



Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II blesses the faithful

Christmas Epiphany Liturgy at St. Gayane Monastery

See full story on Page 3.

Armenian PM Prioritizes Closer Ties with Russia

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has announced plans to further deepen Armenia's relations with Russia, saying that his country needs "new security guarantees" after the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

"The very first minutes of 2021 should be the 'zero point' for us to usher in the outset of our new national rise," Pashinyan said in

a televised address to the nation aired on New Year's Eve.

"What do we need for this? First of all, to furnish a new security environment, the most important component of which is the launch of army reforms and the strengthening of relations with our primary security partner, Russia, and the creation, in this

see TIES, page 4



The Goris-Kapan road

Syunik Villages Falling under Azerbaijani Rule

YEREVAN (Panorama.am, JAM News) — Since the end of the war over Karabakh (Artsakh) and the peace agreement signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, ceding most of Karabakh to Azerbaijan, the latter is laying claims on — and winning — more land in the province of Syunik in Armenia.

One of the villages that has lost 12 homes to Azerbaijan is Shurnukh.

Recently, the Shurnukh mayor said crossing one street can be problematic as part of the village will be ceded to Azerbaijan

"Crossing a street in Shurnukh village of Armenia's southern Syunik province will become problematic from tomorrow," village mayor Hakob Arshakyan told the residents, as the village was divided into two parts with the eastern part transferred to Azerbaijan based on demarcation process carried out via GPS. Arshakyan presented the situation to the villagers live on Facebook.

"Crossing a street will be problematic from tomorrow. You will not be able to

see SYUNIK, page 4

Families of Missing Soldiers Hold Protest Outside Government Offices

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The families of Armenian soldiers who went missing during the recent Artsakh war on Tuesday, January 5, staged a protest outside the government building to again call the authorities' attention to the problem and to learn about the search efforts.

"My son joined the military two months before the war. He went missing in the Hadrut region. One of his fellow soldiers says that he saw my son killed, another says that he saw him wounded. Now I have no news of him, neither his body has been found, nor his name is on the list of prisoners," a missing soldier's mother told reporters.

The mother of another missing serviceman noted that she has not heard from her son for 80 days.

The father of one of the missing soldiers, Roman Gevorgyan, said: "There are parents who have seen photos of their children in intensive care units. They were transported to Yerevan, but cannot be found anywhere, not in a single hospital. The children have gone missing for a week. They are not needed to get lost without a trace."

He showed a photograph of one of the wounded soldiers taken in the Goris hospital, adding they had not been able to find him for a week. He

see FAMILIES, page 2



Roman Gevorgyan, the father of a missing soldier at the January 5 protest

NEWS IN BRIEF

Azerbaijan Bans Intl. Commission From Inspecting Monuments

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — A number of Armenian cultural and spiritual monuments have come under the Azerbaijani control as a result of the recent war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh: these monuments are of special importance for Armenians.

Armenia's ministry of education, science, culture and sport is cooperating with both the local and international organizations for their preservation, however, no tangible results have been achieved yet in this regard.

UNESCO has tried to send a commission of international observers to these sites, however, Azerbaijan refused to grant an access.

Armenian Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport Narine Khachatryan said on December 29 they are cooperating with the Foreign Ministry over the preservation of the monuments of Artsakh which have come under the Azerbaijani control. "We have formed a group with the Armenian specialists who live both in Armenia and abroad, who are engaged in lobbying activities at international platforms, are involved in the group, but the main organization we are applying to is UNESCO. It was expected in December that UNESCO should have sent a commission of international observers to the territories of Artsakh which currently are under the control of Azerbaijan. The commission must have carried out a monitoring of several Armenian monuments. The delegates were from Russia, France, the United States and Italy, however, Azerbaijan banned their entry to these territories," the deputy minister said.

She stated that Azerbaijan doesn't explain its action. According to Khachatryan, Azerbaijan doesn't show any good will in general.

"The members of the commission are specialists. They are visiting a particular monument, then return and visit later to see whether that monument has been destroyed or not," she said.

Baku-Istanbul Flight Enters Armenian Airspace

ISTANBUL (*Yeni Safak*) — A Turkish Airlines flight, for the first time, entered Armenian airspace on Tuesday, December 29, for a flight from Istanbul to Azerbaijan, according to media reports.

Passenger aircraft belonging to Azerbaijan and Turkey generally use Georgian airspace for Baku-Istanbul flights.

There has been no official statement regarding an agreement yet, however, reports claim that Armenia was forced to open its airspace. Some Armenian media outlets alleged that if Yerevan does not open its airspace, Russian aircrafts will be barred from flying to Karabakh and Armenia via Azerbaijan.

INSIDE

Tekeyan, ADL in 2020

Pages 8-9

INDEX

Armenia	2-3
Arts and Living	12
Community News.	6
Editorial	17
International	4,5



ARMENIA

News From Armenia

Opposition Lawmaker Stripped of Post

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – The Armenian parliament voted on December 29 to dismiss the chairwoman of its standing committee on human rights representing the opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK).

The parliamentary majority representing the ruling My Step bloc engineered the move in response to what it regards as offensive comments posted by the BHK's Naira Zohrabyan on Facebook.

In an apparent attack on hardcore supporters of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Zohrabyan last week lambasted “scum” which she said has taken over Armenia and is responsible for its recent misfortunes. She said it must be disenfranchised and even forcibly “educated” for the good of the country.

“I am not going to hand over my homeland to the scum,” wrote the outspoken parliamentarian.

Pro-government lawmakers were quick to condemn the comments. They said that Zohrabyan lost her moral right to lead the parliamentary committee because she not only insulted hundreds of thousands of Armenians but also called for them to be stripped of their civil rights.

Bodies of 1,184 War Dead Found as of January 4

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) – The rescue units of the Artsakh State Service for Emergency Situations continue search operations for bodies of killed servicemen in the Nagorno-Karabakh war zone, the Service reported on Tuesday, January 5. According to the head of the service, Karen Sargsyan, the bodies of 1,184 killed have been found as of January 4, bodies of civilians were among the victims.

On January 3, 20 bodies were retrieved in southern direction (Hadrut-Mekhakavan), one of them being an elderly civilian found in the area of Karmrakuch village. Forensic examination is underway to identify the dead civilian, the source said.

Another 9 bodies were found on January 4 in the direction of Mekhakavan(Jabrayil)-Hadrut, three civilians among them.

Search and rescue operations continue today in Talish-Mataghis direction as well as in Hadrut region and Varanda (Fizuli).

Davit Babayan Named Artsakh Foreign Minister

STEPANAKERT (Panorama.am) – By the decree of Artsakh Republic President Arayik Harutyunyan, Masis Mayilyan was dismissed as Artsakh's foreign minister, the Information Department at the President's Office reported. By another decision of the president, Davit Babayan was appointed as foreign minister of Artsakh.

Babayan earlier served as Artsakh President's spokesperson and presidential adviser on foreign affairs.

Iranian Products to Replace Turkish Goods

YEREVAN (PanArmenian.net) – The Armenian government decided to ban the import of Turkish goods beginning from December 31, 2020. According to reports from Iran, the country is now going to replace thousands of items with products produced in the Islamic Republic, Tasnim news agency reports.

The Director-General of the Asia-Pacific Department of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Mojtaba Mousavian Armenia is planning to replace 2,250 Turkish commodity items with Iran-made products.

A board member of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCI-MA) has reportedly said that Iran now has the advantage of exporting goods such as sweets and chocolates, ceramic tiles, detergents, shoes, flooring and carpets and textile and clothing to Armenia, in addition to the previously traded items.

Armenian Choirs Join in to Sing for Peace

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

On December 19, six choirs from Armenia and Artsakh joined seven other choirs to perform on World Choral Day (<http://worldchoralday.org/>).

This event, organized every December under the auspices of the International Federation of Choral Music, attracts thousands of singers who organize concerts around the middle of the month. This year, the thirtieth anniversary of the initiative, the concerts took place under special circumstances created by the Corona pandemic. In the events involving Armenia, most Armenian choirs appeared live, while the others, from Berd (Armenia), Germany, Lithuania, Moldova, Switzerland, Israel and the United States, participated online. The concert was broadcast live on the Internet.

The Little Singers of Armenia, under the direction of conductor Tigran Hekekyan, hosted the event in Yerevan. In greeting the live and virtual participants, Niery Grace Bardakjian said that Armenia “as always, adds its voice” to the annual gathering: “we join to sing for peace.” As stated in the Little Singers of Armenia's announcement, the Armenian choirs were dedicating their participation this year to “the heroes of the Artsakh war.”

Bardakjian described the ravages of the war that had come to an end just weeks earlier. The “deliberate destruction of churches and monuments,” she said, “has made clear that Azerbaijan's intention was not just to conquer Nagorno Karabakh but to eliminate all traces of Armenian identity and culture.” The fact that the same authorities had destroyed thousands of khachkars in the ancient cemetery of Julfa in 2005, such that there is no trace of them in Nakhichevan today, indicates that “the Azerbaijani authorities will not preserve the Armenian cultural heritage of the land currently under their control.”

The current humanitarian and cultural catastrophe, she went on, “reminds us of the darkest period of our history,” the 1915 genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks, that eliminated 1.5 million of the indigenous Armenian population. She denounced the attempt to repeat the same today and appealed to UNESCO “to raise its voice in the name of the people of Nagorno Karabakh,” to protect their human rights, preserve their rich cultural heritage and protect their right to life. She concluded, “Let us sing for peace and brotherhood.”

The program began appropriately with all participating choirs singing Stepan Lusikyan's Armenia. This theme predominated not only in the pieces performed but also in the visual presentation: after each musical offering, the viewing audiences could join a virtual tour through Armenia. Cartologist Rouben Galichyan introduced Armenia through historical maps, giving a brief

account of the fate of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh). From there, the voice of a young man visiting the country described the sites shown, mostly in spectacular aerial views. Thus, after the Arar Choir, conducted by Gor Melkumyan, sang Yervand Yerkanyan's Hope of Armenia, and the Coro Calicantius from Switzerland performed Eriks Esenval's Stars, the virtual audience visited the Matenadaran and learned about restoration of ancient manuscripts.

When the National Chamber Choir of Armenia, an adult chorus conducted by Robert Mlkeyan, presented Lusnak sari takin by Komitas and David Haladjian's Gloria, there followed a film segment showing underground caves from the 4th millennium B.C., where Armenian wines were stored in clay jugs.

Another piece by Komitas, A Beautiful, Clear Night, was chosen by the Agape Choir, under conductor Mariya Galstyan, followed by the Rapsodia

Choir from Moldova, which sang Constantin Shvedoff's God Is Our Saviour, directed by Natalia Barabanshikova. And from Lithuania the Ugnele Children's Choir, under conductor Valerija Skapiene, presented two of Victor Johnson's Three Songs about the Elements. As a protective measure against virus infection, members of this choir donned plexiglass face shields – and still

managed to give a remarkable performance. The virtual tour through Armenia continued, with breathtaking aerial views of mountainous regions, landscapes dotted with ancient churches and monasteries, a stop at the pre-Christian Garni temple, and a historical review of traditional khachkar stone crosses.

The largest number of groups came from Armenia, among them the Tavush Diocese Children's Choir, which sang A Million Dreams by Ben Pasek and Justin Paul. The conductor was Kristine Sheroyan.

A highpoint came with the appearance of the Children of Artsakh Choir, with conductor Luiza Grigoryan. They sang Edgar Gyanjanyan's We Long to Live, in English. The song addresses the plight of the people of Artsakh; its lyrics are a straightforward declaration of the right to life and to peace. “We have to thrive, to live and fight for life,” they sang, “Against the war, we call to fight for peace and love.” Demanding that wars be stopped and weapons be banned, the song ends in a prayer, for freedom “in our independent land, in our wonderful land; May good prevail on the planet.”

The Little Singers of Armenia were well represented throughout, and not only vocally. The LSA Handbell Choir, directed by Donavon Gray, performed Linda Lamb's Celtic Farewell. Maestro Tigran Hekekyan conducted the LSA choir in Let There Be Peace, by Jill Jack Miller and Sy Miller. To conclude the concert, Hekekyan brought all the choirs together to present Erebuni-Yerevan, by Edgar Hovhannisyan and Paruyr Sevak. Here the Shogher Choir from Germany joined in, as well as the Western USA Hamazkayin Nayirian Choir.



Families of Missing Soldiers Protest outside Armenian Government Offices

FAMILIES, from page 1

stated Health Minister Arsen Torosyan should be held to account for the failed efforts to find those soldiers, demanding a meeting with him.

According to the father, the government does not know that more than 800 Armenian soldiers are being held in a Baku prison. “We talked to 44 repatriated POWs, they say that there were three floors and two buildings, with 6 people kept in each cell. The children got a blood test with their eyes closed, but they saw the numbers. We add up and it turns out to be more than 800,” he said.

He presented the parents' demand: “There is a site where Azerbaijanis buried the dead soldiers. They must find out where they are buried so that we can find and retrieve the remains. In addition, we must be provided with the specific names of the prisoners. I am convinced that there are over 800 children in the Baku prison.

“I don't know what they are doing: what New Year, what Snow Maiden? It's a shame, they are not at work. Everyone must work. I haven't seen my son for three months.”

He also said Azerbaijanis do not allow search operations for the surviving soldiers in some places.

The parent added there will be no meeting with Nikol Pashinyan, as the premier is preparing for a trilateral meeting and avoids contacts not to catch coronavirus.

“We can hold a phone call. We will present our concerns to him over the phone, but the health minister must come here, if he does not come, we will find him,” Gevorgyan said.





ARMENIA

Christmas Epiphany Liturgy at St. Gayane Monastery

ECHMIADZIN – On January 5, on the occasion of the Feast of the Nativity, Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, presided over the Liturgy of the Dawn with the participation of the Congregation of the Mother See, benefactors of the Mother See, and other participants.

The celebrant was the director of the Administrative Department of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, Bishop Mushegh Babayan. During the evening service, various scriptures were read, followed by four deacons from the Mother See reading Daniel's prophecy.

Babayan referred to the Nativity of Christ in his sermon, noting that everyone has again taken steps to the churches to strengthen and desire peace, that all in the first days of 2021 have come together to pray, to live, to be a living and military Church. To feed on Jesus.

"Peace unites us. In search of peace, the Armenian nation embraced Christ, accepted His rule, and relied on His infinite peace. We have



Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II blesses the faithful



Bishop Mushegh Babayan

always united around this mighty Prince of Peace, to be strengthened by Him, to be filled with hope. And at this moment, dear believers, is the good news of the birth of that mighty Prince, who is being trumpeted by angels in the news of the world. "Christ was born and revealed, great news for you and us."

He called on the faithful to make a vow strengthened by the gospel of Christmas, to promise that they will overcome pain with faith, will live every day with hope, and will be filled with love to win with love, because Christ was born and appeared.

At the end of the Holy Liturgy, the pre-holiday ceremony, the Catholicos ascended to the tabernacle and lit a candle, from which the light symbolizing Jesus Christ was distributed to the believers.

Finally, led by the Catholicos, the first Blessing of the Year was performed.

Armenian Couple Weds in Dadivank Monastery

STEPANKERT (PanArmenian.net) – A couple wed in late December in the medieval Armenian monastery of Dadivank in Nagorno-Karabakh, in the first ceremony since the church remained in territories that came under the control of Azerbaijan.



Irina Gabrielyan from Martakert and Aram Berdyan from Stepanakert married on December 27 in Dadivank. According to a report from the telegram channel WarGonzo, the couple thanked the Russian peacekeepers for protecting the monastery.

The Primate of the Karabakh Diocese Pargv Martirosyan arrived at Dadivank not only for the wedding ceremony, but also for a service for the pilgrims. He also brought the Russian peacekeepers New Year gifts – crosses and letters from children of Karabakh.

Armenian President Infected With Coronavirus

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – President Armen Sarkissian has tested positive for the coronavirus, his office said on Tuesday, January 5.

A statement released by the office said Sarkissian, 67, took the test after showing symptoms of COVID-19 following foot surgery which he underwent in London on Sunday.

"President Sarkissian has self-isolated and will temporarily work remotely," added the statement. It did not say whether he remains in hospital.

Armenia has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, with more than 160,000 cases and at least 2,878 deaths officially confirmed in the country of about 3 million to date. The real number of cases is believed to be much higher.

The Armenian authorities largely stopped enforcing safety and hygiene rules, aimed at containing the pandemic, following the September 27 outbreak of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. The daily number of new COVID-19 infections 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 11,215 active coronavirus cases in Armenia as of Tuesday morning, sharply down from 22,850 cases reported on December 1.



INTERNATIONAL

International News

French-Armenian Soldier Killed in Mali during Counterterrorism Mission

PARIS (Panarmenian.net) — A roadside bomb in Mali killed French Armenian soldier Dorian Issakhanian on Monday December 28, according to the French government. The serviceman was part of France's Operation Barkhane mission, which is fighting an Islamist extremist insurgency in Africa's Sahel region, Voice of America reports.

An armored vehicle carrying Issakhanian and two other troops struck the explosive device in the Hombori region of Mali, which left all three of them dead.

They were working as part of a 5,000-troop mission "in an area where terrorist groups are attacking civilians and threatening the regional stability," according to Florence Parly, France's defense minister.

Forty-four other French soldiers have died since January 2013 when French troops began their mission in the Sahel. Jihadists have killed thousands of civilians and soldiers in recent years as they expanded their activities to other parts of the region, such as Burkina Faso and Niger.

Iranian Army Launches Large-Scale Drone Exercise

TEHRAN (Panorama.am) — The Iranian armed forces launched a large-scale exercise involving military unmanned aircraft on Tuesday, January 5.

The drone combat drill is underway in the northern province of Semnan, Tasnim News Agency reports.

The deputy commander of the army for operations said units from the Ground Force, Air Defense, Air Force and Navy practice real war conditions in the drill with a broad range of drone systems.

Admiral Mahmoud Mousavi said various combat operations would be exercised in the war game, including aerial interception, launch of air-to-air missiles, detonation of ground targets with bombs and missiles with pinpoint accuracy, and employment of suicide drones.

The naval drones will fly from warships in the southern waters, and suicide drones would carry out long-range sorties to practice hitting vital hostile targets deep into the enemy's airspace with pinpoint accuracy, he added.

The admiral also noted that the Army is holding an exhibition of military drones on the sidelines of the drill.

Lavrov: Karabakh Situation Can't Be Used To Transfer Mercenaries To Region

MOSCOW (Panarmenian.net) — Russia and Turkey agree that the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh should not be used to transfer foreign mercenaries into the region, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Tuesday, December 29, following talks with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu.

"Our shared opinion is that the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh should not be used for attempts to transfer foreign mercenaries into this region. Our positions overlap on that," Lavrov said, according to TASS.

"We welcome Ankara's desire to help the parties to the conflict fulfill their obligations, in particular, under the statement signed by the Presidents of Russia, Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia on November 9, as well as within the framework of the Russian-Turkish joint center for monitoring the implementation of the ceasefire."

In the war against Artsakh (Karabakh), Turkey supported Azerbaijan militarily, also by transferring terrorist mercenaries from the Middle East to fight against Karabakh. Armenia was the first to report on Turkey's deployment of thousands of Syrian fighters to Azerbaijan. International media publications followed suit, as did reactions from France, Russia, Iran and Syria. The Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army has already unveiled footage from the interrogation of two such terrorists captured on the front.

Armenian PM Prioritizes Closer Ties with Russia

TIES, from page 1
context, of new security guarantees," he said.

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 peace-keeping troops to Karabakh as part of a Russian-brokered agreement that stopped the Armenian-Azerbaijani war on November 10. 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.

Pashinyan again praised the Russian peacekeepers, saying that their presence provides "substantial security guarantees" for Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population.

The vast majority of Armenian opposition forces, including the formerly pro-Western Bright Armenia Party (LHK), also support closer ties with Russia, saying that is the only realistic way to counter Azerbaijan's military alliance with Turkey.

LHK leader Edmon Marukyan called last week for the opening of a second Russian military base in Armenia. Marukyan said the base should be stationed in Syunik.

Former President Robert Kocharyan likewise made a case on December 4 for Armenia's "much deeper integration" with Russia. Kocharyan, who has a cordial rapport with Russian President Vladimir Putin, said that only Russia can help his country rearm its armed forces and confront new security challenges in the aftermath of the Karabakh war.

"I am convinced that the further development of multifaceted Russian-Armenian ties meets the fundamental interests of our two brotherly peoples," Putin said in a New Year and Christmas message to Pashinyan sent earlier this week.

He said that in the course of 2020

Moscow and Yerevan "became fully convinced of the significance of friendly, allied relations between our countries."

Putin himself has also called for a further deepening of Russian-Armenian relations in New Year and Christmas messages sent to Armenia's leaders.

"The outgoing year was not an easy one, but we hope that the challenges it brought along will be left behind," Putin wrote to Pashinyan. "Importantly, we became fully convinced of the significance of friendly, allied relations

between our countries."

"I am convinced that the further development of multifaceted Russian-Armenian ties meets the fundamental interests of our two brotherly peoples and goes in the mainstream of ensuring peace, security and stability in the South Caucasus region," he said.

"I would like to confirm the commitment to the further development of Russian-Armenian allied cooperation," read a separate message sent by Putin to President Armen Sarkissian.

Russia Allocates \$12 Million For Karabakh Refugees

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Russia has allocated 10 million euros (\$12.2 million) in financial assistance to thousands of ethnic Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh who fled to Armenia during the recent war.

The office of Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan reported this week that the sum will co-finance the Armenian government's ongoing aid programs for the refugees remaining in Armenia nearly two months after Moscow brokered an Armenian-Azerbaijani agreement to stop the war.

The government has helped the refugees both during and after the six-week hostilities that displaced the majority of Karabakh's population. According to Grigoryan's office, the government has spent about 15 billion drams (\$29 million) for that purpose since November 16.

The aid has included compensations of between 250,000 and 300,000 drams (\$480-580) paid to those Karabakh families whose homes were destroyed by shelling or who lived in areas occupied by Azerbaijani forces. On December 17, the government also decided to create temporary jobs for refugees, finance paid internships for them and pay monthly benefits to families in Armenia hosting them.

According to Karabakh officials, at least 90,000 civilians making up around 60 percent of Karabakh's population fled their homes during the war that broke out on September 27. Most of them took refuge in Armenia. At least 47,000 Karabakh Armenians have reportedly returned home since the November 10 truce.

Later in November, the Russian government opened in Stepanakert a "center for humanitarian reaction." The center coordinates ongoing Russian-led demining operations in Karabakh and is also tasked with helping to rebuild homes and public infrastructure destroyed or seriously damaged during the hostilities.

Russia's Ministry of Civil Defense and Emergencies says that it has sent more than 1,500 tons of construction materials, household appliances and other relief supplies to Karabakh so far.

Syunik Villages Falling Under Azerbaijani Rule

SYUNIK, from page 1
go after the herd if it crosses the Azerbaijani side in the eastern part of the village," Arshakyan said.

To note, according to the demarcation, some 12 houses of the village are to be ceded to Azerbaijan which gave a deadline to locals of January 5 to vacate their houses and the property.

In Arshakyan's words, in case of controversy, a responsible person captain Aram Ohanyan and the Russian border guards are the ones to reach and solve the matter.

Asked about the roadway connecting Goris to Kapan, Ohanyan said there would be no issue with the operation of the roadway which will be controlled by the local forces and the Russian guards.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is carrying out "withdrawal of troops from Artsakh", political scientist Hrant Melik-Shahnazaryan warned.

"While we are discussing which country Shurnukh was part of during the Soviet period, Nikol the traitor is withdrawing troops from Artsakh. Soldiers are transferred to Armenia under the pretext of the rotation of troops, afterwards they announce that the Azerbaijanis do not allow the servicemen to return to their positions to carry out their service. And this is a constantly repeated process," he wrote on Facebook on Monday, January 4.

"I am simply amazed at the level of

our people's indifference towards the homeland. Let's put aside the broad masses of the public, what about the intelligentsia? What about the political, military and religious leaders?

"So, let me tell you that after Shurnukh, the village of Tigranashen (Kyark) in Ararat Province is to be handed over to the enemy [Azerbaijan]. Just don't ask how I found out about it. The answer can be found on the internet. Search for and read the statement released by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) a month and a half ago, which clearly states that in addition to Yeraskh, a checkpoint will be set up in the village of Paruyr Sevak. Then find Paruyr Sevak village on the map and everything will become clear. Do I have to say what is next?

According to the trilateral agreement signed after 44 days of the war in Karabakh, the Zangelan region was transferred to Azerbaijan. It borders on the Syunik region of Armenia and is now undergoing a process of demarcation along the administrative borders of the Soviet era.

As a result, the road between the cities of Goris and Kapan of the Syunik region crosses the Azerbaijani territory in several places. Recently, incidents have often occurred here due to the fact that the border passes through the middle of some state objects of Armenia and private houses.

The situation in the region is extremely tense. The residents of Syunik believe that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan "voluntarily transferred the territory of Karabakh to Azerbaijan" and now he is "giving away the lands of Armenia." On December 21, people even blocked the roads and did not allow the prime minister to enter the region.

In the morning, at a government meeting, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan spoke about the process of defining borders in Syunik. He warned that painful situations could arise in the villages of Shurnukh and Vorotan:

"But I want to assure that in all those cases when questions arise with the protection of the interests of the residents of Armenia, the government will provide full compensation - the interests of our citizens will be protected."

Nikol Pashinyan is "quietly" fulfilling hidden promises that he made to the Azerbaijani side, analyst Karen Bekaryan said. In his opinion, there is no other explanation for the fact that the same is happening with the borders of Armenia as with the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, that is, they are voluntarily given to Azerbaijan:

"The only logic is that he [Pashinyan] has assumed additional obligations to Aliyev, which are now being silently fulfilled without presenting any document to the people."



INTERNATIONAL

Boxers ‘King’ and ‘Chosenboy’ from Czech Republic

Interview with Viktor and Erik Agateljans

Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/USTI NAD LABEM, Czech Republic – Viktor and Erik Agateljan (Aghatelyan), are Armenian professional boxer brothers from Czech Republic. Born in 1994 and 1995 in the town of Ararat, Armenia, from childhood they live with their family in Ústí nad Labem in the Czech Republic.

Viktor, whose nickname is King, was trained in boxing and football since his childhood. He became the champion of boxing of Czech Republic for eight times. Currently he is working as a security guard in a night club and a personal coach of fitness and boxing.

Erik, whose nickname is Chosenboy, has been involved in boxing and football (soccer) since he was a child. He won the Czech title four times. In 2016 he won a gold medal at the Ústí nad Labem competition, and in 2017, he was named the best boxer in the Czech Republic in a poll conducted by the website profiboxing.cz.

Guys, I want to start our conversation with Muhammed Ali's words: "I hated every minute of training, but I told myself, 'Don't give up, suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.'" Have you ever had similar thoughts?

Viktor – Sometimes I feel I am done but I tell myself I have to go for my dreams on hard way. But because no one pushes me and I have to push myself all alone, that makes me more motivated to work hard.

Erik – I have had some similar thoughts; there is just one difference: I love almost every minute of training!

What are the main qualities a boxer should possess?

Viktor – Fighters have to have a big heart and skills, think fast, be strong and be motivated.

Erik – I think the main qualities are heart, bellicosity, meekness and the most important, loyalty.

Mike Tyson once complained that some young boxers are too business-oriented now. How are you “oriented?”

Viktor – There is a lot of fun between fights and after fights, but you do not have time for fun in the ring, because the real fight is not fun. Tyson is right. Today boxing is more of a business, but I do not think that it is wrong, as we need to do something to make a living.

Erik – I am looking at this as a sportsman and a businessman as well. Boxing touches me, but I am not at that age to fight for free anymore.

Can you share some funny moments from your sporting career?

Viktor – I think there was a lot of fun in boxing camp, but I am not sure if it is funny when I made pushups after a fight to show my opponent how tough I am.

Erik – I have so many funny stories from my career. Once,



Viktor-King and Erik-Chosenboy

back in the amateur ring, I wanted to jump over the ropes and I fell. From that day on, I did not try it again, and I enter the ring like normal people do!

What do you like to do to train?

Viktor – I do lot of fitness, running, so I do almost everything. I try to do everything sometimes in the same day. I do like to spend time with my family, with my girlfriend, dancing and singing, including Armenian ones.

Erik – I am also spending a lot of time with my family and friends and also love to dance and sing!

Have you ever had any suggestions for appearing in other spheres – modeling, advertising, acting, etc.?

Viktor – I had a role once as a boxer in a movie, but it was just in some scenes, and I had also some offers for modeling.

Erik – Yeah, me too, I have got some experiences with acting in movies and modeling. I like it!

My daughter sometimes says she wants to attend a boxing school. What is your advise?

Viktor – I think it is good for girls to train in boxing, but I would not let my daughter go into the rink. However, I do not have kids yet, so I cannot tell for now (laughing).

Erik – Why not, boxing is a great cardio and a beautiful sport, but I would not let my daughter fight in a real boxing match!

Can people see your Armenian temperament in the ring?

Viktor – I think they can see it more in the real life, but in the ring it is also possible.

Erik – Of course they can, it is always different, when Armenian blood is in the ring!

Have you inherited your love for sport from your parents?

Viktor – My parents support me, when I go to the ring or to training, they always push me forward.

Erik – Both our parents used to do sports in their youth, so yes, they have had some role in that.

Your family left Armenia when you were child. What memories do you have from your homeland?

Viktor – I remember big onions in the soup in kindergarten (laughing).

Erik – Nothing, I was too young when my family left Armenia.

You speak Czech and English, what about Armenian? Do you keep Armenian traditions?

Viktor – Yes, I speak Armenian very well; I just cannot read Armenian, but I do not feel that is important. I can also speak Russian and German a bit. I will continue to learn some more languages for future.

Erik – We always talk in Armenian at home, so yes, Armenian is my mother language!

How long did you live in Australia and what was your experience?

Viktor – We lived in Sydney all together one year and a couple of months. First of all, I befriended our big boxing champion Vic Darchinyan, which was a dream. Australian boxer and coach Lincoln Hudson taught us lots of boxing skills, so I got a big experience in Australia.

Erik – That is true. We have learned so much in Australia. We have met a lot of great people. I could talk about Vic Darchinyan and Lincoln Hudson all day, how much they gave me and my brother.

Although you represent other countries, the Armenians always yell out your names. Do you feel it in the ring?

Viktor – First of all I represent myself in the ring and my family, now I represent Czech Republic and I love this country, but of course I will never forget where I am from.

Erik – I have felt that so many times and it is awesome!

Armenians are very active in Czech sports, especially in kick-boxing. Do they feel part of a big Armenian family?

Viktor – I know some guys here and I am proud of them when I meet some sportsmen with Armenian background.

Erik – It is good to be a proud Armenian in my heart, but we should never forget for what country we are fighting.

What do you want to wish Armenian readers worldwide on the eve of upcoming year?

Viktor – I wish for all Armenians to have peace in their lives and have a better year than we had, and of course, stopping the war for good!

Erik – I wish for all Armenian readers and their families the best of luck, peace, and much love to everyone and a healthy new year.

Aznavour Foundation Sends Humanitarian Aid for Armenia

PARIS – More than 60 tons of humanitarian aid have already been delivered to Armenia with 4 humanitarian planes chartered by the Crisis and Support Center of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs following the decision of the President of the Republic; 40 tons of this aid was collected by the Aznavour Foundation thanks to the unity, solidarity and hard work of 50 organizations and hundreds of volunteers. Thanks to 20 collection points organized in France and Switzerland, 11 distribution chains throughout Armenian territory and Nagorno-Karabakh, 12,000 refugees were provided with basic necessities.

On November 12, President Emmanuel Macron received at the Élysée Palace personalities and humanitarian organizations of Armenian community to affirm France's support towards Armenia and Artsakh after the announcement of the ceasefire.

The following humanitarian organizations took part in the meeting at the invitation of the Presidency of the Republic: the Armenian Fund of France (represented by Bedros Terzian, President of the Fund); the Aznavour Foundation (represented by Kristina Aznavour, CEO of the Foundation) and the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) France (represented by Nadia Gortzounian, President of the Union). The meeting was also attended by Youri Djorkaëff, Nicolas Aznavour, André Manoukian, Stéphane Hasbanian and Anouche Dzagoyan.

Macron reaffirmed on this occasion the “historic friendship” between France and Armenia. “At this difficult time, France stands by Armenia,” he said. In addition to sending medical mission to Armenia, the President of the Republic also announced the provision of humanitarian aid to Armenia through a cargo plane and the pursuit of Franco-Armenian cooperation in healthcare. After initial emergency actions involving the dispatch of surgeons and medical/surgical supplies to Armenia, several humanitarian flights have

been organized.

An initial cargo plane leased by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs arrived in Yerevan on November 22. It was transporting items donated by French authorities: emergency medical equipment, and in particular a Mobile Medical Station allowing for the care of 500 people as well as blankets and hygiene kits to be distributed to those affected by the conflict.

On November 27th the second plane with humanitarian aid arrived in Armenia. It had a special delegation on board led by Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, the State Secretary of France, Eric Chevallier, Director of the Crisis and Support Centre, Kristina Aznavour, CEO of the Aznavour Foundation, Youri and Denis Djorkaëff, Stéphane Hasbanian, the team of “Electriciens sans frontières,” French journalists and other delegates. The delegation led by the Minister of State arrived aboard an aircraft leased by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs that carried donations collected by the Aznavour Foundation and humanitarian cargo supplied by charity organizations and corporate foundations.

On December 11 the third plane landed in Armenia, carrying humanitarian aid supplies (wheelchairs, stretchers, walkers, medical equipment, masks, medicines, care kits, clothing) collected by the Aznavour Foundation in France and Switzerland, as well as hygiene kits and duvets entrusted by the Véolia Foundation to the Aznavour Foundation for distribution.

On December 18, the 4th humanitarian aid flight landed in Yerevan, carrying cargo from the Aznavour Foundation (wheelchairs, winter clothes, medicine) and that of other Armenian associations on board.

In addition to the humanitarian aid sent by planes, the Aznavour Foundation collected 60 tons of additional material. The shipment will be transported to Armenia by sea and land at the beginning of

2021. As a result of this operation, the Aznavour Foundation and its partners will have collected and distributed 100 tons of humanitarian aid in total.

Once again we would like to express our gratitude to all involved parties: President of France, Crisis and Support Centre, French Embassy in Armenia, all organizations and individuals that participated in collecting and sending the needed help. We hope that this unity will help us overcome existing challenges.

All this became possible thanks to engagement of: Veolia Foundation, Electriciens sans frontières, UNICEF, Blue Cross of Armenians of France, ASPA, ACABA, AGENK, AGUMP, AU CE, Armenian Center of Geneva, UMAF Lyon, Armenian community of Ticino, SAHB Hilfsmittelberatung, REHA Rheinfelden, “Volunteers for humanity,” the House of Armenian culture of Grenoble, association “Unity for Armenians,” association “Sassoun,” ssociation “Children of Armenia,” Clamart town hall, Marseille town hall, the city of Plessis- Robinson, logistics company “Ani Déménagement,” Armenian culture house in Alfortville, foundation “Elise Care,” Public Assistance - Marseille Hospitals (APHM), Public Assistance - Paris Hospitals, Meditraining, LHD Groupe France, Aide Actions Internationales Pompiers, Résidence Sainte Bernadette, Tempolog, Levis, Sud Express, Municipality of Arnouville, Franco-Armenian Union of New Aquitaine, Chiloe association, AgurArménie de Biarritz, “Solidarity donations,” Franco-Armenian Club of Antony, collection centers in Arnouville, Alfortville, Issy-les-Moulineux, “DiaspoHay,” Bedoian family, Stéphane Hasbanian, Youri and Denis Djorkaëffs, Josephe Arakel, Elise Boghossian, David Perrier, Arax Der-Kevorkian, Hasmik Poladian, Julietta Hovhanessian, Jean-Luc Messenger, Sylvie Moretti, Hayk Arakélian, Benjamin Mouquet Findikian, Hratch et Agop Kirmizyan, Arthur Garabedian and many others.



Community News

US Senator Bob Menendez Marries Nadine Arslanian

BAYSIDE, N.Y. (nj.com) – US Sen. Bob Menendez and Nadine Arslanian were married on October 3, 2020 in an intimate and socially distanced ceremony. Afterwards, the couple celebrated with family and some close friends at a small outdoor reception.

Menendez previously was married and has two



Sen. Robert Menendez and his wife, Nadine Arslanian, leave the church.

adult children and three grandchildren. He first met his wife, Nadine Arslanian, an international businesswoman from Bergen County, almost a decade ago at the IHOP in Union City. They reconnected years later at a political event and began dating.

Menendez spokesman Steve Sandberg said the couple bonded over “their shared interests of travel, love of family, pride for their respective heritage and ethnicity, and a mutual drive to improve access to quality health care and make lives better for the people of New Jersey.”

Menendez, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has been prominent in efforts over many years to get the US government to officially recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Mrs. Menendez serves on the Hackensack Meridian Children’s Advisory Committee.

Mesrobian Robotics Club ‘RoseBot’ Float for 2021 Virtual Rose Parade Dedicated to Karabakh

PICO RIVERA, Calif. – As the pandemic continues to alter daily lives and ways of learning, the Armenian Mesrobian High School Robotics Club has adapted to the new environment by creating innovative ways of applying the foundations of robotics. Led by high school junior Andrew Josephbek, the team was tasked with building a “RoseBot” float for the 2021 Virtual Rose Parade. The students ranging from middle school to high school decided to incorporate the theme of Artsakh in light of the conditions in the region.

Using VEX IQ Kits as a foundation to build the robot, the float was decorated with all natural materials. The theme of the float is “Education Conquers All.” At the center, the statue named “We Are Our Mountains” represents the Armenian people of the mountainous region of Artsakh. Pomegranates are found throughout the float and represent eternal life in the Armenian culture. The book placed inside the pomegranate symbolizes the importance of education. Through education anything is possible. The float is dedicated to the power of education and the students of Artsakh and Armenia.

Robotics Club founder, Andrew Josephbek, will be working with the Hye Hopes Organization, whose mission is to provide equitable learning opportunities for the displaced students of Artsakh. Hye Hopes will be providing remote learning programs for the displaced students and training for volunteer teachers. In addition, weekend workshops will be offered to students where they can learn hands-on robotics skills.



Nviri.am products

Buy Armenian

The Revival of the Armenian Market

By Ani Duzdabanyan-Manoukian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES – “Made in Armenia” became the most anticipated and trendy phrase on price tags which Armenians in Southern California and elsewhere in the diaspora sought out on wine, food, cloths, handmade items and many other products during the last three months. Everything started with the war in Artsakh on September 27, when Armenians all over the world started to reject Turkish products and look for anything originating in Armenia, especially items which tasted and looked Armenian.

The “Buy Armenian” movement grew bigger and bigger every day. In the first week, the number of followers reached 1000. With the increase in the numbers of users, the founders adopted a new goal. It became a mission to present everything Armenian made anywhere in the world, from Armenia to Europe, the Middle East, North America and Australia. This brought in new members, new creators and entrepreneurs, online stores, artists and cooks. After only 1 ½ months, the page had 28,000 followers.

“We are a non-partisan group. We don’t allow any partisan politics in ‘Buy Armenian.’ For us it’s only Armenia and Armenians. But also we closely monitor users’ posts when they are creating a commotion and remove them,” Nishan Odabashian, Lilit’s husband who helps her with the project, says as he joins the conversation. He gives as an example a certain brand of a cheese.

“Every day 10-15 posts discussed the origin of it, whether it’s Turkish or Armenian. We believe that there is no time to waste right now. We have to unite our efforts to accomplish big things,” Lilit said. She states her goals clearly. The discussions over the origins of a product often created targeted movements in social media and expanded into real-life conflicts for local grocery stores. Several stores were forced to discard all Turkish items despite the loss of money involved.

Anton Oganessian’s family has owned Old Fashion Deli in Glendale for more than 25 years. Anton voluntarily refused to sell anything Turkish in July 2020, when clashes with Azerbaijan took place in Tavush, Armenia. When the Buy Armenian movement started, his sales went up 30 percent. “They are still coming and checking to see if we are selling Turkish products. I imported whatever customers wanted, but never even advertised or

see PRODUCTS, page 10



Old Fashion Deli’s Armenian products

AGBU Observes UN Genocide Prevention Day with Two Virtual Conferences

NEW YORK – The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) observes December 9, the United Nations International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and the Prevention of this Crime.

This year, two virtual events were organized, one by AGBU Lebanon in conjunction with the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, and the other by the AGBU Central Office in New York in partnership with the Promise Institute for Human Rights, operating out of California.

Lebanon Genocide in the Middle East Viewed from a Gender Lens

AGBU Lebanon has embraced AGBU’s mission to expand its outreach and education to those outside of the Armenian community. By partnering with esteemed institutions each year, it not only offers a broader dialogue in which to tell the Armenian story to new audiences, but also to encourage understanding and collaborative exchange for a better future,” explained Mireille Kanamirian, AGBU Lebanon District Committee Member and lead of lead of human rights and cultural partnership initiatives.

Taking its cue from the United Nations’ chosen theme of how women bear the brunt of oppressive and genocidal regimes, this long overdue topic established the framework for the conference on December 9, coordinated from Beirut. The three-hour event, divided into two sessions, featured panelists from diverse disciplines who could speak authoritatively about human rights crimes against women and children.

In their opening remarks, Berge Setrakian, the president of AGBU, and Dr. Joseph Bahout, the director of Issam Fares Institute, framed the discussion by contextualizing the mistreatment of women in the greater scheme of genocide studies.

The first session was moderated by International Criminal Lawyer and Presidential Professor of Law emeritus Chibli Mallat of the University of Utah. The panel featured Dr. Darina Saliba Abi Chedid, the director of the International Center for Human Sciences; Dr. Carol Mann, the director of Women in War; and the noted peace-building expert Maya Jizzini.

The second session was moderated by regional analyst Yeghia Tashjian with a panel including Abid Shamdeen, the executive director of Nadia’s Initiative; Bourshra Ali, the president of the Jin Women’s Foundation; Dr. Samah Saleh, an assistant professor at An-Najah National University; Michel Mallo, the secretary general of the Syriac Union; and Dr. Roy Knocke, the deputy director of Lepsius Haus Potsdam.

Throughout the day, the panelists made the case that the murder of and abusive acts against women are an intentional tactics used to eradicate the present and the future. Examples abounded: how perpetrators justify ethnic cleansing of women in marginalized communities throughout the Middle East; how the Islamic State justified attacks on Yazidi women by “othering” their existence and claiming they were not people of the book; and the experience of Kurdish women who were victims of deliberate attempts to Turkify them and even how prominent women in Kurdish society were assassinated. “All genocides are gendered,” is how Dr. Mann summed up the key points presented.

The discussion then turned to the role women play after crimes against humanity are committed, citing the crucial role of Palestinian women in revitalizing their community after the 1948 Palestinian exodus, known as the Nakba and fighting for the Palestinian return through protest, community-building, and clandestine organizing. Assyrian women were also

see UN, page 7



COMMUNITY NEWS

AGBU Observes UN Genocide Prevention Day

UN, from page 6

described as change-makers, along with their pivotal and impressive rise to leadership positions. Such cases debunk the myth that women are apolitical caretakers and highlight the crucial part they actually play in seeking justice after mass atrocities have occurred. Women also are proponents of peace, be it personal peace, familial peace, or national, regional, and international peace, posited Jizzini.

The virtual conference concluded with a live Q&A session with attendees from around the world.

United States

Truth and Accountability: Ethnic Cleansing in the Modern Age

On December 10, an open conversation hosted by AGBU and the Promise Institute for Human Rights featured international war crimes barrister Geoffrey Robertson QC; esteemed human rights lawyer Sheila Paylan; Raees Tin Maung of the Rohingya Human Rights Network of Canada; Stephen Smith, the executive director of the USC Shoah Foundation; Kate Mackintosh, the executive director of the Promise Institute of Human Rights at the UCLA School of Law; and moderator Wendy Lower, director of Mgrublian Center for Human Rights at Claremont McKenna College. The thrust of the discussion centered on raising awareness and holding perpetrators accountable for ongoing atrocities.

In his opening remarks, Robertson asserted: "The denial of genocide is a way of perpetrating and perpetuating genocide, adding that "the wickedness of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 was seen over the sky and over the Artsakh mountains in 2020." Emphasizing the necessity of finding ways to prevent genocide, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes, he emphatically declared, "We have international laws to prevent genocide, but we don't have the will to enforce those laws."

Picking up on the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh, Lower stated: "We feel the echoes of history in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. One hundred years on, the echoes of that history are with us at this very moment." She added that the definition and weight behind the legal term Genocide have often prevented economic and legal action, a conclusion

shared by all the panelists.

Mackintosh remarked, "If we think about some of the mass atrocities that have taken place last century, they have not met the legal definition of genocide. But no one would deny that those are terrible, terrible things that we want to prevent."

Focusing on taking action rather than letting politics interfere with the actionable change, Smith said, "What's important is establishing: what's the intent; what's the endgame; and what are we going to do to mitigate that and highlight that. The definitional issue gets us a little entrapped because it politicizes it."

All the speakers agreed that the collection of eyewitness reports is an essential tool that victims and activists can use to document cases of injustice. Smith, a specialist in the collection of testimonies of victims of mass atrocities, explained, "For those who are experiencing unfolding mass violence, what they need to know is that people are hearing them, that they do not feel abandoned. Make it clear that we really do care for each other. That's half of the battle."

Paylan posited that more often than not, seeking legal justice is a complex process. "When it comes to lending humanitarian aid, it tends to be easy to garner support for it," she noted. "When it comes to seeking accountability for crimes, it's a much more difficult process." She also pointed out that in the case of Artsakh, social media proved key in collecting evidence. "All the hatred that is spewed by the highest-ranking officials of Azerbaijan on Twitter and Facebook - this is evidence. If it's not collected and preserved right away, it will disappear." She advocated for the centralization of this documentation as a priority for open-source investigators.

The conference concluded with panelists suggesting optimum ways to prevent or prosecute human rights crimes, such as holding inter-ethnic and inter-religious discussions. Maung made an astute observation: "The people who are doing the most effective and noble work are people in inter-ethnic and inter-religion bridging. It is crucial that we collaborate and show solidarity. Yesterday it was them, today it was us, and tomorrow it could be someone else."

OBITUARY

Arpi Hovagimian

Longtime Teacher

HINGHAM, Mass. — Arpi Hovagimian died on December 19, 2020. Her untimely death was due to a skull fracture which later caused cranial bleeding.

Arpi lived on the sixth floor of Linden Ponds. Her greatest pleasure was to sit in her living room and watch the stand of trees. Because of the pandemic, she could not join any clubs or organizations. However, there were many and wonderful "classy" events and entertainments.

For her entire professional career, Arpi was an educator in the Quincy Public Schools. First as a kindergarten teacher and eventually teaching first grade. A colleague said that she always found something special in her students and helped them develop accordingly. She was dedicated to her profession and her students.

Arpi lived a healthy life and she was never ill until she contracted pneumonia which led to other medical problems that could not be overcome.

She is survived by her sister, Edna Hovagimian, her niece Maria Wind and family (N.J.), Dr. Sargon Donabed and family (MA), George Donabed and family (MA), Asadourian and Kashish family (N.J.), Albert Melikian (R.I.),



Haig family (CA), Hermine Adamian and family (MA), Susan Covo and family (MA).

She was predeceased by her parents, Hagop and Mary Hovagimian, her sisters, Sona Hovagimian and Rose Hovagimian Salogiannis and many friends, neighbors and colleagues.

Private Graveside services were held on Saturday, January 2, 2021 at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge. A memorial meal will be held after Easter.

Alice (Telian) Najarian

Longtime Member of St. Stephen's Ladies Guild

CENTRAL FALLS, R.I. — Alice (Telian) Najarian of Central Falls, formerly of Waltham, Mass., passed away on December 23, 2020.

She was the wife of the late Michael Najarian Sr.; mother of Michael Jr. and his wife Kerry, Gary and his wife Mary Ellen, Stephen, David, Robert and his wife Robin, and Richard and his wife Joanne; grandmother of Alex, Jonathan, Kathryn, Marisa,



Matthew, Lauren, Michael III, and Katie. Great grandmother of Elliott Anna; and sister of the late Harry B. Telian. She is also survived by many nieces, nephews and good friends including the caring staff at the Mansion Nursing Home.

Private funeral services will be held at Saint Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, Watertown to be followed with burial at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.

Alice was a long-time member of Saint Stephen's Ladies Guild. In addition to spoiling her grandchildren, Alice enjoyed bowling and playing tennis with her friends, and telling a good joke.

Arrangements are by Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Watertown.

Hripsime (DerVartanian) Badrikian

Dedicated to Family, Church

WATERTOWN — Hripsime (DerVartanian) Badrikian passed away peacefully on January 1, 2021. She was 100 years old.

Hripsime was born on June 20, 1920, in the Armenian province of Kharpert. After the death of her husband, the late Asadour Badrikian, Hripsime immigrated to the United States in the 1970s with her children and her brother, the late Neshan DerVartanian. The family settled in Watertown where Hripsime planted roots in the Armenian community through the St. Stephen's Armenian Church.

Hripsime was a devoted mother to Sarkis Badrikian, and the late Moushegh Badrikian, Zohrab Badrikian and Varoujan Badrikian.

She is survived by her son Sarkis, his wife Yeghsapet, and her daughters-in-law, Maida (Sanjian) Badrikian, Aida (Barsoyan) Badrikian, Enna (Pilavdjian) Badrikian, respectively. She was also predeceased by Moushegh's late wife, Lucine (Sahagian) Badrikian.

Hripsime had 9 grandchildren — Arshag, Silva, Hripsime, Salpi, Asador, Asadour, Taline, Shant, and Vicken. She loved them dearly as she did their spouses, Shoghig, Armen, Garo, Ted, Lucy, Christiane, Reid, and Tanya, respectively. These loving relationships



bore 16 great-grandchildren — Vrej, Raffi, Alina, Alex, Jacqueline, Angelina, Moushegh, Andre, Apraham, Leah, Ayden, Tyler, Areni, Reid IV, Ariana, and Karina — and 1 great-grandchild, Rayan, son of Alex and his wife Ayesha.

She is also survived by the families of her late brothers — the late Garabed DerVartanian, his wife Hasmig DerVartanian, their children Arpi, Suzy, Bedros, and Betty, and their respective spouses and children. And the late Neshan DerVartanian, his wife the late Satenig DerVartanian, their children the late Krikor DerVartanian and his wife Nazeli DerVartanian, their children, Vahe, Ani, and Haig, and their respective spouses and children. And her dear niece Tamar (DerVartanian) Boghosian who invited Hripsime into her home and looked after her for the past 5 years.

Hripsime was a proud and generous member of the community and a tireless supporter of the Armenian Church. She loved baking and cooking Armenian foods and shared everything she made with the people around her. She worked, baking at least part-time, at Eastern Lamejun until she retired 8 years ago.

Funeral and Cemetery services are private. Arrangements were by the Bedrossian Funeral Home.

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JANUARY

• Representatives of the Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA) introduced their new executive secretary for the West Coast, Mayda Kuredjian, to local Tekeyan executive members and leaders of various Los Angeles Armenian organizations on January 16 at the TCA Beshgeturian Center in Altadena. Leaders of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL), the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Social Democratic Hunchakian Party were present along with cultural figures and media representatives such as editors from the *California Courier*, *Massis*, *Baika*r and *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.



Mayda Kuredjian



The cast with playwright Taleen Babayan and Sen. Robert Menendez



Many of the guests assembled at the TCA event, with Mayda Kuredjian standing at the center.

• At one last event squeezed in before the 2020 quarantine, the TCA presented the New York City performance of the bio-musical “Charles,” based on the life and songs of legendary singer Charles Aznavour. The program debuted to a standing-room-only audience at Symphony Space, in an event hosted by the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York. Special guests in attendance included United States Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Col. Tigran Hovhannisyan, military adviser of Armenia to the United Nations, and Zoya Stepanyan, second secretary of the Permanent Mission of Armenia to the United Nations.

The Los Angeles-based performers, featuring singer Maurice Soudjian, pianist/actor Bernard C. Bayer, singer/actress Mariette Soudjian, accordion/guitarist Harout Soghomonian and upright bassist Levon Ghanimian, were enthusiastic to showcase the production, written and directed by Taleen Babayan, for the East Coast Armenian community, following two performances in Hollywood last Fall.

APRIL

MARCH

• The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA) undertook the renovation of the Tekeyan School in Berdzor, Artsakh, in parallel to the TCA Sponsor a Teacher Program, which supports this school and four others in Armenia. This renovation program shows that individuals really can make a difference for life in Artsakh and Armenia.

Berdzor is located on the Kashatagh (Lachin) passageway that links Armenia to Artsakh. Its school was in poor condition due to the exigencies of the Artsakh War. During the past three years, TCA initiated renovations, and 15



Math classroom after renovation



Plaque at the school

school only had 24 students, and now has over 200.

Although the TCA Sponsor a Teacher program has been helping the school for a long time, the TCA school renovation program began only a few years ago in 2017, when TCA Central Board Canadian member Arto Manoukian wanted to renovate a classroom. The renovation, like all others, was supervised by TCA's representative in Armenia Gayane Muradyan, and it only took some ten days.



Festival at the Vahan Tekeyan School



• In May and June, during challenging and unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic and after cancelling many events this past Spring, the TCA Metro Los Angeles Chapter organized a Zoom webinar titled “Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turks’ Seizure of Armenian Property,” delivered by Dr. Mehmet Polatel.

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

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

More than 150 spanning six continents and over 18 countries took part in the Zoom webinar.



The TCA school in Beirut after the explosion, top and below



AUGUST

• The already depressed economy of Lebanon suffered a catastrophic shock when massive explosions rocked downtown Beirut on Tuesday, August 4, flattening much of the port, damaging buildings and blowing out windows and doors.

Among the many Armenian institutions damaged are the Tekeyan School in Bourj Hammoud and the Tekeyan Center in Gemmayze.

The principal of the Tekeyan School, Galina Shememian Nadjarian, related the situation the day after the explosion, on August 5. Still clearly shaken, she said, “Yesterday, we lived through an utter nightmare. We did not understand what happened. Only now are some explanations emerging about the situation and its causes. It took place yesterday at approximately 6 or 6:30 p.m. our time. While I pulled myself together, I received photographs from the school’s guard. I rushed to the school this morning.”

The Tekeyan Cultural Association’s Central Board sent a total of \$110,000 to the school after the tragedy, including \$50,000 from donors.

SEPTEMBER

• A year one thought could not get worse became disastrous for Armenia and Artsakh when Azerbaijan, helped by Turkish and Jihadist mercenaries, attacked Artsakh on September 27.

The ADL Supreme Council issued a statement condemning, “in no uncertain terms, the Azerbaijani aggression, and expresses its solidarity with the people of Armenia and Artsakh.

“The mobilization in Armenia must take place also in the diaspora, and encourage the volunteer movement, heal the wounded, and support the Armenian people in Artsakh and Armenia.”

And the statement concluded, “Enough is enough! Armenians will not allow themselves this time around to become victims of atrocities nor to let their homeland be overrun by Turkish and Azerbaijani bands.”

OCTOBER

• At an urgently convened Central Board meeting, the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA) voted to allocate \$100,000 to the Armenia Fund in support of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh). This decision was taken in light of Karabakh’s existential struggle which has mobilized the entire Armenian people around the world.

• TCA’s California chapters organized an evening fundraising gathering for solidarity with Artsakh on Friday, October 23 at the Armenian Society Center in Glendale. The evening was highlighted by a talk by Yerevan political analyst Levon Shirinyan on the current conflict in Artsakh. In her welcoming message, Executive Secretary of TCA West Coast Mayda Kuredjian greeted members and friends and thanked them for their donations, which resulted in a total of over \$40,000. This sum was sent to Armenia Fund with other donations from US and Canadian

TCA chapters and supporters. Along with the contribution from the TCA Central Board, a total of \$100,000 has been assembled which is being transferred to the Armenia Fund.

NOVEMBER

• The management of Tekeyan Cultural Association’s Dr. Nubar Berberian Trust Fund announced the names of Armenian students awarded in 2020 for their academic studies. They are: Nelli Petrosyan from Yerevan, Armenia, University of Geneva, Switzerland, Faculty of Social Sciences, Master Degree In Political Science, 2019-2021, graduating March 2021; Lily Arslanian from Boston, Boston University, Bachelor of Arts in International Relations – Focus on Security Studies in the Middle East, graduating May 2021.

DECEMBER

• Despite the damages from a great explosion in August, the Vahan Tekeyan School of Beirut is operational and repairs continue to be carried out. However, Covid-19 and the poor economy in Lebanon continue to cause great difficulties, while the political situation remains uncertain and a new government has yet to be formed.

Chairman of the TCA Founders Body Hagop Kasarjian said that while fundraising for repair of the Tekeyan School was fairly successful, it was much harder for the Tekeyan Center. He said, “People don’t understand that the revenue from the center is what will support the school in the future.” Some money has been raised through non-Armenian Lebanese sources, but not sufficient to do all of the necessary repairs. The building has been secured from the elements but only some of the sections have been able to be restored. Hundreds of thousands of dollars will be necessary to fully repair the building.

• What one was unthinkable happened. The Tekeyan School of Berdzor now lies in ruins. It lies in the narrow corridor in Kashatagh or Lachin province that is not under Azerbaijani control. During the war it was used as a barracks for Armenian soldiers. At the end of the war, the Armenian population was evacuated and Russian peacekeeping forces control this area, except for around 100 or so remaining Armenians. These are permitted to stay in order to serve the



A renovated classroom in the Beirut Tekeyan School

Russian troops in various capacities, such as running shops or doing other supportive work.

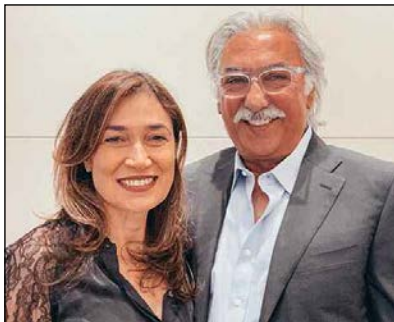
The principal and teachers of the school are now either in Yerevan or various villages with relatives. The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada is attempting to assist



The Berdzor school lies in ruins and is now in Azerbaijani-controlled territory.

them and help them find them new teaching jobs in Armenia’s provinces through the Ministry of Education.

• Benefactors Sam and Silva Simonian pledged \$100,000 for the Tekeyan Cultural Association’s Beirut School. Sam Simonian has close emotional ties to it since he received his early education there. He is a member of the Central Board of Directors of the AGBU and member of the boards of the American University of Armenia and Teach for Armenia. He is a successful telecommunications entrepreneur, but he and his wife are perhaps best known among Armenians for their creation of the Tumo Center for Creative Technologies, a free digital media learning center for teens. The first TUMO center opened in Yerevan in 2011, and then centers in Gyumri, Dilijan and Stepanakert. The model was so successful that centers were established in Beirut, Berlin, Moscow, Paris and Tirana, while many more are being planned.



Sam and Silva Simonian



Buy Armenian

PRODUCTS, from page 6 promoted this,” says Anton about these Turkish goods. He now works with more than 15 distributors from Armenia, selling mostly juices, jams, preserves, tomato pastes, teas and other goods from his homeland. Old Fashion Deli would be an appropriate business for webpage that the Odabashian family is creating to present all Armenian producers worldwide to buyers.

“When you have everything in one place, that makes it so much easier to shop. Instead of finding a sujukh maker in one village and order from him, you can go to the website and order everything in one place,” Nishan says as he talks about their future plans. Centralizing goods and services will contribute to the ultimate goal of creating an Armenian worldwide market. This is only one of the long-term goals of Odabashian family.

For now, the focus is on strengthening Armenian infrastructure by supporting businesses. “When every single Armenian supports another Armenian, then we can make a difference. When an Armenian gains money, he or she will eventually contribute to Armenia,” Lilit said, with contagious optimism. The Odabashians are working with shipping companies to find easier solutions for transporting products from Armenia throughout the world with reasonably low shipping costs. This was a major issue that small businesses and entrepreneurs have encountered.

Nviri.am, founded by Tamar Najarian-Isajanyan, felt the direct effects especially during the past months. Nviri.am is an online shop on Etsy that supports women in Armenia by selling their handmade clothing, toys, ornaments and others goods to customers abroad. “Shipping times are the worst,” Tamar says. In fact, she lost a lot of business because of it. Usually, it takes 10-12 days for an item to arrive to the US from Armenia.



Tamar Najarian-Isajanyan

There are greater difficulties for Canada. There is miscommunication with the tracking and timing. It usually takes 30-50 days, according to Tamar. In the last 3 months she sent out over 250 packages. Only two of them were lost. “They disappeared from the map. But when I sent an international inquiry, they were quickly found,” she adds quickly.

The next problem is the shipping cost; to ship 1 kg. from Armenia costs \$10 and 3 kg. is almost \$45. In order to run a business online, Tamar has to pay PayPal and Etsy about 10 percent of the sale and shipping costs plus tax. This percentage goes up when Etsy advertises the product for her. It brings Tamar 80 percent of her clientele but at quite a high price, which forces her to choose the following strategy. “I try to keep everything high value, low weight. It means that I am able to cover most of the costs myself,” she said.

Tamar visited Armenia as a volunteer in

2011, fell in love with the country and decided to stay and raise a family. Nviri.am started as an idea of making gift baskets with all products, including the basket itself, made in Armenia. Tamar started her small company with 10 people and now the number has increased to 25. Her employees are mostly women from Armenia, with some Syrian repatriates.

Online sales spiked with the Covid-19 pandemic, which allowed Tamar to create jobs for women who could sew, crochet and knit. “Everything that is on my store is a product of my imagination. I choose something then ask my girls to change this and that. The only thing that I can’t use, that is Armenian, is the fabric. Yarn and fabric is being imported and it is being made into something Armenian, T-shirts, blouses and so much more,” she said.

The sales at Nviri.am multiplied four times over in November due to the Buy Armenian movement. The overall demand for Armenian products played an important role in developing different online platforms, small boutiques that can be a bridge between artists in Armenia and the market worldwide. “There are so many talented artists in Armenia, but the only market they have is Russia and Armenia in summer when there are a lot of tourists. Besides, that market is very limited,” said Lusine Simonyan. She is the founder of Miray Collections, an online platform that is presenting Armenian artists and jewelry makers.

Miray solves the problem with shipping in its own way. The company buys a lot of products and ships to customers from the US. This makes it so much easier by saving shipping costs and a huge amount of time. “In Armenia they don’t have the infrastructure for online businesses. For example, they don’t accept

major credit cards like Visa, MasterCard and others. The only access they have is Etsy, but again the shipping takes a long time. Living in the US, where everything is happening so fast (we have Amazon with two-day Prime shipping), no one wants to wait for six weeks for an item to arrive. That’s why representing these artists in US gives them so much opportunities and accessibilities to all the infrastructures that work so well here,” Lusine explains.



Miray collection showcase at event

Her family travels a lot, which allows her transport the items beforehand and have them “in stock” almost all the time when the order is placed. During the Buy Armenian movement, Miray’s sales increased up to 40 percent. “The more we support our fellow Armenians, the more money goes back to Armenia and goes to Armenian businesses. These artists spend most of their time creating. They don’t have time for marketing and selling – that’s where we come in to help,” Lusine shared. This is the strategy she uses to represent over 40 artists from Armenia.

The Buy Armenian movement united Armenians during the most challenging time of war. Even after the painful defeat, the revival of national identity still remains strong and gives hope for significant growth and progress.



Donate!

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Insurance Foundation for Servicemen in Armenia

The Insurance Foundation for Servicemen in Armenia was created in January 2017 to insure the social wellbeing of soldiers injured while on active duty as well as that of the families of soldiers who died while performing their duties. The insurance Foundation for Servicemen will provide monetary compensation to the families of soldiers as well as to soldiers injured or fallen

in combat on or after January 1st, 2017.

Every employed person in Armenia, gives 1000 drams (\$2) monthly from their salary to the Foundation, which will be raised to 3000 (\$6) drams in July 2021

Please encourage everyone to stand alongside the brave servicemen of Armenia by making a small donation for their insurance.

The Foundation operates on the principle of complete transparency. In enactment of this principle this website provides the possibility to see both your donations from overseas and every employed person’s contribution month to month in Armenia.

At any given time it is possible to see the total funds of the Foundation as well as the total amount of compensations.

<https://www.1000plus.am/en/>





Merry Christmas!

(The following are Christmas Greetings received after the publication of our last issue.)



Best Wishes for a prosperous
New Year

Parseh Abajian
Berkeley, CA



Merry Christmas and Happy
Healthy New Year

M. Casey Kazanjian
Rockville, MD



Peace and Prosperity to
Armenia and Artsakh

Tavit O. Najarian
Little Silver, NJ



Merry Christmas and Good
Health for Everyone

Marjorie H. Martiesian
Saunderstown, RI



May you Rejoice in the Miracle,
the Gift and the Promise of
Christmas

Dr. Ruben Boyajian
Effingham, IL



Merry Christmas and Happy
New Year to each and every
contributing member of the
Armenian Mirror-Spectator.

Sirop and Maro Bedrosian
Houston, TX



Best Wishes for 2021

Heratch O. Doumanian
Chicago, IL



Thank you for all your work

Peter Amershadian
York Harbor, ME



Merry Christmas and a Happy
New Year

Saro and Hilda Hartounian and Family
Franklin Lakes, NJ

Tekeyan Cultural
Association
West Coast

Fresno
Greater Los Angeles
Pasadena / Glendale
Metro Los Angeles
Chapters committees

Wish all the readers
of The Armenian
Mirror Spectator

A
MERRY
CHRISTMAS
AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR



Christmas Donations

Aram S. Adourian and Anna Ohanyan, Concord, MA \$300

Tekeyan Cultural Association Fresno Chapter \$250

Tekeyan Cultural Association Greater Los Angeles Chapter \$250

Tekeyan Cultural Association Pasadena/Glendale Chapter \$250

Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter \$250

Dr. Ruben Boyajian, Effingham, IL \$200

Parseh Abajian, Berkeley, CA \$200

Tavit O. Najarian, Little Silver, NJ \$150

Helen T. Gillcrst, Boston, MA \$150

Richard D. McOmber, Rumson, NJ \$100

Dorothy D. Martiesian, Providence, RI \$100

Merritt Agabian, E Walpole, MA \$100

Marjorie H. Martiesian, Saunderstown, RI \$100

Toufayan Bakery, Inc., Ridgefield, NJ \$100

Heratch O. Doumanian, Chicago, IL \$100

John and Joanne Pehlivanian, Bay Head, NJ \$100

Khajag H. and Regina Tchakerian, Philadelphia, PA \$100

Haik Biglari, Huntsville, AL \$50

Arax Balakian, Fort Lee, NJ \$50

M. Casey Kazanjian, Rockville, MD \$25

Peter K. Amershadian, York Harbor, ME \$25



Arts & Living

Project SAVE's 2021 Calendar Pays Tribute to Gatherings

WATERTOWN – Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives has published Gatherings for 2021, its 34th photograph calendar, available now through its website.

Founder and President Ruth Thomasian looked through many photograph collections, knowing that the archives are all about social, “people” history, with folks doing many different things together. She made discoveries of meaningful, heartwarming photos of happy times that can help make our present situations a bit more joyful as we live in relative seclusion from extended family and friends.

You too will discover among these 25 photographs many ways of gathering that may resonate: wedding parties in both the homeland and diaspora; children literally “out on a limb;” healthcare workers with their patients; musicians and dancers making music and being merry; and service-oriented people doing their outreach.



1950s, Optimist Club of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; photo by Jules Schick
Photography Optimists participate in the culmination of their yearly Santa Project, giving gifts to children in need, here with children disabled by polio. Courtesy of Velda Moog, whose father Aram K. Jerrehian stands in the middle.

Thomasian called photo donors who are still living, or their family members to verify and expand on documentation, and to get “the rest of the story.”

The photo captions extend the meaning of many photos as does the grouping of photos – an Aintabtzi picnic in Aleppo, with dinner for Antranig’s cavalry out in a Caucasian field, and a post WWII “guys drinking party” in Cambridge MA. Some images are serious, some seemingly frivolous, but all tell about people and their lives.

Gatherings Calendars can be ordered online at www.projectsavae.org/shop.



Zouloumian wedding, 1892, Sourp (Saint) Stepanos section, upper Kharpert city. Historic Armenia, Ottoman Empire; photographer unknown. The whole community looks up at the photographer as they welcome the hars (bride), name unknown, from Constantinople, and pessa (groom) outside his Zouloumian home. The godfather stands at bride’s left. Courtesy of Ardashes Hampar, documentation assistance from Houshamadyan; Adom Boudjikanian and Aida Karibian.



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

Music and Art Breaking Boundaries

‘Gorky’s Dream Garden’ at Newark Museum of Art

(Editor’s Note: This review from fall 2019 preview is reprinted now to announce two January 2021 on-line events. As an official selection of the Ridgewood Guild International (Virtual) Film Festival, the show’s 90-minute documentary LIVE performance film will be screened and discussed (January 27 – 31). On January 23 The Lied Society will devote an hour-long interview with Ekizian among experts of the arts.)

NEWARK, NJ. – “Gorky’s Dream Garden,” a new work by composer Michelle Ekizian that hybridizes classical opera with popular Broadway musical theater, sacred Armenian litanies with jitterbugging, would give delight to both Stravinsky and George Gershwin and would lead her Armenian precursor Aram Khachaturian to do a sabre dance. Within her will to break boundaries is a

By Pellegrino D’Acerno

parable: the defiance of the negativity surrounding the goal to dream bigger dreams. Ekizian’s musical dream was inspired by Arshile Gorky, the great Armenian-American artist and a founding father of abstract expressionism, whose life’s story is loosely told in her daring new music theater opera. This reach beyond was realized in the September 7, 2019 presentation at the Newark Museum of Art’s Billy Johnson Theater of the work’s developmental reading of its Love Songs Showscape in chamber concert.

Working through traumas imposed by the Armenian Genocide and subsequent personal tragedies, Gorky rose above his tribulations by creating art in a boundary breaking style through which realism, surrealism and abstraction collided and colluded. With the opera’s rapturous music, we find the artist embarking on a thought-provoking journey to a place where nothing seems impossible – and where his search for the beautiful and the eternal begins.

Charged with contemporary immediacy, crossing of shifting time zones (real and dream time), pivotal points of stasis and differing points of view, “Gorky’s Dream Garden” approaches the intensified continuity of cinema. Its dazzling music hails from Ekizian’s opulent symphonic orchestration – shining forth in the Showscape’s virtuoso chamber rendition. The score melds, old Armenian hymns, folk tunes and lullabies, jitterbugging monologues, exhilarating Russian style waltzes, Neapolitan love song, bel canto, power ballads, and a rhythm section of electric guitars and drum set. Broadway veteran, bari-tenor/actor Brent Barrett portrayed the complicated artist with a captivating soulful affinity. Traversing the role’s wide range of singing styles, he gave the necessary exotic Russian/Armenian imperious stance while also exuding suave and sultry charisma. But he held steadfast to Gorky’s grace and his creative rigor with wonder and

continued on next page

Armenian Holiday Traditions

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

DETROIT – This holiday season was a little quieter than many people, especially Armenians, are used to. Due to Covid-19 and the shadow cast by the Artsakh War, the celebrations of the world have been toned down and especially that has been true in Armenia.

Every group of Armenians from every region of the historic homeland or country of the Diaspora has their own traditions and customs and those that relate to Christmas and the New Year are no different. While this survey is not a definitive study, we spoke to Armenians from many different backgrounds, to hear what they had to say about the holiday traditions they grew up with.

The Armenian Holiday Season

The most salient aspect of the Armenian holiday season is, of course, the celebration of Christmas on January 6. This is why in Armenian it is proper to say “Happy New Year and Merry Christmas” rather than the other way around. In Jerusalem, where the Old Calendar is used, the Armenian Christmas is celebrated on January 19, due to the old-calendar year being off by 13 days comparative to the astronomical solar year. The Old (Julian) Calendar continues century by century to deviate, and that is also the reason that some other Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on January 7, (and back in the 20th century, on the 6th). For them it is, by calendar, December 25. The Armenian liturgical calendar is the only one in which Christmas is truly celebrated on January 6.

In general, New Year’s Eve in Armenia and the Middle Eastern communities is observed as a day of celebrations, eating and drinking; it is also when gifts are given and when “Gaghant Baba” or “Dzmer Papik” (Santa Claus) makes his visit. It is where the Christmas tree – called in Armenian “Donadzar” (Holiday Tree) makes its appearance. New Year’s Eve in traditional Armenian culture is pretty similar to the secular version of American and Western Christmas.

Armenian Christmas, on the other hand, is for most, a different kind of holiday. Most seem to see it as a special family gathering and meal rather than an over-the-top festival style holiday.

Why do Armenians then celebrate on a different day than literally every other Christian Church? The answer claimed by the Armenian Church is that January 6 was the original Christmas holiday which celebrated the Nativity, the Visit of the Magi, and the Baptism of Christ. The Church of Rome split the holiday in two with the Nativity on December 25 and the Visit of the Magi along with the Baptism on January 6 (known as Epiphany), and the Eastern Churches followed suit, except for the Armenians. In essence, Armenians celebrate Christmas and Epiphany as one holiday. And in case you’re counting, the time period in the Western Church from Christmas to Epiphany is – the 12 days of Christmas.

Armenian New Year’s Traditions

Pagan and medieval Armenian New Year holidays came at a different time of year. It wasn’t until after the adoption of the Roman Calendar for keeping dates (apparently under Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi in 1774) that Armenians began celebrating January 1 as the New Year, like the Russian and Greek cultures. This day is traditionally called Gaghant from the Latin Kalendae meaning first day of the month.

According to medieval Armenian scholar Anania Shirakatsi, “kaghand” meant the first see TRADITIONS, page 14



ARTS & LIVING

‘Gorky’s Dream Garden’ at Newark Museum of Art

from previous page

innocence. The perfect foils for the mysterious “phantom of the opera” mystique of Gorky are the roles of the ghost spirit of his courageous martyred mother and his capricious ingénue American bride.

Mezzo-soprano Hasmik Mekanedjian and soprano Karen Lubeck were naturals.

In quick cutting dialogue over music, the Art Whisperers acting duo portrayed Gorky’s friends, supporters, critics and foes including art world luminaries and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. New York actors Adela Maria Bolet and John Sannuto performed their multiple roles with the necessary satire and high voltage.

For the speaking role of Gorky’s empathetic and eccentric sister Vartoosh, Bolet delivered tender reminiscences and letter readings with heartbreaking effect.

The Mechanics of Flying

Traversing the artist’s final years (from 1939 to his death at age 44 in 1948), the story opens at the Aviation Pavilion of the 1939 World’s Fair where Gorky designed its aviation murals. The mellifluous playing of the



Introducing Gorky’s fantasies: Barrett delivers the show’s opening “Space Monologue” (left photo). The seasoned man about town encounters an old flame: a red head performed by dancer Needle. Photo by Hank Gans

Palisades Virtuosi (flute, clarinet and piano) brought a cool, airborne sonority in tune with the flight theme of Gorky’s Aviation Murals—and the ancient Armenian wind instrument, the “duduk.” In the Showscape’s Prequel we meet the tall, dark and handsome thirty-something bachelor in the Big Apple during the 1930s in search of romance amidst a fashion show featuring his girlfriends, charmingly performed by the dancers.

Following, the artist’s story of exile, immigration and assimilation eventually shows him married with children, living in a modernist Glass House in the suburbs of Connecticut, achieving a slice of the American dream...until misfortunate events kindle his escalating nostalgic and tormented memories of his lost homeland.

Ekizian’s gripping psychodrama captures the essence of the artist to the point that his specters are not just demons, but a sacred gift for a means to rise beyond. Through his art, Gorky transformed his hidden crosses that marked both the horrors of genocide and his nostalgia for his ancestral lands of Eden and Ararat into color and light. For the artist’s closure at the opera’s grand finale rather than dwelling on his suicide, Ekizian chose spirit and harmony to focus on our own unity as expressed through the ecstasy of music. Developed through concert works inspired by the Interfaith Committee of Remembrance at New York City’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine on behalf of victims of the Armenian Genocide and The Holocaust, the work awakens compassion.

Gorky’s Art in Motion through Music & Dance

Summoning emotions and fantasies implied by Gorky’s heartbreaking portraits and his groundbreaking biomorphic abstractions, the music is filled with floating, gliding and soaring sensations. With a surrealist twist, the protagonist’s dreams running alongside the story’s real time come to life in dance episodes such as “Van Lake” (the region of Gorky’s birth), and “Dance of the Apricot Girls” (after Armenia’s definitive fruit). Using the theater’s entire foot print, the superb quartet of dancers from the Art of Motion Dance Theatre – Lynn Needle (choreographer/director), Janette Dishuk (dance captain), Marcos Velasquez and M. A. Taylor—performed in posed tableaux, en pointe, and in modern and street dance styles. In stunning costumes designed by Annie Hickman, and some by the composer, they immersed the audience with fantastic esprit.

Appearing to rise from the ashes, the Showscape’s penultimate song counterpointed the protagonist’s down hill dive in the real world with his uphill spiritual path in his dream garden.

For the Newark performance of this song, the dancers (with mezzo Mekanedjian in movement only) in Needle’s riveting “Dance of the Exiled Heart” performed before the composer’s music video montage featuring images of the genocide transitioning to glorious panoramas of Gorky’s lost Armenian lands. On the video in the cameo role of the Black Monk was heard the voice of the legendary late “Woodstock/Freedom” folksinger Richie Havens eventually leading to an epiphany moment. Ekizian’s selection for leading man Barrett to return to the stage to sing Gorky’s intimate “In Dreams” from ACT III, as the Showscape’s Postscript was a brilliant touch. The song – like Ekizian’s epic music and Gorky’s courageous art – defied dwelling on old enemies and life’s misfortunes as a means to define the protagonist. This universal outreach was reinforced in the Newark preview’s pop-up interactive spectacle at the museum’s Welcome Center. “Wishing Tree with Birds” by the visual artist Vahagn Arslanian invited passersby to offer their own inscriptions for a better world. It was a perfect counterpart to the Showscape: through Gorky’s dream garden, Ekizian’s masterpiece invites its listeners to dream of a dream garden for our own troubled time.

Pellegrino D’Acerno is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Hofstra University where he served as Queensboro Unico Distinguished Professor of Italian and Italian American Studies. His most recent publications are “Delirious Naples” and “Thirteen Ways of Crossing the Piazza: Collected Poems.”

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ARTS & LIVING

Armenian Holiday Traditions

TRADITIONS, from page 12

day of a month and “kaghindos” meant the first day of the year. This word was actually still used by some Armenians in traditional folk songs such as in Marash where they sang:

Avedis, kaghndos,
Hani bizi injir-koz.

“Good news! New Year’s – so where’s our figs and walnuts?” Yes, that is a combination of Armenian, Turkish, and Latin!

Traditionally, New Year’s Eve in Armenian culture was a time for celebrations and gift-giving and it still is. In 19th century Western Armenia, it seems there was only partial knowledge of Gaghan Baba. In the more prosperous areas closely connected with the West, like Arabkir and Kharpert, he was a known figure; in Evereg, outside of Gesaria, he appeared in school programs “just like in the picture,” according to one book. But in many regions, while Gaghan was associated with gift-giving, there was no need for Santa Claus. Armenians seem to have decided that the word “Gaghan” was related to “gakhel” meaning “to hang.”

In many regions, boys would go from house to house across the flat roofs of the Anatolian-style villages, hanging a bag down the chimney or smoke-hole of each house and singing songs in exchange for sweets, fruit, nuts, or monetary gifts. In Palu, usually the boys would hang an apple, into the sides of which the owner of the house was obliged to press coins as a gift.

Sometimes they lowered down a jug of wine either as a gift or for the lady of the house to fill up; in Malatya it was often a bottle for oghi, if it wasn’t a bag for gifts. In Kharpert, the mischievous Armenian children took “gakhel” to a whole new level; they would accost their father as he arrived home from work, lasso him with a rope or belt around the waist and “try to raise him up to the ceiling”; when the father, laughing, had enough of this nonsense he would give in and open the bags of small gifts he had brought home for New Year’s Eve.

The villagers of Western Armenia used to make merry and feast on New Year’s Eve, but there was one problem. According to church traditions, one must fast for seven days before Christmas. Considering Christmas is January 6, New Year’s Eve was the 2nd day of this fast, which just as in the Armenian Lent, required a vegan diet. The crafty Armenian mayrighs found a solution to this dilemma, by loading the table with the most complex and sweet vegan delicacies, topping it off with Anoushabour (Sweet Soup). Anoushabour, which is essentially a wheat or barley porridge with dried fruits, nuts, sugar, and pomegranate seeds, remains the classic Armenian holiday dish.

Gaghan lives on in the Middle East, and in Armenia where it is simply Nor Dari (New Year). One addition that seems to have been introduced in the 20th century is the Christmas tree, known in Armenian as “Donadzar” (Holiday Tree) as it’s part of New Year rather than Christmas.

Armenian Gaghan in Istanbul involves decorating the Donadzar and putting presents under it. On New Year’s Eve they have a family dinner and feast on turkey, along with mezes such as bastirma, sujukh, cheeses, topik, and yalanchi dolma. The oghi of course is not far away. At midnight they bring out the dessert tables of fruits and sweets of which the centerpiece is the Anoushabour. At the same time, a relative dressed as Gaghan Baba appears and gives presents to the children.

New Year’s Eve in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem is celebrated, according to the Old Calendar, on January 13 – what the Russians and inhabitants of Armenia call “Old New Year.” On December 31, as the rest of the world celebrates New Year’s Eve, the local Jerusalem Armenians might host a barahantes or young people might simply go out on the town as in other countries. (As a side note, “Western Christmas” on December 24-25 is also observed



Ghapama

in Jerusalem by the Armenian Catholic community, and the Apostolic Armenians attend their organized festivities in a spirit of brotherhood.)

But on January 13, the Rum (Byzantine) Orthodox and the Armenians of Jerusalem celebrate New Year’s Eve according to the Old Calendar. Everyone wakes up in the morning, and Scouts and cultural clubs invite the Gaghan Baba to distribute gifts to all the children of the community. In the evening, groups of family friends come together. The Anoushabour is served along with Dalakh (lamb spleen stuffed with parsley and garlic) and Chi Kufta. At midnight the big bell of St. James rings and the whole community of the Armenian quarter puts on their coats and goes to the middle of the convent. The students of Tarkmanchats do recitations and singing in front of the brotherhood before everyone goes their way.

In Beirut, New Year’s Eve on December 31 is a special occasion for the Armenian community. Just as in other parts of the region, the holiday tree is decorated and referred to as Gaghan Dzar (New Year’s Tree). According to Shoghig Tcholakian Terjimanian, it was a tradition in her family that you had to sing joyously while decorating the tree. She shared a song she learned in school in Beirut:

*Gaghan e aysor
Amanor dari
Tzayne ge lsvin
Yerki oo bari*

Mrs. Terjimanian has also taught this song to her children who were born in the US.

Back in Beirut, the New Year’s Eve table was abundant with tabbouleh, basterma, plaki, leblebou and other delicacies. At midnight, in anticipation of Santa’s arrival, the children sing the Gaghan Baba Yegav song. After Gaghan Baba knocks on the door and is let in, he distributes gifts and the children eat sweets until the wee hours of the morning.

The Armenian village of Anjar, Lebanon, is one of the most historic Western Armenian communities, being settled by the refugees of Musa Dag in Cilician Armenia. According to Hermine Der Vartanian, Gaghan Baba arrives on New Year’s Eve, but doesn’t bring presents, as the children have already received presents from their parents. Instead he asks the children if they’ve been good and perhaps they will sing a song or do a recitation for him. The famous holiday treats for New Year and Christmas are “gatov kekhke” (similar to cheereg), “tzetov kekhke” (more like bread) and bourma. The inhabitants of rural Anjar are known to fire off guns into the air to celebrate the coming of the New Year at midnight.

Armenians in Iran also are sure to put up their Donadzar in time for New Year’s Eve. Generally there are parties thrown by the local churches or community centers. Persian Armenians wake up on New Year’s morning to find presents under the tree left by Gaghan Baba, also referred to as “Dzmer Papik” (Grandfather Winter, the Soviet Armenian version of Santa Claus). The traditional gift that comes from him is “mirk.” While in Armenia proper that word just means fruit, in Persian Armenian culture (as well as in historic Western Armenia) it refers to a mixture of dried fruits, nuts, chickpeas, etc. One gets presents on New Year’s Day so that one starts the year with new things.

New Year’s Eve in the villages of Armenia today generally involves slaughtering a pig, drinking a lot of homemade oghi and setting off fireworks. This year, things were more somber as the whole country is in mourning for those who gave their lives in the Artsakh war. The celebrations did not take place for the most part just as the giant tree in downtown Yerevan was not set up.

Folklore expert and Armenian teacher at the AGBU School in Southfield, Anahit Toumajan, grew up in the village of Meghrashen near Gyumri. As she tells it, New Year’s Eve in Armenia was the most special time of the year.

Toumajan said the entire house would be cleaned, all the beds would be changed, clothes would be washed, and everyone would get new clothes if they needed it.

Anyone who had a disagreement with anyone else in the village had to make up by New Year, often by inviting their rival to their home for a New Year’s Eve feast. The doors of all homes were open from New Year to Old New Year (January 13).

The New Year’s Eve dinner consisted of goose, turkey, or a couple of chickens. They had homemade oghi (locally made from apples) along with the Ararat Cognac. The family would sing songs like Seghann Eh Arad (“The Table Is Bountiful”). There was chocolate and seven types of dried fruits or sweets on the table – just as in 19th century Western Armenia, for example in Palu, there were seven foods that would be eaten on New Year’s Eve (all vegan, and often involving dried fruit).

An important part of the New Year in Meghrashen was the large round Gora Gata bread which was literally called dari or year and was baked in the tonir (sunken pit oven found in traditional Armenian homes across historical Armenia). It was round symbolizing the completion of the circle of the year and was a typical Eastern Armenian style Gata with khoriz. A coin would be baked into it. Toumajan states that her ancestors came to the Gyumri region from Kars at the beginning of the 19th century. It is well known that the region was settled by migrants from Kars and Erzurum (Garin).

In the village, they did have a visit from Dzmer Papik, but it was, as with many other communities, in the context only of the year-end school recital, where Dzmer Papik would appear with his girl fairy assistant and distribute books as gifts to the top students and sweets, raisins, or nuts to everyone else.

Traditions Change In The New World

The Armenian-American community has heartily embraced the American Christmas in many ways. Now-retired Fr. Yeprem Kelegian for many years led the St. Mesrob-Racine ACYOA to the sick, elderly, and shut-ins of the close-knit Wisconsin Armenian community, to sing them Christmas carols including the Armenian hymn *Khorhoort Medz*.

Many other Armenian communities across the country have similar initiatives.

Sometimes Armenian and American customs were melded. Marianne Dardarian of West Bloomfield MI recalls, “As kids (in 1960s Detroit), grandma always made a rib roast on Christmas Eve and Kharpert kufta on Christmas Day along with ham or turkey.”

Dardarian continues to prepare Kharpert kufta for her extended family on Christmas Day, this year dropping off packages at family mem-

bers’ homes, due to social distancing.

Since the family celebrations have largely moved to one of the two Christmases, New Year’s Eve in the Armenian-American community has largely – and for many years now – become an occasion for dinner-dances (kef, hantes, barahantes, khunjouyk). Churches and organizations across the country have hosted them for years. The famous, lately discontinued PAND (Philadelphia Armenian Nor Dari), was a rare unified community event which used to split its proceeds equally between the 5 Armenian churches of the area. Hagop Asadourian’s Armenian novel Hovagimi Tornortiner (The Great-Grandchildren of Joachim), which revolved around Armenian-American life, had an annual unnamed organizational New Year’s Eve dance as one of its central themes.

That being said, many families, especially those who have come to the US in recent years from Armenia, continue family celebrations on New Year’s. One source who was born in the states to parents from Aleppo said the family would have a big Armenian feast on New Year’s.

“My aunt would make madzoonov kufta and put an olive in one of the kuftas,” an alternative to the traditional coin into some type of bread.

Yerchanig Callan, who grew up in Detroit, said that her Yozgatsi-Gesaratsi family always ate lamb brain on New Year’s Eve “so they would think good and intelligent thoughts in the New Year” and lamb tongue on New Year’s Day “so they would speak well through the year.”

For many of those who have come more recently from Armenia, celebrating on New Year’s is indispensable. “New Year’s is the biggest holiday,” our source tells us. “Every single year we set up a big table with all our best Armenian food,” listing off oven-baked pork, cabbage (vegetarian with beans) and grape leaf (meat) dolma, salads, lots of sweets, and the famous Gata, not forgetting Champagne.

Friends call to wish each other “amenalav baner” (all the best things) for the New Year. On New Year’s Day, there is an all day dinner which includes Gata. Formerly, they would bake a coin into the Gata and whoever got the coin would have good luck for the year; lately due to sanitary reasons, the family has begun replacing this by putting a chickpea into one of the ichli kuftas. The celebrations continue, though to a lesser extent, until Old New Year on January 14.

Armenian Christmas Traditions

Hayganush Paylan of Illinois, a daughter of Genocide survivors who was raised in a family that remained in the town of Malatya in Eastern Anatolia until the 1970s, related some interesting traditions.

The family was just trying to put food on the table and survive, she tells us. Whatever the Armenians did in Malatya before the Genocide, she is unsure. But they tried as hard as they could to keep traditions alive afterward. New Year’s Eve was a time for eating nuts, oranges, and special fruit that they didn’t eat at other times. They would keep a watermelon fresh by burying it in the sawdust that they used to burn in their stove instead of wood, and they would eat that watermelon on New Year’s Eve.

Paylan’s description of Armenian Christmas had a lot in common with Toumajan’s description of an Armenian village New Year in the Soviet era. Paylan also explained that the whole house would be cleaned in preparation for Armenian Christmas. Paylan’s mother had memorized all the holidays and fasting days of the church calendar. She would clean the entire house and put out special doilies and all white linens and drapes only for Christmas and Easter. Then, she would fast for 2 days before Christmas, not doing any housework, while spiritually and mentally preparing herself. Then on January 5, Armenian Christmas Eve, they would light candles and pray.

On Armenian Christmas, everyone would have something new to wear. After breakfast they would get “dolled up,” and then people started to visit. The family would go to at least 7 households, usually of elderly people or relatives. Everyone would kiss the hands of their elders.

Paylan explained that when they kissed the elderly’s hand, the person kissed them on the head, and also gave the young person coins or sometimes candy. One cousin would even give jewelry. Meanwhile, when they returned to their own home, they had to be prepared for visits as well. Ghurabia, baklava, and soorj (coffee)

continued on next page



ARTS & LIVING

from previous page

would be served to the visitors. Paylan, as the youngest daughter, had the job of spraying the hands of anyone entering the home, with lemon cologne.

Some Turks would also visit the family in honor of their holidays.

In addition to the leblebi, oranges, dried apricots, dried pears, apples, raisins and walnuts, holiday foods included lamb or chicken stuffed with pilaf, and a special dish called Ayva Abour (“Quince Soup”).

Meanwhile, in Istanbul some other very traditional Armenian Christmas customs were celebrated. Up until the 1970s, the traditional Armenian caroling still took place in the Armenian neighborhoods of Bolis. After the jrakalouyts service, young people go around the neighborhood with colored paper lanterns and sing the carol Melkon, Kaspar, yev Baghdasar (the names of the Three Wise Men) from door to door. They would receive sweets at the houses that they visited.

Typically a meal of grilled fish with onions and roasted potatoes was eaten, often palamut, a popular fish in Istanbul. They also had topik and yalanchi dolma, which were indispensable on Christmas Eve, along with beoregs. The next day, after Church, relatives and friends would visit each other from house to house, and the visitors would be offered chocolate, khadayif, gatnabour, and homemade fruit liqueur.

In Beirut in the 1950s-1970s, Terjimanian adds, Christmas was doubly meaningful for her family as it was her father Avedis’ name day. On Christmas Eve many friends and family came to congratulate Avedis on his name day. A mezze and sweets table would be laid out. Terjimanian recalls that as she was a student at the Vahan Tekeyan School, one year her class of 6th grade schoolgirls went on a minibus from house to house to visit certain people the teachers knew and sing *Khorhoort Medz*. The people would open the door; some would let them in, some

would bring candy and chocolate to pass around. They would also give a gift to the teacher – that is, a monetary gift to the school.

Similarly, the Protestant Armenians would organize a group of carolers at midnight.

On Christmas morning in Beirut, Terjimanian remembers, they would start singing *Khorhoort Medz* at 7 a.m. as their father Avedis awoke. He would then give each child a coin and they would all go to church; after church, friends would come and visit to congratulate Avedis on his name day.

On Christmas Day, because Terjimanian’s family was Kessabtsi, they would eat herissa, along with ganach fasoulya, beoreg, and so on.

My sources from both Beirut and Anjar spoke about lighting candles, burning incense, and praying on Armenian Christmas. For some of these families, the tradition of burning incense on Armenian Christmas Eve is also continued in the United States, including incensing outside the house, reminiscent of the old Armenian way of thinking where everything including the outdoors and the farm animals should be blessed.

Der Vartanian, from Anjar, remembered making Soorki cheese and eating it on Christmas along with different types of fruits and chestnuts.

Armenian Christmas in Jerusalem is celebrated according to the Old Calendar on January 19. On the morning of Christmas Eve, the 18th, there is a special procession of the Armenian Patriarch from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, escorted by the scouts, with drums, trumpets, and bagpipes. There is a special convoy so that all the roads are shut from the Old City to Bethlehem. Arab Christian scouts are also invited to partake, as they had invited the Armenian scouts to participate in their Christmas Eve procession on January 6 (again according to the Old Calendar). The Palestinians of Bethlehem have placed a huge Christmas tree and life-sized manger scene in front of the Church of the Nativity since December 24. When the

Armenians arrive in Bethlehem, it is one service after another, including all the liturgical shargans for Christmas. People are there from midnight to the next morning. At midnight, the Armenian Patriarch goes outside to the manger scene where he gives a message to the Palestinian president, his people, and the local

(pagharch), on Armenian Christmas. This latter baked good, which are prepared as individual rolls, was a specialty bread of the people of Sepastia, and Dardarian’s mother would bake a coin into one of the paghajes. (In Old Sepastia, this custom took place on New Year’s).

Susie Reizian, also of Detroit, recalls the coin



Kuku

Armenians. Finally the Armenians return to Jerusalem where badarak for Christmas Day (January 19) takes place at St. James Cathedral. That evening, rather than a familial gathering as on New Year’s, the Hoyetchmen group has a kef night at the local Ramgavar agoump.

One of the most interesting traditions of Armenian Christmas was told by a Persian-Armenian source who came to the US in her teenage years. Whether in Iran or here, families gather for a special meal on Armenian Christmas, January 6. Fish is always the main course. Another staple is Kuku, which is like a frittata with heaps of chopped greens in it. Perhaps the most interesting was the custom of pouring everyone a glass of wine and taking a nshkhar (unconsecrated Communion bread) and breaking off pieces of it which are thrown into each wine glass. When the family members are done drinking their wine they eat the nshkhar bread. “We used to try to drink that wine so quickly, so we could get to that holy bread, that was the best part,” our source tells us. In this particular family, music and culture was valued. “Anytime we had gatherings for the holidays, once we eat, we get up one by one and sing a song.” Regardless of each family member’s ability, they were expected to perform for the rest of the family. These traditions have also been continued in the US by several Persian-Armenian families we contacted.

Toumajan related that Armenian Christmas was downplayed during the Soviet era. However, since her grandmother had been a Der Hayr’s daughter, and her grandfather had wanted to be a Der Hayr himself before the Soviets clamped down on religion, Christmas was celebrated in their home in the village of Meghrashen. There was always fish on the table, she tells us, and something similar to anoushabour. A special meal they ate on Armenian Christmas was Keshkeg, which is a variation of Herissa, using whole grains and big pieces of lamb.

Another Armenian family who immigrated from Yerevan in more recent years, says while New Year’s Eve is a big celebration with friends and distant relatives, Armenian Christmas is “only family.” The main course is fish, boiled with potato and spices (often rainbow trout). Some kind of dish consisting of scrambled eggs with spinach and greens, similar to the Persian-Armenian Kuku, is also on the table, as well as Zadigi Plav which is also eaten on Easter (many Armenians refer to Easter as *Medz Zadig* and Christmas as *Pokr Zadig*) and consists of white rice with raisins and an egg crust. All of this, the family is continuing to do in the US.

The older generations of Armenian-Americans have also preserved some of their customs from Western Armenia. Though for most of them, Armenian Christmas has become a solely religious holiday on which to attend church and drink blessed water from the services of the day, we were able to collect some information on Christmas traditions. Dardarian said that in 1960s Detroit they would have specialties like anoushabour, sou beoreg, and paghaj

tradition being done with cheoreg on New Year’s Day, and that multiple denominations of money would be placed in the cheoregs, with those getting the larger coins supposedly getting more luck. Relatives would often “cheat” out of love – Mrs. Reizian recalls her grandmother turning the plate so that the luckier cheoreg would end up pointed toward her and her sister; Dardarian recalls that her uncle would go around and stick dimes into everyone’s paghaj so that they would all be lucky. In other twist, Diane Kachadurian Nolfi recalls unwrapping the figures in the nativity scene and that whoever found the Baby Jesus would similarly have good luck for the year.

Yerchanig Callan said in 1950s-1960s Detroit, her parents would take her and her brother on Armenian Christmas to visit their grandparents; one set were natives of Yozgat and the other couple were from Gesaria. The children would hold a candle with a ribbon in their left hand, then take the right hand of the grandparent and kiss it, handing them the candle and saying the Christmas greeting. The grandparent would kiss the child on the eyes. Mrs. Callan remembers eating rojig (walnut and grape rolls) and ghapama (stuffed pumpkin, which her Gesaratsi grandmother made) on Armenian Christmas. She fondly recalls helping her grandparents prepare these dishes. “Years went by, and suddenly I was making ghapama again. And I can say that my grandkids really like it!! Resurrected tradition. Do you think hand kissing can be far behind?”

Karinne Andonian, a young mother from Philadelphia, shared that her family traditions, mostly stemming from Malatyatsi ancestors who came to the US some 100 years ago, include making copious amounts of Hrishdig (a version of Sujukh), Cheoreg, and Toursi. Her grandfather’s side of the family, which also hails from Malatya, but via Baghdad, introduced a type of kofta soup called Kubba Hamid. She gifts a pomegranate on New Year’s Day to some of her closest friends; her grandmother on her mom’s side always ate pomegranates at this time of year because her father (who was from Arabkir) would buy her a pomegranate around New Year’s or Christmas. Although it is difficult to keep all these specific holidays and specific traditions on the exact day or in the exact same manner as previous generations due to the stresses and busy schedules of American life, Andonian says she feels “the opportunity to take a bit of the old and adapt it to the new so our children can feel the spirit of it.”

As different as the backgrounds, origins, and journeys of different Armenian families are, they all share similar joyful holiday traditions. One’s family may eat fish, kuku, and gata; or turkey, kofta, and pagharch; sing *Khorhoort Medz*, *Melkon-Kaspar*, *Gaghant e Aysor*, or *Silent Night*, but the memorable Armenian holiday traditions are always about recognizing a special time to be with loved ones to open a new chapter of life out of the darkness of the winter. We need to remember that this year more than ever.



Anoushabour (Photo from Taste of Beirut)

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Students of Armenian Descent

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Applications and other information may be obtained from

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Scholarship Committee
333 Atlantic Avenue • Warwick, RI 02888
Tel. 401 461-6114 • Fax 401 461-6112

e-mail: headasa@aol.com

Deadline for returning completed Applications:
March 15, 2021



Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian

Heroine Hatoon Bazarian's Shish Kebab

Mouth-watering lamb shish kebab is at the core of award-winning chef Jon Koobation's Armenian heritage and family history. This recipe came from Jon's beloved maternal grandmother, the late Hatoon Bazarian. Growing up in the small farm town of Dinuba, Calif., the sight of a pile of grape wood stumps in the backyard and the smell of the lamb cooking on skewers is something Jon will never forget from his childhood. "When the meat finished cooking, it was taken off the skewers and placed into a large pan or bowl that had been lined with fresh Armenian peda bread which had been brought to the table. We all grabbed for the warm bread which had soaked up the juices from the barbecued lamb. This family ritual was almost better than the meat itself," he says. In honor of his grandmother, her authentic shish kebab recipe was served for many years



at Jon's Bear Club, Jon's celebrated restaurant in Reedley, California, and is featured in *Cooking With Jon*, his acclaimed cookbook.

As a young woman, Jon says, Hatoon was a heroine to many people before she came to America, after her first husband and young child were killed. Her incredible story is presented in the award-winning film documentary, "Women of 1915."

"The documentary combines facts and emotion to honor the brave women of the Armenian Genocide, many of whom lost their family and lives, survived to create new lives, or were forced into lives that were not their own. My grandmother appears in the film disguised as a young man protecting her town during the Armenian Genocide. She was a warrior and fighter for her country. At the risk of her own life, my grandmother was able to escape the brutal tyranny by fleeing to Syria, where she emerged as a courageous freedom fighter, defending her family and friends during World War I," he adds.

"In 1922, she immigrated to the United States, met my grandfather, Harry Bazarian, in Detroit, Michigan, and they were married. They then came to California and settled in the San Joaquin Valley, where she became a proud citizen, and began a new life and a family, grateful for the countless opportunities this land afforded. In her lifetime, this remarkable woman taught us so many things, but she never let her painful past hold her back or make her bitter - she moved on with her life through the sheer power of optimism and hope," says Jon.

INGREDIENTS:

1 leg of lamb, boned, cut into 2 oz. pieces (lamb loin may be used instead of the leg, for a more tender piece of meat without gristle)
1 tablespoon whole Greek oregano
6 garlic cloves, minced
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper



INGREDIENTS: For the marinade:

6 yellow onions, small dice
2 bunches flat-leaf parsley, minced
2 cups canola oil
1 1/2 cups cream sherry wine, no substitute

PREPARATION: For the lamb:

The lamb must be seamed and all sinew must be removed. Season meat well in a large bowl or pan, turning and mixing, making sure each piece of meat is seasoned.

Add the onion and parsley, and mix well. Now add the marinade and mix well again. The meat should be covered by the onions and marinade. This should marinate for at least a day or two, stirring or mixing the meat each day. (The meat will keep in the marinade for up to four days.)

Prior to barbecuing, lift the meat out of the marinade, set aside. Strain the marinade through a fine sieve; let it sit for ten minutes.

In a large pan, cook the onions and parsley over medium heat for about 20 minutes or until the onions begin to caramelize. Use this as a condiment on top of the shish kebab.

Serves 6.

ORDER TODAY: Professional recipes you can make at home from award-winning chef Jon Koobation. Jon is the recipient of the 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award in the California Restaurant Association's "Best of the Valley" awards. Contact Jon at chefjonkoobation@gmail.com to order his book and for a personally signed copy. His cookbook is also available at The Market Grocery Store and at Sam's Deli & Cucina in Fresno, California. Order his cookbook directly at Amazon Books at: <https://www.amazon.com/Cooking-JON-Jon-Koobation/dp/0692769315>

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 8 – "SHUSHI" Dance Ensemble – part one

January 15 – "SHUSHI" Dance Ensemble – part two

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"

Lisa Kirazian's Novel, *Cadenza*, Released

SAN DIEGO – *Cadenza* by Lisa Kirazian, the third and final book of "The Music We Made" novel series, has been released by Laurel Publications and is available on Amazon.com. The books follow three generations of the Driscoll family of musicians in London and the US, from the 1940's and 1950's to the present day.

The novels in the series – *Bravura*, *Appassionato* and *Cadenza* – are fiction but inspired by Kirazian's experience as a violinist. The series is also being developed for television.

In *Bravura*, first in the series, luminous violinist Kate Driscoll, and her temperamental pianist brother, Neil, try to escape a troubled family upbringing in Somerset when they are

accepted to the Royal School of Music in London in 1959. There, they meet their lifelong friends and loves. When the young prodigies near graduation, the youth movement, British rock explosion and Vietnam get under way, changing all their lives, and they give everything they have to reach the world stage in the decades that follow.

Appassionato continues the passionate story of the next generation of the Driscoll family of musicians as Jenny Driscoll, now an emerging composer and conductor, navigates the victories and tragedies of her personal and professional life in London in the 1990's, with her famous family, and a few childhood friends, alongside her.

In *Cadenza*, Brian Martin, the famous tenor

son of Jenny Driscoll, leaves his present-day superstardom, his family and his fiancé, to go to America to find out more about his maternal grandmother, the only other opera singer in his family: the late Maggie Crawford.

Lisa Kirazian writes fiction, plays, screenplays, and has had many of her stage plays produced over the years across the U.S. and beyond. Her writing has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Performing Arts Magazine*, *San Diego Union Tribune* and in many other publications. She also directed and wrote the adapted screenplay of the short film, *Reflection Day*. She is a graduate of Stanford University and lives in San Diego with her husband Steve and two daughters Ani and Mari.



COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

Challenges for Armenia's Survival in a New Geostrategic Configuration

By Edmond Y. Azadian

The Karabakh war is behind us but a formal peace is certainly not. While Armenia is waiting for its POWs from Azerbaijan and is burying its dead, the situation in and around the country continues to remain unsettled. Azerbaijan has taken over all the territories prescribed by the November 9 declaration, but the demarcation and delimitation process is still in progress. Competing maps are in play and the losses of border villages are always from Armenian territory.

The impact of the war is so devastating that it has thrown people and government agencies which can barely keep up, let alone control the situation, into chaos.

Before domestic peace is restored, Armenia may lose even more territory and suffer further diplomatic defeats.

The challenge facing Armenia is not confined to the loss of Karabakh and large number of casualties; it is its accommodation to and survival in the new geostrategic configuration that has been created as a consequence of the war.

Turkey's presence and influence has grown exponentially in the region and Armenia has to deal with the unrepentant perpetrator of genocide at its door.

As if Turkey's military presence in Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan were not enough, Ankara has more ambitious plans in the region and beyond. All these plans impact directly or indirectly, Armenia's fate. Those plans may develop in three different directions:

A - The incorporation of peripheral regions into Turkey's territory

B - The pan-Turanian plan which expands through Central Asia, challenging Russian and Chinese zones of influence in the region.

C - A trust against Russia in cooperation with Ukraine over Donbass and Crimea.

A - Turkey already has military bases in the following countries: Albania, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Libya, Qatar, Syria, Somalia and Northern Cyprus.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey no longer keeps secret his desire of incorporating in some form of federal union the following territories: Northern Cyprus, parts of Northern Syria, a region of Kurdish territory in Iraq, Nakhichevan, the southern region of Armenia, a part of Georgia, most probably Ajaria, on whose territory Turkey has lay claim by the Treaty of Kars of 1921, and the entire territory of Azerbaijan, whose leader Ilham Aliyev, has been duped by the formal of "one nation, two states," while in fact it has turned to be "one nation, one state."

President Erdogan had also been complaining about the restrictive clauses of the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which in fact created a republic out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. Had it not been for Lenin's assistance to Ataturk, the Greek forces of Eleftherios Kyriakou Venizelos had already occupied Smyrna, Armenians had returned to Cilicia and the territories prescribed by the Treaty of Sevres of 1920 would have been given to the Armenians and Kurds, and the Turks would have become a minority in Asia Minor.

And yet, President Erdogan wants to change the terms of the Lausanne Treaty, which has given the littoral islands of Turkey to Greece.

B - As Turkey lays its expansion plans, encroaching on neighboring countries' territories, no one is bringing up the principle of territorial integrity of those nations. That question was not raised either when President Trump granted Syria's Golan Heights to Israel.

It looks as if that principle only applies to Karabakh. Actually, it applies only to wealthy nations.

Incidentally, Armenians should continue challenging the case of Karabakh, because what Azerbaijan did in 1989 by annexing the Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno Karabakh to its territory was an illegal action. Because the Armenian people in Karabakh had held a referendum and seceded from the Soviet Union, as did East Timor, Kosovo, Ukraine, South Sudan and others, from their parent countries.

President Erdogan at one point expressed his ambitions for Turkey to become a caliphate of the Muslim world. But then he hit a snag domestically and internationally, because the leader of Turkey's Nationalist Party Devlet Bahçeli characterized him as the "most dangerous living threat to Turks."

He has since entered into a coalition with Bahçeli and the Grey Wolves; he now has changed his tune to take up the leadership of the Turkic nations. Internationally, Turkey was challenged by Saudi Arabia and Egypt for the leadership of the Sunni world. This time around, President Erdogan's plan is to build an empire consisting of 300 million Turkic peoples.

Last year, a conference of Turkic-speaking peoples was held in Baku. This is how Mr. Erdogan formulated his plan at that conference: "Despite the fact that we are two states, we believe we are the children of one nation. But today, enlarging our outlook, we say we are six states but one nation."

These nations are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, led by Turkey.

Chechnya and Iranian Azerbaijan were not mentioned in order not to antagonize Russia and Iran, respectively.

This empire had been Enver Pasha's dream, which did materialize because the newly-rising Soviet power dashed his plans. He was killed in Bukhara by an Armenian, Hakob Melkumyan.

It is no wonder then that Erdogan mentioned Enver, a member of the Ittihadist triumvirate who planned and executed the Armenian Genocide. Erdogan's reference to him during the Baku victory parade after defeating Armenia contained a double meaning: that the heirs of the murderer of the Armenians was alive and that the Turks are joining to realize Enver Pasha's unfulfilled plans.

C - Ever since Crimea held a referendum in 2014 to join Russia, that expression of the people's will has been considered illegal by the West, and Turkey has joined the chorus of disapproval. President Erdogan reiterated many times that Turkey does not recognize the "annexation" of Crimea by

Russia. Former Foreign Minister of Turkey Ahmet Davutoglu further elaborated that Turkey will support the Tatars in Crimea.

Historically, the Crimean Tatars have lived in an autonomous region of the Ottoman Empire for six centuries. But the peninsula has changed hands many times during the Crimean wars between Turkey and Russia. During the Soviet period, Crimea became an autonomous oblast of Russia. In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev, the head of the Soviet Union (who was of Ukrainian extraction) gifted the region to Ukraine.

Today, Crimea's total population numbers 2.3 million, of which 65 percent are Russians, 15 percent Ukrainian and

12 percent Tatars. Under any condition, the results of the referendum were predictable.

Last week, a military agreement was signed between Ukraine and Turkey. The Kiev government has decided to purchase Turkish drones as an alternative to Russian defensive armaments, in light of the former's superior performance on the battlefields of Syria, Libya and Karabakh. It is believed that Ukraine will invade Donbass, which is controlled by pro-Russian forces. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that "restoring Ukrainian sovereignty is one of the objectives of our foreign policy."

One day after Zelensky's announcement, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoglu and Minister of Defense Hulusi

see CHALLENGES, page 19



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COMMENTARY

Amnesty International And Human Rights Watch Cover-up Ethnic Cleansing

By Aris Govjian

Honest reporting and activism take a back seat when it comes to ethnic cleansing for two major NGOs. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which have branded themselves as being beacons for protecting human rights and ensuring social justice have failed Armenians. While Azerbaijan’s military continues to commit horrific war crimes, such as sexual abuse, mutilating captives, abducting and decapitating Armenian villagers, and posting their actions it to social media – Amnesty Internal and Human Rights Watch lend their brands and influence to cover up and white-wash the truth. Both organizations have consistently portrayed Azerbaijan as either a victim or an equal party to the horrific war crimes being committed. It is as if they have an interest in continuing the policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing of native Armenians.

Azerbaijan has spent over \$2.8 billion to buy positive publicity and relationships in Western media outlets and to make friends among western politicians to portray their dynastic dictatorship in a positive light while they commit a genocide. There is no indication of a decrease in

Azerbaijan’s efforts to pay their way to positive reporting and coverage for their government. While most journalists freely report events happening in Armenian populated regions – Azerbaijan’s government prevents journalists from reporting without the guidance of government handlers.

No Amnesty for Native Peoples

Amnesty International has primarily employed the strategy of white-washing ethnic cleansing by casually calling “both sides” to end the violence – rather than directly condemn the aggressor. In Amnesty International’s December 10, 2020 article, they use the misleading rhetoric that “both sides” need to calm down, in spite of all the torture and beheadings perpetrated against Armenians. The article only contains graphic photo evidence of violence committed by Azerbaijan’s military against Armenian people. In Amnesty International’s October 2, 2020 article, they start the introduction in a way that implies that both Armenia and Azerbaijan are using cluster bombs – however the city that these deadly weapons were used on was populated by Armenians. It has been confirmed that Azerbaijan has been use cluster bombs on Armenian civilians. The team at Amnesty International has chosen to obfuscate the truth to support the perpetrator of the crime. They have failed their mission, and in so doing they have failed humanity. It is ironic that Amnesty International pompously and very proudly displays the following words on their website while simultaneously covering up a seemingly untouchable dictator’s genocidal crime.

“Few would have predicted when we started that torturers would become international outlaws. That most countries would abolish the death penalty. And seemingly untouchable dictators would be made to answer for their crimes.” – Amnesty International

Perhaps Amnesty International needs a name change to Goebbels Incorporated.

Armenians Have No Right to Live according to Human Rights Watch

On the other hand, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has taken things to the next level by actively promoting propaganda from Azerbaijan’s dictator. While numerous journalists and official footage evidence Azerbaijan’s war crimes, HRW does more than turn a blind eye. The crimes committed by the Azeri military include decapitating young and elderly people, abusing animals, using illegal cluster bombs on homes and churches, and illegal white phosphorus poured over Armenians and forests. In response to all these crimes, Human Rights Watch weaves a narrative where the victims are presented as the perpetrators. In a phrase, Human Rights Watch is inhumane. It seems for every war crime that the Azerbaijani military commits, HRW provides convenient gaslighting articles to paint Armenia as the perpetrator. They continuously quote themselves and only share talking points from the Azerbaijani government throughout their reporting. Even if Azerbaijan’s military bombs maternity hospitals as it has in the war, Human Rights Watch seems to do its best to cover up their crimes.

Unfortunately, the people at Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have dipped their hands in the blood of innocent people, who have been tortured, sexually abused, and murdered. A population of an estimated 150,000 people are either displaced and left homeless or under threat of being wiped out. Humanity will continue to suffer so long as those who claim to be supporting justice are the ones who are covering up a crime.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch must report the truth, apologize for their part in covering up a genocide, and donate humanitarian relief to the native Armenian population. I do not know what political or monetary advantage Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch employees or board members gain by aiding and abetting murder.

(Aris Govjian is a writer and entrepreneur. He enjoys writing fiction as well as historical and philosophical nonfiction. Aris has been a life-long supporter of various charities and causes, more specifically providing support to impoverished families and children in Armenia. The author is the great great-grandson of the Aris Govjian mentioned in the story *Spirits on the Mountain*.)

Farewell to Shushi

By Alin K. Gregorian

The highs and lows for Armenians around the world – the Republic of Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora – have been eye opening about us as a people. Of course, now, the highs seem like a thing of the past.

I was lucky enough that my first visit to Armenia was with my daughter in 2009, when she was a fifth grader at St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School in Watertown. Every year, the talented and dedicated fifth grade Armenian teacher, Ardemis Megerdichian, leads the students and parents a two-week trip to Armenia and Artsakh. It’s not very easy on anyone, including the parents; we wake up at 6 a.m. and accompany the children as they go to museums, historic sites, churches, schools, etc., and generally try to keep them out of trouble while making them understand this is a special trip.

Our trip was organized such that after four or five days in Yerevan, we left our baggage at the hotel and headed to Karabakh for four days.

If only I had realized that this was to be my last visit ever to Shushi.

The journey from Yerevan to Stepanakert, our final destination, on a very large bus, containing a dozen shrieking girls and rambunctious boys and the parents, plus Ardemis, another teacher, Digin Anahid, and our capable tour guide and lovely, grizzled bus driver, made me yearn for headache medicine. Sadly, on those very well-paved yet narrow and curvy mountainous roads, I realized I suffer from a crippling fear of heights. I needed a cigarette – make that two, one in each hand. I had kicked the filthy habit a long time ago, but the view outside the bus did not help.

After leaving Yerevan, we made frequent stops along the way, including a roadside bathroom in Goris, the stench of which helped many of the mothers on the trip to develop superhuman feats of bladder control.

The children must have sung Getashen about 84 times during the trip, which only helped my ever-increasing cravings for nicotine. A little after our stop at Karahunj, the Armenian Stonehenge, the road started to get windier and steeper. I remember at one point looking out my side of the bus and seeing a sheer drop. For what seems like days, the large bus ascended one side of the mountain and descended the other. I made the tragic mistake of looking ahead just at the point when the bus was making a particularly drastic hairpin turn, high above the mountain, and saw the front of the bus over the sheer drop. Even now, when I think of this particular sight, my palms get sweaty.

Many of the kids, now settling in for yet another sing along, were excitedly pointing out fortresses and churches along the way which dotted the landscape, like jewels on a piece of lush, green velvet. I am embarrassed to say that I didn’t see many of them because my eyes were squeezed shut, as I prayed nonstop and made deals with God to save this busload of children and their parents.

Our next-to-last stop was Shushi. It was to be a brief one as it was already getting dark. The tour guide stressed that we all should hurry and get back on the bus as the mist was due to come in soon. Of course, the preteens, who all have the ability to tune out adults’ words at high decibels with ease, ignored the message completely. By the time we got on the bus and headed toward our final destination, Stepanakert, the mist had descended.

The bus made its way slowly along the highway to Stepanakert. The bus seemed to be ensconced inside a very large cotton ball. I was practically jumping out of my skin, and stutteringly, I asked our driver how he was making his way. The very practical man said that he just followed the yellow lane markings on the highway.

Shushi was certainly not as pretty as it has become since. There were still many buildings with blown out windows and I vividly remember seeing chickens going in and out of an apartment building.

Also, as someone who was born in Iran and left as a young teen, I just adored walking into the shops and seeing Iranian goods for sale there. At a small grocery store in Shushi, I spotted tiny boxes of an Iranian brand of laundry detergent I remembered from my childhood, Barf. (Barf means snow in Farsi, but of course, just the thought of trying to market the detergent under its original name in the US made me chuckle.)

But one episode for me encapsulates all that is wonderful and sad about Shushi.

We visited the Holy Savior Cathedral commonly referred to as Ghazanchetsots, prayed, walked around and finally sat in the pews, looking up at the beautiful ceiling. I was sitting near a fellow mother from our group. Two or three young boys, not more than 10, approached us and slid in

the pew next to us. The more fearless one, flicking his chin up, in a nonchalant move, as if to say “What’s up,” using the familiar “you” in Armenian, asked me and my friend what our names were (Anounet inch a). We restrained our chuckles and introduced ourselves. The first boy told us that he and his friend were the children of martyrs (martiks), which we of course knew was not true. After all, the Karabakh War had ended in 1994, long before they could have been a twinkle in their fathers’ eyes. They asked us for money and whatever else we could offer. It seemed they could spot the tourists. The rules of the game had already been established, apparently. Some of the parents went to nearby stores and bought balls and toys with the money we had all pooled together soon after our arrival in Armenia. In addition, we had brought sweaters and scarves knit by some of the church ladies in Boston. A little while later, our group of kids and parents met with the boys and their friends and handed all the goodies to them.

Though we had all been told that the poverty was dire there, none of us could imagine the real desperation. While the kids might have been hustlers, there was no question that their needs were real and they had their own code of honor in terms of distributing the gifts.

Stepanakert was a fresh, compact and charming city. Our little hotel was in a residential neighborhood. I was on the balcony our first day, taking in the charming view, and a family enjoying dinner in their backyard invited me and the rest of my tour mates to dinner. We did not take them up on their kind offer, but the fact that they were that hospitable and welcoming, gladdened us.

There was something different about Artsakh. I realized that of all the places associated with Armenian history, Artsakh was the only one whose story had ended with victory. Here was this little piece of heaven, as if a slice of the Swiss Alps had miraculously been transported to the South Caucasus, with its fresh air and green slopes. And on this beautiful land, a more hearty, earthy kind of Armenian worked the land. They had fought for and won back their land and were enjoying the fruits of their labors. In the process they had shirked off the intrinsic sadness of our people, it seemed.

We visited the war martyrs’ museum, which honored the soldiers killed in the war. A crumpled, elderly woman was the tour guide. The small museum had on its walls the pictures of all the soldiers killed – a collection that included the guide’s son. The sadness in her eyes was crushing.

We visited the army barracks where the tour guide, with eyes sparkling, said that the Azerbaijanis could not understand how the Armenian side kept acquiring more and more tanks with blockades in place. With pride she recalled that “mer teghanereh” (our boys) had the skills to fix the tanks the Azerbaijani army abandoned after they had incurred minor damage. That is why, she said, the Armenian side ended up with more tanks at the end of the war than at the beginning.

Every Armenian person I know, including those who are not hardcore partisans, have all been enveloped in a cloud of dejection since November 10. Has this really happened? Has the majority of Karabakh been lost – again? When and where will this cascade of loss end? Every day it seems another village in Armenia or Artsakh, outside the terms of the catastrophic treaty, gets handed over to the Azerbaijani authorities.

I cannot fathom that Shushi is not Armenian any more and will be known as Shusha. Before September, every time I recalled my visit to Ghazanchetsots, I smiled at the memory of the young boys who used their wits and wiles to seek help. Now, the lightness of that memory has forever been altered by the site of the destroyed church, its beautiful bell tower and proud and high roof now just so much rubble.

What is bothering me as much is the fact that Nakhichevan, from where my father’s ancestors hailed, is now practically a Turkish base, posing an existential threat to Armenia. All traces of Armenian heritage has been erased from that very ancient piece of Armenia systematically by the Azerbaijani government. Much like they did in the Ottoman Empire, and later the Republic of Turkey, the authorities destroyed the monuments because they knew that by destroying the past, you could alter the road to the future. Clearly these objects and churches and monuments, dating back centuries, will give the lie to the Turkish and Azerbaijani claims about Armenian lands.

Our country, important only to us, is situated smack in the middle of a playground in which some very big and vicious players perennially joust for power.

The news from the official sources in Armenia offered hope. Victory was almost at hand. Despite the dastardly joint actions of Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as the influx of Syrian assassins for hire, little Artsakh and Armenia were chugging along, making the enemy pay for its heartless attack.

Until...

The news of the end of the war suddenly made clear the picture the government offered that had

continued on next page



COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Turkish Generals Led War on Artsakh: This Was a Turkish, Not Azeri, Victory

Exiled Turkish journalist Cevheri Guven disclosed in a video report the names and activities of three Turkish Generals who had a decisive role in leading Azerbaijan's war on Artsakh, starting on Sept. 27 2020. It is already known that modern drones and missiles purchased by Azerbaijan from Israel, Turkey and Russia had a devastating effect on Armenia and Artsakh. It is also known that 200 Turkish military advisors and several thousand Syrian mercenaries participated in the war on behalf of Azerbaijan. However, this is the first time that a detailed report is made public about the presence of these Turkish Generals in Azerbaijan during the war.

One of the Turkish military leaders is Lieutenant General Sheref Ongay. The second is Major General Bahtiyar Ersay, and the third is Major General Goksel Kahya. The presence of these Turkish Generals in Baku is linked to the dismissal before the Artsakh War of Colonel General Nejmeddin Sadikov, Azerbaijan's First Deputy Minister of Defense and Chief of General Staff who had been at his post for 27 years. He was accused of treason and cooperation with the Russian military intelligence, according to Russian and dissident Azeri sources. Sadikov was reportedly arrested after his dismissal which was denied by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense. However, he

has not been seen in public since his dismissal. Sadikov was reportedly born in Derbent, Dagestan, and is of Lezgin origin. He has a poor knowledge of the Azerbaijani language. It is also alleged that his cousin is serving in the Russian Army in Gumri, Armenia. Sadikov was educated in Russia. It is important to note that a large number of Azeri soldiers were sent to Turkey to get their military education. Sadikov did not allow those returning from Turkey to serve in critical military positions. He was opposed to Turkish dominance in the leadership of the Azerbaijan's Armed Forces. As a result, Turkey asked for Sadikov's dismissal after which those trained in Turkey were given leading posts.

Returning to the three Turkish Generals, Sheref Ongay is the Commander of the Turkish Third Army, deployed in Erzingan. He was in control of the Artsakh War. Ongay graduated from the military academy in Ankara in 1982 and served in various units of the ground forces. In 2014, he was appointed Commander of the 9th Army Corps. He was for a while the head of the infantry school in Tuzla.

The second Turkish military leader in Azerbaijan, Major General Bahtiyar Ersay, was earlier jailed for being involved in a scandal (Operation Sledgehammer). However, he was pardoned and released, possibly because he made a plea bargain with the authorities, disclosing the names of the other participants in the conspiracy. He was subsequently promoted to the rank of Brigadier General becoming in charge of the 2nd Commando Brigade which fought with great brutality against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in Eastern Turkey. He is now the Chief of Operations at the Command of Turkish Land Forces. He stayed in Baku throughout the Artsakh War and personally managed the operations. Before the start of the war, two satellite communication centers were built in Baku and at the military airport of Gabala to contact the soldiers on the ground and the headquarters in Turkey. Both centers were managed exclusively by the Turkish Army. The Azerbaijani military was ordered to obey all commands of the Turkish superiors and not argue with or con-

tradict them. Ersay was in charge of the Syrian mercenaries who had earlier fought in Syria and Libya on behalf of Turkey. Furthermore, Ersay managed the highly technical military equipment provided by Turkey to Azerbaijan.

The third Turkish military man is Major General Goksel Kahya who was in Azerbaijan since July of this year. He is close to the Defense Minister of Turkey. Previously, he was Deputy Undersecretary in the Ministry of Defense. While taking part in the war in Libya on behalf of Turkey, he was captured by the opposition Libyan forces and then released. Kahya was in charge of the Turkish drones operating in Libya which gave him valuable experience in managing the drone war against Artsakh.

Since the end of the Artsakh War, the Azeri public has expressed its unhappiness that Russian peacekeepers are located on the territory of Karabakh. Some analysts have described the Russian presence in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia as a defeat for Turkey and the United States, and a victory for Russia, having located its forces "under the nose of NATO member Turkey." As Russian online newspaper, Vzglyad, concluded: Artsakh War's "plan was Turkish, the Generals were Turkish, and the drones were made in Turkey.... Baku can celebrate victory, but in terms of command and control, Turkish Generals can celebrate victory."

Retired Lieutenant Colonel of the Azerbaijani Army Oleg Guliyev, now living in Moscow, told the Vzglyad newspaper: "Azerbaijan must fully reclaim Karabakh. This is correct and fair. But we must reclaim Karabakh ourselves. If we reclaim it on a Turkish leash, then we will reclaim only Karabakh, and we will lose the rest of our country."

Clarification

In last week's article, I referred to a letter purportedly written by Catholicos Khrimian Hyrig. After my article's publication, I discovered that the letter was actually written more recently by historian Hayk Konjoryan imitating Khrimian's writing style and nationalistic views. I regret any confusion that this may have caused.

What Can The Diaspora Do Now?

By Raffi Bedrosyan

Undoubtably, Armenians all over the world are devastated by the 44-day war that resulted in the defeat of Artsakh and Armenia, pitted against an overwhelmingly large combined army of Azerbaijanis, Turks and jihadists equipped with greatly superior armaments and drones. The shock was even further exacerbated by the encouraging but misleading communications from the Armenian army that all was well and we were going to win, until the last day of the war.

Diaspora Armenians enthusiastically contributed to the war effort by donating more money during one month than the funds collected during the past twenty years. Many diasporans further contributed materials, medications and clothing.

Now that the war is lost, there is complete disappointment, loss of faith and trust among diaspora Armenians, combined with angry blame and accusations against both the present and past government leaders. Once the flurry of fury and protests subside, cooler heads prevail and we are again able to discuss the lessons to be learned from the mismanagement of past and present governments, I suggest the following steps be considered to improve the chances of survival for Armenia.

- Armenians in the diaspora have the financial, technological, scientific and economic resources and know-how to help the recovery of Armenia, as well as at least double the population of

Armenia. They can and must be involved in the growth of Armenia by contributing their resources in a coordinated and organized way, not on a voluntary basis, and not be regarded as a milking cash cow as they have been until today.

- This can only be achieved by representation of diaspora Armenians in the government of Armenia. The diaspora Armenians who do contribute to the improvement of Armenia financially, technologically, scientifically or economically must be allowed to vote and be voted for in the government of Armenia.

- In order to provide a reliable and steady funding mechanism, diaspora Armenians should contribute a fixed amount monthly, say 5% of their income, as a tax or bond to the government of Armenia. In order to provide accountability for the proper investment and spending of these funds, diaspora Armenians should vote for diaspora Armenian candidates to be elected in the parliament, based on quotas for five different Diaspora regions, Europe, North America, South America, Middle East and Russia. The Ministry of Diaspora must be re-established with increased powers with representation from the elected diasporans, regardless of which party is in power. I believe this is the only way to re-establish a meaningful relationship between Armenia and its diaspora now.

- In order to provide additional ties for Armenian diaspora youth of high school age, a kibbutz-like program must be established for at least two summers of compulsory visits to Armenia by diasporan youngsters, financed by the government.

- In order to provide technological and cultural interaction for Armenian diaspora university students, a university exchange program must be established for at least two semesters between world universities and Armenian ones for all diasporan Armenian university students.

- In order to capitalize on the technological and scientific expertise of diaspora Armenians, sabbatical exchanges must be arranged through the companies where they work, financed by the government of Armenia.

All of these suggestions should and could have been considered before the war was lost. It is even more imperative to implement them now.

Challenges for Armenia's Survival

CHALLENGES, from page 17

Akar arrived in Kiev. Again, this is a repeat of the choreography of the wars in Syria, Libya and Karabakh.

Although Turkey will be settling scores with Russia, this adventure will be much appreciated at the NATO headquarters in Brussels, where Ukraine's membership is anticipated.

On all fronts where Turkish and Russian forces confront each other, Moscow gives in, seeking some sort of accommodation. In this case, Russia may give up Donbass to legitimize its control over Crimea.

Armenians have been pinning their hopes on Russia for protection for more than a century. But Moscow's recent policy gives one cause for concern. Russian strength is being challenged by Turkish forces and it is on the defensive. One of the reasons Russia kept a neutral stance in the Karabakh war was Moscow's reluctance to engage Turkish forces to save Armenia. The other reason was that Moscow had decided to teach a lesson to Armenia's inept leadership for its anti-Russian posturing for two years.

Therefore, if not rely on Russia, what should Armenia do? First it needs to build up its defensive forces and develop alliances. The laser weapons that Turkey used to pulverize Armenian military hardware could have been countered, because Armenians have been far more advanced in terms of laser technology dating back to 30 years ago. Knowing that the enemies were waiting for an opportunity to strike, why did the Armenian government not use the wealth of knowledge at its disposal?

Turkey's growing power – both in the region and beyond – poses an existential challenge for the very survival of Armenia.

Farewell to Shushi

from previous page

been a work of fiction. The majority of Artsakh was gone, taking with it some priceless Armenian monuments and churches, the most notable of which is Dadivank Monastery, dating back more than a millennium. The dead

numbered at least five times the official estimate and Armenia itself was put in a precarious position that threatened (threatens) its very existence.

Now we can really feel what the witnesses and survivors of the Armenian Genocide experienced, as well as those scattered around the world at the time who could only hear the news and send up prayers for their brothers

and sisters.

I wonder where those cheeky young boys of 11 years ago are. Were they on the battlefield? Do they have a roof over their heads? Did they lose members of their families?

A class trip with my daughter, when we spent so much time together, now has taken a historic significance for both of us.

Perhaps one day, we may find our way back.



Iran Reaffirms Interest in Closer Ties with Armenia

TEHRAN (RFE/RL) – Iran has reportedly reaffirmed its intention to continue seeking closer relations with neighboring Armenia after the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif discussed with his Armenian counterpart Ara Aytvazian regional security and bilateral ties in a phone call on Monday.

According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Zarif and Aytvazian explored “prospects for cooperation aimed at addressing new regional challenges.”

“The interlocutors emphasized the importance of further stepping up [Armenian-Iranian] contacts and dialogue at various levels, based on

multilateral formats,” read a ministry statement.

The two ministers spoke one day after the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, met with Artashes Tumanian, the Armenian ambassador in Tehran.

“Shamkhani expressed the Iranian authorities’ readiness to deepen cooperation between the two countries in these difficult times for Armenia,” the Armenian Embassy in Iran said in a statement on the meeting.

The embassy said Tumanian briefed Shamkhani on “the situation in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh as well as regional developments.” It gave no other details.



Ali Shamkhani (R), the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, meets with Armenian Ambassador Artashes Tumanian, Tehran, December 27, 2020

centuries-old friendly relations between the two peoples. They reiterated mutual readiness to deepen the close cooperation in bilateral and

On Saturday, Armenia’s Deputy Minister for Territorial Administration and Infrastructures Hakob Vartanian held separate talks in Tehran



Shushi after the war

Aliyev Declares Shushi Cultural Capital of Azerbaijan

BAKU (Panorama.am) – Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has declared Nagorno-Karabakh’s (Artsakh) town of Shushi the cultural capital of Azerbaijan, RIA Novosti reported on January 5.

Shushi was occupied by the Azerbaijani military during the recent 44-day war.

“I declare Shusha the capital of Azerbaijani culture. The town of Shusha deserves it,” he said at a video conference with the country’s minister of culture.

According to Aliyev, religious and historical monuments in the town will be restored.

with Iran’s Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh, his deputy Amir Hossein Zamaninia and Deputy Energy Minister Homayoun Hayeri.

The Armenian Embassy reported that the two sides finalized agreements to prolong and expand a long-running swap arrangement involving Iranian natural gas supplies to Armenia and Armenian electricity exports to the Islamic Republic. As a result of those agreements, a gas pipeline connecting the two countries will operate at full capacity, said the embassy.

“Discussions about some technical issues concerning gas exports and gas-for-electricity barter were postponed to the near future, after which a long-term contract will be signed,” the

Fars news agency quoted Zamaninia as saying. The Iranian vice-minister did not elaborate.

The future of the swap arrangement hinges on the ongoing construction of a third power transmission line connecting Armenia and Iran. It will allow the two states to triple mutual energy supplies.

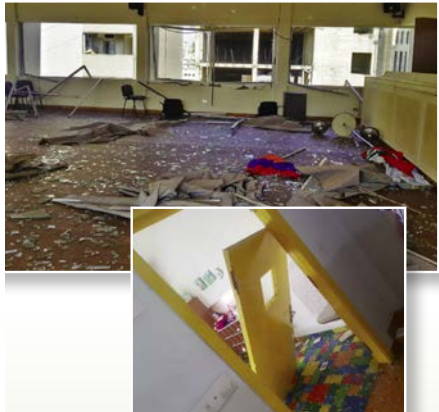
Work on the high-voltage line, which is mainly carried out in southeastern Armenia by an Iranian company, was supposed to finish in September 2019. However, it was delayed due to a host of factors, including U.S. sanctions against Iran.

The Armenian Embassy said Vartanian’s talks with Hayeri focused on the “final stage” of the construction.



HELP Us Rebuild

The Tekeyan School of Beirut



The Vahan Tekeyan School, founded in 1951, was damaged by the August 4 explosion in Beirut. It primarily serves a low-income segment of the Armenian community and already was struggling due to Lebanon’s economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. Now it is trying to reopen for the fall semester.



The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada is sending aid and asks your assistance too. Make your donations by credit card at <https://givebutter.com/bXn8Lm> or as checks mailed to the Tekeyan Cultural Association (memo: Beirut Tekeyan School), at its headquarters (755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown MA 02472). All administrative costs for this campaign will be borne by the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the US and Canada.

For more information, email tcadirector@aol.com or call 617 924-4455.