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Putin, Aliyev and Pashinyan Sign Statement on Karabakh

MOSCOW (Combined Sources) – Following talks in the Kremlin on Monday, January 11, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed a joint statement on the development of Karabakh.

According to the Russian leader, the plan for the implementation of the agreement will soon be presented by the deputy prime ministers of the three



From left, Nikol Pashinyan, Ilham Aliyev and Vladimir Putin



Protestors in Moscow

countries. They will lead a trilateral working group that will deal with the restoration of economic, trade and transport links, as well as the opening of borders in Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, working expert subgroups will be formed.

STATEMENT RELEASED AFTER THE MEETING

“We, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan I. H. Aliyev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia N. V. Pashinyan and President of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin declare the following:

- In order to implement part of point 9 of the Statement of November 9, 2020 regarding the unblocking of all economic and transportation routes in the region, we support the proposal of the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin on the establishment of a tripartite Working Group under the joint chairmanship of the Vice-Prime Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia and Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation.
- The Working Group will hold the first meeting until January 30, 2021, based on the results of which it will form a list of the main areas of work arising from the implementation of point 9 of the Statement, setting railway and road communications as priorities, and will also determine other areas as agreed between the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic Armenia and the Russian Federation, hereinafter referred to as the Parties.

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Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan embraces President Vladimir Putin (top left), as does his Azerbaijani counterpart, President Ilham Aliyev

Armenia Fund Set New Fundraising Records During Karabakh War

Report of Allocations Delayed

By Aram Arkun

GLENDALE, Calif. – The Artsakh war of 2020 may have had disastrous results, but it also led to unprecedented fundraising in the Armenian diaspora. Armenia Fund, a nonprofit non-governmental pan-Armenian humanitarian organization in the United States, set new records during the war. see FUNDRAISING, page 9



The Armenia Fund purchases mobility aids and supplies for disabled veterans in Armenia and Artsakh

NEWS IN BRIEF

Armenia Quarantine Extended Until July 11

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – According to the Government decision of January 11, the quarantine regime has been prolonged until July 11 aimed at diminishing the risks of spreading COVID-19.

The Ministry of Health announced that the adoption of the decision is conditioned by the fact that situation of the COVID-19 pandemic remains tense and the WHO warns of the 3rd wave of the rise of pandemic (given the experience of a number of countries like the UK, Spain, Germany, France, Russia).

At the same time, considering the existing situation over the pandemic in Armenia, some limitations have been lifted or mitigated, particularly,

Foreign citizens can enter Armenia also through the land border, if at the check point they present document on negative COVID-19 test dating back 72 hours or less.

Bodies of 10 Soldiers, Civilians Found

STEPANAKERT (Armenpress) – The bodies of 10 servicemen and a civilian have been found during the search operations in the battle zones, in particular in the directions of Sghnakh, Jabrayil and Hadrut, the official of the State Emergency Service of Artsakh Hunan Tadevosyan announced on January 11.

“The bodies of the fallen troops were found from the sections of the military positions. The dead civilian is an elderly man. His body was found at home. He has been identified. Forensic examination has been set to clarify the circumstances of his death.

So far, a total of 1222 bodies of servicemen and civilians have been found.

Trilateral Group Discusses POWs’ Return

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – By the initiative of the Russian Prosecutor General, a trilateral meeting took place between the Prosecutor Generals of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia on January 12.

The goal was to establish further contacts in the field of international law and to discuss conditions for that.

Prosecutor General of Armenia Artur Davtyan highlighted the speedy implementation of the 8th point of the trilateral declaration signed of November 9, 2020, regarding the returning Armenian POWs and other persons kept in Azerbaijan to Armenia.

He emphasized that the return of POWs and civilians kept in detention will become an important guarantee for the implementation of the other agreements provided by the trilateral agreement and strengthening peace in the region.

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A Toast to a Happy Series Of Accidents Leading to Better Cocktails

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ARMENIA

News From Armenia

Political Analyst Balyan Announces Creation of New Political Party

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) – Armenian political analyst Vardan Balyan on Tuesday, January 12, announced the creation of a new political party to replace the current Armenian authorities “unable to take decisive action” and to restore the image of the people and country.

“The purpose is to unite all vital national forces in building, with the efforts of every Armenian, an honest and fair state that will defend our language, culture, faith, freedom, honor and homeland,” he wrote on Facebook.

“The founding congress of the party is scheduled for a symbolic day for us – on February 21 celebrated as the International Mother Language Day,” Balyan added.

The political analyst said that they will begin publishing documents on their programs and forming an initiative group starting from Wednesday.

700 Private Houses to Be Provided to Displaced People of Artsakh

STEPANAKERT (Panorama.am) – Within the framework of the program to repair uninhabited private houses in Askeran, Martuni and Martakert regions to be provided to displaced people of Artsakh, the restoration of 71 private houses began as of December 30, 2020. 34 of them have already been put into operation, while the rest are under renovation.

The Artsakh Ministry of Urban Development reports that the renovation of the planned 700 private houses will start in the near future, immediately after receiving the data on the number of uninhabited houses by the regional administrations.

An agreement has been reached between 28 construction companies and the Ministry of Urban Development of Artsakh to start the renovation of those private houses in parallel with the restoration works.

Rural private houses, in addition to interior and exterior decoration, will have a kitchen and an internal bathroom.

Meanwhile, the regional administrations are negotiating respective agreements with the owners of uninhabited private houses. In addition, the program also includes those houses in rural areas where virtually no one has lived for many years.

The program will be funded by the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund.

Russian Deminers Cover More Ground in Artsakh

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – The specialists of the International Mine Action Center of the Russian defense ministry continue demining works in the territory of Nagorno Karabakh, the Russian defense ministry reported on January 9.

The Russian de-miners have cleared 6.5 hectares of land in one day.

So far, the engineering units of the Russian peace-keeping forces have already cleared nearly 446.4 hectares of land, about 165 km long roads, 618 buildings. 22,542 explosive devices were found and neutralized.

Komitas Coin Wins Award

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – A silver collector's coin issued by the Central Bank of Armenia in 2019 and dedicated to the 150th anniversary of the birth of the world-renowned Armenian composer and musician Komitas took the 3rd place in the nomination “Coin of the Year” in the 14th international contest “Coin Constellation-2020” (RF), the CBA told Armenpress.

The designers of the “Komitas-150” coin are: Vardan Vardanyan (obverse) and Eduard Kurghinyan (reverse).

The coin is minted in the Lithuanian Mint.

Putin, Aliyev and Pashinyan Sign Statement on Karabakh

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• In order to implement the main directions of activity, the co-chairs of the Working Group will approve the composition of the expert subgroups in these areas made of officials of the competent authorities and organizations of the Parties. The expert subgroups, within a month after the meeting of the Working Group, will present a list of projects with justification of the necessary resources and activities for their implementation and approval at the highest level by the Parties.

• The Working Group, by March 1, 2021, will submit for approval at the highest level by the Parties a list and a schedule for the implementation of measures involving the restoration and construction of new transport infrastructure facilities necessary for the organization, implementation and security of international traffic carried out through the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, as well as transportations carried out by the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, which require crossing the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia.

Speaking after Meeting

“I am sure that the implementation of these agreements will benefit both the Armenian and Azerbaijani people and, without any doubt, will benefit the region as a whole, and therefore the interests of the Russian Federation,” Putin stressed.

Pashinyan agreed that the agreements reached at the meeting in Moscow would lead to greater security guarantees in Karabakh and help change the economic image of the region.

Pashinyan thanked Russian President Vladimir Putin for the efforts he is investing in restoring stability and security in the region and in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

“Unfortunately, this conflict has not been resolved. Of course, we managed to secure the ceasefire, but there are still many issues that must be resolved. One of these issues is the issue of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Armenia is ready to continue negotiations within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship,” Pashinyan said.

“Unfortunately, today we were unable to resolve the issue of prisoners of war, and this is the most sensitive and painful issue, because it is a humanitar-

ian issue. We agreed that we will continue to work in this direction,” he said.

Pashinyan noted that the 8th point of the joint statement of November 10, 2020, is not fully implemented.

“I hope that we will be able to come to a concrete decision in the shortest possible time,” he added.

The 8th point of the statement of the President of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Russia on November 10, 2020, calls for the exchange of prisoners of war, hostages and other detained persons and the bodies of the dead.

According to the Armenian Prime Minister, the statement signed on January 11 may change the economic appearance of the region.

“The statement we signed today is really very important, and I will not hide the fact that the implementation of this statement can simply change the economic image and appearance of our region, and economic innovations can also lead to more reliable security guarantees,” Pashinyan said.

He declared his readiness to work constructively in this direction, “but, unfortunately, it is impossible to resolve all issues during one meeting.”

“I hope that we will continue to advance. I would like to emphasize once again that the most important issue for us at the moment is humanitarian issues, issues of exchange of prisoners of war, which are provided for in paragraph 8 of our joint statement of November 10,” Pashinyan said.

“Unfortunately, we did not manage today to solve the issue of prisoners of war,” Pashinyan said after the talks.

He said that Baku is still not fully complying with another provision of the truce agreement that calls for the exchange of all prisoners of war and civilians held by the conflicting sides. “I hope that we will succeed in finding a concrete solution very soon,” added the Armenian premier.

In addition, the issue concerning Karabakh's status remains unresolved, Pashinyan stated.

“Unfortunately, this conflict remains unresolved. Of course, we were able to reach a ceasefire regime, yet there are many issues to be addressed. One of those issues is the status of Nagorno-Karabakh,” said Pashinyan, adding Armenia is ready to continue the talks under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group.

Pashinyan also noted that the parties to the talk were unable to find a solution on the exchange of war prisoners.

“This is a sensitive topic, and we must address it urgently,” said the PM.

Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev, meanwhile, assessed the meeting efficient and fruitful in the context of the future development of the region. He expressed hope that neighboring states will be actively engaged in developing transport infrastructure in the South Caucasus.

Both Aliyev and Pashinyan received hugs as they were greeted by Putin, however, the two leaders didn't shake hands and gave only head nods.

It is noted that the leaders wore no masks at the meeting. After the official welcome, Vladimir Putin made opening remarks followed by talks behind the closed doors.

The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is calm, Putin said.

“The situation in the region is calm. We have been doing a great deal to promote the safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes. Since November 14, 2020 more than 48,000 people have returned to Karabakh,” Putin said, as quoted by TASS news agency.

“The center's personnel are restoring electric and thermal power supply. More than 800 tons of building materials and 1.5 million tons of humanitarian cargo have been delivered to the conflict zone. Medical assistance is being provided for the population. Mine clearance has been carried out on an area of 479 hectares; 182 kilometers of roads and 710 buildings have been checked. More than 22,000 explosive items have been found and eliminated,” Putin added.

In the words of the president, Russia sought to follow the main principles of the OSCE Minsk Group in all its action on Karabakh. “We continue to periodically consult with our partners, the co-chairmen of the Minsk group,” said Putin.

A protest against Pashinyan's trip to Moscow was held in Yerevan on Monday.

Early in the morning, police closed off all the roads, including Isakov Avenue, leading to the Zvartnots Airport, not allowing activists to hinder Pashinyan's visit to Moscow. As a result, the premier's motorcade reached the airport without obstacles.

Afterwards, police officers reopened Isakov Avenue and citizens continued the protest chanting “Nikol the traitor.”

(Ria Novosti, Arka, Panorama.am and Azatutyun contributed to this report.)

Armenian Government Extends Coronavirus Restrictions

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – The government on Monday, January 11, extended by six months most of its restrictions aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus in Armenia.

But it scrapped some rules in an apparent response to concerns voiced by Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan and Armenian businesspeople.

The government has continued to require people wear face masks in all public areas and kept in place social distancing and hygiene rules set for businesses even after lifting a coronavirus-related state of emergency and introducing a nationwide “quarantine” regime in September.

The less stringent regime was due to expire on Monday. The Ministry of Health asked the government late last month to extend it until July 11, citing the continuing large number of coron-

avirus cases in Armenia.

Kerobyan criticized the request last week, saying that the restrictions would hurt the Armenian economy hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. Some business associations as well as dozens of private firms echoed his concerns.

The government sided with the Ministry of Health while making what appear to be concessions to the critics. In particular, it lifted restrictions on indoor and outdoor festive events. Those include a ban on restaurant parties attended by more than 60 people.

The government also allowed foreign nationals to enter Armenia through its land border crossings and not just by air. But those travellers will have to produce documents showing that they tested negative for the coronavirus up to

three days ago or to self-isolate and take such tests in Armenia.

The Armenian authorities largely stopped fining people and businesses to enforce the anti-epidemic rules following the September 27 outbreak of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. The daily number of new COVID-19 cases reported by them grew rapidly as a result. But it has been steadily falling since mid-November.

According to the Ministry of Health, there were 8,782 active cases in Armenia as of Monday morning, sharply down from 22,850 cases reported on December 1.

More than 162,000 coronavirus infections and at least 2,931 deaths caused by them have been officially confirmed in the country of about 3 million to date. The real number of cases is believed to be much higher.



ARMENIA



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Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan greets President Vladimir Putin.

Pashinyan Eyes Closer Russian-Armenian Ties

MOSCOW (RFE/RL) – Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan expressed confidence that Armenia and Russia will forge even closer ties after the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh when he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Monday, January 11.

The two men held separate talks after Putin hosted a trilateral meeting with Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev that focused on the implementation of a Russian-brokered agreement that stopped the war on November 10.

In his opening remarks at the talks, Pashinyan again praised Putin's role in halting the six-week hostilities that left thousands of soldiers dead.

“Of course, your personal contribution to the [Karabakh] peace process has always been noticeable, especially now, after the known events,” he said. “I am confident that against the backdrop of these events the relations between Armenia and Russia will deepen.”

“Russia has been and remains our main strategic ally in the security sphere,” added the Armenian leader.

“Our relations certainly were, are and will remain allied in all respects,” Putin said for his part. He noted that despite the coronavirus pandemic and the Karabakh war Russian-Armenian trade grew by almost 4 percent in January-October 2020.

Pashinyan announced plans to further deep-

en the Russian-Armenian relationship in a televised address to the nation aired on New Year's Eve. He said his country needs “new security guarantees” now.

Armenia already has close political, economic and military ties with Russia. It hosts a Russian military base and has long received Russian weapons at knockdown prices and even for free.

Moscow also deployed 2,000 peacekeeping troops to Karabakh as part of the truce agreement brokered by Putin. In addition, it dispatched Russian soldiers and border guards to Armenia's Syunik region southwest of Karabakh to help the Armenian military defend it against possible Azerbaijani attacks.

Human Rights Defender Visits Syunik to See Disputed Border Areas

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) – The visits of Armenia's Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman) Arman Tatoyan and his staff to Syunik Province of Armenia continue. On Sunday, January 10, they visited Meghri and Nrnadzor border communities. The ombudsmen presented details of the visit in a post on Facebook.

“During the discussions in Nrnadzor, it turned out that the residents could not use almost 200 hectares of agricultural land in the village due to a number of administrative and judicial processes. The Human Rights Defender's Office will take the necessary measures in this regard. Moreover, according to both the mayor of Meghri and the residents of Nrnadzor, this issue has become very urgent after the end of the wartime military hostilities.

“As a result of the Human Rights Defender's meetings with the residents of Nrnadzor, discussions with community bodies and field studies, it was revealed that due to the approaches used to determine the state borders of the Republic of Armenia, there are



Arman Tatoyan at the Nrnadzor border

lands in the village after the war (for example, for private or economic purposes) which the residents of the region have been deprived of the opportunity of their use, and which are of foremost necessity to provide for and to sustain their livelihood,” he said.

Investigations by the Human Rights Defender's Office have also revealed that threats to the right to life and safety of border residents, their physical and mental inviolability, and other vital rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Armenia have emerged or some of the rights have already been violated.

“The Armenian authorities should make

these issues directly related to the determination of the state borders of the Republic of Armenia a priority issue in order to ensure the unimpeded implementation of the rights of the border settlements of our country, and in this case, specifically as it relates to the residents of Nrnadzor. It is unacceptable that at present there are no direct communications between the public administration bodies of the Republic of Armenia and the referenced issues of the villagers.

“For example, what should a person do if he has a certificate of state registration of land ownership, but because the Azerbaijani mili-

Armenia Plans Limited COVID-19 Vaccination

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – The Armenian health authorities are planning to vaccinate only 10 percent of the country's population against COVID-19, a senior government official said on January 12.

Gayane Sahakyan, the deputy director of the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention, also announced that Armenia will receive its first coronavirus vaccine doses before the second half of February.

“We are planning to acquire vaccines for 10 percent of the population to carry out at first vaccinations of only high risk groups,” Sahakyan told a news conference.

“We are now holding negotiations on concrete time frames for their imports. We are confident that we will have the first imports by the end of January or the first half of February,” she said.

Sahakyan said the talks center on possible supplies of the Russian vaccine Sputnik V or three other certified vaccines that have been developed by the Western pharmaceutical companies Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca. It is still not clear which of them will be chosen by the Armenian government, added the official.

Sahakyan announced in early December that the government has commissioned 600,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines from COVAX Facility, a global partnership backed by the World Health Organization. She said Armenian medical and social workers, seniors and people suffering from chronic diseases will be the first to get vaccine shots free of charge.

The official did not clarify on Tuesday whether the government's supply contract with COVAX, worth \$6 million, remains in force. Nor did she say if the health authorities could vaccinate a larger proportion of the population later this year.

Armenia has been hit hard by the pandemic, with more than 162,000 coronavirus cases and at least 2,941 deaths caused by them reported by the authorities so far. The real number of cases is believed to be much higher.

The daily number of new infections has fallen significantly since the beginning of November. The Armenian Ministry of Health reported on Tuesday morning that 355 more people have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, sharply down from more than 2,000 cases a day routinely recorded in late October and early November.

Sahakyan acknowledged that the coronavirus numbers will likely rise again after the recent holidays and the reopening of schools. But she did not predict a serious resurgence of cases.

tary directly targets him, the use of the land will endanger his life and his mental health, or that of his family member, or that the use of such land has become impossible?

“Moreover, these references are to such lands, for which the certificates confirming the state registration of rights, including property rights, were issued either by Soviet Armenia or by the competent bodies of different periods of the Independent Republic of Armenia (Cadastre Committee, etc.),” Tatoyan wrote.

During Sunday's visit, discussions took place with the mayor of Meghri, as well as with the personnel of the Armenian Armed Forces who are carrying out their selfless heroic service, he noted.

“The Human Rights Defender's Office also obtained facts necessary for the protection of human rights in specific situations, in connection with which separate summaries will be made and the necessary measures will be taken,” the ombudsman added.



INTERNATIONAL

International News

Azerbaijan Spreads More Hate against Armenians with Stamp

BAKU (PanARMENIAN.Net) – A new commemorative stamp sheet released in Azerbaijan on January 11 depicts a person in protective gear who appears to be disinfecting, fumigating or chemically cleaning the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The new stamps were released by Azermarka, the Azerbaijani state company responsible for the production and sale of Azerbaijani postage stamps.

On the new commemorative issue, the territory of Karabakh, as well as the southern parts of Armenia proper are colored in dark green, which, according to the designers of the sheet, need to be cleansed.

Hate speech and calls for violence against Armenians surged to an unprecedented level in Azerbaijan, especially during Baku's aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh.

People in Turkey and Azerbaijan filmed themselves attacking Armenians protesting the war that had been started by Azerbaijan around the world.

Italian Lawmaker Nabbed in 'Caviar Diplomacy' Is Sentenced To Four Years

ROME (Panorama.am) – The former Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Luca Volonte, was sentenced to four years in jail on Monday, January 11, for taking a bribe from two Azerbaijan politicians to get the Council of Europe to pull a critical report on political prisoners in Azerbaijan. He was found guilty of taking about two million euros from the Azeri politicians, who were given the same four-year sentence, ANSA news agency reported.

Luca Volonte has been involved in the international "Caviar Diplomacy" scandal, according to the investigation of the international NGO European Stability Initiative. He was accused of receiving 2.3 million euros from Azerbaijan, which was spent on bribing a number of PACE deputies to fail the report on political prisoners in Azerbaijan.

In early 2013, the Council of Europe discussed a critical report concerning the treatment of political prisoners in Azerbaijan, presented by Christoph Straesser, a German Social Democrat member of the parliamentary assembly of the Council.

According to investigators, Volonte had been tasked by Azerbaijani officials to "direct votes within his parliamentary group" in favor of the country. He also sought the support of Spanish EPP member Pedro Agramunt to divide the socialist group and vote down the Straesser report. The report was eventually rejected by 125 to 79.

Gorbachev: Karabakh Settlement Must Entail 'No Winners and Losers'

MOSCOW (RIA Novosti) – Former USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev hopes that Russia will be able to help in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to him, however, the main role here remains for Armenia and Azerbaijan to find a solution in the interests of both sides, "without winners and losers."

Gorbachev, who led the Soviet Union during the escalation of the conflict in the late 1980s, said the matter is a complex one, old and rooted in the past, RIA Novosti reports.

The former Soviet leader said now that hostilities have ended, it is important to not stop or leave the problem unresolved for decades more.

"I hope Russia will be able to help, but the parties to the conflict have the key role to play. Armenia and Azerbaijan have undertaken to hold negotiations on a settlement. The solution must be in the interests of both sides, without winners and losers," Gorbachev said.

Erdogan Promises to Put EU Ties 'Back on Track'

ISTANBUL (Al-Jazeera) – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said he wants to improve relations with the European Union, following a long-standing dispute with Greece and recent feuds with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron.

During a televised meeting with EU ambassadors on Tuesday, January 12, Erdogan softened some of his toughest rhetoric and took a conciliatory tone.

"We are ready to put our relations back on track," Erdogan told the ambassadors, whom he addressed from his presidential compound in Ankara. "We expect our European friends to show the same goodwill."

On Monday, in another sign of easing relations, Turkey and Greece said they were willing to resume exploratory talks regarding their disputes over contested East Mediterranean waters and other issues.

"We believe that the exploratory talks ... will be the harbinger of a new era," Erdogan said on Tuesday.

Regarding France, a country which Erdogan has severely criticized in recent months over its foreign policy and fragile relationship with the Muslim world, he added: "We want to save our relations with France from tensions."

Last year, Erdogan said Macron need-

ed "mental checks" over his plan to reform Islam in France, while Turkey's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya and parts of the Middle East irked several EU countries.

But as Ankara and Athens looked set to address their longstanding disputes at the exploratory talks in Istanbul on January 25, hopes have risen for a more harmonious 2021.

This month's meeting will be the first since negotiations between the two uneasy NATO neighbors were suspended in 2016 after 60 fruitless rounds of talks stretching back 14 years.

Plans to restart of discussions last year foundered after disagreement about the Turkish seismic exploration vessel, Oruc Reis, deployed to disputed waters. The ship has since returned.

The two countries are at odds about the limits of their continental shelves, energy rights, air space and the status of some islands.

Their dispute threatened to spill into open conflict when Turkish and Greek warships collided in August while shadowing Oruc Reis as it surveyed for oil and gas in the waters in west of Cyprus.

Turkey rejects the maritime boundary claims of Greece and the Greek Cypriot administration, saying Ankara is in favor of resolving all issues through interna-

tional law. The EU, in turn, has threatened Ankara with sanctions, including ones on arms exports, various times since August.

Meanwhile, Ankara and EU officials are about to launch a rare round of shuttle diplomacy that could set their relations on a more cooperative course.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will visit Brussels on January 21 while European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and European Council president Charles Michel are expected in Turkey by the end of the month.

Erdogan noted on Tuesday that Turkey's drive to join the EU – formally launched in 2005 but effectively suspended – could gain fresh impetus after the UK's departure from the bloc.

"The uncertainty increased with Brexit could be overcome with Turkey taking its deserved place in the EU family," Erdogan said.

"We have never abandoned full membership (goal) despite double standards and injustice."

Turkey's accession talks have been sidelined by European concerns about Erdogan's human rights record.

"It is in our hand to make the year 2021 a success in Turkey-EU relations," he said on Tuesday.

French, Armenian Leaders Again Discuss Karabakh

PARIS (RFE/RL) – French President Emmanuel Macron and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan again discussed the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone following the recent Armenian-Azerbaijani war stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire, on January 7.

They spoke by phone late on Wednesday one day after a transport plane chartered by the French government delivered more humanitarian aid to Armenian victims of the conflict. The aid included medical supplies and clothing collected by the French-Armenian Aznavour Foundation.

"The President of the Republic expressed his determination to strive for a balanced political process in order to find a lasting political solution after the ceasefire agreement of November 9," Macron's office said in a statement on the phone call issued on Thursday.

"In this context, the President of the Republic pledged to support the ongoing efforts to allow the release of all prisoners and to support the economic development of Armenia," it added.

For his part, Pashinyan was reported to have thanked Macron for the "attention and support shown by him during this difficult time for the Armenian people."

An Armenian government statement said the two leaders also discussed French-Armenian economic ties. It gave no other details.

France co-chairs the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe together with Russia and the United States. The three world powers tried hard to halt the war in and around Karabakh that broke out on September 27. The hostilities stopped only after Moscow brokered a fresh Armenian-Azerbaijani truce agreement on November 9.

Macron and his foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, have repeatedly discussed the agreement's implementation with their Russian counterparts, Vladimir Putin and Sergei Lavrov.

The French president criticized Azerbaijan and accused Turkey of recruiting jihadist fighters from Syria for the Azerbaijani army shortly after the outbreak of the war. Le Drian reiterated last month French calls for "the

departure of the Syrian mercenaries" from the conflict zone.

Turkey has denied sending members of Turkish-backed Syrian rebel groups to fight in Karabakh on Azerbaijan's side. Azerbaijan also denies the presence of such mercenaries in the Azerbaijani army ranks. Both Ankara and Baku accuse Paris of pro-Armenian bias.

France is home to an influential Armenian community. The latter was instrumental in the recent passage by both houses of the French parliament of resolutions calling on Macron's government to recognize Karabakh as an independent republic. The government ruled out such recognition, saying that it would be counterproductive for France and the Karabakh negotiating process.

Armenians in Kurdistan Region Mark Muted Christmas

DUHOK, Kurdistan Region (Rudaw.net) – Armenians in the Kurdistan Region marked Christmas on January 6 with celebrations more muted than in previous years, due in part to the coronavirus pandemic.

Unlike the majority of the Christian community, Armenian Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on January 6. In the Armenian village of Haweske in Duhok province's Simele district, community members have had to take a different approach to festivities.

"We're knocking on doors one by one, wishing them a merry Christmas," said young villager Marina Watanika. "Last year, [Christmas] was more exciting because there was no coronavirus."

Almost two million people worldwide have died after contracting the coronavirus – over 3,400 of them in the Kurdistan Region. The pandemic has brought life, including celebrations like Christmas, to a near standstill.

Over 2,000 Armenians currently live in the Kurdistan Region, Yervant Nisan, an Armenian community leader and a former MP in the Kurdistan Regional Parliament told Rudaw on Wednesday, January 6.

The vast majority, around 2,000, are in Duhok province, and 200 live in Erbil. Another 800 live in Kirkuk, a province whose control is disputed by Erbil and Baghdad, Nisan said. The Constitution of the Kurdistan Region recognizes Armenians as an ethnic component, provides the right to mother-tongue education in the Armenian language, and reserves one seat in parliament for Armenians. There are six Armenian churches in the Kurdistan Region – four in Duhok province, and one each in Erbil and Kirkuk.

Armenian churches in the Region house memorial statues placed to honor those massacred during the Armenian Genocide – the systematic killing and deportation of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century, in which approximately 1.5 million Armenians were killed.

"When the Armenians fled here [to the Kurdistan Region] 105 years ago, the people of Kurdistan accepted Armenians and let us celebrate our feasts – especially in Zakho, because we entered [the Kurdistan Region] through Zakho," Nisan told Rudaw.

"We have never considered ourselves foreigners here because we are from this country," he said.

Elsewhere in the world, Armenians said in the run-up to Christmas that they would not be celebrating in solidarity with those affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh war, in which over 2,500 Armenians, mostly soldiers, were killed in six weeks of conflict with Azerbaijan.



INTERNATIONAL

Turkish President Erdogan Accuses Local Politician, University Students of Terrorism

ISTANBUL (Stockholm Center for Freedom) — Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has branded Bogaziçi University students protesting a government-appointed rector and Canan Kaftancıoğlu, head of the Istanbul branch of the Republican People's Party (CHP), as terrorists, Turkish media reported.

Answering reporters who asked if he would speak with the students and listen to their demands, Erdogan claimed the protestors were not students but actually terrorists, and that he would not meet with them to hear their demands.

Although Erdogan said there were no students among the protestors, more than 20 students have been detained since the protests began in the first week of January.

The students' lawyer, Ezgi Önal, said in a video posted on Twitter that the students

were subjected to unlawful strip-search and were beaten in the detention center. She said the students had medical reports that confirmed the beatings. Önal added that the police had forcefully entered the students' homes, and images of broken doors and damaged property were shared on Twitter.

Erdogan also accused Kaftancıoğlu, who supported the protests, of being a militant from the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C), a militant Marxist group considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Kaftancıoğlu said on Twitter that Erdogan was obliged to prove his accusations. "Throughout my life as a doctor, a woman and a human rights activist, I have supported the rule of law," she said. "I have never had any connection to terrorism or terrorist organizations,

and the accusations are completely political. I will continue my fight for democracy and a better Turkey."

Kaftancıoğlu also said she would file a complaint against Erdogan for insult and would sue him for damages.

In the wake of Erdogan's statement, John Lubbock, a columnist for the *Ahval* news website, said being a terrorist in Erdogan's Turkey had become very common and that signing petitions, protesting and being a journalist or a Kurd could easily be a reason for a person to be called a terrorist.

He said that up until this day, Gezi Park protestors, the Kurdish YPG militia fighting against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), journalists critical of the government, the Academics for Peace, who signed a petition condemning state violence against Kurds, the

Turkish Medical Association and opposition parties had all been declared terrorists by the government at some point.

Lubbock added that Erdogan had even said that the deteriorating Turkish economy was due to "economic terrorists."

Lubbock did not include the Gülen movement, which has become the most targeted members of society, in his list.

President Erdogan has been targeting followers of the Gülen movement, a faith-based group inspired by Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, since the corruption investigations of December 17-25, 2013, which implicated then-Prime Minister Erdogan, his family members and his inner circle.

Dismissing the investigations as a Gülenist coup and conspiracy against his government, Erdogan designated the movement as a terrorist organization and began to target its members. Erdogan intensified the crackdown on the movement following a coup attempt on July 15, 2016 that he accused Gülen of masterminding. Fethullah Gülen and the movement strongly deny involvement in the abortive putsch or any terrorist activity.

Ivanishvili Says He's Leaving Georgian Politics for Good. His Critics Have Heard That One Before

TBILISI (RFE/RL) — The billionaire businessman-politician who founded the ruling Georgian Dream party back in 2012 says he has decided to leave politics for good.

Former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili announced on January 11 that he was stepping down as the chairman of Georgian Dream and will quit the party.

Proclaiming that he'd accomplished his "mission," Ivanishvili said, "I have decided to completely withdraw from politics and let go of the reins of power."

He said the fact he will turn 65 next month also was a factor in his decision.

But few in the Georgian capital are taking Ivanishvili's announcement at face value.

One reason is because it is not the first time Ivanishvili has announced his retirement from politics in the former Soviet republic.

In November 2013, when Ivanishvili voluntarily stepped down as prime minister after just 13 months in office, he also said that he was quitting the political arena.

Then, in 2018, Ivanishvili announced his formal return. He was promptly elected to serve again as chairman of Georgian Dream.

In the meantime, all four men who've served as prime minister since Ivanishvili quit that post have been party colleagues — including current Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia. And critics accuse Ivanishvili of having continued to govern the country from behind the scenes.

They also accuse Ivanishvili of being close to the Kremlin, something Ivanishvili denies.

According to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, Ivanishvili is the richest man in Georgia with an estimated wealth of about \$5.7 billion.

He made his fortune during the 1990s by

building up a collection of iron-ore producers, steel plants, banks, and real-estate properties in post-Soviet Russia — selling off most of those assets from 2003 to 2006 and the remainder in the run-up to his election as Georgian prime minister in October 2012.

He created the Georgian Dream party in April 2012.

Sources familiar with the inner workings of the party tell RFE/RL it is virtually impossible for Ivanishvili to relinquish his political power — regardless of his formal position or membership in the party.

Ghia Khukhashvili, a former adviser to Ivanishvili, said the Georgian Dream's governing structure is designed so that "all roads lead to Ivanishvili." Consequently, Khukhashvili says, even if Ivanishvili sincerely wants to leave politics, it will be difficult for him to do so without the collapse of that party system.

Political tensions have been high in Georgia since the official results of parliamentary elections on October 31 showed Georgian Dream maintaining its grip on power.

Ivanishvili wants to present himself as a democrat who is not fundamentally opposed to the opposition. But he does not want such an opposition.

The opposition — led by the United National Movement (ENM) and European Georgia, plus six other parties that won parliamentary representation — claims the vote was rigged. Thousands of opposition demonstrators have taken to the streets of Tbilisi to protest the official election results.

Georgian Dream has rejected its demand for new elections, insisting the vote was free and fair.

The OSCE's international election-observa-

tion mission concluded that the vote was "competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected," although it cited "pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state."

In his January 11 announcement, Ivanishvili said he was "heartbroken that a constructive opposition has not been formed" in Georgia.

"I will not hide it and I will honestly say that at the end of my political career, one of the things that makes me grieve is that a state-minded and responsible opposition has not been formed yet" that would help Georgia "meet the standards of European parliamentary democracy."

Ghia Nodia, a political analyst who heads the Tbilisi-based Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development, told RFE/RL that he doubts Ivanishvili's sincerity.

"This is complete hypocrisy," said Nodia, who served as Georgia's minister of education and science in 2008. "Ivanishvili wants his favorite opposition, which has not appeared before. It is clear that he considers the United National Movement as an enemy. His attitude is similar to those parties that are also critical of the National Movement."

He will not go anywhere, of course, and he will not leave either. Ivanishvili's goal has always been to be able to do whatever he wants without hindrance."

— David Zurabishvili, former leader of opposition Democratic Front

Nodia accused Ivanishvili of failing to "recognize any opposition party as a legitimate player."

"Ivanishvili wants to present himself as a



Bidzina Ivanishvili (agenda.ge photo)

democrat who is not fundamentally opposed to the opposition. But he does not want such an opposition," Nodia said. "He wants to control the opposition as he had controlled Georgian Dream when he left the first time."

David Zurabishvili, a former member of the Georgian parliament who used to lead the opposition Democratic Front faction, said the threat posed to Ivanishvili's interests by the current opposition isn't the only reason he will not be able to fulfill his "dream of leaving" politics.

"He will not go anywhere, of course, and he will not leave either," Zurabishvili said. "Ivanishvili's goal has always been to be able to do whatever he wants without hindrance. This means his business, infrastructure projects, and all that require control of state institutions."

"He cannot leave politics," Zurabishvili said. "The political leadership may decide otherwise. The legislation may be different [and unfavorable to him]. But the man does not know where he wants to build or move. He has to run to get permits every time. So he cannot relinquish full control and, in principle, remain as an informal ruler as he was before. I am absolutely sure of that."

Ryanair Recommends Visiting 'Growing Tourist Hotspot' Armenia in 2021

DUBLIN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Ryanair has included Armenia in its list of the top destinations to visit in 2021, suitable for planning your next adventure.

"Located on the border of Eastern Europe and Asia, Armenia is a growing tourist hotspot that has something for everyone with its historic sites, exciting culture, extreme sports and delicious Armenian cuisine," the carrier said.

"Its capital Yerevan is nicknamed 'The Pink City' because of the colorful volcanic stones on which it was built centuries ago. If you're looking to broaden your travel horizons after a quiet 2020 this could be just the unique trip that's needed in 2021."

Azores archipelago off the coast of Portugal, the Greek Islands, Santander in Spain, Tel Aviv in Israel, Katowice and Gdansk in Poland, as well as a handful of other destinations are recommended for visiting in 2021.

Azeri Troops Filmed Toppling Another Armenian Monument

HADRUT (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Another video featuring Azerbaijani troops toppling another Armenian monument surfaced online on January 12, according to publications on social media pages.

Footage shared by Armenian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anna Naghdalyan depicts Azeri soldiers knocking down a *khachkar* in the village of Arakel in Nagorno-Karabakh's Hadrut province which has come under Azerbaijan's control after the recent war.

During the hostilities, Azerbaijani forces launched two targeted attacks on the Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi. After taking control of the city, they destroyed the domes of Saint John the Baptist Church. Azerbaijan earlier "restored" a church by replacing its Armenian inscription with glass art.

Concerns about the preservation of cultural sites in Nagorno-Karabakh are made all the more urgent by the Azerbaijani government's history of systematically destroying indigenous Armenian heritage—acts of both warfare and historical revisionism. The Azerbaijani government has secretly destroyed a striking number of cultural and religious artifacts in the late 20th century. Within Nakhichevan alone, a historically Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani forces destroyed at least 89 medieval churches, 5,840 *khachkars* (Armenian cross stones) and 22,000 historical tombstones between 1997 and 2006.



Soldiers destroying khachkar in the village of Arakel

Community News

Biden Taps Middle East Expert McGurk as Regional Coordinator

WASHINGTON (The National) – US president-elect Joe Biden has named Brett McGurk as his White House coordinator for the Middle East, a seasoned hand who worked in the region under three former presidents and is known for his criticism of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Biden transition team made the announcement on Friday, granting McGurk a senior White House position as “coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa.”

The 47-year-old diplomat is known to be a workaholic and determined policy driver. One person who worked with him in the past described him as a “bulldozer.” He operates with a mission in mind and does everything to accomplish it.

McGurk is no stranger to the Middle East, and he is perhaps one of the very few Washington political figures who have served in the Bush, Obama and Trump presidencies. Under George W Bush, McGurk was the director for Iraq on the National Security Council (2005-2007) and then the special assistant to the president and senior director for Near East affairs on the National Security Council (2007-2009). Under Barack Obama, he served as deputy assistant secretary for Near East Affairs at the State Department (2012-2015), where he worked directly with Biden, then the vice president.

McGurk then became the special presidential envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in 2015, a position he maintained under Trump until the end of 2018, when he resigned. Since then, he has been teaching at Stanford University, and became a trusted voice on the Biden campaign during the presidential race.

A campaign insider told The National that McGurk briefed Biden three times on Syria during the race and then into the transition. His policy views con-



Brett McGurk (DW Photo)

verge with those of Biden, having resigned from the Trump administration after the outgoing president's call with Erdogan that authorized the partial withdrawal of US troops from Syria and allowed Turkey into the northern part of the country. The decision was criticized by Biden as one that gave ISIS “a new lease on life.”

Randa Slim, a Middle East expert and director of Track II dialogue at the Middle East Institute, labeled McGurk as an “irritant” for Ankara.

“His appointment is seen in Ankara as another irritant in an already complicated and increasingly conflictual US-Turkey relationship,” Slim told The National.

McGurk makes no secret of his objections to Ankara's policies, from expansion in Syria to cozying up to Russia and appeasing Hamas.

One US source familiar with his thinking said he sees Mr Erdogan as a policy hurdle. “Turkey got in the way of his mission to kill ISIS quickly,” the source said. “His first priority will be to get on the same page with the allies in the region.”

But this may prove difficult because of his regional detractors, explains Slim. “Many officials and experts in the Middle East view McGurk's record in the US government through the lenses of US policies in Iraq and Syria which he advocated, policies which have not advanced the well-being of the peoples there.”

Slim mentioned McGurk's support during the Bush administration and later under the Obama administration for former Iraqi prime minister

see COORDINATOR, page 8



Litty Mathew and Melkon Khosrovian

A Toast to a Happy Series Of Accidents Leading to Better Cocktails

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

LOS ANGELES – Melkon Khosrovian never thought he would be interested in the world of spirits – of the alcoholic variety.

But here we are: Khosrovian, and his wife, Litty Mathew, cofounded Greenbar

Distillery in 2004, the first in Los Angeles since the end of Prohibition. They specialize in gourmet, organic, small-batch spirits, cocktails and mixing bitters.

The two, who married in 2002, became distillers quite by chance, and for love.

As Khosrovian said in an interview in December, “literally everything happened by some kind of accident.”

Khosrovian and Mathew met at the University of Southern California (USC) where they were both enrolled in the journalism master's program. One thing led to another and they soon became an item and got engaged.

“When my wife and I got engaged, we went round to visit with our families. We would make toasts and drink,” Khosrovian said. Unfortunately, there was nothing that ticked off any of the boxes for Mathew and she said all the liquor was too harsh.

Mathew has a sophisticated palate. She attended Le Cordon Bleu cooking school in Paris, honing her lifelong love of food and cooking.

Mathew has worked as a freelance travel and food writer for major publications like *Maxim* and *Saveur*. In addition, she has also published a novel, *The Musician's Secret*, about the Armenian community in Glendale.

And thus, Khosrovian began to experiment to see if there was a cocktail or spirit his wife would prefer.

“It started with me trying to make something my fiancée could drink,” he recalled.

Both Khosrovian and Mathew are researchers by training, and therefore the idea of finding a solution was one they could not pass by.

Every night, he said, he would experiment with flavors and combinations, trying to hit on the magic formula.

“It became every night,” after work, he recalled. And he remembers thinking, “What exactly are we doing this for?”

Before starting Greenbar Distillery, Khosrovian worked in crisis communications. In 1999, he launched an Internet startup, which he later sold.

Being that they are both highly educated and curious, they decided to take it to the next level.

“We didn't know anything about making complex infusions. I would take some flowers, fruit and spices and put them in vodka. I had no idea what I was doing,” Khosrovian said.

But they had an advantage: “We knew how to ask questions and to think,” he said.

In a way, he noted, their total lack of knowledge about alcoholic beverages was an advantage as they didn't think about the pitfalls and wanted to produce beverages that “tasted real, complex and interesting.”

see COCKTAILS, page 7

Texas Longhorns Name Steve Sarkisian Head Football Coach

AUSTIN, Texas (texassports.com) – The University of Texas (UT) at Austin has named Steve Sarkisian, currently offensive coordinator for the Alabama Crimson Tide, head coach of the Longhorn football team. He replaces Tom Herman, who was released earlier today on January 2.

Sarkisian has a strong track record as both an offensive coordinator and head coach in both Division I college football and the NFL [National Football League]. He also brings to the Longhorn football program extensive experience



Alabama offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian at the Alabama A-Day spring football scrimmage game in Tuscaloosa, Ala., April 13, 2019

coaching in conference and national championship games and developing top talent, including three Heisman Trophy finalists.

“On January 4, 2006, I was the USC [University of Southern California] quarterback coach when we played Texas in that famed national championship game. There has always been something special about Longhorn football, its history and traditions – not just on that day – and I could never have imagined that 15 years later, I would join the Longhorns as their head coach,” Sarkisian commented. “This is a unique and compelling opportunity to lead this storied program to the next level, competing once again amongst the best in college football.”

Sarkisian was just this week named the Broyles Award winner, awarded to the top college football assistant coach, as he has helped lead the Crimson Tide to compete for the 2020 national championship.

“We are excited to have Steve Sarkisian join us and lead the next chapter of our football program,” said Kevin Eltife, chairman of the UT System Board of Regents. “University of Texas football has a long and proud history of competing at the highest levels within our conference and nationally, and he brings with him the coaching caliber and championship experience needed to restore this kind of excellence to our program.”

President Jay Hartzell said: “Hiring Steve Sarkisian represents a critical investment in our football program's future, not just for our student-athletes, but for all of Longhorn Nation. Our entire community benefits from a healthy and successful athletics program, and naming Steve as our coach infuses our football program with the necessary guidance and expertise to drive further success.”

Prior to joining Alabama in 2019, Sarkisian spent two years as offensive coordinator with the Atlanta Falcons, four years as an assistant and two as head coach at the University of Southern California, and five years as head coach at the University of Washington. His head coaching record is 46-35 overall and 2-2 in bowl games.

“Steve Sarkisian is one of the top offensive minds in the game of football, which he has proved over and over during his time with USC, Atlanta, and most recently, Alabama,” said Chris Del Conte, vice president and athletics director of The University of Texas at Austin. “We are confident our players and coaches will thrive under his leadership and in response to his energy and passion for the game.”



COMMUNITY NEWS

A Toast to a Happy Series of Accidents Leading to Better Cocktails

COCKTAILS, from page 6

“We didn’t want them to do things like burn or leave a weird aftertaste,” he noted.

As a result of all the efforts, the couple decided to start their own distillery in the heart of the Los Angeles Art District, Greenbar Distillery, in 2004.

According to Khosrovian, Greenbar Distillery makes around 30 different spirits, such as gins, whiskeys (including single malt), vodkas, liqueurs (ginger, hibiscus, orange and jasmine), and Amaro (Italian herbal liqueur), as well as ready-to-drink cocktail mixes in cans. The distillery also makes two kinds of non-alcoholic beverages, canned lavender and lemon bitters with soda, as well as bottled bitters.

The list of ingredients for both of the sodas is like menu items in a top restaurant. For example, the orange bitters contain orange, tea, jasmine, mandarin, burdock, gentian, neroli, petit-grain, clove, star anise, grapefruit, chamomile, California bay, ginger, allspice, cinnamon, rooibos, eucalyptus, Lapsang Souchong tea, among other ingredients.

The approach to making the flavors is surprisingly similar to the way they created mixes in their home.

“We base it on things you can eat. We are going back to the beginning,” he said.

Khosrovian added that ironically neither he nor Mathew is a great bartender.

The most complex cocktail they make at home, he said, is a Negroni (Campari, vermouth and gin served with orange peel.)

In that drink, he said, the gin is overpowered and basically eclipsed. And that is one reason they decided “to make a better gin.”

“I decided to make a better, richer tasting spirit. Gin is incredibly flavorful,” if done well, he said.

That is where the immigrant background of both himself and his wife comes into play, as does the diverse immigrant population of Los Angeles.

Ingredients from Vietnamese, Middle Eastern and Mexican foods are also a part of the flavor profiles used by Greenbar.

Their gin, he said, contains a “whole slew of ingredients that we love in these cuisines. We took them and built them into the gin flavor.”

They produce two gins – City Bright and City Amber – and for the first, again, their list of ingredients is one that any chef would be thrilled to use: wheat spirits, juniper berries, ancho chiles, angelica, basil, California bay, cardamom, cassia, coriander, cubeb, black cumin, fennel, grapefruit, lemon balm, lemongrass, lemon, kaffir lime, Lapsang Souchong tea, lime, pink peppercorn, Sichuan peppercorn, peppermint, spearmint, star anise and tarragon.

The palate reflects a lot of Middle Eastern and Mexican cuisines, as well as traditional Armenian herbs, especially tarragon.

That gin, he said, makes the Negroni taste a lot better.

Selling to Restaurants, Stores

While the bottles of spirits sell briskly, the distillery is focusing on its line of canned drinks. This past year, 70 percent of total sales were from cans, while next year it is expected to be 85 percent.

Up to now, about 80 percent of Greenbar’s business has been with restaurants. Then, Covid hit and so many restaurants shut down. Now, Greenbar is shifting to retail, with bottles of spirits, as well as canned carbonated alcoholic beverages being sold to stores.

Those cans have proved to be quite popular. “The flavors are very big and bold with hibiscus, ginger and orange,” he said, created in the style of the Italian favorite, Aperol Spritz.

As are two others. “The two most popular [flavors] are rum and cola and whiskey and soda,” he said.

Those currently are retailed at Whole Foods and Albertson’s in the West Coast, and Whole Foods on the East Coast, as well as independent retailers. (If your local liquor store does not carry it, you can ask them to order it for you.)

Taste and smoothness are the guiding lights for the Greenbar team and it was in pursuit of those that they have chosen to use only organic products.

Switch to Organic, Community-Centered

In the first four years of the distillery, they were doing well, Khosrovian recalled, using as good a bunch of ingredients as they could get, with no particular interest in organic products. Then, they distilled a batch of spirits that were off. “We traced the source of the problem,” he said. “It dawned on us that organic products have a lot more flavor,” he said. “In 2008 we switched to all organic to make them more tasty.”

That change in turn led to a greater focus by Greenbar Distillery on its impact on the land and the community.

Said Khosrovian, “Here is everything we want to do: [be] pleasing to the palate but our bigger obligation is to make a difference and inspire. We changed our packaging from virgin paper and heavy glass bottles to lightweight glass and recycled paper labels that are biodegradable.”

Then, he said, they thought about what more they could do.

“Grandparents [in Armenia] plant a tree for new babies. We



Greenbar Distillery

MARC ROYCE PHOTO



Greenbar Distillery Founder Melkon Khosrovian

decided to plan trees for every time we sell a bottle. We want to make a way to give back and make the plant better for the future generations,” he added. They plant fruit trees in various locations, including in Guatemala.

“We want to do well and do good at the same time,” he noted.

In addition, they help the local organizations that feed the hungry. “We want to give back to the communities that have supported us.”

They partner with restaurants to give away a burrito every

time someone drinks a gin cocktail with a Greenbar gin. So far, he said, 30,000 burritos have been given away.

“We are a little company and want to do whatever we can,” Khosrovian added.

Moving to LA

Khosrovian and his family moved to LA when he was a child, in May 1980, first to Providence, RI for 11 years.

Melkon was born in Yerevan. His father was the head of a textile company, working alongside his mother, who studied linguistics. He grew up with his family, including his sister, celebrating life with family dinners where they’d sip homemade fruit brandies and grain vodkas along with their meal. His grandparents made their own high-proof fruit brandies in Armenia from excess fruit in their orchard.

Khosrovian said that now he has very few relatives in Armenia, consisting of a number of cousins and one aunt. The family is descended from survivors of the Armenian Genocide who repatriated to Armenia in the 1930s and 1940s.

Mathew, who was born in Ethiopia, hails from a family rooted in Karalla, India. She also moved with her family to the US when she was little.

Khosrovian noted that in the past his company has tried to do small projects in Armenia, especially regarding walnut, cherry and apricot for use in their line of bitters.

“These are fruits and trees that Armenia grows incredible well,” Khosrovian said. “That’s great about Armenia, the vibrant fruits.”

For more information about the company, visit their website at www.greenbardistillery.com. The site sells the products and also includes a list of outlets that sell them.

Pre-Covid, Greenbar offered tours of the distillery. Once the restrictions are lifted, the tours will start again.



Reforestation in Honduras (Credit Sustainable Harvest)

A Couple of Tasty recipes from GreenBar



Orange Margarita

INGREDIENTS
1.5 oz IXÁ Silver Tequila
0.5 oz Fruitlab Orange Liqueur
1 oz Fresh Squeezed Lime Juice
1 oz Simple Syrup

PREPARATION

Combine all ingredients with ice in a shaker tin. Shake until tin goes frosty. Strain into a margarita glass or mason jar. Garnish with an orange wedge.



Fountain of Youth

INGREDIENTS
1.25 oz TRU Lemon Vodka
0.75 oz FRUITLAB Hibiscus Liqueur
2 oz Pure Cranberry Juice
0.5 oz Fresh Squeezed Lime Juice
2 dashes BAR KEEP Lavender Bitters

PREPARATION

Combine all ingredients except bitters with ice. Shake and strain into cocktail glass. Add two dashes of bitters and stir once. Garnish with a lemon curl.



Koutoujian Completes Term Leading Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association

MEDFORD, Mass. — Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian has officially completed his tenure as President of the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association (MSA) after leading the organization for the past three years.

Elected in October 2017, Koutoujian's tenure was originally slated to conclude at the end of 2019. MSA Presidents traditionally do not serve longer than a single two-year term, but Koutoujian was asked to serve an additional year by his colleagues in order to synchronize the MSA presidential term with the legislature's session.

"I want to thank my colleagues for the faith they placed in me as President. I especially thank outgoing Vice President Sheriff Chris Donelan for his thoughtful partnership over the past three years," said Koutoujian. "During our tenure we worked closely with the legislature and the Baker Administration on some of the most important legislation impacting the criminal justice system in decades. Sheriffs do this job because we want to help those we

serve; I am proud to have helped advance that goal over the last three years."

Koutoujian has been succeeded by Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins as President. Sheriff Donelan has been succeeded by Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi as Vice President.

"As Sheriffs Tompkins and Cocchi begin their tenure, I look forward to working with them to build upon the foundation of collaboration and professionalism that have been the hallmark of MSA's approach to enhancing public safety and improving outcomes for those in our custody, their families and our communities," said Koutoujian.

"Over his tenure as MSA President, Sheriff Koutoujian helped us to shepherd through a number of changes that impacted not only our collective organization as a whole, but our individual county operations as well," said Tompkins. "We are all thankful for his service to the MSA and appreciative of his great efforts to advance our mission. And, as I take

the baton, I look forward to expanding upon those efforts alongside Sheriff Cocchi and MSA Executive Director Carrie Hill as we continue to elevate the work of the MSA."

During his term as president, the MSA worked with State Sen. William Brownsberger (D - Second Suffolk and Middlesex) and State Rep. Claire Cronin (D - 11th Plymouth) on the historic 2018 criminal justice reform bill. The bill included changes to restrictive housing within jails and prisons; created a special commission to study the prevention of suicide among correction officers; expressly authorized the establishment of specialized housing units for individuals ages 18 - 24 (which the Middlesex Sheriff's Office had previously opened); and created a mechanism for medical parole, among other key provisions.

Medical parole had been a top priority for Koutoujian since 2013 when he began working with State Sen. Patricia Jehlen (D - Second Middlesex) on passage.

Under his leadership, the MSA also worked

with the Baker Administration, State Senator Cindy Friedman (D - Fourth Middlesex) and State Representative Denise Garlick (D - 13th Norfolk) on the passage and implementation of legislation establishing a landmark medication assisted treatment pilot program involving seven sheriffs' offices. Under the law, those entering custody in one of those seven counties on an FDA-approved MAT regimen have the ability to continue that regimen unless determined otherwise by a qualified addiction specialist. Sentenced inmates not on a verified MAT regimen at the time of their commitment may also be evaluated for participation 30 days prior to their scheduled release.

For the past year, Koutoujian served concurrently as president of both MSA and the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA). As MCSA President, Sheriff Koutoujian leads an association comprised of sheriffs of over 100 of the nation's most populous counties. He will serve as MCSA President through the end of 2021.

Obituary

Edward Noni Atamian Basketball Player and Coach

LOS ANGELES — Basketball player and coach Edward Noni Atamian passed away on January 9 after a week-long battle with Covid-19. He was 88.

Atamian was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1932.

Atamian started playing basketball at a young age with the Gamk Armenian Club in Alexandria from 1939 to 1952. He then played and coached for the Homenetmen Club's men's and women's basketball teams from 1952 to 1970.

Atamian immigrated to California in 1971. Shortly thereafter he began assembling the legendary Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Valley men's basketball team. Under Atamian, the team won 234 games with only 2 losses from 1975 to 2001. For years the team dominated the AGBU World Games and traveled throughout the world winning championships in North and South America as well as Europe. The team defeated the Men's Armenian National Basketball team in Toronto in 1992 in a historic matchup. Atamian's team also defeated the legendary UNLV Coach Jerry Tarkanian's Armenian team in the Western Armenian Athletic Association games in Fresno.

Atamian coached the AGBU women's team to several championships. Atamian coached the AGBU Valley men's basketball team in the first



and second Pan Armenian Games in Yerevan, which became champions in 1999 and 2001.

From left, David Lalazarian (Pepperdine University), Edward Noni Atamian, Toros Yetenekian (Idaho State), David Djolakian (UC Santa Barbara)

He leaves behind his wife Myriam Atamian, son Eddy Atamian, daughter Alice Atamian, and grandchildren Andre, Dylan and Gina. The burial date has not yet been set due to covid-19 restrictions.



Jerry Tarkanian UNLV and San Antonio Spurs Coach, right, with Edward Noni Atamian

Biden Taps McGurk as Regional Coordinator

COORDINATOR, from page 6

Nouri Al Maliki. "Mr. Al Maliki's sectarian policies in Iraq played a major role in laying the groundwork for the rise of ISIS in Iraq," Slim argued.

It was under Al Maliki that Iran-funded Iraqi militias were able to run amok in the country, and ISIS took over Mosul in 2014.

McGurk's relationship with Al Maliki, however, had its ups and downs. According to The Wall Street Journal, the senior US official played a lead role in the Obama administration's 2010 efforts to back Al Maliki's bid for a second term but then facilitated his ouster in 2014. "The relationship soured and Mr. McGurk became one of the officials to drive [Mr Al] Maliki out as ISIS took over Mosul," the Journal reported.

In Syria, McGurk's mission was focused on defeating ISIS and backing the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). He also supported a transitional government structure in the north-east, a move that complicated the political roadmap for a final settlement in the area, said Slim. "While appreciated by Syrian Kurdish leaders, the transitional governance structure has complicated rather than facilitated

the cause of conflict management in the country."

But others such as Nick Heras, the director of government relations at the Institute for the Study of War, see McGurk's decisions as part of executing a mission which was then to defeat ISIS. "He has a remarkable capability to stay on mission and pursue the goals set out by the White House, even when confronted by multiple regional crises," Heras told The National. He described him as someone who has no tolerance for nonsense and "a driven leader who his team loves to work for and his opponents begrudgingly respect."

McGurk's mission at the White House will be weaving back a regional multilateral coalition, Heras said. "President-elect Biden likely turned to him because of his intimate familiarity with building multilateral co-operation to address security issues emanating from the region."

The expert mentioned McGurk's ability of "keeping diverse regional actors on the same side to address mutual security challenges in a context of regional rivalry and conflict." On Turkey, this would involve efforts to bring Ankara back under the NATO tent.

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Armenia Fund Set New Fundraising Records During Karabakh War

FUNDRAISING, fro page 1

After the war, questions began to be raised about the allocation of those funds. Maria Mehranian, chair of the board of directors of the Armenia Fund, Inc. from 2016, and in 2004-2008, provided information about the current situation and its context.

Armenia Fund: Background

The Armenia Fund was created over a quarter of a century ago in 1994, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, as a result of the Armenian Earthquake of 1988, Armenian independence, and the ensuing liberation war in Artsakh. It provides humanitarian aid and develops infrastructure for Armenia and Artsakh, including schools, hospitals, clean drinking and irrigation water systems, and highways.

Mehranian said, "Parallel organizations were born in the diaspora through the efforts of many concerned individuals. Armenia Fund Inc. was created originally in the United States to bring immediate relief to Armenia and Artsakh. It is a 501c3 registered with the state of California, and all its tax returns and financial information are placed on the website of the Secretary of State of California." Its headquarters are in Glendale, California, and it originally only worked in the West Coast. The East Coast of the US had its own board and separate structure from 1993 to 2018, but after the dissolution of the latter, the East Coast also came under the jurisdiction of the Armenia Fund.

The Armenia Fund is run by a board of 13 individuals, of whom 10 who are representatives of various Armenian-American churches or organizations. These include the Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian Catholic Eparchy of the US and Canada, Armenian Cultural Foundation, Armenian Evangelical Union of North America, Armenian General Benevolent Union, Nor Or Charitable Association, Armenian Relief Society of Western USA, Nor Serount Cultural Association, Western Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of North America. Mehranian said: "So our board members are the representatives of the stakeholders of our community. We have meetings quarterly, or more when needed, and most decisions are taken at these meetings."

Mehranian, like the treasurer and secretary, is not on the board as a representative of any particular community organization but says she feels she is there on behalf of the Armenia Fund itself. She has always been involved in Armenian issues in her life, she said. Her maternal grandfather was the famous Yeprem Khan (Davtian), an Armenian freedom fighter who played an important role in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. After graduating Damavand College in Tehran, she went to graduate school at the University of California, Los Angeles to study urban planning. She eventually became the Managing Partner and Chief Financial Officer of Cordoba Corporation, which is a civil engineering, construction management and program management firm specializing in transportation, education and facilities, and water and energy. It is headquartered in Los Angeles.

Mehranian organized a trip for a delegation of California State Assembly and State Senate members to Armenia in 2001. During the visit, a series of meetings were organized with some members of the international board of the Hayastan All Armenian Fund to explore a blueprint for project development. Back in California, Mehranian began collaborating with the Armenia Fund for several years, and eventually was voted in as the chair of its board. After her election, during the 2004-2008 period, she reorganized the West Coast office, enhancing its operations through state-of-the-art software, data analysis, donor retention, and other development strategies.

Mehranian explained that because of her professional background, "I understand infrastructure. Professionally, it is a joy for me to contribute in thoughts, calibration, and the implementation and completion of projects."

Though she had left the board after her achievements to focus on other things, around eight years later, when the idea of merging the

East and West Coast Armenia Fund organizations was entertained, the Armenia Fund board in California thought her corporate experience would be helpful for this process. She was invited back and Mehranian accepted.

Operations

There are only two full-time employees of the Armenia Fund in its Glendale offices. Their expenses are raised, Mehranian said, through a standalone event held once or twice annually, which usually produces around two to three hundred thousand dollars.

While large and mid-scale donors contribute throughout the year, and some smaller donors also give regularly, the main method of fundraising is the annual Thanksgiving Day telethon, which began in 1996. The telethons usually focus on soliciting funds for a major project. Over the years, the cost of the telethon was gradually reduced from \$700,000 to around \$250,000, through lessons learned by experience, Mehranian said. In the last five years, expenses have fluctuated between \$180,000 and \$300,000, and they are taken from the total donations.

Projects are initiated in three ways, she said. Individual donors sometimes set up projects which they pay for, like a center against domestic violence, but want the Armenia Fund to supervise. Other donors have ideas for projects but want the Armenia Fund to set up the project as well as to implement it. The largest projects are requested by Hayastan All Armenian Fund, and Armenia Fund provides at least part of the money necessary to carry them out.

The All Armenian Fund projects generally are for things like roads or other expensive infrastructure. In the case of the Goris-Stepanakert road or the Vartenis-Martakert one, the cost was broken down so that each meter of road, at a cost of 200 or 250 dollars, could be sponsored.

There are also mid-sized projects which the West Coast office initiates. Twice a year Armenia Fund representatives from the US go to Armenia, once for a meeting with their implementing partner organization, Hayastan All Armenian Fund, and once to visit projects and participate in opening ceremonies. During these trips, Mehranian said, they also conduct their own need assessments. Among the ideas they came up with were projects for drip irrigation, solar panels and a maternity hospital in Stepanakert. The drip irrigation project cost half a million dollars, for example.

The money that is raised in the US for the large-scale projects, like roads, is sent in full to Armenia. The money raised for the smaller individual donor projects usually is kept in the US and sent as needed to Armenia and Artsakh, Mehranian said. The money for the mid-sized projects, like the drip irrigation one, is sent in parts. First a down payment is given, and then after a visit to the project and various reports about progress, further payments are released gradually. The money raised meanwhile is kept in a general account in the US.

All projects except those already set up by donors, whether large or small, are done through the approximately 20 person staff of the Hayastan All Armenian Fund. Before commencing, there are always memorandums of understanding for descriptions of projects, including budgets and timelines, sponsored by the Armenia Fund in the US. Bids are put out through the staff for projects. Three bids from three different contractors are required for each project, and the lowest bid is chosen, Mehranian explained. The staff there then supervise and report back on projects. Deadlines are set in the US and monitored. A third-party auditor is sent to Armenia to do financial and forensic reports.

The Hayastan All Armenian Fund takes seven percent of the total funds they receive for their expenses, Mehranian said, including overhead, program managers, construction people and labor.

She pointed out two advantages to working through the Armenian staff. First, there are strict codes for certification concerning construction, and not all organizations are subject to this level of scrutiny. Second, there is the advantage of having people familiar with local officials and conditions.

Mehranian gave the example of a trip of

some doctors from a hospital in Glendale to Noyemberyan Hospital in Armenia. They were to stay 10 days to do volunteer surgeries but, all of a sudden, the local governor came and locked the hospital. The president of the hospital also refused to let the doctors come in, declaring that they would mess up the hospital. Mehranian immediately called the Hayastan All Armenian Fund which intervened and quickly made arrangements to resolve the impasse, allowing the doctors to do their work.

Corruption

The Velvet Revolution coincided with a scandal involving Ara Vardanyan, executive director of the Hayastan All Armenian Fund. He was arrested in July 2018 on accusations of embezzlement and misuse of funds. He apparently used funds for gambling, though he replaced at least part of these funds. This situation led to talk of closing down the organization or replacing it with a new one but then a new director, Haykak Arshamyan, was appointed in October of that year and worked to regain the confidence of the public, though in 2019 US donations were historically fairly low to the Armenia Fund. Furthermore, the auditing company for All Armenia Fund was changed.

Mehranian remarked that construction in general is a very complicated process. Often the project description and specifications change from design to construction. Even in the US, large companies often face performance problems and cost overruns. They present low bids and end up with numerous changed orders. In the recent history of infrastructure development in California, there are many examples of failure in large scale projects. Often contractors cut corners in favor of a shorter timeline and higher profit margin. In other words, she concluded, irregularities can happen anywhere.

However, she noted that having an international board of the All Armenian Fund with stakeholders from the global Armenian diaspora has reduced the possibility of corruption.

Artsakh War

Everything suddenly changed when the war started. The message was spread by the Armenian government and many organizations that all donations to support Armenia and Artsakh should be via Armenia Fund in the US. The Glendale office was only staffed by two people, but there were 170 people on average walking into the office every day over two months to bring in their donations, Mehranian said, with lines extending down the street. It was unbelievable, she exclaimed. Between 2 and 2.5 million dollars was collected each day.

It was necessary to have 180 volunteers help. There were over 200 fundraising events, some virtual and some in-person, held during this period. Some 175 Instagram fundraisers were held, and 200 on Facebook. There were car show rallies, festivals, bake sales, jewelry sales and clothing sales, a petting zoo and even golf.

In addition to the regular Thanksgiving telethon done by the Armenia Fund, a special Armenia Aid Telethon was organized by an independent group of Armenians on October 10 which the Armenia Fund staff helped, and the \$35 million it raised was given to the Armenia Fund. The Thanksgiving Telethon was announced in the beginning of November and 22.9 million dollars were collected from November 10 till the end of the month. Money is still coming in. Over 100 million dollars has been collected in the US so far, including this sum. Outside the US, 110 million was collected, according to All Armenian Fund figures.

During the war, money was sent by Armenia Fund in increments of 10 million. Mehranian said, "Every time we sent money had a specific memorandum of uses that we wanted, mostly for transitional housing, temporary shelters, food, generators and heating equipment. We were very specific." Aside from money, Armenia Fund also sent certain types of medical equipment, especially wound related, such as suction machines and portable MRIs. From September 27 to December 18, 150 tons of goods were sent to Armenia in two major cargo shipments, along with 20 pallets of goods a week.

The war created an extraordinary situation,

with Armenia and Artsakh facing an existential crisis. It led to the doubling of the size of the Armenia Fund database over the course of six weeks, Mehranian said. There were 175,000 individual donors, and the number of donations were higher, in the range of 250,000, because some people gave twice or thrice. "The reason they gave was the war," she said.

She said that the fund did a statistical analysis and found that many of these donors had not previously donated, and were largely Armenians originally from Armenia. She said, "So it is a whole new universe of donors. Historically we have had a small number of big donors who give 1-3 million dollars, and then we raise another few million from large numbers of smaller donors. The average donor at the day of the [annual Thanksgiving] telethon gives 100 dollars. She is a woman between 35 and 55 years old. This is very different from what we have seen now." The average amounts during the war were higher, but she speculated that they might be single-cause donors. Another unusual element was the millions of dollars that came from matches from corporations.

Finally, there were so many donations that the receipts for tax purposes had to be outsourced to a special mailing house, Mehranian said, which still is continuing to send them out.

After the War

The defeat in the war created a lot of despair and anger among Armenians who blamed the current government of Armenia, amidst a very politically tense environment. One point of controversy was the decision of the board of trustees of the Hayastan All Armenian Fund through a series of votes during the war to transfer over 100 million dollars to the Armenian government for emergency use and allocation. Arshamyan at a November 19 press conference declared that this decision was necessary because of a "force majeure" situation, and that the government largely was using the money to address the refugee problem plus healthcare.

However, meanwhile when social media spread reports that that some government officials received bonuses in this period, this led to rumors of misuse of funds, while the government, seemingly in disarray because of the preceding events, has not yet been able to provide detailed reports of its use of the money.

Even President Armen Sarkissian of Armenia in a December 6 statement declared that the government should consider eventually reimbursing the Armenia Fund for the aid and urged the government to release a detailed report on its use. Nonetheless, Sarkissian, chairman of the Hayastan All Armenian Fund board of trustees, had voted in favor of the transfer of funds during the war, according to documents released by the All Armenian Fund.

Arshamyan, the All Armenian Fund's executive director, on December 18 pointed to the board's authorization, and stated, according to azatutyun.am, that he asked the Ministry of Finance to provide a written report about the use of the transferred money but at that time had not yet received an adequate response. The All Armenian Fund, he further reported in a December 24 interview with Never Mnatsakayan of lin.am, continues its own efforts to support refugees in Armenia, wounded soldiers, and families in Artsakh.

Mehranian declared that as the board of Armenia Fund in the US has the usual practice of visiting its project implementations every year, it expects that after covid-19 related travel restrictions are lifted, a small group of board members will visit Armenia to help organize information concerning the details of the expenditures of money raised in the US.

As far as future fundraising goes, the lessons of not just the wartime campaigns but of the past three or four years point to a shift in modality, Mehranian speculated. In the past, development directors would focus on a few big donors but now more funds are raised through websites and events. This means, she said, it is more and more important to have a good staff to work the database and expand outreach to large numbers of people.



St. Vartan Cathedral Celebrates Christmas

NEW YORK – As a testament to its unwavering faith – despite the past year’s extraordinary global suffering and tribulations – the Armenian Church celebrated the Feast of the Nativity and Theophany (Asdvadzahaydnoutiun), commemorating the birth and baptism of Jesus Christ, at New York’s St. Vartan Cathedral on January 6.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan, joined by members of the Diocesan clergy and deacons, celebrated the Divine Liturgy and performed the Blessing of the Water (Churorhnek) ceremony. A Christmas Eve badarak, celebrated by Cathedral Vicar Fr. Davit Karamyan,

Christmas in a Pandemic

With the safety of parishioners during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic remaining a paramount concern of the Diocese, there were limitations on the usual activities surrounding the celebration and the public’s access to them. Although socially-distanced worshippers donning surgical masks were present in the cathedral, the number of faithful allowed into the sanctuary reached the permissible limit in strict compliance with local regulations regarding public gatherings.

However, to ensure that all of the faithful had an opportunity to experience the spiritual beauty of the Christmas service, a live broadcast on the Eastern Diocese’s YouTube and Facebook social media platforms enabled thousands of worshippers to participate from home. The use of a four-camera configuration to transmit the program, directed by Yervant Keshishian with live English commentary by Chris Zakian, enabled viewers to watch the cathedral service in three-dimensional definition.

By Stephan S. Nigohosian

preceded the service the prior evening. The Feast of Theophany is an annual eight-day (octave) celebration observed from January 6 to 13.

“The glory of the Lord will appear, and everyone shall see God’s salvation, which will bring comfort to humanity,” said Findikyan in his moving homily. He defined Christ as comfort, or mkhitaroutiun: consolation and relief from pain and sorrow incarnate.

“Relief is coming; God’s salvation is within reach and hope fills the air. It is already here because Jesus Christ is here,” he continued. Bishop Daniel then spoke of the gravity of the realization of the birth and revelation of Jesus Christ into this world, which compelled mankind, particularly the Armenian people, to shift its entire view and perspective of “who we are, why we are here, and where we are going.”

“It is this realization that we celebrate on this Feast day of Christmas and Theophany.”

Reborn in the Christian Faith

Throughout the service, the angelic spiritual hymns sung by the St. Vartan Choir created an atmosphere of hope and underscored the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout.

Following the Divine Liturgy, the Blessing of the Water ceremony, a symbolic commemoration of the baptism of Christ, began with Bishop Daniel introducing Saro Hartounian as the Godfather of the Churorhnek. He described Hartounian’s coordination and funding of countless philanthropic and humanitarian endeavors benefitting the global Armenian community.

Most recently, Saro, along his wife, Hilda, three children and brother, have provided food, shelter and medical relief to the needy who were displaced and are suffering in Armenia and Artsakh as a result of the tragic conflict and injustice recently in that region.

“Being selected as Godfather of this ceremony is a humbling honor for me, and today I am again reborn in the Christian faith that plays such an important role in our Armenian identity,” said Hartounian with humility, during an interview after the service.

“I am one member of a very large group of selfless people in the Armenian diaspora whose collective efforts help our brethren in dire need. This recognition belongs to all of them.”

Hartounian spoke about his lifelong connection to the Armenian Church, which has been passed to him through generations. “My grandfather built an Armenian church in Haleb (Syria), and my father was very involved in the church. My involvement in the church is a continuation of their history, and now my children are carrying that legacy forward,” he said.



The masked Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan



Saro Hartounian, the Godfather of the Churorhnek



Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan



The faithful receive Holy Communion from Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan.



Saro Hartounian, the Godfather of the Churorhnek



Saro Hartounian, the Godfather of the Churorhnek and his family



The service at St. Vartan Cathedral

Arts & Living

NE Patriots Staffer Najarian's Cleats Set New NFL Auction Record, Garner Attention for Armenia

By **Aram Arkun**

Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON – As the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* previously reported, the National Football League (NFL) every year conducts a My Cause My Cleats campaign, in which custom sneakers or cleats can be worn on the field before final auction for philanthropic purposes. Berj Najarian, director of football/head coach administration of the New England Patriots, had a pair of Armenian-themed shoes which had the statement “Peace for Armenians” written on them. They were shown off on the field by quarterback Cam Newton, while a number of players made supportive video statements, the latest of whom was Super Bowl MVP and three-time champion Julian Edelman. This auction was an effort to call attention to the plight of Armenians in the recent Artsakh War, as well as to raise some aid for them through the Armenia Fund.

Najarian's bold step led to coverage in major American media, including various television stations, the Washington Post and Sports Illustrated. The auction on his sneakers ended on January 6 with 141 bids and a closing price of \$40,300. This auction price had surpassed not only that of all others in the NFL campaign so far, but all prior My Cause My Cleats auctions in the past. The prior record went to Tom Brady, whose shoes were sold for \$31,025 in 2017. The winning bid for Najarian's footwear came from two Armenians who wish to remain anonymous at present. There were many non-Armenians who also participated in the auction.

When asked about its extraordinary success, Najarian said, “I think it shows the connection that Armenians have for one another and how strongly Americans in general feel about helping people who are really struggling now. There were many people who were bidding, which is indicative about how people feel. It shows that everyone is trying to do their part on whatever level they can, whether they can give 10 or 40,000 dollars, show up at a demonstration, or have conversations with people about Armenia. People are dropping a lot of other things they are doing and focusing on doing whatever is possible. This is only one illustration.”

Najarian has not just limited himself to his cleats' auction campaign. In December, he assembled over 300 pieces of Patriots winter clothing, he said, which was donated by various staff at the Patriots, including coaches, as well as the New England Patriots Charitable Foundation, to be sent to Armenia. The clothing was sent to New York to the Children of Armenia Fund, which in turn is shipping the clothing to Armenia to help the needy during this post-war winter period.

“When you see the photos of people, including young men who lost limbs, many of whom were not originally soldiers but decided for the love of their country and parents and grandparents to serve, as well as others who did not make it, and all those whose lives were changed drastically by this war, you know that if you have the opportunity to do anything to support them or their families, that takes priority over anything else. It is winter, it is cold in Armenia, and living conditions are not good for many people,” Najarian exclaimed.

He has helped various other philanthropic Armenian campaigns recently which have reached out to him for assistance, including Hoops4Hayastan and PeaceforArmenians and did a number of interviews on Instagram and other media platforms. His personal Instagram site has served as a popular means of presenting information on Armenian topics.



Amidst dream scenes featuring Mother, World and Holy Breath performed by dancers Lynn Needle, M.A. Taylor, Janette Dishuk. Photo by Hank Gans

A New Sense Of Place

Santomieri-Farhadian Sound Installation Enriches Public Space

BERKELEY, Calif. – Critics have compared the San Francisco-based Santomieri-Farhadian Duo's experimental musical compositions to everyone from modernist Anton Webern to hard rock icon Frank Zappa. This exciting pair – Thea Farhadian on (electronic) violin and Dean Santomieri on guitar/ electronics – have been collaborating for close to a decade now, creating some of the most compelling work on the music scene. Their latest work “A New Sense of Place,” a series of multichannel duets for violin and guitar (and electronics), forming a remarkable 50 minute-long nine-track sound installation at the new BART Plaza in downtown Berkeley.

By **Christopher Atamian**

Mirror-Spectator Staff

The two were among the 10 artists selected for a first round of programming commissioned by the Berkeley Civic Arts Commission. Their new collaboration will play continuously from 7a.m. to 10 p.m. daily until February 15. In this particular piece, their two instruments are spatially isolated on a busy street, in an eight-channel overhead array on twenty-foot high state-of-the-art Meyer speakers that are permanently installed for ongoing sound artist projects.

What can passers-by and BART riders expect? “Catchy rhythms, colorful textures, timbres, catchy rhythms, and iridescent micro tonalities,” according to the duo. Their amazing sound is achieved through an almost entirely improvisational process [which where Farhadian's Farhadian's violin answers Santomieri's guitar and vice-versa – what which Thea terms a “musical conversation,” in which the two respond to each other intuitively based upon the pitch, energy, and artistic direction. of the music.

“We play without chord charts or notated music,” she continues, “but we devise structures that combine our individual styles in myriad ways.”

The first piece of the installation begins with solo guitar altered with digital effects and the acoustic violin enters in a Middle Eastern mode, and the music transforms from there. “For instance, the first piece of the present installation begins with a solo electric guitar which has been altered with digital effects. The violin enters in a Middle Eastern mode and Together we create our music on the spot, in the moment.” This inherent playfulness has hints of Dada and free-form modernist experimentation.

Installations in general form a particularly interesting genre, as they place three-dimensional objects or creations into spaces hitherto empty – creating alternate realities and aesthetics. This may be doubly interesting in the case of sound installations like “A New Sense of Place” whose title alludes to the changes in perception that music can create in listeners. We are so used to daily sounds that

see SOUND, page 13

Gayane Georgyan

‘To Work, Create, Create For the Sake of the Motherland’

By **Artsvi Bakhchinyan**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

MOSCOW/YEREVAN – Lawyer, public figure Gayane Georgyan, was born in Tbilisi and raised in Russia. She is the director of the branch for the CIS and EAEU countries of the Helsinki International Commercial Arbitration. Since 2018, she has been managing the Victoria International Charitable Foundation, founded by her. Over the past two years, the foundation has carried out a number of social and cultural projects in the field of preservation, promotion and restoration of cultural values of world importance. Three books have been published - *Dadivank: A Revived Miracle* (2018, in Armenian, English, Russian, there is also unpublished French translation), *Armenian Frescoes* (both are by a group of authors, in Armenian) and *The Restoration of Wall Paintings in Several Armenian Churches of First Christian Ages* (by Ara Zarian and Christine Lamoureux, in Armenian and English, 2019). Gayane lives between Moscow and Yerevan, she has four daughters and is actively involved in the cultural life of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh.



Dear Gayane, although you are a lawyer, you initiate Armenian cultural projects. Why is that?

The main mission of a lawyer is to protect the weak, defend the rights of the disadvantaged and deprived people. Therefore, for me, jurisprudence is directly related to the protection of culture, values of world importance, to which the rich cultural heritage of Armenia, including Artsakh, belongs undoubtedly. I discovered the multifaceted Armenian culture upon my return to my historical homeland. And it was like a journey into a wonderland, where all the beauties and pearls of our centuries-old, unique, unparalleled Armenian culture opened for me door after door.

Artsakh occupies an important place in your charitable pursuits...

When your life, thinking, knowledge are formed in a foreign land, when you grow up in several cultures and when you consider yourself, first of all, a man of the world and a symbiosis of many cultures and traditions, then a moment comes when all this accumulates in you, and you realize that sooner or late you must return your debt to your country and the people. This is your duty, and when they say to me: “Oh, thank you,” I say: “I must be thankful

see GEORGYAN, page 14



ARTS & LIVING

Santomieri-Farhadian Sound Installation Enriches Public Space

SOUND, from page 12

come at us from personal devices, speakers, outside sources, ambient sound that the concept of a sound installation which purposefully tries to guide us through a curated listening experience is even richer than the standard art installation that we are more used to.

“Like an art installation, a sound installation is three-dimensional and intended to work with the space at hand,” Farhadian explains. “The tracks here are spatialized, so the music moves around the eight speakers, sometimes in all eight, sometimes in groups of four and slowly shifts to another group of four, producing a

three-dimensional sense.”

Public sound installations, Farhadian notes, in passing, are generally produced on a grander scale and far more often in Europe but the BART installation is one of the few in the US that meets even the most stringent of standards. And definitely is a welcome cultural venue for the Bay Area.

The duo’s unique electronic sound contains a prototypically modernist combination of consonance, assonance and dissonance, found sounds and wonderful distortions that one might hear in, say, a John Cage composition or at a Merce Cunningham dance performance.

They are able to fuse these difficult elements into wonderfully organic and challenging pieces such as their 2015 debut collaboration “RedBlue.”

Santomieri’s amazing guitar riffs and Farhadian’s playful command of her violin combine to form a self-described “amalgam of modern avant-garde classical, rock, Middle Eastern, and Asian influences. As a duo, we contribute equally to the music and decision-making.”

A classically trained violinist and former member of the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra, Farhadian has scored sound for video and performed internationally. As a solo artist, she

focuses on violin and interactive electronics, as heard in her 2016 CD, “Tectonics Shifts.”

Farhadian also incorporates her Armenian roots and much of the present installation is influenced by eastern music. She notes that “Some of the first music I heard as a child was Armenian liturgical music at St. Vartan’s Church in Oakland where I grew up. To this day I adore this music and it is deeply meaningful for me. We also listened to Armenian folk music in our home, as well as western classical music. My draw to Arabic classical music was the taqsim/improvisation which has similarities to Armenian liturgical music. This can be heard particularly in tracks 1, 6, and 7. The long-sustained notes with ornamentation, non-metered phrases, ornamentation, spacious music with nuanced silences, and the integration of micro-tonality” speak to some of these stylistic overlaps that enter our music.”

Apart from using incorporating Armenian Middle Eastern rhythms and influences in her actual music, Thea’s bio also includes co-founding the Armenian Film Festival in New York City with Anahid Kassabian (2002) and co-producing the San Francisco Armenian Film Festival in 2004 and 2006 with Kassabian and Hrayr Eulmesekian. She has also presented at the Center for Contemporary Experimental Art in Yerevan, as well as other important international venues such as the Alternative Museum in New York City, Galleria Mazzoli in Berlin, and the Center for New Music in San Francisco.

Santomieri is equally polyvalent: apart from his work as a guitarist and a member off several well-regarded groups, he performs regularly as a spoken word artist who finds inspiration in everything from music and dreams, to word games and misheard/misread items from radio and newspapers.

In 2013 he premiered his composition “Facebook, the Opera” in San Francisco.

Prior to their present commission the Santomieri-Farhadian Duo has performed together throughout the Bay Area at venues such as the Meridian Gallery, the Garden of Memory Solstice Concert at the Chapel of the Chimes in Oakland, and the Berkeley Arts Festival.

“A New Sense of Place” highlights many of the duo’s musical strengths in a particularly fluid manner, for lack of a better term. It would be hard to describe the wealth of sounds and tonalities – and the corresponding emotions that the listener undergoes listening to the piece’s nine tracks for the first time. These include classical violin excerpts with plangent, romantic strings juxtaposed with modernist atonalities, and guitar plucks; Middle Eastern and Armenian folk elements come through as well, but I also found myself thinking of experimental modernists such as John Cage and Nam June Paik; and in some places even Franz Schubert! The two composers got together and improvised certain tracks, that they developed their ideas together in rehearsal, and then recorded in the studio, together or and individually – they kept certain tracks that they preferred, and then integrated the selected recordings into the final 9 pieces.

SoundMixing engineer David Kwan then helped worked with the duo to spatialize the sound in his studio on speakers that mimicked the 8 speakers that the duo eventually used. Introspective at times, explosive at others, there is even a eulogy included in memory of composer Hardy Fox who co-founded the San Francisco Music group, The Residents. The work’s different rhythms and genres should be a pleasant musical adventure for passers-by, who have perhaps grown accustomed to the sound of cars or metros rushing by when they cross the downtown BART Plaza.

And the duo are especially pleased to see their work exhibited during the COVID 19 pandemic: “It’s exciting to have this piece open during this time while museums and theaters elsewhere are shuttered, the arts in Berkeley remain active...it’s our hope that people moving through the plaza will be pleasantly roused from their thoughts, conversations, or devices, by the unexpected gift of music.”

And a beautiful gift it is, indeed.

Listen to an excerpt from “A New Sense of Place” on Soundcloud.

Visit the Sound Installation at: Downtown Berkeley BART, 2160 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA 94704, USA

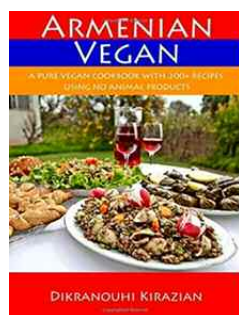
Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian

Armenian Vegan’s Spinach Borag with Fillo (Spanakhov borag)

Armenian Vegan’s Spinach Borag with Fillo (Spanakhov borag) “Borag (also spelled beerek, boreg or börek) is a popular staple in many Armenian and Middle Eastern households. Every Armenian family, bakery, and ladies church guild has its own recipe for these savory pastries that is often passed down for generations. “This egg-free, dairy-free Vegan Spinach Borag with Fillo is as pleasing as the traditional cheese version we all grew up with, but with a healthy twist,” says Dikranouhi “Dee” Kirazian, author of the essential Armenian Vegan cookbook that she published in 2013. “The number of people around the world cutting



down on meat and dairy, or reducing these foods from their diets entirely, has been rising over the last decade, and this recipe offers a delicious option,” she adds.

Borag is thought to have originated in Central Asia, and is found in the cuisines of many countries, from Greece to parts of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It is considered the Armenian version of the Greek tiropita and spanakopita, and is also part of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewish traditions. Borag is made from thin, flaky dough known as fillo (phyllo) or yufka. It is often made in a large pan and cut into portions after baking (like this version), but many people and cultures make individual pastries, too. In Armenia, borag usually consists of dough folded into triangles and stuffed with cheese, spinach or ground beef, and the filling is typically spiced. A popular combination is spinach, feta, parsley, cottage cheese (or pot cheese), and a splash of anise-flavored liquor (such as raki).

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1lb. package fillo dough pastry (28 sheets in total)
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil or olive oil for brushing the fillo and the baking dish
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil or olive oil for sautéing the vegetables
- 1 cup tofu, crumbled
- 2 cups chopped fresh mushrooms
- 1 large onion, chopped (about a cup)
- 1 lb. fresh spinach, washed, roughly chopped
- 2-3 tablespoons pine nuts
- 2-3 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- Black and red pepper or paprika
- Sesame seeds or poppy seeds for topping, if desired



PREPARATION: For the lamb:

Note: If frozen, 2-3 hours before you begin, take your fillo dough out of the freezer and let it defrost. You can also let it defrost overnight in the refrigerator, if you prefer.

Preparing the filling: Chop onions and mushrooms, put in a large frying pan, and sauté for several minutes until onions are softened. Add 1/4 cup vegetable (or olive) oil, stir, and toss for a few minutes until onions and mushrooms are fully cooked.

Next, add the chopped spinach and sauté for several minutes until spinach is limp. Add crumbled tofu, pine nuts, parsley, soy sauce, and all spices, and stir frequently.

In another bowl, dissolve 2 tablespoons of cornstarch in 2 tablespoons of cold water. Add this to the pot mixture and stir for several minutes until the mixture becomes creamy and sticky. Shut off heat and allow to cool.

Preparing the borag: Take a 13 x 9 x 2-inch baking dish, brush it with vegetable (or olive) oil, and set it aside. Open the fillo dough on a flat surface. Take half the package of fillo first, and cover the other half because fillo dough dries very quickly. Placing 1 layer at a time in the tray, brush it all over with vegetable (or olive) oil, and continue layering and brushing until the half package is finished, layered, and brushed. Take the cooled filling and spread it all around the top of the fillo dough, covering the entire surface.

Next, take the other half of fillo dough, open it up, and start placing each sheet on top of the filling, brushing each sheet as it is placed on the filling. Continue until fillo dough is finished. Cut borag into 2 1/2 x 2 1/2-inch squares.

When finished, bake in a 350° pre-heated oven until golden brown for about an hour. Remove from oven and cool for 15-20 minutes before serving.

Makes 15 squares. Serve hot and use as an appetizer or as a main dish.

For this and other recipes, go to:
<https://armenianvegan.com/recipes>

Armenian Vegan is available at Abril Books at:
<http://www.abrilbooks.com/armenian-vegan.html>



ARTS & LIVING

Gayane Georgyan: 'To Work, Create, Create for the Sake of the Motherland'

GEORGYAN, from page 12

to God and my parents that I was born an Armenian." And my belonging to my centuries-old culture could not leave me indifferent and ignore the pain and those weak points that we, unfortunately, have. I will frankly say that it was Artsakh and especially the Dadivank Monastery that caused me to have the idea of establishing a fund and two important projects - "Armenian Values in World Heritage" and the unprecedented "Armenian Frescoes an Integral Part of the World Heritage." This all happened from the period when I set out to find images of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in Armenian churches. Why exactly was Saint Nicholas interested? This is a Christian saint revered all over the world, but I noticed the absence of his image in our churches. As the first Christian country in the world, I was sure that there must be an iconic portrait of this saint somewhere, and it would be something unique. And so it happened. My long search led me to the Dadivank monastery, where Saint Nicholas the Miracleworker appeared in the form of an 800-year-old fresco. The first thing I said after the shock of what I saw was: "The world must learn about this!" I decided that this would be a book.

And on your initiative, in 2018 the illustrated book Dadivank. Revived Miracle was published, a unique work that comprehensively represents this monument of Armenian architecture and the image of the All-Christian Saint Nicholas the Miracleworker in Armenia. It is interesting that in the 13th century, Princess Arzu built the Dadivank cathedral church, and in the 21st century, another Armenian woman spares no effort to make it known all over the world... Already at that time you were raising the alarm about the endangered state of this masterpiece of architecture.

You are right, this book is unique. It tells the true story of the creation and prosperity of one of the best monuments of Armenian architecture, about finding Christian relics of world significance and of course, about the unique frescoes of the monastery with the image of St. Nicholas the Miracleworker! But I could just go there as a simple tourist, light a candle, pray and leave, but ... the desire to do something more is probably motivated by my heredity. My childhood, the formation of personality and consciousness passed under the talk about the 1915 Genocide, about pain for the lost territories, about pain for the killed relatives and loved ones. My family is patriotic, it went through all the stages of a hundred-year history - my great-grandfather was a warrior, who fought with Andranik, a warrior was also my grandfather, who fought against fascism and had the title of Chevalier of the Order of the Red Star. All my life my ancestors and parents, living in a foreign land, defended their right to be Armenians. And this tradition of being an Armenian, the tradition of preserving my culture and fighting for it, could not leave

me indifferent. I knew that sooner or later this mission would come true anyway. When I discovered St. Nicholas, I had the feeling of a man walking through a dense forest or jungle and suddenly finding a beautiful temple unknown to mankind. Dadivank for me was just such a miracle, which was somewhere in the deep mountains, so calm, sort of forgotten at that moment. The fact of finding a common Christian saint in this monastery is still a mystery that I want to solve. It was later that I learned that this ancient monastery was founded in the first century, according to legend, on the site of the death of Dadi, a disciple of the Apostle Thaddeus. Dadivank Monastery was one of the centers of Armenian literature and book-copying. There was a school, four hundred Armenian monks lived and there was the first monastery in the world with a women's abbey. This fact is even more striking! Women - disadvantaged, humiliated or widows in difficult situations - found their shelter in this monastery. I consider Dadivank in world history to be one of the first, which laid the foundation for feminism. Now everyone is talking about women's rights, but in Artsakh, already in those days, women's rights were respected.

Thanks to your efforts in March 2019, children from Artsakh presented the republic for the first time at the international festival.

When I got acquainted through the work on my book with the wonderful country of Artsakh and with the magnificent talented Armenian people, my thoughts haunted, and I jokingly said: "But what can I do with you, you are all so talented!" Really a very noble, courageous people. At that time, I was working on the idea of creating a children's festival in Artsakh. My good friend Tatyana Shchepatova, the founder of the FaSiLa Moscow Festival, a singing competition in foreign languages, responded to my idea. And as a result, a very interesting format was chosen for Stepanakert - FaSiLa: World Children Against War, a singing competition in foreign languages. Why was it conceived in such an international format (songs were sung in only five foreign languages), was because it was supposed to additionally attract the attention of the world public to Artsakh. The winner of the festival was to perform at one of the best and largest venues in Moscow. Not to mention that in the thirty years of Republic of Artsakh's existence, for the first time on the Moscow stage, for the first time on the international stage, it was at this festival that children from Artsakh performed on behalf of their country - it was an important diplomatic move. The festival will be continued, we will do this in 2021 and nothing will stop us. I always say that all the projects of the Foundation related to Artsakh and the preservation of the Armenian world cultural Christian heritage will continue.

Everyone, of course, is interested in the funding of your projects.

All the funds are sitting in front of you, dear friend (laughing). Funds, of course, are the most painful topic, there are no sponsors, we survive at the expense of our personal savings and the help of friends. I have no idea how long this will be continued. I do my job, launch it into the universe, turn it into energy, and then let everyone decide. I have always loved these words: the way I treat people is my karma, and what they answer me - is theirs.

But nevertheless, I hope you get generous sponsors for your projects.

I always say that I will not work for anyone and I do not like working with intrigues. But I am always open for good people, for partners, for people who are idealistically committed to this work, like me. That is, if someone looks for some kind of benefit for themselves, personal ambitions in these projects, they will not find it. If you are dealing with sacred things, with holy concepts, you must serve them unrequitedly, free of charge.

Gayane, I cannot help but notice that seven years ago, when we started to communicate, our communication was only in Russian, and now you speak fluent Armenian.

This requires two important components. First of all - to have a desire to master the language and ambition to overcome difficulties. The second is to surround yourself with the right literate people and absorb from them like a sponge. All these years I was energized and studied, eagerly absorbing knowledge from the best artists, musicians, public figures. I have always said that one of the first people I met in Yerevan, especially in the field of social and cultural life, was you! Interesting people opened up for me through you, I listened to everyone and eventually listened to them. Now, thank God, I express myself in my native language. You have to talk, read all the time, the main thing is not to be ashamed of expressing yourself. If I don't know a word, I'm not ashamed to ask how it will be in Armenian. I am never ashamed to ask about something that I do not know.

What is the last book you read in Armenian?

My publications (laughing). I can hardly read them, as well as the materials of the Foundation, which are in Armenian. By the way, it really pulled me up. And so I always knew how to read and write in Armenian. At the age of 12, I took the alphabet of the Armenian language for the first time and started just learning. At the age of 13 I already knew by heart the poems of our poets, for example, "Little Lake" by Bedros Tourian ...

After the last national calamity, how do you imagine the continuation of your activities?

People called me and asked me to share my optimism and energy with them. I am not going to give up, I always say that I am not going to shed tears, suffer and grieve for the sake of the Motherland. I even forbid people from thinking that. One hundred years is too much for suffering, and now I force everyone, even order them to work, create for the sake of the Motherland, be optimistic, eventually learn to respect each other, help each other freely, learn to rejoice in each other's successes. And if you see that one person has a good idea, something useful for the Motherland, help him. Three years ago, I knocked on all doors: governments, international organizations, at all levels, whether in Armenia or abroad. I raised the relevance of what is happening now. The preface to the projects and mission of the Foundation today sounds like a prediction. And then no one even understood what I was talking about. Now I find it funny that all and sundry, regardless of their quality or intelligence, dedication or awareness of the importance of this matter, for the sake of their own PR, raise the topic of preserving cultural heritage. Where have you been before, gentlemen?

And how will surprise us in the near future?

This is again a book, an unprecedented encyclopedia for Armenology - Fortresses of Artsakh by historian and researcher Slava Sargsyan. This is the result of thirty years of work, consists of about 1000 pages, which show more than 100 fortresses of Artsakh that have survived to this day. So far - in Armenian...

Calendar

MASSACHUSETTS

JANUARY 27 - 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. To register, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org Haley House Bakery Café Signature Dishes Chefs Brie Garner and Alima Mbabzi

FEBRUARY 10 - 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. To register, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org French Cuisine Chef Tyler Stout Executive Chef, Troquet on South

FEBRUARY 27 - UNDER THE SNOW

MOON A virtual program of Friends of Armenian Heritage Park to Meet & Greet, Virtually Walk the Labyrinth. Share Wishes for The Wishing Tree. Enjoy Musical Performances. at 4pm. TO REGISTER VIA ZOOM, please email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org with February 27 in Subject line

MARCH 3 - Labyrinth Walking: The

Power & Health Benefits. A virtual program of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at Brigham & Women's Hospital/Harvard Medical School and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park in collaboration with Armenian-American Medical Association, Boston Public Health Commission, City of Boston Age Friendly and The Greenway Conservancy. at 5pm. Welcome: Maura Koutoujian, PCC, CPHWC Senior Professional Coach, Mass General Brigham/Brigham and Women's Hospital; Fellow, Institute of Coaching, McLean/Harvard Medical School; In Conversation: Darshan Hemendra Mehta, MD, MPH, Medical Director and Director of Medical Education, Benson-Henry Institute; Associate Director, Osher Center for Integrative Medicine, Brigham & Women's Hospital/Harvard Medical School; Assistant Professor in Medicine, Harvard Medical School, with Armineh Mirzabegian, MD Internist, Reliant Medical Group, part of OptumCare; UMASS Medical School, To register, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org with March 3 in Subject line

MARCH 24 - 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. To register, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org Seafood! Executive Chef Kathy Sidell Owner, Sidell Hospitality, Saltie Girl, Met Back Bay, Stephanie's on Newbury

RHODE ISLAND

The Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church of Providence hosts the following Armenian Cultural Hour programs virtually every Friday at 7:30 pm. For information on how to watch or participate in the programs, contact the church office or check the church's Facebook Watch page.

January 22 - "My Songs for You", concert presented by renowned composer Aram Satian, President of the Composers Union of Armenia

January 29 -Levon Hovsepian & Armen Ghazharyan in Concert "From Classics to New Days"

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02888**

Tel. 401 461-6114 • Fax 401 461-6112

e-mail: headasa@aol.com

**Deadline for returning completed Applications:
March 15, 2021**



COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

Pashinyan's Mission Impossible To Moscow

By Edmond Y. Azadian

There is a tug-of-war between Moscow and Ankara, and Armenia is caught in-between the two.

The 44-day war was necessary for Russia to return its military force back in Azerbaijan. It was also necessary for Turkey to deliver a victory to Azerbaijan, in return, to buy its sovereignty.

For a long time, Turkey had been looking for just such an opportunity. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is more elated with the victory than President Ilham Aliyev because a historic Turkish dream is coming true. That is why Mr. Erdogan evoked Enver Pasha, who had tried to build a Turanic empire a century ago, during the victory parade. Now, one impediment on that road map has been removed with the declaration signed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, President Vladimir Putin and Aliyev on November 9, 2020, the centerpiece of which was the building of a road between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan through the southern tip of Armenia.



The declaration has not yet been fully interpreted. The Turkish and Azerbaijani sides claim the roadway should operate under extra-territorial rights, supervised by Russian peacekeeping forces, while Armenia insists on its normal use when all transportation routes are unblocked for all parties.

Turkey controls Azerbaijan militarily and politically, which in the long term will turn into economic control. Ankara has been quick to extend Azerbaijani oil and gas lines to the Balkan countries and the rest of Europe, gradually weaning those countries from dependency on Russian energy.

Therefore, Moscow, in addition to its military adventure in Azerbaijan, has been trying to entice the latter to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) bloc. Technically, Armenia can veto Azerbaijan's membership to that economic club, but under the current circumstances, when Armenia has become the underdog, Russia will not give a hoot for Yerevan's opinion.

That treatment was even manifested in the protocols accorded to Aliyev and Pashinyan when they arrived in Moscow for the tripartite summit on January 11.

There was tremendous apprehension in Armenia about Pashinyan's trip to Moscow to meet with Putin and Aliyev, because a justified fear existed that Pashinyan might be forced to sign another agreement without any consultation, leading Armenia to experience even deeper problems, in addition to the ones already inflicted by the November 9 declaration.

But as it turned out, the meeting was for setting up a mechanism to implement the terms of the November 9 declaration.

Welcoming his two guests, President Putin expressed his satisfaction that the principles of the November 9 declaration were being implemented under the supervision of Russian peacekeeping forces and that 48,000 displaced Armenian refugees from Karabakh had returned to their homes.

To put it in perspective, before the war, the number of Armenians living in Karabakh was at 150,000.

And investments were being made by Russia to return life to normal in the amputated enclave, Putin added.

The meeting agreed to work towards "unblocking all economic and transportation routes in the region."

Toward that end, the parties agreed to form a Working Group comprising the vice prime ministers of the three countries.

A timetable was set for the Working Group to hold its first meeting on January 30, and to submit a plan for the "implementation and security of international traffic carried out by the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia" by March 1.

A protocol for the implementation of the program may have been signed in Moscow, but that in and of itself does not mean much, since basic problems remain unresolved.

Before his Moscow trip, President Aliyev made some provocative statements, on the occasion of the visit of Armenia's Foreign Minister Ara Aivazyan to Karabakh. Aliyev has requested that all Karabakh visitors first seek Baku's permission. He has even threatened to kill any visiting politicians by drones.

Russian peacekeepers, and for that matter, Moscow, have kept silent.

If the roads will be unblocked and supervised by Russian peacekeepers, why the threat? Aliyev has announced that very soon, roads will be constructed through Armenia to begin traffic between mainland Azerbaijan and the exclave of Nakhichevan.

It has also been reported that Turkish aircraft are now entering Armenian airspace to fly from Turkey to Azerbaijan. If point 8 of the declaration has not been implemented yet, why is there this unilateral rush to take advantage of its provisions?

Following the signing of this new document on January 11, the three leaders have made contradictory declarations.

Putin has expressed his satisfaction that both sides have been honoring the terms of the declaration. Aliyev has announced that the problem is behind us and it is time to open up the roads and develop businesses in the region. Pashinyan has complained that the issue of prisoners of war has not yet been resolved, making it impossible to implement the other terms.

Indeed, those roads cannot be built over the ashes of Armenian martyrs.

As for the Armenian prisoners of war, Azerbaijan is holding them as hostages and is hampering the work of finding and identifying the dead soldiers to cause more pain for the Armenian public, with the full knowledge that not releasing the POWs will cause further destabilization in Armenia.

He has also started to characterize the Armenian POWs as terrorists to find an excuse – or justification – for not releasing them, or worse.

The speeches following the signing of the document sounded like three deaf people had spoken to each other.

Russia believes that it has created facts on the ground and that is final. President Putin announced time and again that the status of Karabakh will be determined at a future date. Pashinyan reminded those present of the status issue but there was no response from the other parties.

If one of the principles of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has been met, namely the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, then it is time to address the other issue, that of Karabakh's self-determination. The future is now.

Putin has been offering some lip service to the Minsk Group, believing that the co-chairs will go along his actions. It does not seem that it will happen.

President Emmanuel Macron of France has been pursuing the issue on behalf of the other two co-chairs, as the US is caught in its own domestic debacle.

Before the Moscow meeting, Mr. Macron had taken the initiative to call Putin and Pashinyan, stating that the political aspects of the Karabakh problem have to be addressed.

A public announcement from the Russian Foreign Ministry states that Macron and Putin have discussed the humanitarian aspects of the war, with no mention of the political aspects.

Talking to President Putin, Macron stated that in addition to the humanitarian issues, the Minsk Group should also address the political solution of the problem and reminded him of the resolutions passed by both chambers of the French legislature recognizing Karabakh's independence. He also made clear that under no condition would unilateral solutions be accepted by the other co-chairs of the Minsk group.

Now that France has forcefully taken a pro-Armenian position, see MISSION, page 17

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COMMENTARY

Armenia's Defeat in Laser War Is a Shocking Paradox, But It Can Be Reversed

By Dr. Arshavir Gundjian C.M.

THE YEAR 2020 ended, leaving the Armenian world still recovering from the shock of an unprecedented humiliating defeat at the hands of the aggressive forces of a Turkish-Azerbaijani coalition. The war started suddenly on September 27; however, it was hardly unexpected, considering the highly publicized Azerbaijani-Turkish military joint manoeuvres preceding it at the very borders of Armenia and Artsakh. Armenia should not also have been surprised by the advanced modern weapons technology that the aggressors successfully used, which was a primary reason for painful human and territorial losses.

The purpose of this article is to focus on one very fundamental strategic failure that has emerged from this tragic war. The latter has multiple scientific, technical, economic, and military implications. Armenia better recognize and confront that issue squarely in order to make it a central component of its post-recovery strategic planning. Armenia must make the development of highly sophisticated modern military weaponry, based on advanced technologies, the centerpiece of its next five-year plan of industrial activity.

The adoption of such a plan is perfectly realistic. Actually, it would be based on a return to the decades-old unique wealth of knowhow and training that Armenia acquired in the highly sophisticated fields of physical sciences and their industrial applications, while it was the tiniest republic of the Soviet Union. At that time, it had become one of the most active centers of Soviet scientific research and development. It was said that Armenia provided up to half of the Soviet Union's high tech military needs...and that was only thirty years back, just before independence in 1991.

By adopting resolutely such a policy, Armenia could very soon not only become the master of its own border security, but also an internationally sought-after supplier of highly profitable sophisticated modern weaponry, which would contribute conveniently to its economic prosperity.

It is deplorable that after the 1991 independence, Armenia's successive regimes have all failed to recognize how strategically precious was their inherited institutionalized high-calibre system of education, research, training, and knowhow in the field of physical sciences, applicable directly to combat war weaponry. In fact, unfortunately, since 1991 and especially in the last twenty-five years, all arts and sciences have lost in Armenia their privileged status of top-level importance which they had attained during the Soviet period.

Just imagine if Armenia's national strategic planning of the last few decades had included the continued use of the full potential of that wealth. Then during this last September war, it would have been Armenian high-power laser canons deployed along the borders of Artsakh and Armenia that would be literally pulverizing helpless Turkish or Azerbaijani drones venturing into Armenian air space. Also, quite contrary to what happened, the Armenian army's stealth drones, equipped with high-precision smart laser ranging and targeting devices, would have been the ones targeting the enemy forces across our borders and then "kamikaze-ing" and smashing them in their own bases, thus raising havoc in the Turkish aggressor ranks, instead of all that panic which happened within the ranks of our own heroic Armenian army.

Such a scenery would not have been fiction. It could have been definitely real, had our successive regimes in Armenia properly monitored their neighbours' military appetite and activities and consequently appreciated the seriousness of the increasing existential threat they were facing during the past several years.

Ironically, one lethal tool Turkey and Azerbaijan were equipping themselves with during those years was based on combat laser technologies. This was a component of the trove of advanced technologies and expertise that Armenia was privy to by 1991, well ahead of these two neighboring states. The paradox is that it was instead Turkish war-grade laser equipment, including laser-equipped drones, that brought our Armenian fighters to their knees.

The advent of the laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation) is one of the two most fundamental and sensational scientific developments of the twentieth century, the other being the invention of atomic energy. They both rely on novel and fascinating basic phenomena of physics which were revealed by Albert Einstein, way back at the beginning of the last century, but the implementation of which in a form usable by human society occurred only in the middle of that century.

The laser is essentially a source of very pure, "highly organized" high frequency electromagnetic radiation, which we more simply call "light." The difference between laser light and ordinary light that comes from the sun or from any mundane everyday environmental light sources consists in the fact that in the latter, the individual tiny elements that contribute to the total light vibrate in a totally random and asynchronous manner, whereas, on the contrary, within a laser source, those vibrations are synchronous. They add perfectly their intensity to each other to thus result in what is a blindingly bright, and when need be, a high power lethal and destructive beam of "coherent radiation."

This rather simple sounding special quality of laser light leads to an incredibly vast range of applications which belonged previously to fiction. By now the innumerable variety of different types of lasers can range in size from a smallest device of a fraction of a millimeter to the largest ones that can have few kilometers length. In turn, the applications made possible range from the sharpest and finest high precision eye surgery tools to the highest capacity information-carrying beams of laser light travelling within optical fibers, lying at the bottom of oceans. They also include the most brutal multikilowatt power laser beams that are produced by laser canons, mounted on an armored vehicle which can easily chase and literally burn and pulverize flying drones as well as standing still military targets in the battlefield.

The first practical lasers came to existence in the 1960s, almost simultaneously in the West and in the East. Theodore Maiman and Charles Townes in the West, and Mikhail Prokhorov and Nikolay Basov in the Soviet Union, are considered to be the fathers of the laser.

We can be proud as Armenians to note that Armenia's scientists were among the first in the world to enter this new and fascinating field, thanks to their being an integral part of the Soviet scientific world community.

Mikhail Ter-Mikaelian is credited to have developed the first Soviet commercial laser way back in 1965. Actually, soon in 1967 he has established Armenia's well-known Institute for Physical Research (IPR) in Ashtarak, 30 kms. from Yerevan. Over the years, IPR and other centers and teams of researchers made Armenia a cradle of state-of-the-art laser developments that found applications not only in Armenia but also in the Soviet Union and in the world.

Both in the West and in the East, lasers became part of a vast field of diverse activities, be it in research or in diverse medical and industrial applications. Inevitably, militaries focused their attention very quickly on the destructive potential of laser gun applications, which so far had been merely the subject of the imagination of cartoonists and science fiction writers.

Needless to say, while all this was happening in the world, and until very recently, Turks and Azerbaijanis did not even exist on the world map of laser research.

Sadly, in Armenia after the independence of 1991, the National Academy of Sciences, and many specialized institutes, were no longer on the list of the country's favorites. Since then, and to this date, they have had to struggle for their survival by searching for grants from outside sources, by developing contacts and connections with foreign companies and institutions. Thus, in the absence of a well-focused national science strategy, while some good quality local scientific activity still exists in Armenia, it has hardly any strategic focus. Many of Armenia's top talents consequently gradually left Armenia to become highly regarded and sought for human resources, mainly in Western academic and industrial circles. Personally, and professionally, as I was a dedicated disciple of the world of lasers and their applications, during my post-1991 initially frequent visits to Armenia in the context of issues related to the Armenian world, I witnessed with pain this situation. However, at that time, Armenia's leaders were mostly concerned with dismantling the traces of the Soviet regime.

In the meantime, and especially since around 2010, ironically right next door, Armenia's archenemy neighbor Turkey, was busy catching up. Indeed, Turkey's belligerent president Ragıp Erdogan had decided to fill its war chest with military equipment of the most advanced technology. Erdogan had quickly realized the enormous tactical advantages provided in modern warfare by combat drones equipped with sophisticated precision laser targeting equipment, as well as by optically guided high power laser canons, mounted on straight-forward ground armored vehicles.

Of course, Erdogan would not bother to waste time with any fascinating scientific research work. He simply focused on buying the knowhow, and when need be the human resources, to build local weapons manufacturing facilities. He focused on laser-equipped drones and high-power laser

canons. Whatever he was short of, he would buy from foreign countries only too willing to sell quite profitably such equipment to a good paying customer.

By now Turkey manufactures its Bayraktar TB2 infamous combat drones at the Baykar company, owned by Erdogan's son-in-law. Such drones are equipped with precision laser imaging and targeting systems bought from the Canadian L3 Harris Wescam company. Turkey's anti-drone, armored car-mounted laser canons are produced by the Turkish military weapons manufacturing company Aselsan. And surely enough, it was all this equipment that was used by the Turkish-Azerbaijani coalition in the Artsakh war.

It is important to note that as laser equipment manufacturing is not a capital-intensive industry, Turkey's budget in this area is only in the range of \$450 million dollars. However, Erdogan had rightfully noted that with such a small expenditure, the manufactured weapons are capable of causing, inexpensively, multiple billion dollars' worth of damage to the enemy!

Following the war, Armenians have now many lessons to learn in quite a hard way. However, the one superseding issue is that of physical survival. This requires the complete restructuring of its defense system. During the presumed lull of five years provided by the notorious declaration of ceasefire, Armenia's top priority must be to build a first-class army, equipped with first-class, state-of-the-art war military hardware. The present article points to an evident path to follow in that respect.

On the one hand, speaking politically, it is now irresponsible and unpardonable to still continue to waste time in the streets on fruitless and unjustified actions of political and civil unrest. Since the current government has lost all its credibility and effectiveness, a transitional government of national reconciliation and unity must be set up, preferably with the cooperation of the current authorities. The first order of business of the latter must be to prepare for anticipated elections in order to elect within less than a year a new parliament and a new government that does not carry the stigma of capitulation. On the other hand, and simultaneously with the above, at the very least, a separate national emergency special committee of economic and technical experts must be formed to work out a five-year economic and military reconstruction plan. The creation of a modern, sophisticated, state-of-the-art military-industrial complex must be the centerpiece of its plan.

Armenia still has the necessary top-level intellectual resources, knowhow, and infrastructure which is one valuable and essential component to successfully implementing such a plan. As for the other vital component, which is that of financing, considering the specific type of the projected products, the necessary budget would be in the accessible range of few hundred million dollars, if this effort is centered specifically on and around the drone and laser industry.

Products made in Armenia in this field promise to be competitive and to comply with the highest international standards of quality. They will surely attract rapidly the interest of international investors. In any case, provided an honest and serious program is put together under a credible leadership such as one that can be provided by the current president, Armen Sarkissian, based on the latest Artsakh war experience, financing of this magnitude dedicating to launch a nation-saving effort, can realistically be obtained even just from the Armenian sources of the Russian and international diaspora. This can very well be on the basis of long-term investing principles.

We must realize that currently the very existence of Armenia's statehood is in serious danger. Once more, we have to pull our forces together. Armenians in Armenia must sober up, and those in the diaspora must do their best to help Armenia return to a path of survival and prosperity by creating the smartest, most efficient, and most lethal laser combat industrial complex - let's baptize it as the Sassountsi Davit complex.

From that point on, any enemy, be it Turks, Azerbaijanis or even any new ones, will think very hard before crossing our borders. Actually, they may even instead line up to try to buy these Armenian-made state-of-the-art weapons!

Dr Arshavir Gundjian is a prominent Canadian-Armenian scientist and community leader. He has had a prolific career as a researcher and inventor, and now is a retired professor of McGill University's Department of Electrical Engineering. Some of his publications are in the field of high-power laser detection and damage to materials. He has been for many years the chairman of the Laser Equipment Canadian Subcommittee of the International Electrotechnical Commission. He also holds more than twenty patents in the field of products and documents security. Simultaneously with his active professional life, Dr. Gundjian has been an active leader in the Armenian diaspora. He has been Ramgavar party Central Committee chairman for many years, especially during the period coinciding with the 1991 independence of Armenia. He is a founder and now vice president of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada. He is an AGBU Central Board emeritus member. He also is the honorary chairman of the Canadian Armenian Apostolic Church Diocesan Council. The Governor General of Canada appointed Dr. Gundjian in December 2019, a Member of the Order of Canada, the highest civilian honor in Canada, recognizing the exceptional contributions of its citizens.



COMMENTARY

Towards the 'Fourth Republic' – Armenian President Pens Commentary

Armenian President Armen Sarkissian penned a fresh article about the inevitability of building a substantive state and the ways to restore the country's strength.

It is reproduced in full below:

The opportunity of restoring the Armenian statehood was the dream of our people for the last few centuries. It stemmed not only from the need for having a national home to preserve own culture, identity, and history, but also from the desire to be able to master our own destiny. This had been the mission of our ancestors, who practically did the impossible: in the absence of statehood, subject to cruel and bloody trials of history, they preserved the ground, the sense of being Armenians - Armenia- and further enriched the Armenian civilization.

Our ancestors left a great heritage and hoped that we would be able to pass it to future generations in a completely different qualitative form.

The history of international relations shows that small countries often fall victim to the interests of big powers, as it happened with Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Those nations managed to build high-quality systemic states, were able to thoughtfully analyze the causes of their failures and sufferings, and work to correct their own mistakes, work out clear visions and development programs. Such states have the capability to meet their citizens' internal needs and protect them from external threats. They can also create conditions which allow to compete with regional and even big powers, merge their own interests with theirs or even become a true and valuable ally.

Such examples exist and they prove that through the right policy, diplomacy and governance even the nations, which do not possess ample natural resources, can start as soldiers but rise to kings.

Today, we are experiencing yet another moment of all-national psychological depression. Whether we will be able to overcome it and establish new principles to build our future depend on us only.

Current failures are nothing but the result of once unresolved, deep-rooted problems, which were accumulating over the last three decades. We all, from top to bottom, apparently have no desire to take a substantive responsibility for our own destiny. And it is not about the lack of criticism, but rather its formal nature. Just like before, we are looking for special footholds and "rescuers" - individuals or countries who will be able to take us in the right direction which will ultimately lead to prosperity and security. In this frantic search, we completely forget that this path is right in front of our eyes and is called the independent Republic of Armenia.

Our millennial dream came true: we have our home, at last, our flag, our coat-of-arms, and our anthem. Finally, we are able to be Armenians in the Armenian state recognized by the international community. For the first time in the course of centuries, Armenians did not lose their territories, but regained historical territories in the 1990s during the war imposed by the adversary many times superior to us its resources. We managed to do that because dreams and dedication were our driving forces. They were filled with the insane energy; every Armenian particle anywhere in the world was maximally charged to achieve the national goal.

Subsequent events showed how much we underestimated that gift of history in reality. Instead of building a substantive state and

national construction projects, based on the successful examples of small countries and people, we mostly engaged ourselves with imitating activities. The basis of internal immunity, i.e. foundations of the effective system of public administration based on the actual division of responsibilities between the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches, was not laid. It is this model that shapes any society and educates its citizens, which is the core value of any government. Such a citizen can appreciate the significance of being able to vote and being elected. And most importantly, such a citizen will be responsible for his or her own choice, the surroundings, and the country. The absence of such a system is an unacceptable luxury for the countries in difficult and geographically limited conditions.

For the past years, we have not conducted a pan-Armenian inventory to understand what is, for example, the real resource base for elaborating long-term development models for the economy, high technology, military and industrial complex, science, education, and healthcare. That is why we did not have vitally important and efficient strategic concepts of defense policy and security of demography, information, and food. After gaining independence, we did not fill it with specific content.

There is no need to go far for examples. In 1994, we liberated Artsakh, but up to September 27, 2020 we did not have a clear vision of the political future of Artsakh. There were only tactics of preventing a new war through diplomacy, doomed from the very beginning. For twenty years, our adversary asserted that it would not allow a second Armenian state in the Caucasus, acquired modern weapons, engaged in active international lobbying, and established networks of influence around the world for one purpose. For what? The question is rhetorical because the answer is very clear.

We lost at the moment we believed the mission to return Artsakh was over. We did not pay enough attention to the real guarantees of Artsakh's development and strengthening: the population growth (population of Artsakh remained the same for the past three decades), and the improvement of the art of war, armament renewal and equipment. We got relaxed and continued to live as if there were no serious challenges or threats. Of course, the victory in the Artsakh war became an integral part of our identity, and it is obvious that the most terrible consequence today is the crisis of self-perception. The Armenians woke up, lived, worked, and went to bed with the feeling that they were part of a victorious nation. Now, in a search of the answer, they ask, "Who am I now?"

We lost the information war, both externally and internally. For years, we indulged in wishful thinking. These lies had crept everywhere, threatening the national security. In that imaginary world, we supposedly had an organized state, a modern economy and science, a strong army, a democratic society, and free press, but in reality the picture was completely different. We had only managed to deceive ourselves, and thus had already signed the defeat statement.

To throw off all this, we need immense efforts, willpower, and courage to look into the eyes of the bitter reality.

We are in a difficult situation, but we cannot allow Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora feel defeated.

There is a golden rule in politics for all times: never say never. Yes, we have lost today on the

battlefield and on the external front, for which the current government must be held accountable. However, other challenges await us, both domestically and internationally. To preserve our statehood and to take it to a fundamentally new level, we must put our emotions aside and start the difficult, and unpleasant, but essential work on ourselves, giving it first priority.

Today, we (and first and foremost, the government that has taken responsibility for its own citizens and Armenians of the world) must acknowledge the existence of a deep political, economic, social and psychological crisis. Citizens have every moral right to demand concrete, timely and meaningful answers on the ways-out of the crisis from the members of the National Assembly elected by them, the government and prime minister.

The President of the Republic also has his role and responsibility.

The division of the society can lead to catastrophic consequences; thus, the country and the people need treatment. The only logical and civilized prescription is off-year elections in reasonable terms with necessary amendments to the Electoral Code and Constitution, which will allow to start the real process of state building from scratch. Until then, a government of national accord must be formed with the help of the institute of the president, one of the legitimate, balanced and impartial branches of power. I see the main mission of that government in achieving three goals.

Firstly, the elimination of immediate consequences of the war: return of all prisoners, hostages and displaced persons, proper treatment and care of the injured, repair of destroyed homes and apartments, provision of normal living conditions, and accommodation for the homeless.

Secondly, creation and implementation of a roadmap to bring the country out of the political and economic crisis.

Thirdly, the reform of the normative and legal framework, providing the necessary conditions for the early elections in reasonable terms, i.e., reforms of the Electoral Code, the law on political parties and, of course, the Constitution. Proceeding from this, the government should be composed of professionals and experts who specialize in specific areas.

I would like to repeat, there is no need to look for "saviors of the nation" or exceptional personalities. The country should be governed by institutions, a system of checks and balances should operate between the branches of power. All citizens, without exception, should respect the law and follow it. Otherwise, we will find ourselves in permanent crises.

The Law in capital letters and following it are the basis of any healthy society and strong state, the guarantee of development and survival. It is on this basis that our political culture must be built. There is no other formula for building a stable state.

Under a parliamentary system of government, the institute of the President is symbolic or formal in appearance, but internally it can be a lifebuoy in any political crisis. As the head of the state and follower of the Constitution, the institute of the President can become the irreplaceable platform where the constitutional ways-out and mechanisms for overcoming the crisis will be formed through a dialogue. The question is: is our Constitution ideal? The answer is one: no, like the constitution of any country. Everywhere in the world, there are ongoing debates and discussions about chang-

ing the basic laws of their countries. As a citizen of the Republic of Armenia, I have my opinion on the shortcomings of our Constitution, but as the President of the Republic, I am obliged to follow the letter of the Law. We can give in to emotions, but all political demands must be carried out within the law.

The "Third Republic of Armenia" is a thing of the past, we are facing a new reality that forces us to be very sober, accountable and purposeful. The national carelessness, disorganization, disorder and inconsistency, the false agendas, ideas and approaches that have accompanied us in recent decades must be thrown into the archives of history.

Unfortunately, to date there is no complete perception of the real scale of the dramatic events in Armenia and the Armenian world, and its causes and consequences. We need to understand that a new page of history begins for us with its challenges, and this time with an exceptional imperative to make no mistakes, and to act competently and professionally.

No matter what we call that new page: "New Page", "Restart", "A New Beginning", "The Fourth Republic" or otherwise, the reality is that we are entering a new stage of history.

After the nationwide shock caused by the war and the obligatory transition phase, we must undertake the construction of a new state, conventionally called the "Fourth Republic" in this article.

The change of power in 2018 could have been the beginning of a new phase in our history, for which there were sufficient grounds for people's unification, enthusiasm and support, but it became the end of the previous phase, without offering a new ideology.

The defeat in the last war was the defeat of that system, not of the soldiers, the people and the nation.

The "Fourth Republic" must become the new ideological, conceptual and substantive basis of our people. The emphasis will be placed on the quality of the state, which requires a radical overhaul of the system of interrelations with our compatriots around the world. Geopolitical perceptions, politics, economy, security, military-industrial complex, medicine, science and education are created by people, and today we are in dire need of the best specialists.

There is no lack of prominent Armenians and never has been; we need to stop just being proud of their existence, and make them part of our state's reality. For that, it is enough to remove the artificially created Berlin Walls (which are in the Constitution and in the laws) between Armenia and the Armenian communities. Having a lot of experience in communicating with our Diaspora, I can speak with confidence about their huge potential. I shall repeat that in order to discover and use that potential effectively, we need a state systemic approach and proper governance.

Hard work is expected, but I do not doubt the final success. The main thing is that everyone should believe in it and participate in the work of bringing that day closer within their abilities and opportunities.

We do not have time and chance to think long. The time has come for cold-hearted, quick and effective actions to create an efficient, disciplined and organized modern country based on new technologies and thinking, the FUTURE ARMENIA, ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The ways to reach it will be discussed in the future.

Pashinyan's Mission Impossible to Moscow

MISSION, from page 15

who is the skillful diplomat who could reach out to France and extend the country's position to the entire Minsk Group?

After his meeting in Moscow, Pashinyan was planning to meet with Armenian business leaders in Moscow. Instead, he faced a hostile demonstration outside the Armenian Embassy in Moscow and returned to Armenia empty-handed to face more hostile groups.

Thus, it is a mission impossible for Pashinyan.

In addition to the 17 parties, President Armen Sarkissian has announced that he is planning to lead Armenia toward the

Fourth Republic, hoping to form a transition cabinet of technocrats.

Resignation calls have been getting louder for Pashinyan and his team as they have demonstrated that solving Armenia's current problems are beyond their capacity. They lack diplomatic skills but their arrogance matches their ignorance. Against all the calls for resignation, they have stuck to their position that only snap elections can dislodge them from office, with the firm belief that they control the state apparatus and can win the elections just as former leaders Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan did.

The 17 parties include the Republican Party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, whose records are well documented. Additionally, Pashinyan's propaganda machine has demonized them enough to discredit them.

President Armen Sarkissian seems to be the only viable alter-

native but he is also the victim of the government's vilification machine.

Armenian society is gravely polarized and social media networks are working overtime to further aggravate the situation.

Both the government and the opposition have their well-oiled social media networks to throw mud at their opponents, at the cost of the erosion of public trust.

If all-powerful President Trump's Twitter account can be silenced to forestall an insurrection, why can't Armenia do the same to reduce tensions and create a more positive atmosphere for public discourse?

Only after the toning down of this rhetoric can the public heal its wounds, pull together and think about Armenia's perilous future, before their own.

Until then, Armenia faces its own mission impossible.



Can We Build Our Future Together?

By Marine Petrossian

In December, my essay “The Turkish Border Has Gotten Closer to Me” was published in the *Mirror-Spectator*. When writing the piece, I mostly had in mind American readers whose ancestors had lived in Western Armenia/Turkey. All my ancestors are also from Western Armenia, but I speak Eastern Armenian. I was born in Soviet Armenia, part of the superpower called the Soviet Union. Then, in the 1980s, Gorbachev started his Perestroika. Next, in February 1988, the Karabakh movement began—hundreds of thousands of people in the streets of Yerevan. These were years of my youth. The first publication of my poems had just appeared in the *Garun* magazine. Having heard the chants of “Ka-ra-bakh, Mi-a-tsum,” I looked down from our balcony in Arabkir district towards downtown Yerevan and it was like a bee hive—all the streets were filled with people.

With this chanting, people were demonstrating their support for the request issued by the Council of People's Deputies of Nagorno-Karabakh, then part of Soviet Azerbaijan, to transfer the region to Soviet Armenia. But Moscow answered No. What then? Would people accept this No and go home? No, they didn't. People stayed in the streets and the Karabakh movement turned out to be also a movement for Armenian independence—for the right of the Armenian people to decide their own destiny. Some three years later, the Soviet Union collapsed. And when Azerbaijan attacked Artsakh, trying to resolve the problem by force, we quickly created our own army and won the war.

Now, when I write these words, our victory is gone. We badly lost the war. We lost most of Artsakh and we lost our self-confidence. Now we all feel unsafe in Armenia. The post-Soviet era is gone; we are no longer in the post-Soviet world; we are in Middle Eastern turmoil. Until yesterday, I did not realize that I was living in the Middle East. During Soviet times, Europe was our neighbor in the west and Japan and the United States were our neighbors in the east. The Soviet Union had disappeared long ago, but now I realize that up to yesterday I continued to see Europe as our neighbor.

After the war, things have changed also in my mind. Now I know well that I live in the Middle East. Turkey is on our left. Huge and aggressive. Azerbaijan is on our right, not very small and even more aggressive. Our next two neighbors are Iran and Georgia. Iran is more an ally than not. But we can't count much on its support. Georgia is not an ally at all.

Armenia is in danger. Once there were two Armenia's: Western Armenia and Eastern Armenia. All my ancestors once lived in Western Armenia. We badly lost it, and I was born in Eastern Armenia, in Yerevan. Now, when Yerevan is also in danger, I suddenly realize that this concept of Western and Eastern Armenia's does not work for me anymore. Now we have one Armenia and it is in danger, because now we have two Turkey's: the first, the bigger one, is on our left side; and the second, the smaller one, is on our right side. We lost the war to both of them.

My great-grandfather Kozmas Messaiyan, a famous doctor in Sepastia, having survived the Genocide, in 1926 took his family and came to live in Soviet Armenia. I have seen neither him nor his eldest daughter Henaz Messaiyan. Kozmas died in 1936, and my

grandmother, Henaz, died in 1940, when my mother was only five years old. But I know a lot about my grandpa—there are photos left, there are stories told, and there are some short but fascinating articles about him in the Armenian media of the day. The Messaiyans were a family of physicians well-known in Sepastia from the 17th century. Many of them perished during the Genocide. My great-grandfather survived and brought his family to Soviet Armenia. Other Messaiyan survivors went to America and France.

Often, when searching for information about my grandfather on the Internet, I find names of Messaiyans whom I don't know. Sometimes the name is written as Messian. Most probably, all of them are descendants of Doctor Messia, son of Bishop



Dr. Kozmas Messaiyan

Yeghiazar—he lived in Sepastia in the 18th century and was the originator of the Messaiyan surname. I close my eyes and imagine a room where all Messaiyans could come together. How large must the room be to accommodate all of us? But then I remember that my surname is not Messaiyan. So let's put the question this way: how large must a room be to accommodate all the descendants of the Messaiyan family?

Then comes the next question: what will be the main goal of our gathering? Surely, we will share our memories about Sepastia, about its happy days, about the big disaster of 1915. And what about the future? Can we make a plan about the future that will unite us? Is that possible?

And what about all of Sepastia's Armenians, not just the descendants of the Messaiyan family? How large must the room be to accommodate all of us? As far as I know, in the 20th century there were rather large associations of Sepastia Armenians in the diaspora, particularly in New York. One of them, the Reconstruction Union, built a town called New Sepastia near Yerevan. Later on, this became one of the districts of Yerevan. But these were Soviet times. Not very easy ones. And now? Now, in January 2021, times are even more difficult. Can we find ways to construct our destiny with our own hands in these difficult times?

(Marine Petrossian is a columnist, poet and essayist based in Armenia.)

Battlefields In Eurasia

By Ana Arzoumanian

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

There was a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Artsakh Republic, the Armenian name for the Nagorno Karabagh region. I won't dwell on the political, economic or military aspects of the war, but I will analyze the spirit that is behind the war speech in a zone in dispute, which is an enclave with historical Armenian population found within the territory of Azerbaijan.

“There are things that are not said in two languages” – Abbas Beydoun

In one of the translations of the *Iliad*, Book 1 begins with: “Goddess, sing me the anger, of Achilles, Peleus' son, that fatal anger that brought countless sorrows on the Greeks, and sent many valiant souls of warriors down to Hades, leaving their bodies as spoil for dogs and carrion birds.”

The traditional title of these verses is “Wrath” (Ménis). Homer narrates Achilles' wrath in the last year of the Trojan War. After invoking the Muse, he tells that Agamemnon followed Zeus' plan. Battles, duels, embassies, offerings, assemblies, oaths, speeches, monologues. The epic hero persists, while the poem gives information about the political and social structures, geography, myths and traditions of that time.

The military tactics of the Hoplites, the fights upon chariots, the strength of four horses, the advice to cremate the deceased and bring the bones back home to the children are all composed to be sung orally, but at the same time it is an historical document. Achilles' wrath narrated by the *Iliad* is a symbol of the whole war. And the war is between the Trojans and the Achaeans.

There are no clues given as to suggest in which season of the year the battles take place, and the fights are stylized in a way that the rest of the battlefield seems to vanish while the warriors' hand-to-hand combat takes place. There is a moral content in the behavior attributed to the warriors, a spiritual elevation and humanity in the hero and a desire typical of ancient Greek culture for bringing a rational explanation out of the strife.

The poem begins when the war ends.

This fact reminds me of Theodor Adorno's question about how to write epic poetry after the horrors of Auschwitz. He questioned himself as if the very writing of epic poetry would be barbarism. Of course we should stop at the “after” in Adorno's phrase. This is because the trauma caused by a genocide, a Holocaust, doesn't allow for the transition from a before to an after; the after never arrives.

This School of Frankfurt thinker considered his question, arriving at the conclusion that epic poetry should still be written, but with a determined aesthetic that wouldn't renew or gratuitously recount that experienced horror.

There is a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

There's a war in Artsakh, the Armenian name for Nagorno Karabagh. I won't dwell on the political, economic, or military aspects of the war. Nagorno Karabagh is an enclave with a historical Armenian population found within the territory of Azerbaijan, based on the borders determined by Stalin. In the USSR, many territories like Nagorno Karabagh were granted the status of an autonomous region, most of which were plunged into war as the USSR disintegrated, such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, and Transnistria. The Nagorno Karabagh war began as soon as the USSR fell and lasted until the year 1994, when a ceasefire left Armenians in control of most of the territory and established an independent government. This territory included a corridor which connected it to Armenia and with additional territories surrounding Karabagh.

Despite this independence, the Republic of Artsakh received very little recognition from the international community. The ceasefire

between the two nations never really went into full effect and in 2016 the conflict erupted into a four-day war, after which the status quo of the ceasefire resumed.

The status quo was shattered for good this September when Azerbaijan started bombing Artsakh's capital city, Stepanakert, beginning a confrontation which brought with it an immeasurable loss of soldiers and cultural damage in the region.

But the question is: Can we write/say something while the war is happening? Are there words contemporary to action? Are they possible?

The next question would be: Which words are possible to be said while the battlefield is pierced by death?

Words, yes there are some.

Yes, poetic words. Stylized words where honor, dignity, the past of a people, the greatness of a nation, the trauma of a genocide, the following trauma of denial are represented by phrases, “sayings.”

The first saying that appears in a war is: “we are going to win.” Yet nobody considers what it means to win. Territory, dignity, historical reparation? Certainly the equation for winning would be: we lose lives, but we win a national future.

The prime minister of Armenia has called upon all men in the diaspora to join as volunteers in the army to save the motherland, the Armenian Nation. So I think about the fields where words are settled. What's a nation?

For Armenians, *azk* is nation and *Hayots azk* means the Armenian nation or the Armenian people. To understand this term further we would have to think of its derivatives: *azkanún* meaning last name; *azkagán*: relative; and *azkapán*: genealogy. In a sense, the notion of a nation or community is intimately bonded to family, but even closer than that, to one's own name.

For a person in South America the last name (“apellido”) is a family name and to *apellidar* somebody is to call them by saying their name, to appeal to them, to interpellate them. To call for arms is a distant meaning of the word which, however, puts the accent on the call and not on the national/communitarian aspect.

The discursive discordances also speak about the function that language has in the composition of a social group. In a syntax of domination or from one of struggle, the construction of the symbolic field gives shape not to a political vocabulary but instead to the affections of the members of that group.

The request to join volunteer groups to defend the nation until death leads us to think not only about what a nation is, but also about what death is.

For a person in Argentina, or from South America, immersed in the Western culture, death is the end of life. Death itself is so ungraspable and unspeakable an idea that it leads to the failure of every logical attempt to grasp the idea of how an “I” that lives in the first person only once and never again is offered not an eternal survival in a mythical afterlife, but the realization of a current-life for the mere fact of living, of having lived, which concerns every life. In a way in which death seals the historical meaning of a lifetime and helps shape some idea of the gratuity and the strangeness of life.

The concept of death in Armenia arrives through the legend of a battle which took place in the year 451: the battle of Avarayr, the fight against the imposition of Zoroastrianism and General Vartan Mamikonian's confrontation with the Persians. The Armenian alphabet had already been created. Armenia was already a Christian nation, but the empire wanted to impose its religion.

Vartan Mamikonian was a prince, a soldier, a general of the Mamikonian family, who legend says descended from the Han dynasty of China, or from other lands of the Chinese empire, or from a region nearer to Afghanistan. What's known, however, is that a handful of men under the command of this general fighting against the Persian forces were doomed to lose, and indeed they did lose. But yet, not completely.

In the moment before being destroyed by the Persian fire; before the confrontation that would lead to their death, the princely general uttered his famous phrase, a phrase which was

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COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Trump Could be the First US President To Be Impeached Twice

When planning to write this column, there were two key points I wanted to highlight. The first was that Trump had a couple of weeks left in his presidency which millions of people were anxiously looking forward to. My second point was that Trump was proven to be the biggest liar in history. Little did I know that events in Washington would take a disastrous turn that would shake the United States and the world.

During the last four years of his presidency, Trump has made hundreds of irrational statements and decisions rarely based on facts or reason. This ignorant man arrogantly claimed that he knew more than the generals about war, more than the doctors about coronavirus, more than the financial experts about the economy, etc. He became the laughing stock of people around the world.

What is amazing to me is that 74 million Americans blindly followed Trump and voted for him on November 3, 2020. If it weren't for the other 81 million Americans who voted for Joe Biden, Trump may have remained in office another four years, further destabilizing the United States. I blame Trump's blind supporters more than Trump himself, because without them Trump would not have been elected four years ago and would not have caused such damage.

Trump was clever enough to sow the seeds of doubt long ago about the outcome of the presidential elections. According to the Washington Post, Trump made bogus election claims 1,795 times from January to November 2020, thus preparing the ground for refusing to accept the results of the election. During one of his campaign rallies Trump said that if he loses the election, he will leave the country, which is the best thing he has said, but like all his other statements this too was a lie!

To make matters much worse, Trump called on his loyal

and blind followers to gather in Washington on January 6, 2020 and prevent Congress from certifying the votes of the Electoral College, confirming that Biden had won the election. Trump even told his followers that he will personally join them in the street and march with them. Fortunately, this too was a lie. He stayed in the White House and let his followers do his dirty bidding.

Thousands of mindless Trumpsters descended on Washington, DC from all over the country, most of them not wearing a mask. Some came armed with guns and Molotov cocktails. They fought with the police and pushed their way in the halls of Congress, the cradle of American democracy. They killed a policeman guarding the Capitol, one protester was shot and killed and three others died of health-related problems. They disrupted the joint session of Congress, threatened the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Vice President of the United States who were immediately whisked away fearing for their lives. The mob smashed the doors, windows, furniture and paintings, and stole the property that belonged to the Congress. Not since the British Army attacked the Capitol building in 1814, such a despicable invasion of the seat of power in Washington, D.C., has occurred.

It is surprising that the Capitol police, having prior notice of the impending attack, failed to take special measures to defend the building and members of Congress. The chief of the Capitol police has since resigned. Calls for the National Guard went unheeded and were obstructed by the White House until later that evening, after the damage was done.

The hoodlums or Trump's terrorists will not be able to get away with their crimes. Dozens have been already arrested and many more are expected to be captured in the next few days. Trump, the chief instigator of these crimes, however, remains at large. He is the one that incited the mob to commit this violence. The day after the mayhem in Washington, in a video speech, Trump proudly told the attackers "We love you." Facebook, Twitter and Instagram immediately blocked his messages so he does not instigate any more violence. His followers have wrongly called these measures censorship. Trump has been repeatedly warned for years that he is violating the terms of service of the social media. He arrogantly persisted. The social media companies have the right to block him. They should have done so long ago. Furthermore, instigation of violence and insurrection are crimes. The perpetrator, in this case Trump, who is the leader of the rioters, must

be held legally responsible for his crimes in a court of law. Several members of Trump's Cabinet have since resigned to disassociate themselves from the violence in Congress. A dozen other high-ranking Trump officials have also resigned.

The House of Representatives is now considering a new impeachment trial for President Trump and forward the decision to the U.S. Senate. In recent days, several Republican Members of Congress have called on President Trump to resign or face impeachment. This is the first time in U.S. history that a President will be impeached twice. To make sure that the Republican majority in the Senate does not block Trump's conviction like they did last year, the Senate will consider his impeachment after January 20, 2021 when the new Senate takes over with a Democratic majority. Even though Trump will no longer be President by then, his successful impeachment will prevent him from holding federal office ever again, including running for President! Trump's departure will be a stain on his presidential legacy, in addition to all his other indiscretions during the past four years.

Such a vicious attack is something that usually happens in third world countries and the U.S. government traditionally condemns the violence. No one expected that such an undemocratic act would take place in the heart of Washington which made the United States the laughing stock of the world. Several world leaders, including those of Iraq and Iran, lectured the United States about democracy. Even Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, one of the vilest dictators in the world, who has repeatedly violated the most basic rights of his people, mocked the United States by daring to give Americans a lesson in democracy.

Returning to Trump's record of lies, the Washington Post has documented that President Trump, as of Nov. 5, 2020, has made 29,508 false or misleading claims in almost four years. By the time he leaves office, the number of his lies will reach or exceed 30,000 – probably the most lies told by anyone in the world. Unfortunately, millions of Trump's followers blindly swallowed these lies.

Regrettably, Trump's supporters are now calling for a "million MAGA [Make America Great Again] march," in Washington on January 20, 2020 to disrupt President Biden's inauguration. I hope this time the police and the National Guard will be better prepared to keep the protesters under control and immediately arrest those who behave violently.

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embroidered in the armbands of the fighters of the first Nagorno Karabagh war: "Death not understood is death. Death understood is immortality."

And they fought and they died and they were defeated. But every February, Vartanants is celebrated. Because they were defeated, and yet remained Christian. Vasak Syuni, who advocated trading their Christianity for their lives, is still considered a traitor to this day.

Unconscious death is death, conscious death is... What is a conscious death? A thought-through death, a chosen death. (Which in the West is called suicide?). A deliberate death, a teleology in death, a death as a mean to achieve an end: immortality. Martyrdom. Sacrifice. The reenactment of the Christian passion, but without a body.

Let's remember Christ dies a man and resurrects; his resurrection is his immortality, becoming the body and blood in the communion given at each Mass: This is my body, he says, and the worshippers incorporate his grace. The sacrifice of Vartanants is an immortality without a body.

To obey an order, in South America in general, and in Argentina in particular, brings back the memory of the due obedience to military dictatorships. To obey an order has the counterweight of the law and its controls. To obey has for the political vocabulary a bond with justice, what's just for the judicial "dictum" which carries the forensic imperium of being applied.

To comply with a precept has in Armenia a mythical root: it's said that when a king died, there was such a commotion that his friends threw themselves into the sepulcher, committing suicide. The king's son Artavazd begged his father: "you leave and take the whole country with you. Am I supposed to reign over ruins?"

The dead father hears the pleas of his son and curses him. When Artavazd goes hunting he falls down a cliff and there he lives chained for eternity. In each celebration of Navazart, the Armenian New Year, the blacksmiths open their workshops, stoke the fire and beat the anvil repeatedly with their maces, strengthening the chains that keep Prince Artavazd prisoner. Prison is the end for he who disobeys his destiny.

And here we stumble upon the idea conceived in the Enlightenment as the founding of political framework: responsibility. Modernity with the establishment of law and government of the people makes leaders have to answer to those they represent, both in their work but also through the elections which determine who will lead. Together with the idea of democracy, it consolidated the concept of sovereignty in the head of a Nation-State which extended as empires fell.

The peace of Westphalia created the category of Nation, but

it was only after the dissolution of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires that nations really took on their grandness. In that time the Soviet Empire secured the idea of brotherhood of the homo sovieticus between republics and autonomous regions. The Union fell in 1991, bringing the emblems of modernity to this region at the gates of the year 2000, when the world was opening up to the concept of total war.

In which way and with which elements is a post-Soviet nation built? With which epistemic diagrams? With the notion of destiny and its epic tragic outcome. A fate that does not depend on the action of men but instead is linked to ancestral disputes (hatreds, resentments).

When the prime minister calls for voluntary enlistment he's calling them to be part of what in Latin America is called paramilitary groups. Those groups, which in Latin America have a mark of excess and outlaw, in the Caucasus are designated under the repertoire of the defense of the blood.

Translating political and military vocabulary into other languages stumbles upon an impossibility: to transplant semantic fields. A language is produced on the battlefield within a culture complete with its myths, its desires, its dreams.

In an interview on North American TV, the interviewer tells the Armenian foreign minister that the government must assure the right to safety of its population (indicating the risk that implies sending its population to the battlefield). However, safety, in the terms of the South Caucasus, is linked to territory.

The contemporary Armenian novelist Vahram Martirosyan titled his novel Landslide, hinting not only at the seismic nature of the zone (recall the major Spitak earthquake of 1988) but also to the shifting of borders.

So the diaspora uses terms that it already comprehends, words that it finds in its own trauma, in its own loss: extermination, genocide, negation. Words that assume absolute victimization, words that admit no negotiation, words that cry for an international penal court or for vengeance.

The words in their associative constellation also conform to the battlefield where the effects of a language over the body are settled.

The poem ends when the war ends.

For those who write, the only thing left is to feel.

Translated by: Diego Ardouin Trento

Editing: Paul Vartan Sookiasian

POST-SCRIPTUM:

This article was written during the Artsakh war. This is the first time it is being published in English.

It was published in Spanish on October 27, 2020 by Cine y

Literatura, the first South American cultural digital newspaper in Chile, and a couple of days later in Turkish in the Agos newspaper in Turkey.

Just before the ceasefire, I wrote another article, published in Diario Armenia in Buenos Aires, Argentina, about the misunderstanding of the concept of democracy in the Middle East and the Caucasus.

The word democracy arises from the French Revolution and the beginning of the Modern Era. Since bourgeoisie in the Middle East and in the Caucasus didn't get to strengthen, the word democracy doesn't represent those political regimes. Therefore, even though in Armenia the last government started as the "Armenian Velvet Revolution," it's not possible to affirm that it's a strict democracy.

Ana Arzoumanian

I was born in Buenos Aires in 1962. I am a lawyer, writer and translator. I have completed a postgraduate course on psychoanalysis at Escuela de Orientación Lacaniana. I am a professor at Tres de Febrero University on Creative Writing, and editor-in-chief of the Canoa Literary Collection of Poliedro magazine at San Isidro University.

I have published poetry books: *Labios, Debajo de la piedra, El ahogado, Cuando todo acabe todo acabará, Káukazos, La Jesenská*; novels: *La mujer de ellos, Mar Negro*; stories: "La granada," "Mía," "Juana I," "Del vodka hecho con moras," "Infieles"; and essays: "El depósito humano: una geografía de la desaparición"; "Hacer violencia. El régimen insurrecto en el arte."

I have shot a documentary film about Armenian genocide and Argentinian dictatorship in Argentina and Armenia directed by Ignacio Dimattia in 2010.

LETTER

Azadian Analysis on Target

"Once again, thank you for a very insightful analysis of the current events in Transcaucasia and beyond. This article provides much food for thought, what should Armenia do in this difficult geopolitical crisis... Part of a long term strategic plan should be to seek a non traditional partner like China."

—Houry Koushadjian



Nagorno Karabakh Shuffles Top Officials, By Ani Mejlumyan

STEPANAKERT (eurasia.net) – Following the defeat to Azerbaijan, the government in Nagorno Karabakh has reshuffled many of its top officials and is preparing for new elections.

On December 1, the head of the self-proclaimed republic, Arayik Harutyunyan, said that it would start forming a “government of national accord” to manage the territory “in this period which is so difficult for our motherland.” Since then, several new cabinet officials including a new national security adviser and foreign minister have been named, representing a wide swath of the territory’s political spectrum.

“Overall, we can say that the appointments of the new government are completed,” the spokesman for president Arayik Harutyunyan, Vahram Poghosyan, told RFE/RL on January 5. “We have to get on with work in order to try to get the life back to normal in [Karabakh] as soon as possible.”

The most consequential appointment has been that of Vitaliy Balasanyan as national security adviser. Balasanyan is a veteran of the first war with Azerbaijan, in the 1990s, and is a close ally of former Armenian presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan. He was national security adviser from 2016-2019 and ran unsuccessfully for president in elections last year while also helping lead a

campaign to free Kocharyan, the archenemy of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who was in jail in Armenia for charges related to the violent breakup of protests under the old regime.

In a 2019 interview with Eurasianet, Balasanyan said that Pashinyan was a “Western project” and that his coming to power “wasn’t a revolution but a seizure of power by force.”

Since reassuming the position Balasanyan has signaled a hard line, vowing to further militarize the territory. In a December 29 interview, he said he would be soon creating new military structures, including new border units. “Everyone will be obliged to serve, they will be paid, they will get a high salary. This is a sacred duty for each of us,” he said.

In the interview he also said he intended to crack down on drinking, drug use, and “sects.”

“People who drink should do it at home,” he said. “Every citizen of Karabakh needs to be disciplined.” In another interview, he said that all state workers – including the president – would be banned from using social media while they are at work.

Balasanyan’s position holds substantial authority: All security forces in the territory answer to him, and Harutyunyan has given him effective veto power over any security-related



Nagorno-Karabakh’s national security adviser Vitaliy Balasanyan, left, and the man he may soon replace, President Arayik Harutyunyan. (photo: Facebook, Arayik Harutyunyan)

decision. “All presidential decrees and government decisions related to the defense and security of [Karabakh] will be adopted only with the approval of the Security Council,” Harutyunyan said in a December 16 statement.

Harutyunyan also has said there will be snap elections “in a reasonable time frame,” though he did not provide details. He said he will himself not be running and will be leaving politics.

Analysts have seen Balasanyan as the early frontrunner to take over. “From the recent [December 16] statement of the president, we see that there has been an effective transition of power to the Security Council and accordingly to Balasanyan,” political analyst Hakob Badalyan told RFE/RL. The upcoming elections “can be expected to be a confirmation of that political power,” Badalyan said.

Balasanyan’s rise has been closely noted in Azerbaijan, where he is seen as a hardliner and pro-Russia figure. A recent report from the independent Azerbaijani agency Turan identified him as a “participant in the Khojaly genocide,” a massacre of Azerbaijani civilians in the first Karabakh war, as well as “a speaker of pure Azerbaijani” and a “harsh public critic of Pashinyan.”

The de facto government also has named a new foreign minister: David Babayan, currently an adviser to Harutyunyan, will take over from Masis Mailyan.

Several other new figures come from a wide variety of political and ideological backgrounds. Newly appointed Minister of Social and Labor Affairs Mane Tandilyan held the same position in the Armenian government shortly after Pashinyan came to power and was a member of the Bright Armenia party.

Minister of Territorial Administration Hayk Khanumyan was for a time the only opposition member of Karabakh’s parliament, and also unsuccessfully ran for president in 2020. The new presidential chief of staff Artak Beglaryan was formerly the territory’s human rights ombudsman.

However, Balasanyan has suggested that he also will hold veto power over all senior appointments, even the newly named officials.

“All the high-ranking positions will be discussed in the Security Council,” he said in a December 28 interview. “Even those who have already been appointed but are not competent will be replaced.”

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