

THE ARMENIAN
Mirror-Spectator
Volume LXXXI, NO. 31, Issue 4673 \$ 2.00

The First English Language Armenian Weekly in the United States Since 1932



Philly Billboard Questions Armenian Peacefulness

PHILADELPHIA — A billboard recently appeared on the I-95 North freeway before the central Philadelphia exit stating “Azerbaijanis (and Turks) are ready to live in harmony with Armenians. ‘How about Armenians?’” It also states, “paid for by MÜSAİD USA,” which is an organization of Turkish-American businessmen and industrialists.

Armenians upset by this insinuation, especially in the context of attacks on Armenians and their institutions in the US last year (San Francisco, Boston, and even Philadelphia), are contacting the billboard company Lamar Advertising by phone (610) 779-9421 or its representative Rick Zitkovic by email (rzitkovic@lamar.com) to protest this billboard (number 06.4056).

In addition, Armenians of the city noted on Twitter that the Armenian flag has gone missing for the second time in two months from the Ben Franklin Parkway.

New Artsakh Foreign Minister Babayan Declares Republic Must Remain Geopolitical Actor

By **Aram Arkun**

Mirror-Spectator Staff

STEPANAKERT — David (Davit) Babayan is a familiar figure to those interested in the Artsakh Republic or Nagorno Karabakh. He has held various Artsakh government positions since 2000 and since 2013 has often acted as a governmental spokesperson as he was head of the Central Information Department and Deputy



David Babayan

Chief of Staff for the president. He was appointed as foreign minister this January, part of the cabinet changes in the aftermath of the recent Karabakh war. He spoke recently with the Mirror-Spectator about conditions in the country and region.

The losses of the recent war, including Shushi, the cultural center of Artsakh located in a strategic elevated position, were foremost on his mind. He declared, “Artsakh is like a wounded person who has lost one of its legs, one of its arms, and one of its eyes, and whose heart is wounded. We are in a kind of emergency department. Every day we get up and look at Shushi.”

He strongly opposed internal Armenian polarization and politicization of the situation, stating “a society divided into several pieces which detest each other cannot survive.”

He stressed that Artsakh must remain above internal political issues see BABAYAN, page 3

Academics Discuss Race, Ethnic and ‘Armenian-American Studies’ during Zoom Panel

By **Harry Kezelian**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES – On Thursday, February 12, four academics joined for a lively virtual discussion to highlight the importance of “ethnic studies” and its inclusion in the K-12 curriculum, something which has mostly begun on the West Coast, and to delve into the future of Armenian academia in the US and how it will grapple with pressing issues of race in society.

The attendees of the meeting were from a broad spectrum of scholars and members of the Armenian community. The four discussants were Dr. Suzie Abajian (PhD in Education and activist for Ethnic Studies in California); Sophia Armen (PhD candidate in Ethnic Studies, UC-San Diego); Kohar Avakian

(PhD student in American Studies, Yale); and Thomas Simsarian Dolan (PhD candidate in American Studies, George Washington University). The panel discussion was organized by the Armenian Action Network and the Armenian-American Studies Collective.

The conversation was opened by Abajian, who gave an extensive history of Ethnic Studies in the Arizona and California public schools curriculum, something which she helped fight to make possible over the years. As of late, Ethnic Studies has been banned in Arizona under the theory that see RACE, page 9



Suzie Abajian

One More Step to Success

Vahan Yepremyan in Search of the Perfect Formula

By **Ani Duzdabanyan-Manoukian**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

POETS,” produced by Ketchup Entertainment, premiered on all main platforms with the start of the new year. The movie tells a story of a teenaged boy who is struggling with undiagnosed anxiety disorder and seeking help from an imaginary bird-therapist while his own parents refuse to recognize their son’s illness. Moving beyond an ostensible personal comedy to a real drama about society, the film focuses on the importance of accepting mental health problems as real issues.

Vahan Yepremyan, the co-founder of Ketchup Entertainment, sees the visual arts as a way to see YEPREMYAN, page 16



NEWS IN BRIEF

Japan Approves \$3.6M In Aid for Armenia Amid Post-War Crisis

TOKYO (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Japan’s government has decided to provide humanitarian assistance worth \$3.6 million to Armenia for reconstruction after the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday, February 16, TASS reports.

The East Asian country will provide medical equipment, foodstuffs and also financial support for restoring shelters, hospitals, schools and residential buildings.

The funds will be transferred via a number of international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In total, Japan has approved humanitarian assistance worth \$4.8 million, of which \$3.6 will be provided to Armenia, with the rest expected to go to Azerbaijan.

Russian Border Guards Upping Presence in Armenia’s South

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — One more observation post of Russian border guards has been established in Armenia’s Syunik province, amid reports of Azerbaijani troops firing various caliber weapons into the air in the vicinity of the village of Agarak, the Syunik governor’s office said in a statement on Monday, February 15.

The Russian troops are now placed on round-the-clock duty at the observation post, the statement added.

Both Armenian and Russian border guards registered the indiscriminate fire coming from the Azerbaijani side on February 13, the Syunik authorities said.

Garó Paylan Opens Case Against Azerbaijani Woman

ISTANBUL (*Nor Marmara*) — Armenian deputy in the Turkish Parliament Garó Paylan of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) shared over social media on February 11 that he had contacted the prosecutor’s office to request legal prosecution against an Azerbaijani woman who advocated for violence against Armenians.

Paylan took the step after seeing a video clip. In the course of a street interview in Istanbul, when an Azerbaijani woman was asked, “What would you do if you knew you wouldn’t be punished for it,” she answered: “I would cut off the heads of 20 Armenians.”

Paylan indicated in his complaint that the words constitute a hate crime against Armenians.

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ARMENIA

News From Armenia

Karabakh Publishes Names of 132 More Troops Killed

STEPANAKERT (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Defense Army of Nagorno-Karabakh this week published the names 132 more soldiers killed in fighting against Azerbaijan.

The Armenian side has announced the names of some 2300 servicemen who were killed in the war that started on September 27 and ended on November 10. Hundreds of bodies are waiting to be identified, many are still missing.

Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan said earlier that 3,439 bodies had been recovered from the zone of hostilities in Karabakh as of January 20, and that the final death toll from the six-week war wouldn't surpass 4,000.

Official Sends Report to UN on POW Return Delay

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Office of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia has sent a detailed report to the UN Human Rights Council that the Azerbaijani authorities are delaying the return of the prisoners of war and grossly violating the international demands, Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan said on Facebook on February 16.

"The report has been sent to the UN Human Rights Council in a separate procedure. Only the national human rights institutions having "A" international status have such an opportunity.

The report specifically notes that the Azerbaijani authorities abuse the legal procedures and politicize the issue of the return of POWs. With this they cause psychological sufferings to our society and first of all to the families of POWs, play with their emotions and create targeted tension.

High-Tech Companies Raised \$50 Million in Investments in 2020

YEREVAN (Arka) — Armenian startups raised last year \$50 million in investments, High Technology Industry Minister Hakob Arshakyan said at a press conference earlier in February.

According to him, 192 new companies were founded in the country in 2020, which received certificates and will receive tax benefits.

"These are startups of Armenian origin, which have their own research centers in Armenia. These companies in 2020 attracted \$50 million investments, mainly from abroad," Arshakyan said.

The Armenian authorities adopted unprecedented legislative changes in 2017, granting start-ups in the IT sector five-year tax breaks.

Genocide Institute Condemns Holocaust Memorial Desecration

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute has condemned the recent desecration of the Holocaust memorial in Yerevan.

The monument, which, honors the victims of both Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide, was spray-painted on February 12 with the names of Israeli-made weapons that were used to target civilian settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) during the 44-day war in fall 2020.

"Of course, the policy of the state of Israel, in particular, during the war was condemnable. Not only did Israel deliver weapons to Azerbaijan [prior to the hostilities], but it also did not stop the deliveries even after it was proved that those weapons were being used to annihilate the civilian population of Artsakh," the AGMI said.

"But the Holocaust memorial has nothing to do with the state of Israel. It symbolizes the suffering of the Jewish people, with whom we have relations spanning thousands of years."

The Museum-Institute said the vandals must be "severely punished."



Yerevan residents rush out after the quake. (Armenpress photo)

Yerevan Jolted by Earthquake

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — A major earthquake struck Yerevan and surrounding areas on Saturday, February 13, causing many of their residents to rush out of their homes.

The earthquake measured at magnitude 4.7 at its epicenter 8 kilometers southeast of Armenia's capital, reported the national seismic protection agency. It said tremors were also felt in five of the country's ten provinces.

According to the Armenian Ministry of Health, the quake did not kill or injure anyone. The ministry reported only minor injuries sustained by three people "as a consequence of panic caused by the earthquake."

The Ministry of Emergency Situations urged local residents to stay outdoors shortly after Yerevan was jolted by the quake at around 3:30 p.m. local time. It said it has registered 46

aftershocks.

In another statement issued at 7 p.m., the ministry told people to return to their homes. "The analysis of available data shows that the likelihood of a powerful earthquake is low," it said.

The quake appeared to have caused no serious material damage in or outside Yerevan. The Ministry of Emergency Situation reported tentatively that it damaged only one house and three buildings in the city of one million.

A magnitude 4.7 earthquake struck another Armenian region on February 5. The authorities warned on February 6 that more "earthquakes of low or medium magnitude" could occur in the days ahead.

Armenia is located in a seismically active zone and earthquakes are a regular occurrence there.

Border Communities Benefit from Expanded, Renovated Kindergartens

TAVUSH, Armenia — Children in the Tavush border communities of Achajur and Varagavan now benefit from newly renovated and expanded kindergartens. These projects were implemented through the Paros Foundation's Prosperity on the Border initiative over the course of the last 18 months.

In the village of Achajur, an overcrowded kindergarten meant that almost 100 children that were of kindergarten age were unable to attend and receive the benefits of early education. To address this need, the Paros Foundation agreed to completely reconfigure and reconstruct the second floor of the large building that houses the kindergarten. A new dining room and three large classrooms to accommodate the addition of these new children we successfully added. The rebuild included a more powerful heating system for the entire kindergarten, new bathrooms, new windows, and work to the exterior of the building. Work on the kindergarten at Achajur was made possible through the support of benefactors Ara and Valarie Cherchian.

In the village of Varagavan, only one small portion of the building that housed the village kindergarten was able to be used for a partial day program for 19 children in the village. A total of more than 40 children are of kindergarten and preschool age, but none of the children in this community were able to fully benefit from a full day early education program. This large, two story building needed a complete rebuild including roof, water, electrical, sewer and gas systems. New windows,

doors, stairs, flooring and kitchens and bathrooms were installed as part of the Paros Foundation's Prosperity on the Border initiative. Work on the kindergarten at Varagavan was made possible

furniture for the children.

"The effects of the July attacks, Covid 19 and the Artsakh War have weighed heavily on the children in these communities," said Peter Abajian, exec-



Children at the Achajur Kindergarten offered a short performance for opening day.

through donations received primarily from the "Cocktails on the Terrace" fundraiser sponsored by Gregory and Kelley Badishkanian at their home.

To view a video of the Varagavan Kindergarten, visit www.parosfoundation.org and search for Varagavan Kindergarten.

Focus on Children Now partnered on both of these kindergarten projects to provide high quality playgrounds and

utive director of the Paros Foundation. "Returning to beautifully renovated, safe and inviting kindergartens will dramatically improve these communities return to in-person education and significantly benefit these important villages and their residents in the long run."

To learn more about the Paros Foundation or to support a project, visit www.parosfoundation.org.



ARMENIA

New Artsakh Foreign Minister Babayan Declares Republic Must Remain Geopolitical Actor

BABAYAN, from page 1

and must have a crucial political voice: “Artsakh is a value...If Artsakh says something it should be an imperative or at least a very strong message to the entire Armenian nation, both in Armenia and the diaspora. This is one of the key components for maintaining our status as a geopolitical player.”

Babayan said, “We have to be led by patriotism and our strong and unshakeable faith, our notion of friendship and mutual respect. These are the most important factors of our greatness...We always think of the material components of territories. These are important, but we have much more important things to do in order to survive.”

He said that the majority of Artsakh’s population has returned, yet around 1/3 of the population, some 45,000 citizens, remained in Yerevan still. Many of them used to live in Hadrut, Kashatagh, Karvachar, and areas of Martuni, Askeran and Martakert, regions which are now occupied by Azerbaijan. Babayan said that while Artsakh needs to bring them back, “we need some time to create appropriate conditions, construct houses for them and provide them with jobs and other opportunities for living.” At present, around half the population in Artsakh live in its capital of Stepanakert and half in the villages. In both cases, he noted, either old houses must be renovated or new ones constructed for them.

The recovery process will require great resources and time but, he said, “We should not prolong it for years and years. The most important social and economic projects should be carried out within a relatively short period of time – several years.”

Babayan was direct and said that in order to realize the government’s plans, “We need assistance. It can be divided into two main categories, assistance from the Armenian Republic and the diaspora, representing our internal national potential, and humanitarian assistance from various countries, including Russia, and international organizations like the United Nations. We need very sophisticated and coordinated work.”

Captives and Hostages

While Armenians are returning to Artsakh, Babayan said there are none left living willingly in the Artsakh territories now occupied by Azerbaijan. He said, “We have Armenians who are hostages and prisoners of war but there is not a single person from Artsakh who is living in Azerbaijan or has any intention to live under Azerbaijani control because Azerbaijan is a country where Nazism is a state-building philosophy, because Armenophobia is the basis of its state-building philosophy.”

The Artsakh government, he said, is doing everything possible to bring back the captive Armenians. “Artsakh doesn’t have enough resources unfortunately to do it alone, but we are communicating with peacekeepers and international organizations. We are issuing various statements to somehow facilitate this process. Unfortunately, international law and institutions cannot guarantee the return of these people because Azerbaijan violates international laws, norms and conventions, including the Geneva Convention.”

Artsakh has a list of people whom it knows definitely have been captured, sometimes through video footage, and through other types of data, but, Babayan said, it is a very difficult situation because Azerbaijan denies such actions and refuses to reveal how many Armenians are in its control. There probably are many more missing Armenians whose ultimate fate remains unknown.

Babayan said, “It is a very difficult and sensitive problem. We encounter its consequences every hour of every day. We have to communicate with the relatives of these hostages or prisoners of war who are in very delicate physical conditions.”

Meanwhile, search efforts continue to be carried out jointly by the Rescue Service of Artsakh, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Russian peacekeepers and an Azerbaijani unit, he said.

When asked whether Artsakh would accept the return of any Azerbaijanis who lived there in Soviet times, Babayan said, “We don’t have any hatred towards the ordinary Azerbaijani people. The return of people however should be on a mutual basis. If Armenians have the right to return to Baku and other places [in Azerbaijan], then we can talk about return to Nagorno Karabakh. It should be mutual.” He said that first the most important political issues must be settled and then the humanitarian sphere can be discussed so that people are not put at risk. Many questions remain to be answered, he continued, such as whether people would return as citizens of Artsakh.

Compensation and Preservation

Azerbaijan is threatening various types of legal measures against Armenians for economic losses over the last several decades on lands that it claims as its own. Babayan said that the Artsakh foreign ministry must work to do everything possible to rebuff such measures. When asked whether there was any hope, on the other hand, of compensation for owners of properties and businesses in Artsakh that are now controlled by Azerbaijan, he replied, “We have to be realists. I don’t think Azerbaijan will compensate anything.”

As far as Armenian monuments, churches and museums in the



lost regions, Babayan said that the Azerbaijanis “are destroying our culture and heritage. We are going to struggle to preserve our heritage, which has been destroyed systematically.” The Artsakh Foreign Ministry issued some statements and appeals recently about this. Babayan said that action is what it hopes for, not just responses and words.

One action was taken by Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, who, Babayan said, became the main guarantor of the medieval Armenian monastery of Dadivank. He said, “It is due to him that this monastery has not been destroyed by the Azeri side, but other parts of our heritage are still at serious risk. We need the actions also of international organizations, the United Nations and its appropriate structures. We need to do a lot of work, and we also have to use the potential of our diaspora in this process.”

Russian Peacekeepers

Babayan spoke positively about the Russian peacekeeping forces in Artsakh, declaring, “We have almost daily contacts. We have quite an effective cooperation. This is a very positive thing.”

While the Russians have a rescue service and representatives of their health ministry, they primarily act through the peacekeeping force, he said. The latter has both a purely military part and a humanitarian one. Among the humanitarian projects being conducted is the reconstruction of damaged houses and buildings, he said, and the provision of medical care. Babayan said, “We feel it is a very palpable assistance and we hope that it will continue.” Sometimes, he said, the Russians provide materials and sometimes they themselves engage in these activities.

The Artsakh government and its security forces are kept aware of the activities of the peacekeepers, Babayan said, as a matter of “political politeness.” While Artsakh’s armed forces are not required to inform the Russians of their own actions, Babayan said that there is close cooperation. He remarked, “Acting as the guarantor of peace and stability in the region, via their mediation the war was stopped, so they also bear responsibility for maintaining the peace and stability. This means we have to cooperate with them but it does not mean that they are interfering in our defense policy or army process.”

The situation in the Kashatagh or Lachin corridor leading to Artsakh from Armenia is an example Babayan brought up of cooperation. He said, “We have been developing or making more appropriate the system of entrance to Artsakh because of the new situation. There are many international terrorists who are still on the territory of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan brought many of them from the Middle East to fight against our people and state. They may somehow enter our territory illegally by using passports of different states or come as tourists, so we need to make our security system appropriate for these kinds of challenges.”

This is why, he continued, the Artsakh state is collaborating with the Russian side to not allow terrorists access to Artsakh territory, but it does not mean denying people of various nationalities or citizenships access to Artsakh. Instead, he said, they can apply for visas and if they receive them, wait for one day before permission to come.

In other parts of occupied Artsakh, such as Karvachar, Azerbaijanis must pass through Martakert region to reach it, but they are accompanied by Russian peacekeeping forces, who again control the situation, Babayan said. He declared, “There is a theoretical possibility for terrorists to penetrate our territory but Russian peacekeeping forces and our own forces always follow this type of transportation. There are peacekeepers almost everywhere around the perimeters of our borders and also some areas are controlled by our own army. We have increased the level of security everywhere.”

When asked about attempts by Azerbaijan to place conditions on entry to Artsakh via the Kashatagh corridor, he said, “It would like to do so, but I don’t think it will succeed. No permission is needed from Azerbaijan for entry to Artsakh. This is totally unacceptable.”

While much of the Armenian population has left the corridor, Babayan said that the people of the village of Aghavno continue to live there. In general, the situation is quite stable, he said. Several incidents of shootings have taken place, but not along this road. Also, a number of Armenians who unknowingly crossed the line of contact were taken hostage by Azerbaijani forces. The Russian peacekeepers intervened and some were returned.

Artsakh is not the scene of attempts to delineate its borders through GPS and maps, as in the case of the borders of the republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Babayan said, “Our present-day borders are the result of war – the line of contact or the frontline. So the situation and the approaches are different here.”

Babayan touched upon the possibility of Artsakh citizens receiving Russian passports and citizenship, explaining that this has no connection with the presence of the peacekeepers. Russia, he said, has a very liberal procedure for those who were born in the Soviet Union to obtain Russian citizenship. At present, however, the numbers of such dual citizens is not that great, he said.

Babayan as Foreign Minister and Conservative Party Leader

Babayan commented on what policies he would implement as a new minister, stating: “I am a proponent of continuation. I dislike any revolution, any destruction or denying of the past, because if you fight with your past, you cannot create a firm present or future. In this case, I am a proponent of evolution, not revolution. Revolution is one of the greatest disasters of humanity.”

Consequently, he said, “Some of the traditions should definitely be maintained and we are going to bring some fresh ideas too.”

For Babayan, a realistic foreign policy is a must. He said, “We have to maintain the most important thing: Artsakh should remain a geopolitical actor. This is not only the key task for foreign policy but for the state-building process.” Among the goals to be maintained, he said, are the peaceful settlement of the Azerbaijani-Karabakh conflict, the international recognition of Artsakh, and the strengthening of inter-Armenian ties.

He declared, “We are very much interested in the Artsakh, Armenia and diaspora trinity. If this trinity will be shackled we will have great problems in the future.” He said that Armenians from the diaspora are already directly engaged in the reconstruction process and that this needed to continue.

He said that he thought the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group will remain as the only platform for peaceful settlement of the Azerbaijani-Karabakh conflict, and this has been articulated by Russian, US and French leaders. Meanwhile, he said that Artsakh was doing everything possible to again become a direct party to peace negotiations.

However, at present there was no direct line of communications with the state or government of Azerbaijan due to the policy of the latter. He said that there were some local contacts. For example, when the rescue service is carrying out search operations it has to be done together with the Azerbaijani side.

There was also no direct contact with the Turkish government at present, he said. The only contact has been with Turkish troops fighting Artsakh during the recent war. He raised the question of how a NATO member state could be engaged in such a war and bring in mercenaries. A conversation, he said, needed to be had about whether Turkey informed other NATO allies about this. If it did so but did not receive a green light, how could it ignore its allies. If it did get the go-ahead, does NATO actually consider Artsakh a threat to his existence, he wondered.

He added that the Turkish side together with Azerbaijan allowed the terrorist Grey Wolves organization to found a school in Shushi, but there has been no response from the international community. He said that this too generates question marks.

Concerning possible new elections for Artsakh, Babayan said that though it was a democratic country, the situation was precarious, and there were some issues with the constitution. If the president resigned, the assembly or parliament would also have to terminate its activities, but this would not be desirable. Babayan said he brought up this matter during the most recent election campaign.

Babayan is the founder and leader of the Artsakh Conservative Party, and was a candidate for president during the last election, but he said that at present party activities and his own participation have been frozen. He noted that a number of young members of the party perished in defense of the homeland. When asked whether he might run again in the next elections, he said that it was too early to say, but his party would definitely play an active part in the life of the country.



ARMENIA

Artsakh Denies Ban on Foreign Press amid Reports of Russian Peacekeepers Blocking Entry to Journalists

By Raffi Elliott

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Artsakh officials insist that tourists and foreign press are still welcome as details on recent reports of Russian peacekeepers preventing foreign journalists from entering the republic continue to emerge.

The Artsakh authorities' traditionally straightforward entry requirements for foreign press, and relatively freer media environment have long provoked the ire of Baku, which has repeatedly attempted to stifle international coverage of war crimes committed by Azeri soldiers both during and after the recent war. Azerbaijan, which ranks between Bahrain and Yemen as one of the world's most repressive countries, maintains a black list for foreign journalists, even going so far as to press criminal charges against reporters.

Rumors that Russian peacekeepers, probably acting under pressure from Baku, had begun clamping down on cross-border travel into Artsakh and restricting media freedom sparked concerns over the potential erosion of the unrecognized republic's sovereignty in the wake of last year's bloody conflict which left at least 3,500 Armenian and an unknown number of Azerbaijanis dead. Azerbaijan has already attempted to assert its jurisdiction on the republic by hindering access to the Armenian Dadivank monastery and condemning the visit of Armenian government officials to Stepanakert.

Allegations made by former President Serzh Sargsyan's son-in-law Mikael Minasyan — currently in exile avoiding charges of bribery and embezzlement of government property in Armenia — that a supposed secret "verbal" clause of the November 10 armistice agreement entitles Azerbaijan final approval on entry into Artsakh, has been firmly denied by officials in Stepanakert. Last week, Artsakh Foreign Minister David Babayan insisted that "Artsakh never asks and will never ask for Azerbaijan's

permission for anyone's entry to the republic."

Minasyan — better known in Armenia by the sobriquet "Mishik" — has been the source of a number of unsubstantiated claims about the cease-fire agreement which ended the war. Virtually all of these have been refuted by authorities in Stepanakert and Yerevan, or exposed as fabrications.

Still, the Artsakh MFA did eventually issue an update to its entry procedures last week. Citing "security reasons," visa applications will also be shared with the Russian peacekeeping contingent. The entire process is expected to take up to three business days. Previously, visa applications could either be submitted at the representation in Yerevan or in person at the MFA in Stepanakert upon arrival.

Babayan explained that these temporary security measures were a response to what he claims to be the continued threat of foreign Islamist fighters in the area who had been flown in by Turkey during the war. Several Armenian civilians have been abducted by Azerbaijani forces since the ceasefire took effect, including the Lebanese-born Maral Najarian, who remains in captivity despite international pressure for her release.

Speaking to the *Mirror-Spectator* on Tuesday, February 16, a representative of the Artsakh consular office in Yerevan acknowledged several incidents in which foreign journalists were initially denied entry into Artsakh by Russian peacekeepers, adding that they were all eventually let in "once the situation had been clarified."

This account echoes earlier comments by Artsakh Presidential Chief of Staff Artak Beglaryan that such cases were the results of miscommunication between the Artsakh MFA and Russian peacekeepers. Asked about an incident in which a foreign journalist of Armenian origin was barred entry into Artsakh while a local news crew travelling with him was allowed to continue reporting unimpeded, Beglaryan



Russian peacekeepers entering Karvajar on November 13 (photo by Raffi Elliott)

blamed delays in transmitting updated lists of visa approvals to the peacekeepers manning the checkpoints, stating "The names of these journalists weren't transmitted to the Russians because the system was still being introduced." Beglaryan insists that the issue has since been resolved.

The Artsakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs says its visa application procedure remains open to

international journalists provided that proper press accreditation is presented. However, the representative could not guarantee that reporters wouldn't be turned away at the border even with the proper documentation being granted. "The best way to avoid potential mishaps is to submit applications sooner rather than later to ensure that the lists are updated before the journey," the Ministry said.



Former Royal Marine Eric Ghessen

Former Royal Marine Examines Human Side of Karabakh War in New Doc

LONDON (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Royal Marine-turned-war correspondent and filmmaker Emile Ghessen has filmed a new documentary about the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Titled "45 Days, The Fight For A Nation," the documentary is told from the Armenian perspective and is set to be released in the spring, Forces reports.

Ghessen met soldiers who took part in the war and spent time with families who have lost loved ones to the conflict in Karabakh. Surprised by the content of the documentary, the journalist said it was unlike any he had made before.

"[It] surprised me compared to my last two in the sense that I've seen more of the human side of the war, I've done three tours of Afghanistan, of Asia, of Iraq — war's war. I've seen action all

over the world, filming as well. The shooting of guns doesn't really interest me; what interests me now is the human stories of the war," he says.

Ghessen explained how deep the roots of this war ran for those directly affected, with many of the volunteers having very little combat experience: "We've got grandmas [whose] husbands and their sons fought in the last war, now their grandsons are fighting in this war."

Martial law was declared so a lot of volunteers went to join the army.

"So, it's not just professional soldiers or guys doing their two-year national service. There were a lot of civilians that were put in uniform and off they went."

The documentary will be released later this year.

UK Minister for European Neighbourhood Morton Pays First Official Visit to Armenia

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — UK Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas Wendy Morton made her first visit to Armenia on February 16, visiting the Yerevan and regional center of Vanadzor, British Embassy Yerevan reported.

During this two day visit, the minister will officially open the new British Embassy office in Yerevan with Deputy Foreign Minister Avet Adonts, as a symbol of the strengthening links between the people of the UK and Armenia.

The minister will also welcome a new partnership between the UK, UNICEF and the UN Development Programme, which will support the economic and social resilience of communities in Vayots Dzor, Gegharkunik and Syunik provinces that have been particularly affected by COVID-19 and the recent conflict. The UK hopes to develop this partnership to identify how to enhance stability in these remote regions over the longer term.

Ahead of the visit, Morton said: "The UK is committed to our enduring friendship with Armenia. I look forward to meeting Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan and President Armen Sarkissian to discuss the many opportunities for our countries to work together to tackle global challenges such as climate change and Covid-19."

"The UK stands ready to help Armenia build back greener following the conflict and the effects of Covid-19. We welcome Armenia's ambitious commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and look forward to helping Armenia realise its leadership potential in tackling climate change ahead of COP26."

The UK has been pleased to support Armenia's impressive progress in democratic and economic reforms and combatting corruption in recent years. Minister Morton will high-

light how our countries can work together to drive further progress, including through measures to help small businesses grow and supporting Armenia's National Assembly as it becomes a more modern and transparent institution.

Morton will meet Ayvazyan and will reiterate the UK's support for the work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in



UK Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas Wendy Morton

Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-chairs towards a real and lasting peace settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia has the opportunity to build a strong and long-lasting peace in the wider Caucasus region, including through increasing the involvement of women in peace-building initiatives.

Strengthening women's participation in politics and the business world is vital for Armenia's development and prosperity. Morton will visit Vanadzor Technology Centre to meet female entrepreneurs and women involved in business and innovation in Armenia, who the UK has supported and empowered through its Good Governance Fund.



INTERNATIONAL

Turkey Rejects US Call to Free Jailed Philanthropist Osman Kavala

By Amberin Zaman

ISTANBUL (Al-Monitor) — Turkey rebuffed on Feb. 11 a US call to free Osman Kavala, a Turkish businessman and philanthropist, saying the United States had no right to tell the Turkish judiciary how to conduct its affairs. But amid all the bluster, Ankara's nerves are growing increasingly frayed in the face of the frosty tone espoused by the newly installed Joe Biden administration. A senior Turkish official told Al-Monitor, "We are feeling increasingly squeezed." He declined to elaborate.

The State Department called the charges against Kavala "specious" in an unprompted and standalone February 10 statement crafted to convey its seriousness. The statement referred to the European Court of Human Rights' rulings calling for Kavala's immediate release.

It also mentioned US academic Henri Barkey, who along with Kavala, has been indicted on bogus charges of espionage and conspiring to overthrow the government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Barkey is in the United States and is being tried in absentia.

"Taken with the other public statements, this administration is sending a clear signal about the need for Turkey to address rule of law issues. It's challenging Turkey to return to being the kind of country that the United States wants to work with," said a Western diplomat speaking not for attribution.

"The No. 1 priority issue for this administration is rebuilding its alliances and partnerships that it felt were undermined by the last one. That will mean a more coherent and consistent approach between the US and its European allies toward Turkey," the diplomat added.

The tougher approach has manifested itself in multiple ways. Secretary of State Tony Blinken has yet to call his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Çavusoglu. Erdogan's entourage is frantically lobbying the White House for a call with Biden. The highest level contact between Ankara and Washington so far was between national security adviser Jake Sullivan and Erdogan's chief adviser, Ibrahim Kalin. The White House's readout of the exchange was hardly effusive.

The State Department has rebuked Turkey twice already — once over the government's brutal repression of protestors at Istanbul's Bogazici University, and over its anti-LGBT rhetoric surrounding the demonstrations. On February 4, State Department spokesman Ned Price took aim at Turkey's Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu over his assertion that the United States was behind the July 2016 attempt to overthrow Erdogan. "These remarks and other unfounded and irresponsible claims of US responsibility for events in Turkey are inconsistent with Turkey's status as a NATO ally and strategic partner of the United States," he said.

While Ankara was bracing for change after four years of being coddled by Donald Trump, the alacrity with which the Biden administration has shifted course appears to have caught Erdogan and his lieutenants off guard. "Erdogan was hoping to make some kind of a deal with the Biden administration whereby he would act more dovish internationally and continue to get away with democratic backsliding at home," said Berk Esen, an assistant professor of political science at Sabanci University. "It won't happen."

The government's recent maneuvers include ill-received overtures to Israel. It's also talking of reopening borders and establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia after helping Azerbaijan clobber its eastern neighbor with the help of Syrian mercenaries in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Turkey's main opposition parties have yet to comment on Washington's new language. The Kurds, however, have aired dismay at the Biden administration's failure to address the plight of the ever-swelling population of Kurdish politicians and activists who are behind bars.

Giran Ozcan, the Washington representative of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the third-largest party in parliament, conceded that "the strength of its statement on Kavala was very good." However, "It fails to mention democratically elected officials who have been imprisoned and deprived of their right to represent their constituents. It seems the State Department is intentionally disregarding Kurdish elected officials," Ozcan told Al-Monitor. "They have completely neglected Demirtas and have never mentioned him at all."

Ozcan was referring to former HDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtas, who has been in prison since October 2016 in yet another example of politically motivated charges. In December, the European Court of Human Rights, whose rulings are binding for Turkey, called for his immediate release. Turkey refused to comply and has brought a fresh case against him.

"The administration has set a tone of being interested in such issues. The Kurds should feel encouraged. The administration has only been in office for three weeks," the Western diplomat said in response to Ozcan's comments.

The Biden administration's most immediate demand is for Turkey to get rid of its newly acquired Russian S-400 missiles. Should it fail to do so, further sanctions may follow those that were slapped on Turkey's state defense procurement agency in December under the Countering America's Adversaries Act.

After months of grandstanding, Ankara is starting to blink. Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar signaled in an interview with the daily Hurriyet that Turkey could cede ground if Washington were to ax its partnership with a Syrian Kurdish militia that has links to Kurdish rebels fighting Turkey.

But Washington is in no mood for compromise. US forces will remain in northeast Syria to counter the Islamic State and effectively serve as a shield for the Kurds.

Price said in a Feb. 10 news briefing, "We have and continue to urge Turkey not to retain this [S-400] system. They threaten the security of NATO technology, and they're inconsistent with Turkey's commitment as a NATO ally."

It will not have gone unnoticed in Ankara that Saudi Arabia freed female activist Loujain al-Hathloul after the Biden administration withdrew its support for the kingdom's military campaign against Houthi rebels in Yemen. Earlier this month, the White House said the US president expected Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights record.

Erdogan has bowed to US pressure in the past. In October 2018, Turkey freed North Carolina pastor Andrew Brunson, who was being held on a cocktail of outlandish terror charges, after Trump threatened "large sanctions." Similarly, Turkey freed Turkish German journalist Deniz Yucel in 2018 when German Chancellor Angela Merkel threatened similar punishment.

A federal case against Turkey's state lender Halkbank for helping Iran evade billions of dollars in US economic sanctions is set to resume next month, creating further pressure on Ankara to redress its behavior. Will it?

Former Syria envoy Jim Jeffrey contended in an interview with Al-Monitor that "when pressed, Erdogan is a rational actor." Jeffrey added, "Erdogan will not back down until you show him teeth. You have to be willing, when Erdogan goes too far, to really clamp down on him and make sure he understands this in advance."



A journalist stands in front of a poster featuring jailed philanthropist Osman Kavala during a press conference of his lawyers on Oct. 31, 2018. Kavala was arrested by Turkish authorities and has yet to be charged with an offense. Photo by OZAN KOSE/AFP via Getty Images.

International News

Iran Entrepreneurs Say They Want to Do Business in Armenia

TEHRAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Iranian entrepreneurs are interested in doing business in Armenia, according to a statement provided by Armenia's Embassy in Tehran this week.

Ambassador Artashes Toumanian on Sunday, February 14 hosted Saeed Pourabadi, Head of the Chamber of commerce in North Khorasan, and a number of entrepreneurs from province.

The guests said they were interested in doing investments and running economic activities in Armenia, the Embassy said.

After Toumanian briefed the guests on the business environment and the economic specifics of Armenia, the two sides agreed to arrange a trip for the representatives of N. Khorasan Chamber of commerce and the entrepreneurs in near future.

Armenian Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan and Iran's Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Alireza Razm Hosseini signed a memorandum of understanding on January 23. Kerobyan said later that as a result of negotiations with the Iranian envoy to Armenia, the countries were willing to increase trade to \$1b within six months.

Russian De-miners Cleared Nearly 1343,3 Hectares of Land in Nagorno Karabakh

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The specialists of the International Mine Action Center of the Russian defense ministry continue demining works in the territory of Nagorno Karabakh, the Russian defense ministry reported on February 11.

The engineering units of the Russian peacekeeping forces have already cleared nearly 1343,3 hectares of land, 420,8 km long roads. 24,268 explosive devices were found and neutralized.

In the course of demining and clearing the territory of explosive objects in Nagorno Karabakh, Russian peacekeepers use modern robotic systems.

EU-Armenia Accord Set To Take Effect

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — European Union member states have completed the ratification of the EU's Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia which was signed more than three years ago.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry said the EU notified Yerevan about the "completion of the ratification process" on Wednesday, February 11.

"The Agreement will fully enter into force on March 1, 2021," the ministry announced in a statement.

The agreement commits the Armenian authorities to carrying out political reforms that will democratize the country's political system and boost human rights protection.

The CEPA was signed in November 2017 as a less ambitious substitute for an Association Agreement which Armenian and EU negotiators nearly finalized in 2013. Then Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan scuttled the signing of that agreement with his unexpected decision to seek his country's membership in a Russian-led trade bloc.

The Foreign Ministry described the CEPA as a "solid legal basis" for deepening Armenia's ties with the EU in a wide range of areas.

"The effective implementation of the Agreement will bring tangible results to our citizens by promoting democracy, political, economic and social stability through extensive reforms and will over time have a positive impact on the

welfare of our citizens," read its statement.

Arman Yeghoyan, the chairman of the Armenian parliament committee on European integration, likewise expressed confidence on February 12 that the accord will produce "qualitative changes" in Armenia's relationship with the EU.

Yeghoyan said that although the CEPA makes no reference to visa liberalization it will facilitate the eventual lifting of the EU's visa requirements for Armenian citizens.

Community News

Diocesan Clergy Marks Saints Ghevontiantz Day

NEW YORK — Clergy throughout the Eastern Diocese marked a holy day with special relevance to their vocation and the trials of the past year, on the Feast of the Ghevontiantz Saints, observed on February 9, 2021.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan presided over the service hosted by St. Leon Church of Fair Lawn, NJ, which is itself named for St. Ghevont (Latinized as Leontius or Leon). Attending were pastors and deacons from the New York-New Jersey and Mid-Atlantic regions.

St. Leon pastor Fr. Diran Bohajian celebrated the Divine Liturgy, and Fr. Hakob Gevorgyan, pastor of Holy Trinity Church of Cheltenham, Penn., delivered a homily connecting the story of the 5th-century Ghevontian martyrs with the heroic sacrifices of countless young Armenians in the recent war in Artsakh. Among the thousands of lives claimed last year, he noted, were young priests and deacons serving on the front lines of the conflict.

The historical St. Ghevont played a critical role in the drama of the Vartanantz war. On the eve of battle, Ghevont celebrated the Divine Liturgy, conferred the sacrament of Holy Communion on the soldiers, and baptized those who had not yet been received into the church. His stirring sermon assured the soldiers that their mystical union with Christ would survive even physical violence and death.

He remains one of the great exemplars of the Armenian priesthood, remembered for his rare courage and resolution at the Battle of Avarayr.

To conclude the service, the Primate offered some brief reflections of his own. “Only a few of us are gathered physically in this sanctuary



Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan, center, at the service hosted by St. Leon Church.

today,” he began, “but our hearts are joined with our clergy brothers, wherever they are, throughout our Diocese and the world.”

He went on: “We remember our Catholicos Karekin II, and pray for the unbelievable burden that rests on his shoulders. Like St. Ghevont and his companions — who gave themselves fully to God’s will — we pray that our Catholicos, bishops, and clergy will give themselves fully to God.”

“Doing God’s will is not always about smiling and happiness and fellowship; it also involves pain and suffering,” he observed. “We will be reminded of that later this week as we honor St. Vartan: another example of giving oneself fully to God’s will.”

“And on Sunday, the first day of Lent this year falls on Dyurnuntarach: the Feast of the Lord’s Presentation to the Temple. It celebrates the complete self-giving of our Lord, in love and service, to a goal which is much higher than any of us. Let us be inspired by it, so that we can live with hope through the suffering and sickness of these days...”

Addressing his brother clergy, Bishop Daniel concluded: “Through all the anger, pain, and tears, let us recommit ourselves to the church and to our service to God. The ultimate battle has already been won, by the Lord Jesus Christ. What remains for us is to say ‘Amen,’ and to confirm that we are God’s servants. With courage, may we be emboldened to say, ‘*Park kez Asdzvadz, park kez, haghakus amenayni Der park kez*’: ‘Glory to you God, glory to you, in all things, glory to you.’”



The bracelet designed by Regina Oswald featuring the ancient Armenian coin

Designer Regina Oswald Launches Bracelet to Benefit COAF

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif. — Designer Regina Oswald, has partnered with the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) to launch an exclusive bracelet with proceeds donated to the charity.

Triggered by recent events, the new designer looked to create a piece of jewelry to symbolize the longevity of Armenia and serve as a reminder of the region’s rich history.

The bracelet, made of garnet, carries a replica of one of the most historic symbols in history, an authentic ancient Armenian coin of the Byzantine Empire. The coin originated between 814-820 A.D. and was purchased by the designer years ago from an antique dealer. She had held onto the coin, with the intention to one day make a piece of jewelry that would celebrate her heritage and realized now was the perfect time.

The bracelet, made from 6-millimeter round garnet beads, is set with a sterling silver charm molded from an authentic ancient Armenian coin and comes with a Certificate of Authenticity.

Oswald says, “It has always been my hope to design something beautiful with this rare coin and I am honored to partner with COAF to launch this bracelet to remember our ancestors while helping future generations succeed.”

“We at COAF greatly appreciate this partnership which will help improve the lives of children across villages in Armenia during these difficult times. The unique bracelet’s ancient Armenian coin design is a testament to Armenia’s rich history and the Diaspora’s strong links to its past and present,” said COAF Senior Director of Development Haig Boyadjian.

Oswald is primarily a clothing designer. Her eponymous clothing line represents the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, and the culmination of a journey back to herself.

She is of Armenian descent and while growing up in Uzbekistan, she discovered her talent for design.



Designer Regina Oswald

see JEWELRY, page 10

Assembly’s Trustees Meeting Features Armenia’s Ambassador to the US, Artsakh’s Foreign Minister

WASHINGTON — The biennial Board of Trustees meeting of the Armenian Assembly of America took place on Saturday, January 30. Trustees, board members, state chairs and staff participated in the two-hour online session, which featured remarks from Armenia’s Ambassador to the United States Varuzhan Nersesyan and Artsakh’s Foreign Minister David Babayan, who provided insights on current conditions.

The Assembly leadership also provided updates and reports about the organization’s activities.

A moment of silence was observed to honor the lives of Armenian soldiers and civilians, who made the ultimate sacrifice during the war, and Armenian Assembly and community members who passed away in the pandemic year, as well as for the safe return of Armenian prisoners of war.

Assembly Co-Chairs Van Krikorian and Anthony Barsamian paid special attention to the subject of jihadist mercenaries, transported by Turkey and financed by Azerbaijan, to fight against the Armenian people in the Artsakh war. These actions by Turkey and Azerbaijan violate the letter and spirit of US anti-terrorism laws.

Nersesyan expressed his gratitude to the Assembly and to the diaspora, in general, for its productive humanitarian fundraising efforts, which, he repeated, are “immensely appreciated” by the people and governments of Armenia and Artsakh, and underlined the importance of transparency and accountability. He also underscored the unity and determination demonstrated by the Armenian people.

The ambassador explained that the priority of the Armenian Embassy is to strengthen ties with the new administration, highlighting President Biden’s commitment to democracy and human rights, and his long-standing support of Armenian Genocide affirmation.

Despite the current challenges, Nersesyan shared that Armenia and Artsakh are focused on “healing the wounds of the war” and “restoring our path towards growth and development.” According to the IMF and World Bank, Armenia was on track for double-digit economic growth prior to the war’s outbreak.

“I believe in the strength of our people to move forward in this very difficult situation,” he said. “Armenia’s security is inseparable from the security of Artsakh, and we cannot see the future of Armenia without the future of Artsakh.”

Nersesyan also emphasized the pressing importance of the unconditional release of Armenian prisoners of war and civilian captives currently held by Azerbaijan. He added that the POWs are being kept as “pawns and hostages” by the Azerbaijani government as it mislabels them as “criminals and terrorists.” He deemed this as “unacceptable behavior.”

In his remarks, Babayan reflected on the losses caused by the war and especially the loss of innocent lives. He also encouraged continued close cooperation with the diaspora.

Babayan noted the important issue of extending support to the native population remaining in Artsakh, as they face enormous challenges and urgent humanitarian needs.

Upon the conclusion of the briefings, Barsamian thanked Babayan and Nersesyan for their service to Artsakh and Armenia, respectively. Krikorian emphasized that “now is the time to stand up and rebuild.”

Barsamian strongly concurred and again thanked all of the Assembly’s supporters, donors and activists.

see ASSEMBLY, page 9

COMMUNITY NEWS

Boston Medical Group Presents Informational Session on COVID Vaccine

BOSTON – The Armenian American Medical Association of Boston (AAMA) will present a panel discussion program titled “What You Need to Know About the COVID-19 Vaccine: An Informational Session for the Community,” on Sunday, February 28 at 4 p.m. EST.

The program will feature Doctors Armineh Mirzabegian, John Saryan, Lorky Libaridian and Anush Sahakian.

Mirzabegian practices internal medicine at Reliant Medical Group, part of Optum Care.

Saryan is an emeritus staff member specializing in allergies and immunology at Lahey Hospital and Medical Center.

Libaridian practices internal medicine and pediatrics at Cambridge Health Alliance.

Sahakian, who also holds a master’s in public health, practices internal medicine at Acton Medical Associates and Emerson Hospital.

“This session is designed to help people have a better understanding of all the issues around COVID-19 vaccines. As practicing physicians, we are constantly on top of the latest developments, and we hear all the different kinds of questions and concerns our patients have. Our panel will tackle all of these so that people can gain some confidence in making their choices,” Mirzabegian said.

All those interested have to register for the Zoom panel.

All questions need to be emailed in advance.

To find out more or to email questions, write to info@aamaboston.org



Dr. Armineh Mirzabegian

Dr. Lorky Libaridian

Dr. Anush Sahakian

Dr. John Saryan

NAASR to Hold Online Panel Discussion on Armenia’s Future, Security

BELMONT, Mass. – The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) / Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Lecture Series on Contemporary Armenian Issues and the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) will present a panel discussion entitled “Armenia in 3D: Democracy, Security, and Sovereignty in an Uncertain World,” on Sunday, February 21, at 1 p.m. (ET).

The panel will feature the co-editors of and two contributors to the volume *Armenia’s Velvet Revolution: Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World* (I.B. Tauris, 2020): Dr. Laurence Broers, Associate fellow, Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House, and Dr. Anna Ohanyan, Richard B. Finnegan Distinguished Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Stonehill College; and Dr. Kristin Cavoukian, University of Toronto Mississauga, Department of Political Science, and Richard Giragosian, founding director of the Regional Studies Center (RSC), Yerevan, Armenia.

The panel will be moderated by Marc A. Mamigonian, NAASR Director of Academic Affairs.

Few events in modern Armenian history have generated as much excitement world-wide as the Velvet Revolution in 2018, led by Nikol Pashinyan. Peacefully ushering out a corrupt regime and promising reforms and increased democratization, Armenia appeared as an exception to a global trend towards authoritarianism.

This distinguished panel will present the publication *Armenia’s Velvet Revolution* as well as discuss the promise and the peril facing Armenia’s democratic consolidation, in light of the new post-war realities in the country and the region.

The discussion will be livestreamed on YouTube or via Zoom.

To view live on YouTube, no registration is required. Go to NAASR’s channel at the start of the program or watch afterwards at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies>.

To attend on Zoom registration is required. Zoom attendees can submit written questions via Zoom which will be asked as time permits.

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

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OBITUARY

Aram A. Jeknavorian

Active in Armenian Issues, Army Veteran

CHELMSFORD, Mass. — Aram Abraham Jeknavorian, father, grandfather, brother, Armenian activist and pillar of Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, passed away peacefully with his family by his side, on Thursday, February 4, 2021, at Southern New Hampshire Medical Center after a brief illness. He was 81.

The son of the late Abraham and the late Flora (Keukjian) Jeknavorian, he was born

the Parish Council for many years as chairman and secretary, and chaired both the annual bazaar and picnic on multiple occasions.

He was a distinguished member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Armenian National Committee where he was awarded the Vahan Cardashian Award for his activism and dedication to the Armenian cause.

He also actively participated in the Armenian Monument Committee and Merrimack Valley Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee. He was also a member of the Armenian American Veterans of Lowell and Pelham Post #100, American Legion serving as Commander of both organizations.

His Armenian heritage was a great source of pride to him, second only to his family, especially his grandchildren, taking them to church every Sunday meant the world to him.

He also led a flourishing career in the chemical industry co-founding Coating Systems, pioneering many innovative technologies, and co-authoring several publications.

His survivors include his son, Aram G. Jeknavorian and his wife, Kerri, of Pelham, NH; his grandchildren, Madison, Emily, and William-Henry all of Pelham; his sister, Armig Ferris of Nashua, NH; his brothers, Armen Jeknavorian and his wife, Sossy, of Chelmsford, and Dr. Ara Jeknavorian and his wife, Milka, of Chelmsford; as well as many nieces, nephews, and cousins. All of Aram's family was always very important to him, and he will be greatly missed.

He was predeceased by his former wife, Helene (Pelletier) Jeknavorian and his sister, Rose Zartarian and her husband, the late Garbis Zartarian.

Following Covid-19 social distance guidelines, Funeral Services for Aram were held privately at Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, with the participation of Very Rev. Simeon Odabashian, Vicar of the Eastern Diocese and Rev. Father Stepan Baljian, pastor of St. Gregory Armenian Church, No. Andover. A touching message from Father Khachatur was read at the service. When restrictions are lifted, a celebration of his life will be arranged in Aram's honor.



April 10, 1939, in Lowell, and was raised in the Highlands Section of the city. He was educated in the local schools, graduating from Lowell High School. He then attained a bachelor's degree in plastics engineering from the Lowell Technological Institute.

He served with the United States Army in the 4th Armored Division from 1962 until his Honorable Discharge in 1964.

He was a long-time member of Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church. He served on



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Lucy Mirigian

Oldest Resident of San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO (*San Francisco Chronicle*) — Lucy Mirigian, who was believed to be the oldest person in San Francisco, has died.

"She wasn't really sick," her daughter, Sonia Mirigian-Koujakian, said. "She died of being 114."

Mirigian, who lived with her daughter and son-in-law in the same Balboa Park house she bought in 1950, died Friday, February 12 morning surrounded by her family.

She lived a full life, her family said, but didn't really make news until the US government decided in 2017, without any apparent proof, that she was already dead and no longer entitled to receive her \$377-a-month government pension.

The government said she had not responded to letters; Mirigian said she never got them.

Failing eyesight meant that Mirigian could best enjoy Giants games if her daughter put the TV very close to her face and then provided a running play-by-play. Her primary concession to age was switching not long ago from 500-piece jigsaw puzzles to 60-piece jigsaw puzzles, which she worked at the kitchen table, often with a glass of wine alongside.



Lucy Mirigian, left, with San Francisco Mayor London Breed (Photo courtesy of the *San Francisco Chronicle*)

Siranoosh (Sally) Martin

Gifted with Zest for Joy, Travel and Family

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Siranoosh (Sally) Martin passed away peacefully on January 27, 2021, at age 95. She was born in Cambridge to Mardiros and Vartanoush Avakian. She was the mother of Glenn Herosian and his wife Karen of Belmont; and grandmother to Carly, Aria, and Alexis Herosian. She was pre-deceased by brothers Haig, Jack and his wife, Ozzie, George, sister Siranoush Avakian, and best friend, Mary Hagopian.



She was a sociable and ambitious woman. She excelled in real estate and for many years had her own brokerage company in Cambridge.

Following her family's tradition, she was a long-time member of the Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge where she taught Sunday School and in the church's Armenian School. Always creative, when Sally could not find texts to use in her language classes, she deftly created an illustrated book for her students featuring a witty, Armenian-speaking alligator.

She always sought new adventures and began skiing in the White Mountains in the early 1950s. She wrote glowing letters to her friends describing the mountain views and the thrill of a new sport coming from Europe.

She was also an early advocate of the benefits of Yoga, and in the mid-1970s trekked across a newly-opened mainland China.

Later, Sally moved to Newport, RI, where she enjoyed living by the ocean. She graciously

hosted many family holidays and dinner parties at her beloved home, "Villa Rosa."

Talented in art and photography, Sally spent a year attending Christie's Fine Arts Classes in London and organized her own "Grand Tour" across Europe visiting museums, buying art and even making rubbings of medieval tombstones. The following years took her on safari to Kenya and South Africa, where she fell in love

with the animals she photographed and the art of modern Africa. Sally filled her home with a unique blend of African paintings and colorful Chinese furniture and at age 70, she enrolled at the Rhode Island School of Design to continue her studies in the graphic arts.

Sally relished her role as the family matriarch, whether dispensing wisdom to her family or teaching them how to make chocolate boorma and cheoreg for special holidays.

In addition to her son, Glenn and his family, Sally is survived by her sister-in-law, Doris Avakian, and by nephews Robert, James, William, Andrew, Richard and Brian Avakian as well as many cousins.

As she wished, Sally was buried with her parents in a private ceremony at the Cambridge Cemetery. Sally enjoyed a long and eclectic life that enabled her to live in grand fashion, while staying true to herself with humor and sincerity appreciated by all who knew her.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Academics Discuss Approach to Race and Armenian-American Studies During Virtual Meeting

RACE, from page 1

it is “racist” while in California there is currently a mandate for a model curriculum to be created by next month, for Ethnic Studies to be included in K-12 schools as well as colleges.

Abajian’s discussion of school curriculum was difficult to follow for someone not acquainted with the contours of the debate in California and Arizona. Abajian did make a point about Armenians in regard to Ethnic Studies. The Ethnic Studies curriculum initially focused on the four categories of Black, Native American, Asian and Chicano. Because Middle Eastern ethnicities were not included, some political groups who were opposed to the Ethnic Studies curriculum had claimed that the Armenian community, among others, did not support Ethnic Studies. Abajian’s colleagues, in concert with the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), protested this categorization, saying that Armenians support Ethnic Studies but want to be included in it. Abajian implored listeners to support the Ethnic Studies inclusion in state curricula, so that “students can see themselves in the curriculum.”

The other discussants appeared to be concerned with a wholly different issue: the intersection of Armenian Studies and racial issues in America. Several topics consistently were raised, one of which was the status of Armenians in America as “legally white” which was defined in the Supreme Court case, *US vs. Cartozian* (1925). The fact that Armenians are supposedly “white” in the US conflicts with experiences of racism many Armenians have faced in this country. Sophia Armen discussed the *Cartozian* case at length. The landmark case defined Armenians as legally white in an era when “Orientals,” which often included Middle Eastern ethnicities, were not allowed to become naturalized citizens. The members of the panel discussed that not only was “whiteness” imposed on the Armenians by the US government, but that the Armenian community was rallying to gain this status at the time, to avoid the imminent threat of mass deportation. Therefore, racial categories were not only a top down construct but the people themselves also participated in that construction. (It should be noted, as one of the discussants did, that the star witness at the trial, Jewish American anthropologist Franz Boas, declared in his testimony that “race was a social construct.”) Nevertheless, many Armenians at the time as well as today have experienced racism in the United States. Because of this, the definition of Armenians as white sometimes seems like a technicality, stemming from a Supreme Court case that only made such a declaration for the purposes of now-defunct immigration laws, and this definition raises questions and problems for defining Armenians’ experience in the United States in regard to race.

Armen also discussed the foundations of

Ethnic Studies, stating that the field is rooted in questions of “power and race” and that it talks about “narratives that have been erased.” This is important to Armenians, she continued, because we have been bumping up against erasure during our entire experience in the US. She stated that sometimes “we humble Armenians” are shy to place our stories in these contexts. The field of Ethnic Studies is evidence driven and data driven, she says, and while race is a construct it’s also “a social fact.”

Mixed Heritage

Kohar Avakian, a native of Worcester, MA, whose father is Armenian and mother is mixed Black/Native American, and who grew up in an Armenian Protestant church, described how



Kohar Avakian

her exploration of her own complex background led her to the academic questions she has been raising. She described that as a scholar in the American Studies field, one of the problems with the field is that it was originated by white men who “believed in American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny,” and how those early scholars were glorifying the “project of America” which in Avakian’s words “is a settler-colonial project.” Avakian stated that current American Studies scholars are questioning and revising the views of earlier scholars. Avakian also characterized the situation as such where American Studies is considered the larger field that has more authority; while Ethnic Studies is a reaction to the topics not addressed in American Studies and “insists on being heard.”

Thomas Simsarian Dolan pointed out in response that the birth of American Studies had some positive motives. One of the sources of the field at its inception were scholars, who in Simsarian Dolan’s words, essentially said “we’re spending too much time studying Shakespeare.” In other words, American Studies was a reaction to Eurocentrism in the early American academic world. Later, he continued, Ethnic Studies came along as a reaction

to White Supremacy. Simsarian Dolan proffered the idea of a field of “Armenian-American Studies” focusing on the Armenian experience in the United States. Other discussants, such as Abajian, agreed with this, in the sense that when Armenians are mentioned in the school curriculum in this country, it is often only in the context of the Armenian Genocide and immigration to the US as refugees at that time. Since no other issue or story is addressed, Armenians are “perpetual foreigners” in America and as things are presented, “nothing has happened to Armenians since [the Genocide].”

Simsarian Dolan mentioned the experience of Armenians being surveilled by the US gov-



Thomas Dolan

ernment after the Tourian assassination, during the Cold War, and later, in the context of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and other groups in the 1970s and 1980s, as one area of study for “Armenian-American Studies.” He also mentioned the music that has been passed down or developed in the United States since the community was founded and Dr. Sylvia Alajaji’s work on this topic.

American Genocide

One of the topics touched upon by more than one of the discussants was the assertion that the United States is “founded in genocide” of Native Americans. It was mentioned that for these scholars, the “Armenian Genocide” does not just refer to one historical incident (i.e. 1915 or 1895) but that genocide is a “process or structure of power” that is rooted in race in which the Armenians were “constructed” by the Ottoman Government as an “other”, often-times as an “other” which is not indigenous to their native land and therefore whose expulsion is justified. In this sense, the US has constructed the Native American as an “other” in the same way and has subjected the indigenous peoples to ongoing genocide which continues

to this day, as it may similarly be said of Armenians in Turkey today. On this same topic, Avakian poignantly described her discovery of documents detailing the erasure of the tribe of her Native American ancestors and how this has been left out of history books, just as many Armenian experiences have been left out of history books in Turkey. Avakian invoked a popular topic for the panel, viewing Armenians through the lens of indigeneity. (I.e. as Native Americans are the “indigenous” people of North America, Armenians are the “indigenous” people of Anatolia). Avakian feels that this is a fruitful way to make connections between the Armenian experience and the experience of indigenous peoples in North



Sophia Armen

America and across the globe.

One problem, stated several discussants, is that Armenians have been deemed “white” and therefore their experiences of racism in the United States have been erased and ignored. In this context, Armen brought up the *Cartozian* case. She mentioned the moment when *Cartozian* had to present himself before the judge for physical scrutiny (in other words, for the judge to look at him and decide if he was “white”) as one of the poignant moments of the case which showed how vulnerable Armenians were at that time. She stated as well that it is very important to protect and value our oral histories and community history archives, which are valuable to tell the story of America at large. This also played in Simsarian Dolan’s suggestion of a field of “Armenian-American Studies.”

Avakian suggested that this obsession with whiteness continues today and that Armenian Twitter often breaks out into discussions about race and that many members of the Armenian community to this day are obsessed with proving the “whiteness” of Armenians. This is a distraction from more important work we can be doing as a community, says Avakian, and involves the continued use of language that originated in the Eugenics movement.

Simsarian Dolan chimed in that as Armenians, we need to “unlearn” anti-Blackness, but at the same time we need to “deconstruct race.” It was further suggested that as Armenians, we have a particular entrée into that field, due to the unclear racial position and ethnic position we hold in the United States. (See this previous article by Janice Okoomian).

Abajian brought the discussion full circle to the place of Ethnic Studies in the California schools, saying that after being attacked by conservatives, Ethnic Studies has changed into something that could better be referred to as “Multicultural Studies.” Ethnic Studies is rooted in questions of power and race (i.e. what’s known as “Critical Theory”), while Multicultural Studies lacks the important questions and just views every ethnic group from Irish to Armenian to Black in a way that discusses their cultures but not their experiences of racism. Anti-Blackness continues to be the central organizing force of power structures in America, it was claimed, and in our everyday lives we cannot be neutral.

The panel discussion was moderated by Mashinka Hakopian of Los Angeles.

Assembly’s Trustees Meeting Features Armenia’s Ambassador to the US, Artsakh’s Foreign Minister

ASSEMBLY, from page 6

Echoing their words, Assembly President and Armenia Tree Project founder, Carolyn Mugar, stressed the importance of remaining committed to addressing the current challenges. “If there ever was a reason why we are here, it is now,” she said.

Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny provided an overview of the Assembly’s 2020 activities and programs – from congressional relations and grassroots advocacy to public affairs and the Assembly’s internship programs – as well as coalition-building in both the Armenian and non-Armenian communities.

Looking ahead, Ardouny announced that the Assembly’s annual National Advocacy Conference will take place virtually in March 2021. “We are reaching out to the new

Administration, as well as to the new Congress. Everyone is motivated and committed to helping the people of Armenia and Artsakh,” Ardouny stated.

Assembly Treasurer Oscar Tatosian reviewed the financial, audit, and endowment reports. Krikorian emphasized that the Assembly’s Board “prides ourselves on our transparency” and noted that the Board requested a full audit from the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund for donations received during the war, including the Assembly’s \$2.1 million contribution to Armenia Fund, Inc.

In closing, Krikorian shared information about Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights, led by David L. Phillips, which recently launched a website that records the atrocities waged against

Artsakh by Azerbaijan and Turkey.

During the meeting, the Trustees confirmed the election of the following Board Members to serve a four-year term effective 1/1/2020 through 12/31/2023: Anthony Barsamian, Van Krikorian, Lisa Kalustian, Ani Yeramyian Speirs, and Talin Yacoubian.

The Assembly’s full Board of Trustees includes Anthony Barsamian, Co-Chairman; Van Krikorian, Co-Chairman; Carolyn Mugar, President; Robert A. Kaloosdian, Counselor; Oscar Tatosian, Treasurer; Bianka Kadian-Dodov, Secretary and Assistant Treasurer; Lisa Kalustian, Assistant Secretary; Aram Gavor; Alex Karapetian; Lu Ann Ohanian; Toros Sahakian; Ani Yeramyian Speirs; Joyce Stein; Annie Simonian Totah; and Talin Yacoubian, along with Mark Momjian as Solicitor.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Designer Regina Oswald Launches Bracelet to Benefit COAF

JEWELRY, from page 6

With the help of her seamstress grandmother, she made clothes for her dolls, and later, for herself – inspired by the styles she saw in Western magazines. At the age of 22, she emigrated to the United States, where she obtained her second bachelor's degree and found success in pharmaceutical sales in New York, but it wasn't until the age of 40 that she was able to reconnect with her true passion: fashion.

Recognizing a need in the market for timeless, luxurious apparel at more affordable prices than most designer brands, Regina drew on the understanding of fit, fine fabrics and couture finishes she had inherited from her grandmother. She began to envision a collection of essential pieces that would help women express their femininity, and with the help of a team of Southern California artisans, she brought this concept to life.

She incorporated the ouroboros – the serpent eating its own tail – into her company logo as a symbol of fertility and renewal. The serpent also holds personal significance: Regina's greatest fear is snakes. It is a reminder that when we live beyond our fears, anything we dream is possible.

Regina Oswald is an exquisitely crafted ready-to-wear line that celebrates the strength, beauty and femininity within every woman. Designed and manufactured in Southern California from the finest imported fabrics, our garments are made for a woman who knows her worth. She understands that luxury speaks through cut and fit—not logos—and that nothing is more becoming than clothing that makes her confidence shine. Chic, elegant, and versatile, Regina Oswald brings a much-needed ease to the wardrobes of career women, busy moms, and community leaders. The line features separates that can adapt to your many moods, or transition from day to



Debet, in the Lori province, where COAF has focused a lot of its work

night with the addition of a simple accessory. Of course, we know that a woman's best accessory is her smile, and whether we are sourcing the softest cashmere or lining our pieces with silk, the pleasure is all yours.

COAF launched its programs in 2004, starting in one village and expanding to 64 villages in Armavir, Aragatsotn, Lori, Gegharkunik,

Shirak, and Tavush regions, impacting more than 107,000 beneficiaries. Since 2015, COAF has developed and started implementing a new vision – SMART Initiative. COAF SMART is designed to advance a generation across the rural world through education that will benefit individuals, societies, and the environment. COAF SMART will become an exemplary model

of development and will be replicated in other regions and communities throughout Armenia. The first COAF SMART Center was inaugurated on May 27, 2018, near the village of Debet, Lori Region.

To purchase the bracelet visit www.reginaoswald.com. For information about COAF, visit www.coaf.org.

ANCA-WR Board of Directors Meets with Rep. Adam Schiff

LOS ANGELES – The Armenian National Committee of America – Western Region (ANCA-WR) Board of Directors, regional and national staff, as well as local ANCA chapter leaders held a productive meeting with Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA-28).

ANCA representatives briefed Congressman Schiff on the latest developments in the region following the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression and 44-day war waged against Artsakh and Armenia with the assistance of terrorist mercenaries from Syria. Chief among the topics discussed were the issues relating to the deployment of immediate U.S. humanitarian aid to Armenia and Artsakh, strict enforcement of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act as well as sanctions and other punitive measures against Turkish and Azerbaijani regimes, and the immediate return of Armenian POWs still in Azerbaijani captivity.

"Congressman Schiff is one of the most knowledgeable and committed legislators we have representing our community in the federal government. He has championed all aspects of the Armenian Cause in Congress and through the media, and we are grateful to enjoy a close partnership with him and his office throughout his 20 year Congressional tenure, especially as he successfully led the passage of the resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide," remarked ANCA-WR Chair Nora Hovsepian, Esq. "We look forward to continuing to work with him moving forward as he continues to advocate for the needs and concerns of his constituents," she continued.

Democratic Vice-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, Schiff has consistently and persistently advocated for justice for the Armenian Genocide, secure and prosperous Artsakh, stronger U.S.-Armenia strategic partnership, and other matters of critical importance to the Armenian-American community. In October 2020, Rep. Schiff called for the formal U.S. recognition of the Republic of Artsakh, in a statement entered into the official Congressional Record. He reiterated his position in a recent op-ed published in the San Francisco Chronicle and co-authored with Rep. Jackie Speier.

In 2003, ANCA Western Region honored him with the prestigious Freedom Award. Schiff was also honored at the 2019 "Thank You Congress!" town hall as the principal co-author of H.Res.296 which passed in an overwhelming 405-11 bipartisan vote.

California Father and Son Help Dzovinar Christian Education Project

BURBANK, Calif. – Dr. Neshan Tabibian and his son Dr. Hagop (James) Tabibian, Associate Professor at the UCLA Medical School, have made a donation of \$35,000 to rehabilitate the Christian Education Building of Dzovinar in Gegharkunik province of Armenia for the use of more than 100 children who daily come for Christian Education instruction.

Fr. Kevork Ter Parseghyan, the parish priest in charge of the project, started teaching the students in a home in Dzovinar. As the number of students grew, the city gave the project a building that needed a great deal of repair to make it usable. Over the years parishioners of St. Paul Armenian Church and other parishes in the United States helped to fund some improvements to the building and the play yard.

Dr. Neshan Tabibian visited Dzovinar and was very impressed with how the children were learning under difficult conditions and as a result he and his son decided to create a modern and safe environment for the children to learn in every day after school. With the \$35,000 contribution that the two made in the past year the pro-

ject truly came to reality. The painting and repair of all floors and walls, windows, electrical, etc. quickly took place. Once that phase was completed, then desks, chairs, computers, bookcases and all other furniture needed to make the classrooms and meeting hall totally usable were placed in the building in their appropriate rooms. Today, each day after school students from elementary to high school age gather to use the facilities to learn more about their Armenian Christian beliefs.



Dr. Hagop (James) Tabibian



Dr. Neshan Tabibian, left, with his son, Dr. Hagop (James) Tabibian



COMMUNITY NEWS

Vartanatz Day at Cathedral Honors Martyrs of Armenia's Past and Present

NEW YORK — With angelic strains of liturgical hymns and the recitation of centuries-old prayers echoing throughout its sanctuary, St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral in New York City held its annual observance of the Feast of Sts. Vartanantz on the evening of February 11, 2021.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan presided over the Divine Liturgy, celebrated by Fr. Mamigon Kiledjian, commemorating Armenian military leader and martyr St. Vartan Mamigonian.

Throughout the entire program, the juxtaposition of the fate of St. Vartan and his men during the Battle of Avarayr in A.D. 451 and the tragic challenges and tribulations facing the Armenian people in the Artsakh region today provided countless parallels between the two events.

Revered for having led the Armenian army at the Battle of Avarayr, St. Vartan and his grossly outnumbered band of Christian Armenian defenders took arms against the pagan Persian empire. Although they were martyred in the tremendous military defeat, the battle is significant in that the Armenian's defense of their Christian faith with their very lives prompted the Persians to eventually abandon their bloody campaign of conversion.



The service at the Cathedral, with, from left, Fr. Mamigon Kiledjian, Kathryn Ashbahian and Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan

A Never-Ending Struggle

"Today we celebrate St. Vartan's courage, spirit and Armenian faith and identity," said Fr. Davit Karamyan, Vicar of St. Vartan Cathedral.

Citing several similarities between the centuries-old Battle of Avarayr and today's conflicts, Karamyan drew a clear line over time connecting both events. "St. Vartan and his dedicated army fought the first battle for Christianity on Armenian land, but it was just the beginning. Today, the Armenian people fight the same battle in Artsakh today."

He further identified those who gave their lives for their Christian beliefs as witnesses of faith and bravery, and referred to the Letter to the Hebrews to illustrate their importance in

green hills of Artsakh were suddenly and cruelly seized with blasts and gunfire. "Like the battle of Avarayr, many saw this as a doomed battle from the start. Despite knowing the ultimate price they would pay, our young soldiers defended their faith, homes, churches and families, just like St. Vartan and his soldiers did."

Ashbahian emphasized that Jesus Christ does not ask of us that which he is not willing to do himself. "Christ gave his own life and sets the example for us. He stormed into battle and fearlessly went to the cross," she concluded. "I have

Tekeyan Cultural Association

A Virtual Lecture Organized by the
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Hasmik Meikhanejian

our Christian faith. "A cloud of witnesses is always above us in the skies in Armenian heaven, including our Armenian martyrs from just a few months ago," he said. "This is how we understand Vartanantz: it is a fight that started, but has never ended."

Unwinnable Battle; Unshakeable Faith

Following the Divine Liturgy, Kathryn Ashbahian of the Eastern Diocese's Youth and Young Adult Ministries department delivered a spiritually moving analysis.

"We are here today celebrating the lives and sacrifices of Vartan Mamigonian and his loyal companions who served as clergy, soldiers and friends in an altogether unwinnable battle."

She described how unwavering fortitude and faith of St. Vartan and his army still shapes, inspires and informs our lives today.

"With many clergy on the battlegrounds of Avarayr, including St. Leon, the soldiers drew strength by fervently praying and reciting the Psalms," she said. "On the morning of the battle, they celebrated the Divine Liturgy, preparing their hearts and minds for the inevitable defeat and impending martyrdom that lay before them with the peace and love of Jesus Christ."

She recalled how many of us watched in horror as the

no doubt in my mind that it was with this strength that our brothers and sisters in Artsakh walked into battle."

In addition to speakers, several musical selections were presented by St. Vartan choir members Hasmik Meikhanejian and Christopher Nazarian. Both sang songs of faith an inspiration by Gomidas Vartabed and Makar Yekmalian, further adding to the emotional and spiritual connection.

At the conclusion of the program, Bishop Daniel shared his closing thoughts, which underscored the significance of St. Vartan and his defense of our Christian faith, and the spirit of our martyred brethren that lives within us all.

— Stephan S. Nigohosian



Christopher Nazarian



Arts & Living

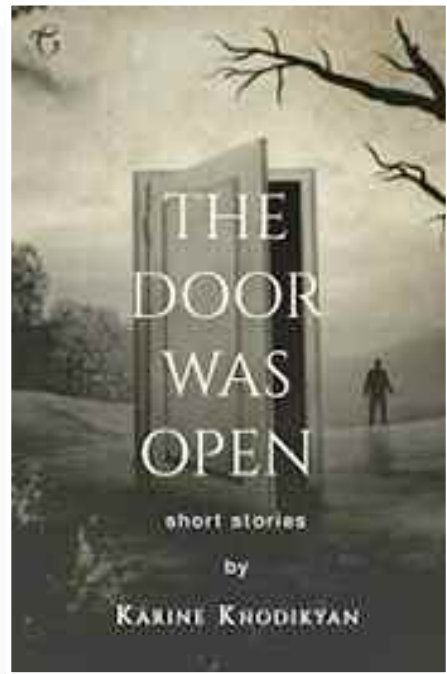
A Critical Exclusive

The Door Was Open: The Uncanny World of Karine Khodikyan

By Christopher Atamian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

Karine Khodikyan’s deft prose accomplishes something quite rare: it plumbs the depths of the human psyche and presents moral quandaries in realistic ways without being didactic. Her wonderfully dark tales limn the boundary between reality and fantasy, the concrete and the fantastic. They recall the theory of the *unheimlich* or uncanny, defined as a character’s response upon encountering something that is at once strange and familiar – usually fear or apprehension. Khodikyan zeroes in on small family units or individuals and spins out from there, describing everything from simple male-female sparring between partners all the way to life-and-death encounters. Yet she never makes a final or definitive statement about an issue or person and often leave stings open ended, sometimes even turning things on their head at the very end. The result is evocative, sometimes scary, always interesting.

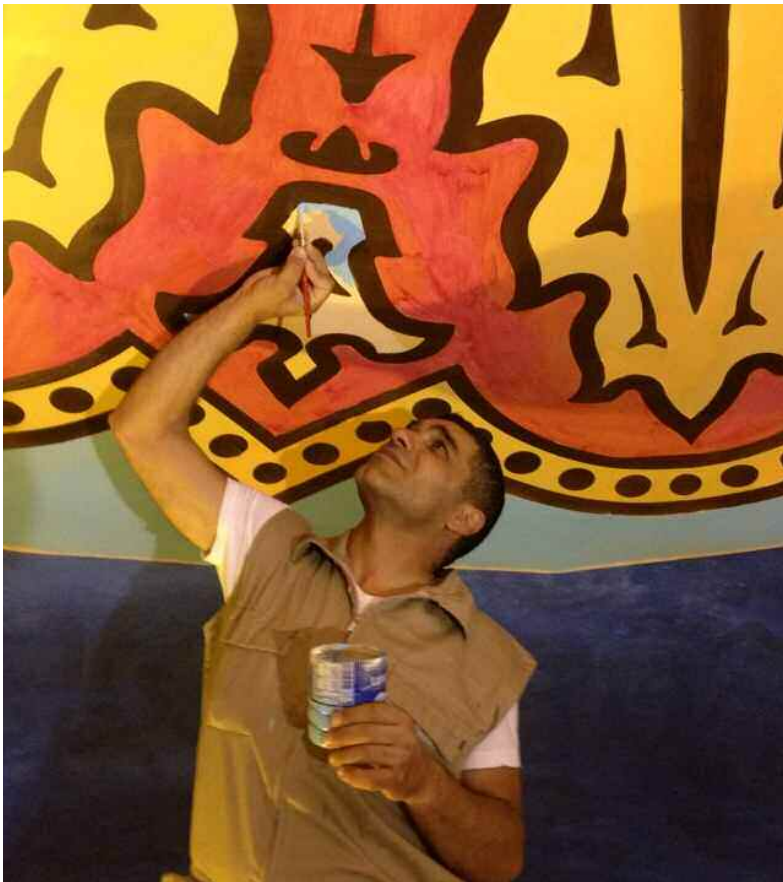
In the title piece “The Door Was Open,” a sexy insomniac thumbs her nose at a neighbor who is in a frenzy regarding a supposed half-naked serial killer who is on the prowl for single women in the neighborhood. Khodikyan sets the mood as the main character comes home and opens her apartment door: “But when she opened the door and the empty darkness of her corridor rapidly embraced her with greed, she would feel like she was growing



acquainted with her own grave.” What a delicious if cold image: darkness that greedily surrounds and envelops you, as in your grave! Yet that very night the woman sees a man profiled against her wall who meets the description: naked above the waist, eyes shining like a cat’s. Does she imagine it? The man observes her (or does he?), and elicits physical responses from her—then disappears? In any case her fear is palpable, the event uncanny and inscrutable.

As in other pieces, Khodikyan cleverly leaves the answers up to the reader. Her constant ally: a wry sense of humor. When her frantic neighbor first insists that the woman take precautions, the main character asks deadpan: “Why would a serial killer come here?” (italics mine), as if there were no one worth attacking in her building or its surroundings. As in many of her stories, Khodikyan’s characters have no names: they are simply “he” or “she” or “the woman,” “the mother” or “my son.” The author thus universalizes her characters by simultaneously taking away this most important part of their identity.

see REVIEW, page 15



Harout Bastajian painting

Harout Bastajian Combined Passion of Adventure and Art

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / KESERWAN (Lebanon) — Haroutioun Isack Bastajian, 47, studied at the Armenian Evangelical High School, Ashrafieh,

Beirut, from kindergarten to graduation. Later he studied technical science in interior design at International Institute in Jounieh, Keserwan, as well interior design at Notre Dame University in Zouk, Keserwan and Islamic Art at Lebanese American University in Beirut. After working at Raffi Institute (with sculptor Raffi Tokatlian) in the field of decorative art works, in 1996 he founded The Art of Mosques establishment, being its president, executor, and artist, dealing with the decoration of houses, villas, palaces and mosques. Harout himself makes the decorative painting and ornamentation (gilding, calligraphy, patina, stone and wood imitations). He lives in Mount Lebanon, married to Alina Novikova and has three daughters and three sons.

Dear Harout, in Beirut — one of my favorite places, which I have visited three times and wish to visit again and again — I have visited the Mohammad al-Amin mosque, a very remarkable building. At that time, I did not know that its art-work was commissioned by our compatriot.

The Mohammed al Amine mosque is a landmark in the center of Beirut, since its construction in 2005; it changed the picture of Beirut standing beside the St. George Cathedral; it became the true picture of coexistence of religions in Lebanon. As an Armenian whenever I find a compatriot who has achieved in any success, I feel moved and proud and I am sure this is the exact feeling most of us Armenians have all around the globe.

And also I am sure it should be something unusual that a non-Muslim person works for this very typical Islamic art. How religious people react on it?

I love my career. I work as an artist to provide the best I can and that is always my main concern and dedication; frankly not only in Lebanon where religions coexist, but anywhere outside Lebanon I have never ever had a problem with my religion. When asked how come a Christian is decorating Muslim mosques, my sincere answer will be: “God works in mysterious ways, bringing us together to contribute to His house of worship.”

Since my early childhood I have been interested in dangerous sports and art, I trained in both mountaineering and arts, being a professional paragliding pilot with no fear of heights and love of art. I combined my passion of adventure and art in huge projects.

I also have seen many photos of your decorative paintings and ornamentations in mosques. In order to master this art, I assume one should know very well not only traditional Islamic art, but also philosophy, psychology, etc.

I am fortunate enough to be born in Lebanon, in the Middle East, the cradle of civilizations and religions. Unlike what the mass media shows of the unfortunate ugly picture of war and terror, the earth is full of good people. We live with each

see ADVENTURE, page 13

Remembering My Uncle Lud

By Ruth Bedevian

My Uncle Lud was larger than life. There is no other way to describe my father’s older brother than as a genuinely gifted, good man. He was born to survivors of the Hamidian massacres, Shahpaz and (Haji) Soghme Shahbazian. Lud emerged a beacon in the second-generation of Armenian-Americans who made valuable contributions and noteworthy achievements.

Shahpaz was fond of German names and for whatever reason, he wanted his first-born son to be named Ludwig, quite an unusual name for



Lud Shahbazian

an Armenian boy born in 1902. Perhaps Shahpaz had a premonition because Lud proved to be unusual – singular – superior – distinctive – extraordinary!!

Lud was the pillar of the family in his mother’s eyes. Haji Soghme, the major breadwin-

ner in the family, feared losing her ability to work as

she advanced in age and illness. She depended on Lud who was very appreciative of her sacrifices and sensitive to her long suffering.

Haji Soghme had scrimped together a savings of \$800. She gave the sum to Khoren, Lud’s older half-brother, to help him make a success of his small elastic braid manufacturing business. There were no other savings left to send Lud to college who so deserved higher education. However, by 1920 Lud had landed a job at the *Hudson Dispatch* (a newspaper that served Hudson County residents for more than 125 years and folded in the 1980s due to changing times). College would become a fading dream for this 18-year-old whose guardian angel had other plans for him.

A Career Begins to Blossom

Boxing was at its height of popularity in these years and newspapers, magazines are radio generously informed the public. Lud drew upon his natural artistic talent, drawing a series of cartoons of the famous 1921 boxing fight between Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier. It made history, becoming the first fight to generate \$1,000,000 in revenues. He submitted these caricatures to Jackie Farrell for approval to print and the rest is history. Two years later Farrell left the Dispatch to work for the *New York Daily News* and Lud was elevated to Farrell’s position as sports editor, a profession that he would keep for 56 successful years. Lud’s columns were unique among newspapers in the country because he accompanied his reporting with descriptive cartoons.

Some of the celebrities he encountered were yet to become celebrities. In charge of the Annual Golden Gloves Boxing Match that the newspaper sponsored (1937 to 1942), Lud refused an aspiring young singer an opportunity to sing the National Anthem at the opening events. He did so because the Hoboken youth worked as a paperboy for the rival newspaper, the *Jersey Journal*. That refusal did not discourage the young man. He, too, succeeded, singing his way to becoming a Hollywood legend as “Ol’ Blue Eyes” – Frank Sinatra.

Lud was fortunate to have had the mentorship of the editor of the *Hudson Dispatch*, Haddon Ivins. He so respected him that in addition to naming his only son after Ivins, he

see REMEMBERING, page 14



ARTS & LIVING

Vartanantz Day Concert Raises More than \$2,500 for Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund

BAYSIDE, N.Y. — On Thursday, February 11, the Armenian Church of the Holy commemorated Vartanantz Day — the day when all Armenians around the world honor and remember General Vartan Mamigonian and his heroic soldiers who perished in the Battle of Avarayr.

On this occasion, Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan, the pastor of Holy Martyrs, celebrated Badarak in the morning and prayed for the souls of these Armenian heroes. In the evening, a special Vartanantz Day concert was held live on Facebook to honor the Armenian soldiers from another battle, the Artsakh War.

The concert, which featured the talents of Holy Martyrs students from the Language School and Day School and musical performances from parishioners, helped raise funds for the Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund. The program, narrated live by Fr. Abraham, was the beautiful vision of Holy Martyrs' church organist Nevart Zeronian Dadourian. The performances, prerecorded from the homes of the performers, were weaved together by the artistic direction of Nevart and the technological prowess of Alex Vartanian.

Special thanks to all the talented performers: Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan (vocal, Norahrash Busagavor, Vartanantz Day sharagan), HMALS students (prepandemic hantes recordings), Nevart Zeronian Dadourian (piano, Melody by Arno Babajanian), HMADS students (recitations), Armen Malkhasyan (vocal, Dasnerek Ardzeevner by Ashough Arentzi), Evelina Malkhasyan (recitation, Dzon Surpotz Vartanantz by Felekian), Maral Mouradian Jamgochian (piano,

Elegy by Arno Babajanian), Isabelle Sirounian (vocal, Chinar Es by Gomidas), Karen Ajamian Smaldone (piano, Clair de Lune by Claude Debussy), Nargiz Mkrtchyan Dumanyan (vocal, Gyankeed Knov by Kristine Pepelyan), Jemma Khachatryan (piano, Ave Maria by Johann Sebastian Bach / Charles Gounod), Diana Vasilyan (violin, Adana by Ara Gevorgyan), and Karina Vartanian (vocal, Yerevan Erebus by Edgar Hovhanessian) accompanied by Nevart Zeronian

Dadourian (piano).

The beautiful and moving performances helped raise more than \$2,500 (at the time of printing) for the Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund. To watch the recording of the concert and to make a donation, visit the Holy Martyrs Facebook page for Thursday, February 11. For more information about the Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund, visit ArmenianWoundedHeroes.com.

— Lynn T. Cetin MD



Harout Bastajian: Combined Passion of Adventure and Art

ADVENTURE, from page 12

other, understand each other and copy the good habits and this simple act of accepting each other is beyond any certain philosophy and psychology. As for Islamic art, it has its strict rules and philosophy, need to be creative in artistic touch within those unlimited borders. And the beauty of Arabic calligraphy with its diacritical artistic flow will turn an empty hall into a masterpiece.

You have executed numerous landmark mosques and residential palaces around the world. What countries are the most memorable for you?

I was fortunate enough to travel to and work in numerous countries including many countries in the Persian Gulf, Africa, Europe and the US. And whenever in a new country, I am always interested in their authentic way of working and living. All those countries have left a positive impression on me; but the community and the family I lived with at the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Mich. left a life-changing impact in my heart. There I met the purest hearts ever, whose main purpose in life is to spread love and happiness around them.

How many mosques have you worked on?

I am not sure; I have to go through previous data to check the number of mosques (must be more than a dozen). I am sure that I have executed 42 domes and half domes with different shapes and forms at mosques, churches and secular projects.

What is new in 21st century Islamic art?

Art is dynamic; it is in constant change and transformation. For sure contemporary Islamic art is on track for innovation and contemporary mosques are and will be the attraction of future generations.

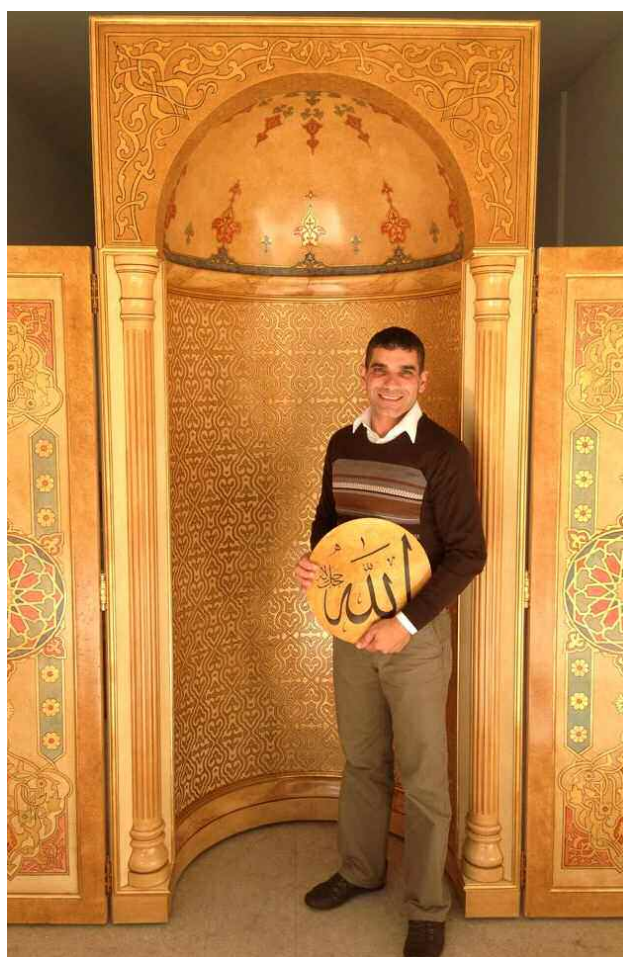
Have you any experience in working with Christian art and architecture?

Yes, I was fortunate to be involved in the execution and restoration of several churches including a landmark 19th-century authentic Roman church and the restoration of murals at an 18th-century Armenian monastery in Lebanon.

Do you know other Armenian artists who have succeeded in Islamic art?

Yes, for sure. When we go through the history of Ottoman art, we can proudly take credit of architects like Mimar Sinan and the Balian family. And recently I was reading an article about a mosque I executed in the northern coastal area of Lebanon. This mosque was nicknamed the Armenian mosque after the Armenian Mr. Hagop Okajian successfully completed the exterior cladding.

I am sure that the artistic heritage of any culture is worthy



of being preserved for future generations. By saying this I cannot help myself to say that the Armenians restored the Persian mosque in Shushi, Artsakh, while the Azerbaijanis, after occupying that city again in last November, began to destroy local Armenian churches, as always, although they ascribe to Armenian churches of the region another origin. What do you think on this?

The unfortunate events that unfolded recently hit us hard both in Armenia and around the world. Regardless of their religion, people are good and pray to the same God from different perspectives and spread tolerance and love as long as they live in

peace and harmony, but unfortunately, political and historic events will fuel hatred and war. History will not forget and forgive the disgrace brought to religious sites as it did with the Crusaders, Ottomans... But as an artist when I look at the Hagia Sophia (built in the sixth century) in Constantinople (Istanbul), I truly thank God that it was transformed into a mosque and restored in the 16th century by the Ottoman empire, otherwise that cornerstone of Byzantine art and architecture would have become rubble and would have vanished. Name it a church, mosque, museum... it is standing there magnificently.

From what part of Armenia/Asia Minor did your ancestors come?

My grandparents were from Adana, as I am told from questionable sources, they were from an area known as Bastia where my family name (Bastajian/Bastadjian) comes from. Their ancestors worked in that area in apricot plantation and as apricot merchants; only the merchants who were outside the area survived the Genocide. My grandmother told a lot of stories about their marching through Syria to reach Lebanon, where she remembers losing her siblings in the desert of Der Zor.

Although you studied at Armenian school, now your environment, I assume, is mostly Arabic. However, can you succeed to transfer to your Russian wife and children also some Armenian culture?

I speak, read and write Arabic, Armenian, English and French, I can understand and communicate with difficulty in Russian and Turkish. As for my children, they are fluent in Arabic, English, French and somehow Russian; Armenian is unfortunately an extra language in the community, where they live, but they learn it with great enthusiasm.

My first visit to Armenia was in the early 2000 with my parents and children, at that time Armenia was still recovering from the hardships of war and economic crisis. I had a great time visiting landmark destinations I learned about in the Armenian history book. I took a memorable helicopter trip to lake Sevan. I also fell in love with Tsaghkadzor and spent few days hiking there. My next visit to Armenia was in 2012, Yerevan has already become a top Western tourist destination; I was amazed how much the country has changed and was touched with the promising young generation.

Being an Armenian is not only a heritage, religion or language; it is something that courses in the blood and shapes you into a decent hard working human being, that has no wealth other than your mind making something out of life, and this is what makes us Armenians special anywhere in the world.



ARTS & LIVING

Remembering My Uncle Lud

REMEMBERING, from page 12

dedicated his book, to him. Relief to Royalty is the authorized biography of James J. Braddock, a native son of Hudson County, who held the World Heavyweight Boxing Championship from 1935 through 1937. Braddock lost to Joe Louis in 1937 and Louis would keep the title for the next 12 years. Thus, Lud never made a windfall profit with his book.

He inscribed a copy for my father, writing, "To my 'kid' brother, Karney, in the hope that he, may yet write his book, too. Lud - August 24, 1936." The Dispatch had published the book and donated unsold copies to the servicemen during WW II. Today it sells online at Amazon from \$350 - \$970!

Jeremy Schaap who authored Cinderella Man on which the 2005 motion picture of the same name was based, drew valuable and factual information from Relief to Royalty and included a photo of Lud in the book. With my cousin Haddon, Schapp visited Lud's old home in Cliffside Park, knocked the door, introduced himself and asked the owners if they would allow entrance to see the attic where Lud had created an office to work on the book and where my Aunt Joey (Josephine) typed his manuscript.

A Loyal Servant

Characteristic of second-generation Armenian sons and daughters he was enriched by his heritage and appreciated it. Dedicated to the Armenian Church, he was among the godfathers of St. Vartan Cathedral in New York City in 1968 when Vasken Vehapar made his first visit to the USA for the Consecration. Lud received the St. Gregory medal from His Holiness, the highest honor for benevolence to the Armenian Church.

Holy Cross (Union City, NJ) was Lud's home which he loved and where he served loyally his entire life. It was built in 1906 and is fondly referred to as the 'mother' church to its sister churches in New Jersey which were established in the coming years. Lud drove to Idlewild Airport (now JFK) in 1956 to greet and welcome the new parish priest who had come to serve at Holy Cross - Father Vatche Hovsepian (now Archbishop). The respect, love and friendship that flourished between Lud and Hayr Vatche during the ensuing years of the pas-

torate have transcended generations within our family.

Humor: His Hallmark

Gifted with intellect, artistic ability, eloquence and a generous heart, he was additionally gifted with a keen sense of humor and would capture and delight his audiences when he was called to be a master of ceremonies, a toastmaster or a keynote speaker at literally hundreds of banquets, dinners, and programs in the world of sports journalism and the Armenian-American community. I often quote him, "Humor will help you get through the rough times in life."

Lud had an exceptional talent for retaining jokes and puns and could retell them with perfect timing. He often told the true story of how he forgot his car on the ferry, but the one I love to tell is the true story of the "Cookies." Lud worked nights because the Dispatch was a morning paper. When he would come home in the wee hours of the morning, he would inevitably look in the refrigerator or the cupboard to snack on something. He was notorious for eating unorthodox combinations of foods. After one of these early morning binges, he said to Joey, "What kind of cookies did you buy? They're very hard. Don't buy them again."

Joey was puzzled, "What cookies? I didn't buy cookies."

Curiosity sent Joey on a search to the pantry, "Oh, Lud! You ate these!? They're dog biscuits!" "Ha," he quipped, "No wonder I was barking all night."

Reciprocal Passion between Family and Friends

Lud and Joey were abundantly enriched with a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. People craved to be around Lud because it was guaranteed that he would transform the grumpiest face into a smile, if not a chuckle. In 1971, more than 800 people attended a banquet held at Schuetzen Park in North Bergen to honor him for his 50 years of service as sports editor of the Dispatch. He was inducted into the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame in 1981 and was one of the founders of the New Jersey Boxing Writers Association. At a Kiwanis Club 'Man of the Year' award dinner in 1986, he concluded in his acceptance remarks, "I've had a wonderful life. I've enjoyed every minute of it."

Lud was also an avid book collector, especially acquiring books in the fields of sports, arts and Armenian culture. Lud took me to the Strand Bookstore in New York City the summer before I started college and invited me to select all the books I wanted. He bought them



At Thanksgiving

for me, saying, "Ruthie, if you get just one idea - one idea - from a book, it is worth all the money you spent on it." He bought me a set of Encyclopedia Britannica; and he gave me his copy of Elements of Style, a classic bible for writers.

Lud was forever taking the family and friends out to dinner. Conversations and exchanges at the table continued as Lud would listen and sketch simultaneously making excellent caricatures. It was very common for him to give a person a paper napkin decorated with one's likeness. His pencil and quick eye were always capturing and creating.

When his health began to fail and he could not go out, my mother, my children and I would visit him. After one of these visits, Mother remarked, "Oh how Lud just loves sitting at the head of his table in his home surrounded by his family and friends."

That image of Lud that Mother so fully appreciated vividly describes the countless Thanksgivings at Uncle Lud and Aunt Joey's home. The family gathered waiting for Lud who would be the last one to make his entrance because he covered the Emerson-Union Hill High School football game. A wide circle of cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends, (who otherwise would find themselves alone on the holiday), joined Lud and Joey's festive table. We feasted on the turkey of course, and a host of sides and trimmings including the Armenian

treasures, Hajmom's dzedzodz, boreg, and the kofta. Grandma Keshian, Joey's mother who was an endeared member of their household, made the kofta. She made the best kofta. It is still Cousin Haddon's favorite.

Lud Shahbazian garnered fame and admiration, never losing sight of his roots. He was a guiding light for me of intellectual sensitivity and tenderness towards people. Lud had a special place in his heart for Father Vahram Nazaretian. He had celebrated the sacrament of marriage for Lud and Josephine in 1925. Every year on their wedding anniversary Lud mailed Father Vahram a letter and enclosed a gift. He faithfully carried out this tender act of grace until Father Nazaretian's lonely demise in Florida in 1980. I felt his sorrow as I watched him fold the letter that had carried the news.

Every Christmas following his 'kid' brother's death, Lud (whose handwriting was becoming weaker and more illegible) wrote a Christmas check, remembering Alice. Karnig was gone, but Alice was tenderly remembered by her husband's brother. Nothing can depict more clearly the deep affection Lud and Karnig shared than this gentle act of caring. Lud was a remarkable human being.

My Uncle Lud rested in God in 1990. I feel his spirit encouraging me every day to find joy in learning, loving and living.

Baryshnikov Center and Cherry Orchard Festival Co-Present Cherry Orchard Workshop

NEW YORK - Baryshnikov Arts Center and Cherry Orchard Festival Foundation co-present an interactive new media experiment, adapted from Anton Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, created by Boston's award-winning Arlekin Players Theatre and their newly-established Zero Gravity (zero-G) Virtual Performance Lab. The Cherry Orchard: A New Media Workshop will debut online Friday, February 26, 2021 at 8PM ET as part of Baryshnikov Arts Center (BAC)'s Digital Spring 2021 Season. Registration for this free event is re . This presentation is not open for review.

The Cherry Orchard: A New Media Workshop is an experiment in development by Arlekin Players Theatre's founder and director Igor Golyak, who has been a leading innovator of virtual theater since the start of the pandemic. His recent State vs. Natasha Banina was a Critic's Pick in The New York Times by Maya Phillips who declared "The verdict is in: Zoom can, in fact, be an effective new stage for theater." Golyak's latest work fuses film, theater, and video game technology to create a new medium where viewers are able to interact with the performers. Drawing from the original text of Anton Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, scenes from the play, and recordings of Chekhov's letters and dreams, the online event accesses Chekhov's desktop computer, where viewers discover six of his classic characters living in a virtual space, searching for happiness.

The cast comprises a cadre of well-known stage, television, and film actors including Tony-Nominee Jessica Hecht, who performs the iconic role of Ranevskaya. Hecht says, "I have been longing to explore The Cherry Orchard with

Igor and our company in a way that gives us the most intimate and relatable portrait of a family in crisis. I believe we can create something raw and modern, without losing an authenticity to Chekhov's vision."

The presentation also features other celebrated performers, including Anna Baryshnikov (Apple TV+'s Dickinson) as Varya; Arlekin's Darya Denisova as Tramp/Guide; Jeffrey Hayenga (The Elephant Man) as Fiers; Melanie Moore (Finding Neverland, So You Think You Can Dance) as Anya; Mark Nelson (Angels in America, The Invention of Love) as Gaev; and acclaimed Boston-based actor Nael Nacer as Lopakhin. BAC's Founder and Artistic Director Mikhail Baryshnikov makes a special appearance in the role of Anton Chekhov. The work was developed and filmed, in part, at BAC in January with strict adherence to COVID health and safety protocols.

This project is the first phase of a larger New Media Cherry Orchard Project that Arlekin plans to develop into a hybrid production featuring new media, online, and live elements, with aspirations for a New York run in the 2021-22 season. "The Post-pandemic theater has to reexamine and reimagine itself. Through this experiment we are finding out how humankind can find each other in the virtual while continuing to treasure the in-person encounter, which makes for a new kind of site-specific theater," says Golyak. "And I find myself in constant dialogue with The Cherry Orchard-during a time of loss and recovery, it helps us explore connection, transition, loss, and the human yearning for happiness."

An international team of designers, new software usage, and technical engineers has collab-

orated with Golyak both virtually and onsite in Arlekin's new Zero Gravity (zero-G) Virtual Performance Lab in Needham, MA for several months to create the functionality and online environment for this project, which includes software support from Aximmetry Technologies Ltd., the official software provider for Arlekin's Zero Gravity Lab; a new platform called "The Soft Layer" from Will Brierly of Snowrunner Productions; and back-end/design work from Vladimir Gusev, Anna Fedorova, and Anton Nikolaev.

The Cherry Orchard: A New Media Workshop marks the second collaboration for Cherry Orchard Festival Foundation and Baryshnikov Arts Center, who co-presented Arlekin's State vs. Natasha Banina during BAC's Digital Fall 2020 Season. The evening offers an immersive experience as Arlekin shares their new proof of concept, followed by a live talkback with members of the cast and creative team.

The Cherry Orchard: A New Media Workshop, co-presented by Baryshnikov Arts Center and Cherry Orchard Festival Foundation, is made possible with generous additional support from ArtsEmerson, Fooksman Family Foundation, ZiphyCare, BroadBand Collaborative, Meghan Coleman, Robin Hanley, and Aximmetry Technologies Ltd., the official software provider for Arlekin's Zero Gravity Lab.

The Cast includes: Jessica Hecht, Mark Nelson, Anna Baryshnikov, Melanie Moore Nael Nacer, Jeffrey Hayenga, Darya Denisova and and Mikhail Baryshnikov as Anton Chekhov

Arlekin Players Theatre, founded by Artistic Director Igor Golyak, was created in Boston in 2009 and has since toured to New York, Chicago,

and Hartford, as well as to international festivals in Russia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Monaco. Its production of State vs. Natasha Banina has received world-wide acclaim, including the New York Times Critics' Pick. Arlekin has received multiple awards for its work including four 2020 Elliot Norton Awards from the Boston Theater Critics Association for its recent productions of The Stone and The Seagull. Arlekin takes strong pride in their emphasis on self-identity; they are a company of immigrants performing works that play on the ideas of cross-culture, home, and traditions, challenging the idea of nationality, and finding common themes that unite us all. In 2020, Arlekin launched it's Zero Gravity (zero-G) Virtual Theater Lab to explore new theater possibilities for a new time. The company makes its home in Needham, MA. For more information, visit www.arlekinplayers.com.

Baryshnikov Arts Center (BAC) is the realization of a long-held vision by artistic director Mikhail Baryshnikov who sought to build an arts center in Manhattan that would serve as a gathering place for artists from all disciplines. BAC's opening in 2005 heralded the launch of this mission, establishing a thriving creative laboratory and performance space for artists from around the world. BAC's activities encompass a robust residency program augmented by a range of professional services, including commissions of new work, as well as the presentation of performances by artists at varying stages of their careers. In tandem with its commitment to supporting artists, BAC is dedicated to building audiences for the arts by presenting contemporary, innovative work at affordable ticket prices. For more information visit bacnyc.org.



ARTS & LIVING

The Uncanny World of Karine Khodikyan

REVIEW, from page 12

The reader shouldn't be surprised by Khodikyan's mastery of her craft. She is a prolific writer and the editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Grakan Tert*, a noted screenwriter and journalist as well. She's served as the Republic of Armenia's Deputy Minister of Culture and currently hosts the popular show "Between You and Me" on public television. In all these endeavors, one assumes that she is well served by her precise writing style and her ease at playing with conventions, as in the second story of this collection, "I wasn't going." What would you do if someone stabbed your only son to death and his mother then came to you begging for your leniency in court? Here the answer is: beta her down and try to tear her to pieces...But then the mother of the murdered child has a dream where it is her son who murdered the other woman's child instead. The tables are turned: now what? The issue of whether one should one forgive at all, and if so when and under what conditions becomes more complex, unanswerable perhaps. For Armenians often obsessed with crimes from the past, this is an especially loaded question.

"Étude" is a deceptively simple look at the difference between the sexes, a husband who is constantly foiled by his wife's superior verbal ability — Khodikyan's version perhaps of Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus. The story opens with "'See' said the man/'See' thought the woman.'" By alternating between the unnamed man and woman, and between "I" and "she," the author takes you inside the minds of both characters as they play a game of verbal/intellectual chess.

Death is a constant theme in the anthology. From "The Door Was Open" and the smell of the main character's own grave, we move on to "The Smell of Bread and Death," which features a family of hereditary gravediggers. We follow young Avet as he takes over from his father and learns to dig his first proper grave as he advances through the stages of his life. "Five Cars on the Road," takes a tragicomic look at drivers who all speed by a man lying on the side of the road — but none stop to help him. In the

ensuing arguments and accidents, one of the main characters is killed in an accident while another is murdered. Yet the ultimate humor comes from the man lying by the side of the road, who is just sunbathing it turns out. He gets up off the side of the road at the end and quietly walks away, the story now a parable perhaps about all those who fill their lives with constant and often meaningless events and encounters, mistakenly thinking that these will make them happy.

Happiness is elusive indeed in this set of short stories — there are no happy families, no happy main characters — this isn't chick lit, not by a long a shot. Only death seems certain, or a last-minute change of fate. In no particular order, "The Black Bed" plays with the childhood story of a monster hiding under the bed — but in this case it's an adult woman who is so scared of an imaginary monster that she can't get into bed with her lover. "The Eleventh Commandment" is narrated by a ghost, a literally ghoulish device. The final short story of the collection, "The Turnabout," concerns a murderous set of events set in motion by a fortune-telling parrot, of all things. The main character, a young woman, follows instructions that she is told she must execute in order to "hold on to the happiness you'll find." She does so — murders someone — without blinking. Yet the last words of the story, and of the book, seem like vintage Khodikyan. As the woman waits for an unnamed man to confirm their date on the phone, happiness is still not to be had: "And as she waited to hear his response, she felt her soul going cold."

Somehow irony and a perfect sense of pacing keep this short anthology from being in any way sad or unnerving. Instead, the reader jumps from story to story, from one blurred time frame to another, anticipating another clever, unexpected turn of the literary screw. He is rarely disappointed.

The Door Was Open, Karine Khodikyan, translated by Nazareth Seferian (Glagoslav Publishers, October 2019), available at Glagoslav Publications: <https://glagoslav.com/shop/the-door-was-open/>

Books by Glen Chesnut on Armenian Survival at Abril Bookstore

LOS ANGELES — From the killing fields of Marash, Turkey, in 1920 to America and from the dustbowl in Amarillo, Tex., to California in 1935, *We Armenians Survived! Battle of Marash 1920* and *Written Works of Glen Chesnut* both tell remarkable stories.

The first book relates the tale of immigration

of the murder of his immediate family and others by none other than one of the perpetrators who happened also to be his next door neighbor, a Turk, who proudly showed Berberian his father's pocket watch.

Berberian would later become the co-discoverer of plaquenil, an anti-Malaria drug now known as hydroxychloroquine.

Glen, married for 45 years to his Armenian-American wife, Ellen, was the youngest son of Sam and Ulta Chesnut and had a remarkable story as well.

Coming from a ranching family, he quit high school in Tehachapi, Cal., for one year to work as a cowboy.

In later years he would become a merchant seaman and ship out of San Francisco, when it was a great port city, and then out of Oakland. Glen was a self-taught artist and a writer. *Written Works* features some of his best flash fiction, poetry and short stories.

Those interested can visit his website to read more of his works not in the book, see his paintings and multi-media works and the photo gallery of pictures Glen took while stationed in Germany in the early 1950s.

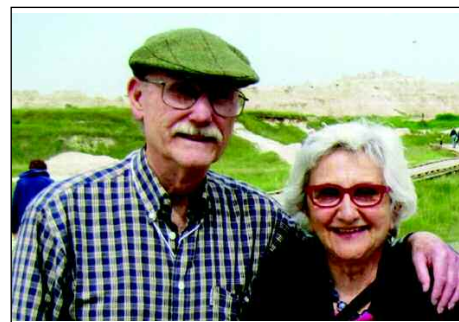
Go to <https://glenchesnut.com> to learn more.

Glen's book can be ordered through Amazon in both an eBook and a paperback version and at bookstores.

We Armenians Survived can be ordered at Abril Bookstore and through Amazon in both eBook and paperback versions.

To purchase the book visit www.abrilbooks.com. All proceeds from book sales have been going to and will continue to go to Armenian charities.

All proceeds from the sales of the books will be donated to Armenian charities.



Glen and Ellen Chesnut

to America by a people besieged by a government bent on their extermination.

The second written by Glen Chesnut weaves the narrative of Americans leaving a parched homeland in Texas to literally greener pastures in California.

"I am very proud of being able to tell the story of my mother's family and the Armenians of Marash, Turkey by sharing the experiences of eight Armenians who made it through the blood bath of Marash where thousands were torched in their churches," said his wife, Ellen Chesnut.

The author of *The Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian, was newly born when his family trekked out of Marash in one of the worst blizzards in memory following behind the retreating French soldiers many of whom were black Senegalese.

Dicran Berberian, at 17 years of age, learned

Calendar

MASSACHUSETTS

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

MACRH 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

RHODE ISLAND

February 26 – "The Greater Worcester Armenian Chorale" – 7th annual Gala concert Armenian Cultural Hour , Providence RI. Every Friday at 7:30 p.m. Whether or not you have a Facebook account, you can find the LIVESTREAM of the event through the parish's Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/armenianchurchprovidence>

FEBRUARY 19 – "Your Heroism is Immortal" Charity Concert, Part One

FEBRUARY 26 – "Your Heroism is Immortal" Charity Concert, Part Two

MARCH 5 – Our Youth Talents

MARCH 12 – "The Greater Worcester Armenian Chorale"– 7th annual Gala concert

MARCH 19 – "Our Yerevan"- Film Presentation in English

MARCH 26 – "The Birth of Sassuntsi David" Oratorio by Garbis Aprikian. From the large amphitheater of the Sorbonne, France

April 9 – "Sayat-Nova" State Minstrel Song Ensemble, Armenia

April 16 – "Cultural Genocide" - Film Presentation in English

April 23 – Memorial Concert, dedicated to Armenian Genocide

April 30 – "Armenia, The Land of Noah"- Film Presentation in English

Variety of Armenian Antiquities for Sale

Manuscripts and large collection of early printed books and newspapers dated from the 19th century, silver and gold religious objects, as well as religious objects, including chalices, textiles, carpets and paintings.

**Please visit armenianartworks.com
Call (212) 685-1208 and mobile (201) 562 9902**



ARTS & LIVING

One More Step to Success

Vahan Yepremyan in Search of the Perfect Formula

YEPREMYAN, from page 1
deliver important messages, especially now, when because of Covid-19, people are very much isolated and don't have the possibility to express their feelings and emotions. "That's one of the values that movies can bring to people: not only to entertain and inspire, but also to make them think, [and] bring awareness about mental health or any other thing. I myself learned a lot from this movie. With mental health comes a lot of stigma and label. But instead of doing that it's important to understand, to interact with people sometimes with just a simple 'hello.'"

Vahan founded Ketchup Entertainment about ten years ago as a passion, a creative outlet which brought him an Emmy Award for the film "Lost Christmas," which was created by partnering with BBC. Vahan successfully incorporates his passion for producing with his primary vocation of attorney, which gives him the opportunity to help his clients to achieve their goals as entrepreneurs. "People come to me



Vahan Yepremyan receiving his Emmy Award

with some idea or concept and I help them put it together and realize whatever vision they have. Or if they come with an existing business or a company and they want to grow it, scale it,



In Nicaragua building homes



license it, I help them get wherever they need to," he says.

Vahan immigrated to US in 1987 from the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and found himself in a new reality somewhat familiar from some movies that were not restricted back in his homeland, but also so different from the one he left behind. "When I was moving — this was the time before Internet and YouTube — I really had no idea what life looked like here. It was a cultural shock in the beginning. I didn't speak any English back then. I ended up going to college to learn English. My parents worked hard. I worked on and off campus, but it was exciting because we were here for a better life, to build something new. There was a lot of adjustment, a lot of learning but also a lot of excitement; for a 17-18-year old, it was a welcomed change," remembers Vahan.

First, he considered going into art (his mother is an artist and he grew up around the art), then he thought about the movie industry. Later his career search took him to politics, where he worked at the White House think tank Economic Strategy Institute during the

presidency of Bill Clinton and subsequently assisted Al Gore's presidential campaign with fundraising. Finally, he served as a clerk in the US Department of Justice in Washington working on prosecuting major criminal cases in US federal courts.

Even though it seemed like he was on a perfect path to pursue a political career, for

contracts. Now, working with different clients from all kinds of industries, I am learning a lot from them," he says.

"Growing up when I grew up, where entrepreneurship was illegal, I think one of the main reasons that that system collapsed is because there were no entrepreneurial innovations and competition. Everything was anti-entrepreneur-



In Guatemala building a school, houses and water wells

Vahan's creative mind it wasn't enough. "I got a taste of politics, but one other thing I saw was how the lobbying groups and money play such a big role in politics and how limited the politicians are in making their own decisions, because they need the funding. The world of entrepreneurship seemed more exciting with more opportunities to impact the world and change it from the outside instead of going into the system, being part of it and trying to change it from the inside. I found myself in law school because I realized how important the legal part was for structuring businesses and negotiating

ial: don't question authority, don't speak up, don't be different, follow the herd, don't create anything, don't make money... Everything was state-owned and state-controlled. But entrepreneurs are such an important part of any economy in any country," Vahan notes.

Entrepreneur Magazine named the law firm he created, Yepremyan Law Firm, one of the Best Entrepreneurial Companies in America for the last three years in a row and Inc. Magazine included Vahan on the list of Greatest Entrepreneurs in America.

continued on next page



from previous page

There is a dedicated spot in Vahan's schedule for philanthropy. And when it comes to protecting children's rights, it becomes professional: Years ago, he went to Cambodia with World Vision to cover a story on child labor and sex trafficking. Vahan was doing photography for the organization. The project impacted him so much that after returning to the US, he decided to become involved more actively in protecting these children's rights and to create appropriate conditions for them to have a better life.

"We spent a lot of time with kids in the rescue center and heard atrocious stories. I came back with these stories and wanted to do something. I realized how big the problem was, and I was thinking that I won't be able to make an impact, since I hear stories like you rescue a kid, then they get three more And then you realize that all you need to do to is to rescue one kid at a time or help and support one thing and go from there. Just do what you can," Vahan relates.

Each year Vahan supports one organization or project. But mostly he prefers direct involvement where he can do so much more than only help financially. In Nicaragua, working with the organization WeJourney, he helped building homes in the jungles for homeless families. He said: "It's one thing to write a check for building homes and another thing to be there and help the families to build them. It's very fulfilling. It makes you push yourself really hard. It makes you grateful. It's really amazing to see all these people who have so little to share, but so many challenges in life, to be also so generous."

Vahan remembers how they were building a house for one family and all the other families were helping even though they knew that they



Vahan Yepremyan being nominated by Inc. Magazine to its list of Greatest Entrepreneurs in America

wouldn't get a house for themselves. The organization ended up building 12 homes for Nicaraguans. "When you go there you think that you are going to give something, but you end up gaining so much more than you give," he exclaimed. Vahan came back with a new appreciation and new understanding of what is important.

He shares his impressions from his last trip to Africa where he spent time with one of the tribes there and saw how connected the members of the tribe are and how they are taking care of each other. "The word for the tribe meant family. So, they looked at their tribe as a family," he says. Yepremyan Law Firm is sponsoring over dozen children from these countries.

"But it's always different when you play soccer with them," Vahan says as he smiles. He thinks that it's more important to spend time with people in the Third World countries, not to feel sorry for them, but to understand them and treat them the way they are.

Yepremyan is involved in different organizations that are helping children in Armenian orphanages and other institutions. He shared that he is planning to do more now, when the homeland is recovering from a devastating war.

In his search for self-awareness, to find his real limits and challenge himself to new heights, Vahan uses travel. Two years ago, he climbed the mountain Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Africa. The experience ended up turning into a book with the title One More Step that he is working on now. "It was an interesting journey and I've learned so many life lessons in the process. It was transformational for me. 'One more step'

Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian



Armenian Tava from A Serious Bunburyist

(PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE SHARAFIAN)

This family recipe is from A Serious Bunburyist* food blog (August 2017) re-created by Steve Sharafian, who contributes the recipe's history here:

"I grew up eating Armenian food that ranged from complex, time intensive dishes, such as my paternal grandmother's Izmir Kufta, to simple country food, like Tava. What is Tava? This depends upon whom you ask. According to my mother, Tava consists of lamb shoulder chops baked on top of layered vegetables. My dad will tell you that Tava's lamb chops rest on cubed - and not layered - vegetables. You'll find Armenian families that top the vegetables with seasoned ground beef or ground lamb instead of chops and call the dish Tava or Duzmeh. A Book of Favorite Recipes (1968) compiled by the Los Angeles Daughters of Vartan includes a recipe for Tava that layers vegetables on top of seasoned meatballs. Vegetarians, don't worry: Many Armenians entirely skip the meat and they still call the resulting dish Tava. Present this meatless version to a Frenchman or Frenchwoman and he or she will tell you that you have made Ratatouille.

The vegetables in Tava come from every corner of a summer garden, but mainstays include eggplant, tomato, squash, onion and potato. Expect to find recipes that add bell peppers, green beans and even okra. My mother claims that Tava just isn't Tava without carrots (layered - and this is important - on top of the potatoes). Most, but not all, recipes pour a little water or tomato sauce over the vegetables. Some recipes call for mint or parsley as seasonings, but most versions call for nothing more than salt and pepper.

With countless Tava recipes, why do I post my version? Because I believe it important to memorialize how a family - in this case my family - makes a loved food. My grandmother and great-aunt frequently made Tava. My mother only occasionally. Unless a family's recipe boards a food ark, children (or grandchildren) might never eat a dish that comforted their great-grandparents."

HOW TO MAKE ARMENIAN TAVA

Pre-heat oven to 375°F. Butter a baking dish. The size and depth of the dish depends upon how much meat and how many vegetables you wish to accommodate. This recipe, which makes 2 to 4 servings, uses 2 large lamb shoulder chops, so I suggest a deep 8-



inch by 8-inch baking dish. A deep, 10-inch diameter pie plate also works nicely.

Peel 2 medium-sized yellow potatoes (e.g., Yukon Golds) and slice



into 1/4-inch rounds. Cover the bottom of the baking dish with a single, overlapping layer of potatoes. As you arrange the slices in the dish, season the potatoes with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. You will add salt and pepper to each following vegetable layer, so season judiciously. Peel a medium eggplant and slice it into 1/4-inch rounds.

Place a single layer of eggplant slices on top of the potatoes and season. Slice a medium zucchini into rounds - again 1/4-inch thick - and layer on top of the eggplant, seasoning the squash layer to taste. Next, peel a large yellow (or white or red or sweet) onion and make 1/4-inch thick slices and lay these into the dish in a single layer, seasoning as you go.

Finally, slice enough ripe tomatoes to cover the onions and lightly season this final vegetable layer.

Pour about 1/4 cup water or tomato sauce over the vegetables.

Place seasoned lamb shoulder chops on top of the tomatoes and cover the baking dish with foil. Place the package in the oven and bake for approximately 1 hour. Remove the foil and flip the lamb chops over and return to the oven to bake for another 15 minutes. Flip the lamb chops again and increase the oven temperature to 400°F and bake for 15 more minutes until the chop look browned.

"Personally, I like to salt the lamb shoulder chops the night before I make Tava. I put a rack into a baking sheet and dust the lamb with kosher salt and refrigerate the lamb, uncovered, overnight. I also like to use mild red pepper flakes - think Aleppo or Marash or Piment d'Ville - when seasoning the vegetables and lamb. Sometimes I substitute a splash of dashi in place of water or tomato sauce. I think this completely and utterly nontraditional ingredient adds a lovely smoky flavor to this simple dish."*

For this recipe, go to:

<http://ibunbury.blogspot.com/search/label/Armenian%20Tava>
For Armenian recipes and recollections from Steve Sharafian, go to:
<http://ibunbury.blogspot.com/search/label/Armenian%20Choreg>
<http://ibunbury.blogspot.com/search/label/Armenian%20Gerago>
or
<http://ibunbury.blogspot.com/search/label/Armenian%20Pilaf>
<http://ibunbury.blogspot.com/search/label/Armenian%20Tutoo>
**Dashi is a family of stocks used in Japanese cuisine. Dashi forms the base for miso soup, clear broth soup, noodle broth soup, and many simmering liquids to accentuate the savory flavor known as umami.

was actually something that I was telling myself while I was climbing. As you're climbing the fifth day and you're getting closer to the top, you have less oxygen to breath, your hearth is beating, your nose is bleeding and it's extremely cold. The last five hours are in the dark; you can't see anything in front of your shoes and

you want to quit. But I was thinking if before I quit can I do one more step and then one other step.... All of a sudden you see that you are halfway through and you see the sun coming out. We are all climbing our own mountain in life. It wasn't about Kilimanjaro. It was about my own mountain inside me," he explains.

On this journey Yepremyan was wearing a t-shirt of another organization that he is supporting, Feed A Billion. Taking it to the top of the mountain and bringing awareness to the cause that way was one of the goals that kept him taking that one more step towards the "the mission that is bigger than you."



COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

News Media Pioneer Azg Celebrates 30 Years

By Edmond Y. Azadian

The first president of the independent Republic of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosian, maintains that it was the Karabakh Movement in Armenia that brought down the Berlin Wall. If there is some exaggeration in that statement, we can agree on the fact that the movement was one of the indicators that heralded the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the eventual demise of the Eastern Bloc.

In the wake of the collapse, the citizens of Armenia, like other constituent republics of the Soviet Union, found themselves in an atmosphere of boundless freedom. They were overwhelmed with their new reality and were not even sure how to handle their new situation or use that freedom responsibly to enhance their lives.

It was a defining moment for Armenia. Means of expressing and using that freedom had to be devised. It was at that moment – to be exact, on February 16, 1991 – that *Azg* daily began publication, creating a model for the news media to emulate.

During the Soviet period, the news media was the dull

est was not yet available in Armenia. But *Azg* was able to bypass that hurdle by bringing to its readers world news and commentaries, thanks to contributors from around the world.

Initially, the daily's print circulation bordered on 30,000-40,000 – an unprecedented number for an Armenian publication.

From day one, the intellectual elite gravitated toward *Azg*. And today, when the paper has become a weekly publication, it can boast that it is still home to the current intellectual elite.

Much of the credit for that goes to charismatic editor Hagop Avedikian, who was trained under the legendary Lebanese-Armenian journalist Kersam Aharonian. Avedikian is a gifted journalist with a solid academic background.

Under Avedikian, the paper not only has remained a vibrant publication, but it has served as a school for modern Armenian journalism. Avedikian himself, serving as a professor of journalism at the State Pedagogical University, was able to train a crop of young reporters. Many prominent journalists and several diplomats working today were trained at *Azg*. In that respect, Avedikian can rightfully call himself the dean of journalists in Armenia.

Freedom of the press means having the right to report news or circulate opinions without censorship from the government. Avedikian believed that this should be the guiding principle of a free publication and he tried to exercise it in a newly-awakening society.

He soon discovered that the innocent exercise of this simple principle could be dangerous. He suffered the consequences, first by being attacked by unknown assailants and then finding that even the country's president was blocking his way.

Indeed, Levon Ter-Petrosian took extraordinary measures to obstruct the publication of the paper. In addition, a judge who was recently elected to the post of Supreme Judicial Council of Armenia, Gagik Jahangiryan, seized the paper and gifted it to his cronies. It was at this time that the Western embassies in Armenia were alarmed and condemned the illegal act in no uncertain terms.

Thus, after several trials, the publication was returned to its rightful owners, the ADL organization.

Incidentally, when Armenia attained independence, the ADL was the first diasporan organization to build a cultural center in the heart of downtown Yerevan. It also founded the first radio station and politically it ranked second only after Ter-Petrosian's Armenian National Movement in the freely elected first parliament.

During the last 30 years, journalism in Armenia has developed with a tremendous pace. Professional news outlets like CivilNet have emerged. But overall, journalists get mired down over trivia, and they have a myopic view of world affairs where they fail to distinguish the relevance of local or regional issues within the context of the broader developments of the world.

Even Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who began his career as a journalist, has proven to be a mediocre one, most of the time confusing rabble-rousing with robust journalism.

Like many publications, *Azg* is shifting its emphasis to its electronic format, which has a much more global audience.

Azg is still enriched by the contributions of eminent journalists and intellectuals and it remains a thorn in the side of the authorities, with its independent stance.

With the profusion of news outlets, *Azg* has become one of many. But historically, it has been a trailblazer, which has illuminated the path of journalism in Armenia, and it can boast of having trained many of the best journalists in the country.



venue in citizens' lives. It was centrally dictated and the local news had to be confined to the latest agricultural developments or glorify the production of certain items, such as light bulbs, the production of which, they noted with enthusiasm, had grown exponentially compared to the statistics of 1913!

During the periods when the Soviet central government decided to win over Ankara, newspapers in Armenia were not even allowed to mention the Armenian Genocide.

It was in this stifling atmosphere that *Azg* breathed fresh air into the media by introducing the international norms of free journalism. *Azg* not only transformed the format of newspaper business, but also its content.

Readers experienced for the first time news about developments that had a bearing on their own lives or on the destiny of the homeland.

Citizens of Armenia who had been raised in an atheist society barely comprehended the role of the church and particularly that of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Thanks to the news and coverage in *Azg*, this new dimension was introduced into the lives of the Armenians. Ironically, to this day, the news media is not comfortable dealing with the role of the church in today's society and its role in Armenian history.

Fundamental issues of Armenian history were brought forward and discussed freely, as gradually Soviet cosmopolitanism gave way to Armenian nationalism.

At that point, the electronic media was in its infancy and

Mirror Spectator

Established 1932
An ADL Publication

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

Baikar Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472-1509
Telephone: 617-924-4420

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

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COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Warning to Armenia's Leaders: Don't Fall in the Turkish Trap Again

Neither Armenia's previous nor current leaders have had the adequate experience to run a country. This is true in both domestic and foreign policies. In order to rectify this undesirable situation, some have suggested finding the pertinent experts who would advise Armenia's leaders. Regrettably, all such efforts have failed for the simple reason that before the experts could be helpful: the leaders have to be willing to listen to their advice.

My long experience in dealing with Armenia's leaders has shown that they think they know everything and have no need to learn from anyone. This is one reason why the Republic of Armenia has been mismanaged for 30 years.

It is understandable that a leader does not have to be knowledgeable about every issue. That is why he or she has advisors. But when the advisors know even less than their leader, as is the case in Armenia, the situation becomes hopeless.

I have written this lengthy introduction to make the point that in addition to not knowing much and not listening to advice, Armenia's leaders refuse to learn from their past mistakes which is the reason why they repeat them.

One such example is the current discussion in Armenia and Turkey about the possible opening of the Armenian-Turkish border, closed by Turkey since 1993. Last week, Armenia's Foreign Minister Ara Aivazyan told the members of Parliament: "There is no longer a reason [for Turkey] to close the border with Armenia. For long years, Turkey blockaded Armenia's border, demanding a change in the status quo of the Artsakh conflict. The status quo has been changed through the use of force." The Foreign Minister assured the Parliament that currently no activities have been initiated in that regard.

The Armenian foreign minister's statement comes on the heels of recent expressions by the president and foreign minister of Turkey of their willingness to open the border with Armenia, should the latter meet certain conditions. In the past, Turkey's reason for closing the border was Armenia's refusal to free "Azerbaijan's occupied territories." Therefore, one would

think that now that Azerbaijan has forcefully occupied most of these territories, the problem is solved and Turkey will open the border. However, let us remember that Turkey had two additional conditions to open Armenia's border:

- 1) Armenia must abandon its pursuit of the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide;
- 2) Armenia must recognize Turkey's current borders and not make any territorial demands.

We all recall that back in 2009 after Armenia and Turkey signed the Protocols to open their mutual border, Turkey made the additional demands from Armenia. When Armenia refused to accept these new conditions, Turkey decided not to ratify the Armenia-Turkey Protocols, after coming under intense pressure from Azerbaijan.

At the time, there was a major outcry from the Diaspora and many within Armenia that the Protocols were not in Armenia's interests. Nevertheless, President Serzh Sargsyan persisted in his misguided approach, until Turkey gave up on the Protocols, inadvertently saving Armenia's interests.

The other major harmful effect of the Protocols was that it undermined the pledge that President Barack Obama had made to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide on April 24, 2009.

The Protocols were a clever Turkish ploy to derail the acknowledgment of Armenian Genocide by the President of the United States. The Turkish leaders, with the collaboration of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, repeatedly told President Obama not issue a statement recognizing the Armenian Genocide at a time when Armenia and Turkey were engaged in serious negotiations on normalizing their relations. They succeeded in convincing President Obama that using the term Armenian Genocide would disrupt these negotiations. As a result, instead of keeping his campaign pledge to recognize the Armenian Genocide, President Obama stated on April 24, 2009: "I also strongly support the efforts by Turkey and Armenia to normalize their bilateral relations. Under Swiss auspices, the two governments have agreed on a framework and roadmap for normalization. I commend this progress, and urge them to fulfill its promise."

It is true that President Obama failed to keep his campaign promise, but Armenia's leaders are the ones who gave him the perfect excuse to hide behind the charade of the Protocols. Consequently, Armenians lost both the acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide by the President of the United States and the opening of the border.

Regrettably, the same scenario is about to repeat again this year. President Joe Biden made a campaign promise to recognize the Armenian Genocide. It should be much easier for him to take such a step now, since both the House of Representatives (almost unanimously) and the U.S. Senate (unanimously) acknowledged the Armenian Genocide in 2019. While it is not certain that President Biden will keep his promise, we should not give him the excuse not to do so.

If the past is any indication, this is the exact ploy that Turkey is plotting now. We know that the Biden Administration has a much harsher position vis-à-vis President Erdogan and Turkey. There are several disputes between the United States and Turkey that will be difficult to overcome. Knowing this well, President Erdogan has started in recent weeks to take steps to reconcile with Israel, Greece and Saudi Arabia in order to ingratiate himself to President Biden. President Erdogan's suggestion to open the border with Armenia is a part of this overall Turkish strategy.

In the aftermath of the disastrous Artsakh War, Armenia's leaders cannot afford to make more miscalculations. While most of Artsakh and its surrounding territories are already lost, I hope the Armenian Government does not make the mistake of providing an excuse for the Biden Administration not to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide. Even more importantly, Armenia's leaders should not take the unthinkable step of pledging not to pursue the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide and acknowledge the current borders of Turkey. Such an acceptance would damage Armenia's interests forever. How could Armenia agree to such Turkish suggestions in the aftermath of the vicious role played by Turkey in the recent Artsakh War, which resulted in the killing and maiming of thousands of Armenian soldiers and the occupation of Armenian territories? The wounds are too fresh to contemplate any attempt to normalize relations with Turkey.

Armenia's inexperienced leaders can find themselves in an untenable situation if Turkey decides unilaterally to open its border, while Armenia refuses to do so; giving Turkey accolades and making Armenia seem obstructionist in the eyes of the international community. Armenia's situation will be further complicated should Turkey open its border, whereas the Armenian Government just banned the import of Turkish products for six months or longer. Should the border open and Armenia allow the import of Turkish products, the Armenian market would be flooded with cheaper Turkish products, adversely affecting local manufacturers.

One possible solution would be for Armenia, instead of outright banning Turkish imports, to place such an exorbitant tariff on them, making them practically unsellable in the country. By avoiding the ban, Armenia would not look bad in the eyes of the world, while generating much needed revenue for the Armenian Government, should anyone import Turkish goods.

In the meantime, Armenia should put its own conditions on Turkey before agreeing to open its border, such as Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide and compensation for the Armenian losses. Such a move would contradict the positions of both President Serzh Sargsyan and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who have expressed their readiness to have Armenia ratify the ill-fated Protocols and open the border with Turkey, without any preconditions!

Will Armenian Gain From New Regional Transit Routes?

By Manya Israyelyan

Armenian analysts have cast doubt on how much the country is likely to benefit from the planned reopening of regional transport corridors following the recent war in Nagorno Karabakh.

A new agreement envisages Armenia guaranteeing the security of transport links between Nakhichevan and the western regions of Azerbaijan. Citizens, vehicles and goods will enjoy unimpeded movement in both directions, supervised by Russian security services.

According to the joint statement from the heads of states of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan issued after their January 11 meeting in Moscow, a working group headed by the deputy prime ministers of the three countries will deal with transport links and economic issues.

The Russian newspaper Kommersant published a map of the transport corridors in question. This showed Azerbaijan gaining access to one corridor and railway from Nakhichevan through Armenia's southern Syunik region to the Azerbaijani-controlled part of Karabakh. This would also connect Azerbaijan to Turkey.

Armenia will see two railway routes reopened, one through Nakhichevan to Iran and another through Azerbaijan to Russia. Armenia will also have access to the same southern railway from Yerevan to Syunik and through Nakhichevan.

However, much remains undecided in terms of both technical arrangements and time frames.

"Whether roads will open before the railway or vice versa is unclear," said Hayk Gevorgyan from ruling My Step faction.

He noted that Azerbaijan had estimated that reconstructing a section of railway from Agarak to Horadiz, which used to be under Armenian control, would take at least two years.

"Before that, opening the vehicle routes should be dis-

cussed," Gevorgyan added.

Spinnaker Group LLC co-founder Norayr Gevorgyan, a specialist in cargo transportation, told an online discussion that this 120 km stretch would take longer than two years.

"Why go to Baku from Yerevan through Nakhichevan and then Russia, if Kars-Akhuryan through Ghazakh to Russia cuts the road by 250 km?" he asked.

Because this shorter route would involve more Armenian territory, revenue from transit fees could double or even triple.

Some maintain that freeing these channels will be an economic win for Armenia. Minister of economy Vahan Kerobyan outlined what he said would be the opportunities for Armenia as a result of unblocking regional transport corridors.

In the short term, he said, "competition results in better products," while in the longer term, he continued, "Our products could be exported to Russia and other countries via better roads than they are now."

Critics disagree, warning that domestic instability would only escalate in the face of direct competition with the more powerful economies of Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Avetik Chalabyan, leader of the National Agenda opposition party, said that unblocking regional transport corridors would only be possible under conditions of permanent peace.

He argued that Karabakh needed to be given some kind of internationally recognized status, the Armenian settlements occupied by Azerbaijan in the most recent conflict should be freed, with displaced Armenians able to return to their homes with security guarantees and all prisoners of war released.

"Otherwise, it turns out that we place the cart before the horse," he said. "There is no peace, but we are trying to establish transport communication through mutual territories, which is not realistic."

While officials state that Armenia is interested in cargo transportation to Russia and Iran via Azerbaijan, experts are less upbeat. Any potential benefits, some fear, may be reaped by Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia rather than Armenia.

"The route to Russia via that railway is two to three times longer than through Georgia," said economist Hrant Mikaelyan, a researcher at the Caucasus Institute, adding that the new route would also be vulnerable to arbitrary closure by others.

"Now we are going to have a corridor in Armenia proper, which will be controlled by a third party, Russia, and corridors controlled by Azerbaijan," he concluded.

The security risks of opening these corridors could also not be ruled out, given the disruption to the balance of power in the region.

"Those risks are too high in the face of an unfinished war and by providing the enemy with a passage through our territory, we open an additional door of potential aggression against our country, it is quite obvious," Chalabyan stressed.

While the Armenian ministry of economy has not yet published its calculations, their argument is that Armenia has the potential to grow a significant transit economy.

"We are going to develop a program that will prepare us to reap all the benefits that unblocking of the region may yield," said the minister.

Chalabyan said that an Armenian railway route through Nakhichevan might at best lead to an increase in transit from Iran to the Black Sea as well as in the opposite direction.

However, if international sanctions on Iran increased, this might massively reduce any possible flow of goods.

"Therefore, at this moment we should focus not so much on abstract talks about opportunities, but on the restoration and strengthening of our security system, which has been really disrupted as a result of the war," Chalabyan concluded.

This publication was prepared under the "Giving Voice, Driving Change from the Borderland to the Steppes Project" implemented with the financial support of the Foreign Ministry of Norway.

(This analysis was originally published by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, UK, on February 12.)



Biden Should Sanction Perpetrators of War Crimes against Armenians

By David Phillips

On September 27, 2020, the Azerbaijani armed forces attacked Nagorno Karabakh (“Artsakh” in Armenian). They were backed by the Turkish military and jihadist mercenaries with armed drones, heavy artillery, rocket systems and special forces.

At least 3,500 Armenians were killed and over 100,000 civilians were displaced during 44 days of violent conflict. Eye-witnesses describe Azeri soldiers mutilating bodies, beheading civilians, and using banned weapons such as cluster bombs and white phosphorus. Sanctions are needed to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Turkey deployed up to 2,000 Islamist jihadis from Syria and Libya who were promised a bounty for killing Armenians. The identity of jihadis leaders is known.

Sayf Balud (Sayf Abu Bakr) has led the Syrian National Army (SNA)’s Hamza Division since 2016. He participated in Operation Olive Branch, the invasion of Afrin in northern Syria, and the Libyan Civil War, both with Turkish patronage. In 2013, Balud appeared in an ISIS video. He and his mercenary cohorts are responsible for multiple war crimes, including the kidnapping of Kurdish women and brutal repression in Afrin. He is one of Turkey’s most trusted and supported mercenary leaders. He and approximately 500 of his men were reportedly flown to Azerbaijan to fight in Artsakh.

Fehim Isa (Isa al-Turkmani) has led the SNA’s Sultan Murad Division since at least 2015. He was directly involved in Turkey’s Operation Euphrates Shield in northern Syria, Operation Olive Branch, and the Libyan Civil War. He and his division have also been accused of war crimes, such as the torturing of Kurdish soldiers and indiscriminate shelling of civilians.

Abu Amsha (Muhammad al-Jassim) is the leader of the Suleyman Shah Brigade, nicknamed the al-Amshat militia, which gained prominence in 2018 as one of the most brutal factions occupying Afrin. Al-Amshat confiscated property and kidnapped individuals for ransom, generating \$12

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million per year. He was also accused of rape and murder. Like Isa and Balud, Amsha was an important recruiter for Turkish-backed mercenaries in Libya.

Other jihadi war criminals include Ahmed Osman of the Sultan Murad Division; Abu Jalal, a military leader of the Hamza Division; Mohammad al-Abdullah headed the Hamza Division’s so-called Head of Political Bureau; Fadlallah al-Haji heads the Faylaq al-Sham, an important Turkish proxy fighting in Syria and Libya, with connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Qaeda in Syria’s Idlib province.

These jihadis did not act on their own. The Nagorno-Karabakh operation was orchestrated by Hakan Fidan, head of Turkey’s National Intelligence Agency (MIT). Field operations were managed by active-duty Turkish commanders.

Major General Bahtiyar Ersay, Chief of the Operations Directorate of the Land Forces of Turkey, oversaw the Azerbaijani General Staff in Artsakh. He previously led Turkey’s 2nd Commando Brigade, which was notoriously cruel to Kurdish civilians in northern Syria. Ultranationalist militias, known as Grey Wolves, joined this brigade.

Major General Göksel Kahya, head of the Turkish Air Force’s 1st Supply and Maintenance Centre, managed the deployment of Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones in Libya and Artsakh. TB2 drones have killed countless civilians.

Lieutenant General Şeref Öngay is Commander of the Third Army of the Turkish Ground Forces. According to Armenian representatives to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Öngay “took part in planning and conducting” Artsakh operations. He was spotted in Azerbaijan on Sept. 4, planning joint operations with Azerbaijan’s military.

In addition, Adnan Tanrıverdi, a retired Turkish general and the founder of private defense contractor SADAT, played an important role recruiting, training, equipping, and transporting Syrian mercenaries to both Libya and Artsakh.

Azerbaijan paid up to \$2,000 per month to jihadi mercenaries. Major General Hikmat Hasanov, Commander of the

1st Army Corps of Azerbaijan, coordinated operations on the northern frontline of the Artsakh conflict and was instrumental in capturing Suqovusan and other northern targets.

Major General Mais Barkhudarov, Commander of the 2nd Army Corps of Azerbaijan, was responsible for the southern frontline in Artsakh. He led the occupation of Jabrayil where many civilians were killed.

Lieutenant General Hikmat Mirzayev, head of the Azerbaijani special forces, is the highest-ranking Azeri general involved in the Artsakh operation. He has close ties to MIT and the Turkish General Staff. Many Azerbaijani special forces were trained by Turkey. Mirzayev was recently promoted to Lieutenant General.

For sure, there were other war crimes committed in Artsakh. Columbia University’s Artsakh Atrocities project has been documenting war crimes and will augment the list of perpetrators as more information surfaces.

We know who committed these crimes. We do not know, however, if the Biden administration will turn a blind eye to atrocities in Artsakh or hold perpetrators accountable. Unlike the previous administration, U.S. government officials are now taking a harder line towards Turkey and its nefarious regional activities. It should reaffirm its commitment to the OSCE Minsk Group, which includes the United States, Russia and France as official mediators. Nagorno-Karabakh is still a powder keg, that is only stabilized by the presence of Russian peacekeepers.

The United States should sanction perpetrators, imposing a travel ban on them and their families, while freezing their overseas assets. It should also provide case files to the INTERPOL and request red bulletins mandating their arrest.

Holding war criminals accountable is the best way to prevent further crimes against humanity by Azeri and Turkish personnel, as well as their jihadi proxies.

(David Phillips is Director of the Program on Human Rights and Peacebuilding at Columbia University and heads the Artsakh Atrocities Project. He served as a Senior Adviser and Foreign Affairs Expert during the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations. This analysis originally appeared on the website Ahval.)

Digital Matenadaran Receives Grant from Aurora Humanitarian Initiative

YEREVAN — The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative has allocated a \$10,000-grant to the Matenadaran, the national repository of ancient manuscripts named after Mesrop Mashtots, to help it create Digital Matenadaran and present its main exhibition hall online. This new project will give visitors an opportunity to take a virtual walk around the central hall of one of the world’s largest museums of Armenian manuscripts. Digital Matenadaran, planned to occupy a new section at the Matenadaran’s website, will be designed as a virtual exhibition with both text and audio descriptions. It will allow users to virtually stroll through the exhibition and to study more than 100 items of manuscript treasures, including exclusive samples of Armenian miniatures, presented in high-resolution digitalized copies with zoom-in options.

“It’s no longer possible to imagine our lives without use of high technologies. The world’s leading museums pay special attention to the organization of interactive exhibitions and displays, which would be available on online platforms as well. This project is another important milestone in popularizing the rich cultural heritage kept at the Matenadaran through the digital platform and making it more available to the world. And in this important endeavor, we have the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative next to us,” said Vahan Ter-Ghevondyan, director of the Matenadaran.

The new project, Digital Matenadaran, will allow people from around the world to virtually wander around the exhibitions while getting insightful descriptions provided in several languages and accompanied by medieval Armenian music in the background.

“In the five years since the launch of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, it has always been an honor to support the Matenadaran. Aurora was founded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide, and promoting Armenian heritage and history remains one of the core values on its agenda. As the coronavirus pandemic affected museums worldwide, going online and curating virtual experiences became critical to maintain a meaningful connection with the visitors. Aurora is delighted to be able to assist the Matenadaran in this much-needed endeavor,” noted Dr. Vartan Gregorian, co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

This is Aurora’s fifth grant to the Matenadaran, allocated within the Aurora Grants program and in accordance with the Memory Act. Through the Aurora Grants, the descendants of the Armenian Genocide survivors seek to honor the memory of their ancestors’ saviors by supporting educational initiatives and preserving Armenian heritage while promoting awareness of humanitarian efforts and Armenian history.

In 2015, funds from Aurora enabled the Matenadaran to purchase a special scanner to digitize manuscripts. More than 4324 manuscripts, archival documents and antiquarian books have been digitized to date thanks to this equipment. The 2016 grant funded the training of ten guides in Germany, while in 2017-2020, Aurora helped the Matenadaran organize more than 50 lectures for scholars and researchers and create an interactive map of Armenian scriptoria while supporting its other educational and academic programs.



Some of the treasures at the Matenadaran