is the takeover by the government of 47 out of 65 mayorships that his party won.

Surp Partoghimeos Church Near Van Damaged by Earthquake Across Border in Iran

Istanbul (Agos) – Friends in Van with ties to Agos report that the recent earthquakes that took place in Iran damaged the church of Surp Partoghimeos near Van. A piece of the wall fell during the quakes. Years ago, experts were sounding the alarm and demanding immediate repairs to the church. Until very recently, Surp Partoghimeos was located in a forbidden militarized zone. Lately, the army has relaxed the restrictions of that area and the church has become the target of treasure-hunters.

Sources revealed that from the same causes, the old broken-down house which belonged to William Saroyan’s family in Biflis has also been damaged. This news has not been verified since it is debated whether the house actually belonged to the Saroyans.

The monastery and church of Surp Partoghimeos, or St. Bartholomew, in the region of Aghipag (Bashkale) was traditionally considered by the Armenian Apostolic Church as the resting place of the Apostle Bartholomew. Its diocese once stretched from Aghipag in the hinterlands of Van province where it is located to the Urmiya region of Iran.

Esayan School of Istanbul Faces Problems in Coronavirus Era

Istanbul (Agos) – The coronavirus has created critical conditions in many countries within the field of education. The Turkish Ministry of Education has delayed the start of the school year from August 31 to September 21. Meanwhile distance learning is being planned and classrooms having less students may have face to face learning. In all this, the Armenian community’s schools are also trying to conquer their particular and multifaceted problems. Currently, the Armenian public’s attention is directed to the Esayan School, where the positions of the two dismissed principals have not yet been filled. Unless secret preparations have somehow been made behind closed doors, it is very likely that Esayan will start the school year without a principal in either the primary or the secondary divisions.

Aside from all the problems related to this unresolved situation, two worthy teachers have resigned: Armaveni Miroglu and Yeva Buyuksimkesyan. The productive Armenian language teacher Armaveni Miroglu indicated to Agos that she was dissatisfied with the firing of the two principals in such an unethical way. The English teacher Yeva Buyuksimkesyan also expressed the same opinions and put an end to more than 24 years of service in this school.

HELP Rebuild The Tekeyan School of Beirut

The Vahan Tekeyan School was damaged by the August 4 explosion in Beirut. It serves a low-income segment of the Armenian community and already was struggling due to Lebanon’s economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. Now the school is trying to reopen for the fall semester. The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada is sending aid and asks your assistance.

Send your donations by credit card at https://givemoney.com/Tekelman or send checks to the Tekeyan Cultural Association (memo: Vahan Tekeyan School), ext to its headquarters (755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown MA 02472). All administrative costs for this campaign will be borne by the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada. For more information, email tekeadv@tds.net or call 617 924-4455.