

Development on the Frontier



The Tavush countryside on the outskirts of Ijevan (courtesy of Mateos Hayes)

California Assemblymember Nazarian Asks Congress to Halt Military Funding of Azerbaijan After Tavush Attacks

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

SACRAMENTO –
Fifteen California
State Assembly

and Senate members sent a letter to the Californian representation in the United States Congress calling for an end to US assistance and funding to Azerbaijan after the attacks on Tavush, Armenia, in July 2020. Assemblymember Adrin

Nazarian, who spearheaded this initiative, provides its background.

The letter, dated August 3, is signed by members of the Armenian Caucasus in the California legislature as well as other supporters. Nazarian said that in general, if there is an important issue on the national level, such letters asking for support from the California delegation are sent, but that usually they concern domestic topics like health care or criminal justice reform. Foreign policy does not fall under the jurisdiction of the state level, so this, he said, was an act “purely of advocacy.”

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California State
Assemblymember
Adrin Nazarian

Tavush Province, Part I

As part of a three-article series, the Mirror-Spectator has investigated the economic and development challenges faced by residents and leaders of the Tavush region

By Mateos Hayes

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

TAVUSH, Armenia – The province of Tavush is the green jewel of the Armenian landscape. Located in the

landlocked nation’s northeastern corner, Tavush is a crossroads of sorts, sharing an international border with Georgia and Azerbaijan.

With its idyllic rolling green hills, its majestic mountains, and its picturesque valleys and rivers, Tavush Province is unquestionably one of the most beautiful corners of Armenia. It is replete with friendly and hard-working locals eager to extend their hospitality to the few outsiders that pass through the province.

However, the largely agrarian province is also one of the more underdeveloped parts of Armenia, accounting for just 1.2 percent of Armenian industrial output as of 2019. There are many contributing factors to this situation, including underdeveloped infrastructure and the legacy of post-Soviet economic decline. But one of the factors central to the challenges the province currently faces has been the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

see TAVUSH, page 3

Armenia Backs Egypt In Row With Turkey

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Armenia voiced on Monday, September 14, strong support for Egypt’s position in bitter disputes with Turkey over maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean and the conflict in Libya.

Making an official visit to Cairo, Foreign Zohrab Mnatsakanyan also accused Ankara of destabilizing these and neighboring regions, including the South Caucasus.

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Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry (R) and his Armenian counterpart Zohrab Mnatsakanian hold a news conference after talks in Cairo, September 14, 2020.

Little Armenias: It’s a Small World After All

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

PARIS – Say you are visiting Estonia and get the yen for *yalanchi*. Robin Koulaksezian has you covered. You have your choice of Sevan Grill, Noy Grill and Zangezur Grillbar in downtown Tallinn. Similarly, yearning for some *khovats* in Vietnam? Look no further than Restaurant Armenia, Small Armenia and Yerevan Grill BBQ on the beach resort of Nha Trang on the south central coast of that country. Feeling in the need for spiritual support in Eswatini? He offers directions to the Church of Holy Resurrection in the capital.

see DIASPORA, page 15

NEWS IN BRIEF

Anniversary Events Moved Online

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Most events dedicated to the 29th anniversary of Armenia’s Independence will be held online and will be shown on TV because of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

On September 21 festive programs will be broadcast on the First Channel, Armen Khachatryan, head of the department of Information and Public Relations at the PM’s administration, told Armenpress.

“There will be numerous interesting archival videos, warm greetings by soldiers serving in the Army and performance by musicians in the beautiful sites of the country, and the annual award ceremony Hero of Our Times will take place in the Zvartnots historical-cultural museum-reserve. It will be held by keeping all anti-coronavirus rules,” he said.

China to Join Military Exercises in Russia

BEIJING (AP) – Chinese and Russian forces will take part in joint military exercises in southern Russia later this month along with troops from Armenia, Belarus, Iran, Myanmar, Pakistan and others, China’s defense ministry announced Thursday.

The “Caucasus 2020” drills will deploy wheeled vehicles and light weaponry to be flown to the drill location by China’s latest transport aircraft, the ministry said in a statement.

The exercises, running September 21-26, will focus on defensive tactics, encirclement and battlefield control and command, the ministry said.

The exercises have special meaning for China-Russia ties “at this important moment when the whole world is fighting the pandemic,” it said.

China has reported no new domestic coronavirus cases in weeks, while Russia is continuing to see new cases and has reported more than 1 million people infected.

Since establishing a “comprehensive strategic partnership” two decades ago, China and Russia have cooperated increasingly closely on military matters and diplomacy, largely to counter U.S. influence.

New Yerevan Metro Station in the Works

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – The Armenian government will provide \$35 million for the construction of a new subway station in the north of Yerevan, mayor Hayk Marutyan said Monday, September 14.

Marutyan noted they initially intended to involve the private sector to ease the burden on the government but none of the terms were in the interests of the city or the state, Aysor.am reports.

“A tender for the project is being worked out at the moment, which will cost about \$35 million,” the mayor said.

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Ode to the Midwest

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ARMENIA

News From Armenia

Opposition Lawmakers Drop Plans for Anti-Abortion Bill

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Citing strong objections from civil society members, two opposition parliamentarians have abandoned plans to introduce legislation that would ban abortions in Armenia except in cases of medical emergency.

Naira Zohrabian of the opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) announced last week that she and fellow BHK deputy Shake Isayan will circulate a “draft law on unborn children’s right to life” in the coming days. Zohrabian cited a large number of abortions carried out in the country. She said the bill is also necessary for tackling the chronic problem of gender-based selective abortions.

Health experts and civic activists strongly objected to the proposed ban. They argued, among other things, that Armenian law already prohibits selective abortions.

Zohrabian complained about critics’ “attacks” but sought to distance herself from the bill on Monday, September 14.

Zohrabian, who also heads the Armenian parliament committee on human rights, said she and Isayan decided not to press for the bill’s passage by the National Assembly because other NGOs came up with “substantiated” arguments against the proposed ban.

Abortion has been legal in Armenia since Soviet times. Armenian law currently allows the procedure during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Artsakh Extends State of Emergency for COVID

STEPANAKERT (Armenpress) — President Arayik Harutyunyan of Artsakh has signed an order on extending the COVID-19-related state of emergency for another 30 days, his office said.

Artsakh originally declared a state of emergency on April 12 and extended it ever since. The currently active one was set to end September 11.

The state of emergency will be prolonged until October 11.

The country recorded 328 coronavirus cases so far. As of September 11, the number of active cases stood at 43.

Aronian Finishes Third At Champions Showdown: Chess9LX

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian Grandmaster Levon Aronian drew the match against former world champion Garry Kasparov to in the ninth and final round to finish third in the 2020 Champions Showdown: Chess9LX (Fischer Random) online tournament over the weekend.

Hikaru Nakamura shared the title with Magnus Carlsen with six points apiece, half a point ahead of Aronian and World No. 2 Fabiano Caruana of the United States with 5.5 points apiece.

The 2020 Champions Showdown: Chess 9LX was a 10-player Chess960 single round-robin, which took place online from September 11-13 and was hosted by the Saint Louis Chess Club.

For First Time, Woman Heads Armenia Interpol Office

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Police Chief of Armenia Vahe Ghazaryan signed a decree on appointing Police Lieutenant-Colonel Narine Hakobyan Head of the National Central Bureau of Interpol in Armenia.

For the first time in history the NCB of Interpol in Armenia will be headed by a woman.

Previously Ara Fidanyan was serving as head of the NCB of Interpol in Armenia, but according to the September 2 presidential decree, he was appointed Deputy Police Chief.

Opposition to Boycott Election Of New High Court Judges

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Opposition members of the Armenian parliament said on September 14 that they will boycott the election of three new members of the Constitutional Court who will replace justices controversially ousted in June.

The deputies representing the opposition Prosperous Armenia (BHK) and Bright Armenia (LHK) parties again challenged the legality of constitutional changes enacted by the parliament’s pro-government majority.

The changes call for the gradual resignation of seven of the Constitutional Court’s nine judges who have been locked in a standoff with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s political team. Three of them were to resign with immediate effect. Also, Hrayr Tovmasyan had to quit as court chairman but remain a judge.

Tovmasyan and the ousted judges refused to step down, saying that their removal is illegal and politically motivated. They appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to have them reinstated.

Despite the legal action, Pashinyan, President Armen Sarkissian and a national convention of Armenian judges

have each nominated a candidate to replace the ousted judges. Under the Armenian constitution, all new members of the Constitutional Court must be appointed by the parliament in secret ballot.

The National Assembly discussed the three candidacies ahead of the vote scheduled for Tuesday. The candidates held separate meetings with deputies from Pashinyan’s My Step bloc prior to the parliament session. None of them met with the BHK’s and the LHK’s parliamentary groups, a fact deplored by the latter.

“I have been a member of the parliament since 2007 and can’t recall any other case of parliamentary opposition factions being ignored in this fashion,” said the BHK’s Naira Zohrabian.

Ruben Rubinyan, a senior My Step lawmaker, criticized the opposition boycott. He also dismissed other critics’ claims that all three candidates for the vacant Constitutional Court seats were linked to Armenia’s former leadership in one way or another.

The candidates were asked tough questions by other pro-government lawmakers. One of the candidates, Yervand

Khundkaryan, has headed the Court of Cassation, the country’s highest body of criminal and administrative justice, for the last two years. He was nominated by fellow judges in early August.

According to media reports, the state Commission on the Prevention of Corruption has advised the parliament against appointing Khundkaryan, citing his judicial track record.

Also, My Step’s Taguhi Tovmasyan cited a 2013 report by the country’s former human rights ombudsman which accused Khundkaryan of helping the former Armenian authorities suppress judicial independence. The nominee strongly denied that.

Another candidate, Artur Vagharshyan, was picked by President Armen Sarkissian. Vagharshyan is a chair of jurisprudence at Yerevan State University. Sarkissian already nominated him for a vacant seat in the Constitutional Court as recently as in May 2019. The parliament majority rejected his candidacy at the time.

Pro-government lawmakers were clearly unhappy with the president’s decision to again try to have Vagharshyan appointed to the high court.



Deputies start the autumn session of the Armenian parliament, Yerevan, September 14, 2020.

Archive Director to Challenge Sacking in Court

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — The long-serving director of Armenia’s National Archive, Amatuni Virabyan, on Friday, September 11, condemned the government’s decision to sack him as illegal and pledged to challenge it in court.

Virabyan said that he was fired by Justice Minister Rustam Badasyan on Tuesday after refusing to step down.

A spokeswoman for the Armenian Ministry of Justice, Lusine Martirosyan, attributed the sacking to

accounting irregularities which she said have been exposed by the State Revenue Committee (SRC).

The SRC claimed two years ago that the National Archive failed to pay 742 million drams (\$1.5 million) in profit and value-added taxes. According to Martirosyan, the SRC fined it more than 21 million drams as a result.

The archive’s chief accountant, Vahagn Abisoghomyan, insisted that that the tax arrears resulted from a

delay in government funding of the state-run agency, rather than its mismanagement. He argued that the Finance Ministry paid the back taxes after the SRC audit.

Virabyan likewise denied any fraud or other financial wrongdoing. “If it was my fault why would they give me [the sum paid to the SRC?]” he told RFE/RL’s Armenian service.

The well-known historian, who has managed the National Archive for 19 years, said he will file a lawsuit against the Justice Ministry on Monday. He expressed confidence that a Yerevan court will overturn his sacking.

Virabyan described the legal action as a matter of principle. He said that his employment contract was due to expire in November and that he did not plan to ask the government to extend it.

Virabyan’s colleagues interviewed by RFE/RL’s Armenian service voiced support for him and deplored his dismissal. They included Karen Khtrian, the archive’s newly appointed acting director.

There are some 350 million historical and other documents kept at the National Archive. The oldest of them date back to the 1830s.



Amatuni Virabyan, director of the Armenian National Archive, at a news conference in Yerevan, February 8, 2011.



ARMENIA

Development on the Frontier: Tavush Province, Part I

TAVUSH, from page 1

This has been especially true in Tavush's border villages, a set of 42 villages that are near Armenia's border with Azerbaijan, 23 of which are in the direct line of fire. By gleaning the perspectives of regional leaders, the Mirror-Spectator has investigated the principal barriers to economic development and entrepreneurship in Tavush, and what can be done to overcome them.

'Strategic, Targeted Aid and Legislation Are Needed'

In short, the border towns of Tavush suffer from a dearth in investment. Inga Harutyunyan, director of the Pahapan Foundation, which works to bring sustainable economic and social development to the province, explained the problem as one concerning risk and trust: "We need to build trust with our donors for projects, which is a difficult thing to do." Harutyunyan also emphasized the importance of government incentives in encouraging sponsors to invest in an otherwise high-risk region.

The Pahapan organization has worked to address this problem, attracting investment from other parts of Armenia and from the Armenian diaspora. Using these sources, it has raised funds for the construction of communal shelters in schools and towns so that residents of the border region can protect themselves from shelling attacks.

Harutyunyan said the state must make it easier for the border villages to receive donations, take out loans and thus create businesses and jobs in the area. While she noted the VAT tax exemption given to border villages, Harutyunyan nonetheless emphasized that more must be done to ensure that government legislation facilitates entrepreneurship in Tavush border towns. Harutyunyan cited a specific example in which a donor wished to invest money for the establishment of a factory which would make recycled wood products, such as

mulch. This would be achieved via the importation of the required machinery from China.

Although this factory would have been exempt from the VAT tax, a 20-percent import tax still applied to the Chinese equipment, which would have amounted to a tax in excess of \$3,000. This rendered the project unfeasible, as the donor could not pay such a cost for equipment that could be targeted by artillery fire. In effect, the high-risk nature of this investment precluded the continuation of this project. Residents of these border villages would likewise be unable to foot this prohibitive cost. Thus, the Pahapan Foundation had to put this project on indefinite hold. In effect, the high-risk nature of this investment, absent certain financial incentives from the state, precluded the continuation of this project.

Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan, Primate of Tavush, agreed the government could provide better incentives. He said that although the Armenian government had taken several steps to improve life in the border areas, a more systematic approach was needed for these efforts to be more effective. He argued that any government legislation addressing the concerns of border towns must be focused and targeted on the most pressing needs of the province, stating that "there must be more strategic coordination of [government] policy. For instance, border towns are given an exemption on VAT tax, but this policy must be more widely publicized in order to attract investors."

Additionally, Galstanyan believed that financial aid itself needs to be more strategically coordinated: "Increased support [for the border villages] must be focused and strategic. It cannot be just emotional. There needs to be clear goals and priorities in terms of investing and participating in that process." Galstanyan argued that certain donors had made onetime donations towards goals that had proven unproductive, as these had not addressed the most

pressing needs of local communities.

To this end, the Children of Armenia Foundation (COAF), a charity based in New York City, is working to make its operations more focused and streamlined in Tavush. The pandemic has caused the organization to redouble such streamlining efforts. As stated by Anahit Hakobyan, Village Programs Manager for COAF, the foundation is focusing its resources on developing "a holistic program, whose goal will be to develop rural communities [of Tavush] by focusing on multiple aspects such as education, increasing the capacity of local health facilities, improving child family services, and developing local economies and infrastructures."

COAF's presence in Tavush is currently limited to English classes in the seven border communities it serves, and its new program is currently in its pilot stage.

Negative local attitudes were another common theme discussed by regional leaders. Bishop Galstanyan said there is a need to combat through spiritual education what he described as a pessimistic culture which pervades border villages. This culture has imbued locals with a feeling of helplessness, in which locals feel powerless to ameliorate their situa-

tion. As Bishop Galstanyan explained, "Everyone used to look at the people [of Tavush] as always in need, unable to help them-



Sand-filled defensive barrier installed at Aygehovit secondary school by the Pahapan Foundation (courtesy of Pahapan Foundation)

selves, as stuck in poverty. They cannot work, they cannot do anything. We are working to change that." Inga Harutyunyan echoed this sentiment, speaking of the importance of providing and promoting opportunities for residents of border villages to become self-dependent.

Whether by engendering entrepreneurship or reawakening spirituality in Tavush, regional leaders agreed that the amelioration of local attitudes was an important aspect of development in the region.

My Step Foundation Awarded Scholarships to Armenian Students to Study in World Top Universities

YEREVAN — On September 8, the Oshakan Culture House hosted the ceremony of granting My Step Foundation's Scholarship Program Certificates to its recipients.

The Scholarship Program based on the development of human capital through education is one of the pillars of My Step Foundation. Now, 45 students have the opportunity to study in the world's top universities by profession, provided that they return to Armenia and put into practice their knowledge and skills for the development of their Homeland. Scholarship Certificates were awarded once the application, all the necessary documents and the results of the interview with the Selection Committee were summarized. The Foundation finances professions which are on the priority list of Armenia's development (agriculture, veterinary science, healthcare management, medical science, data science, statistics, urban planning, etc.).

The ceremony was attended by Anna Hakobyan, Spouse of the Armenian PM, Chair of the Board of Trustees of My Step Foundation and City of smile Charitable Foundation, Hovhannes Ghazaryan, Executive Director of My Step Foundation, Artur Martirosyan, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia, benefactors of the Foundation, members of the Board of Trustees, scholarship holders of different years.

Ghazaryan delivered an opening speech, particularly stating, "The idea behind the Foundation's Scholarship Program is to enable Armenian youth to acquire professions in the world's top universities required for assurance of Armenia's sustainable development.

"It is quite obvious that continuous contact with the world's top universities is a must for sustainable progress of Armenia. It is a key opportunity to keep up with the modern world, thus no alternative exists.

"This idea, regardless of historical circum-



The scholarship recipients with Hovhannes Ghazaryan, Executive Director of MY STEP Foundation

stances, has always been in our minds. In the absence of statehood, due to the vision and efforts of prominent Armenian donors, gifted Armenians, who have left their mark on our identity, had an opportunity to get higher education abroad. Later, foundations were established for young people to make the development of our society and country more efficient and structured by studying abroad.

"We believe that over time an institutional framework will be laid for these initiatives in order to use knowledge potential in more effective and targeted way.

"For two years we have been sparing no effort

for the development of the Scholarship Program. During this time we have managed to make the Program transparent, ensure the increase of confidence level, draft and adjust the procedure, from the announcement of the Scholarship to the return to Armenia. The process of increasing the efficiency of the Program will be permanent. In only three years we have formed community of scholarship holders – about 100 professionals, each of whom can bring a great change in their field.

"I am very glad that the perception of the Armenian youth about the professions required is gradually changing. And yes, we need individ-

uals who contribute to the development of the country, leading professionals – doctors, construction workers, farmers, data scientists, veterinarians, engineers, etc.

"Dear Scholarship holders, you are contributing both to your personal development and to the development of our state. Today, owing to the foundation's benefactors and state support, we have unique opportunity to make your and our dreams come true. Bon voyage et bon retour."

Artur Martirosyan, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia, delivered greeting speech of Minister Arayik Harutyunyan, mentioning, "Encouraging sustainable professional growth, sectoral development and progress in Armenia, from 2018 on My Step Foundation awards scholarships to young people admitted to the world's leading educational institutions who wish to acquire professions based on Armenia's sustainable development priorities, to apply their knowledge and skills to the progress of our Homeland.

And today, it is our pride and responsibility to grant 2020 Scholarship holders Certificates in this symbolic place within the framework of the foundation's Scholarship Program."

The foundation's 2019 Scholarship alumni economist Arno Muradyan and Foundation's 2020 Scholarship alumni doctor-epidemiologist Christina Hakobyan shared their success stories.

At the end of the event, Scholarship Certificates were awarded to the students.

It is worth mentioning, that the choice of the venue was not coincidental. Oshakan Culture House is one out of ten cultural centers, included in the My Step Foundation's "Reviving Cultural Centers in the Regions and Rethinking their Role in Communities" Program. The Program provides for the improvement of the infrastructure of the Centers of Culture and the strengthening of human resources.



INTERNATIONAL

International News

More Fires Break out in Beirut

BEIRUT (Armenpress) – As Beirut was still struggling to recover from the trauma inflicted from the August 4 explosion at the city's port in which at least 192 people were killed, more than 6,000 injured, and homes and other property were devastated for many miles around, the Lebanese capital was hit by two fires again – one near the same place in the port, and the other on September 15 at a commercial district.

Now, after the most recent fire, two Lebanese-Armenian figures are suspecting that the incidents involve foul play.

Aztag daily's Editor-in-Chief Shahan Kandaharian said in an interview that authorities haven't yet determined the cause of a September 15 fire in the commercial building.

"Fortunately there was no explosion here, however, these similar successive incidents are creating a very bad mood. After what happened a month ago, these fires give reason for suspicions, and also create some panic and a difficult psychological situation," Kandaharian said.

Sevak Hakobian, the editor-in-chief of the Beirut-based newspaper *Zartonk*, added that it would be "naïve" to think that all these incidents happened coincidentally.

"Three incidents in one month, the explosion in the port, then a fire in the same port, and now a fire in a commercial building. [Authorities] haven't yet announced the cause of the fire, but I think that this all is happening in an atmosphere of general pressure," Hakobyan said.

Neither Kandaharian nor Hakobyan elaborated.

Court Case Begins on Threats Made to Hrant Dink Foundation

ISTANBUL (Nor Marmara) – On September 11, the first court session of the case in regard to the threats directed at the Hrant Dink Foundation began at the Caglayan courthouse in Istanbul.

Police have arrested Huseyin Ates and Ersin Baskan on charges of making death threats.

On May 27 and 28 the foundation received threats by e-mail.

In the threatening letter the following expression was used: "We may come one night by surprise."

This phrase was often repeated also until 2007, and January 19 of that year when Hrant Dink was murdered by Ogun Samast. The writers of the letter blamed the Hrant Dink Foundation for telling "fairytales of brotherhood," and they demanded that leaders of the foundation leave the country. Death threats were also made against Rakel Dink and to the foundation's board of trustees.

OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs Hold Intensive Consultations in Paris

PARIS (Panorama.am) – The co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group (Igor Popov of the Russian Federation, Stephane Visconti of France, and Andrew Schofer of the United States of America) held intensive consultations on September 14.

As they said in a statement, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office (PRCiO) Andrzej Kasprzyk also participated in the meetings.

The Co-Chairs reviewed the situation in the region with particular focus on new developments following the mid-July violent escalation on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. The co-chairs considered and assessed the private and public messages and concerns of the sides.

The trio spoke separately by phone with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and invited the ministers to meet individually with the Co-Chairs in person in the coming weeks to further clarify their respective positions, with the aim of resuming serious substantive negotiations without preconditions.



Teams from left to right: UWC South East Asia; UWC East Africa; UWC Mahindra College

Young Aurora 2020 The Three Finalists

Project Teams from UWC East Africa in Tanzania, UWC Mahindra College in India and UWC South East Asia in Singapore have been selected as the three finalist teams to proceed to the final of Young Aurora 2020. The three teams will present their projects to the final jury on November 3.

Twelve projects from across UWC Schools and Colleges and the African Leadership Academy entered Young Aurora with detailed plans to tackle a far-reaching breadth of issues in each of their school's local communities. From providing preventative medical care plans in rural Mulshi-Taluka, India to helping patients in New Mexico, USA avoid harmful drug-food interactions through an App; From establishing a peaceful co-existence between villagers and elephants in Sanya Hoyee Village, Tanzania to establishing ways of building peaceful cohesion between refugees and the local communities in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Each of the projects were both a reminder and proof of the importance of the mission behind Young Aurora's founding organization: the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. Founded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to those who helped them, Aurora aims to empower modern-day humanitarians to help those who need them today through a number of programs. This includes Young Aurora which, now in its fourth year, encourages, showcases and supports student-driven projects addressing concrete humanitarian issues and offering solutions through innovative and sustainable approaches.

This humanitarian spirit shone through clearly in each of the projects submitted, which were then evaluated by a pre-selection panel of humanitarians and entrepreneurs along seven core criteria: creativity, sustainability, quality of research, impact, commitment, self-reflection and format. Whether they made it to the final or not, each of the

project teams received detailed feedback from the panel to ensure that all can go on to develop their projects further into fruition.

Reflecting on the importance of Young Aurora, Juliana Bitarabebo, member of the Global Shapers Community Kampala Hub and of the Young Aurora 2020 Pre-Selection Panel, shares: "The Young Aurora Initiative is special because it teaches young people to look outside of themselves and their life bubble to impact others. Empathy is most effective when it transitions from a feeling into an action and I believe this initiative allows the student to participate in that process in a practical way. The project proposals this year were impressive and community centered. They touched on a range of issues – some even opened my eyes to a few social issues that are not as widely spoken of. Young changemakers really are the future of the world – I wish each of the teams of young humanitarians the very best."

The three finalist teams from UWC East Africa in Tanzania, UWC Mahindra College in India and UWC South East Asia in Singapore are now busy preparing to present their projects to the final jury for a chance to win a grant of \$4,000 to help them further develop their project. In previous years this event was held in Armenia, however due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions it will be held online this year.

The Three Finalist Teams:

UWC East Africa with Beehive Divide
Beehive Divide is a project that aims to establish peaceful co-existence between the elephants and villagers in Sanya Hoyee village in Siha District, Tanzania. Due to its location, Sanya Hoyee encounters a human-elephant conflict where lives are lost and crops are destroyed. The team intends to build two protective, elephant-repelling barriers between the fields and elephant corridors - a beehive fence and a chili fence.

The beehives will be built by UWC East Africa students in their design rooms out of both wood and recycled plastic. This project will ensure the protection of the endangered elephant species while enabling the Chagga community to thrive in both crop farming and bee-keeping to increase food security and reduce poverty. Reflecting on their involvement in the project so far, team member Mariam Jusabani from Tanzania says: "We started off with a very small plan and had never imagined getting to this stage, I have learned that with determination, even a small initiative can prove to positively impact countless lives."

UWC Mahindra College with MedRangers

The MedRangers project started when a woman from Sadhana village told the team about her challenges in receiving medical assistance in rural areas. Further inquiry, through surveys and local mentors, revealed that medical malpractice in Mulshi-Taluka, caused by a lack of health education and medical assistance was worsened by socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural factors: Despite housing 68.4% of India's citizens, rural areas receive only 25% of India's health infrastructure. MedRangers aims to improve health outcomes in rural Mulshi-Taluka through preventive and diagnostic approaches. Primarily, this is achieved by conducting educational workshops on the science, symptoms, and treatments of prevalent diseases, basic first-aid skill training, and health-insurance schemes for school staff and villagers, and by facilitating further medical training for Accredited Social Health Workers (ASHA). For diagnosis, the team will organize health camps in Mulshi-Taluka to further increase access to medical assistance. Their aim is clear: "We aspire to empower the local population to make independent and

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INTERNATIONAL

Armenia Backs Egypt in Row With Turkey

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“We are following closely developments in the Eastern Mediterranean,” Mnatsakanyan said after talks with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry. “We are in solidarity with Greece and Cyprus on their inalienable rights to economic activities in the exclusive economic zone in line with international law.”

“I want to also emphasize our solidarity and support to Egypt in the same way,” he told a joint news conference held shortly before his separate meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Mnatsakanyan went on to praise Egypt’s “commitment to peace and stability” in Libya where Cairo and Ankara support rival warring factions. “We very much welcome your efforts in this regard,” he told Shoukry.

Tensions between Turkey on one side and Greece, Cyprus and Egypt on the other have grown in recent months over conflicting claims to the extent of their continental shelves in the eastern Mediterranean.

In early August, Egypt and Greece signed an agreement designating their exclusive economic zone in the region thought to be rich in natural gas. Both nations had denounced as illegal a similar deal signed by Turkey and Libya’s internationally recognized government earlier. For its part, the Turkish government described the Greek-Egyptian agreement as null and void before ordering more preparatory work for potential hydrocarbons exploration.

Armenia publicly sided with Greece and Cyprus later in August, sparking a renewed war of words with its big neighbor and archrival. Yerevan and Ankara began trading bitter accusations following the July 12 outbreak of heavy fighting on Armenia’s border with Azerbaijan, Turkey’s regional ally.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other Turkish leaders blamed Yerevan for the week-long deadly hostilities and reaffirmed support for Baku in unusually strong terms, raising the possibility of Turkish military intervention in the Karabakh conflict.

Mnatsakanyan expressed serious concern over the Turkish “military buildup” and cited unconfirmed reports that Ankara is recruiting Islamist militants in Syria and sending

another jibe at Ankara.

Successive Turkish governments have refused to establish diplomatic relations with Yerevan and open the Turkish-Armenian bor-

Turkey after the coup.

Mnatsakanyan seemed satisfied with his “very good discussion” with the Egyptian foreign minister, saying that it focused not only



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (C) meets with Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanian, Cairo, September 14, 2020.

them to Azerbaijan. “These are exactly the moves which undermine the efforts towards peace and stability in the region,” he said.

In that context, the Armenian minister spoke of the “same sources of destabilization” in the South Caucasus, the east Mediterranean and North Africa. “Any attempts to export instability and escalation to different regions as part of power projection is deplorable, whether it is in North Africa or in the South Caucasus,” he said in

der out of solidarity with Azerbaijan. They have made the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations conditional on a Karabakh settlement acceptable to Baku.

Turkey’s relationship with Egypt has been strained ever since the 2013 overthrow of the Arab nation’s former Islamist president, Mohamed Mursi. The latter was supported by Erdogan’s Islamist-rooted AK Party during his short rule. Many members and supporters of Mursi’s Muslim Brotherhood fled to

on international security but also ways of expanding Armenian-Egyptian relations. “We are keen to take practical steps in this direction,” he said.

The top Armenian diplomat also said his country supports Egypt’s efforts to sign a free-trade deal with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union.

He further revealed that al-Sisi is planning to visit Armenia. But he gave no possible dates for the trip.

Aurora 2020

AURORA, from page 4

informed decisions about their health.”

Speaking about what the team have learnt so far with the project, team member Priyanka Chahahria shares: “While working on this project, I had the realization that my will to contribute back to the community is not enough. We must work for what is desired by our stakeholders and not what we deem fit for them. We have to remain mindful that, when needed, sometimes the best thing we can do is to let our ideas go.”

UWC South East Asia with HER Journey

The HER Journey initiative aims to advocate for and empower Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) from Singaporean households. FDWs often face linguistic and cultural barriers, employment conflicts and labour rights violations. The team hopes to achieve this aim through a three-pronged approach: (1) In collaboration with local NGOs, they are developing educational videos titled ‘Know Your Rights’ for FDWs that feature solutions to common labor rights disputes. (2) In their efforts to educate the public (especially employers), they designed the Empathy Challenge card game, where players roleplay as FDWs and employers, and negotiate solutions to challenges in their employment process. (3) The team has also created podcasts based on interviews with FDWs, where they share their personal migration stories and advice for fellow workers. Looking back at the journey the project has been on so far, team member Xinchang Liu (Karen) writes: “Our project has come a long way since the first liaison with the Migrant Workers’ Center and the Center for Domestic Employees in May 2019. We set clear goals for ourselves and are open to adjustments according to our limita-

Applications Accepted For UK Government’s Chevening Scholarships

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – On September 11, UK’s chargé d’affaires to Armenia, Ambassador Helen Fazey hosted a farewell reception for departing Chevening Scholars who have been selected for to receive scholarships to study for master’s degrees at UK universities in 2020-2021, the UK Embassy announced.

Fazey presented certificates to the three scholars and wished them the best of luck.

“Chevening Scholarships are the UK Government’s global scholarship program, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and partner organizations. The scholarships support study at UK universities – mostly one-year master’s degrees – for individuals with demonstrable potential to become future leaders, decision-makers, and opinion formers. The scholarships also provide opportunities to gain access to a wide range of exclusive academic, professional and cultural experiences.

Over the last 36 years, over 50,000 individuals worldwide have had the opportunity to study in the UK through Chevening.

As of today, there are around 170 Chevening alumni in Armenia, among them senior government officials and staff, members of parliament, influential civil society representatives and opinion makers, entrepreneurs, media professionals, staff of

tions. We go over feedback and constantly make revisions. Although we’ve been scattered around the world over the COVID-19 outbreak, we persist to operate remotely.”

About the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, founded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian

Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors, is transforming this experience into a global movement based on the universal concept of Gratitude in Action. By addressing real, on-the-ground challenges, the Initiative provides a second chance to those who need it the most.

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is the vision of philanthropists Vartan Gregorian,

Noubar Afeyan and Ruben Vardanyan who have been joined by thousands of supporters and partners. Our Chair, Dr. Tom Catena, draws on his experience as a surgeon, veteran, humanitarian and the 2017 Aurora Prize laureate to spread the message of Gratitude in Action to a global audience.

More information available on www.auroraprizemovement.com.



Ambassador Helen Fazey presents one of the scholarship recipients with the certificate.

international agencies, and businesses.

Visit www.chevening.org/apply or the British Embassy pages on Facebook (@BritishEmbassyYerevan) and Twitter (@UKinArmenia) for detailed information on the eligibility criteria and scholarship specifications”, the Embassy said in a statement.

Community News

Eastern Diocese's Richmond Parish Welcomes New Pastor

RICHMOND, Va. — Sunday, September 6, marked a new chapter in the life of the St. James Church of Richmond, as parishioners welcomed a new pastor, Rev. Samuel Rith-Najarian.

The occasion was the first time the badarak had been celebrated in the church sanctuary since March, and the first indoor service to be shared by the parishioners, who carefully observed the local distancing guidelines for public gatherings.

Introducing Rith-Najarian to his new flock was the Very Rev. Oshagan Gulgolian, a former pastor in Richmond who now leads the St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church of Wynnewood, Penn. In the course of his enthusiastic remarks, he read a message from Bishop Daniel Findikyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

In his letter addressing the local parishioners, Bishop Daniel called the St. James



Fr. Samuel Rith-Najarian

Church “one of the historic parishes of our Diocese, with a proud and impressive history undergirding it.”

“I know how excited the parishioners are to have Der Samuel take up this new role in the community,” wrote the Primate. “You have good reason to be enthusiastic, for Der Samuel is a seasoned priest of our Diocese: a learned man of God, whose vibrant, inner faith is belied by a quiet, humble manner.”

Rith-Najarian offered a thoughtful inaugural sermon, focusing on the miraculous command uttered by Jesus to heal a deaf and mute man. “Be opened,” says our Lord in the gospel reading today. He has a message and purpose for each of us here. We need to be able and willing to listen for that message. By being opened, hearing the Word of God, and putting our faith into tangible fruitful action, we will build up the Body of Christ here at St. James Church.”

After the services, he said: “It was a joyous day for me to begin my ministry and service to the Lord among the St. James faithful. The kindness and welcome from the parish council and community made Yn. Danielle and me feel at home. The Lord has opened many new possibilities before us, and I have great hope for what lies ahead.”

The service was broadcast on the Internet for those unable to attend.



Pre-COVID St. Gregory Hovsepian School activities

Mental Health in COVID-19 Classrooms

Seeking Healthy Ways for Remote Schooling

By Ani Duzdabanyan-Manoukian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GLENDAL/PASADENA — Talar A. is in second grade.

She was one of the 26,000 students in the Glendale Unified School District (GUSD) who never went back to school last March after the spring break. COVID-19 forced the students all around the world (about 1.3 billion according to UNESCO) to replace their school desks with tables in their living room, kitchen or dining room. In May, the school year ended remotely with no probability of in-person learning in the new academic year.

In Talar's case it was more challenging: Talar has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder. Learning through a 21-inch computer screen forced Rita, Talar's mother, to summon up all the creativity she could. “She was confused and kept asking me why she doesn't see her friends and saying she wanted to go back to school. Asking a child, who is already overwhelmed in a classroom setting, to follow a Zoom class is very difficult, especially early on in the process, when everyone lacked the necessary skills and it was hard to control constant interruptions and simultaneous speaking,” remembers Rita. She decided to hire someone to supervise Talar the entire time, which caused a huge financial burden. In addition, her three-year-old twins required a lot of attention.

On July 17 California governor Gavin Newsom announced that schools statewide will start the new school year remotely. Some exceptions were made for essential worker, homeless and foster care families, as well as all those in need of child care. School campuses were set up as learning pods, giving these families the opportunity to participate in the curriculum in a socially distanced setting. For Talar this is the perfect setting. She has a one-on-one aide who

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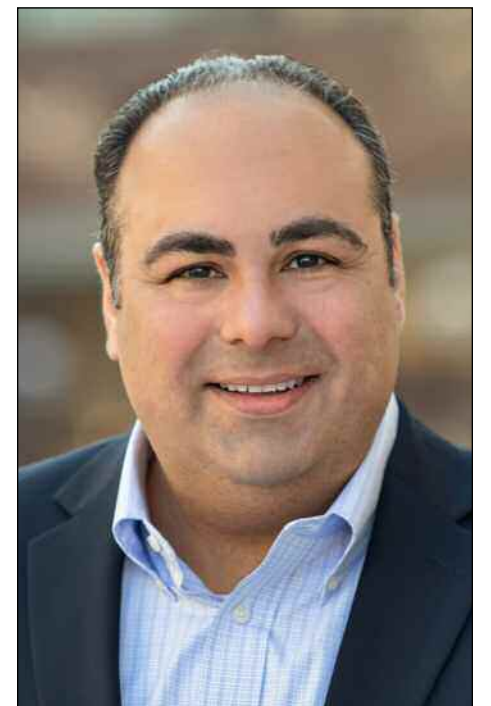
Pre-COVID St. Gregory Hovsepian School activities

Artist Ara Topouzian Re-appointed to Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs by Governor Whitmer

BLOOMFIELD, Mich. — Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer recently announced the re-appointment of Ara Topouzian, award winning musician to the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA).

The Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, a 15-member council, serves to encourage, develop and facilitate an enriched environment of creative and cultural activity in Michigan. The Council envisions a Michigan where every citizen celebrates the state's cultural treasures and arts and cultural experiences are accessible to all its citizens.

“I am thrilled to hear that Ara has been reappointed to the Michigan Council of Arts and Cultural Affairs by Governor Whitmer,” said state Rep. Mari Manoogian (D-Birmingham). “His advocacy for the arts in Michigan is second to none; his reappoint-



Ara Topouzian

ment to this Council is well earned. Ara's storied career has made him a shining star of our state and of the Fortieth State House District, and his work in promoting our shared Armenian heritage through music showcases the depth and breadth of Michigan's diversity. His reappointment by the Governor is good news to us all and I look forward to following his work on the Council going forward.”

“These are challenging times for all of us, especially in the arts world. We have a creative state with some phenomenal artists and musicians and as a council member, we have accomplished much over the years. I look forward to continuing the great work of MCACA and honored to be reappointed to the council,” said Topouzian.

Topouzian is the executive director of Michigan Venture Capital Association and previously served as President and CEO of the Troy Chamber of Commerce as well as the economic development director for the City of Novi. He is an active member in the arts community and is involved in various associations and boards. In 2012 he received a Kresge Artist Fellow and has produced several musical recordings including an award-winning film documentary on about Armenian music in Detroit. Topouzian holds a bachelor's degree in communication from Wayne State University.

Topouzian term commences on September 4, 2020 and expires on September 1, 2023.



COMMUNITY NEWS

FAR Children's Center Offers Healing and Care

By Florence Avakian

YEREVAN/NEW YORK — Two eighteen year olds, Michael and Khan, each spent several weeks, traveling by foot, taxi, truck through Iran and Turkey, often without food, to arrive in Armenia. These two boys, from Muslim families came separately from war-torn Afghanistan where terrorist acts had reached their homes and families. They would be forced to join the armed forces and become mercenaries.

Both were warmly welcomed to the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) Children's Center in Yerevan two years ago, now speak fluent Armenian, in addition to four other languages, and have helped the staff of this Center.

For twenty years, this center, the only one of its kind has taken in and healed children who have been abused, sexually trafficked, beaten, abandoned and or are homeless.

Michael's story took a difficult turn when he arrived in Armenia. Abused himself, he had lost his mother in childhood, and had crossed the border into Armenia illegally without an ID. He appeared in a village, and the residents called police. Arrested and taken to jail, he remained there for two years. "I cried all the time, often did not eat, and never saw the sun," he said in a telephone conversation from Yerevan with this writer.

NGO lawyers in Armenia who work with refugees, finally were able to free Michael who asked for asylum. He has been at the Children's Center for the past two years.

"At first, after prison, I had the feeling that I was in another closed facility. I tried to do everything as correctly as possible. I also wanted to re-establish ties with my relatives who have been scattered all over the world since the 1980s."

Michael continues by saying that the Children's Centers specialists "gave me a telephone and internet connection so I could call my father and tell him that everything is fine with me. I gradually mastered Armenian and my social worker let me register for sports classes which have completely redefined my life. Now I have Armenian friends, speak Armenian well enough and am very well received in Armenia."

The Children's Center, Michael says "embodies trust for me, and is home. After sports, I come 'home' to water my flowers and trees, and take care of them. Of course, one day, I will have my own house which will be as hospitable as the FAR Children's Center."

Tall and handsome, he has modeled in shows, but he hopes to be a boxing champion. Devoted to his father who lives with Michael's two sisters in Afghanistan, he nonetheless says that he "feels Armenian. I love the people here. They are so kind. I want to live in Armenia."

Eighteen-year old Khan "very much misses his parents, five brothers and eight sisters, and hopes someday to return to Afghanistan."

When Khan crossed the border into Armenia, he had "feelings of fear, anxiety and uncertainty. The police took me where there was a different atmosphere, many children, everything bright, people smiling and treating me well. I didn't understand what they said, but I had a sense of security. They spoke to me through an interpreter and I asked if I could contact my family and tell them I am in a safe place where nothings threatens me."



Mira Antonyan and Michael

Khan started to learn Armenian with the help of the children at the Center. "Now I understand and speak Armenian well enough. I also started to attend sports clubs and make friends outside the Center."

Khan comments that the center always awakens two feelings in him: "One, that nothing will happen to anybody while they are here and the specialists are with them. Secondly that it is a unique school for everyone to increase their knowledge and skills every single day."

He continues, that the center helped him to "overcome my traumas, and also to prepare for an independent life. Here, I started taking photo- video recordings with specialists, learning computer programs related to editing." He has been at the Children's Center in Yerevan for two years, teaching graphic design, and football to the children.

"I love the center's staff very much. They are always ready to help me. I would like to emphasize that I don't feel like a stranger in Armenia and in the Center. I always have a chance to



A new normal

share my cultural experience with Armenians, and want to say they are great. I love them, but I also miss my family very much, and want to reunite with them."

Finding Strength

The three Syrian youngsters have grown up in Aleppo (Haleb) where their ancestors came after the Genocide. In Armenia they lost their mother. After facing long time hunger in Syria, they finally got strong physically, strengthened their Armenian and learned English.

Hagop, the father of the family now, is a pro-

fessional cyclist, brother Jirair, is a graphic designer, and sister Saria is learning Turkish and hopes to be a Turkish translator for tourists coming to Armenia.

All three remember a happy school life in Syria, but now "have come to Armenia to help

and keep our homeland safe", stresses Hagop. In the future, they hope to live together in an apartment in Armenia.

The Armenian Diocesan Primate, Bishop Daniel Findikyan, who has often traveled to the Children Center, expressed his strong feelings on meeting the five teenagers from Afghanistan and Syria.

"My heart was both warmed and broken when I met Michael, tall and handsome. To hear him and Khan speak Armenian, I felt they were ours. We hear of Armenian orphans, but not enough about non-Armenian orphans. It was wonderful to see the Center and its children give them hope and a place to settle their life," he noted.

On the Primate's first visit "Baron Jirair, my friend," the youngest of the Syrian teenagers, gave him a tour of the center.

"He was speaking like he was a grown adult, self-confident and mature, everyone's older brother." The Bishop said he was "deeply moved that the three Syrian youngsters read the bible, and pray together before bed."

Findikyan, who is the president of the Fund for Armenian Relief, called his trips to the FAR Children's Center "one of the highlights of my trips to Armenia, always inspiring and heart-warming." He has always emphasized to the FAR staff that they "are doing God's work."

Pan-Armenian Forum on Education Draws Unprecedented Record Participation

NEW YORK — The first online version of the biennial Pan-Armenian Educational Forum, which took place from August 22-24, 2020 was co-organized by Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU)'s flagship online learning institution, the Armenian Virtual College (AVC) and Armenia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (ESCS).

In its previous eight editions, this forum had been held every two years in Armenia with the purpose of discussing the key issues facing Armenian schools abroad and opportunities for strengthening Armenian-Diaspora relations, as enhancing cooperation in the field of education. With the global pandemic shifting all gatherings online, the virtual setting lifted any geographic limitations and allowed for greater participation. As such, the joint effort attracted a global audience of over 1,300 educators, administrators and supporters of Armenian education from 36 countries, the largest and most diverse participation in the Forum's history.

In his welcoming remarks, ESCS Minister Arayik Harutyunyan stressed the necessity of such forums to generate new opportunities for Armenia-Diaspora, citing AGBU for co-organizing the conference so diligently, under the direction of AGBU Central Board Member and founding president of AVC Yervant Zorian.

During his introductory message, Zorian highlighted the value of e-learning, pointing out the variety of modern interactive educational technologies offered by AVC in seven instructional languages, which has already attracted more than 25,000 e-learners. Even in the midst of a global pandemic and perhaps because of it, AVC has emerged as the flagship institution for delivering high quality Armenian education

online, enriching its content to meet the needs of and interactively engage with the diverse audiences from across the virtual universe.

The three-day forum, entitled "Armenia-Diaspora Cooperation in the Time of COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities," brought together guest speakers and a variety of panelists from all spheres of education. Thirty-three educators from around the world shared their work experience, programs and challenges, while guest speakers continued on this theme in the daily "Visionary Talks" sessions, presenting their vision, activities, as well as issues and possible solutions. Each plays a leading role in the spheres of community life and education, including Azatouhi Simonyan (Artsakh), Razmik Panossian (Portugal), Rev. Paul Haidostian (Lebanon), Sebouh Aslanian (USA), Arpi Manukyan (Turkey), Kayane Tumbalian (Syria), Salpi Ghazarian (USA), Mary Gulumian (USA), Ara Vassilian (Lebanon), and Tatevik Ayvazyan (Great Britain).

By all accounts, the interactive live broadcast proved to be an excellent opportunity for numerous teachers, principals and administrators to actively participate in the discussions, many expressing particular concern for Armenian language learning among new generations. To better represent all opinions, Dr. Zorian proposed continuing the conversations on the Forum's platform as an opportunity for greater dialogue and exchange, explaining how it could lead to greater collaboration and coordination in hopes of unifying disparate programs. His recommendation elicited a positive response from the participants who are also seeking more effective ways to bring their ideas, approaches and experiences to the table.

California Assemblymember Nazarian Asks Congress to Halt Military Funding of Azerbaijan After Tavush Attacks

PETITION, from page 1

He declared, "My goal is to make sure that a) I raise awareness and advocate, and b) I continue the conversation with follow-ups and see what some of these individuals have to say on the topic. Given that the name on the letterhead is that of an Armenian American, it could potentially get a second look and at least pique curiosity or interest in seeing what the issue is about, and then lead to engagement. This is just getting your foot in the door. On the secondary level, there is also the responsibility of the elected officials who are receiving the letter."

Those recipients, he said, may have significant Armenian communities in their region or district, or the issues may resonate with them because they also come from backgrounds which have made them sensitive to such issues. Ultimately, he said that his goal was to let the recipients know that there are people in their home districts paying attention to what is going on internationally.

He noted that "given the dynamics of what is going on right now in the world and our country, and added to that the complications of this pandemic, it would be understandable that peoples' focus is not where it needs to be."

Nazarian said that as the sole Armenian-American elected official on a state level in California he felt a responsibility to take this step. He pointed out that aside from the effect on Congress, it could indirectly have other long-term consequences. The signatories of the letter themselves become better versed on the issues, and as they may in the future run for other offices, including in Congress, they will then take that reinforced awareness with them.

This was why, he said, the letter encapsulates a little bit of context on what has been going on, who the aggressor has been, and tries to explain it from the perspective of why

we as the United States are actually siding with the aggressor. He concluded, rhetorically, "Where did we lose our way so as not to be engaged with protecting those who are very much being aggressed?"

He pointed out that Armenia, though landlocked and lacking many natural resources, used its human capital to make something out of nothing. It created a democracy and changed governments through a bloodless revolution, while Azerbaijan is ruled by something resembling a de facto monarchy.

For a full copy of the letter, see this article on the *Mirror-Spectator* website.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Growing Up Armenian in the Midwest

By Harry A. Kezelian III

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

DETROIT — “In those days, we lived from Armenian event to Armenian event,” my friend reminisced. A group of us had gathered in a small restaurant in Chicago. It was a reunion of sorts — most of us were the same age and had been close friends throughout our late teens and twenties. The time period my friend was speaking of was now 10-15 years behind us. But her comment was spot on. A few months later, her comment sparked, for me, memories and reflections on how we had grown up in the Armenian community of the Midwest.

Growing up Armenian in the Midwest didn’t seem unique or interesting to us at the time, but it seems so to me now; now that time has passed, people have moved on, and I have gotten a closer glimpse of the Armenian community around the world.

If you live on the coast and have never been here, the Midwest might not be what you think it is — at least not the areas where most Armenians live. We don’t live on farms, and I don’t know a single Armenian who made their living that way. In Fresno, yes. In the Midwest, no. Most Armenians live in the Rust Belt, surrounding the cities of Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, Milwaukee — and good old Racine, Wis. There are also the two “outpost” communities around St. Louis and Minneapolis-St. Paul. None of these are rural areas, and with the exception of Racine, they aren’t even small towns. They’re cities, urban areas. Most Armenians live in the suburbs of those cities, though there is a large community of Armenian young professionals in downtown Chicago, and increasingly, downtown Detroit, which is on the upswing. While the fall might bring trips to a cider mill or apple orchard, and summer usually brings treks “Up North” to the fabled land of touristy beach towns on the Great Lakes, most of our lives are lived “in the city.” Unlike in New York, where “the city” specifically means “Manhattan,” in Metro Detroit “the city,” while sometimes referencing the City of Detroit in contrast to the suburbs, in this context means

the Middle East, and relatively few Latinos.

The bottom line is, if you want good Mexican food, go to Chicago; if you want good Lebanese food, go to the Detroit suburbs. And — I feel I have to shout this at the top of my lungs: THERE ARE MORE ARMENIANS IN MICHIGAN THAN IN ILLINOIS AND WISCONSIN COMBINED! For some reason, many Armenians (I’m looking at you, L.A. residents) have a hard time believing or understanding this. I don’t wish any disrespect to my wonderful friends in Chicago, who much of this article is about, and whom I love dearly; besides, I myself

Diocese. Many Armenians affiliated with the Prelacy/ARF circles also sent their kids to Hye Camp, because it was nearby. Most of us met our out-of-town friends at camp, and I was no different.

When we got to be older and became involved in ACYOA and when we were able to drive and had the freedom to travel, the inevitable road trips began. I can’t count the amount of times I have driven to Chicago and back, and I’m sure my Chicago friends would say the same thing about Detroit. Those from Wisconsin always had to travel an extra hour or

Boston and New England Armenians had quite enough Armenian social life in their own region of the country. They didn’t need or care to travel for it — not even to New York.

At least the Boston Armenians seemed to be involved in their local area. Los Angeles has so many Armenians, that it seems a lot of people really take it for granted. I’m always meeting Armenians from L.A. who seem quite Armenian in their identity, but don’t even want to get involved in the Armenian social scene at all, for a variety of reasons. New York Armenians, to give them their due, seemed more involved. Based on my theory, it could be a combination of the fact that getting from one part of the NY-NJ area to another is in itself quite a trek, and the fact that with the Diocese located there, any Church or ACYOA related events always seemed to circle back to New York. The local population always seemed to show up for those things.

The Midwest was different. Being Armenian is always a struggle in the Diaspora, but it was a special kind of struggle in the Midwest. We were always travelling to see our friends, whether it was just in other Midwest cities or on the East Coast. We didn’t have the luxury that people in Boston or Los Angeles had. We had to pack our bags every couple months if we wanted to stay connected. But we had to stay connected. We wouldn’t know what to do without our friends. We had to go to all the dances, we had to drive five hours, because otherwise we wouldn’t see them. It was in those tight bonds of friendship that we kept the Armenian spirit alive, in addition to our families and our friends from our own local community. And even staying connected with our childhood local friends eventually became an issue of travel — especially after the Recession of 2008 depleted the Michigan economy and tons of the graduating young people left Metro Detroit for jobs elsewhere.

What did being Armenian in the Midwest consist of? What was our Armenian-ness? It was our food, our dances, our families, our family stories. It wasn’t just listening to your own grandma’s story, but visiting a friend in another city who might have a different family background, and listening to their Armenian story. It was our church and our faith, which most people in the group were devoted to, and which bonded us together with each other and with our ancestors. There was the language, which wasn’t necessarily spoken daily, but which we had a great familiarity with, and which we were always in the process of learning more about — all of us asking questions to our elders — “and how do you say this?”

It was the dances, the kefs, the parties we threw — the times we heard the master oudist, Richard Hagopian play, in Milwaukee, in Detroit, in Chicago — the latter was in an outdoor, public concert! The ACYOA Sports Weekend in Detroit in 2007 with the Battle of the Bands in a hall full of some 700 people. The time Michael Gostanian and the younger generation of musicians played AYF Olympics in 2011 in Chicago and we danced the night away to the hottest Armenian band in the country. (Our little ACYOA contingent ordered pizza and for some reason ate it in the hallway, I remember). All the times one of the families in Chicago opened their home to a gang of young Armenians to sleep in the bedrooms, the couch, the basement, on the floor, so they could attend a dance. And how we rolled up the rug and had late night dance parties in the living room. The way that Armenians from Racine, Chicago, and Cleveland would descend upon Detroit every Thanksgiving Weekend for the annual back-to-back AYF and ACYOA “November Dances” (going strong since the 1930s!), and the different activities people would think up to do during the day.

It was the story of how we came to the Midwest, to these factory and mill towns like Racine, Waukegan, Cleveland, Milwaukee, South Pullman, and the biggest mill town of them all: Detroit. Just as everyone in Racine worked for J.I. Case or Johnson Wax, the livelihood of everyone in the Detroit area was tied to the American auto industry — Ford, GM, and Chrysler. It was the story of where we were from before that — we had the old line Sepastatsis,

continued on next page



Hachig Kazarian on clarinet and Richard Hagopian on oud

lived in Chicago for a while. But Detroit is and remains the Armenian capital of the Midwest. True, the demographics are changing; 20-40 years from now we might not be able to say that anymore. But Detroit’s dominant position, which it has held for the past 100 years, is still intact. To my knowledge, the last time there were more Armenians in Chicago than in Detroit was around 1917.

Big Distances for Close Friendships

In the Midwest, things are far apart. It’s about 3 hours to drive from Cleveland to Detroit. Then it’s about 5 hours to drive from Detroit to Chicago. It’s another hour and a half north from Chicago to Racine, and then 45 minutes more to Milwaukee. To drive from one end to the other — Cleveland to Milwaukee — is about 7 hours on a good day. My group of friends rarely went to St. Louis, let alone Minnesota — though the Armenians from those places would try to come into the Chicago area for events. The region as a whole is almost as extensive geographically as the East Coast Armenian community. The difference is, we probably have as many Armenians in the entire region as there are in one state on the East Coast.

The geographic distribution of Armenians gave us the social life that my friend had referred to. We did feel like we lived from event to event — the daily minutiae of life was made

bearable by the fact that we were looking forward to the next dance, the next retreat, kef weekend, or whatever it was. But, attending those things always meant travelling. And the low number of Armenians in each community compared to the East Coast or California communities meant that a lot of our best friends were in other cities — a not uncommon experience for Armenians, but almost a given for Midwestern Armenians.

There is one Armenian camp in the Midwest — Hye Camp, which has moved around a bit but always stated in Southern Wisconsin/Northern Illinois, and which is run by the Eastern

two, but sometimes we went up there as well. The Wisconsinites are probably the most laid-back Armenians you could ever meet (which might sound to some like an oxymoron), and always showed everyone a good time.

Trips to Chicago or Wisconsin always started with a text message: “Are you coming to the dance?” Then the preparations would begin — what to take, what clothes to wear, who you were going to stay with (Armenian parents would not countenance their kids’ friends staying at a hotel when they didn’t have to), how long you were going for, who was riding in the car. It seemed like this happened practically every month.

For those of us like me, who struggled to fit in at school or college, the Armenian community was a welcoming, friendly environment. It’s where we found people we could bond with, people who shared our values and our culture, people who would be friends for life.

There were always the long goodbyes (typical of all Armenians, of course), and when we went home we couldn’t wait until the next reunion with our out-of-town friends, who were so close to our hearts.

And so, with the burning desire to see our friends, a couple months later we would make the 5-hour trek to Chicago again. As for me, I would go as often as I had an excuse to do so. And my friends from Chicago and Racine would come to Detroit when there was an event in our town. Certainly, there was something happening at least 4 times a year, whether it was a dance, a retreat, or a fundraiser, whether it was through ACYOA, AGBU, an Armenian university group, or one of the churches.

We’ve seen legends of Armenian kef music perform countless times — Richard Hagopian, Onnik Dinkjian, John Berberian, and Detroit’s own Hachig Kazarian, master of the clarinet. Our local bands, the Johnites and Nigosians of Detroit, Mid East Beat of Racine, and Hye Vibes of Chicago brought the kef to our local dances and picnics. And because we hungered for the company of other Armenians, we absolutely came to every ACYOA Sports Weekends, and most years to AYF Olympics (though none of my group of friends were even a part of AYF). We were frequent, excited attendees to the St. Nersess Summer Conferences. When we would go to St. Nersess or to the ACYOA General Assembly, we would always notice the comparative lack of people from New England, or rather, their low representation in proportion to the Armenian population of the Boston area. Our theory, and I think it was correct, was that



Onnik Dinkjian sings, while his son, Ara, plays oud.

the urban/suburban complex of Southeast Michigan, as opposed to rural areas.

I grew up on the freeways of Metro Detroit; in the Greek-owned diners (which we refer to, for reasons too complicated to explain, as “Coney Islands”); in the heavily Jewish, Polish, and Italian suburbs, surrounding an 80-percent Black city. When we visited our friends in Chicago, it was pretty much the same. The only difference was that Chicago had a nicer downtown; it was much, much bigger. And Chicago has a large Latino population with small Middle Eastern population while Metro Detroit has more Middle Easterners than any place outside



COMMUNITY NEWS

Growing Up Armenian in The Midwest

from previous page

Kharpertsis, Everegtsis, and Kghetsis, not to mention the Tomarzatsis of Racine, along with the second wave of immigration: Bolsetsis, Halebtsis, Beirutsis, Anjartsis, and Hayastantsis. We had several families in Chicago whose parents were from the Anatolian interior: Malatya, Arapgir, Sepastia – places that Detroiters like me had only heard about in relation to our great-grandparents' generation. We had a few Barsgahyes. And we had a lot of Bakutsi refugees, whose struggle for their Armenian identity was real – their identity and their church squashed for 70 years of Soviet rule, and then turned into refugees by the pogroms of the early 1990s, they were the only people from overseas who would look to a 3rd-generation Armenian-American like myself for their Armenian cultural cues. We heard their stories with awe and true respect, and the same went for those who had suffered persecution in post-Genocide Turkey or who had spent generations struggling to uphold the remaining proud Armenian cultural institutions of Istanbul. (References to “the Island” or neighborhoods like Beyoglu, Taksim, and Bakirkoy were commonly heard when I was growing up, having many Bolsetsi friends.)

Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Racine, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and St. Paul all had their own characteristics, but it was take too long to get into them extensively here. Detroiters seemed to be the leaders, and we certainly threw the best dances, and produced the best Armenian delicacies (in our minds), but if we didn't have Chicago and Racine to market our crazy ideas to, it wouldn't have been the same. Chicago people were special, friendlier. They didn't have the whiff of East Coast attitude that Detroiters like my friends and I, in comparison, seemed to have. Yet they were in their own way hipper than us, and a lot more of them seemed to speak Armenian. Racine has a special place in the heart of any Midwestern Armenian. Being a small town with a relatively large Armenian population, the people there had a unique personality and a unique outlook

on life. Most of their ancestors came from the village of Tomarza in Central Anatolia. Tomarza, though not a remote mountain fortress like Zeitoun or Sassoun, had been inhabited exclusively by Armenians, and administered by four families who claimed descent from Cilician nobility. How did they do that out in the open, in the middle of the plains near Kayseri? How did Armenians managed to forge such a strong community in a seemingly random Midwestern small town? Both answers are unclear. The independent, yet not militant, spirit of Tomarza lives on in the unique character of the Racine Armenians. And I would be remiss not to mention that the ever-present, yet under-valued Armenian trait of a goofy sense of humor is very strong with this unusually laid-back community. In the end, every community contributed in one way or another, but most of all, the real contributions of each community were the good-hearted people that they produced.

Mostly our Armenian-ness consisted in keeping the knowledge of who we were, and passing it on to the next generation. As we all got older, many of my friends have gotten married and had children of their own. I myself have not had that good fortune, but I am sure that when I do, I will impart to my children the lessons I learned not only from my family or even from my community in Detroit, but also from the broader Armenian-American community of the Midwest.

But passing on your heritage doesn't just mean to your children. Sometimes it means passing it on to the next group of kids, ten years younger than you. I think of how many times at Armenian dances that we, the older group, started the line, and younger people joined in and followed us! How I taught the younger guys how to dance the Haleh. The last dance that was held in Michigan before COVID-19 broke out was the U-M Armenian Club's annual January Hye Hop. I arrived at this dance, that I had attended since high school, that I had been on the committee for and attended as a U-M student, that I had played at with my own band more than once, and I realized for the first time that they didn't even need me to start the line. The kids knew what they were doing. The dance had been started, the leader sat down, and the dance had kept on going...



Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian with Millie with her training certificate

Middlesex Sheriff's Office Formally Introduces Therapy K-9 Millie

LOWELL, Mass. – Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian is proud to formally introduce Millie – the Middlesex Sheriff's Office first therapy dog (YouTube, Twitter). Millie joins fellow MSO working dogs who are tasked with searching for contraband, explosives and missing people.

Unlike her K-9 colleagues, Millie – a one year old English Lab – is trained to help provide comfort. Throughout her initial training period Millie was already making a difference in the lives of those she came in contact with, including officers, incarcerated individuals and loved ones – especially children – visiting them at the Middlesex Jail & House of Correction.

“From day one, Millie has made a huge impact during her visits with officers, civilian staff, incarcerated individuals and community members,” said Koutoujian. “Whether it's visiting with staff, individuals inside the jail or people in recovery coming through our counseling center, Millie has an incredible ability to put people at ease, break down barriers and provide comfort.”

Named in honor of the Mill City of Lowell where she will be based, Millie was acquired by the MSO last year. She recently completed her therapy dog training with Absolute K-9 Solutions in Lunenburg and is partnered with Lowell Community Counseling Director Jillian Ketchen.

“In her brief time with us, we've already seen Millie's ability to be a calming influence and help reduce anxiety amongst those she's met,” said Koutoujian. “We're glad to have her as a member of our MSO team and look forward to expanding her role to assist crime victims, witnesses and others in the community who may benefit from her presence and support.”

To learn more about the Middlesex Sheriff's Office and our programs, visit www.middlesexsheriff.org.

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OBITUARY

Hagop Sarkissian

ADL Member, Publisher of Armenian Books

WATERTOWN – Hagop Sarkissian of Watertown died on September 14, 2020, at Seasons Hospice in Milton. He was 87.

He is survived by daughter Sharon Hekimian and her husband Gregory Hekimian; son Robert Sarkissian and his wife Audrey Dow; grandson Joshua Hekimian and his wife Sara Hekimian; granddaughter Emily Overstreet and her husband Simeon Overstreet; great-grandsons Elijah Hekimian and Todd Overstreet; sister Mary Karaguesian, and brother Hovsep Sarkissian. He was predeceased by his parents Hovhannes and Haigouhi (Tavoukjian) Sarkissian, sister Alice Ashjian; brother Aram Sarkissian and his wife, Helene Pilibosian Sarkissian.

He was born in Kirik Khan, Syria, on March 17, 1933. His family moved to Beirut, Lebanon, in January 1938. At the age of 13 he left school to support his family by becoming a typesetter for the Armenian-language Zartok newspaper.

He came to the United States in December 1957, arriving in Philadelphia to work as a linotype operator for Groong newspaper, and then moved to Boston to work for Baikar Armenian Daily in 1958. He later worked for Harvard University Printing Office from 1966 until his retirement in 1995.

On September 17, 1960, he married Helene Pilibosian, with whom he had two children, Sharon and Robert.

He was an active member of the Armenian Democratic Liberal party, and a longtime member of the Armenian Memorial Church in Watertown. In 1983, he and his wife established Ohan Press, an independent press for publishing poetry and prose books. In 1996, he compiled and translated *From Kessab to Watertown: A Modern Saga*, by Hovhannes H. Sarkissian. He also compiled *The*



Collected Works of Khachador Pilibosian in 2002. He authored *The Sarkissian and Pilibosian Families: A Guide for the Curious* in 2009. In 2019, he published the volume *Legacy of an Author: Events and Wanderings Sprinkled in Six Books*, by Helene Pilibosian, and established “The Papers of Helene Pilibosian,” a collection of Helene's materials at Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University.

(Pilibosian was a former editor of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.)

He was an adoring husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, and lover of classical music and travel.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and current public safety measures, funeral services are private. For online guestbook visit: www.giragosianfuneralhome.com



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Mental Health In COVID-19 Classrooms

EDUCATION, from page 6

assists her the entire time. She has the assistance she needs while she is surrounded by other students. Schools have also found better ways of providing services such as occupational therapy and speech therapy. "Although these services are not ideal and quite as effective as they used to be, the learning pod setting is lot better than what I would get out of her at home," mentions Rita.

In the Glendale Unified School District, about 10 percent of the students (around 2,600) have a learning disability or are enrolled in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

According to Dr. Armine Gharpetian, president of the GUSD Board of Education, "Glendale Unified has been very successful in providing vast resources for all of their students. We have a very diverse community with a very diverse background: special aid students, foster and homeless youth, English learners, and students in a FLAG [Foreign Language Academies of Glendale] program. This is the variety of things that we offer to our students and at the same time we try to do everything remotely by offering all the available resources. Obviously, it is a very challenging task for us."

During the summer, the district conducted different surveys with the parents, teachers and students which helped develop the program for the new school year. According to the survey, the students wanted more time with teachers. They needed more textbooks, and some of them needed a private space to learn, a better environment at home. All this information guided the teachers to adopt new approaches when teaching on Zoom.

"We call it a gradual release: We don't want to put our kids in a situation where they are uncomfortable, but we can certainly help them. For those who have a particular reason not to turn on the camera because their background is not the one that they want to share, or they feel uncomfortable about the way they look (one kid told me 'My forehead is too big on the camera. I don't want to show it'), we try to work with the family and the student. We certainly don't want to embarrass them; we have to build up their confidence over time and bring it to a level where they can become a more active participant. Turning the camera on also gives them the opportunity to build relationships with their teacher and peers. Part of this is also building a friendship even though it's virtual," shares GUSD superintendent Dr. Vivian Ekchian.

Glendale Unified School District Student Wellness Services is keeping close contact with the families who didn't log in or have been absent in the remote classrooms. In order to facilitate communication during the summer, the district recruited many interns who can connect with the parents in their native language. "We are asking the families what their needs are, if the students feel depressed, upset, or isolated. If the answer is yes, we provide resources and counseling therapy," says Dr. Ilin Magran, GUSD Student Wellness Services Director. Like the educational process, counseling is being conducted remotely as well.

Ensuring students' mental health during the



Students at the Tufenkian School prior to the COVID-19 era

remote learning process has been and still is a new and challenging task for private schools as well. St. Mary's Richard Tufenkian Preschool and Kindergarten in Glendale for the first time in its 45 years of history needed to come up with a new strategy to keep young children, ages 3-6, busy on the other side of the screen. School principal Arsine Aghazarian is certain that creating an interactive and fun learning environment is the key aspect for young children.

For the new school year, it is using Elmo document cameras and projectors to recreate the actual classroom-like atmosphere for the students. The camera moves with the teacher whenever she goes and even shows the book when the story is being read. Hands-on activities are very important for learning at this age and the school has a huge box full of materials that goes to each student to be used later during the remote class. "Children can do many, many things. We just need to give them the tools and trust them that they will succeed," says Aghazarian.

St. Gregory Alfred and Marguerite Hovsepien School in Pasadena has a handful of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP). School principal Shahe Mankerian was surprised to find out that they didn't experience any specific difficulties with the remote learning. In fact, one of the third-grade students even

gained some benefits from it by being able to focus more on his lessons at home setting compared to classroom.

Some other students without IEPs started to "fall apart" without the social aspect.

After monitoring the student's behavior, the school psychologists started to work closely with the teachers, students and the parents to find better strategies.

In the new school year armed with more experience and training, the school will conduct more social emotional assessments. In the first two weeks the psychologists will have separate sessions with the students in groups and individually if needed.

St. Gregory Hovsepien school lost students during the remote learning. Mankerian thinks

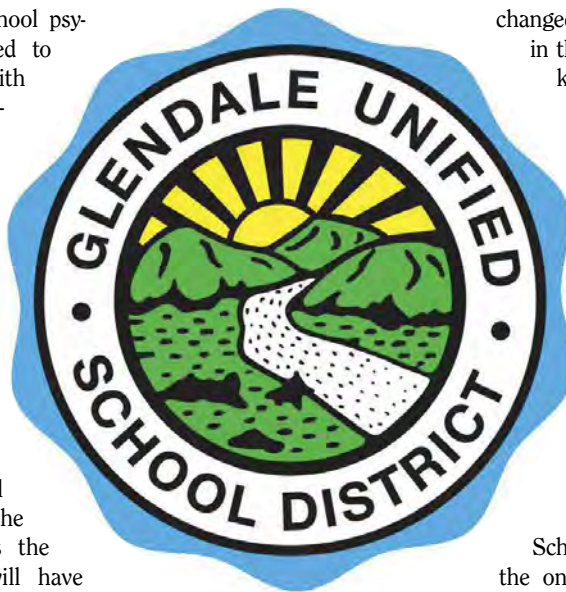
that the parents didn't believe that the school's constantly implemented "love and logic" strategy will be enough to guide their children through the pandemic. "Nothing has been changed: we still need to be the teachers.

I don't think the roles have changed. Yes, we need to be in the classroom with the kids, but we also need to understand that our kids are capable of learning remotely. Sometimes they know even more than we do; they will never panic when the computer crashes," Mankerian says, smiling during our remote interview.

Glendale Unified School District is one of the only school districts in the Los Angeles area that decided to reconsider in-person learning some time during the school year. The Board of Education and the superintendent agreed to revisit the school reopening after a couple of months of full distance learning. "Of course, we need to get the green light from the Public Health Department. At this moment, all our schools are ready to bring students back to the classrooms in person, hybrid [style], or in any other way. It breaks my heart that we are asking our kids, especially those who have a learning disability, to interact with their teachers and classmates remotely," Gharpetian hopefully exclaimed.

When schools reopen, GUSD will follow all the safety guidelines it is doing now with learning pods in all 20 elementary school campuses. I couldn't help asking how these kids were doing with the face mask on all day long. Ekchian has her observations ready: "They are physically distanced, playing, having lunch together, building a friendship. Wearing a mask wasn't an issue at all. It seems like a new normal for them and I am so proud of our kids."

"And knock on wood, so far we didn't have any outbreak. That's definitely something to celebrate," states Gharpetian.



St. Gregory Hovsepien School's campus in Pasadena



COMMUNITY NEWS

Trudeau Center Has New Wheelchair Van Thanks To Match, Donation from Garabedian

WARWICK, R.I. — The J. Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center has taken delivery of a new wheelchair-accessible van, the result of a successful fundraising campaign. The effort included donations from over 150 individuals and companies, an \$8,000 donation match from Aram Garabedian and his co-partners at the Warwick Mall, and a generous personal donation from Aram Garabedian.

The new vehicle, which expands Trudeau's transportation services for adults with disabilities, can transport up to six wheelchair users and is equipped with state-of-the-art safety technology for securing all wheelchair models and scooters.

"I am so happy to have this beautiful van to safely transport the men and women we support," said Vice President of Adult Services Charlotte Higham. "I'm also grateful to Aram Garabedian and his Warwick Mall partners for their match contribution. The van will increase Trudeau's access to community opportunities and give the people we support a smooth ride. Everyone at Trudeau appreciates the generosity of all of those who made this possible."

Aram Garabedian, president of Bliss Properties, presented the match challenge to the Trudeau Center as fundraising efforts for the van were ending and the Center was close to meeting its goal. Garabedian said in a statement, "The arrival of this van could not come at a better time. We all need uplifting news and the community support behind this van is heartwarming. Helping the Trudeau Center with this project was extremely important to me. Much of what I do is in tribute to my late mother, an Armenian Holocaust survivor, and I know that she would be proud of this latest accomplishment."



The newly acquired van at the Trudeau Center can transport up to six wheelchair users at a time.

Armenian Studies Program to Hold Int. Conference on 'The State of the Art of The Early Turkish Republic Period'

FRESNO — The Armenian Studies Program will hold an international conference on "The State of the Art of the Early Turkish Republic Period: Historiography, Sources, and Future Directions" on Friday, October 2, and Saturday, October 3. The Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) is a co-sponsor of the conference. The conference will be held virtually as a Zoom webinar.

The registration link for Friday is: <http://bit.ly/armenianstudiesconference1>. The registration link for Saturday is: <http://bit.ly/armenianstudiesconference2>.

Organized by Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian (Armenian Studies Program, California State University, Fresno) and Dr. Ümit Kurt (Polonsky Fellow, Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem and Lecturer in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem), the conference will explore the early Turkish Republican period. The modern state of Turkey — formally established on October 29, 1923, under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk — came into existence in the period 1908-1945, in which traumatic and revolutionary developments followed each other in quick succession: the constitutional revolution, eleven years of war, mass migration and mass murder, the end of a 600-year-old empire and the almost partition of the remains among the victors in World War I and the foundation of Turkish Republic.

Armenians remained in the new Turkish Republic and experienced these developments. At the same time, it is the period of political experiments, the building of a national economy, and the birth of Turkish nationalism. The republic is both heir to all of these developments and a daring experiment in nation building and modernization.

This conference aims to use the historical context of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of a new nation state, the Republic of Turkey, to discuss and analyze major issues that played a dominant role in the history of this period: the emergence of the modern state, the impact of war, nationalism and nation building, and the role of religion and secularism.

The Thomas A. Kouymjian Family Foundation, the Leon S. Peters Foundation, and the M. Victoria Kazan Fund for Armenian Studies are supporters of the Conference.

Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian will open the Conference at 7 p.m. on Friday, October 2. A keynote address will be given by Dr. Christine Philliou (University of California, Berkeley).

The first session will then open with two panelists: Christopher Sheklian (the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center, New York) "Armenians and the Problem-Space of Secularism in the Early Turkish Republic" and Erdem Ilter (UCLA) "The Ottoman Imperial Legacy on Turkish Nation Building: An Analysis of the General Inspectorates (1895 - 1945).

The conference will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Saturday, October 3, with one session, which will feature presentations by Talin Suciyan (Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich) "The Amorphous/Abstracted Peasant of Ottoman and Turkish Historiography"; Ümit Kurt (Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem) "History of A Local Republican Entrepreneur in New Turkey: Cemil Alevli"; and Ari Sekeryan (Manoogian Post-Doctoral Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) "The 'loyal citizens' of the Republic: The Armenian Community During the First Years of the Republic of Turkey (1923-1928)."

All sessions are free and open to the public. Zoom registration is required for each session of the conference. For Friday: <http://bit.ly/armenianstudiesconference1>. For Saturday: <http://bit.ly/armenianstudiesconference2>.

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Arts & Living

Aris Movsesyan

‘The Smile Connects All The Things I Have Ever Done’

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/BELGRADE – Aris Movsesyan (Movsesijan in Serbian spelling) was born in 1966, in Belgrade, where he received his secondary education. He graduated from the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Belgrade. In postgraduate courses, he has published a number of scientific papers on periodontal medicine and oral medicine.

Aris Movsesyan is quite active in the cultural and political life of Serbia. He was an active participant in the musical “New Wave.” He is engaged in literary work. His short stories have been awarded many times. In 1995 he published a collection of short stories “Characters and Writers.”

He is the screenwriter and assistant director of the film “The World’s Greatest Monster” by Goran Rusinovic (2003). As a screenwriter and director he shot his first feature film “Aporia” in 2006. As an actor he acted in two films



Aris Movsesyan

“Comrade Black in the National Liberation War” TV series (2013) and “Goat Ears” (2017).

Aris Movsesyan is also active in Serbia for adoption a state resolution for recognizing the Armenian genocide. He has written “1915-1922 in the Ottoman Empire towards the Armenian people. The resolution on the recognition and condemnation of the genocide committed in 2015.”

Aris, your biography is quite versatile – from medicine to literature, from film to political activity. What do you label yourself?

I have always been one of those people, who never complains about not having enough free time. I belong to the generation which had a different definition for an intellectual than it is today. My belief is that a person cannot be entirely fulfilled with one profession. All this does not come from great joy, but from a need for communication and the need to put your thoughts and ideas out there in the world. Imagine it as a pain, something torturing you. Once the cause of the torture is gone from your mind, comes relief and the pain disappears. I have always loved writing and consider it to be the medicine for life. As for film industry, I have entered that world by pure chance. For me it was a great privilege, that I, who am incapable

see MOVSESYAN, page 13



The late Jirair Gharibian

Armenian Radio Hour of Boston Celebrates 40th Anniversary

BOSTON –On Sunday, October 11, the Armenian Independent Broadcasting of Boston will be marking its 40th anniversary!

The event, originally scheduled to take place in Watertown, has been converted to a virtual one, which will air live on October 11, at 2 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, via Facebook Live.

Many renowned artists from around the world will be joining this celebration, with special appearances and performances, including Arthur Ispiryan, Yeva Yeganyan, Erebus Dance School, Margar Yeghiazaryan, Papin Poghosyan, Herand Markarian, Anush Kirakosyan and many more!

Throughout the past 40 years, Armenian Independent Broadcasting of Boston, founded by the late Jirair Gharibian in October 1980, has aired every Saturday, reaching more than 50,000 Armenian listeners in the Greater Boston area. The program, broadcasted both in Armenian and English, covers national, political, and cultural news and events both in the Diaspora and in Armenia. After the untimely death of Jirair Gharibian, his wife, Yevghine Gharibian, kept the legacy of the founder alive, which continues to this day, uninterrupted.



Margar Yeghiazaryan

Since its inception, the radio hour has been diligently and faithfully serving and uniting Armenians in the diaspora. Its unwavering commitment to strengthen and spread Armenian culture has been challenging at times. However, through Mrs. Gharibian’s relentless efforts, the exemplary dedication of many volunteers and the generous support of its listeners, the historic radio hour has endured.

Please join us as we all come together to celebrate this remarkable milestone, in an unprecedented and unique cultural program, that will include performances by many well-known singers, musicians, dances and recitations.

For more details regarding the event, visit <http://armenianradioboston.com/40th-anniversary/>

Wonderfully Unsettling Paintings of Charles Garabedian

By Caroline Liou

LOS ANGELES (Hyperallergic) – Charles Garabedian’s paintings are not beautiful because they depict scenes from classical mythology, but because they render the world of classical mythology real. I’ve never imagined Prometheus surrounded by his own shit, for example, terrified and in unbearable agony from having his liver torn out on a daily basis. But Garabedian did, and did so with such inventive detail and visceral humor that he transports the classical to the present day, here. After hundreds of years of art history fetishizing classical aesthetics, Garabedian’s paintings remind the viewer that the world of Olympic gods and titans is one that is not perfect – instead, it is idyllic and savage and surreal all at once.

Charles Garabedian: Outside the Gates, an online exhibition jointly organized by L.A. Louver and Betty Cuninghams Gallery, brings together a selection of paintings – classical and otherwise – from the last three decades of the artist’s life (he died in 2016), and they are all wonderfully unsettling. A decapitated head served on a golden platter immediately recalls the story of Holofernes in “You Should Have Looked at Me” (2012), but the boy wearing a striped tie and peeping up from a ladder adds a voyeuristic, and anachronistic, element to the enigmatic image. “The Eunuch” (2003–04) is equally bizarre, depicting a man contorted in a position no earthly human would be able to maintain. This treatment of the body as a malleable entity of its own, lopsided and even putty-like, is characteristic of see UNSETTLING, page 13



Charles Garabedian, “Prometheus” (2011), acrylic on paper, 47 3/4 x 24 3/8 inches (all images courtesy L.A. Louver, Venice, Calif. and Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York)



ARTS & LIVING

Aris Movsesyan: 'The Smile Connects All the Things I Have Ever Done'

MOVSESYAN, from page 12

of drawing anything, can bring words and thoughts to life through moving images on screen. And as for politics, I have joined the political scene in my fifties. Living in Serbia, politics was always a great part of my life, so finally I decided to become a part of it. Being an intellectual, I felt a need to actively help.

I assume dentistry is the most profitable of your professions. Do you practice dentistry now?

Yes. I live through it and for it. It is a medicine branch which has gone through the quickest transition in Serbia. Right now is the time to reflect on the state of dentistry in Serbia, in which direction it should further develop, and how to put prettier smiles on the faces of as many people as possible. You know, a smile is exactly what connects all the things I have ever done. A dentist will give you teeth to smile; a writer and a filmmaker will make you smile. Politicians can make your worries go away and therefore produce an environment where you can smile. Humour is something only people possess, so I made it my life's purpose to put that human characteristic as a priority.

In 2006 you came to Armenia to the Yerevan Golden Apricot International Film Festival with your film "Aporia." For some people with Armenian roots visiting Armenia is like visiting home, while for the others it was just another country they have visited. How was for you?

That was something very special to me. I would wake up early in the morning and just walk through the town. Yerevan seems to me to be the most beautiful in the morning. On one of my early morning walks, I came across an old lady, sweeping the doorstep of her house with a broom. She was turned with her back to me and for a moment I thought I was looking at my grandmother, who was, even then, already long gone. Everything was so surreal. It might sound corny, but through whole of my stay, I have felt like I have already been there. Everything was so familiar and close to heart. Of course, I realised that my father and I were not the only ones with big noses and thick eyebrows. I regret not speaking Armenian. This came as a consequence of my grandparents speaking Armenian only when they did not want us kids to understand what they were talking about. So naturally it was an amazing feeling to understand each and every one I have met on my walks through Yerevan, even without speaking the same language. I have always said it is no wonder we had Parajanov.

Is there something Armenian in your writings or films?

I tried writing a script, which I could best describe as paraphrasing Bertolucci's "Nove Cento." Twentieth century through three generations of Armenians. The first part of the movie was supposed to be about the genocide, while the second and third part would be about some of the life changing events, inspired by the lives of my grandfather, my father and myself. As a synopsis everything seemed to work. I believed it would be the best thing I will ever do in my entire life, but after writing the first part, after so many strong emotions, it was impossible to write anything else. It just did not make sense. That was the first time I realized how the genocide, along with being pure horror and evil, is a dark shadow following each Armenian to this day. Genocide is not over the day it is physically finished. It is a crime which follows and burdens a whole nation through generations. Maybe, when I retire, I will build up the courage and strength to put all this into words in form of a novel.

Your grandfather Yeznik Movsesyan's story – how he escaped from Ottoman military service and became a coffee-maker in Pozarevac, is quite interesting. Don't you think it is a great stuff for a literature and film? Please tell us about him and your Armenian family.

My grandfather is my life's inspiration. What could possibly be so difficult for me, considering what he went through in his lifetime? This realization gives me strength. Whenever I think something is impossible, I remember that Yeznik, as a small boy, walked all the way from Armenia to Serbia. If he could have such a

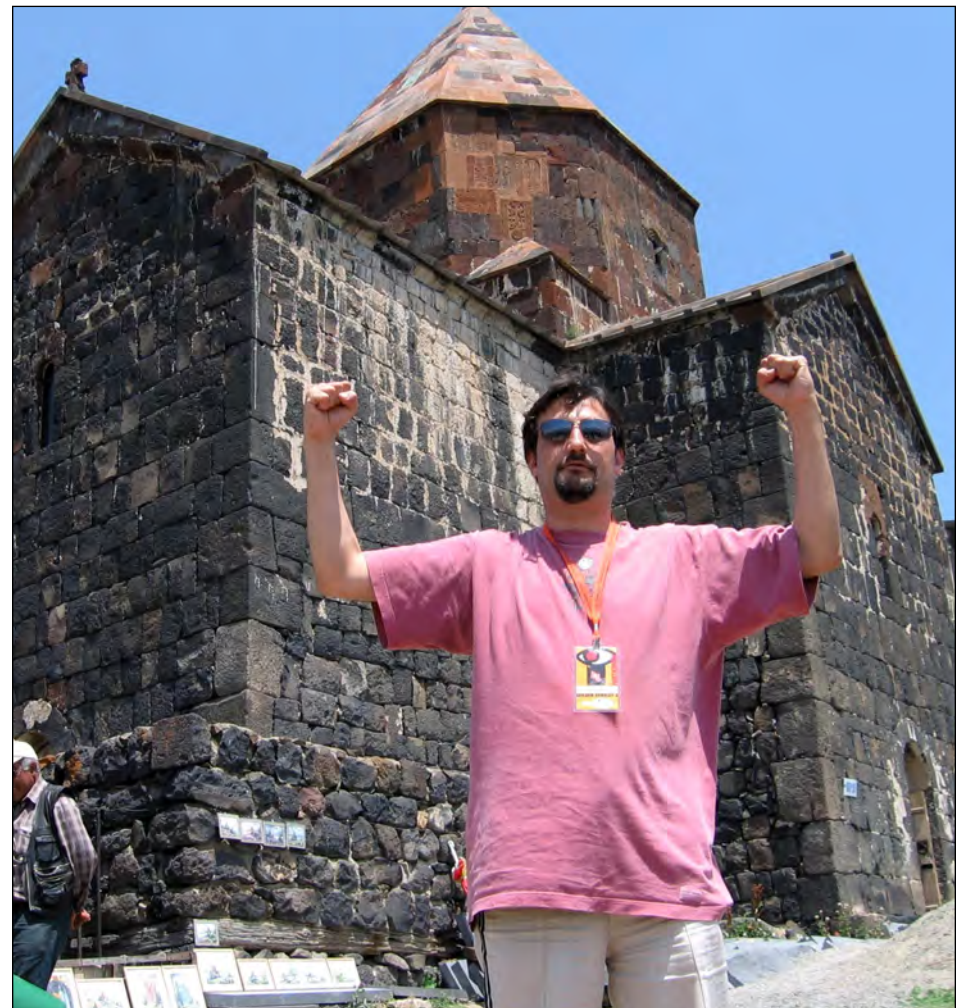
spark and will to live, then who am I to just give up when life gets hard? One very interesting story is the one of how my grandparents met: My grandmother, Anna Bagdasaryan, lived in Bulgaria. My grandfather was in Serbia. They wrote to each other all the time. Letters and photos are what connected them. I like to say that this was Facebook before Facebook. When they finally met in person, they stayed together till the end of their lives.

You are also involved in politics, being a member of the Nova Party since 2014. What do you think, why the Serbian government has not recognized the Armenian genocide so far, having so similar fate with the Armenians?

Nova Party has been proposing the adoption of the resolution on the recognition and condemnation of the genocide committed in 1915-1922, in 2015 in the Parliament of Serbia for five years. I consider it to be a political act, and will persevere until the resolution is officially acknowledged. The reason why it still did not happen is also political. Serbia is currently a country with a series of problems. It is like a puzzle which has not been assembled correctly. That is why I believe that eventually everything will fall in its rightful place and that the resolution, which I wrote with help of my friends, will finally be adopted. We Armenians are patient people, are we not? Stubborn as well. The lack of official recognition does not mean that the people of Serbia do not understand what happened in Armenia at the beginning of 20th century. It is upon me to make sure that the state acknowledges it official.

What are your current projects? How else can you surprise us?

The political situation in Serbia is very difficult. I have already gone through such periods when art must be put aside until much more pressing matters are handled. Let then the read-



Aris Movsesyan

ers in Armenia be the first ones to find out: I have written a novel. I am waiting for things to calm down, so I can put finishing touches on the novel and then finally let it see the light of

day. My wish is for it to be translated in Armenian so we can meet again and discuss if there is something Armenian in my way of writing. Of course, with a smile. How else!?

The Unsettling Paintings of Charles Garabedian



Charles Garabedian, "The Eunuch" (2003-04), acrylic on paper, 48 x 61 inches

UNSETTLING, from page 12

Garabedian's somewhat Mannerist style. Any necessity for bodily logic falls away, yielding to visual pleasures, like how the figure's backside echoes the curve of the hill in the background. There is a sense of play that suffuses Garabedian's work throughout, allowing the artist to eschew conventions and revel in the richness and the oddities of the world he has created.

The unembarrassed quality of his paintings is perhaps due to the fact that Garabedian came to his art career relatively late in life.

Born in Detroit to a family of Armenian refugees fleeing the genocide, he first served in United States Air Force, then went on to work for Goodrich Tire and the Union Pacific Railroad, before ever picking up a paintbrush. In 1961, he graduated with an MFA from the

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), saying, "Here I was, almost 40 years old at the time, and I was like a little kid."

As a late-blooming artist, Garabedian was never interested in making things that look like art; instead, he gave himself over to his instincts, pretensions, and mistakes, unafraid to explore and even embrace what others considered to be "bad." He states in one interview, "The bad – I'm responsible for that and there must be something there. You know, you can't just dismiss it by saying, 'Oh, well he said that's bad, this is good.'" His willingness to constantly question and prod at preconceived notions of good and bad is what earned him a spot in Marcia Tucker's notorious "Bad" Painting exhibition at the New Museum in 1978, what later cemented his reputation as an artist's artist, and what makes



Charles Garabedian, "You Should Have Looked at Me" (2012), acrylic on paper, 101 x 38 1/2 inches

his work so compelling, even today.

"Charles Garabedian: Outside the Gates" continues online at L.A. Louver through September 19.

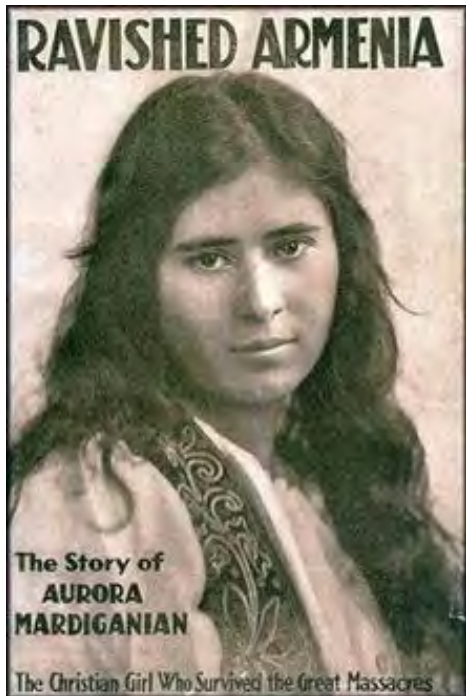


ARTS & LIVING

Books

Aurora to Support Reprint of Ravished Armenia by Namesake

YEREVAN — A grant from Aurora will help the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute to republish Aurora Mardiganian's book with additional notes



Aurora Mardiganian on the cover of her book *Ravished Armenia* written in 1918.

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is glad to announce that it will support the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in its unprecedented efforts to republish *Ravished Armenia* by Aurora Mardiganian with additional references and explanatory notes. This unique publication in Armenian and English will mark the symbolic start of the *Mémoires of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide Series*, a milestone project of the Museum-Institute.

"The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative has been closely collaborating with the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute for many years and is especially delighted to support this project in particular, as our Initiative was inspired by the story of Aurora Mardiganian and named after her. As a child, she was subjected to the atrocities of the Armenian Genocide and not only survived but went on to relive the trauma as she told her story to the world on stage and in film, raising awareness of the Genocide. This year, we are celebrating the fifth anniversary of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, and this reprint couldn't have come along in a better time to highlight the importance of shedding light on the resilience and generosity of the human spirit," said Tom Catena, Chair of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

This effort is part of the *Mémoires of Survivors of the Armenian Genocide Series*, the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute's new publishing project that will feature the memoirs



Aurora Mardiganian

of the Genocide survivors that have never been published before. The re-print of "*Ravished Armenia*" in English and Armenian, featuring 20 additional pages of references and explanatory notes, will be the first two volumes of the *Memoirs Series*. The English edition will be published in 2,000 copies and the Armenian one in 1,000 copies.

"More than a hundred years have passed since the Armenian Genocide, and today's readers are not familiar with many terms and geographical denominations, so these references and explanatory notes are a necessity. In this regard, the collaboration with the Aurora is very symbolic. Both the Genocide Museum-Institute and the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative aim to raise awareness of the

Armenian Genocide, to fight and prevent modern-day genocides, and to help people going through similar tragedies. This is where our goals and visions align," emphasized Harutyun Marutyan, director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute.

Aurora supports Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute through the Aurora Grants, a program that allows the descendants of the Armenian Genocide survivors to honor the memory of their ancestors' saviors by helping educational initiatives, promoting Armenian heritage and raising awareness of humanitarian efforts. In accordance with the Memory Act, the Aurora Grants collaborates with the Armenian Genocide Museum-institute, contributing to the preservation of Armenian culture and history.

How Reagan Captured the Presidency, and the Right Captured Politics

By Michael Bobelian

Republicans hit rock bottom in 1964. Lyndon Johnson crushed Barry Goldwater by a record vote margin, and after ceding 36 House seats, the GOP was outnumbered 2 to 1 in both chambers of Congress. Already humiliated by the electorate's rebuke of Goldwater's far-right ideology, his acolytes watched in horror as Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen and other GOP standard-bearers allied with liberals to enact civil rights legislation and Johnson's Great Society agenda.

In three previous volumes, noted historian Rick Perlstein portrayed this epoch as the zenith of a liberal consensus and the origin of the conservative movement that came to dominate American politics. Starting in 1968, Republicans won eight of 13 presidential elections, controlled Congress for protracted intervals after spending most of the preceding four decades in the minority and appointed 15 of 19 Supreme Court justices. Published in 2001, *Before the Storm* recounted the rise of the firebrand Goldwater as the progenitor of this movement. Perlstein's next two books, *Nixonland* and *The Invisible Bridge*, encompassed Richard Nixon's presidency, followed by Ronald Reagan's emergence as Goldwater's heir. *Reaganland: America's Right Turn 1976-1980* concludes Perlstein's authoritative and engaging series with Reagan capturing the White House.

Initially considered too conservative to win a national election, Reagan benefited from the electorate's shift to the right, the development of unrivaled grass-roots and fundraising networks, and the exploits of cutting-edge political operators.

Perhaps no group personified these developments better than the New Right. Described by one of its pioneers as "radicals working to overturn the present power structure," these public relations experts and campaign strategists commonly operated without the GOP's imprimatur. Brazenly exploiting legal loopholes and shattering norms to the chagrin of the party's patriots, the New Right zeroed in on racial resent-

ment and divisive social issues — abortion, gay rights and the Equal Rights Amendment — to stir voters' emotions. "We organize discontent," declared one of its leaders, Howard Phillips. Alarmist and ugly — one newsletter opposing homosexuals and gay rights vowed to "protect... children from their evil influence" — the strategy nevertheless corralled Reagan Democrats to the party.

As the New Right mastered these newfangled strategies, religious institutions and large busi-



Reaganland: America's Right Turn 1976-1980
By Rick Perlstein
Simon & Schuster. 1107 pp. \$40

nesses, which had intermittently dabbled in partisan politics in the 1960s, gelled into strongholds for the GOP. Led by Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, evangelicals abandoned Jimmy Carter over abortion and gay rights and, through the proliferation of Christian television stations and direct-mail operations, backed Reagan even though he, like Donald Trump, had been divorced and was not particularly devout. Wary of escalating environmental and consumer protection regulations, corporations — "boardroom Jacobins" in Perlstein's lexicon — amped up their lobbying efforts to promote the GOP's calls for deregulation and lower taxes.

While Reagan is the book's central figure,

Perlstein chronicles this transformation through the exploits of culture war trailblazers and political advisers such as Phyllis Schlafly, Richard Viguerie and Anita Bryant who led the GOP's about-face on the ERA, voting rights and the Panama Canal treaty. Perlstein's knack for bringing these long-forgotten clashes to life and his eye for telling details — along with cameo appearances by Roger Stone, Paul Manafort and Trump, a "hungry young killer" out to conquer New York real estate — conjure many eye-opening moments. Although Perlstein rarely draws explicit comparisons to modern-day politics, the unnerving parallels between the time periods — and the origins of the many divisions currently ailing the nation — jump off nearly every page. Reading *Reaganland*, it's easy to identify Trump's imitation of the New Right's ploys and its fixation on toxic, socially contentious issues to woo voters through emotional appeals.

The era continues to resonate in other ways as well. The New Right's purging of Republican moderates and ousting of Democrats from states with small, conservative populations accelerated a trend started a decade earlier. This expulsion of centrists from the political landscape and the reduction of ideological diversity within the parties fueled hyper-partisanship for decades to come. Lacking the bountiful incisive commentary of Perlstein's earlier work, however, and bogged down by the unrelenting rotation between multiple story lines, *Reaganland's* narrative doesn't reach full speed until the 1980 campaign.

Conservatives were fortunate to have Reagan serve as the prophet delivering their radical message. Though he, too, strove to steer the party away from the "country club big business image" epitomized by Nelson Rockefeller, Reagan never projected a cutthroat persona, earning the public's affection over Carter, who came off as increasingly coldhearted. Reagan's biggest handicap was his tendency to blurt mistakes and falsehoods — one commentator said he had a "very loose hold on the real world around him" — when going off-script. Critics pounced on his gaffes questioning evolution and asserting that vegetation caused pollution, but, as with Trump, Reagan's backers cared lit-

tle about these blunders or his nescience over public affairs. His telegenic charisma, unapologetic patriotism ("Make America great again" became a campaign slogan) and sanguine vision overwhelmed an incumbent prone to scolding the public for its profligate ways. Unable to lift the nation's spirits, Carter's "Scrooge" was no match for Reagan's "Santa Claus."

These forces alone didn't explain Reagan's triumph. Blinded by overconfidence and mired in internecine divisions, liberals had no response to conservatism's subterranean growth. Lacking a cohesive vision, Democrats failed to refashion the formidable coalition of labor unions, religious organizations and civil rights groups from the 1960s. A testy relationship between Carter and congressional Democrats, compounded by his bruising nomination fight with Ted Kennedy, squandered the opportunity to leverage the party's gains after Watergate. It's no wonder that Democrats suffered their worst drubbing in more than a half-century.

Over time, liberals learned to counteract the right's stratagems, but even Bill Clinton and Barack Obama — the two savviest Democratic leaders of the past six decades — failed to unite the party's fragmented factions or forge a cogent and lasting doctrine. Clinton, in particular, outmaneuvered his archrival, Newt Gingrich, yet shifted the party firmly to the right to prevail. In doing so, he defined the Democrats on Republican terms.

In many ways, the right wing's ascent that Perlstein has admirably recounted owes as much to avant-garde tactics, the passion of its adherents and the changing tastes of the electorate as it does to the inability of Democrats to effectively and consistently confront conservatism with a vibrant, clear and enduring alternative. The complete story of conservatism's rise during the past 60 years cannot be told without accounting for liberalism's role in its ascension.

(This review originally appeared in the *Washington Post* on August 28. Michael Bobelian teaches journalism at Baruch College and is the author of *Battle for the Marble Palace: Abe Fortas, Earl Warren, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and the Forging of the Modern Supreme Court*.)



ARTS & LIVING

Little Armenias. It's a Small World After All

DIASPORA, from page 1

Readers can find these facts and so much more about culture, population and things to do in the book *Little Armenias: The Travel Guide of the Armenian Diaspora*, by Robin Koulaksezian, recently released in English.

Koulaksezian, in this compendium piece, has information about 101 countries. The 280-page book is categorized by countries, then cities, where appropriate. The information is succinct and easy to read.

He graduated from Sorbonne University and later received a master's degree from ESSEC Business School.

Koulaksezian, in his press material, calls himself a traveler. Indeed, he is one.

After visiting over 100 countries and collecting information from hundreds of locals, he decided to publish a travel guide dedicated to the Armenian Diaspora.

In a recent interview, he said his love for travel, and specifically for finding Armenian diasporas around the world, sprang from his own background. He is the son of a French mother and French-Armenian father. The first time he got on a plane was when he was about 18 and went to Armenia.

"I discovered my Armenian roots," he said. In the meantime, he got fluent in the Armenian language as well as had a great time.

The travel bug had bitten him.

"I started traveling regularly. Whenever I traveled, I tried to find Armenians," he explained.

Fond Memories of Syria

Eventually, he started to work at the French Institute in Syria. He lived in Damascus for a year, during which time, he made trips to nearby Middle Eastern Armenian diasporas.

"It was very interesting for me," he added.

What has happened since to the country makes him "very, very sad."

"We are losing one of the greatest diasporas," he said, referring to Syria, but also adding Lebanon. "Syria and Lebanon were the hearts of the diaspora."

He added that Syria was "the coolest place," where he found efficient classes and structure.

"You still had some freedom, more than in other Middle Eastern countries," he added.

Syria is near and dear to him for another reason; his paternal grandparents moved to France from Aleppo.

He next lived in Russia for two years, working in Moscow.

"It was very different," he said.

"I was surprised that in every single city in Russia, you have an Armenian population," he said.

Koulaksezian first started to think about cre-



Robin Koulaksezian

ating an online tool for travelers, something which to his mind, was akin to the popular *Lonely Planet* series, which are packed with details, distances and activities.

World Traveler Finds Gems

Koulaksezian received an AGBU Noubar Nazarian YP Innovators Fund to start the diasporan project online. The idea, he explained, is to create tours and maps, offering "structures to make places you can visit."

He is working on the maps, tours and excursions on the website.

He has loved many of the cities he has visited. When asked about Iran, he said, "I am very interested in Iran. I like its history," he said. He had visited there by taking a bus from Yerevan, which took 26 hours.

When he visited Tehran, he still did not speak Armenian well. "My English was OK," he said, and that is how he got by.

"The people were helping me a lot," he said.

He also added that he was surprised by the sizes of the Armenian populations in Ukraine and Brazil.

The latter, especially, was a revelation for

him. "It was very interesting. Much better than I expected."

Another city that offered a large and semi-hidden diaspora was Mexico City, he said. "There are generations that came after the Genocide. There were many boats that came from Veracruz."

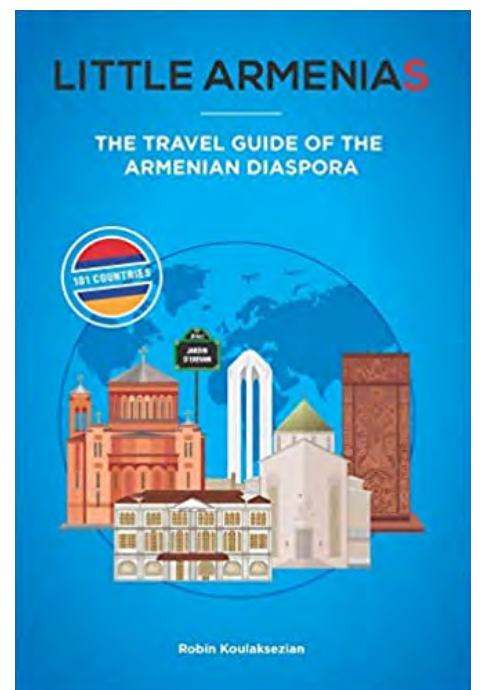
In fact, he explained, the community there is so well established that one part of the city, La Merced, housed all the cobblers, who were all Armenians. "All the Mexican elite used to go to the Armenian shops and get shoes," he added.

He is only one person, therefore he cannot be everywhere. That is why he has a network of local Armenians contacts for updates and further details.

Many Armenians don't know about the treasures in other diasporas.

For example, he noted that in Lviv, Ukraine, the Armenian Cathedral of Lviv, is part of the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

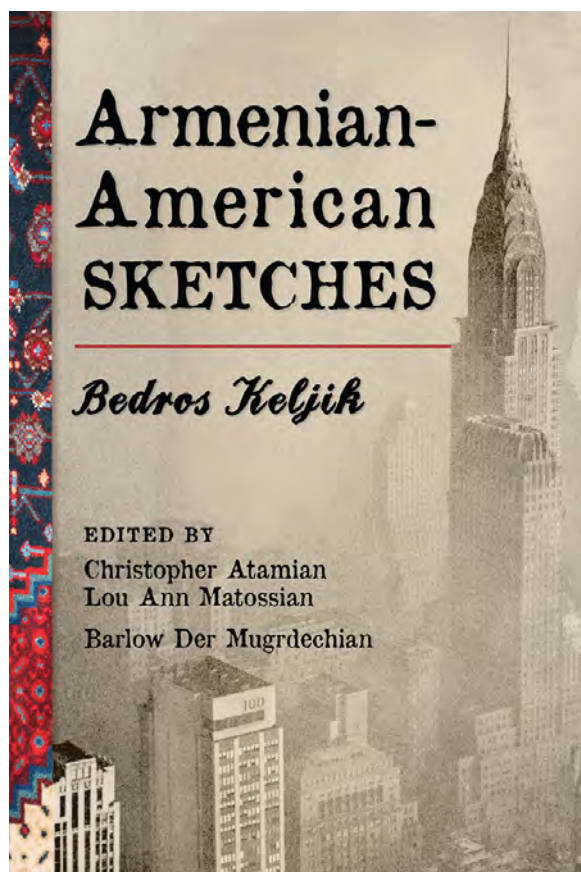
The French edition of *Little Armenias* was published in 2018. After a meeting with the author in Lisbon in 2019, Dr. Razmik Panossian, director of the Armenian Communities Department at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, suggested to have the book available in English too. The English ver-



sion was published in February this year. Of course, all the materials were reviewed to keep it up to date.

In fact, he said, he plans to update the information in the book every two years.

Little Armenias is available on Amazon.



"Bedros Keljik's Armenian-American Sketches: Stories of Armenians in the Early 20th C."

FRESNO — "Bedros Keljik's Armenian-American Sketches: Stories of Armenians in the Early 20th C." will be presented as a webinar at 4 p.m. (Pacific time)/7 p.m. (Eastern time) on Sunday, September 27. The presentation is co-sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), the Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota (ACOM), and the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS).

A panel featuring co-editors Christopher Atamian, Lou Ann Matossian, Barlow Der Mugrdchian, and co-translator Vartan Matiossian will discuss various aspects of the new publication. Marc A. Mamigonian will moderate the discussion.

Keljik's *Armenian-American Sketches*, originally published in Armenian in 1944 as *Amerigahay Badgerner*, is the work of a member of the pioneer generation of Armenian immigrants, and is of both literary and historical significance. Now fully translated into English for the first time and recently published as volume 8 in the Armenian Series of The Press at California State University, Fresno, these stories retain their vitality, humor, pathos, and relevance.

Twenty of the short stories were translated by the late Aris

Sevag, one by Lou Ann Matossian, and eight pieces originally published in *Baikal*, were translated by Vartan Matiossian. Volume editors Christopher Atamian, Lou Ann Matossian, and Barlow Der Mugrdchian have also included an enlightening biography of Keljik, *An Armenian Odyssey: From the Euphrates to the Mississippi*, written by his grandchildren, Mark and Thomas Keljik, as well as Bedros Keljik's own translation of his fellow-Kharperetsi author Roupen Zartarian's *How Death Came to the Earth*.

With keen observation Keljik provides the reader with an often-humorous insight into that life, with all of its sadness and joy, with the sense of community, and with the hard work and challenges faced by the immigrants. This is a book which appeals to any reader who seeks to understand the immigrant experience in the United States.

The lecture will be a Zoom Webinar, and registration is required. Use this link to register: bit.ly/armenianstudieskeljik. The lecture will also be streamed on the Armenian Studies Program YouTube channel at bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube.

For more information about the lecture visit www.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies.



ARTS & LIVING

New Album By Michael Sarian Combines Jazz And Armenian Core

NEW YORK — Trumpeter/composer Michael Sarian is an artist who paints images of humanity through sound. On “New Aurora,” his fourth album as a leader, we find him on trumpet and flugelhorn as the sole melodic voice in this acoustic quartet, a clear departure from his previous releases which feature extensive four-horn arrangements, electronics and hard-hitting grooves (Sarian has released three albums as a bandleader with his septet, Michael Sarian & The Chabones, and also leads Michael Sarian & The Big Chabones, a 16-piece big band).

The album, released on September 4 on Ears&Eyes Records, features Sarian (trumpet, flugelhorn, compositions); Santiago Leibson (piano); Marty Kenney (bass) Matt Pavolka (bass) and Dayeon Seok (drums).

Listening closely through flesh, metal, breath and spit we can hear his family’s heritage, his musical heroes and his declaration as a jazz artist who has something compelling and beautiful to add to the conversation.

Born in Toronto and raised in Buenos Aires from the age of 1, Sarian has been calling New York City home for the past eight years. “New Aurora” has been in gestation since Sarian’s first release in 2014, and the album comes to us as a result of engineer/producer Luis Bacque’s downright insistence that the trumpeter venture into a freer, more acoustic setting that would feature his own playing, particularly on the flugelhorn, at the forefront of the ensemble’s sound (Sarian plays flugelhorn on all tracks save the first).

Inspired by the music of trumpet greats Kenny Wheeler, Tomasz Stanko, Enrico Rava, and legendary Armenian/American drummer Paul Motian, Sarian ventured into Bacque’s studio to test the waters of this new musical direction. After an afternoon spent at the New Jersey recording studio with Santiago Leibson (piano), Matt Pavolka (bass) and Dayeon Seok (drums), the session yielded the first two tracks of what would become “New Aurora.”

Sarian began writing the first of the compositions, *This Is Only The Beginning*, in a hotel room in Florida during the first days of 2019, while reading Japanese writer Haruki Murakami’s *Killing Commendatore*. The novel tells the story of a 30-something artist facing an early onset mid-life crisis, who, after a devastating separation, decides to quit his lucrative career as a portrait painter, retreat into the mountains and pursue a more fulfilling path of abstract self-expression, proclaiming “this is only the beginning.”

Scottie(33), in honor of the great 1990s Chicago Bulls player Scottie Pippen, followed soon after. The opening theme is in 9 (the result of multiplying both 3s of his jersey number) and presents a subdued atmosphere. Originally meant to be a more upbeat composition, Sarian discovered that the only nickname Pippen had during his playing days was No tip-pin’ Pippen, because he was a notoriously poor tipper, probably as a result of the terrible contracts Pippen had with the Bulls organization and having to support his family, so Sarian decided to convey that sense of sorrow and disappointment in the music. The choppy, hip-hop groove in 7, then 15, gives the track a big finish because, after all, Scottie did win six championships.

The album derives its name from the track *Aurora*, which Sarian began writing on February 15, 2019. Although the word literally means dawn, which is the meaning Sarian hopes to convey behind the project, the composition came after hearing of a mass shooting that day in Aurora, Illinois. The composition bears a somber mood, a hopelessness which Sarian felt assuming #Aurora was trending because of the 2012 mass shooting there, only to find out that yet another senseless act of violence had taken place.

Dedicated to his cousin Nick, *Primo* (cousin in Spanish), is



Michael Sarian playing the trumpet

arguably the most “straight-ahead” track of the album. The idea for the composition came after getting a copy of Nicolas Slonimsky’s book *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*. Sarian based the composition on a scale found on the second page. The marking at the top of the chart is “fast + gritty swing”, with no chords to be found, just the scale the tune is based on.

Paying homage to his Armenian heritage, Sarian arranged two pieces by Komitas, the celebrated Armenian monk, composer, musicologist, and founder of the Armenian national school of music (who last year celebrated his 150th birthday). Originally a love song, *Dle Yaman* became a song of loss and longing after the Armenian Genocide, and is considered to be one of the folk songs that best represents the soul of Armenia. The theme is first presented on its own by Sarian’s trumpet, and then restated with the rhythm section playing roots and fifths. The piece is used as an introduction for Sarian’s original piece *Portrait of a Postman*, inspired by the music of the Paul Motian Trio, and named after the Vincent Van Gogh painting.

The second piece by Komitas on the album, *Chinar Es*, translates quite literally to “You Are A Tree.” Sarian says “The title refers to the poplar tree, and back in the day this was apparently something men told women when trying to flirt, as in ‘You’re as tall and slender as a tree.’” He says that much to his dismay, this pick-up line does not hold water any longer in Yerevan. Sarian arranged this piece using the traditional Armenian rhythm *curcuna* in 10/8, with the melody played loosely over pedal tones.

Drawing on his own family’s heritage in Armenia and Eastern Europe, *Mountains* deals with the landscapes his ancestors had to navigate, from historical Armenia in Eastern Turkey, to Istanbul, to Romania during and after the genocide, all the way to Argentina, Canada, and back to Argentina, for him to finally find his current home in New York City. A nod to his family name (*sar* means mountain in Armenian, and Sarian translates to son of the mountain), the track has three layers working together: a drum groove in 5 based loosely on Armenian rhythms, the bass and piano playing a static two beat back and

forth, and a floating melody on the flugelhorn.

Sarian introduced a new piece the evening before the first December session, titled *The Morning After*. It starts out with a Beatles-esque piano motif, and conveys the frantic despair one might have after a big night out, which as fun as it might be, many times comes with self-doubt the next morning, giving in to the briefest of existential crisis. The shortest track in the album, the tune breaks down into a completely free improvisation between the four musicians, only to be brought back into the melody before an abrupt finish.

Colorado Yeta is the only recycled tune of the album, which Sarian recorded with his septet and released on his previous recording. Literally translated into Spanish (or Argentine slang), it means Bad Luck Ginger, and expresses the sorrows of growing up as a redhead in Argentina.

The last track on the album is, Monk’s *Ask Me Now*, presented here as a lovely duet with Sarian and pianist Leibson, serving as a sort of palate cleanser after almost an hour of original compositions and arrangements.

Michael Sarian is a trumpeter and composer whose work has been described as “a steady study in dichotomy. With a wordless elegance, the New York City-based musician is flexibly firm, loosely tight, and brightly dark. The innovations within his compositions are deceptively dramatic with varying degrees of a melodic sensibility.” – Frank De Blasé, *The Rochester City Newspaper*.

He relocated to New York City in 2012 to pursue a master’s degree in Jazz Studies at New York University, where he studied with great musicians such as Laurie Frink, Alan Ferber, Brad Shepik, Ralph Alessi and Mike Rodriguez. He has since performed at the Montreux Jazz Festival, BRIC JazzFest, Getxo Blues Festival, Canary Island International Jazz Festival, Blue Note Jazz Club, Jazz at Lincoln Center, The Beacon Theater, Central Park SummerStage, Teatro Colón, Thelonious Club, has appeared on WNYC’s Soundcheck with John Schaefer, NPR’s World Cafe, and many more.

Michael has released three albums as a bandleader with his septet, Michael Sarian & The Chabones, most recently *LEÓN* in 2018 with Zoho Music, and has appeared on countless more as a sideman. He also leads Michael Sarian & The Big Chabones, a 16-piece big band alternative, in addition to his most recent quartet *New Aurora*, with a debut album set for September 4, 2020. Since the fall of 2015, Michael has been making yearly pilgrimages back home to Buenos Aires to perform his music with local musicians, including some of his old mentors. Sarian is a faculty member at TrumpetLand.com and a Remic Microphones endorser.

Besides performing regularly with his own projects and as a sideman throughout New York City, Sarian teaches trumpet, theory and composition.

To listen to Sarian’s music or purchase the CD, visit www.MichaelSarian.com or www.EarsandEyesRecords.com





ARTS & LIVING

Armenian Cultural Hour from Providence, RI

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – The “Armenia Cultural hour” held every Friday by the Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian church’s cultural committee over the past four months, and over 20,000 people watched.

Every Friday of week, cultural and educational programs are presented, including concerts by famous Armenian performers from around the world, documentaries about Armenia, as well as monthly on-line meetings

with Armenian Doctors who deliver lectures and answer questions to an online audience.

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

A couple of minutes before the start of the next “Armenia Cultural hour” program, you

just need to click on the link, which is placed on the poster for each event. Which is published on the sites of MENK, Easter Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, or facebook of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, Providence, RI. As we were told by the Director of cultural and musical programs of the church, Konstantin Petrossian. For the near future, the following programs are provided:

OCTOBER

October 2 – “Meet with Armenian Doctors” – Dr. Michael Alavian, Urologist

October 9 – “Louys Zvart” Geghard Vocal Ensemble, Armenia

October 16 – “A Century of Light, Hope and Faith” Concert dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of Saints Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church

October 23 – Saro Danielian, Virtuoso Duduk and Zurna player (Argentina)

October 30 – Garo Nishanian, Bass-Baritone, Canada “A bouquet of Armenian songs”.

NOVEMBER

November 6 – “Musical greetings from Lisbon” Levon Muradian, Cello (Portugal)

November 13 – Emma Tovmasian & Vazgen Avetian (CA) in concert “Sere chi tseranoom”, Armenian popular songs

November 20 – “Meet with Armenian Doctors” – Dr. Aznif Calikyan, Anesthesiologist

November 27 – “Nor Serund” Youth Talents from Armenia Armenian folk music and songs

DECEMBER

December 4 – Renowned Armenian Bass & Songwriter Ruben Telunts in Concert “Karotee Kanch”

December 11 – World Renown “Cadance” Ensemble from Armenia

December 18 – Christmas Concert, featuring “Yerevan” Chorale & Orchestra, Boston, MA

December 27 (Sunday) – Memorial Concert “David Ayriyan”, Virtuoso Kamancha player



Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian

Eggplant Pomegranate Salad from ANI Catering & Cafe

ANI Catering & Cafe' in Belmont, MA, has been serving authentic Armenian and Middle Eastern cuisine to the Greater Boston area for over 20 years. In April, in honor of the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, five Armenian-owned restaurants in the Boston area collectively donated more than 150 meals to fuel the night shift crew working at the Emergency Department at Massachusetts General Hospital during the global pandemic. ANI Catering & Cafe' with the other restaurants each added their own creativity to individually packaged meals filled with flavorful kebabs and falafel, shawarma wraps and stuffed grape leaves complimented with hummus, warm rice and zesty salad. “We love this community and cherish any opportunity to show how much the community means to us,” says Hovhannes (John) Janessian, co-owner of ANI Catering & Cafe.

The café was established in 1993 as a part-time catering company by John and his wife, Ani. Customers come from as far as Concord, Lexington and Wellesley, while the catering business ranges over eastern Massachusetts, even into neighboring Rhode Island. Events for up to 600 people have been catered by the company, including corporate and family or social occasions. In 2006, they turned the catering business into a fulltime one, and moved to its present Belmont location. When customers asked for takeout service, they expanded, and in 2014, John turned part of the store into a sit-down restaurant. “We owe the success of the takeout business to our son Ari’s hard work, talent, and outgoing personality. We use only fresh and natural ingredients with no preservatives or processed food. We replace the chicken stacked on the spit or vertical rod for our shawarma three times a day, it is always fresh, while falafel is fried only after it has been ordered. And Ani’s garlic sauce (toun) is always in demand. It is so good, I would even eat our toun with ice cream,” adds John.

INGREDIENTS:

2 medium Italian eggplants
3 tablespoons extra olive oil, plus more for grilling
2 tablespoons lemon juice
5-6 cloves garlic, minced
2 cups diced plum tomatoes
1 large scallion, chopped
Handful of fresh parsley leaves, chopped
Handful of red bell pepper, chopped
1/3 cup walnuts, chopped
1 1/2 oz. pomegranate molasses
Pinch of salt and black pepper
Pinch of Aleppo pepper and cumin
A handful of pomegranate seeds, if available

PREPARATION:

Cut the two ends off the eggplant and slice lengthwise into 1/4-inch slices (or into rounds). Salt slices to help remove excess moisture and any bitterness from the eggplant, and place in a colander. Set aside for 15 minutes. Rinse salt off eggplant slices with cold water, and pat completely dry with paper towels.

Preheat the grill to medium or heat a grill pan on the stove top over medium-high heat. Ensure the grill is hot before beginning. Using a pastry brush, lightly brush both sides of each slice of eggplant with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Grill on both sides until you have nice grill marks and eggplant is pliable, about 3-4 minutes on each side.

In a small jar with a lid, combine the olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, Aleppo pepper, cumin, and pomegranate molasses. Cover and shake until mixed well. Taste and add salt and pepper, as needed. Set aside.

Cut grilled eggplant into bite-size pieces and toss with a bit of prepared dressing. In a bowl, mix the eggplant with the diced tomato, scallion, parsley, bell pepper, walnuts, and Aleppo pepper. Add the dressing and toss. Transfer mixture to a plate and garnish with pomegranate seeds.

Serves 6.

ANI Catering & Cafe', 687 Belmont St., Belmont, MA 02478

<http://www.anicateringandcafe.com>

<http://www.anitakeout.com>

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/food-dining/2018/09/17/ani-catering-cafe-makes-eating-healthier-taste-really-good/2Jiv1t01DDrvtsZBQgwo2I/story.html?event=event25>

<https://mirrorspectator.com/2016/03/24/ani-catering-and-cafe-entices-with-armenian-and-middle-eastern-food/>



Calendar

CONNECTICUT

SEPTEMBER 19 — Armenian Open 2020,

Saturday, 11 a.m. Tallwood Country Club is the home of the Armenian Open which provides a unique, traditional experience for this golf tournament. The three churches of St. George, St. Mark and Holy Resurrection have combined their efforts to continue on the tradition, at the original site of where it all started. The committee is working diligently to ensure a memorable experience while adhering to COVID-19 guidelines. Register to play and become a sponsor at <https://www.armenianopen.com/register>. To learn more visit our Facebook page : <https://facebook.com/events/s/armenian-open-2020/326043275095372/?ti=icl> or <https://www.armenianopen.com/>.

MASSACHUSETTS

SEPTEMBER 20 — St. James Fall Kick-Off To-Go! Hosted by the St. James Men's Club and Hye Café groups,

in lieu of in-person September events. 12:30 - 2:30pm. Meals will be available for pre-order curbside pickup only. Online ordering will be available starting on September 1st at <http://stjameswatertown.square.site>. St. James Armenian Church - 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown. Please contact info@stthagop.com with any questions.

SEPTEMBER 22 — Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston 2020 Gregory Hintlian Memorial Golf Tournament.

Tuesday, Marlborough Country Club, Marlborough. Please submit completed registration information directly to the Church office via mail or e-mail. Questions? 617 354-0632

SEPTEMBER 23 — Wednesday, at 10am Celebrating What Unites Us!

A virtual cooking series, a collaboration of City of Boston Age-Friendly Boston, OLDWAYS and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park to keep us connected, coming together. BREADS! Andrew Janjigian. America's Test Kitchen Bread Expert. Editor, Cooks Illustrated. To register email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

OCTOBER 7 — 10am Celebrating What Unites Us!

A virtual cooking series, a collaboration of City of Boston Age-Friendly Boston, OLDWAYS and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park to keep us connected, coming together. NATIVE AMERICAN CUISINE Chef Sean Sherman member of the Oglala Lakota tribe Cookbook author, The Sioux Chef Indigenous Kitchen - 2018 James Beard Award for Best American Cookbook; co-founder, The Sioux Chef.com - 2019 James Beard Leadership Award. To register via Zoom, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org



COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

The Confluence of Armenian-Chinese Interests

By Edmond Y. Azadian

The strategic balance in the Caucasus is undergoing a rapid transformation. Russia is viewed by the West as a shrinking power and that is why NATO and the US have ensnared Georgia, moving it away from Russia’s grip. Turkey seems to be a proxy for the West to fill in the perceived power vacuum in the Caucasus. On the other hand, Russia and China have been intensifying their cooperation.

Iran is about to sign a \$400-billion megapact with China, frustrated by the sanctions imposed on it by the West.

There are forces in Iran willing to improve relations with the West, among them President Hassan Rouhani.

As odd as it may seem, President Trump’s intolerant attitude towards Iran is playing into the hands of domestic conservatives to escalate tensions and push Iran into the Russo-Chinese embrace. There is little hope that the US elections would shift the balance, even if Joe Biden were elected president.

Armenia has been caught in these transforming shifts of policies, when particularly, Turkey has become the antagonizing factor in Karabakh, replacing Azerbaijan. Ankara, in addition to its tra-itional animosity toward Armenia, has its grand plans to deliver the Caucasus to the West, all the while pursuing designs of Ottomanism, which look beyond Armenia, towards Central Asia. This in turn irritates Moscow and Beijing, simultaneously.

The Velvet Revolution only had a domestic agenda but some elements who were in lock-step with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s My Step party had an alternative agenda in mind and they have continued to pursue it, despite the pandemic and the internal turmoil; that agenda aims to oust Russia from Armenia and the Caucasus.

Pashinyan himself has already realized that to accommodate that agenda is becoming more and more difficult, as Armenia has become forced to become more dependent on Russian military presence and take its chances with China, whose soft power has helped to make it a presence much to Washington’s chagrin.

On two occasions, Beijing rolled out the red carpet for visiting Armenia’s leaders. Both Serzh Sargsyan and Nikol Pashinyan were received with great fanfare in China, much more so than Armenia’s weight would command anywhere in the world. That kind of treatment has been coupled with a Chinese diplomatic presence in Armenia.

Indeed, China built its second largest embassy in Yerevan, after Moscow. Although China is not locked in an ideological bind in formulating its foreign policy, as the former Soviet Union used to be, it is very much aware where its interests lie.

China has trade and economic relations also with Azerbaijan and Georgia, but it realizes that the first is beholden to Turkey and the latter to the West.

Armenia would be more accommodating if its leaders realize the mutual benefit to both countries.

China has taken a 75-percent interest in the Free Industrial Zone at Poti on Georgia’s Black Sea coastline.

When Pashinyan visited China last May, there were very cordial exchanges at the time.

“We are united by the common goals of cooperation and civilization,” said the Chinese President Xi Jinping. He continued, “We are well aware of momentous events in the history of Armenia. We believe that the tragic events that befell the Armenian people must be prevented in the future.”

That was a direct allusion to the Armenian Genocide, yet on the other hand, in relations with Azerbaijan, China assures the latter that mutual relations are to be developed respecting the territorial integrity of both countries, the meaning of which is very obvious.

Answering the Chinese president, Pashinyan stated that “our peoples represent ancient civilizations. Already in the fifth century, Armenian manuscripts described ties between the two peoples.”

China was the first country to recognize Armenia’s independence; it is its second largest trading partner. Trade between the two increased 29 percent in 2018 to \$771 million. What is most important is that Armenia is relying on Chinese support to achieve projects to improve its infrastructure.

China is already involving in some highway upgrades. But it is more significant to be included in the development of regional networks undertaken by Beijing in its Belt and Road Initiative, since Azerbaijan, in collusion with Georgia, has bypassed Armenia in all their joint projects.

China has spent \$12 million to build the Chinese-Armenian

Friendship School, where 400 students are immersed in a Chinese education.

China has been building Huawei’s Smart Cities around the world, from Germany to Singapore. There is talk that a similar Smart City is also being planned for Armenia, at a cost of \$10 billion. That will give a tremendous technological boost to Armenia.

There are more prospects in the making: the Horasis China 2020 meeting which was planned to take place in Yerevan, was postponed because of the pandemic. Now it has been rescheduled for October 20-25, 2021.

More than 300 Horasis Vision Community members from businesses and governments will join an intense program. It is said that Horasis China “will play an accelerating role in the rapidly expanding trade and foreign investment between China and Armenia.”

Economic and technological cooperation is a welcome component to Armenia’s technological advancement, particularly in view of the fact that there is a concerted effort by Armenia’s neighbors to isolate it. But beyond that, Armenia is concerned with its security as it is facing existential threats with Turkey’s aggressive stance in the region.

Fortunately, Yerevan has assumed a more assertive posture in taking advantage of international developments.

It began to diversity its foreign policy when the opportunity rose, to partner with Greece and Cyprus when these countries were threatened by Turkey recently. A major development for Armenia is the recent opening with Egypt. Egypt is at odds with Turkey regarding Libya. But beyond that, Turkey has posed a larger challenge to Egypt, with its ambitions to lead the Sunni Muslim world.

Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan’s recent trip to Cairo and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi’s planned visit to



Yerevan will enhance Armenia’s visibility on the diplomatic map of the Middle East.

As important as these developments are for Armenia, they cannot replace the support of a superpower, which Yerevan will find in China. It is believed that China has been helping Armenia militarily. But that cooperation will become more formal when the two countries join the Caucasus 2020 military drills scheduled to take place in Astrakhan, at Moscow’s initiative. Armenia, Belarus, Iran, Myanmar, Pakistan and China will be sending military delegations to the exercises to take place on September 21-26.

Russia and China have established a “comprehensive strategic partnership” to cooperate on military matters and in diplomacy to counter largely the US influence in their respective neighborhoods. They also cooperate at the United Nations, particularly on strategic issues on the Security Council agenda.

Although Armenia is small, for China it has significant strategic importance. Turkey views Armenia as a roadblock for its drive to unite the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. From the Chinese perspective, Armenia represents a safeguard against such Turkish penetration in Central Asia. Turkey has been trying to agitate and incite the Uyghur Muslim minority in China’s Xinjiang province to rise up against the central government. The Chinese authorities are fighting back, trying to put a lid on incipient imported extremism, though their methods are harsh.

Armenian activism and advocacy can play a small role in the US to yield some political dividends. But while Turkey is on the other side of the NATO balance, Armenia’s existential concerns cannot be met when push comes to shove. The West does not seem to offer a safe haven for Armenia, despite all its rhetoric.

Strategically, there is a confluence of interests between Armenia and China, in view of Turkey’s growing role in the Caucasus.

Mirror Spectator

Established 1932

An ADL Publication

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The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is published weekly, except two weeks in July and the first week of the year, by:

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

U.S.A.	\$80 a year
Canada	\$125 a year
Other Countries	\$190 a year

© 2014 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston, MA
and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 0004-234X

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472

Other than the editorial, views and opinions expressed in this newspaper do not necessarily reflect the policies of the publisher.

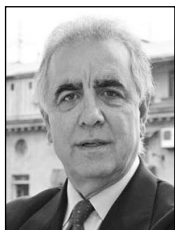
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COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Pro-Trump Black American Group's Controversial Link to Turkey

(Part I)

The website Salon.com published on September 4 and 5, 2020, a lengthy two-part expose of a Black American group that tried to raise funds from Turkish businesses in support of President Trump's reelection. The articles were titled, "How a pro-Trump Black group became an off-the-books Turkish lobbying campaign: A Salon investigation reveals a strange tale of Black Trump surrogates who tried to leverage Turkish billions," and "The Turkey hustle: How a pro-Trump Black group became unofficial lobbyists for Erdogan: A sketchy nonprofit linked to the Trump campaign tried to orchestrate a massive trade deal." The articles were written by Roger Sollenberger and Kathleen O'Neill.

Salon.com reported that "In 2018, officials with a controversial pro-Trump nonprofit called the Urban Revitalization Coalition (URC) – which recently lost its tax-exempt charity status and made headlines earlier this year with suspicious cash giveaways to Black voters – facilitated an off-the-books foreign influence campaign on behalf of powerful people in Turkey."

"URC officials Darrell Scott and Kareem Lanier, both prominent Trump surrogates in the Black community, are said by multiple sources to have used the organization as a vehicle to 'solicit donations,' including from wealthy Turkish nationals. Some of these solicitations came by way of former MAGA-world star [Turkish writer] Rabia Kazan," according to Salon.com.

Furthermore, "an associate of Scott and Lanier named Bruce Levell, a Trump surrogate, former congressional candidate and Small Business Association advocate...allegedly shook down Kazan for cash, then asked her to destroy records after reports of government raids on former Trump attorney Michael Cohen's home and offices," Salon.com reported.

These Black American efforts were intended to shape US policy expecting a large investment in the United States by Turkish businessmen. According to Salon.com, "some of these activities, described in detail below, raise serious legal questions, such as violations of rules governing tax and lobbying law, experts tell Salon. Legal experts and people familiar with the URC told Salon that given these activities, the organization appears to have functioned as a shell lobbying and fundraising operation, and a go-between that communicated with both the Trump administration (and Trump campaign) and Turkish interests close to Erdogan. This is a story about how peripheral players, including foreign nationals, worked on the legal margins of lobbying, campaign and foreign agent laws amid the chaotic free-for-all of the Trump presidency. They blurred official and unofficial administration posts with other organizational and campaign roles, and obscured the source and usage of funds from both the public and government agencies such as the IRS and Federal Elections Commission."

It all started in 2018, when "URC officials first curried financial favors and investments from Turkish business representatives in connection with an economic initiative launched by the Trump administration," according to Salon.com. "Turkish business emissaries secured meetings in New York and Washington that extended to Trump officials, Republican members of Congress and campaign surrogates such as Tom Barrack [billionaire and close friend of Pres. Trump], and Lara Trump [the president's daughter-in-law and Trump campaign adviser]."

This multi-billion dollar scheme was intended to open the American manufacturing market to Turkish companies. "The fact that these meetings were apparently geared towards influencing official U.S. policy, experts say, raises questions

about whether those involved should have registered with the Department of Justice as foreign agents," Salon.com reported.

"The URC made headlines when it held campaign-tinged events with cash giveaways for Black voters in poor communities, including a \$25,000 raffle last December – something the organization had told the IRS it wouldn't do. Politico described the raffles as a nationwide strategy of holding events 'in Black communities where they lavish praise on the president while handing out thousands of dollars in giveaways,'" according to Salon.com.

"Multiple people familiar with the workings of the URC told Salon that it was clear that Scott and Lanier established the organization to do what they had frequently told Rabia Kazan they were prevented from doing within Michael Cohen's politically-focused predecessor organization, the National Diversity Coalition, which was effectively an arm of the Trump campaign. That is, to take in money. There's documentary evidence that the URC sought and received large sums of money in at least one instance. It received a \$238,000 grant from America First Policies, a pro-Trump dark money organization affiliated with the super PAC America First Action. The URC received the grant in 2018, a few months after directing Kazan to seek financial contributions. Because the URC never filed a tax return, however, it is impossible to know how much money the group took in or how that money was spent," Salon.com reported.

Turkish businessman Ali Akat, "who met several times with Scott and Lanier, was supposedly discussing a comprehensive, multi-billion-dollar investment plan that would open opportunities for Turkish companies to gain manufacturing and packaging footholds by investing and building factories in Opportunity Zones," according to Salon.com. "The plan would have taken advantage of a loophole in U.S. tariffs. Akat told Turkish media that Turkish business owners could evade high duties if they exported unfinished products to the U.S., where those products would be assembled and packaged, ideally by Turkish companies in Opportunity Zones."

(To be continued next week)

Armenians and the Turkish Coup d'état of September 12, 1980

By Raffi Bedrosyan

FORTY YEARS AGO on September 12, 1980, Turkish generals toppled the elected government in Turkey which had been unable to stop the wave of killings between leftist and rightist factions. To establish law and order, the generals resorted to brute force by quickly implementing mass arrests in record numbers. As a result, more than 650,000 people were arrested from all walks of life, based on the flimsiest of excuses, subjected to unimaginable beatings and torture in several prisons, followed by rapid trials and hangings. Five hundred and seventeen people were sentenced to death and 49 were hanged, ensuring "fairness" by hanging one from the left and one from the right. More than 500 people died in prisons during torture sessions. The Kurdish language and music were banned. More than 3,000 Kurdish villages in the east were forcibly vacated and burnt to the ground, resulting in almost a million Kurds displaced to the west. In short, terror caused by leftist-rightist struggles was replaced with state terror many times more violent.

I would like to offer a few glimpses of how Armenians were affected by this turn of events.

Along with thousands of other leftist and rightist youth, Hrant Dink was also arrested and subjected to regular beatings and torture in prison. He explains that due to severe overcrowding in regular prisons, he was taken to a military school converted to prison. Turkish washrooms have only a hole on the floor and by covering the hole with plywood, the tiny washroom cubicles were made into prison cells.

As related by a Facebook friend, Artun Sukyas, was a young man interested in news photography. He would take newsworthy pictures and pass them on to a journalist working at a Turkish daily. When the car of a bank director was firebombed on a street in his neighborhood, he grabbed his camera and rushed to the scene. Police arrested him as a suspect of the car bombing and a possible member of ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia). Despite frantic searches, for three months his family couldn't find out where he was taken and kept. Eventually, he was tried and set free based on the evidence of his journalist friend. At the first opportunity, he left Turkey and came to Canada but due to the lasting physical damage from the severe torture that he was subjected to, he soon passed away.

An Armenian friend who was in the metal fabricating business in Istanbul, was arrested on suspicion of illegal exports. Although he was not charged by any prosecutor, he was kept in prison and tortured continuously. A routine torture method was inserting a police baton into the inmate's rectum. His family tried to secure his release by bribing several police, prison and justice ministry officials, until they sold all their belongings. He was let go only when the officials became convinced that there was no more funding source left. There were hundreds of other Armenians arrested without charges, imprisoned and tortured for the sole purpose of extorting money from them.

During this time, ASALA did carry out an attack at Esenboga Airport in Ankara, Turkey

on August 7, 1982 in order to publicize the continuing denial of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey. One of the militants, Zohrab Sarkissian was killed and the other, Levon Ekmekjian, was wounded and captured by Turkish security forces. Ekmekjian was tortured for several months in an Ankara prison and then put on trial. The trial was aired live on Turkish national television and Ekmekjian gave his testimony in Armenian which was then translated to Turkish. The trial was a formality, and Ekmekjian, age 25, was executed on January 28, 1983. This turned out to be the last execution in Turkey, as the death sentence was abolished soon after.

As a postscript, Ekmekjian was buried in an unmarked grave near Ankara until 2016, when the heroic Turkish human rights lawyer Eren Keskin succeeded in having Levon's remains transferred to France, to be reunited with his family. But unfortunately, the Turkish officials played another twisted trick as DNA analysis revealed that most of the transferred bones turned out to be dog bones, not human bones.

Going back to the trial, people all over Turkey were glued to their television sets watching it, including the Hamshen people. Hamshen (or Hemshin) is the name given to people living in the eastern Black Sea coastal region of Turkey. There is strong evidence that they are Armenians who migrated to this region after Seljuk Turks captured the city of Ani in the 11th century, followed by more waves of Armenians settling in the region in later times. The region was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in the 16th century, and the Armenians were eventually forced to convert to Islam. Most of them did convert, but interestingly enough, they kept the Armenian language, and continue to use it until today. And although they still speak a dialect of Armenian, with constant indoctrination from the government they have been made to believe that their ancestors migrated from Central Asia and their language is a branch of Central Asian Turkish. Watching the trial on TV, the Hamshen people were surprised to discover that Levon Ekmekjian spoke their own language. Many of them wondered if he was a Hamshentsi, and eventually realized that their language is Armenian, like his.

As stated above, the state terror after the September 12, 1980 coup was particularly vicious against the Kurds. Thousands of Kurds were arrested and tortured in the notorious Diyarbakir prison. One of the tortured Kurds was a young Kurdish teacher. The prison commander had ordered her to teach another imprisoned Kurdish girl to recite the Turkish national anthem. The Kurdish girl did not even speak any Turkish. The torture method was diabolical. There was a chamber in the prison basement where the pumped sewage would be collected. The teacher and the girl were made to stand in the chamber, with the stinking sewage level rising around them to their neck, until the girl learnt to recite the national anthem. This torture went on for days.

Several years after her release from the prison, the teacher was shocked to discover that her father was a hidden Armenian. On his deathbed, the father revealed this secret, asked his daughter to return to her Armenian roots and also to become a Christian. The teacher was on the first trip that I organized for large groups of hidden Armenians from Turkey to Armenia in 2014. She was faced with a huge dilemma, as she was married to a pious Moslem Kurd, who would never accept his wife to become Christian. As explained in my book *Trauma and Resilience – Armenians In Turkey, Hidden, Not Hidden and No Longer Hidden*, this lady faced an agonizing decision while our bus travelled from Sardarabad to Echmiadzin. At the end, she decided to get baptized and become a Christian Armenian.

When I asked: "Are you sure, what about your husband?", her response was: "My father suffered all his life hiding his Armenian roots. If I will start having problems with my husband for the rest of my life, I am prepared for it and God will help us." And the Kurdish teacher became Christian in Echmiadzin, baptized with her Armenian grandmother's name. Thankfully, there was no crisis at home upon her return from Armenia to Diyarbakir, except for the added trauma of being Armenian on top of being Kurdish.

Forty years have passed since the September 12, 1980 coup and the dictatorial regime that followed. After a few stable years of attempted democratization in the early 2010s, developments since 2015 indicate that Turkey is again veering toward a path of dictatorship, which means life for non-Turk, non-Moslem people such as Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Assyrians and Kurds will become even more unbearable.



HDP Leads Tributes to Greeks, Armenians, Jews on Istanbul Pogrom Anniversary

ISTANBUL (Public Radio of Armenia) — Turkey's opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) led tributes on September 7 to those killed in the state-coordinated massacre of Greek, Armenian, Christian and Jewish people in the Istanbul pogrom 65 years ago, Bianet reports.

It described the events of September 6 and 7 1955 as "one of the most painful and shameful pages in Turkey's history."

The HDP said that 73 churches, eight holy springs, two monasteries and 5,500 houses and workplaces — 3,500 of which belonged to Greeks — were destroyed and plundered during the massacre. The damage was estimated at about £100 million.

"The attacks were planned and implemented by the National Security Service (NSS)," a party statement said.

"The state has not faced up to the September 6-7 pogrom, apologies have not been offered to Christian and Jewish citizens, primarily Rums and Armenians, and the damages have not been compensated in any way at all," HDP said.

"It is our major demand and a must of living together that this shame targeting the old peoples of Turkey be faced, the perpetrators be identified and the material and immaterial losses of suffered by the aggrieved people or their families be compensated," the party added.

The Istanbul pogrom, also known as the Istanbul riots or September events were organized mob attacks directed primarily at Istanbul's Greek minority on 6-7 September 1955. The riots were orchestrated by the Tactical Mobilisation Group, the seat of Operation Gladio's Turkish branch; the Counter-Guerrilla, and National Security Service, the precursor of today's National Intelligence Organisation.

The events were triggered by the false news that the Turkish consulate in Thessaloniki, in northern Greece—the house where Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had been born in 1881—had been bombed the day before. A bomb planted by a Turkish usher at the consulate, who was later arrested and confessed, incited the events. The Turkish press, conveying the news in Turkey, was silent about the arrest and instead insinuated that Greeks had set off the bomb.

A Turkish mob, most of which had been trucked into the city in advance, assaulted Istanbul's Greek community for nine hours. Although the mob did not explicitly call for Greeks to be killed, over a dozen people died during or after the attacks as a result of beatings and arson. The police remained mostly ineffective, and the violence continued until the government declared martial law in Istanbul and called in the army to put down the riots.

The pogrom greatly accelerated emigration of ethnic Greeks from Turkey, and the Istanbul region in particular. The Greek population of Turkey declined from 119,822 persons in 1927, to about 7,000 in 1978. In Istanbul alone, the Greek population decreased from 65,108 to 49,081 between 1955 and 1960.

The 2008 figures released by the Turkish Foreign Ministry placed the number of Turkish citizens of Greek descent at 3,000-4,000; while according to the Human Rights Watch (2006) their number was estimated to be 2,500.

Eduardo Eurnekian Visits Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan hosted Argentine-Armenian businessman, National Hero of Armenia Eduardo Eurnekian, on September 14.

He told Eurnekian, "Dear Mr. Eurnekian, I am glad to see you in Armenia. During this period we also had a telephone conversation, discussed our plans and your possible investment projects in Armenia. I am happy that under the conditions of the coronavirus and the situation caused by it you are equally enthusiastic about the opportunities to implement investment programs in Armenia. Your previous projects are being successfully implemented, and we, of course, are happy over it. I am confident that this cooperation will bring more visible results to Armenia."

In turn Eurnekian said he will continue investing in programs in the homeland in various areas and highlighted the close cooperation with the Armenian government.

The two discussed the programs being implemented by the Armenia International Airports CJSC in Armenia. In particular, they touched upon issues relating to the development of Yerevan's Zvartnots, Gyumri's Shirak airports, improvement of infrastructures, their renovation and further operation.

Pashinyan and Eurnekian praised the process of the bilateral partnership and reaffirmed the mutual readiness to further develop it.

Later, Eurnekian visited Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

During the conversation, the catholicos brought his blessing and appreciation to Eurnekian for his continuous commitment to the national and patriotic life and large-scale programs implemented by him, as well as for his support to the Armenian Church and the mission of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin.

At the end of the meeting, the Catholicos of All Armenians, Eurnekian, visited the Mother Cathedral to follow the renovation works, and visited the Holy Archangels Church.

They also visited the Eurnekian School under the auspices of the Mother See to talk to students and wish them a successful academic year ahead.



Eduardo Eurnekian lights a candle at Echmiadzin with Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II



The Tekeyan School of Beirut

The Vahan Tekeyan School, founded in 1951, was damaged by the August 4 explosion in Beirut. It primarily 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 it is trying to reopen for the fall semester.



The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada is sending aid and asks your assistance too. Make your donations by credit card at <https://givebutter.com/bXn8Lm> or as checks mailed to the Tekeyan Cultural Association (memo: Beirut Tekeyan School), at 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 tcadirector@aol.com or call 617 924-4455.