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Pashinyan, Allies See No Need For Snap Elections

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and lawmakers representing his My Step alliance spoke out against holding fresh parliamentary elections to resolve the political crisis in Armenia when they met late on Sunday, February 7.

In a short statement, My Step said the participants of the meeting saw no popular “demand” for the conduct of such elections proposed by Pashinyan on December 25. They also noted the proposal’s rejection by the two opposition parties represented in the Armenian parliament, said the statement.

Pashinyan had offered to hold snap elections following opposition protests sparked by the war in Nagorno-Karabakh stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire on November 10.

Virtually all Armenian opposition groups blame Pashinyan for the Armenian side’s defeat in the war and want him to hand over power to an interim government that would snap elections within a year. The

“NIKOL PASHINYAN CANNOT BE ONE OF THE FEW LEADERS IN WORLD HISTORY WHO STAYED IN POWER AFTER SURRENDERING LANDS”

—NAIRA ZOHRABYAN

leaders of the two parliamentary opposition parties, Prosperous Armenia (BHK) and Bright Armenia (LHK), insisted on the prime minister’s resignation when they met with him later in December.

Edmon Marukyan, the leader of LHK, warned of more public calls for a violent overthrow of Pashinyan and his government.

“Of course, this is not Bright Armenia’s [preferred] path,” he said. “But that accumulated [anti-government] energy will burst somewhere and the authorities will be primarily responsible for that.”

The BHK is a key member of the Homeland Salvation Movement, an alliance of 17 opposition parties that staged the anti-government demonstrations in November and December. Representatives of the alliance said on February 3 that it will resume soon the protests aimed at forcing Pashinyan to step down.

A senior member of BHK insisted, for her part, that Pashinyan was never serious about holding fresh elections.

“The conscious, thinking and patriotic part of the society concerned about the country’s future — and they are a majority — is demanding that Nikol Pashinyan resign as soon as possible,” Naira Zohrabyan said.

“Nikol Pashinyan cannot be one of the few leaders in world history who stayed in power after surrendering lands,” she said.

Reacting to My Step’s statement, the Homeland Salvation Movement coordinator, Ishkhan Saghatelian, announced on February 8 that the first rally will be held in Yerevan’s Liberty Square on February 20. “Those citizens who thought about getting rid of the government of evil through elections will now take to the streets,” he wrote on Facebook.

Saghatelian said Pashinyan “abandoned” the idea of holding fresh elections because he realized that he stands no chance of winning them.

Some opposition forces, including the BHK, seemed ready to participate in the possible elections even if they were held by Pashinyan. Former Robert Kocharyan also spoke out against an election boycott favored by other opposition groups.

Kocharyan expressed confidence on January 27 that he and his political allies will win the elections. In an interview with the Sputnik news agency published on Saturday, he likewise suggested that he would be Pashinyan’s main election challenger.

Lawmakers representing the ruling bloc insisted, meanwhile, most Armenians do not want regime change or pre-term elections.

Moderna’s Noubar Afeyan Is Awarded Lebanon’s Order Of Merit

WASHINGTON (Facebook) — Noubar Afeyan, co-founder and chairman of Moderna, was honored with Lebanon’s National Order of Merit, along with seven of his colleagues, all executives and scientists of Lebanese origin on February 2. Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States of America Gabriel Issa presented the awards on behalf of the President of the Republic of Lebanon General Michel Aoun. The ceremony was streamed live on Facebook, with some award recipients present in person and others participating virtually.

The ambassador declared that the Moderna executives raised the flag of see AWARD, page 4



Dr. Noubar Afeyan

NEWS IN BRIEF

COVID Infection Rates Continue Growing in Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The number of confirmed coronavirus infections in Armenia grew by 123 to reach 168,300 on Tuesday, February 9, according to the Health Ministry.

The new figures also revealed that 293 more people have recovered, three patients have died from Covid-19, while one person carrying the virus has died from other causes in the past 24 hours.

A total of 3,126 have died from coronavirus in the country.

Pope Is Following Caucasus Developments

THE VATICAN (Armenpress) — Pope Francis said this week he is following the developments in the South Caucasus with particular attention.

While addressing the representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis touched upon the geopolitical situation and the instability globally, including the situation in the South Caucasian region. “I follow the situation in the South Caucasus with particular attention where several conflicts continue, some of which erupted last year, distorting the stability and security of the entire region,” Francis said.

He expressed hope that 2021 will be the year of the end of the Syrian conflict, of the resumption of direct dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, of stability in Lebanon and of peace in Libya.

Armenians in Holland Welcome Motion to Recognize Genocide

AMSTERDAM (Armenpress) — The Federation of Armenian Organizations in the Netherlands (FAON) announced it welcomes the motion of MP Joël Voordewind (ChristenUnie), which calls on the government to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

“The very broad support for the motion shows that for too long there has been great dissatisfaction in the Parliament how the successive governments have dealt with the Armenian Genocide.

The motion’s message is that clear language is needed to resolve precarious issues in the future. The FAON considers this idea especially important, given the current situation, in which Genocide Watch warned of a new genocide during the war in Nagorno Karabakh, and after the war both Turkey and Azerbaijan are aggressive towards Armenia.

The Parliament recognized the Armenian Genocide, after the Dutch Parliament had already recognized it in 2004 unanimously, which appeals to the government “to expressly and continuously raise the recognition of the Armenian Genocide during the bilateral and EU dialogue with Turkey.”

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The Mighty Mantuh

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Sol Sanasarian, Allan Jendian, Jimmy Haboian, Peter Chorebanian, Guy Chookoorian

Tribute to Guy Chookoorian

Voice of a Generation, Leaving Legacy of Service

By Harry Kezelian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — The year is 1947. The location, a hotel somewhere in the Eastern United States where an Armenian youth

convention is being held. A group of young people are gathered in a room having a little after-hours party; the day’s meetings, banquets, and dance have ended. Someone brings out a portable record player. The group’s jokester, with a sly smile, pulls a record out. “You guys gotta hear this,” he says. As the shellac disc begins to spin at 78 rpms, a beautiful piano melody flows from the tiny speaker. The one young lady in the room who is a classical music snob is pleasantly surprised. Then the pianist suddenly shifts to a jump-blues riff. There is confusion in the room as to what they are listening to. The jokester is grinning. And then the voice on the record, that of a young man their own age, singing juke-box music in Armenian starts to belt out:

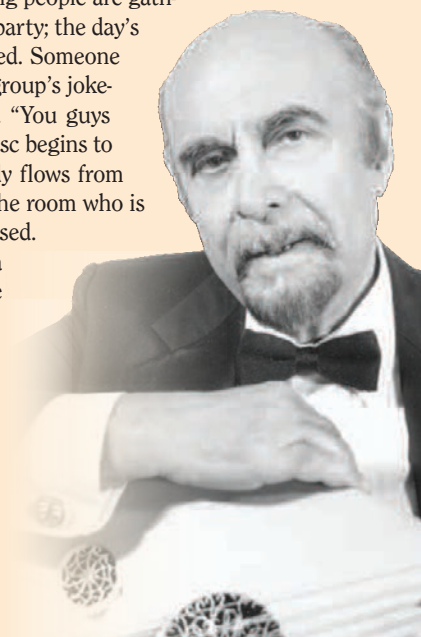
Toore patz, Dikran

Toore patz, vor yes ners kam

Toore patz, Dikran

Dikran, inchoo toore ches panar?

see TRIBUTE, page 13





ARMENIA

News From Armenia

World Bank Approves Loan for Building Hospitals

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — The World Bank has approved \$7.4 million in fresh loans to help the government build and equip two provincial hospitals.

In a statement issued on February 4, the bank said they will serve as “additional financing” for a health-care project launched in Armenia in 2013. It had lent the country’s former government \$35 million at the time.

The statement said the expanded project will close “financial gaps” for the construction of the hospitals that will be located in Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor provinces.

It quoted the head of the World Bank office in Yerevan, Sylvie Bossoutrot, as saying that more than 137,000 local residents will gain access to “quality medical care” as a result of the project. The bank has already financed the construction of 18 regional medical centers in Armenia, said Bossoutrot.

The statement added that the extra funding will also increase the country’s capacity to deal with the pandemic.

Ventilators Made in Armenia Ready for Clinical Trials

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Five ventilators made in Armenia are ready and clinical trials will soon be conducted on them, Minister of High technological industry Hakob Arshakyan said at a press conference, commenting on the ventilator funding project.

“Five such devices have already been prepared. They have almost passed the trial stage, and there is a need for clinical trials. No such complex devices have been made in Armenia as far as I know. They are complex systems, and acknowledge of such knowledge can have a very serious effect in Armenia,” the minister said.

Foreigners Will Need Entry Permit to Visit Karabakh

STEPANAKERT (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Foreign citizens wishing to visit Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) must from now on obtain an entry permit from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Karabakh authorities said Monday, February 8.

The procedure applies both to foreigners who need a visa and to citizens of countries that have a visa-free regime with Karabakh, the Foreign Ministry said.

Application information will also be shared with the Russian peacekeeping force for security reasons. After getting the approval, foreign citizens will be notified, while their certificates will be sent to the permanent representation of Artsakh in Yerevan. After that, they can visit Artsakh, the Ministry added.

Azerbaijani Authorities Stop Christian Pilgrims From Entering Dadivank

STEPANAKERT (Armenpress) — Azerbaijani authorities have barred a group of Armenian Christian pilgrims from entering the Dadivank monastery, demanding that from now on they should receive a manifest listing the identities of pilgrims beforehand.

“Previously, the Azerbaijani side was demanding only the number of pilgrims heading to Davdivank, and the number was to be no more than 30 persons,” the Prelate of the Diocese of Artsakh of the Armenian Apostolic Church Bishop Vrtanes Abrahamyan said. “Now they are demanding us to present nominal lists beforehand. Therefore, on Sunday we will provide the list of pilgrims with the peacekeepers in order not to have other difficulties in entering Dadivank,” he said.

Pilgrims from Armenia are visiting Dadivank accompanied by Russian peacekeepers.

New Ambassdor of China Visits Pashinyan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan received the newly appointed Ambassador of China to Armenia Fan Yong on February 9, the office of the prime minister announced.

Pashinyan congratulated the diplomat and wished his productive work for the sake of the development of the Armenian-Chinese relations. He recalled with satisfaction his visit to China in 2019 and the impressive meetings with the president and prime minister of China, noting that the agreements reached during those meetings are being successfully implemented. “Armenia and China have intensive relations, Chinese Business, culture, education are tangibly represented in our country. We are ready to consistently deepen cooperation in political, economic, humanitarian and other areas,” the PM said.

According to Nikol Pashinyan, despite the difficulties in 2020 caused by the pandemic, the volume of exports from Armenia to China has increased, which shows the positive dynamics of bilateral trade. The Prime Minister thanked the Chinese government for the assistance to the Armenian healthcare sector in the fight against coronavirus.

Thanking for the warm reception, the Chinese Ambassador assessed it an

honor to hold a diplomatic position in Armenia and assured that he will make all efforts for the development of the Armenian-Chinese relations. According to him, the two countries are bound by mutual trust and understanding, and the Chinese government highlights partnership with Armenia.

The sides exchanged views on the post-war situation in Artsakh. The Prime Minister thanked China for its impartial position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, noting that the issue of the status of Nagorno Karabakh remains unsolved and that Armenia highlights the negotiations

under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-chairs’ format.

Referring to the humanitarian aspect, Nikol Pashinyan stressed that the return of the detainees remains a priority, as well as the protection of the Armenian historical, cultural and religious heritage in the territories under the control of Azerbaijan.

Fan Yong noted that China supports the establishment of security, stability and peaceful cooperation in the region, and supports the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

The two discussed issues related to the agenda of bilateral relations and its

further expansion. In the context of the development of economic relations, the sides referred to the expansion of Chinese investments in Armenia, increase of trade turnover, implementation of infrastructural programs, acti-



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, right, with Ambassador of China to Armenia Fan Yong

UN Resident Coordinator Meets With Science and Culture Minister

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Minister of education, science, culture and sport Vahram Dumanyan received UN Resident Coordinator for Armenia Shombi Sharp and his delegation on January 8.

The meeting was also attended by the representatives of the ministry and the UN Office in Armenia.

Welcoming the guests, the minister attached importance to the ongoing educational, scientific, cultural and sports projects implemented by the support of the UN, expressing hope that they will continue with a greater active-

ness. Dumanyan said the UN mission is highly important especially in the post-war crisis.

“The Armenian side expects the support of the international organizations and in particular the UN in the preservation of the Armenian historical-cultural heritage in the territories of Artsakh which have come under the Azerbaijani control due to the 2020 war. That historical cultural monuments are the universal civilizational values created by the Armenian people,” the minister said, expressing hope that the UN Office in Armenia will continue its support aimed at the full exercise of the children’s right to education who have appeared in the post-war period.

Sharp also highlighted the bilateral partnership and stated: “The UN Office in Armenia highly values the years-long cooperation with the ministry of education,” he said, adding that they expect to continue supporting the educational reforms in Armenia. “In particular, we will soon focus on creating temporary educational sites and will assist in providing access to quality education for children who have been displaced from Nagorno Karabakh and sheltered in Armenia”.

At the meeting other issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-war situation were also discussed.

Pashinyan Hails Lifting Of Russian Travel Ban

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan again welcomed on Friday, February 5, the Russian government’s decision to lift a coronavirus-related entry ban for Armenians, saying that it will reduce their economic hardship.

Moscow banned the entry of visitors from many foreign countries last spring as part of its efforts to contain the coronavirus pandemic. It subsequently allowed citizens of some countries, including all other members of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) except Armenia, to visit Russia.

The ban directly affected tens of thousands of Armenian migrant workers earning a living in Russia on a seasonal or permanent basis. Many of them had to return to Armenia following lockdown restrictions imposed across Russia last March.

After repeated appeals from the Armenian government Moscow last week allowed Armenian citizens testing negative for COVID-19 to enter Russia by air from February 1 to March 1. They have to use a special mobile phone application certifying negative results of their coronavirus tests taken shortly before their departure from Armenia.

Pashinyan “noted with satisfaction” the lifting of the ban when he spoke at a meeting of the prime ministers of Russia and other EEU member states held in Kazakhstan. He said that the move is of “fairly great social and economic significance” for Armenia.

Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan said on Thursday that 1,423 Armenian citizens flew to Moscow and other Russian cities from Yerevan on February 1-3. More than 1,260 others returned to Armenia from Yerevan in the three-day period, Grigoryan told Pashinyan during a cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

Flights to Russia from Armenia’s second international airport located in Gyumri resumed on Thursday evening. Gyumri and the surrounding Shirak province have for decades suffered from high unemployment and poverty, forcing a large part of the region’s population to work in Russia.

“I’m going [to Russia] for work. I was stuck here for a year because of the pandemic,” one local resident, Onik Pogoshyan, said as he prepared to board a Gyumri-Moscow flight on Friday.

“My family will stay here and I will come back again,” Pogoshyan said in an interview.

Armenuhi Ghasaboghlyan was at the Gyumri airport to see off her son and his family that had emigrated to Russia in the 1990s but returned to Armenia following the 2018 “Velvet Revolution.” She said the family decided to again leave the country.

“Our living conditions were such that we realized that we can’t sufficiently provide for the children,” explained the woman. “We weren’t scared of the coronavirus or the war [in Nagorno-Karabakh.]”



ARMENIA

Aurora Distributes Humanitarian Aid to Artsakh

YEREVAN – The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative continues to broaden its humanitarian program in Artsakh, the IDeA Foundation announced.

Aurora's international standing and its vast network of engaged donors, experts, humanitarians and beneficiaries are being used to provide support to the people of Artsakh and ensure effective solutions on the ground. Taking into consideration the scale of Aurora's relief program, a decision has been made to bring onboard a local expert with relevant background, and Narine Aghabalyan, former minister of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Artsakh, has joined the Aurora team to lead the project. In the meantime, Aurora keeps accepting proposals from organizations in need of assistance on the ground – they are invited to submit their applications to info@auroraprize.com.

"It is very important that Aurora is able to help people in need in different corners of the world, as well as to direct large-scale programs to Artsakh in 2020. Aurora has already supported around 50 projects focused on immediate needs of locals, impacting thousands of Artsakh people. We are very glad to welcome Narine to the team and are certain that her expertise will allow the program to reach new heights," said Arman Jilavian, board member of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

In the aftermath of the war, Aurora has been providing direct aid to the people of Artsakh on the basis of the #AraratChallenge crowdfunding initiative and has already allocated \$473,000 to the program. Together with partner organizations, the #AraratChallenge helps 48 projects focused on providing essentials to displaced people and restoring civil infrastructure in Artsakh through financial support, as well as by connecting volunteers willing to donate their time and expertise with humanitarian organizations in need of assistance on the ground.

Over the years, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Co-Founders, Vartan Gregorian, Noubar Afeyan and Ruben Vardanyan and organizations founded by them have been



Children in Artsakh with the packages they have received.

involved in numerous programs in Artsakh. In addition, starting with Marguerite Barankitse, the recipient of the inaugural Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity, the Aurora Prize Laureates have been visiting Artsakh annually, promoting its internationally.

"Overcoming the consequences of the autumn war of 2020 in Artsakh is a challenge for every Armenian. Aurora can unite us all and help us meet it. United, we can do so much more than what we think we're capable of," said Aghabalyan. An Artsakh native born in 1967 in Stepanakert, she held offices within the Government of the Republic of Artsakh in

2009–2020. For more than 8 years, Aghabalyan had been the Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs, and later occupied the position of the Minister of Education, Science and Sports before joining the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

In her new position as Head of Artsakh program, Aghabalyan will oversee the implementation of the projects in the region supported by Aurora, as well as the development of a humanitarian platform to connect all stakeholders under the auspices of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and enforce the centralized coordination of major Artsakh-related efforts and funding.

AMAA Spreads the Good News of Christmas to the Children of Armenia and Artsakh

YEREVAN – During the first weeks of 2021, the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) in cooperation with the Evangelical Church of Armenia (ECA) delivered a message of hope to over 15,600 children, adolescents and their parents during more than 100 Christmas Programs held in 45 towns and villages throughout Armenia and Artsakh. Along with the Good News, over 12,000 children received Christmas Joy packages filled with stationery, educational games, hygiene items and warm hats that were prepared in advance by volunteers from the AMAA and ECA.

This year, the AMAA's and ECA's "Hayasa" Theatrical group, led by Artistic Director Nune Abrahamyan, conveyed the Good News of Christmas to the children with a puppet show based on Oscar Wilde's "Selfish Giant" story. The icy heart of the "selfish giant" melts, and his garden turns green again when he hears the Gospel of Salvation. The troupe started its tour and performances from the AMAA's Shoghig Camp in Hankavan, where over 200 women, children and elderly from Artsakh were sheltered since the first days of the war, and later with families who lost their homes in Shushi and Hadrut regions. The children who attended school in the Pyunik village of Hankavan,



The cast and young audience at a border village.

where the Artsakh children who were staying at camp attend, were also invited to the event.

Following the Christmas Program in Camp Shoghig, the "Hayasa" Theatrical group presented their program in Yerevan, Stepanavan and the neighboring villages. Children and teenagers from Artsakh families who had taken

refuge in these regions were also invited to attend.

After the war, words such as dream, rejoice and laugh might sound strange, especially to the children of Artsakh, where joy seemed to be hidden in their eyes. Many of these children dream to return home, but for the time being it is an unattainable dream. "Return to Home" was the theme of another Christmas theatrical performance presented to the children in Gyumri and later in Artsakh led by Artistic Director Vazken Torosyan.

In Artsakh, from January 8-11, the Gyumri theatrical group presented a Christmas Program in Stepanakert, Askeran, Martakert and other regions of the area. During seven sessions and from various

stages, about 3,000 children watched a musical performance which told the story of a little girl who always complained about her family. She lied and wanted to get away from home. Because of her lies no one trusted her anymore and she lost everything. Finally she found herself in the realm of dreams, whose king is the King of Kings. It is the prayer to Him that changed the girl's heart and helped her understand that the most precious thing in life is her family, and only the King can fulfill her dreams, which are good by His will and will come true at the right time. The message from this performance was a ray of hope especially for the children and their parents who lost their homes in Shushi and Hadrut.

Besides the major cities and towns in Armenia, this year the AMAA's and ECA's Vardenis team conveyed the Good News of Christmas not only in Vardenis, a border village of Armenia, but also to 20 other nearby border



After the show in Yerevan



Performing in Artsakh

villages. In just a few days, despite the harsh snowy weather, the team visited these villages and presented the story of Jesus' Nativity and distributed Christmas Joy packages.



INTERNATIONAL

International News

Azerbaijan Media Keeps Up Attacks on Armenia Human Rights Defender

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Azerbaijani media organized attacks against the Human Rights Defender of Armenia Arman Tatoyan in the recent days with the involvement of also MPs, Tatoyan noted this week.

“The attacks are accompanied by announcements on starting a process of releasing him from duty, extreme insults against him, threats and hatred,” he said.

In addition, the Human Rights Defender received threats also by personal messages.

Those attacks are connected with his statements related to human rights violations in the process of determining the borders of Armenia, the appearance of Azerbaijani soldiers in the Syunik region of Armenia and Azerbaijani provocations against civilians.

Moreover, the statements are openly falsified.

For example, Tatoyan speaks about the inadmissibility of the presence of Azerbaijani servicemen, flags and placards in Syunik, Azerbaijani war crimes, threats of war, ethnic cleansings and state-sponsored Armeniophobia, while the Azerbaijani media presents this as “hysteria,” and “so-called Syunik.”

Tatoyan said he considers these attacks by the Azerbaijani media absolutely condemnable.

Armenian, Russian and Azerbaijani Panel Discusses Transport

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — A virtual meeting of the expert subgroup on transport communications of the trilateral working group from Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan was held on Tuesday, February 9, under the joint chairmanship of the Deputy Prime Ministers of the three countries.

According to Armenia's Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures, the meeting was attended by those responsible for areas included in the respective commissions created by the three countries.

Issues related to the state of the region's railway network and road communication for the implementation of transit traffic were considered, the Armenian side said.

The Deputy Prime Ministers of the three countries first met in person on January 30 in Moscow to discuss new transport corridors that would link Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia.

Czech Parliament Group Urges Azerbaijan to Return Armenian POWs

PRAGUE (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czech Chamber of Deputies has slammed Azerbaijan's failure to return the Armenian prisoners of war after the completion of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian Embassy to Prague said in a Facebook post.

The Committee on Thursday, February 4, adopted a resolution on the conflict, welcoming the establishment of the ceasefire, but expressed regret over Azerbaijan's non-compliance with the ceasefire clause on returning POWs, urging Baku to return the remaining captives.

At the same time, the Committee called for a political settlement to the conflict within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairmanship.

Several dozen Armenian POWs returned from Azerbaijan in mid-December, although Armenian officials said many more people were being held in Baku. Dozens of others, both servicemen and civilians, have been captured after the completion of military hostilities. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has said the newly detained persons are not prisoners of war but “terrorists.”

Human rights lawyer Siranush Sahakyan has said, meanwhile, that at least 120 Armenian prisoners of war are being held in Azerbaijan. Sahakyan represents the rights of some of the Karabakh POWs before the European Court of Human Rights.

Turkish Embassy Offer of Language Classes Worries Lebanese Armenian Political Leaders

BEIRUT (Zartong, Aztag) —Major General Imad Osman, director-general of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces, recently issued a circular to the officers and soldiers he commands

announcing that Turkish language classes would be conducted online in Lebanon in cooperation with the Turkish embassy in that country. The news has inspired alarm among Lebanese Armenians as a reflection of growing Turkish influence and involvement in Lebanon.

Incidents last year in connection with Lebanese-Armenian television anchor Neshan Der Haroutiounian's criticism of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and even earlier reactions in Beirut and Tripoli against the 2015 commemoration of the Armenian Genocide already indicated the negative effects of Turkish influence for the Armenian community.

Chairman of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party District Committee of Lebanon Sevag Hagopian responded publicly to Osman, asking why it was important to promote the learning of Turkish in Lebanon at this point in time when the language was not a major recognized international one and a major Turkish-speaking community did not exist in Lebanon. Furthermore, he pointed out that the circular asked for interested soldiers to send their personal information directly to an email address connected with the Turkish embassy. In other words, this would allow Turkish state bodies to use this information in the future for purposes

other than that of language education.

He wrote that in the context of Turkish intervention and expansionist intents as far afield as Libya and the Southern Caucasus, the proposal to administer such courses should not be considered as an innocent one. He said that he was afraid that Turkey could in the near future threaten the national security of Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Lebanese parliament deputy and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Central Committee of Lebanon representative Hagop Pakraduni held a telephone discussion with Interior Minister Mohammad Fahmi and expressed his amazement and puzzlement concerning the announcement. He pointed out that Lebanon's political figures do not speak Turkish and this step could in fact create spies for Turkey. Pakraduni noted that Turkish state agencies in various places and different circles in Lebanon attempt to form opinion and impose perspectives, as well as to promote Turkish policies.

Fahmi responded that this decision for Turkish language lessons was not obligatory for the Internal Security Forces and is similar to plans for instruction in languages such as English, Spanish or Italian. He promised to follow up on this matter and reach a suitable solution.

Greek PM in Nicosia: ‘There Will Be no Two-State Solution to Cyprus’

ATHENS (Panorama.am) — Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Cypriot President Nikos Anastasiades in their meeting in Nicosia on Monday, February 8, took a joint position on the Cyprus issue.

The two leaders called for a bi-zonal bi-communal federation as the only solution to resolve the division of Cyprus caused by the 1974 Turkish invasion that led to 200,000 refugees, thousands of deaths and hundreds of women raped, the Greek City Times reports.

“Today's visit comes at a sensitive time for the Cyprus issue,” the prime minister said, noting that discussions on the issue are under way for a five-party meeting under the auspices of the UN.

“I assured that the end of Turkey's occupation and the finding of a functional and mutually acceptable solution remains a top priority of Greek foreign policy, an act of justice to the Cypriot people,” said Mitsotakis, referring to a “national priority.”

He expressed the commitment of both sides to the UN decisions that define the “only universally binding solution framework” for the Cyprus issue is a “bi-zonal bi-communal solution.”

“Unfortunately,” he added, “Turkey and the new Turkish Cypriot leader are “outside the UN, insisting on the groundless position of two states, something rejected, not only by Greece and Cyprus, but also the UN and the EU.”

“Ankara and (Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin) Tatar should know that the resumption of dialogue will take place within the limits I have underlined,” he said, adding that “the solution must not serve Turkey's goals.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on Sunday for talks to aim for “two separate states” in Cyprus, during a controversial visit to the north of the divided island which Turkey has occupied for nearly five decades.

Judge Kirill Gevorgian of Russia Elected VP of International Court of Justice



Judge Kirill Gevorgian

THE HAGUE — On February 8, Judge Joan E. Donoghue (United States of America) was elected President of the International Court of Justice by her peers, and Judge Kirill Gevorgian (Russian Federation) was elected Vice-President, each for a term of three years.

Following the elections held on November 12 by the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council to fill the five seats which were due to fall vacant on 6 February 2021

Gevorgian, 67, is a Russian diplomat and jurist. From 2003 to 2009, he served as Russia's ambassador to the Netherlands. In 2014, he was elected to the International Court of Justice for a term beginning the following year.

Moderna's Noubar Afeyan Awarded Lebanon's Order of Merit

AWARD, from page 1

Lebanon very high. They helped promote the name of Lebanon while solving a basic problem of survival for humanity. Lebanon of course will also benefit from the vaccine like any other country, he continued.

Issa remarked that when he met President Donald Trump during a ceremony to present his ambassadorial credentials, and thanked the US for all its help to Lebanon, the latter surprised him by asking what Lebanon did for the US. He did not have the opportunity to respond then. The February 2 ceremony, he said, provided the opportunity to give a partial delayed answer: Lebanese helped the US with its people and talent.

Afeyan could not participate in person but delivered his remarks of thanks virtually. He first praised the other members of Moderna who received the

award and provided a brief background about the birth and development of Moderna. He paid tribute to his country of birth and expressed gratitude to Lebanon for accepting so many Armenian refugees and orphans who survived the Armenian Genocide.

Afeyan spoke fondly about his memories of his childhood in Lebanon. He noted that the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative was able to provide aid after the August 2020 explosion, which reminded him of the burning port he saw when fleeing with his family in 1975.

He said that he saw special kinship between Armenians and Lebanese today, with both countries facing difficult conditions but also having successful diasporas and the possibility of making positive changes through entrepreneurship.

The National Order of Merit was pre-

sented to:

- Dr. Noubar Afeyan, Co-founder and Chairman of Moderna
- Marcello Damiani, Chief Digital & Operational
- Said Francis, Senior VP for Business Development & Corporate Strategy
- Charbel Haber, Senior VP for Regulatory Affairs
- Dr. François Nader, Board Member
- Monique Yoakin Turk, Director, Program & Alliance Management.
- Joe Sarkis, Associate Director
- Joyce Kfoury Sousa, Quality Control Manager.

Sarkis could not participate due to a last-minute family emergency. Former US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar, who himself was recently decorated with the Lebanese National Order of the Cedar, was among the guests virtually present at the ceremony.



INTERNATIONAL

Musicians in Germany Raise Funds For Artsakh

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

MARBURG, Germany – It was in the middle of October, not long after the outbreak of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Amalia Safaryan, a young pianist living in Marburg, called her friend, Seda Nahapetyan, a singer in Giessen. Her message was urgent: “We have to do something; we’ll go crazy if we just sit around waiting for the war to end. We have to do something for our country!”

Her idea was to organize a benefit concert and Seda was all ears. Amalia knew a woman in Marburg with connections, who might be able to arrange something in a church. Seda contacted her friend Ruben Gulkanyan, a violinist, and he agreed instantly. Of course, any Armenian would be happy to be able to contribute something to the country. Seda travelled twice to Marburg to rehearse with Amalia, and that was it.

Luckily, the St. Mary’s Lutheran parish church was free on October 23. It was a stroke of luck, because the next available date was November 13, and by that time the new COVID lockdown would have come into effect. No one knew the lockdown would begin on November 2, but the musicians decided to move quickly, unsure of what conditions would prevail on the later date. And they knew that Armenia needed funds.

Their aim was to bring the joy of music to an audience and raise funds for Armenia. “It was all very spontaneous, Seda said, “perhaps not perfectly organized, but very moving.

She put together a program that she thought would “move the soul of any Armenian, and I think it worked.

Everyone in the audience listened with nostalgia for the homeland. Seda sang nine songs by Komitas, which most Armenians know and can sing along. She opened, however, with *Ave Maria* and presented an aria from Puccini’s “La Boheme” as an encore. Amalia, who accompanied her on the piano, also performed three solos, a piece by Babajanyan and two folk dances. And Ruben played works by Komitas (*Krunk*), Bach and Massenet on the violin.

About a hundred people turned out for the event, most of them Armenians. In observance of the public health measures, they sat at a safe social distance from one another, and wore facemasks. Their applause was enthusiastic, and their response



Seda Nahapetyan accompanied by Amalia Safaryan

was generous. Two thousand euros (well over \$2,000) in donations were transferred later the same day to an Armenian foundation, Himmnadram, the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, to support victims of the war.

The three Armenians who organized the concert are all active members on the German music scene. Pianist Safaryan, a mother of four children, completed her studies in Armenia at the Yerevan Conservatory and is a music teacher in Marburg. Violinist Gulkanyan also began his music education in his country of origin, and graduated from Yerevan Conservatory before coming to Germany where he studied at the Nürnberg Academy of Music. He now plays as a member of the Giessen Theater.

Singer Nahapetyan comes from Armash in the Ararat province. She began her musical training at the age of 7, when her mother, a very musical woman who always dreamed of playing the piano, took her to a music school to learn to play the instrument. Throughout her school years, she continued parallel lessons at the music school, but in her final year decided to switch to singing. At 17, she entered the Yerevan Conservatory and later came to Germany where she continued individual instruction with teachers in Dresden and Freiburg.

She has sung with the chorus in Verdi’s “Jerusalem, at the Freiburg Theater, and in Johann Strauss’s operetta “Die Fledermaus. The premiere took place on October 31, and further performances will be scheduled after the lockdown.



Ruben Gulkanyan



Backstage-Die Fledermaus. Seda Nahapetyan (right)

Community News

CSUN Is Accepting Applications for Scholarships Created by \$3M Anonymous Gift For Work in Armenian Community

NORTHRIDGE, Calif. — California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is accepting applications for a scholarships available to any student interested in studying or working with the Armenian community through advocacy, humanitarian, cultural or philanthropic work.

The Armenian History and Cultural Scholarship Fund was created last year by an anonymous \$3-million gift to the university to support Armenian studies and students. A majority of the gift, \$2.5 million, was designated for scholarships, while the rest was earmarked to support activities within CSUN's Armenian Studies Program.

"This generous gift will benefit a broad segment of CSUN's student population, and will promote Armenian history and culture, thereby becoming yet another venue for mutual understanding and appreciation among the various constituent groups of our society," said Vahram Shemmashian, head of the Armenian Studies Program.

Scholarships of up to \$15,000 per year are available to undergraduate CSUN students — currently enrolled or planning to enroll at the



university in fall 2021 — who have demonstrated financial need and maintain at least a 3.0 grade point average. The scholarship money can be used to defer the cost of tuition, fees, books, and room and board. Scholarship recipients can apply again in subsequent years, as long as they meet the criteria and funding is still available.

Those interested in applying for the scholarship can click [here](#) for details.

Scholarships will be awarded to students who best meet one or more of the following criteria:

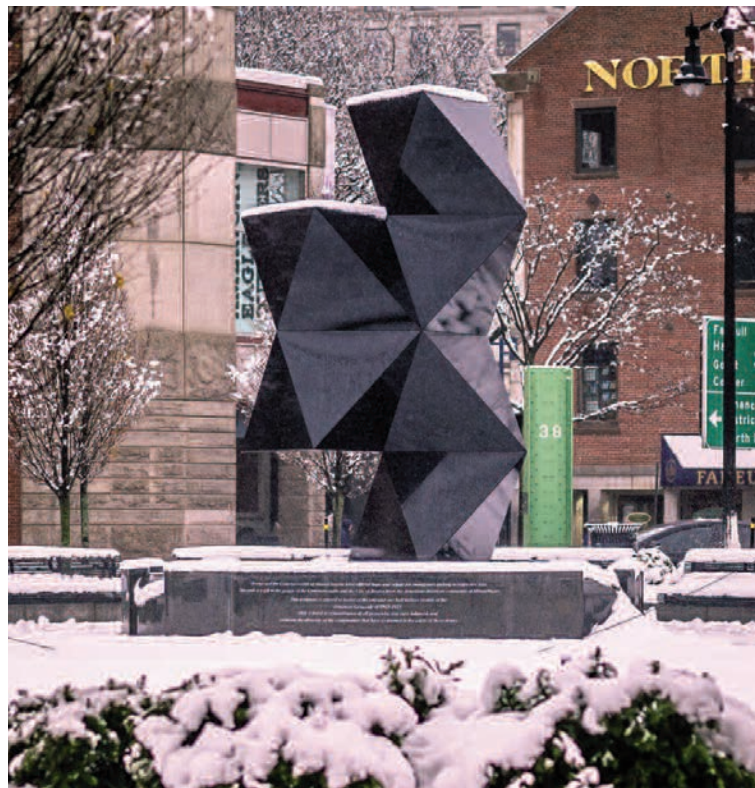
Is a descendent of an individual who survived or was killed in the Armenian Genocide of 1914-1924;

Can demonstrate a commitment to the support of and advocacy for the Armenian community through humanitarian, cultural and philanthropic work, or athletic programs and endeavors;

Is minoring in Armenian studies;

Is a language and cultures major with Armenian language or studies as a concentration and/or

Is a liberal studies major with Armenian language or studies as a concentration, or is enrolled in the Integrated Teacher Education Program in CSUN's Liberal Studies Program, with a minor in Armenian studies.



Snow Covered - Annual Reconfiguration of the 2015 Abstract Sculpture.

Armenian Heritage Park Virtual Public Programs: Connecting and Engaging

BOSTON — Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway public programs are usually held year-round except during the winter months. However, with virtual adaptations of several programs since March, many programs are keeping people connected, coming together virtually all while expanding our reach and building community. The response to these programs speaks to the Park's influence and impact, with appreciation to the Park's Benefactors, Supporters, Collaborators and Friends.

"Our Park on public space is unlike most, with innovative design features that, when experienced as a whole, enlighten, enliven, and enrich our senses of citizenry and community," comments Ann Zacarian, Founder, Motion Play Ventures, who serves on the Friends' Programs Planning Team.

A key design feature of the Park is the Abstract Sculpture, a split rhomboid dodecahedron made of stainless steel and aluminum. Annually the sculpture is reconfigured, symbolic of all who pulled away or were forced to pull away from their country of origin and came to our Massachusetts shores to establish themselves in new and different ways.

Annually, the two halves of the Abstract Sculpture are pulled apart by a crane and reconfigured to create a new sculptural shape, symbolic of a new life. "Public Art...permanent and alive," The Boston Globe

The much-anticipated Annual Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture is held in April, under the direction of Aurelian Mardiros, A&A Industries, Bill Martin representing the Armenian Heritage Foundation, sponsors of the Park and Don Tellalian, AIA, the park's architect/designer. A&A Industries, Anahid and Aurelian Mardiros, co-founders, fabricated the Abstract Sculpture, their most generous gift in-kind.

The annually reconfigured Abstract Sculpture sits on the Reflecting Pool. The etched dedication reads, in part, "This sculpture is offered in honor of the one and one-half million victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. May it serve in remembrance of all genocides that have followed and celebrate the diversity of the communities that have re-formed in the safety of these shores."

Waters from the Reflecting Pool wash over its sides and reemerges at the Labyrinth's Center as a single jet of water, representing hope and rebirth.

The Labyrinth, a circular winding path paved in grass and inlaid stone, celebrates life's journey. Etched around the Labyrinth's Circle are the words Art, Service, Science and Commerce in tribute to contributions to life and culture.

Year round, many walk the labyrinth at the park daily, a source of relaxation, contemplation and meditation. Unlike a maze with dead ends, the labyrinth has one path leading to the center, the same path leading out. Some visit this place of solace and comfort each day for a quiet moment on one the benches that surround the Labyrinth and the Abstract Sculpture.

Influenced by those who walk the park's labyrinth and the medical community, the Labyrinth Walking Wellness series focuses on the benefits of labyrinth walking. The series is being planned under the leadership of Kristin Asadourian, founder, Living BECOME, LLC; Armineh Mirzabegian, MD, Internist, Reliant Medical Group, part of OptumCare; Katrina Piehler, founder, Living from Center and Chiara Megighian Zenati, founder, Aya Institute of Systemic Constellation Work.

Under the leadership of Dr. Armineh Mirzabegian, Labyrinth Walking: The Power and Health Benefits will be held virtually on Wednesday, March 3 at

see HERITAGE PARK, page 7

St. Vartan Cathedral To Hold Outdoor Bonfire Ceremony On *Dyarnuntarach*

NEW YORK — Bishop Daniel Findikyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, will preside over a special outdoor celebration on the evening of Saturday, February 13: the eve of the Feast of the Lord's Presentation to the Temple (Dyarnuntarach).

The event will begin with a brief prayer service in New York's St. Vartan Cathedral, beginning at 6 p.m. But then the festivities will move outside to the cathedral plaza, where a traditional bonfire lighting ceremony will take place, with participants gathering around in a suitably distanced manner.

The Armenian Church has an age-old custom of lighting bonfires on the evening prior to Presentation Day. In Armenia, hardy souls, young couples, and families brave the frigid February night by circling around large fires. For the past few years, churchgoers in New York have experienced their own version of the traditional bonfire on the plaza of St. Vartan Cathedral.

"In this dark time of the year — indeed, after a dark year for us all — this ceremony, derived from a beautiful gospel story (Luke 2:21-40), reminds us that Christ is the Light of the world, the Light for all nations," said Bishop Daniel. "Standing by the fire in front of the House of the Lord, in the presence of our loved ones, we remember the warmth of God's love for humankind, which He showed by giving us His infant son."

As an outdoor event, worshippers — especially young adult faithful — may feel more comfortable attending in person, to "present themselves" to the Lord on the evening of February 13. The usual pandemic precautions will be observed, of course. Click [here](#) to view a flyer for the event on the cathedral plaza. And see below for additional information.

The indoor and outdoor events will be broadcast over the Facebook pages of the cathedral and Vemkar. Learn more about the Dyarnuntarach bonfire tradition in this video from the Bread & Salt series: "Over the Fire."

Three Feasts Over Four Days

St. Vartan Cathedral in New York City will mark three holy days in quick succession from February 11 through 14. The cathedral will be open to worshippers during these feasts, with services going forward in strict compliance with local regulations regarding public gatherings, which includes mask-wearing, social-distancing, and limits on the number of worshippers permitted in the sanctuary.

On Thursday, February 11, the Sts. Vartanantz Day Divine Liturgy will begin at 6 p.m., celebrated by Fr. Mamigon Kiledjian. Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan will preside over the celebration. A short program will follow in the sanctuary, featuring guest speaker Kathryn Ashbahian and a musical performance by Hasmik Mekhanejian and Christopher Nazarian. Due to the city's pandemic restrictions, there will be no reception.

Findikyan will also preside over the celebrations of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple, or Dyarnuntarach. On Saturday, February 13, at 6 p.m., the special "anticipatory service" will take place in the cathedral sanctuary, followed by a traditional bonfire lighting ceremony on the cathedral's outdoor plaza. (See above for details.)

On the feast day itself — Sunday, February 14 — the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at the cathedral beginning at 10 a.m. Diocesan Vicar Fr. Simeon Odabashian will be the celebrant and preacher of the day.

Services for all occasions will be broadcast live over the St. Vartan Cathedral Facebook page. St. Vartan Cathedral is located at 630 Second Avenue (corner of 34th Street), in New York City.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Assemblymember Nazarian Introduces Seismic Functional Recovery Act

SACRAMENTO – On February 9, the 50th anniversary of the 1971 Sylmar Earthquake (also known as the San Fernando Earthquake), Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian (D -Van Nuys) will introduce the Seismic Functional Recovery Act calling for California's building codes to include standards to provide for timely recovery of housing and other community services following an earthquake.

"Fifty years ago, the San Fernando Valley was left devastated by the Sylmar earthquake and our community saw the destruction that happens when we do properly prepare for these seismic disasters," stated Nazarian, "California deserves buildings that can be reoccupied and provide basic services in a timely manner after the 'big one' hits, with limited loss of life and property. By proactively protecting our infrastructure we will save lives, protect property, provide basic services and maintain jobs after an earthquake, and actually save money in the long run."

Currently, state law only requires a building to protect the loss of life, but not limit damage and loss of property to enable timely recovery. In the event of a major earthquake, buildings built to current codes should withstand the earthquake safely but could be rendered unusable and maybe even unrepairable. Buildings built to older code are expected to perform worse. This would result in a massive loss of housing throughout the earthquake zone, exacerbating our already dire housing shortage in California. Furthermore, the expected level of damage and downtime would likely result in limited availability of services



Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian (D -Van Nuys)

such as pharmacies, grocery stores, home improvement stores, and other basic government services throughout the earthquake zone.

Given our state's high seismic risk, California should follow the recommendations of a recently-released report from the federal government that encourages state and local governments to develop and implement seismic functional recovery standards or take other interim steps that they deem appropriate for their state and local conditions, which will further inform the development of national standards that will take at least 10 years to complete.

Analyses of large earthquakes anticipated in Southern California and the Bay Area predict that up to 40 percent of buildings built to the current code may suffer enough damage to be unoccupiable and up to 20% may be economically unrepairable. This represents billions if not trillions of dollars of damage, displacement of people from their homes, and significant disruption to the regional economy.

"By strengthening our building codes we are proactively preventing catastrophic property damage, economic disruption, and loss of homes," stated Nazarian. "We are already dealing with a severe housing crisis across Southern California and cannot afford to lose more of our stock to a large quake. It's just common sense to make new buildings safer and able to more quickly regain function. Doing so will ensure that we can get back to business as usual more quickly after a major earthquake."

This bill is expected to be heard in Assembly policy committees in the spring.

Armenian Heritage Park Virtual Public Programs: Connecting and Engaging

HERITAGE PARK, from page 7

5pm. A public program of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park offered in collaboration with the Armenian American Medical Association, Boston Public Health Commission, City of Boston Age-Friendly and Parks and Recreation, and The Greenway Conservancy.

Darshan Mehta, MD, MPH, an expert in stress management and resiliency, will offer a talk on stress reduction and the meditative benefits of walking the park's labyrinth, especially timely as the pandemic has caused a great deal of stress and anxiety for so many people. Dr. Mehta is Medical Director and Director of Medical Education, Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine; Associate Director, Osher Center for Integrative Medicine, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Assistant Professor in Medicine, Harvard Medical School.

A conversation with Drs. Mehta and Mirzabegian follows Dr. Mehta's talk. Maura Koutoujian, PCC, CPHWC, Senior Professional Coach, Mass General Brigham / Brigham and Women's Hospital and Fellow, Institute of Coaching, McLean/Harvard Medical School will offer the welcome.

Celebrating Art, Science, Service and Commerce: Leadership, Sharing Experiences, a public program in a series to celebrate contributions to life and culture in Art, Science, Service and Commerce, the words etched around the Labyrinth's Circle. This virtual program will be held on Wednesday, April 7 at 5pm and will feature influencers - each leading by extraordinary example - who will speak about their experiences and commitment to social good and making a difference. Ann Zacarian, Founder, Motion Play Ventures, will offer the welcome; Chief Marty Martinez, City of Boston Office of Health and Human Services, will offer greetings. WCVB TV Cindy Fitzgibbon is host. Participants include Edward Casabian, investor, early Uber employee; Julia Grove, Picture

Editor, This is Us, NBC series; Avak Kahvejian, PhD, General Partner, Flagship Pioneering; Councilor Julia Mejia, Boston City Council; Berj Najarian, Director of Football and Head Coach Administration, New England Patriots; and Tracey Zhen, President, Zipcar.

For the first time, Under the Snow Moon will be held virtually on Saturday, February 27 at 4 p.m., a part of the series of moonlit evenings held at the park during the summer. The program opens with Tsoleen Sarian offering a welcome and includes a virtual labyrinth walk. Participants will share their wishes to be then written on colorful ribbons and tied to The Wishing Tree at the park at a later date when all can come together at the park. The ribbons are the gift of Faith Cass, Cass the Florist. This initiative, among others, is under the leadership of Susan Deranian and Tom Dow. Under the Moon series was prompted by Tea and Tranquility, the late afternoon series hosted by MEM Tea Imports and initiated by and under the leadership of Catherine Minassian.

Celebrating What Unites Us! virtual cooking series continues on Wednesday, February 10 at 10 a.m., highlighting French Cuisine with Chef Tyler Stout, Executive Chef, Troquet on South in Boston. Wednesday, February 24, at 10 a.m. will highlight African Cuisine with Gloria Fernandez, Oldways Instructor. Special guest is Emmanuel Owusu, co-founder/Executive Director, African Bridge Network.

This virtual cooking series is offered bi-monthly in collaboration with the City of Boston Age-Friendly, Andrea Burns, Director and Oldways. Sara Baer-Sinnott, engaging participants world-wide. The two-part program was successfully launched three years ago to build community and cross-cultural understanding while promoting healthy and active living. Each month features the ethnic heritage of many living in the City of Boston and beyond. Prior to the pandemic for two years, participants first met at the park where a community leader shared his/her immigrant experience and then all walked the labyrinth. Then, walked to The



Diran Jebejian taking his oath of office

Diran Jebejian Sworn in as Fort Lee Ambulance Corps Chief

FORT LEE, N.J. (Combined Sources) – On the evening of February 4, Chief Diran Jebejian and Deputy Chief Steven Curry were sworn in as 2021 Chiefs of the Fort Lee Volunteer Ambulance Corps at Borough Hall.

Founded in 1971, Fort Lee Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Inc. is a non-profit agency that has provides life-saving emergency medical services to the Borough of Fort Lee, New Jersey and surrounding areas. Its ambulances are staffed 24 hours 7 days a week by professional Emergency Medical Technicians who strive to provide the highest quality of care with compassion, care, and respect. Its motto is "We serve so that others may live."

Jebejian, a deacon of the Armenian Church, serves as a parish council member of St. Leon's Armenian Church in Fairlawn, NJ and has been a longtime volunteer for the Armenian Radio Hour of New Jersey. He is a former Armenian Church Youth Organization of America Central Council chairman.

(Fort Lee Volunteer Ambulance Corps Facebook; Armenian sources contributed to this article.)



Diran Jebejian, left, with Steven Curry at the swearing-in ceremony

KITCHEN (now permanently closed) at the Boston Public Market where a guest chef shared a signature dish for all to enjoy for lunch and conversation. The series was offered in collaboration with City of Boston Age-Friendly and The KITCHEN and funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. Planning is underway to continue the series once all are out and about again.

Geometry as Public Art: Telling A Story, the educational curriculum inspired by the park's design and geometric features, was developed by the Friends' Curriculum Development Team, Jason Behrens, Manneh Ghazarians and other educators among the Friends in collaboration with the 4th grade educators at The Eliot K-8 Innovation School, Boston Public School in the North End. The curriculum is now available to all schools in Boston and beyond.

A Boston Public School Partner Program, the curriculum can be implemented virtually with the video, Join us! We're on our way to Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, developed and narrated by Tom Cahaly and Elizabeth Cahaly, Wellesley High School students.

"This curriculum is an exciting and engaging way for students to learn more about their family heritage and reflect on the American immigration experience...and a wonderful way for teachers to learn about and better understand their students and for the students to learn

about one another," comments Brianna Greene, 4th Grade Educator at The Eliot K-8 Innovation School.

Friends of Armenian Heritage Park is an initiative of the Armenian Heritage Foundation. The Foundation Board, comprised of representatives from parishes and organizations within the Armenian-American community of Massachusetts, is responsible for proper governance and fiduciary oversight, as well as for the park's ongoing care and maintenance. Please visit ArmenianHeritagePark.org for Armenian Heritage Foundation Board and its key leadership.

Let's all – benefactors, supporters, friends and collaborators – continue to celebrate the park, an extraordinary gift to the City of Boston and Commonwealth, and to children and grandchildren. A living tribute to parents, grandparents and ancestors engaging all, coming together on common ground. Remembering the past. Honoring the present. Celebrating the future.

To support the park's ongoing care and maintenance, visit ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support or mail your check, made payable to Armenian Heritage Foundation, to Karen Dederyan, Treasurer, Armenian Heritage Foundation, PO Box 77, Watertown, MA 02471.

For the link to register for these virtual programs, visit ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Events



COMMUNITY NEWS/OBITUARY

Souren Maserejian

Dedicated to AGBU New England Chapter

WATERTOWN — Souren Maserejian of Belmont, Mass. died on February 5, 2021 at the age of 70 after a brief illness.

He was born on July 16, 1950 in Aleppo, Syria to the late Yacoub and Siranoush (Nersessian) Maserejian.

He attended Gilligian, and completed his studies through high school. He then went on to study the art of jewelry making.

In 1972, he immigrated to the U.S., along with the rest of his family, and started working as a jeweler.

In 1976, at his cousin's wedding in Toronto, he met Lisa Tanashian and they were married

in 1977. Together they had three children.

He opened his own store and ran a very successful business, Maserejian Jewelers.

Souren loved his Armenian culture and heritage and was very involved in the Armenian community in Boston. In the late 1970s, he was a part of the Daron Dance Ensemble Committee and ran its music program. The Armenian General Benevolent Union however held a very special place in his heart. In 1986, he was elected as the Chairman of the AGBU New England District and spent almost 25 years in that role, organizing events and dances, fundraising for Armenia, and bringing people



causes and needs of the Armenian community near and far. Whether it be the devastating Armenia earthquake of 1988, children's centers in Armenia or the much needed renovation and restoration of the local AGBU headquarters, a now historic building of Watertown.

He was also a devoted and long-time parishioner of the Armenian Memorial Church, and was serving as a member of the board of trustees.

In addition, he was a member of the Knights of Vartan Ararat Lodge and a past Vice Chairman of the Armenian Jewelers Association East Coast Chapter.

He is survived by his wife Lisa (Tanashian) Maserejian. He was the father of Tina Panian and her husband Ardo of Waltham, Natalie Tsaturyan and her husband Albert of Waltham, and Alex Maserejian and his fiancé Jenny Balabanian of Belmont. He was the grandfather of Aren, Vicken and Raffi Panian and Milan & Bastian Tsaturyan. He was the brother of George Maserejian and his wife Azniv of Arlington, Zareh Maserejian and his wife Hasmig of Belmont, the late Samuel Maserejian and his late wife Eugeny, and the late Krikor Maserejian. He is also survived by his sister-in-law Mary Maserejian of Waltham and many nieces, nephews and cousins.

The funeral was private, arranged by the Giragosian Funeral Home.

Rosie Tokatlian Passes Away

ADL, Tekeyan Activist

VANCOUVER, Canada — Armenian community activist Rosie Tokatlian passed away on February 1, 2021 peacefully at her home, surrounded by her loving family.

Born in Athens, Greece on March 15, 1938, she immigrated with her family to Montreal, Canada, in 1956 and settled in Vancouver in 1974.

Rosie was affectionately known by most for her larger-than-life personality and off-beat sense of humor which she used to great effect with friends, family and strangers alike. She had an immense passion for life. Her enormous generosity and dedication drew much adoration nationally and internationally. She was an integral part of the Armenian community and heavily involved in all forms of charitable work with the Armenian churches, Armenian Cultural Association and Armenian General Benevolent Union.

Rosie was a longtime member of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party as well as a leader of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada. She spearheaded the revival of the Vancouver chapter of Tekeyan in 2016 and energetically organized a number of events bringing together the Armenian community.

As a Brownie leader, teacher, and superb organizer and fundraiser, she inspired and captivated the hearts of many. She received numerous awards for her profession in sales, as well as for her tireless community service.

Finally, and perhaps the ultimate key to her happiness was surrounding herself with family, fun-loving friends, music, dancing and creating special memories with her grandchildren. She will live in our memories and our hearts forever.

She is survived by her adoring husband of 47 years, Edward Tokatlian, her daughters Sophie Mardirossian and Margaret Mardirossian (husband Bradley Gifford), and her treasured grandchildren Natalie Gifford and Lucas Lehmann. Additionally, she is survived by her brother Haik Manoukian (Nadia) and nephews.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, a celebration of her life will be announced at a later date.



together. Even before he took on more official responsibilities at the New England District of the AGBU, he proved his dedication to the organization at a young age. Newly arrived in the US and in his early 20s, Maserejian was voted the most valuable AGBU volunteer in 1984. Two years later, he was elected chairman.

Soon after Maserejian became chair of the New England District, AGBU embarked on multiple efforts in fundraising to aid to various

Nancy Diane Guzelian

Veteran Teacher in Boston

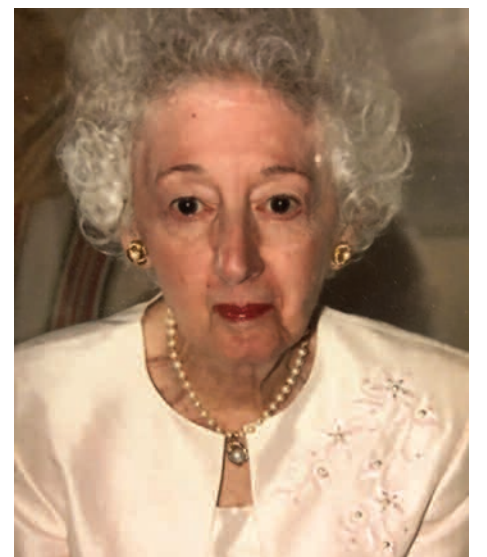
BROOKLINE, Mass. — Guzelian, Nancy Diane, age 93, of Brookline, died on February 2, 2021.

She was the daughter of the late Mihran and Makrouhie (Tufenkjian) Guzelian; sister of Vartkes Guzelian and his wife Audrey, Astor Guzelian and his wife Lucy; aunt of Michael Guzelian and his wife Susan, Gail Guzelian Iverson and her husband Ronald, Andrew Guzelian and his wife Alice, Edward Guzelian and his wife Madellaine, and Eric Guzelian and his wife Amy; great-aunt of Aram, Taline, Ani, Adrineh, Alina, Haig, Mark, Stepan and Peter.

She was born in Somerville Massachusetts, and grew up in Cambridge, Somerville and Roxbury, finally settling in Brookline.

After finishing high school, she went to Massachusetts School of Art where she received a Bachelor of Arts followed by a Master of Arts at Simmons College. She then earned a PhD at Penn State University. She was a dedicated home economics teacher in the Boston Public Schools for 35 years.

Nancy was very proud of her Armenian heritage and was committed to preserving Armenian values and traditions within her family and the community. She was very involved in the Armenian community throughout her life at St. Stephen's Armenian Church in Watertown, where she was a Sunday school teacher for a number of years and a member of



the Ladies Guild. Nancy was also an active member of the Armenian Youth Federation, a strong supporter of St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School, as well as Camp Haiastan, in Franklin, MA

Private funeral services were held at St. Stephen's Armenian Church, Watertown followed with a private burial at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge.

Arrangements were made by the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home.

Sandra Satenig (Russian) Aghababian

LEXINGTON, Mass. — Sandra Satenig (Russian) Aghababian of Lexington, died on February 1, 2021.

She was the wife of Robert Aghababian; mother of Pamela Aghababian, Scott Aghababian and his wife Elizabeth, and the late Ronald Aghababian; grandmother of William, Helen, and Grace. Loving sister of Hank Russian and his wife Rita.

Sandra was a graduate of Boston University and earned a Master's degree in Education at Boston College. She was a teacher, an accomplished painter, and a member of a number of Armenian cultural organizations. She wrote and published *Hrant's Story: A Journey to Survive*, about her father's life. She instilled a love of reading and the arts in her children and grandchildren. She loved playing and inventing games, cooking for the holidays, and learning Armenian recipes.

Private funeral services were held at Saint Stephen's Armenian Church, Watertown followed by a private burial at Newton Cemetery, Newton.



Margaret Mensoian Conrad

Teacher, Active in Community

WESTWOOD, Mass. — Margaret "Peggy" M. Conrad (Mensoian) of Westwood, was born on May 15, 1923, in Providence, RI, to Michael George Mensoian, Sr., originally of Kesrig, a village outside of Kharpert, Armenia and Alice Mensoian (née Ogassian), from Massachusetts, whose parents had emigrated from the Adana region in the mid-1890s.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Richard P. Conrad of Westwood, and her brother, Dr. Michael G. Mensoian, of Newton Centre. She is survived by her niece, Martha A. Mensoian of Boston, and her nephew, Christopher M. Mensoian of Boston, both of whom were by her side when she passed peacefully.

Peggy was a vibrant and loving daughter, sister, wife, aunt, teacher and friend.

She received her Bachelor of Science in Education, Master of Education, and Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Education, all from Boston State College (which later merged with the University of Massachusetts at Boston) and was a member of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International for professional women

educators and the Iota Rho Chapter of the Gamma Theta Upsilon National Professional Geographic Fraternity.

She began her career as an Executive Secretary at Norton Company (where she met her future husband, Richard), but later changed careers to pursue her passion for teaching, becoming a geography teacher at Dedham Junior High School, where she was loved by her students.

After she retired from Dedham Junior High School, following a lengthy tenure, Peggy enjoyed traveling abroad and dedicated a significant amount of time as a volunteer at the Westwood Public Library, Westwood Historical Society, and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Needham.

She was also passionate about giving back to the Armenian community and served as a member of the Saint James Armenian Church Women's Guild and lifetime member of the Armenian Women's Welfare Association. Most importantly, she cherished spending time with her family.



COMMUNITY NEWS



SPONSOR A TEACHER
IN ARMENIA AND ARTSAKH

Since its inception in 2001, the TCA Sponsor a Teacher Program has raised \$757,072 and reached out to 7,229 teachers and school staff in Armenia and Artsakh.

These are the donors for the year 2020, listed by state.

Arthur Ehamjian AZ \$200
Dr. Neshan Tabibian CA \$200
Kevork & Silva Keushkerian CA \$400
Kaspar H. Gazarian CA \$200
Dr. & Mrs. Guiragos Minasian CA \$250
Jack Kalfayan CA \$100
Aram & Lisa Tokatian CA \$20
Dr. & Mrs. Ohan & Artemis Bedros CA \$200
Dr. Berjouhi Koukeyan CA \$200
Harry & Aida Chakarian CA \$200
Hagop Nazarian CA \$200
Alice Mazmanian CA \$200
Sona Minakian CA \$200
Alice Norsigian CT \$200
Ann Barsamian-Polasek FL \$100
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COMMUNITY NEWS

Nina Boutchakjian: With Her Oud Close to Her Heart

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / DUBAI – Musician Nina Boutchakjian, known as “Nina Oud” on her social platforms, was born in Lebanon to an Armenian father (whose family hails from Aintab) and Lebanese mother and raised in Sweden (Stockholm/Nykvarn). She began her studies at the Arab Music Institute in Cairo, Egypt. Boutchakjian consequently saw her career take off, touring all over Europe and the Middle East with her oud and remarkable voice. In 2014 she produced her solo album, “Sea Salt” (MBI), which was the third best-selling Arabic album in Virgin Megastores.

Boutchakjian now resides in Dubai, performing with guitarist Abir Saidani and traveling throughout the world.

Dear Nina, I firmly believe that not a single instrument has any gender limitation – a woman can play a tuba and a man can play a harp. You are the pioneer among women professional oud solo players. Was it hard to overcome that obstacle?

Yes, I believe anyone can. When I started my solo concerts 20 years ago, it was hard to be accepted, but not because my being female. I think it is more because I had no experience. Today I am happy to see so many female oud players around the world.

How did your interest in oud music arise?
My step-dad used to sing a lot at home, and my younger brother, Christian, is a DJ in Sweden, specializing in deep house music. I went to Cairo for tourism and I found the music school! The only available instrument

sound of the instrument I love. The sound of oud is what catches my heart.

What other innovation would you like to make to the oud?

I think the oud is perfect as it is. It is just the sound problem on stage when there is a big band. The band usually covers the sound of oud as it is very soulful, but with semi electric/acoustic, a good microphone and a good sound engineer it works.

What other instruments do you play?

Not as professional, but I play some percussions and keyboard.

International Armenian performers have made an important mark in the history of oud playing - Udi Hrant Kenkulian, Agapios Tomboulis (Hagop Stambulyan), Roupen Altiparmakian, Harry Minassian, John Berberian, John Bilezikjian, Richard Hagopian, Alan Shavarsh Bardezbanian, Ara Dinkjian, Georges Kazazian, Daron Malakian, Haig Yazdjian, Andrew Hagopian, Brian Ansbikian. Do you consider yourself a part of this tradition and family?

I wish one day I will be a part of that family – we all have our dreams and I hope one day they will be realized. But for now all I want is to make people happy and enjoy my music. The icons you mentioned have had a long way and history I am still learning.

Do you have any Armenian compositions in your repertoire?

Every time I listen to Armenian music I get goose bumps, even though I do not speak the language, but it is in my future plans, God willing. I also have many Armenian musician friends in Dubai. We meet to jam together. The Middle Easterners after settling in the West sometimes go back...

I assume, that with your passion for the



part of 300 choir members from Armenia and Artsakh performing with the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra choral songs perhaps for the first time in UAE... How is a musician's life in Dubai now?

That is amazing! As you know, Dubai is

multicultural, that opens for us musicians to embrace music from all over the world. This mix of culture makes it richer to learn.

Since in Armenia few children are interested in folk music (unfortunately), teaching oud and other folk instruments in musical high schools is free. My daughter attends oud classes without any intentions to become a musician. However, what would you tell oud students?

When I started learning the oud, I was not a fan of this instrument, but with time you might build a beautiful relationship with this piece of wood, very close to your heart (literally) and soul. I would say – choose always what you like and what you want, but always give a chance, it might be the one as in my case...

And one of my customary questions: have you ever visited your fatherland?

It is my dream to perform in Armenia but I will definitely visit even without any concerts. Last year I was going to travel to Armenia with an Armenian friend (also from Lebanon), but the coronavirus came and we changed our plans. Maybe this year... we will see what life is hiding for us.



was the oud, but my dream was to play the accordion! I was so small and the Arabic accordion is so big and heavy my teachers did not let me, but I do play a little today!

It was so interesting to listen to the electric oud. How long has it been around?

I remember, when I started to play the electric oud, musicians were calling me to ask about it! It was not so popular back then, but now it is trendy, I think! Today I play on a semi-electric oud, as it gives more the real

oud it would be almost impossible to pursue a career in Sweden.

Sweden is home for me; I wish I could make career there, but I did not try really hard. Maybe I will one day. Sweden is a global leader in music. I believe the world is much smaller now, especially after 2020, when a song coming out, for example, in Africa, people can hear it immediately in Canada.

I was in Dubai once back in 2007 as a

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenia Tree Project Welcomes U.S.'s Renewed Priority on Climate Change

BOSTON — Armenia Tree Project (ATP) welcomes the Biden administration's renewed commitment to join the Paris Accords.

The Paris climate accord is a landmark international agreement signed in 2015 by 189 countries to limit global warming. Under the agreement, countries commit to decreasing greenhouse gas emissions every five years. The U.S. had initially joined the accord under the Obama administration, and had pledged to cut its emissions by 26 to 28 percent by 2025. The Trump administration had abandoned the agreement late last year.

In his campaign, President Biden set an ambitious goal of ensuring that the U.S. achieves net-zero emissions by 2050. The administration's urgency to contribute in combating global climate change comes after record-breaking atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations seen in 2020.

The importance of Armenia's contribution to these global commitments are discussed in an article titled "Armenia's Environmental Security," co-authored by the former Minister of Environment and Nature Protection of Armenia, Erik Grigoryan, and the former Deputy Minister of Environment of the Republic of Armenia, Irina Ghaplanyan:

"While Armenia, together with many other small developing nations, relies on the biggest polluters of the world to make the right commitments and curb emissions, it must also do its own 'homework' and not only mitigate its own emissions (which are only 0.02% of the global total) but also adapt to the changing climate..."

For the past 26 years, ATP's mission has been to utilize tree-planting initiatives to help curb carbon emissions. Simply put, trees help slow down climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the air, storing carbon in the trees and



"ATP WELCOMES THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S WILLINGNESS TO TACKLE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES"

JEANMARIE PAPELIAN
ATP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

soil, and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere. In 2019, Armenia committed to doubling its forest cover by 2050, a task ATP has spearheaded with its years of experience and native seedlings.

Significantly, ATP's programs have had a substantial economic impact by empowering community members, primarily rural villagers in Armenia. As a result of the Artsakh war and global pandemic, labor migrants were unable to travel outside of Armenia for work, and many resorted to illegal logging, fishing, and hunting to sustain themselves. In 2020, ATP provided over 150 seasonal jobs to rural villagers to help limit these actions, and provide critical socioeconomic aid to the most vulnerable groups.

"ATP welcomes the Biden Administration's willingness to tackle environmental issues," said ATP Executive Director, Jeanmarie Papelian. "The US has always been at the forefront of innovation and we are eager to see new and creative approaches to tackling climate change. In the meantime, our organization will continue to provide its expertise, skill, and knowledge to our homeland, so that our small country can continue to contribute in the global battle against climate change."

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Arts & Living

Songs by Konstantin Petrossian Presented in Virtual Concert

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The “Armenian Cultural Hour” is held every Friday by the Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church over the past eight months, and several thousand people have tuned in to watch the programs.

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

This time, upon the numerous requests of the viewers of “Armenian Cultural Hour,” a concert dedicated to the songs of composer Konstantin Petrossian will be presented.

Petrossian is a renowned Armenian composer of symphonic, choral, chamber, instrumental and vocal music, sound tracks and theatrical music. His works have been performed and recorded and have been published worldwide.

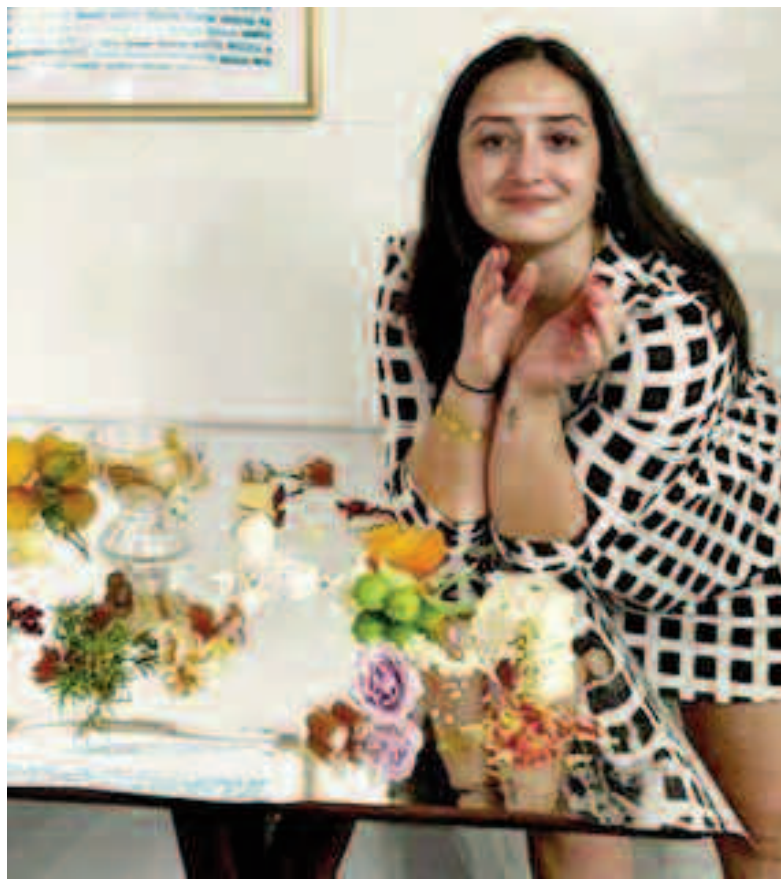
He serves as the Cultural and Music Director of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church, and has also been the artistic director and conductor of the Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island. Petrossian has given numerous performances in many countries. He has been the music director and conductor of the Erevan Choral Society.

The concert dedicated to his songs was organized by the State Television of Armenia and took place in the TV studio of the popular “Yerg Yergots” program, in Yerevan. The songs written by the composer throughout the years were performed by popular Armenian singers. Anna Mailyan, Arthur Ispiryan, Masha Mnjoyan, Arsen Grigoryan, Lilit Yan, Sona Rubinyan, Anna Khachatryan, Setrak Papyan, David Khachatryan, the well-known “Arevik” youth ensemble, and the “Yerg Yergots” instrumental ensemble led by Arthur Hakobyan, all performed.

Viewers can watch this concert on Friday, February 12 at 7:30 p.m. through the Facebook page of the “Armenian Cultural Hour” of the Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church. Those who will not be able to watch on this day can then watch this concert on any other day and hour on the same website.



Composer and conductor Konstantin Petrossian



Lara Talatinian at her first mantuh pop-up in November 2019

Connecting Family Culture And Finding Solace From Trauma Through Armenian Cooking

LOS ANGELES — A first-generation American side hustle becomes a path for generational bonding and war relief efforts.

Story by Lara Talatinian as told to Kirsten Judson. Originally published on *Zagat Stories*.*

Contributed by Christine Vartanian Datian for the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Lara Talatinian is a first-generation Armenian-American. She is an event specialist and graduated from California State University, Northridge. She created Call for a Good Thyme

as a way to bring Armenian cuisine to the table, support mutual aid, and preserve her family's legacy.

Call for a Good Thyme is a multifaceted events company focusing on cultivating community through food, party and culture. It specializes in charcuterie and cheese platters, floral design and party planning.

From Lara Talatinian:

Generational cooking has played an important role in my life. I think about my grandparents, my grandmothers, both maternal and paternal, and I reflect on how each one had a different style, and how I would only eat certain things they would make.

One of my grandmothers lives in Toronto, and her apartment always smelled like manakish, which is basically just za'atar bread. She would make it at home all the time—I thought that was the coolest thing. I'd wake up in her apartment on the pullout couch and have manakish and tea. It was the definition of comfort.

My other grandmother in Los Angeles was an incredible chef, but the thing I enjoyed the most from her was simple—toasted pita bread, turned around a few times on the stovetop, a little crunch but still soft, along with some black tea with cloves and cinnamon sticks. We got to choose how many teaspoons of sugar we wanted. These experiences were a way for both of my grandparents to pass tradition along. Kids are picky eaters, and I was by far the pickiest. These simple, warm, bready treats brought comfort to me anytime I needed it.

I have the image in my head of my house in 1994, before we remodeled. The kitchen was small with white tiles. I had a stool I would put against the counter when my mom and I would wake up early to make *mantuh*. *Mantuh* is every kids



see COOKING, page 16

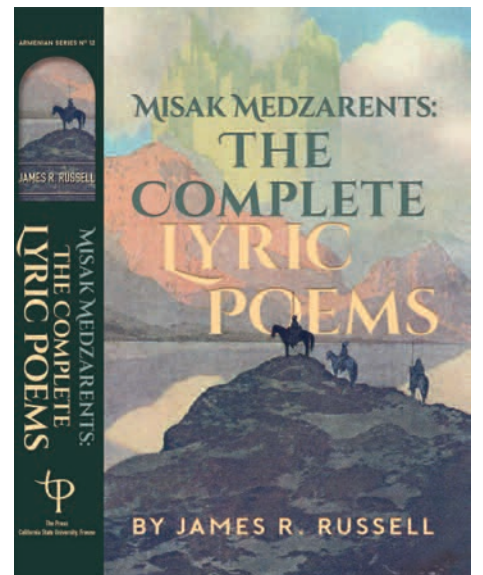
Fresno State Armenian Series Publishes *Misak Medzarents: The Complete Lyric Poems* By Dr. James Russell

FRESNO — Armenian Studies Program Director Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian announced the publication of Dr. James Russell's *Misak Medzarents: The Complete Lyric Poems*, Volume 12 in the Armenian Series of The Press at California State University, Fresno.

Misak Medzarents, 1886-1908, was the second great lyric poet of the Western Armenian language after Bedros Tourian. During his tragically short life he published several slim volumes of verse. The poems are written in a complex and allusive language that deploys ancient Armenian, local dialect and the vocabulary of Symbolism.

Misak Medzarents: The Complete Lyric Poems is a translation and commentary by James Russell of Medzarents' complete works, the first of its kind in any foreign language, complementing James Russell's previous work, *Bosphorus Nights*, of Bedros Tourian. *The Complete Lyric Poems* include more than 180 poems written by Medzarents, and includes the Armenian text of his poems.

In the commentary accompanying each poem Russell has endeavored to analyze at length and in detail the particulars of language (reduplicative and alliterative patterns, etymological points, plays of



intertextuality and allusion, and so on) and the dense thematic content, with its frequent echoes of literary and mythological imagery going far back into the Armenian past. Medzarents' poems are gorgeous to read and can be enjoyed without one's plunging into their depths.

The translation is intended to help as a jumping off point for future scholarship, for new insights and different opinions. The poems are chromatic: Medzarents loved color, as Daniel Varuzhan notes, he uses blue, a color favored by Symbolists but not only by them, most often.

“*Misak Medzarents: The Complete Lyric Poems* is an important addition to the Armenian Series,” said Prof. Der Mugrdchian, general editor of the Armenian Series. “Dr. Russell's translation will bring Medzarents' work to a broader audience.”

“This book is an undisputable contribution to world literature, as much as it is to Armenian literature,” said author Aris Janigian

Dr. James R. Russell is Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies at Harvard University, Emeritus, and now lives in Fresno. Dr. Russell is the author of a number of books including *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, *The Heroes of Kasht: An Armenian Epic*, and *Bosphorous Nights: The Complete Lyric Poems of Bedros Tourian*. He is the author of several hundred articles and monographs.

Copies of *Misak Medzarents: The Complete Lyric Poems* are available for purchase from: Abril Bookstore, <http://abrilbooks.com> or the National Association for Armenian Studies & Research (NAASR) Bookstore, <https://naasr.org/collections/naasr-bookstore>.



ARTS & LIVING

Tribute to Guy Chookorian

Voice of a Generation, Leaving Legacy of Service

TRIBUTE, from page 1

The room explodes into uncontrollable laughter. The listeners are surprised and amused at the same time. Even the classical-music snob is a little impressed. Weren't all Armenians either faux-European 19th century relics, or unreconstructed Anatolian peasants? The question on the minds of many in the room and their peers across the country was how to be modern American young people and remain Armenian at the same time. The voice coming from the record player, singing the latest American jukebox hit, *Open the Door, Richard*, in fluent but slang-filled Armenian perhaps held the answer. The song's famous monologue, translated and turned on its head, was now filled with Armenian inside jokes (like the nosy Digin Shadakhosian who yells at the narrator from her window that it's "khaidarag" to be coming home at 4 in the morning). The group is cracking up. This strange record, by a young man whom nobody (outside of California) had yet heard of, seemed to reflect their generation's reality, right down to the fact that the singer's adventure started because "we went to an Armenian dance tonight." But who was this guy named Guy Chookorian?

Guy Chookorian died on January 31, 2021; he was a musician, a comedian, an actor, and a singer. He was an accomplished oud player and Armenian folk musician. He played the piano, mandolin, bouzouki, banjo and harmonica, and probably other things besides. He wrote and arranged music, and recorded it, in a variety of genres. He helped his father preserve the folksongs of his native region, songs that would have otherwise been lost. Rare for someone born in the US at the time, he wrote bilingual Armenian-American plays. He appeared in Hollywood movies and TV shows. In a less "politically correct" time, he did every ethnic accent imaginable and was cast in every type of role, particularly ones that seemed vaguely to fit his Armenian features.

He had one of the first Armenian radio shows in Los Angeles. As an oudist-vocalist, he was a member of a 50s-era "kef" band, and then fronted his own Armenian dance music group, his own American dance band, and his own belly-dance revue in Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe. He played traditional Armenian dance music for years at picnics, dances, and weddings in Southern California for the generations that loved that music and looked to him to bring to them — along with his signature deadpan comedy. And yes, he was the man who sang *Toore Patz*, Dikran and on the East Coast he will be forever remembered as such — along with a litany of other Armenian parodies of American songs from the 1940s and 50s.

He was also a religious family man, and a loving father and a grandfather. He was a proud American — a veteran of World War II, a hero with medals from both the US and France. He was a proud Armenian — the choir director at an Armenian Evangelical church, and a mentor to younger generations. He was the son of heroic Genocide survivors from Yerzinga, Western Armenia. He was a member of the first generation of Armenians born in the United States, and in many ways his story is the story of his generation, a generation he helped to shape.

Immigrant Beginnings

Gaidzog "Guy" Chookorian was born in Kenosha, Wis. on November 15, 1923 to Roupen and Srpouhi Chookorian. Two years later his sister Dziadzian (Sue) was born. The family soon moved just south of the state line to Waukegan, Ill. Most Armenians in Waukegan were from the village of Tadem in Kharpert. The Chookorians were from Yerzinga.

Roupen Chookorian came to America in 1913, leaving his wife Srpouhi in Yerzinga; he was wanted by the Turkish authorities for revolutionary activities. During the Genocide, Srpouhi was initially spared because her family owned a factory that made headscarves and other clothing needed by the Turkish population. Later she fled south into the Dersim where many Armenians were finding shelter with sympathetic Kurdish tribes — while other Kurds were busying themselves with doing the Ottoman government's dirty work. When the Russian forces invaded and occupied Western Armenia, they arrived in Yerzinga — the furthest point west which they reached — in July 1916.

Srpouhi returned from the Dersim and was enlisted to find Armenian women and children that had been taken into Turkish homes. Under the guise of selling headscarves, she gained entry to the women's quarters to ascertain the whereabouts of the Armenians. She also helped Mourad with his plan to buy Armenians back from Kurdish tribes. Srpouhi was credited with saving the lives of hundreds. She was also credited with the capture of the notorious "Valibegtsi Mrtashan", who was responsible for the massacre of numerous Armenian villages, and handing him over to Mourad for justice to be done.

Armenian life began to return in the region, as families went back to their villages and the city of Yerzinga. But not for long. After the Bolshevik revolution, the Russian Army was recalled, leaving only the meager Armenian volunteer units in Anatolia. Mourad set up his own government, attempting to make peace

with the local Turks, telling them to reopen their mosques and assigning a Turk as mayor of the city with one Armenian and one Kurd assistant. But the constant attacks of Kurdish villagers, eventually joined by the opposition of the Turks, and finally the approach of the Turkish regular army, forced Mourad to gather the Armenian remnants together and in February 1918 retreat to the Caucasus by way of Erzurum and Kars.

Roupen, ignoring friends who tried to dissuade him from a dangerous mission, travelled to the Caucasus via Poti, Georgia, to find his wife in a refugee camp, and returned with her to the United States in 1921.

Fresno Beginnings

The Chookorians moved to Fresno in 1936. Whether it was in Waukegan or in Fresno, Guy also attended weekly Armenian school like so many of his generation. But unlike most, he obviously paid attention. Chookorian's lyrical genius evinces a much larger Armenian vocabulary than most American-born Armenians could muster. In addition, Chookorian's son, Arshag, said when Guy was a kid he would go to the library and check out books on humor and comedy. He was active in the drama department in high school and started to take an interest in acting.

Roupen, opened up a shoe repair shop in Fresno, and continued to play the oud and sing at picnics and other events, as well as the violin, which he played on his lap like a kemanche. Though Roupen was not as in demand as some of the more famous Fresno musicians of the era, his son Guy had a chance to learn the oud by watching his father play. But the young Chookorian got his real start in entertainment when he was 15 playing cowboy music with another Armenian friend, Gil Abcarian, on a Fresno radio station. In between the announcements the duo "Guy and Gil," would play guitar and fiddle, respectively, sing cowboy songs and tell cowboy jokes. Chookorian dreamed of getting into the entertainment business, but his mother thought he ought to go to college and become a doctor. He attended college briefly and then in December of 1942, a year after the US entry into WWII, the 19-year-old Chookorian signed up with the military.

Because Chookorian enlisted voluntarily rather than waiting for the draft, he was able to choose what branch of the service he wanted to enter. He chose the Army Air Corps and became a radio operator and gunner on a B-17. As a member of the 331st Bomb Squadron of the 94th Bomb Group, Chookorian flew 32 missions over Europe. Arshag pointed out that "they usually let you off after 26 missions, but they needed my dad's crew."

On one mission, the entire squadron was blown out of the sky except for two planes. One turned back. Only Chookorian's continued and completed its bombing mission.

Chookorian rose to the rank of Technical Sergeant and was decorated with numerous medals. One very special honor Chookorian received was due to the fact that on seven of his 32 bombing missions, his crew dropped supplies to the French Resistance to aid in their fight against the German occupation. In 2017, Chookorian was awarded the French Legion of Honor rank of Chevalier (Knight), one of ten veterans from Southern California to be so recognized.

Hollywood Bound — And Sidetracked

After the war was over in 1945, Chookorian moved to the Los Angeles area to try and get an acting job in Hollywood. It was difficult for him being away from his family, but he connected with the local Armenian community, which was relatively small at the time. He became popular as a stand-up comic at Armenian community events and banquets. One of the acts he came up with was to parody the rhythm and blues jukebox hit song *Open the Door, Richard*, which was so popular at the time that five different recordings of it by different artists charted in early 1947. Chookorian changed the singsong refrain to *Toore Patz, Dikran* and transformed the monologue into Armenian complete with references to a *barahantes*, a nosy Armenian lady, and surprise ending that's only in Chookorian's version, all delivered in rapid-fire, slightly dialectal Armenian with a lot of slang. Someone commented to Chookorian that if he had a recording of the song, they would buy it. Chookorian approached the Andonian Sisters, a popular Russian-Armenian musical act at the time who used to cut records, and asked them how many they generally sold. Hearing that they typically sold around 200 records, Chookorian was underwhelmed, but reckoning that he would break even if he sold that many, decided to take a chance. In 1947 he recorded the song and had 500 copies produced. He brought a box of copies to an Armenian 4th of July event and got up and performed the song. Chookorian was amazed when he ended up selling a few hundred copies just that weekend. Soon he was getting calls about the record from places like Detroit and Chicago. Armenian record dealers in New York, Rhode Island, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, San Francisco, Fresno, and Los Angeles were all putting in huge orders. Chookorian ended up selling at least 3,000 copies of the record, which was phenome-



Guy Chookorian In The 1950s. Photo Used For Auditions

nal for an Armenian record at the time. Bootleg copies seem to have made it as far as Beirut. More importantly, Chookorian was the first Armenian popular musician of his generation in the US to cut a record; Onnik Dinkjian and the Vosbikian Band would follow in the next couple of years.

Toore Patz, Dikran was followed by *Dzukhe Dzukhe Dzukhe* (*Smoke, Smoke, Smoke that Cigarette* by Tex Williams, 1947); *Vaghuh* (*Mañana* by Peggy Lee, 1948); *Harsnikid Bidi Barem* (*I'll Dance At Your Wedding*, also by Peggy Lee, 1949); *Choriner* (*Mule Train* by Frankie Laine, 1950); and *Yegoor Im Doonus* (*Come On-A My House*, made famous by Rosemary Clooney, 1951). In all cases, Chookorian not only translated the songs into Armenian but dropped inside jokes and references to make them even more funny; in *Dzukhe Dzukhe Dzukhe* the singer finds himself on a date and hearing that the girl is in possession of 40 acres of land, declares suddenly in English, in an Armenian accent "But I wanted to marry her just de same." In *Vaghuh*, sister Sue mentions that she burned the house down while cooking pilaf; in *Harsnikid Bidi Barem* Chookorian declares that not only will he dance at your wedding, but he'll do the Tamzara, continuously drink and carry on with the young women, and just for the sake of the patented Chookorian deadpan absurdism, will "carry water in sieves" (an Armenian idiom for a fruitless task) and "slice *basturma*." In "Choriner" the mule train knows well the road from Yerzinga to Arapger.

The flip sides of these records mostly featured more traditional folk-type material, which sometimes also had comedic lyrics by Chookorian, sung by his sister, Sue Chookorian. The flip side of *Vaghuh* was a song called *The Four Note Bar*, commonly known in kef music circles as *Yega Yega Yaris Mod*, Sue and Guy sang various folk verses that fit with the melody and then end with a verse in English slyly referencing Chookorian's sudden popularity among Armenians across the country.

The flip side of *Choriner* is an interesting story. Entitled *Amoosini Voghperkuh* or "The Husband's Lament," it's an original melody and lyric written by Chookorian based on a suggestion from Assyrian dumbeg player Joe Elby. In the song a man describes the various "hardships" he has dealt with since getting married, such as his wife's cooking: "the bread is like a rock, the coffee is like mud, and the chicken is like wood," ending by warning young men to flee at any mention of the word *daros* (a wedding greeting meaning "may you be next")! With a very catchy Armenian-type melody, and lyrics, which though comical, are not as absurd or satirical as Chookorian's other songs, *Amoosini Voghperkuh* could perhaps pass for an Armenian folk song. And that is what many people for years assumed it was, with artists like the Vosbikian Band and others covering the song without any knowledge that it was written by Chookorian himself. Chookorian would politely call these artists to say that he didn't need any royalties, but he would appreciate it if they credited him as the composer.

The recording of *Yegoor Im Doonus* (*Come On-A My House*) had as its flipside *No Real*, a hilarious English version of the Armenian song *Sood eh, Sood eh*, where Chookorian impersonates an old country singer performing the well-known kef song in broken English. As usual, Chookorian parodies the actual lyrics. This disc led to one of Chookorian's interesting encounters. He always asked permission to record a parody, and in this case, the songwriters demanded a meeting with him, which didn't usually happen. The writers of *Come On-A My House* just happened to be William Saroyan and his cousin Ross Bagdasarian, the creator of Alvin and the Chipmunks. And so Chookorian found himself in Saroyan's swanky Beverly Hills office, conversing with the two fellow Fresno Armenians. Saroyan was much older; he had left Fresno almost before Chookorian was born. Bagdasarian was a little older than see LEGACY, page 14



ARTS & LIVING

Voice of a Generation, Leaving Legacy of Service

LEGACY, from page 13

Chookoorian, they knew each other from Fresno, but had been in different age brackets. After giving permission for the use of *Come On-A My House*, they found out about Chookoorian's English version of *Sood Eh*. Recognizing his talent, they suggested forming a 3-way partnership to write more English versions of Armenian songs. Unfortunately, Bagdasarian and Saroyan had a falling out soon after, and this never came to pass.

Marriage, Family, and Armenian Heritage

In 1951 Guy Chookoorian married Louise Paul (Bogosian) who came from a strong Armenian-Protestant family. Her grandfather had been a minister back in Turkey and was martyred in 1915. With his marriage came Chookoorian's longtime involvement in the Armenian Protestant community. For more than 50 years he served as the choir director of the Immanuel Armenian Congregational Church, originally in Los Angeles, and later in Downey, Calif. His wife served as the organist, a role she already held at the time of their marriage.

The couple had two children, Arshag and Araxie, both of whom would follow in their father's musical footsteps and eventually join his band. Although Chookoorian was still trying to break into Hollywood acting, he had to pay the bills for his growing family. He held a number of jobs, but the longest-lasting one was cleaning swimming pools for Hollywood's elite in the backyards of their Beverly Hills homes. With clients like Rudy Vallee, and the young John Ritter and Ron Howard,

of the music. There have been a handful of plays like this that were written in the late 1940s and early 1950s, rare instances of American-born Armenians of that generation writing original material in the Armenian language. Chookoorian's play was intended to have enough dialogue in both languages so that everyone would understand what was going on, regardless of their linguistic ability. Chookoorian later reused some of the music he wrote for this play in his albums.

Another project of Chookoorian's in the 1940s or 1950s was an Armenian melodrama — with a classic evil villain, perhaps trying to tie the female lead to the railroad tracks — which Chookoorian attempted to film. Unfortunately, this 1950s Armenian-American movie was not to be; Chookoorian's actors, members of his own generation, could not read Armenian and Chookoorian had to write out the lines phonetically. That wouldn't be so much of a problem, but while the young men and women could understand Armenian and speak it a little, they didn't speak very well and many of them had strong American accents. Ultimately, the movie project was a flop.

The language issue was coming to a head in 1954 — Peniamin Noorigian's independent New York Armenian literary quarterly *Nor Kir* was discontinued and writers who continued to create in the Armenian language began to look toward Beirut to have their works published rather than anywhere in the States, as had previously been the case.

His wife's aunt, an older woman from Erzurum, used to play the mandolin for her Armenian women friends of her generation.

She asked Chookoorian if he would translate *You Are My Sunshine* into Armenian for her. He did a very nice translation. Then he recorded it himself. Although the main part of the song is done straight, in the middle Chookoorian breaks into a hilarious monologue where the narrator is the victim of a crazy wife who takes all his money. But the real comedy was on the flip side. Chookoorian came up with an idea and then sat down with his mother-in-law to play it for her. He played a somber funeral march-like tune while going into an Armenian patriotic monologue: “Sireli hayrenagitsner” (Dear

compatriots), he began, continuing to say that it was unfortunate that the new generation does not speak Armenian well, and some even struggle to understand it. They can tell people they are Armenian, and when asked what foods Armenians eat, they reply “shish-kebab, pilaf, etcetera.” To which Chookoorian deadpans “we know what shish-kebab is, and we know what pilaf is, but what is this so-called etcetera?”

Chookoorian's mother-in-law flipped out laughing, and he knew he had a hit with what he titled *Nor Serounti Yerkuh* (The New Generation Song). But that disc and the one that came after it (Davit Amoo) were to be the last of the old school Armenian novelty records on 78 rpm discs. New things were brewing in the Armenian community. For one thing, 1954 was by some estimates the year that the new generation of Armenian bands on the East Coast, like the Vosbikians, the Gomidas Band, and the Artie Barsamian Orchestra, really started to take over the music scene in the Armenian community.

Chookoorian continued to be an innovator. He hosted what was probably the first Armenian Radio Hour in Los Angeles, “Hye Time,” on which he played Armenian music and also interviewed Armenian celebrities, like Ross Bagdasarian. It only lasted a few months, due to lack of sponsors. Then something amazing happened. A cover of an Armenian kef song, entitled *Shish Kebab* hit number 10 on the pop charts in 1957. The original disk, unfortunately retitled *Harem Dance* by “the Armenian Jazz Sextet” (it was actually *Arax Bar* by the “Arax Band of Detroit”) also got into the top 100. Chookoorian thought to himself that maybe, just maybe, Americans were ready for Armenian music.

Chookoorian prepared two songs using the best recording studio — Gold Star Studios in LA, where Bagdasarian recorded, and where Phil Spector would later create the Wall of Sound and the Beach Boys would record “Good Vibrations” — and rather than utilizing Armenian kef musicians, he used highly talented session musicians, jazz and big band players who were veterans of the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and similar big name groups. The 45 single they produced was *Opal From Constantinople*. The orchestration was great, including a Middle Eastern style clarinet solo that Chookoorian wrote out for the musician. The flipside Armenian Rock was a sort of jump-blues version of Armenian folk classic *Im Chinari Yaruh*.

It got some airtime on the West Coast and got written up in Billboard but that was the end of that.

Chick Ganimian and Onnik Dinkjian's *Daddy Lolo/Halvah* released the following year had a similar experience on the East Coast. Apparently the success of “Shish Kebab” was a fluke, and the public was not ready for Armenian music.

Becoming Guy Chookoorian, Oud Player

It was around 1958 that Chookoorian was asked to join a new LA-based Armenian band, the Barrites, as oud player. The Barrites were Southern California's answer to East Coast bands. Their goal was to play Armenian dances, picnics, and weddings. They also got involved in playing the burgeoning belly-dance scene.

Listening to current oudists of his generation, like Chick Ganimian and George Mgrdichian, he began to develop his style. To the end, Chookoorian respected Richard Hagopian, who was just becoming popular locally at the time, as the greatest Armenian oud player in America. But the younger generation of Armenians in Southern California didn't want just Armenian music. They wanted a band that could play American standards. This was something the Barrites weren't really capable of. So Chookoorian assembled a group of musicians, veteran swing jazz players, to play the dance standards and switch off with the Armenian group at events where both styles were in demand. Simultaneously, he learned to play bass guitar so that he could direct the American group.

After a few years of this Chookoorian got involved in other projects, but the real turning point was the death of his father and sister both in 1962. It was a real blow; he took a break from his day job. And then as one door closed, another opened. In 1963 he got a call from the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. They were looking for someone to lead the music for a belly-dance revue called “Cleopatra and the Nymphs of the Nile,” which was to have 7 dancers. Chookoorian brought a group of professional non-Armenian session musicians. He wrote charts for the 7 piece group for Armenian, Arabic, and a few Turkish songs. Chookoorian developed a repertoire which was a combination of Westernized Armenian and Arabic music, along with Greek songs, and popular Mediterranean “ethnic” hits like *Misirlou* and *Never on a Sunday*.

The first gig lasted only a few months. But no matter; Chookoorian ended up getting called for a different casino job. He developed the Guy Chookoorian Middle Eastern Revue, based on the swing jazz players he had been hiring. For Armenian weddings, dances, and picnics in Los Angeles he had the Guy Chookoorian Armenian-American Band. Again, the same musicians or the same type of musicians were part of this band. With this double-pronged approach, Chookoorian made music his full-time job for the rest of his life.

Chookoorian played Vegas, Reno, and Tahoe. He toured the Western States and Canada. He had the longest running lounge act at the Aladdin, 7-8 months. He played for the Armenian community in Los Angeles, Fresno, and all of California. He even appeared as a session musician at times — memorably playing oud on a track called *Love Don't Come* by Sonny and Cher. Sonny Bono wrote it and thought it would be a hit, but it ended up being the B-side of The Beat Goes On.

Chookoorian couldn't stray far from his roots and his personality. He started to incorporate comedy into his act again. One day he was working at a supper club in Fresno called the Arabian Nights (owned by the Harootunian family) with the pianist Wayne Bedrosian and a drummer. There was an old cowboy hat someone had left on the ground, so he put it on his head and started to play cowboy music on the oud. Then he started telling cowboy jokes, just like he did as a kid on the Fresno radio. From then on, comedy once again became an integral part of his act.

Always Evolving

In the 1960s, an Armenian immigrant named “Happy” Harry Hadigian started a new Armenian Radio Program. While Guy had difficulty getting sponsors in the 1950s, Hadigian was able to get sponsors from the Armenian and also Arab community. Chookoorian and Hadigian were great friends; Chookoorian helped Hadigian with legal issues so he could stay in the country and also did some of the advertisements on the radio show since Hadigian's had a heavy accent. “Happy” Harry's radio show lasted for over 25 years in the Los Angeles area.

In 1971 Chookoorian produced his only LP, “Guy Chookoorian Does His Hits.” He re-recorded *Toore Patz Dikran* and several other of the parody songs for a new generation.

When Chookoorian started his revue, it was composed of Guy on oud, a drummer, pianist, saxophonist, trumpet player, and maybe a second sax or a dumbeg. Aside from the American big-band musicians, a very talented Greek dumbeg player named Gust Aspiotes often played with Chookoorian — until son, Arshag Chookoorian, got old enough to join the band. Chookoorian taught his son Arshag to play dumbeg at age 7. At 15 years old, in 1970 Arshag joined him on stage, though he wasn't allowed to play for belly-dancers until he was 18. At that time, in October 1974, he booked a gig at Hadji Baba's in Inglewood, owned by Harry Akulian. Said to be one of the best Armenian-American restaurants in the country, Akulian was a

continued on next page



Manny Petro, Arshag Chookoorian, Guy Chookoorian, and Jeff Elmassian with the cast of Full House

Chookoorian had many interesting encounters.

It was in 1952 that Guy's father, Roupen Chookoorian, was commissioned by an Armenian organization to document the songs of his native Yerzinga by pressing them on record. Roupen, playing oud, enlisted the help of his son Guy and daughter Sue and one or two other musicians for this project. Ten songs were recorded; nine of them were specific dances that were native to the region. Yerzinga dances are known for a few things; first of all, unlike the vast majority of Armenian line dances, they move to the left rather than to the right; secondly, the dance Tamzara and the 9/8 beat it uses was very popular in Yerzinga, to the point where they had multiple dances with this odd rhythm; thirdly, some European folk dances such as the Polka had made inroads into Yerzinga and were included as folk dances, as Armenians had developed their own variations of these.

In 1955, Guy Chookoorian chose to record a final Yerzinga song, the very well known dance, *Ghosh Bilezik*, which having a Turkish name, he simply titled *The Golden Bracelet*. This was actually used as the flipside of one of his best parodies, *Davit Amoo* (Uncle David, a parody of *The Ballad of Davy Crockett*). In this song, Davit Amoo is a humble Armenian peasant from Kharpert (who killed a bear when he was only three), who comes here from the “yergir” (old country) in '20, buys a vineyard in Fresno, and attempts to harvest raisins, but loses money when the price of raisins goes down. Our hero then moves to Los Angeles, gets married, starts a rubbish business, makes money, builds a *madzoon* factory, becomes a millionaire, and then looks for a vineyard in Fresno to retire on.

The New Generation Comes Of Age

Meanwhile, Chookoorian was trying to live his dream of breaking into Hollywood. His dark Armenian features made it possible for him to play any number of ethnic types and “heavies.” His ability to do accents also helped. But it seemed he was having more success with Armenian novelty records than with getting acting jobs. He had tried to write a radio show in 1947, but it didn't go anywhere. He got into Armenian community theatre by writing a play called “Gesoorus” (My Mother-In-Law) with Leo Danielian. It was a three-act musical comedy half in English and half in Armenian, and Chookoorian was in charge



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butcher who only served the best meat. He recognized Chookoorian's talent and unlike some club owners never bothered him about anything.

As the influx of new Armenian immigrants created an Armenian boom in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and 1980s, Guy Chookoorian was one of the few of the old guard of Armenian musicians that survived. "Continental" Armenian pop music, born in Beirut, was transplanted to Southern California after the ravages of the Lebanese Civil War starting in 1975. Chookoorian was a symbol for the old-line Armenian generations who preferred the traditional sound of the oud



Guy Chookoorian with Sonny Bono & Gil Surabian

and the traditional line dances.

Because Chookoorian, along with John Bilezikjian, and one or two other bands, were the only acts performing that type of music in Southern California, he became much sought after for weddings of old generation families and picnics or events at the parishes where they congregated, like St. James in Los Angeles proper. Yet unlike some, Chookoorian did not scorn the new music. Always a lover of people, he met and befriended artists like Harout Pamboukjian and the singer Vatche. They in turn respected Chookoorian as an elder statesman of Armenian dance music.

Around 1980 Chookoorian's daughter Araxie joined the band as a rhythm keyboard player and vocalist. "Araxie is an amazing singer," says her brother Arshag. "She got it from her Aunt Sue. Sue's singing was known throughout California and she was part of the choir at Holy Trinity in Fresno." He added that Araxie sang all through school and her father said "you need to sing with my orchestra."

In 1982 Chookoorian stopped doing his touring revue when a club owner in Tahoe wouldn't let him go home for his wife's cancer operation. Everything ended up fine, but Chookoorian refused to play at the casinos after that. He continued to play in LA clubs and at the many Armenian community events where they were booked. His band consisted of himself on oud and vocals, son Arshag on dumbeg or drum set, daughter Araxie on keyboard and vocals, and a clarinet player, often a Japanese gentleman who played from sheet music Chookoorian prepared. (In the past he had occasionally used Armenian clarinet players, John Elmassian, or Peter Chorebanian from the original Barrites).

Chookoorian Finally Gets An Acting Career

In 1964 Chookoorian was asked to perform for the "Lucy Show" (Lucille Ball) as a member of a "Greek Band." He and his musicians were off camera, but their music was heard in the program. Into the 1970s and 1980s, Chookoorian became the go-to man at Universal Studios whenever they needed a Greek or Middle Eastern musician or band. He did shows such as "Ironside," "Columbo," "McMillan and Wife," "McCloud," "Love Boat," "General Hospital," "The Bold and the Beautiful," and countless more.

One of the most memorable TV episodes for the younger generation today to relate to, would be when Chookoorian appeared in an episode of "Full House" in the early 1980s as the bouzouki player and leader of a Greek band that was hired to play for a party when John Stamos' relatives visit from Greece. Arshag Chookoorian (dumbeg), Jeff Elmassian (clarinet) and Manny Petro of the Kef Time Band (guitar) appear in the episode as the other band members.

Aside from these actual appearances, one memorable event toward the end of his career was when Disney's "Aladdin" (1992) was wrapping up production. Chookoorian was asked to play an Arabian Nights-themed party for all the people who had been involved in making the picture. Arshag along with well-known kanoun player Jack Chalikian, also from L.A., accompanied Guy at the party.

Another very memorable event in 1992 was Chookoorian's appearance in the film "Chickpeas" by director Nigol Bezjian. The film, an independent venture that tells the story of a group of young men who grew up together in war-torn Beirut, reunited years later in Los Angeles, features Chookoorian's only true speaking role in a film.

The Apple Tree Song and Giving Back To The Community

Finally, in 1998, the family decided it was time to rerelease the rest of Chookoorian's parody songs. As with the 1971 album, tracks that were usable were re-used and many tracks were re-recorded with modern arrangements and production value. Two standout tracks from this album were the *Apple Tree Song* and the *Takhsim in E*. The *Apple Tree Song* was a routine where Chookoorian sang the well known Western Armenian folk song *Mer Khntzorin Dzaruh* and then told the audience they were going to do it in English. After they pre-

sumably started singing in an American accent, Chookoorian says "no, you're doing it all wrong. You sound like a bunch of *odars*" and then proceeds to dissect how to pronounce the English translation with a heavy old school Armenian accent (It's not "Our Apple Tree", it's "Avoor Epul Turee"!)

Songs like the *Apple Tree Song* and *No Real*, which were primarily in English, were a big hit with the younger generation, though they also loved *Toore Patz*, *Dikran* even if they didn't understand half the jokes. In the 1980s and 1990s Chookoorian volunteered for over a dozen years teaching Armenian song, dance and culture as well as Christian songs at Camp Arev, the West Coast summer camp of the Armenian Evangelical Union.

At the same time, Chookoorian worked as an English as a Second Language instructor in the public schools. There was a great demand for fluent Armenian and English speakers in the 1980s due to the huge influx of immigration to Southern California.

Always proud of his military service and considering the men he fought with his brothers (his best friend died in the war), Chookoorian continued to stay in touch with his crew from the B-17 bomber. Starting in the 70s, they would get together every year for reunions.

Guy Chookoorian's Legacy

Guy Chookoorian leaves behind his wife Louise, his son Arshag with his wife Sona and two sons Armen and Ara, and his daughter Araxie with her husband Michael Marderosian and their daughter Ani.

Arshag, Araxie, and Ani have all carried on Guy Chookoorian's musical and performance legacy. Arshag Chookoorian has been playing with a bluegrass band at Disneyland and elsewhere for the past 37 years, named Billy Hill and the Hillbillies (he also has his own iteration of the band called "Drivin' Mama Crazy").

"Growing up, my folks said don't you dare be a musician because it's a struggle. But I travelled with my dad watching him perform in front of people. I got hooked. I started playing drum kit at 11, taking lessons from Dick Simonian. At 15 I started playing with my dad's dance band to pay for college. I got a degree in film and production which I never pursued. I got a job at Magic Mountain theme park on entertainment staff, as a talent buyer. And I was working with my dad all the time. The music just sort of fell into place. But in 1983 I met this band playing country and bluegrass....I learned everything from my dad, how to work an audience, timing, and how to tell jokes. My dad was a huge influence on my work," concludes Arshag. He also adds, "What was most precious to him was family, God, and country."



The Chookoorian Band - Guy Chookoorian, Araxie Chookoorian Marderosian, Arshag Chookoorian

Araxie Marderosian, Guy's daughter, says: "He was the coolest dad in town. He was the dad who was around during the day, because he worked nights. He was very supportive in what we wanted to do. We all went into his business. There was one time when I was a teenager and I wanted to audition for 'Star Search,' and he took me, knowing full well what was going to happen. Nobody else there had their father bring them....after that I became a vocalist with his orchestra. And I sing for other things too. I was also classically trained."

Finally I spoke to Guy Chookoorian's granddaughter, Ani Marderosian. Currently she is a full time actor with Kaiser Permanente's Educational Theater, though it's shut down during the pandemic. The Educational Theater tours throughout Southern California and educates children and adults on the most pressing health issues for their age group. By night, Marderosian is a freelance theater director in the Southern California equivalent of the "off-Broadway" circuit.

"My grandfather and I were very close because I was his first and only grandchild for 10 years, and we lived down the street," Marderosian says. "So we were close from the time I was very young. The trajectory of my life would be very, very, different if my grandfather was not Guy Chookoorian. He would pick me up, plop me on the couch and let me watch any movie that was on. I mean, great, Academy Award-winning films, like "Citizen Kane"...He would just dissect and analyze the film in front of me, frame by frame, scene by scene. He was probably just being my grandfather, sharing something he was passionate about with me, but it ended up being my life. Being able to watch a film and understand what goes into making a film. He would explain to me what the music was doing to enhance the scene...my grandparents' house was just filled with so much life...the door was always open. He loves people so much, which is probably why he was an actor. There was always music playing. He always had a film on. It was filled with life and art. And he created an environment in that home that oozed art and creativity and most importantly, family."

Truly, Guy Chookoorian kept three generations of Armenians, dancing, smiling and laughing. May his legacy live on.

Calendar

MASSACHUSETTS

FEBRUARY 14 — Armenian Museum of America Online Concert Series, "Kez het Hayastan" (With You, Armenia!)

Sunday at 2 pm EST (11:00 am PST and 11:00 pm in Armenia): The Armenian Museum of America is hosting its third bi-monthly Online Concert. The performance is recorded live in New York by three Armenian sopranos, Hasmik Meikhanedjian, Alvard Mayilyan, and Anahit Zakaryan. They will be accompanied by pianist and composer Hayk Arsenyan. The concert includes works by composers Komitas, Tchukhadjian, Melikyan, Amirkhanyan, Petrossian, and Mekanejian. The event will be aired on our YouTube Channel, is free, open to the public, pre-registration is not required, and the video will be available on the Museum's website and Facebook page. This concert series is supported by a grant from the Dadourian Foundation and is curated for the Armenian Museum by artistic director Maestro Konstantin Petrossian, composer and conductor.

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.

Wednesday at 5pm 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. 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. For the link to register, please visit ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Events

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

APRIL 7 — CELEBRATING ART, SCIENCE, SERVICE & COMMERCE: LEADERSHIP, SHARING EXPERIENCES.

Wednesday at 5 pm. A public program in a series to celebrate contributions to our life and culture in Art, Science, Service and Commerce, the words etched around the Labyrinth's Circle This virtual program features influencers - each leading by extraordinary example - who will speak about their experiences and commitment to social good and making a difference. Ann Zacarian will offer the Welcome, Chief Marty Martinez, City of Boston Office of Health and Human Services, Greetings. Cindy Fitzgibbon, WCVB TV, is Host. Participants include Edward Casabian, investor, early Uber employee; Julia Grove, Picture Editor, "This is Us," NBC series; Avak Kahvejian, PhD, General Partner, Flagship Pioneering; Councilor Julia Mejia, Boston City Council; Berj Najarian, Director of Football & Head Coach Administration, New England Patriots; and Tracey Zhen, President, Zipcar. For the link to register, please visit ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Events



ARTS & LIVING

Finding Solace From Trauma Through Armenian Cooking

COOKING, from page 12

favorite — crunchy little beef dumplings wrapped in dough. The aroma takes over the entire house when it's baking."

In my opinion, *mantuh*'s not like a dumpling. It doesn't have certain creases you need to work with, and it's a lot more delicate. Traditionally you knead the dough and roll it out thin, then cut them into small squares. The meat goes on top, and you pinch two sides together to resemble a bowtie. My mother and I took the easy route, using wonton wrappers instead of making our own dough.

She worked long hours and did not play around with difficult dishes — rather, she made

things that were simple, traditional, and nutritious. To make *mantuh* for her was a big feat, and having my brother and myself by her side to help was the only way we were going to get to eat it — to put work into it. It was a great life lesson, being able to work together for a common cause.

Making *mantuh* is so tedious, and one really needs help doing it. My mom would always praise my talents. Over the years, it became my favorite thing to do in the kitchen because I couldn't wait to eat it, and I was good at making it. When I got to college, I would make *mantuh* for my friends. It was always a big event. I would have people over, and we would

cook together. Making *mantuh* is a collaborative process — it's not difficult, but you definitely feel like you are making something.

I grew up eating Armenian comfort food and learned generational recipes that were passed down. My grandmother's recipes sustained my relationship to my family's history — something not discussed much in our household. Through cooking, my senses were able to preserve culture and family, and give me insight into a world I was brought up in, but ultimately was able to make my own.

Some years ago, I worked for a tech company. They hosted events and dinners for clients and had giant meetings. Over time, they trust-

ed me doing the food, and I began to curate these events. This was the fun part of the job. I always assumed I was good at it, or else someone else would be doing it. I really thought of it as me doing the hosting, in a way.

I come from a background where we always anticipate what other people's needs are. In my culture — Armenian, from Lebanon — one must always be nourished. We are constantly reminded that we need to take care of one another. This cultural understanding trickled down to my hosting skills when I was at the tech company. I tried to take special diets into consideration when planning the menu. At the time, a lot of people were on the keto diet, so I started to order a lot of Armenian or Lebanese food because it was keto-friendly.

As soon as I incorporated cuisine close to my heart, I became fascinated with the world of hosting. We would have bartenders come make drinks, and I would go behind the bar and get my hands dirty. I would help in the kitchen. I liked watching the whole process. I would plate things, do the dishes, and also play with prosciutto. And this was very fun. That aspect of the job is what made me love it so much. When I left that job, I thought, I guess I could host in this capacity outside of this specific environment. That's when Call for a Good Thyme was born.

Call for Good Thyme is a way to express my culinary aesthetic and unique way of presenting. My style became "tables of wonderment," or what I like to call "an adult snack table." I believe that food needs to be presentable. This facet of my aesthetic comes from my culture—everything needs to be aesthetically pleasing, and the more the better. It's got to be in the right dish, in the correct color. You have to have everything on the table, which is why our Armenian and Middle Eastern tables are filled to the brim.

I work in colors and textures, making sure I include the high- and lowbrow snacking needs of my clientele. I want my tables to feel approachable. I want people to flirt with each other over the table, discuss ingredients with the person across from you. Food should be a shared experience, and for what it's worth I think we all miss that aspect of sharing meals with those we know, or want to get to know better.

I started creating Mantuh-2-Go kits 10 days before the war in Nagorno-Karabakh started. After we got word of the war, I began donating 100 percent of proceeds to the Armenia Fund in October and November, while reaching out to people on social media to let them know that Armenians need their help in getting recognition for the atrocities being committed on civilians in the Artsakh area.

The way the community came together was tremendous, and the only way I knew how to contribute was with the kits. After we lost some of the lands in the Artsakh region, and a treaty was signed to stop the war, I felt it was a good time to stop working on the kits and start trying to understand what happened—where we went wrong, what else we could have done, and where my next steps were taking me.

So many different stages and phases of the war were discussed in the doorway of my apartment. Friends and strangers alike — those wanting to support in any way they can — found solace in being able to say hello and speak about the emotional hardships we were dealing with due to the war. Food won't make anyone forget that people halfway around the world are suffering, but it can be of some momentary comfort. Bringing culture out of the kitchen has always been my goal, and being able to sell my kits to those who wanted to help was the best way to manifest that for me.

I feel like food, cultural assimilation, and identity are so connected — it's this kind of subconscious thing. As an Armenian, when you are a people who has a direct ties to generational trauma — especially after what's been happening, and what's happened in the last few months — you cling to whatever you can that brings you comfort. And a lot of times what brings you comfort is the food you eat and make. It's being able to see each other and say, "Hey, how are you doing? Do you want to share a meal?" Sharing a moment of indulgence can create a space that is devoid of that pain and trauma.

Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian

Daughters of Vartan Favorite Zucchini Casserole

"This recipe is adapted from *A Book of Favorite Recipes, Daughters of Vartan*, an essential Armenian cookbook originally published in 1968 by the Daughters of Vartan (Los Angeles Chapter)," says food and wine writer, blogger, and cookbook author, Barbara Hansen. "It's my go-to book and resource for Armenian food, given to me by a talented woman who helped compile it many years ago. The original recipe was contributed by Virginia Kidian. 'The recipes in this cookbook feature mainly Armenian cuisine but some are favorites from other regions,'" adds Barbara. "This updated version is one of my favorite recipes to serve any time of year. Fresh zucchini is definitely the star of this dish."

A staff member at the *Los Angeles Times* for many years, Barbara contributed to various publications, including *Bon Appetit*, *Daily Dish*, *Saveur*, and the *Cook's Cook*. She is a James Beard Award winner in the wine and spirits category for an article on mezcal in Oaxaca.

Barbara's six best-selling books include: *Mexican Cookery*; *Southeast Asian Cooking: Menus and Recipes From Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines*; *Cooking California Style*; *Good Bread*, and a revised edition of the *Southeast Asian cookbook* with new format and new recipes. By request, she wrote *Guidebook to Korean restaurants in Los Angeles*. She is an avid world traveler and considered an authority on Indian and Mexican food. She has two blogs, www.tableconversation.com and www.eatmx.com, which is devoted to Mexican food.

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/2 pounds zucchini
2 medium eggs
1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon milk
1 1/2 teaspoons flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
3 tablespoons butter
1/4 pound Jack cheese
1/4 green bell pepper, finely chopped
1/2 teaspoon dried dill
1 tablespoon Italian parsley, finely chopped
Salt

PREPARATION: For the lamb:

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.
Cut the squash into 1/2-inch cubes and cook in boiling salted water 5 minutes. Drain and cool.
Beat the eggs with 1/2 cup of milk. Place the flour and baking powder in a small cup. Stir in the 1 tablespoon milk until smooth, then gradually stir in some of the egg mixture until well blended. Add to the remaining egg mixture.
Lightly grease an 8-inch square baking dish with some of the butter, then dot half of what is left over the bottom of the dish. Place the zucchini in the dish, then top with an even layer of Jack cheese cut into small cubes or slices.
Sprinkle the cheese with the green pepper, dill and parsley. Pour in the egg mixture. Season with salt to taste. Dot the top with the



remaining butter.

Cover with foil and bake for 25 minutes. Uncover and bake 10 minutes longer, or until the top is lightly browned.

Serves 4.

For this recipe, go to:

<https://www.tableconversation.com/recipes-armenian/>
Also see:

<https://www.tableconversation.com/2013/07/korean-squash.html>

<https://www.tableconversation.com/restaurants-middle-eastern/>

<https://www.instagram.com/tableconversation/?hl=en>
<https://thecookscook.com/author/barbarahansen/>

<https://twitter.com/foodandwinegal?lang=en>

<https://www.laweekly.com/guest-author/barbara-hansen/>

ORDER TODAY: *A Book of Favorite Recipes, Daughters of Vartan* (Los Angeles Chapter), 1968. The is a collection of recipes from the members of the Los Angeles Chapter first published in 1968, and again published in 2018. The Daughters of Vartan is an Armenian ladies organization, a Sisterhood, established in 1933. It currently has 18 chapters nationwide. The sisterhood promotes Armenian heritage, traditions, values, friendships, leadership and culture through education, service, community, fundraising, activities.

This latest 2018 version of *A Book of Favorite Recipes, Daughters of Vartan* (Los Angeles Chapter) is available for \$25.00 each plus postage. For questions and to order, please send e-mail to: agbarbaratchalikian@gmail.com



COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

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EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Marc Mgrditchian

SENIOR EDITORIAL COLUMNIST:

Edmond Y. Azadian

CONTRIBUTORS:

Florence Avakian, Dr. Haroutiun Arzoumanian, Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, Philip Ketchian, Kevork Keushkerian, Harut Sassounian, Hagop Vartivarian, Naomi Zeytoonian

CORRESPONDENTS:

Armenia - Hagop Avedikian
Boston - Nancy Kalajian
Los Angeles - Taleen Babayan
Berlin - Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Contributing Photographers:

Jirair Hovsepien

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FAX: 617-924-2887

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E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

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Should Armenia Expect Any Dividends from Biden's Peace Initiatives?

By Edmond Y. Azadian

In his first speech at the State Department, President Joe Biden presented an outline of the new US foreign policy, beginning his speech with the following statement: "America is back, diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy. As I said in my inaugural address, we will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again."

This was in stark contrast to his predecessor Donald Trump's foreign policy, whose core principle was "America First," which at the end evolved into "America Alone."

Following his inauguration, President Biden, on his first day in office, had signed a series of executive orders rescinding most of the Trump policies which had led the US to isolation on the world scene.

President Biden also sent messages to friends and foes around the globe. The most significant were his peace initiatives.

With the recent Burmese coup, he said, "The Burmese military should relinquish power they have seized, release the advocates and activists and the officials they have detained."

This was in contrast with his predecessor, who was enamored with despots and potentates; the more power crazy, the better the relationship (i.e. North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.)

Most significantly, he addressed the situation in Yemen, a

halt with the agreement between General Haftar and the government of National Accord headed by Fayeze al-Sarraj.

Anticipating upcoming changes, Turkey requested the United Nations to restart negotiations with Cyprus and sent Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu to Brussels to try to resurrect its moribund relations with the European Union.

Along with these peace initiatives, President Biden fired the first salvos at Russia and Beijing, referring to existing differences and potential problems.

In view of the above statements, one is justified to ask whether the new US administration is poised for global peace or reallocation of the targets from unending wars to traditional adversaries?

The question is answered by William Astore, in the February 2 issue of The Nation, stating, "President Joe Biden's new cabinet and roster of advisors are well stocked with retired generals, reconstituted neocons, unapologetic hawks and similar war enthusiasts. ... 'Defense' spending, as war spending is generally known in this country, remains at record levels at \$740.5 billion for fiscal year 2021. Talk of the New Cold War with Russia and China (or both) paradoxically warms Pentagon offices and corridors with yet more funds."

The writer offers nine recommendations to the Biden administration to shift from a warpath to a peaceful goals and one of those recommendations significantly reminds him, "Pay attention, for once, to President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1961 farewell address and exert vigorous over-



festering civil war that has led to 80 percent of the country's 30 million population to the brink of famine. It has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced millions.

"This war has to end," the president announced.

The war, though civil in scope, has been fueled by outside powers; in fact, this is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia, supporting the beleaguered government in Yemen, and Iran, who fund the Houthi rebels who occupy most of the territory.

Biden will immediately stop supplying arms to Saudi Arabia, hopefully, as well as providing the country with technical military advisory support. The irony is that the Kingdom is awash with cash, purchasing the most sophisticated weapon systems that it cannot use and yet it needs the supplier to come to its assistance.

President Trump had argued that arms sales to Saudi Arabia for the war in Yemen were creating US defense jobs – a most humanitarian view of the direst humanitarian catastrophe in the world!

President Biden's peace initiatives have had a domino effect as the long-simmering war in Libya recently came to a

sight and zealous control over the military-industrial complex."

The US economy is wedded to the military-industrial complex and under any administration. Mr. Trump's logic still remains valid that war "creates defense jobs." Therefore, enemies have to be confronted or created to keep the defense contractors at Boeing and Raytheon happy.

Since President Biden is targeting unending wars, Armenians can pin their hopes on some positive signs emanating from the Biden camp and the State Department regarding long-standing problems and recent ones, namely the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the resumption of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group co-chairs' reengagement.

Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan has already seen the handwriting on the wall and has been planning to preempt any move that may come from the international community.

To begin with, Turkey is one of the instigators of those unending wars, stirring up trouble and body counts in Syria, Iraq, Libya and very recently, Nagorno Karabakh. Perhaps

see DIVIDENDS, page 19



COMMENTARY

Realism, Vision And Defeatism: Right and Wrong Lessons From the War

By Vahan Zanoian

The devastating defeat of Armenia and Artsakh in the 44-day war has understandably led to an avalanche of analyses, controversy, finger pointing, misinformation and a never-ending cycle of blame and counter-blame. Having been misled that victory was at hand during most of the war, the nation is in shock. Even though little is known about the specific details of the war, there seems to be no shortage of explanations and conclusions from all sides on both social media and news media.

But perhaps the most dangerous phenomenon that has resurfaced is an old mindset best known by its proponents, First President Levon Ter Petrosian and his one-time advisor, Gerard (Jirair) Libaridian. In a nutshell, this mindset advocates that Armenia should look realistically at its strengths and weaknesses vis-a-vis its adversaries, not confuse wishful thinking with a strategy, abandon ambitions that are clearly beyond its means to achieve, embrace peace and coexistence with its neighbors, trade territory for economic and physical security, avoid the slightest provocation, military or diplomatic (such as mentioning the Treaty of Sevres) directed at Turkey or Azerbaijan, and hope that by thus appeasing them, it shall enjoy peace and prosperity. The mindset claims that Armenians suffer from a political culture that relies on dreams and that we allow our illusions to guide our judgement. Recently, the Ankara-based Turkish think tank, AVIM, published a commentary presenting Libaridian's views, calling them a sober wake-up call and praising Libaridian's pacifism, foresight and the accuracy of his predictions. Clearly, this mindset is music to Turkish ears, and for good reason.

What makes the Ter-Petrosian/Libaridian mindset especially dangerous today is that it has resurfaced with a vengeance and with a "we told you so" addendum, which, given the enormous losses of the war, has begun to find resonance with an already demoralized, disillusioned and confused public. After all, we just lost a war they said we could never win, which to many unsuspecting observers, proves not only that they were right, but that their reasoning was right, too. This is dangerous because nothing could be further from the truth.

Let me start with the concept of realism. To assess a given situation correctly, as it really is, with no interference from emotions and prejudices, and to accept facts as they are, is being realistic. However, to assume that today's realities will be the realities of tomorrow, that we have no power to shape or change them, that external circumstances either do not change, or, as they change, they do not present opportunities for changing one's circumstances, is not realistic. It is based on a static view of the world. The 'Static Mindset' is not about just accepting, but also succumbing to the realities of the moment. In short, it is defeatist. It lacks the vision and ambition to realistically shape a different future than the present. No political leadership can serve the nation it leads with a Static Mindset, because having a realistic vision for the future and the determination to pursue that vision are prerequisites for effective political leadership.

Yes, we lost the war, but not for the reasons the advocates of that mindset give. We lost the war because right after the victory and Bishkek ceasefire agreement of 1994 we did not consolidate our gains through international legal measures and through intensive, deliberate and goal-oriented diplomacy to secure the status of Artsakh and reverse the prevailing international acceptance that it is an integral part of Azerbaijani territory. Because we stayed intoxicated with our victory far too long and failed to upgrade our military. Because we spent the last 26 years in complacency and corruption. Because we did not have a clear and attainable vision of an economically advanced, militarily defensible, prosperous Armenia and Artsakh, nor enough dedication to our statehood to pursue such a vision. Because Armenia's political and military leadership happily lingered in the tired assumption that Armenia could always rely on an external guarantor of its security, ignoring the ways in which the world, the region, and the circumstances of that presumed guarantor were changing. Because we did not invest in our capabilities and in strengthening the country, and our political leadership throughout independence, taking the prevailing status quo for granted, was more interested in enriching itself than in building the state and populating all of the territories under Armenian control.

The advocates of Static Mindset were not realistic in everything. Their belief that if Armenia appeased Turkey and Azerbaijan it would enjoy peaceful, harmonious and mutually beneficial neighborly relations with those two countries, was and still is fallacious. It is no secret that Azerbaijan's future territorial ambitions are larger than what it has achieved in the last war. Turkey, in large part because it is yet to acknowledge and come to terms with the Armenian Genocide, still openly demonstrates genocidal intentions, with no retribution or rebuke from the international community. It is as critical to be realistic in assessing the true intentions of our neighbors, as in assessing their capabilities.

The wrong and most dangerous lesson that we can draw from the war is that it could never have been won, and therefore it can never be won in the future, and therefore Armenia should simply accept its fate, make further concessions if asked to, adjust to the new realities on the ground and accept them not only as today's realities, but also as the fate of future generations.

The correct lesson to draw is the exact opposite: The war

could have been won if we had invested the last 26 years in getting ready for it. Ironically, the war may even have been avoided if we had been truly ready for it, because, if we had been truly ready for it, we would have won the war before it even began.

It is incumbent on any political leadership in Armenia to have a realistic, sober, unemotional assessment of where the country stands today. But it is also within the political leadership's responsibility to extend that realism to an assessment of the most ambitious potential that the country has, and to have the will, determination and selfless dedication to strive for that potential at any cost. Realism does not preclude imagination, ingenuity, vision, daring, ambition and courage. Quite the contrary, these characteristics are part and parcel of the true realist.

"In order to be a realist, you have to believe in miracles," said David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel. The state he founded seventy-three years ago overcame odds of survival not much better than those of Artsakh, and thrives today.

(Vahan Zanoian is a retired global strategic and energy advisor to numerous governments and multinational corporations.)

Jirair Libaridian Responds to Vahan Zanoian

Dear Editor:

I read with deep sadness Vahan Zanoian's article "Realism, Vision and Defeatism: Right and Wrong Lessons from the War." (Armenian Mirror-Spectator, February 3, 2021, online)

Zanoian argues that the first president Levon Ter-Petrosian's and my realism are responsible for Armenia's current woes, and he equates that realism with "defeatism." He is also very quick to bemoan the fact that so many Armenians now think that such realism would have served the interests of Armenia and Armenians better than the predictably disastrous policies that led us to where we are now. The author also argues that there is nothing wrong with the ideologically inspired mentality that extolls visions and miracles, a mentality which "defeatists" say is responsible for the most recent war and the defeat in that war; the problem, he argues, is only with the execution of that mentality.

In doing so, Zanoian joins many others who would rather cover their failures instead of stopping for a moment and casting a critical look at what actually led us here, something many Armenians seem to be doing, something Zanoian finds dangerous. These are our self-described "visionaries." Since this author's arguments are shared by many others, I thought it would be appropriate to consider them at some length.

Let me begin by expressing my dismay at the number of distortions and outright misrepresentations of the first president Levon Ter-Petrosian's and my own words and views. I will not enumerate them here since that would constitute a whole article in and by itself. Instead, I will focus on the core issues of the author's argument since these are even more dangerous than those falsehoods.

It takes a particular kind of impudence to prescribe again the cure to the disease that incapacitated the patient and brought him close to death. It takes a particular kind of impudence to then go on and blame the alternative cure that was certain to have produced a better outcome. Zanoian is doubling down on a mentality that led us to war, a war that caused the death of some 4,000 young Armenian men, an unnecessary war that was lost, a war that erased most of the gains of the previous war where we were successful, a war that has done some irreparable damage to our vital interests. It takes also either blindness or shamelessness to rewrite that failed prescription even before all the bodies of the soldiers killed in that war are buried.

Certainly the author has not forgotten that the president who won the first war was called a "defeatist" long ago, in fact as soon as he had won the war. That president, Levon Ter-Petrosian, was forced to resign in 1998, 23 years ago, for being a "defeatist." His successors, visionaries or supported by visionaries, had over 22 precious years to prove their point, to work their magic.

I may be mistaken, but I do not remember Vahan Zanoian expressing any concerns with the policies of Armenian governments in the last 22 years, governments that pursued policies based on wishful thinking, hoped for miracles, super patriotic rhetoric, and baseless comparisons with Israel, all of which Zanoian thinks will save us in the future. The lesson the visionaries want everyone to draw from the last war is, then, that the way not to feel defeatist is to insist on making the mistakes we have made in the past.

I do not remember Zanoian and his co-religionists warning Armenia and Artsakh leaders that we were not yet ready for war when in the summer of 2020 the leaders of Armenia and Artsakh declared that they no longer see any sense in continuing negotiations, and thus making war imminent. Was he, like so many others, silent because they thought the expected miracle had occurred and Armenia had become another Israel, capable of winning a war against Azerbaijan and Turkey? Or was it because he was sure we had all the time in the world to become Israel in a hundred or more years when the rest of the world, including our best friends and allies, were telling us to make piece based on compromises, while Azerbaijan and Turkey were practically informing us they were going to go to war for certain, and will be doing it sooner rather than later?

Zanoian argues that Ter-Petrosian and his administration, who could have solved the whole problem immediately after the 1994 cease-fire - with less than four years to deal with the conflict and the rest of the critical issues for the people of Armenia following the war - did not behave as Zanoian thinks they should have. Then why did not the others who followed him do so, when they had over 22 years?

The author and other visionaries accuse Ter-Petrosian and his administration of failing to resolve the Karabakh issue when Armenia won the war in 1994. The fact is, Ter-Petrosian tried to do exactly that by consolidating the essential gains, but he was forced out with arguments similar to what Zanoian is arguing today. If Ter-Petrosian's solution was wrong and he was forced to resign because of that, then why did his successors NOT do the right thing in 1998 or soon after, when Armenia was still at least as strong as Azerbaijan? They had 22 years to correct that mistake.

This argument assumes, first, that Armenia was functioning in vacuum; that there were no neighbors, even powerful ones; that victory meant you could do what you want, that we were living in the middle ages where victory meant conquest; that there was no international community, much more relevant then, a community on which Armenia depended quite a bit after the collapse of the Soviet economy; and that one can conveniently forget that independence started with war and blockades.

But there is something even more nefarious in the author's argument here. The argument that Armenia was at the time just a war machine; that only soldiers lived in the country; that all others were there to produce soldiers; that, in fact, the government and state of Armenia were there only to make war. Zanoian does not seem to remember that Ter-Petrosian's presidency started without even an army, that independence was declared to secure peace and freedom and security to a real people of a real country. That a real people had needs beyond a war.

This argument of the visionaries displays a decades-long reluctance to recognize that the first war was fought under the worst of possible conditions, and it was won. While the second war was fought when Armenia was in far better circumstances, and it was lost. In fact, to recognize the achievements of the Ter-Petrosian administration is to recognize the value of pragmatism and realism, of statesmanship over partisan and self-absorbed politics; to recognize the success of realism and failure of "visionary" politics, abstracted from real people and real possibilities. The visionaries are not ready to give up on their "vision" politics at the expense of real lives, real people, and a real country. Real Armenia is not the Armenia they dream of; it never is. For the visionaries Armenia must always become a dream, even before it is a reality; it is much easier to make decisions for an imaginary Armenia, and if that means that real people must be abstracted in favor of an imaginary Eden inhabited by a people who must behave as the vision dictates, so be it. The visionaries have no use for real people. Reality is harder to deal with. Besides, when dealing with the vision, one does not have a sense of responsibility for what one advocates.



COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Russian Archbishop of Azerbaijan Makes Anti-Armenian Remarks to Please Aliyev

Archbishop Vadyka Alexander, the head of the Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church in Azerbaijan, gave an interview last month to Jayson Casper of Christianity Today, shamelessly spewing Azeri propaganda, badmouthing Armenians and praising Azerbaijan. He spoke more like a spokesman for the dictator Ilham Aliyev than a man of God. This is a clergyman who would not hesitate to sell his soul to the devil for the right price! It is not surprising that Azerbaijan's Embassy in Washington, D.C., immediately posted his interview on its Facebook page.

Abp. Alexander started the interview by stating: "1,500 years of separation between the Eastern Orthodox church and the Armenian Apostolic church has complicated relations. We have holy books and traditions in common, but we are not in fellowship."

The Russian Archbishop knowingly lied by stating that "Azerbaijan has a high level of multicultural acceptance and preserves its religious monuments. The Armenian churches and libraries in Baku are kept safe. In the case of a peace agreement, these can be used again, as they should." Abp. Alexander is wrong. There are no functioning Armenian churches in Baku.

Strangely, the Russian Archbishop accused "Armenians of lying to themselves." He said that Armenians "are very sorry they had to leave" Azerbaijan. The Archbishop must have forgotten about the massacres of innocent Armenians by Azeris in Sumgait, Baku and other parts of Azerbaijan.

When asked if he would be willing to make a phone call to Catholicos Karekin II, the Russian Archbishop sarcastically replied: "I don't have his phone number [smiling]."

In response to the interviewer's question about the

Armenian Genocide, the Russian Archbishop lied again by stating: "When the word genocide is used, we should be very careful. We have very sad facts about the actions of Armenian forces on the territory of Azerbaijan. We have thousands of Azerbaijanis killed by the Armenian side, so to whom should we address the word genocide?" He then added, "Azerbaijanis do not have hate in their heart," forgetting the beheadings of Armenians by Azerbaijani soldiers during the recent war, not to mention the earlier massacres in Sumgait and Baku.

Christianity Today mentioned that early in the recent Artsakh war, the Russian Archbishop "signed an Azerbaijani interfaith letter congratulating President Ilham Aliyev on his military victories."

In response to these anti-Armenian remarks, the Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, sent a harshly-worded letter to the Russian Orthodox Archbishop criticizing him for his false allegations:

"Responding to your interview with Christianity Today Magazine would be considered a waste of time and effort, for it would be replying to an individual who lacks humility, knowledge of history, attempts to distort uncontested historical facts, but above all, distorts the TRUTH. Furthermore, your arrogance is quite astonishing for a shepherd of Christ, the Lord.

"You speak of finding ways to live together. We certainly agree that both parties should find ways to live together. Yet when a country, that committed the Armenian Genocide a century ago by killing 1,500,000 innocent Armenians, rejects to accept the obvious facts, and in addition to that openly supports Azerbaijan, it is hard to find ways to live together. Moreover, when the same country leads the war operations of Azerbaijan, sends its special forces, recruits thousands of radical Islamists to kill Christian Armenians, it becomes difficult to reconcile. When the leader of that country vows to 'continue to fulfill the mission that our grandfathers carried out for centuries in the Caucasus again' (Recep Tayyip Erdogan - July 24, 2020), attempts at reconciliation are questioned, don't you think?

"You state that Armenians have hatred toward Azerbaijan. When an Azerbaijani army officer axes a sleeping Armenian army officer to death and is later pardoned by the President of Azerbaijan, freed from his sentence, and is granted the status of 'Hero' of Azerbaijan by the same president, I ask you the definition of hatred. On May 26, 2020, the European Court of Human Rights said it 'found that there had been no

justification for the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to enforce the punishment of Ramil Safarov and in effect grant him impunity for a serious hate crime.' Isn't hate in its purest form the deliberate circulation of videos on social media of Azeri soldiers assassinating, skinning and beheading Armenian prisoners of war amidst celebration?

"Your contention is that 'Azerbaijan has a high level of multicultural acceptance and preserves its religious monuments. The Armenian churches and libraries in Baku are kept safe.' How can you state such a thoughtless claim when there is video evidence of purposeful destruction of Armenian cross stones in Nakhichevan, carried out systematically to permanently erase all traces of Armenian heritage from the region?

"You speak about the Catholicos of All Armenians not doing enough to make peace. Let me remind you that in 2010, His Holiness Karekin I travelled to Azerbaijan, met with Allahshukur Pashazade [Grand Mufti of Azerbaijan] and President Ilham Aliyev for peace talks in Baku.

"Replying to your interview responses is futile indeed, for the lack of respect for history and the truth is quite evident."

These are strong words from one clergyman to another. I suggest that other Armenian clergymen and Catholicos Karekin II write letters to Patriarch Kirill, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church in All of Russia in Moscow, who has exclusive jurisdiction over Russian Orthodox Christians in Azerbaijan, complaining about Archbishop Alexander's shameful statements.

Amazingly, on June 25, 2017, Archbishop Alexander was awarded a medal of honor from the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow for his significant contribution to the promotion and strengthening of interreligious dialogue. Patriarch Kirill, in his congratulatory message, commended Archbishop Alexander for carrying out his task with "special tact and diplomatic skills ... in the land [Azerbaijan] where representatives of different religions and nationalities live side by side."

Obviously, after making such false statements about Armenians, Archbishop Alexander has failed in his 'interreligious' duties. Patriarch Kirill should be urged to take away the medal that he was awarded.

It is understandable that Archbishop Alexander is trying to please the dictator of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. However, a man of God should not tell lies for any reason, under any circumstance. Patriarch Kirill should tell Archbishop Alexander to apologize for his lies, and if not, he should strip him of his religious rank.

LETTERS

Zanoyan Provides Counter-response to Libaridian

To the Editor:

With utter bafflement, I read Jirair Libaridian's response to my opinion piece of February 3. I could not imagine a more comprehensive and systematic distortion of my arguments. From the very first sentence, where Libaridian claims "Zanoyan argues that the first president Levon Ter-Petrosian's and my realism are responsible for Armenia's current woes" to the very end, Libaridian's response is full of misrepresentations of my opinions. For some reason, he carefully avoids touching upon my main message, which is about the perception of future possibilities, and not about the past. He repeatedly accuses me of not finding fault in the past 22 years, when I repeatedly attributed today's woes to the mistakes of the last 26 years, covering all three presidents and the current prime minister.

Inexplicably, Libaridian goes beyond distorting the views that I did express, to attributing to me a slew of ideas which I never even touched upon in my piece. Clearly, his painfully acute defensive anger has driven him to a stream of consciousness diatribe. He has reacted not to what I have written, but to far-fetched inferences he has chosen to make from my lines; and he has often addressed his criticism not to me, but to my "co-religionists" and "the visionaries," whoever they may be.

I have no intention of engaging in a fruitless debate about this subject. Both pieces are available to the public. My arguments are clear and precise. I invite readers to compare what I have written with Mr. Libaridian's response, and judge for themselves if one has any relationship with the other.

Respectfully,
Vahan Zanoyan

Should Armenia Expect Any Dividends From Biden's Peace Initiatives?

DIVIDENDS, from page 17

the Biden administration's the most daunting challenge will become the one to tame Turkey.

On the Karabakh front, the news is that the Minsk Group co-chairs — Russia, France and the US — will visit the region and particularly the war-ravaged areas to continue their mission. The State Department has released a statement indicating that "the US contributes to the OSCE Minsk Group's process with the goal of helping the parties to come to a final settlement based on the principles of Helsinki Final Act, which calls for the exclusion of military force to resolve problems, territorial integrity and the right of people's self-determination."

The politicians who have made those statements will find a fait accompli in Karabakh, since the first principle they advocate — that of the non-use of force — has already been violated. That violation has led to the resolution of the second principle, the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. What is left for them to resolve is the self-determination of the people in Karabakh.

President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan has already stated that Karabakh's status has been determined. President Putin has countered that by stating that the status has not been determined yet and that the decision will be taken up at a later date.

Now that the other two co-chairs have reengaged themselves, they have to weigh in with their proposals. The French parliament has already passed a resolution seeking the recognition of

Karabakh's independence. It is anticipated that that view will be reflected in the upcoming deliberations. The US view is not clear yet, but in many problems in the region, it counters the Russian position. Barring some last-minute horse-trading, the US will also concur with France, since both have complained that they have been excluded from the process of the settlements following the war. Their involvement will mostly dwell on the implication of the nine-point cease fire declaration imposed by Russia and Turkey on Armenia. The latter has a challenge and chance for diplomatic maneuvering to interpret some of the unfair and unclear clauses to its advantage.

Within the general scheme of Turkey to demonstrate good behavior as a citizen of global diplomacy, Ankara has resorted to several initiatives, in addition to the Cyprus negotiations and rapprochement with Europe.

Ankara has signaled that it is "ready to normalize relations with Armenia," as reported in an article published in the Washington Post. Turkish political analyst Amberin Zaman's piece in Al-Monitor's February 1 issue refers to that signal. The title of the article says it all: "Turkey's talk of peace with Armenia rings hollow."

Her comment is more revealing when she writes: "Critics say Turkey's apparent magnanimity smacks more of its recent efforts to fix its battered ties with Washington without making the concessions that are actually being demanded of it."

Zaman has interviewed several diplo-

mats both Armenian and non-Armenian and finds that Turkey's intent is not sincere and looks like a trial balloon indicating political expediency.

An anonymous Armenian diplomat answers the writer's query: "It is shocking that a country may stick to genocidal intent for a century without feeling an inch of guilt for what its predecessors did [rather than] acknowledge and repent for the crime."

What could offer Turkey to Armenia to entice the latter to normalize relations? If the offer is lifting the blockade and opening communications, that offer benefits Turkey more than Armenia. By lifting the blockade, Turkey will be correcting its act of violating international law by blockading Armenia and in addition, leaders in Turkey have been planning for more than a century to occupy the Syunik section of Armenia or to force their way through towards accomplishing their pan-Turanic plans. Since the nine-point declaration after the Karabakh war has granted that transit passage, Turkey has already been rewarded with one of its historic goals.

It is not in the interest of the Armenian side to consider any olive branch from Ankara.

Besides dealing with Armenia Turkey has a long and arduous way before it to improve its relations with Washington.

We hope President Biden makes good on his pledge and recognizes the Genocide and instructs the US co-chair of the Minsk Group to reflect Washington's friendly policy. Those may prove to be dividends from Biden's peace initiative for Armenia.



AUA Raises \$1.5M for Veterans’ Education Campaign

YEREVAN – The American University of Armenia (AUA) has successfully reached its goal for the “Honoring Those Who Served: Investing in our Veterans” Education endowed scholarship campaign, raising more than \$1.5 million for AUA veteran students.

Thanks to the remarkable response from the AUA community of supporters, veterans will have access to the top-quality education AUA

offers. The campaign positions AUA to welcome back with open arms all the heroes who defended their homeland further enhancing the institution’s vibrant culture that celebrates and supports veterans.

“The immeasurable strength and sustained giving spirit of the AUA network of supporters was, once again, exemplified in reaching the goal set for the Honoring Those Who Served:

Investing in our Veterans’ Education campaign. Donations, small and large, poured in within a short period of time as an expression of heartfelt and sincere gratitude to our veterans,” remarked AUA’s Vice President of Development, Gaiane Khachatryan. “The lessons learned from the unprecedented recent challenges imposed by the global pandemic and the war in Artsakh have inspired new perspectives on education and reaffirmed the role AUA must play in cultivating strong leaders who are equipped with the potential to design systemic solutions, propose pioneering development strategies and contribute to advancing our nation.”

The endowment fund campaign signals and further strengthens the commitment of the university to this end. Specifically earmarked for veterans, the fund will ensure success for veteran students and create pathways for their professional growth and opportunities for career advancement.

The Fund also has established named scholarships in honor of those six AUA students who fell in battle: Shavarsh Muradyan, Davit Uzunyan, Erik Hajikyan, Aziz Aghajanyan, Areg

Gevorgyan, and Hakob Hakobyan. The memory of these heroes of the recent Artsakh war will live on forever at AUA through the scholarships awarded every year to other soldiers studying at AUA.

“Funding this endowed scholarship creates enduring tuition support and opportunities for our enrolled veteran students. The recent war has emphasized that education has a crucial role to play, universities serving as great institutions and making substantial impact on society. This dedicated scholarship has the potential for veterans to gain a transformational experience at AUA and ensure their success,” remarks AUA President Karin Markides. “The Honoring Those Who Served: Investing in our Veterans’ Education campaign is just one of the pragmatic and constructive measures the University has taken to provide our veteran students with the right level of support for making a successful transition to student life. Shavarsh, Davit, Erik, Aziz, Areg, Hakob and every soldier who tragically lost their lives defending Armenia’s borders have made us more resolute in our commitment to our servicemen.”

Though the Honoring Those Who Served: Investing in Our Veterans’ Education campaign has attained its goal, it continues to stay open for new donations. You may make a secure donation online. To learn more about the impact of the campaign and other initiatives at AUA in support of veteran students, please visit our website at veterans.aua.am.



Six AUA students lost their lives during the recent war.

Jirair Libaridian Responds to Vahan Zanoian

LIBARIDIAN, from page 18

The problem is that without first recognition of realities one cannot even achieve a country’s actual potential, let alone someone’s vision. It seems that dreaming and imagining is what is pleasant and satisfying; here it is not necessary to actually achieve anything. Having a vision is the purpose of politics in this case.

Zanoian, like many others who agree with him, states that the mere fact that some Turks like what I write makes my writings suspect, by definition. This kind of political judgment can be summarized in one simple sentence: what Turks like must be and is bad for us; what they hate must be good for us. I can assure these would-be critics that what has made the leaders of Turkey and Azerbaijan delighted – and these are the Turks and Azerbaijanis that count – are our underestimation of their capabilities, our lack of sense of power relations, our reliance on non-existing assets and allies and on fantasies, all of which are part of the kind of thinking Zanoian is advocating. Azerbaijani and Turkish leaders appreciate miscalculations of the visionaries, because that is what made their victory possible. I believe that should count more than the fact that some Turkish or Azerbaijani analysts and academics have appreciated my analysis.

Maybe I should restate the simple truths I have been highlighting for a while. We must distinguish between two different issues as far as responsibility for failures are concerned.

The first is the failure of negotiations: I have assigned responsibility for this failure to all sides of the conflict as well as to the mediators; I have also made it clear that the major part of responsibility belongs to Azerbaijan. Failure in negotiations made war in this case inevitable.

The second is the failure to weigh properly the risks of another war, that is, the failure to understand where we stand in terms of power relations with our antagonists; or, even worse, while knowing that we may be unable to win the next war, our failure to allow the processes that lead us to war to continue, as if playing a role in a classical Greek tragedy. Regardless, responsibility for this failure belongs completely to our side. No one told us to miscalculate; on the contrary. What Ter-Petrosian and I and many others did was to warn whoever was willing to listen about the certainty of war, the ever-

decreasing chance of victory in a new war and the distinct possibility of defeat and, therefore, about the absolute need to continue negotiations with the aim of achieving peace on the basis of compromises on both sides.

And when I say “our” side, I mean the leaders of Armenia and Artsakh since 1998, the political parties that were in coalition with them or otherwise supported or agreed with their policies, our historians, intellectuals and public opinion makers who hailed the policies epitomized by the very short sentence “not an inch of territory back.” That must have made them all feel good. Politics, statesmanship and governance is thus reduced to what makes one feel good.

A quote from a figure from our own history, someone more admired than actually read, may make the point better:

“It is the sacred duty of the government to love peace at all times, to govern with peace, and to exert every possible effort not to undertake war against another government, and also not to give any reason to others to make war against you. But if relations are ruined and another government imposes itself on you and endangers the interests of your country, then it is your duty and right to declare war, so that the enemy does not trample upon your freedom and rights. Except that the government now going to war must remember Christ’s parable that teaches us to have foresight. First you must calculate your expenses, and then assess your strength compared to that of your enemy, by asking yourself whether you should go to war with an army of 10,000 against an enemy who is coming at you with an army of 20,000. Otherwise, it will be much more circumspect to send a peace delegation and talk about reconciliation.”

These words are from none other than Khrimian Hayrig, the dominant and misunderstood figure from our 19th century history.

Articles by visionaries like this author constitute a desperate quest for arguments that will allow the authors to escape responsibility, and for the mentalities they represent escape scrutiny. Saul Bellow said it best: “A great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep.” To what depths of irresponsibility is he ready to sink just to defend that cherished mentality that makes us feel good but does only harm, a mentality that knows how to deal with defeat but not with victory, a mentality that afflicted the would-be dictator Kocharyan, the autocrat Sargsyan and the democrat Pashinyan. The problem had something to do with personalities and parties

involved but everything to do with mentalities.

The facts speak for themselves. And our people can judge for themselves. Our people have undertaken that scrutiny. It seems that the visionaries are afraid. “Believe me,” this author is telling our people, “trust my distorted and tortured argument, and don’t trust your own judgment!” What is he, what are they afraid of? Are they afraid that the people’s judgment will not be in favor of their kind of political sorcery, that their magic is losing its luster, and that the people’s judgment will allow a degree of sanity and reasoning to enter our discourse?

Zanoian and his fellow visionaries resent the fact that, at the end, Ter-Petrosian’s 1997 November article “War or Peace,” his 2017 television interview, and a large number of articles and interviews by me and others in the camp of realists and “defeatists” turned out to have offered the right analysis, proved to have done the right prognosis and offered a better cure. They seem to resent that history validated the concerns and critique of the non-visionaries.

The facts spoke for themselves when realism and pragmatism brought victory and a good possibility for an honorable peace where we could obtain what we needed; and the facts speak for themselves when the visionaries

risked all with little chance to get the maximum they dreamed of and, in fact, brought nothing but loss, defeat, death and destruction.

The visionaries are being consistent with their continuing belief in their more comforting ideology based on fantastic calculations, pseudo-strategies and on willfully ignoring facts. We do not see them recognizing simple facts with grace or being chastised, even today.

Instead of thinking about making the necessary adjustments to their thinking and their policies in order, first of all, to preserve what we have left, the visionaries are concerned about defending their past and justifying their shortcomings. What they cherish more than anything else are their fantasies, their “visions.”

The list of possible disasters that can befall Armenia and Artsakh is not exhausted. Should the logic of these visionaries survive this defeat and continue to dominate our thinking and policies, we are likely to witness yet more disasters. At which time it is almost certain that they will blame, once more, anybody and anything other than themselves and their mentality.

Painfully,
Jirair Libaridian
Cambridge, Mass.
February 7, 2021

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