

**Boston City Council
Supports Genocide
Education, Including
Armenian Genocide**

BOSTON — As it stands, Boston Public Schools currently do not require their history or social science curriculum frameworks to include the topic of genocide when teaching United States history or world history.

At the Council meeting the first week of March, the Council voted to adopt a resolution in support of passage of House Docket (H.D.) 1167, “An Act Concerning Genocide Education” and Senate Docket (S.D.) 1592, “An Act Advancing and Promotion Genocide Education” in the Massachusetts State legislature.

H.D. 1167, “An Act Concerning Genocide Education,” sponsored by Rep. Jeffrey Roy, and S.D. 1592, “An Act Advancing and Promoting Genocide Education,” sponsored by Sen. Michael Rodrigues, are acts that seek to amend the Massachusetts General Laws to require that all school districts in the state shall include a curriculum unit on the Holocaust and genocide.

Such curriculum unit would include, but not limited to, teaching the histories of the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, the Famine Genocide in Ukraine known as Holodomor, the Pontian Greek Genocide and the more recent atrocities in Bosnia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Sudan.

**Uncertainty Persists
Over Army Chief**

YEREVAN (RFE/RL, Panorama) — The status of Armenia’s top general remained uncertain on Tuesday, March 9, nearly two weeks after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan decided to fire him in response to demands for the government’s resignation voiced by the military’s top brass.

General Onik Gasparyan, the chief of the Armenian army’s General Staff, and 40 other high-ranking officers demanded that Pashinyan and his cabinet step down in a joint statement issued on February 25. They accused the government of putting Armenia “on the brink of collapse” after last year’s war in Nagorno-Karabakh.



Colonel-General Onik Gasparyan

of the Armenian army’s General Staff, and 40 other high-ranking officers demanded that Pashinyan and his cabinet step down in a joint statement issued on February 25. They accused the government of putting Armenia “on the brink of collapse” after last year’s war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

see CHIEF, page 2

**Opposition Continues to
Rally Against Pashinyan**

YEREVAN (Armenpress, Panorama.) — The joint candidate of the Fatherland Salvation Movement Vazgen Manukyan said during a demonstration at Baghramyan Street that they will patiently move forward their struggle, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Vazgen Manukyan emphasized that it is necessary to organize elections, so as the people could make a choice, but that should be done not under the current authorities. He once again reminded their plan, according to which the Prime Minister steps down, after which an interim government is formed, the situation in the country stabilizes and elections are held.

Manukyan urged protesters to block all the entrances of the National Assembly to prevent the MPs from entering.



Vazgen Manukyan

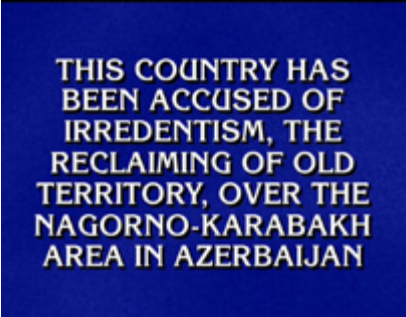
see OPPOSITION, page 2

**‘Jeopardy!’ Show
Clue Calls Armenia
Irredentist towards
Karabakh**

‘Jeopardy!’ Expresses Regrets

CULVER CITY, Calif. (gwswire.com, Twitter) — The game show “Jeopardy!” used the clue “This country has been accused of irredentism, the reclaiming of old territory, over the Nagorno-Karabakh area in Azerbaijan” in an episode aired on March 4. The answer given as “What is Armenia” by Jim Cooper was accepted as correct, but it led very quickly to a social media kerfuffle.

Various individual Armenians, angry that the clue, using the word “accused,” seemed to be negatively characterizing Armenia’s actions, while “irredentism” implied that Karabakh (Artsakh) did belong to Azerbaijan, reacted quickly on social media, as did Armenian or-



THE CLUE ON “JEOPARDY!” ABOUT KARABAKH

ganizations like the Armenian National Committee of America’s Western Region. Alex Galitsky, spokesman for the latter organization, saw the clue as a “blatant misportrayal of the #Artsakh self-determination movement,” further saying, “It’s profoundly disappointing to see a cultural staple like ‘Jeopardy!’ use its platform to sanitize the genocidal violence perpetrated against the indigenous Armenians of Artsakh by the Azeri government.”

On the other hand, individual Azerbaijanis on social media were pleased with the clue, assuming that it meant that the show was somehow ratifying Azerbaijani claims to Karabakh. Some also complained that Armenians were always crying about their history.

Azerbaijani Consul General Nasimi Aghayev in Los Angeles used the opportunity to crow, exclaiming in a Tweet on March 5, “Illegal, @ UN-condemned occupation & ethnic cleansing of #Azerbaijan’s #Qarabagh region by #Armenia was exposed again. Watched by millions of people. Truth always comes out.”

see JEOPARDY, page 20

Armenia in a Box

How Two Startups Became a Gamechanger in the Marketplace

By Ani Duzdabanyan-Manoukian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — During the most challenging time for Armenians all over the world, two families kept the connection between the diaspora and the homeland alive with an interesting idea: two boxes full of delicious snacks and wearable art pieces that kept hundreds of people busy and helped small businesses survive during the war in Artsakh and the Covid-19 pandemic. Hye Box and Ararat Box, with a simple but powerful concept, were able to diminish the miles and hours of difference to deliver homeland-made products to the US, Canada, Europe and Australia.

Two sisters, twins Elen and Elmira Gabrielyan, founded Hye Box about one and a half years ago as a box with Armenian crafts and books for children. “We were thinking that our product will be more useful for children, since many of them never even visited Armenia and knew little about the motherland,” explains Elen. But last

see BOXES, page 3

Elmira Gabrielyan (left) and Elen Gabrielyan



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Armenia, Cuba FMs Exchange Views on Prospects of Cooperation

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenia and Cuba expressed readiness to strengthen partnership and bolster political dialogue. In a phone call on March 9, Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Aivazyan and his Cuban counterpart Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla attached importance to deepening of cooperation also in international organizations.

Aivazyan and Parilla exchanged ideas over integration processes, namely over prospects of cooperation within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) — of which Armenia is a member of and Cuba an observer.

“In this regard, Minister Aivazyan attached importance to the expansion of the geographic boundaries of the EEU’s foreign economic relations. Ministers Ara Aivazyan and Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla expressed the conviction that the status of an observer state will enable Cuba to more effectively cooperate with EEU members, namely in industry, healthcare, energy, transport and agriculture,” the Armenian foreign ministry said in a readout.

Documentary on Azerbaijani Pogroms Released

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On March 5, on the 33 anniversary of the pogroms and self-defense of the Armenians of Gandzak (currently Ganja), a short documentary prepared by the Public Relations and Information Center of the staff of the PM of Armenia about these events was released on YouTube.

Archival video, audio recordings, as well as eyewitness accounts of the time are put together about the events that took place in Kirovabad (Gandzak) in Soviet Azerbaijan.

The pre-production process lasted from 2019 till 2021. The events are told by one of the leaders of the self-defense of the Armenians in Gandzak, Grisha Oganezov, as well as one of the founding members of “Gandzak” Self-Defense Committee, Julieta Verdyan-Yeremyants.

The documentary starts with an archival audio recording in which one of the Azerbaijani rioters arrested by the Armenian self-defense body in the Armenian quarter of Gandzak tells how their “activities” were coordinated by Azerbaijani professors at the Kirovabad Agrarian University, and how Azerbaijani police supported their actions.

Now, the city of Gandzak, located in the Utik province of Greater Armenia, has been turned into “Azerbaijani Ganja” and has also gone through a consistent demolition of the Armenian cultural heritage by Azerbaijani authorities, as part of its anti-Armenian state policy. This policy of Armenophobia adopted by Azerbaijan was clearly manifested in 2020 during the 2nd Artsakh War. To see the documentary go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJW-on5wuFg>



The opposition rally on Yerevan’s Baghramyan Street

Opposition Against Pashinyan Continues

OPPOSITION, from page 1

“They must be unable to enter here. This entrance is blocked, go and block the other ones. Go ahead, my friends. We are surrounding the National Assembly, and it will return to normal operation only when it is ready to make decisions suitable for our people,” Manukyan said.

Another opposition figure, Ara Saghatel-yan, also urged on his supporters.

Saghatel-yan, the former chief of staff of the Armenian parliament, was set free on Saturday pending trial. He thanked people for the “struggle against the dictatorship and for his freedom” at an opposition rally on Yerevan’s Baghramyan Avenue on March 9.

“You won and I am standing here today. We won. We will achieve another victory soon. Thank you. They [PM Nikol Pashinyan and his cabinet] have broken all the written and unwritten rules and crossed all the red lines,” Saghatel-yan said in his speech.

He noted that instead of reporting on 5,000 war casualties, prisoners of war,

missing persons and all the losses the country suffered, the authorities think that resorting to repressive measures, imprisoning people and discrediting them will help them retain hold on power.

“It won’t work. Today I declare from here that all the slaves of the regime, all the servants will answer before the law, generations and God,” Saghatel-yan said, blaming Pashinyan and his cabinet for the large number of war victims and territorial losses.

Saghatel-yan said he was in Artsakh almost throughout the whole period of the recent war and witnessed the “mess” created there.

“The current infantile authorities even turned the war into a show. Bayraktar drones and cluster munitions were being used against us, while they were assuring people here that we were winning. Then he [Pashinyan] says, “I am sorry.” Seriously? Do you understand what you have done? Do you give yourself an account of what you have done, the lights of how many homes you have extinguished? Do you re-

alize that you have deprived a whole nation of their homeland and honor? Do you realize that you have left tens of thousands of people homeless and thousands of children orphans? There is and will be no forgiveness for you for the simple reason that everyone who will share that responsibility will become an accomplice, and no sane person will go for it,” Saghatel-yan emphasized.

Saghatel-yan had been arrested for two months as part of a criminal probe into a case concerning a fake Facebook account opened in the name of “Gagik Soghomonyan.” The page continued to be updated while the former senior parliament staffer was remanded in custody.

Another opposition member, Artur Vanetsyan, said rallies do not in any way hinder the return of the Armenian prisoners of war (POWs) from Azerbaijani captivity. Vanetsyan, the former Director of the National Security Service and opposition Homeland Party leader, was part of the Homeland Salvation Movement on Tuesday.

He noted that the current authorities once again try to blame others for their “incompetence and inability to take action.”

Vanetsyan expressed hope that the president will eventually ask the Constitutional Court to determine the legality of the dismissal of the Armenian army’s General Staff chief, Onik Gasparyan, by Pashinyan, after refusing to sign the draft decree on his dismissal twice.

“We hope that today we will receive news from the President’s Office that the president has nevertheless applied to the Constitutional Court. Otherwise, we will decide what next steps to take on the spot,” the opposition leader said.

He added he is convinced that their persistent struggle and increased public pressure will yield results.

“From now on, the political agenda will be dictated from Baghramyan Avenue, and all issues related to further developments in Armenia will be resolved here,” Vanetsyan said.

Asked whether his Homeland Party plans to team up with the opposition Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, Dashnaktsutyun) party and nominate Robert Kocharyan as their candidate for prime minister in the event of snap elections in the country, as suggested by some media reports, Vanetsyan said: “We have a primary task — the removal of Pashinyan from office, followed by the formation of an interim government and early elections. Once we get to that point, we will talk about it. During my activity of the past year, I realized that nothing can be ruled out in politics, but now it is also impossible to make any assertions.”

Uncertainty Persists Over Army Chief

CHIEF, from page 1

Pashinyan rejected the demand as a coup attempt and petitioned President Armen Sarkissian to sign a decree relieving Gasparyan of his duties.

Sarkissian refused to sign such a decree on February 27, saying that it appears to be unconstitutional and would deepen the “unprecedented” political crisis in the country. Pashinyan criticized the refusal as “unfounded” and resent his motion to Sarkissian in another attempt to get him to fire Gasparyan.

Sarkissian again refused to sign the decree drafted by the prime minister’s office. But he made it clear that he will not ask the Constitutional Court to invalidate it, effectively paving the way for Gasparyan’s removal.

Under Armenian law, the president can keep blocking the prime minister’s decisions only by appealing to the court.

A spokesperson for the Constitutional Court said that it had received no appeals from Sarkissian as of Tuesday afternoon.

Sarkissian made no public statements on the issue despite strong pressure from opposition leaders and other critics of Pashinyan’s administration, who have backed the military’s demands. But he did send a written answer to one of those critics, Ara Zohrabyan, who heads the

national bar association.

In his letter publicized by Zohrabyan, the head of state indicated that it is now up to Pashinyan to decide General Gasparyan’s future and face legal and political consequences of that decision.

Zohrabyan condemned Sarkissian’s “inactivity” when he and a group of his supporters gathered outside the presidential palace in Yerevan earlier in the day. He suggested that the president is facing strong pressure from Pashinyan.

Sarkissian has chosen the “path of adventure” by failing to ask the Constitutional Court to determine the legality of the dismissal of Gasparyan, Zohrabyan said on Tuesday.

“We have just received a response from the presidential office. Unfortunately, the president has taken the path of adventure,” he wrote on Facebook.

A close Pashinyan associate, deputy parliament speaker Alen Simonyan, stated, meanwhile, that Sarkissian has missed a legal deadline for challenging the legality of Gasparyan’s sacking. The general has therefore ceased to be the chief of the General Staff, Simonian told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service.

“As a citizen and a lawyer, I and my colleagues will start exposing the president’s fears starting from tomorrow,” Zohrabyan added.



ARMENIA

Armenia In a Box

How Two Startups Became a Gamechanger in the Marketplace

BOXES, from page 1

year in late October the sisters realized that the same box will be more significant as a family box. The main purpose remained the same: to work with small businesses, entrepreneurs, artisans and artists and give the diaspora the opportunity to keep in touch culturally with Armenia.

Elen is studying computer science at the American University of Armenia. Elmira is majoring in management at the French University in Armenia. The financial part is Elmira's responsibility. Content creation and marketing is Elen's passion. "We complete each other as business partners. We came a long way together. Of course, we are having clashes too. We both have strong personalities and always express our opinions. But it's very interesting working with your twin sister," laughs Elen.

The sisters co-founded several endeavors before this last one that became their star project. Hye Box is a preference-based platform that allows choosing the box's content with a specially designed questionnaire, according to the number of people in the family and the presence of children. But the element of surprise still remains. "This way we keep close interaction with our customers and it is very encouraging, with all the kind words and feedback we have received," says Elen.

Every month the box has a specific theme. February was about St. Sargis, March is dedicated to Armenian women and April will focus on Easter.

"We will try to support Armenian business owners, entrepreneurs and artists. Also, we will include stories of the women who created the products or are famous with some accomplishment," explains Elmira. Two boxes (small and big) include 6-9 handmade items and children's books. "For us, it's important that the customers can have products that are usable on daily basis like jewelry or beauty products. We are also buying some of the products for ourselves — that's how much we appreciate the local market," says Elen, smiling.

The sisters are working with various producers and make the effort to establish 10-15 new contacts every month. The producers are mostly from different regions of Armenia and Artsakh. Elmira and Elen are finding them through social media and other platforms according to the previously established theme of the box for that month.

After choosing the artists remotely, they travel to the cities and villages to see the products and establish relationships.

The biggest issue remains shipping. "We don't use Hye Post as a shipping company anymore since they raised their prices but never improved the quality. We decided to work with two different companies. At least the quality of



ferent nationalities besides Armenian. "Hye Box will be part of the entire project which will increase interest about it," assures Elmira.

Ararat Box

While Hye Box is presenting the art and culture of Armenia, another initiative, [Ararat Box](#), is catering to the taste buds of the Armenian diaspora with snacks full of the flavors of the motherland. This startup was established by husband-and-wife Narek Safaryan and Mariam Ghazaryan right before the war started in September 2020.

Anna Khurshudyan, the digital marketing specialist of Ararat Box, shared the story and purpose of the concept that up until now is unveiling the nostalgic memories with Armenian made sweets and snacks, saying: "The project was planned to launch on October 1 and we couldn't even imagine that something like that could happen. In the beginning we were very disappointed and confused, and weren't sure how to continue our work. But soon we realized that we need to get our act together and go on. That was the best thing we could do at that moment."

She added enthusiastically: "As all of us have a relative or friend abroad, we noticed that these people still miss the flavors of the motherland. And we decided to create that platform which can unite everyone."

The main purpose of Ararat Box is to help small business owners and entrepreneurs in Armenia by exporting their products. They represent small, medium, and some large companies. "We even work with a few companies that have just started and are

continuing to progress thanks to the involvement with Ararat Box. We ourselves were so amazed to see how many talented people there are. They just need to be discovered," Anna excitedly exclaimed.

In Ararat Box, the main standard is maintaining quality, and it must meet everyone's expectations. "We always try every new item with our stuff, prior including it in the box. We all must like it," says Anna.

She adds, "We didn't even know that there is granola made in Armenia and it's actually delicious. No need to buy from somewhere else." Every box contains up to 20 items from different producers that come as a surprise every month either with membership or a single purchase of a box.



There are some problems with shipping to Canada. It takes more than the usual 15-30 days because of the customs of a transit country like Belarus. Anna says that the company is doing everything possible to reduce the wait time but, in this case, they can't do much.

The biggest issue for all startups and entrepreneurs in Armenia becomes the shipping cost which increased in 2021 despite the hope for economic recovery so vital for postwar Armenia. Anna doesn't talk about the damage this caused the company, but mentions that it received a lot of complains from the customers. "They were very surprised and frustrated since the shipping prices went up so unexpectedly and they confess that they weren't prepare to pay that much," says Anna.

The management of Ararat box is negotiating with other companies to find more affordable options for its customers. Despite all the obstacles, the team of Ararat Box is adding more options to keep the connection with the diaspora alive. And gratitude is "our daily dose of encouragement," smiles Anna.

Looking at the bright side helped these young people put Armenia on the map for so many. Hye Box and Ararat Box have become the most anticipated monthly shipments for a lot of households whose support allows hundreds of entrepreneurs to live and create in their homeland.



Fruit Food, one of the producers used for Ararat Box

the packaging is better," Elen assures me.

The other disadvantage is the absence of the payment mechanisms in Armenia like PayPal which makes it difficult for the customers to pay for their purchases from abroad. MoneyGram and Ameria Bank are the financial institutions Hye Box uses for now along with a PayPal account which is registered outside of Armenia. In the future, the sisters think of making boxes representing dif-

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Pallone: Azerbaijan Committed Gross Human Rights Abuses

WASHINGTON (Armenpress) — Azerbaijan committed gross human rights abuses during the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, Rep. Frank Pallone, Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, said in a tweet on March 8, reflecting on the issue of Armenian prisoners of war (POWs) and hostages being held in Azerbaijan.

“Azerbaijan committed gross human rights abuses during last year’s conflict. They continue to detain hundreds of Armenians in violation of international law,” he tweeted.

“I have personally spoken with the Biden Administration to immediately address these issues,” Pallone said.

He was quoted about the issue for a story in the March 7 edition of the *Wall Street Journal*.

Dutch Government Considers All Captive Armenians as POWs

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Dutch government considers all captive Armenians held by Azerbaijan as POWs, the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Armenia Nico Schermers said in a March 9 interview.

“All Armenians held in Azerbaijan are recognized by the Netherlands as prisoners of war. The Netherlands has a very small role in the issue of the NK conflict settlement, and we are conducting our efforts through Brussels or the OSCE Minsk Group format,” he said, and expressed hope that a lasting solution to the conflict will be found.

Meanwhile, the Azeri government continues violating the November 9, 2020 ceasefire terms regarding the exchange of POWs and other detainees. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev announced that they have returned all POWs, and even claimed that the remaining Armenians in custody are not classified as such and are “criminals.”

German MP Immunity Removed in Light of Bribery Charges

YEREVAN (ArmenPress) — The German Bundestag has deprived MP Axel Fischer of immunity to give investigative bodies an opportunity to conduct searches and collect facts on the criminal case of taking bribe from the Azerbaijani authorities, Deutsche Welle reported. A number of incumbent and former Bundestag MPs, part of the German delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, are accused of taking bribes from the Azerbaijani leadership for conducting lobbying in international organizations. “Among other things, they are accused of receiving money from Azerbaijan during the period of 2008-2016 though British fake organizations,” reads the statement issued by the Prosecutor’s Office. According to the Prosecutor’s Office, following receiving the money, the Azerbaijani MPs demanded them to support resolutions at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Mystery of Azerbaijan’s Missing Army Chief

By Ulkar Natiqqizi

BAKU (Eurasia.net) — Najmaddin Sadikov had been Azerbaijan’s top military officer since 1993, the chief of general staff of the armed forces and a deputy defense minister. But in the middle of last year’s war with Armenia, on the cusp of the victory for which the armed forces had prepared nearly all those 27 years, Sadikov mysteriously disappeared.

Rumors had long swirled around Sadikov, a career Soviet army officer who joined the Azerbaijani armed forces in 1992 during the first war with Armenia. Many Azerbaijanis considered him a “traitor,” a word they often used in social media posts about him. Insinuations were made about his ties with Russia and claims that his brother was a senior officer in the Armenian armed forces.

The rumors reached a peak during fighting in July, when a well-known and respected senior officer, Major General Polad Hashimov, along with Colonel Ilgar Mirzayev, were killed. On social media, many Azerbaijanis accused Sadikov of giving their coordinates to Armenia.

Sadikov attended the funeral, acting as a pallbearer along with Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov.

But at a massive demonstration in Baku that followed the funeral of another fallen officer, protesters blamed Sadikov for the deaths and called on him to resign. Rumors spread that he had been fired.

The allegations of treason appear ungrounded, but the government seems to have been worried by the harsh public reaction to Hashimov’s death and the heightened accusations against Sadikov, said Fuad Shahbaz, a Baku-based political and military analyst.

“The harsh criticism of Sadikov during the mass demonstrations in July and the

information spread by enemy forces for provocative purposes,” the ministry said. “Unfortunately, the recent spread and discussion of news on social networks clearly shows that this is done in order to create bias, hostility and confusion in society.”

Sadikov’s family also was mixing with the Azerbaijani elite: Azerbaijani-Russian pop star Emin Agalarov, the former son-in-



Najmaddin Sadikov

law of President Ilham Aliyev and friend of former U.S. President Donald Trump, released a song in September on Instagram called “Fatima,” which many fans took as an announcement that he was marrying Sadikov’s daughter, Fatima Sadikova. Agalarov has been coy and not confirmed directly that he is marrying Sadikova, but continued to drop hints that he was.

About two weeks after “Fatima” was released, war broke out again with Armenia.

When Azerbaijan appeared to suffer significant early losses in the fighting, especially around Murovdag in the Kelbajar region, many Azerbaijanis again blamed Sadikov. Rumors again spread that he had been fired for treason.

On October 4, the Ministry of Defense

the Ministry of Defense and then four days later dismissed him from active duty. Neither decision was publicly announced and the decrees passed unnoticed.

Azerbaijan went on to win the war, and on December 10 held a military parade in Baku to celebrate. Sadikov, who hadn’t been seen since that October 4 photo, didn’t appear at the parade.

Social media speculation again spiked. One Facebook user, under a post captioned “What do you think of Najmaddin Sadikov?” commented: “Why has he not been punished before the people? Why has whatever he has done not been investigated? Why is there no news?” Others returned to Agalarov’s Instagram post and accused the pop star of marrying the daughter of a traitor.

Finally, on January 28, there was official news, of a sort. The Defense Ministry, in response to a query from state news agency APA, confirmed that Sadikov was no longer in military service. APA reported, without citing a source, that he was suffering serious health problems and was undergoing open heart surgery in Moscow.

But other government officials began to say a bit more.

One member of parliament, writer Agil Abbas, wrote a short humor piece about Sadikov headlined “Najmaddin Sadigov Has Become a State Secret,” which concluded with a pointed retelling of an old Soviet joke. “So, a journalist wrote about a very high-ranking government official who was a fool. The journalist was sued. The judge sentenced him to a very high sentence – 15 years. Not because he insulted that high-ranking government official, but because he revealed an important state secret.”

Abbas gave a more serious interview to a local news website, Yenicag, where he said he believed that Sadikov was under house arrest. “He made mistakes, or lost credibility, in my opinion, that’s why he was removed,” Abbas said. “If he was arrested, it would be published in the press. Because the arrest of a general could not be hidden. He is probably under house arrest in his house, or one of his villas.”

A former state prosecutor, Ferman Rzaev, said in an online video show that Sadikov was responsible for early losses in the war.

“Who created the tactics? Of course, Chief of General Staff Najmaddin Sadikov,” Rzaev said. “Najmaddin trapped our army, directed the attack to the right, towards Agdam. For 30 years, Armenians have built tunnels, fortifications and traps there. Najmaddin had a plan to attack the direction in which the Armenians were strongest.”

Rzaev also had implicated the current minister of defense, Zakir Hasanov. A few days later, the defense ministry responded to Rzaev’s report directly defending Hasanov, but also Sadikov, albeit indirectly. It noted that Hasanov was commanding troops in the operation led by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, i.e. Aliyev.

“We once again call on the media, as well as electronic media, to refrain from circulating unfounded, untrue and unofficial information,” the MoD said.

Detailed official information, however, is not likely to be forthcoming.

“The state wants a quiet solution to this and for people to forget about it,” Shahbaz said.



Sadikov with President Ilham Aliyev last June (president.az)

demands for his resignation gave the government serious doubts about Sadikov’s image,” Shahbaz told Eurasianet. “This is likely the reason for his dismissal.”

Sadikov still retained official support, however. In response to the many public insinuations about him, several articles in pro-government media appeared, chronicling his successful career and blaming rumormongers for slandering him.

The Ministry of Defense issued a statement on July 21 denying the rumors that he had been fired and that his brother was in the Armenian armed forces; the ministry said the brother had been dead for more than 30 years.

“These reports are fabrications and dis-

published a photo showing a video teleconference among senior military leaders, including Sadikov.

A few days later, though, Sadikov’s biography and other information was quietly deleted from the MoD’s web page. There was no official comment, though the erasure was noticed and widely commented on in social networks.

At the same time, Aliyev quietly signed two decrees to dismiss Sadikov’s nephew, Ramil Asgarov, another senior military official. In June, Aliyev had promoted Asgarov to major general. But then in two late October decrees, Aliyev first dismissed Asgarov from his position as chief of the Main Department of Special Security of



INTERNATIONAL

Preserving Cultural Heritage

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Lessons of Syria And Iraq

War makes many victims. Soldiers are the first to suffer, civilians caught in the line of fire, or deliberately targeted, follow. Bombs destroy homes, schools, hospitals, churches, factories, farmlands — everything society needs to protect and perpetuate human existence. And among the inanimate objects required for human society are works of art, architectural treasures including churches, monasteries, temples, with their sculptures, reliefs, and, in the case at hand, the uniquely Armenian stone crosses, khachkars, marking the final resting places of the deceased, or gracing the grounds around a place of worship.

These are not only works of beauty but vital components of the heritage of a people and a nation. The recent Artsakh war led to the loss of thousands of lives, and the wanton destruction of edifices of all sorts, as well as the expulsion of Armenian residents, threatening the continued existence of a people. It also devastated cultural treasures in the entire region, which endangers the very existence of an Armenian identity.

On February 27, a group of highly qualified experts came together in a webinar organized by the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) and the Syrian Studies Association (SSA) to discuss “Heritage Imperiled: Wartime Destruction of Antiquities from Syria to Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh).” Conducted over the internet, the discussion was moderated by Heghnar Watenpaugh, Professor of Art and Architecture at the University of California, Davis. Joining her were Christina Maranci, who is the Arthur H. Dadian and Ara Oztemel Chair of Armenian Art and Architectural History at Tufts University and Chair of the Department; Ani Avagyan, Director of the ROCHEMP Regional Center for Cultural Heritage Management, Enhancement and Protection, and Chair of the International Council of Museums National Committee of Armenia; Stephennie Mulder, Associate Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture at the University of Texas, Austin; and Salam Al Kuntar, Lecturing Assistant Professor of Archaeology at Rutgers Department of Classics and Assistant Dean of Middle Eastern Affairs at Rutgers Global.

The focus of the discussion was the recent war in Artsakh. Elyse Semerdjian, president of SSA opened the event, recalling that Raphael Lemkin included the intentional destruction of cultural heritage in his initial formulation of the concept of genocide. In addressing the issue, the panelists would draw not only on their scientific research but also experience in field work in war-torn Syria and Iraq, as well as Turkey. The aim was to consider what lessons one could learn from the experience of intentional cultural destruction through those conflicts, lessons that might be applied to attempt to save Armenian cultural heritage in the wake of the recent conflict.

Extent and Character of the Devastation

Maranci, author of three books and numerous articles on medieval Armenian art and architecture, has worked for more than a decade on issues of cultural heritage. As a result of her campaign for the Cathedral of Mren, near Ani, it was included in the World Monuments Watch List for 2015-17.

In her remarks, she used maps and slides to estimate the scope of the destruction of Armenian artefacts, both in quantity and quality. A remarkable relief on one khachkar depicted the figure of a mother nursing her child. This highly unusual khachkar is located in Kalbajar province, and its post-war status is a question mark. It is one of thousands of artefacts exposed during the conflict. Maranci showed a map of the region of Kashatagh, which hosts an incredibly large number of monuments; one of them is the basilica in Tsitsernavank, from the 5th-6th century, which has an exceptional gallery above the eastern apse. Another is the monastery at Amaras with a tomb from the 5th century. These works tell us about certain unique architectural features, as well as social factors, for example, the role of women in society.

Turning to the kinds of destruction wrought, she recalled the case of a school constructed in the 1950s in Kelbajar province, for which Armenian tombstones had been recycled as building materials. In the razing of khachkars in the Julfa cemetery, and the defacement of Armenian inscriptions from monuments, the intent was clearly to obliterate traces of the Armenian presence, to make way for introduction of the myth of a “Caucasian-Albanian” culture.

These examples, the attack on the Shushi cathedral and the threat to monasteries throughout Artsakh, give an idea of what is at stake, what could be lost; it is, she said, a multifaceted issue, comprising the material Armenian presence, the sacred dimension of the monuments, and their historical significance. Referring to the progress made for Ani with the World Monuments Fund, Maranci posed the question: how can this be communicated to those capable of taking effective action? What role do scholars have to play? What lessons can be learned from the experience in Syria and Iraq?

Avagyan, who has vast experience in museum work, reviewed attacks on cultural heritage in Artsakh from September to November 2020. The sheer number of museums — 22! — listed, state as well as private, and individual collections, is mind-boggling. An estimated 20,000 pieces of movable items were on the territory taken by Azerbaijan. In Shushi alone there are numerous museums, for fine arts, with 600 artefacts; the Grigor Gabrielyants State Museum of Geology, the carpet museum, and so forth. The status of these collections is unclear, though the director of the carpet museum reportedly succeeded in evacuating part of the exhibits on September 1; the Cultural House of Shushi, however, was destroyed a month later.

Past experience has shown that Armenian cultural artefacts under Azerbaijani control have become objects of illicit trafficking and “Albanification,” a term she used to characterize an integral part of the process of cultural genocide. To protect these treasures, she called for transferring collections to the people of Artsakh and mobilizing Interpol to interdict smuggling.

Rescue Attempts: Local and International

Salam al Kuntar drew on her experience in Syria, where she worked in a number of capacities at the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) from 1996-2012, and since then has been active in the field of cultural heritage preservation. The damage to six heritage sites in Syria is unprecedented, she said. There was massive destruction

wrought by aerial bombardments, the Aleppo tunnel bombings in 2011, the intentional sectarian targeting by Shia militias of Sunni monuments from the Umayyad era, and the most notorious case of the smashing of statues in Palmyra by ISIS.

In response, social media played an important role, especially through the activities of archaeologists, to launch a “protect Syrian heritage” effort. People from the Ministry of Culture and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, where she worked for 15 years, did what they could to hide art treasures, and evacuate some museums where possible. As for the international reaction, from UNESCO and others, she remarked that funds were often spent to “organize workshops.” The task of documentation was considerable, with satellite images, laser scanning and photogrammetry deployed. The Safeguarding the Heart of Syria and Iraq (SHOSI) has worked to secure and stabilize sites inside Syria located outside the areas under control of the Assad government. Syrians and Iraqis have received online training in Turkey, learning methods for covering wall paintings and sandbagging structures to stabilize them. This “emergency conservation” effort aims also at preventing looting from exposed sites. Such protection is vital, considering her estimate that 1500 ancient tablets from Idlib city museum have been looted, leaving 500. St. Simeon Monastery in northern Syria is another project, where the extent of the damage to sites from the 4-6th centuries has been documented and emergency conservation efforts have been made, filling in Corinthian columns and propping up walls to prevent collapse.

Rethinking Basic Assumptions

Mulder, a specialist in Islamic art, architectural history and archaeology, worked for over a decade as head ceramicist at Balis, a medieval Islamic city in Syria, and has also conducted field work in Syria, Egypt and Turkey. In her presentation, she suggested reconsidering fundamental assumptions about the “universal” heritage model in post-wartime reconstruction. Referring to ISIS, she recalled that it started its cultural cleansing in June 2014 in Tel Afur, Mosul, the site of a Christian monastery from 600 AD. Though devastating, that assault went almost unreported; however, in February 2015, when ISIS terrorists took sledgehammers to smash statues in Mosul’s museum, they filmed the assault themselves and released it worldwide. This led to international outrage.

The question she raised relates to how we conceptualize antiquities; are all antiquities considered part of the heritage? How “old” are antiquities? The idea of cultural heritage was developed after World War II, she explained, and mentioned the name of Dresden, whose almost total obliteration became a symbol for the damage wrought by aerial bombardments. In 1954 the Hague Convention defined the basic concepts and the World Heritage List followed.

Mulder cited two examples of how antiquities may be defined and redefined. One was the Temple of Bel in Palmyra. Dated back to 32 A.D., it remained a temple for 240 years, then became a Christian church for 330 years, and finally was converted into a mosque and remained one for 1300 years. The area around the monument was filled with dwellings and was inhabited until the early 1930s, when the area was cleaned out (“spatial cleansing”) and it was returned to a Roman era temple. What else might it have been? The contrasting example was the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, built in 713 A.D. It had also been a Roman temple (to Jupiter), and a Christian church, before becoming a mosque. The case is similar to that of Palmyra, but different, because the mosque has survived. The two examples provide insight into the need to rethink the “authorized heritage discourse,” she said.

And UNESCO?

Heghnar Watenpaugh wanted to know what actions might be possible if a state in control of territories with such monuments proves to be unable or unwilling to protect them; or, if the state itself engages in their destruction. Salam al Kuntar commented that the UNESCO model was certainly not the answer. Anyone familiar with UNESCO’s inaction when Azerbaijan destroyed the Julfa khachkars would agree. The Monuments Men, of World War II fame, were more effective.

Professor Maranci developed the UNESCO issue further in response to a question from one virtual participant who asked if there were links between that organization and Azerbaijan. Maranci noted that a former leader of the organization indeed had such links, and pointed to the Julfa case, where absolutely nothing was done. In contrast, UNESCO responded to comparable destruction in Syria by labelling it a war crime. In the current case of Artsakh, UNESCO has been silent.

Another aspect raised in the Q&A session, moderated by SAS president Bedross Der Matossian, dealt with the function and value of documentation. Watenpaugh commented, in relation to the mystery of the whereabouts of Idlib’s antiquities, that documenting and cataloguing artefacts is extremely important for law enforcement efforts. The black market in looted antiquities is immense and lucrative, and the US is directly involved; not a few antiquities from Syria and Iraq have turned up in American museums. She noted that the Manhattan District Attorney’s office has opened a new unit on art crimes, because the problem is so widespread. That said, Stephennie Mulder suggested that the amount of attention, as well as funds, paid to documenting efforts might be excessive, and other means of protecting artistic heritage should also be supported.

In closing the circle, the discussion returned to the immediate threats to the Armenian cultural assets in Artsakh. Could the Christian community in Azerbaijan be contacted to help monitor sites? Watenpaugh noted that the community is a small minority, close to the government. At the same time, the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, who has visited the country, does have contacts with religious leaders there. How independent these representatives are and what their view of the Artsakh issue is remain a question mark. And what chances are there that the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the US with Turkey may lead to cooperation to protect Armenian artefacts? Here Watenpaugh expressed her criticism of this and the MOU with Syria, on grounds that the state organizations themselves have not provided protection.

Semerdjian concluded with the pertinent observation that (as the webinar had amply demonstrated) the work done by academics who have become activists is most effective. She thanked the panelists, who, acting as public historians, are informing the world and opening relevant and necessary debates.

Community News

AIWA Accepting Applications for Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Affiliate of the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) announced recently that applications are now being accepted for the Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships. The Hasmik Mgrdichian scholarships were established in 2011 to annually award scholarships to female university students of Armenian descent who are California residents. Thanks to the continued generosity of Hasmik Mgrdichian, each year \$5,000 is awarded to five or six students. Applications are online now.

In order to be considered for the scholarship, the criteria states that candidates must be a female California resident of Armenian descent; provide financial verification (first 2 pages of 2020 income tax returns. If not available, please provide first 2 pages of 2019 tax returns.); be a full-time student at an accredited University/College; be in her Sophomore, Junior or Senior Status or Graduate student (2021-2022 Year); have 3.2 minimum GPA; provide certified copy of university college transcripts; submit two letters of recommendation (one from an academic instructor/advisor; one from a community representative); and attach a small (passport size) photograph.

Applicants may submit a scholarship application annually; former scholarship recipients also may re-apply. Winners will be announced sometime in June 2021.

Applications are available at: www.aiwainternational.org. Applications, with all the required information, should be submitted to the Los Angeles Affiliate Scholarship Committee, Lily Balian, Chair.

"Our scholarship program was created by Hasmik Mgrdichian, one of the founders of the Los Angeles Affiliate. The scholarships are a tribute to her memory and continue to recognize her legacy to assist in the education of young Armenian women. She would be proud of the young women who have received her scholarship awards and the knowledge that the awards have been of great assistance in accomplishing and achieving their goals," stated AIWA-LA President, Nicole Nishanian.

The Scholarship Committee is chaired by Lily Balian with committee members Hermine Janoyan, Cindy Norian, Diane Cabraloff, Diana Hekimian, Houry Aposhian, and Lysa Grigorian, granddaughter of Hasmik Mgrdichian. They are committed to reaching out to all California universities and colleges to inform women students of the opportunity to submit an application for the scholarship awards. Flyers and notices are also being sent to Armenian schools, organizations and churches.

In addition to the Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarship Awards from the Los Angeles Affiliate, the Founders Scholarship Awards, ranging from \$500 to \$2500, are available through the AIWA International Board. The Founders of these awards are Olga see SCHOLARSHIPS, page 9



Burbank City Hall

City of Burbank Recognizes Independent Republic Of Artsakh

Rescinds Friendship City Status of Hadrut

BURBANK, Calif. (thebluntpost.com) — The City of Burbank unanimously adopted a resolution recognizing the Independent Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and rescinding the friendship city status of the town of Hadrut in Artsakh during its March 2 city council meeting. The Council requested for the city staff to write the final text of the resolution to be approved in the next few weeks.

The request for the City of Burbank to consider the resolution was initiated by the Armenian-American journalist, radio host, and activist, Vic Gerami. It was sponsored by Councilmember Nick Schultz.

"As an Armenian-American who grew up in Burbank, this is a very important recognition for me. I am grateful for Councilmember Nick Schultz for sponsoring the resolution, as well as other Councilmembers for their vote," said Gerami, the host of the Blunt Post with VIC on KPFF 90.7 FM.

He continued, "Burbank is known as the 'Media Capital of the World,' so this historic move will have significant reverberations and send a clear message that Burbank stands for human rights, people's right to self-determination, and in support of its large Armenian-American community."

Burbank is a city built by people, pride, and progress. These three ingredients turned a tiny, rural town into the thriving community it is today. Throughout its 100-year history, Burbank has embodied a forward-thinking city that provides a high quality of life and strong sense of community to its residents. In keeping with this tradition, the city will continue to combine 21st century technology with the same small town feel that will make Burbank an ideal place to live, work and play for see BURBANK, page 7



Vic Gerami

St. Nersess Seminary Receives Generous Donation

ARMONK, N.Y. — Last month, Dean Shahinian, former St. Nersess Board member and longtime supporter, became the most recent naming donor on the Armonk campus. He chose the Recreation Complex to honor his parents, Paul and Grace (Jelalian) Shahinian, with a generous donation.

When asked what led him to make such a generous donation to St. Nersess, Mr. Shahinian simply replied, "Confidence. I have confidence in the staff, in particular the integrity of Fr. Mardiros. I have confidence in the vision of Abp. Tiran Nersoyan and the Seminary's mission and the perseverance of Fr. Karekin Kasparian." He then added, "I know the Seminary will use my donation as promised."

Back in the 1980s, Dean Shahinian donated a ping-pong table to the seminary, which was lovingly used for many years by the seminarians and summer conference attendees. When the opportunity again arose to donate towards the seminarians' recreation, he embraced it. "How ironic that 40 years later, I am donating towards the recreation



Dean Shahinian with Rev. Mardiros Chevian

room. With the refurbishment, I hope the students will find a nice place to relax from their studies."

In addition to the naming of the building, he has donated towards the upgrade of the recreation complex, which includes new flooring, furniture, electronics, large screen TV and refreshing the wall color, as well as new items outdoors, including soccer, volleyball and basketball nets. All will be enjoyed by summer conference attendees, too.

Shahinian's father passed away in 2010 and his mother is now 94. "I am profoundly grateful to my parents for their love, advice and encouragement, which ultimately led to my successes as an adult. This is why I want to honor them publicly," reflects Dean Shahinian. A plaque has been placed outside the front door to the recreation building bearing their names.

On January 30, Fr. Mardiros Chevian traveled to Washington DC to spend time with Dean and to review how his donations will benefit the seminary. A proposal to support the continuing see SEMINARY, page 8



COMMUNITY NEWS

Onanian Endowment Realizes the Dream of a Longtime Diocesan Leader

NEW YORK — A new endowment has been established with the Armenian Church Endowment Fund (ACEF) to honor the legacy of longtime Diocesan leader, the late Edward Onanian.

At the close of 2020, the Onanian family made a gift of \$500,000 to establish the “Edward Onanian Endowment Fund.” The endowment will benefit lay staff members of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, providing them with an annual retirement benefit for the first time in the organization’s history.

It represents the realization of a goal for which Edward Onanian advocated throughout his long years of leadership in the Armenian Church. The spirit of dedication and sacrifice animating the clergy and staff of the Diocese was not lost on him, and in response Ed became a tireless advocate on their behalf. To him, retirement benefits were a critical part of securing the future — both for the employees of the Diocese and for the institution itself.

Since Dr. Onanian’s passing in 2019, the family has been contemplating a way to realize his vision. “My family is pleased to honor my father’s legacy in this way,” said Ed Onanian’s daughter, Laurie. “Thanks to efforts by him and fellow Diocesan delegates, provisions were made to ensure an annual retirement benefit for our clergy. A similar benefit for the lay staff never materialized in his lifetime, however. I know dad would be very pleased with this gift.”

Laurie Onanian added that the family chose to give

to the Armenian Church Endowment Fund (ACEF) because of its record, but also because of her father’s long association with ACEF, and his confidence in its mission.

“I can fondly recall my father inviting to our home the late Colonel Victor Arzoomanian, ACEF’s tireless fundraiser in its earliest days. Over dinner they would discuss the importance of ACEF for our Diocese. It was only in its infancy back then, but they foresaw that ACEF would grow into a powerful benefit to the entire church.”

Gift of a Rare Individual

Deeply committed throughout his life to the Armenian Church, Edward Onanian was a member of the Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Church of Providence, RI, and the St. Mary Church of Washington, DC. He was a pillar of both parishes, serving on their respective parish councils, investment committees, and nearly every endeavor that aimed to build, expand, or fortify those churches. He served on the Diocesan Council for 10 years (1983-1993), and as a Diocesan delegate for more than 25. These were the logical extensions of Edward’s youthful years of leadership in the early 1960s on the ACYOA Central Council (which he chaired) and the Choir Association.

“I instinctively associate the name Edward Onanian with the inner workings and leadership of our Diocese,” recalled Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan.



The late Edward Onanian (1936-2019)

“Long before I met him personally, I had heard his name constantly in various church circles. It was as if he was one of the legendary figures of our Diocese — which he was, in so many ways. The scope of his contributions was vast, and affected virtually every facet of our Diocese’s leadership and ministry.”

To many of the longtime Diocesan staffers, the name Ed Onanian awakens fond memories of a dignified but always down-to-earth gentleman.

“I loved talking to him and hearing what he had to say; I will never forget him,” said Elise Antreassian. “The Edward Onanian Endowment is such a beautiful gift to the Diocesan staff. It is the rare individual who gives substantively to something like this — not a building wing or a room or a statue, but a means of helping those who work ‘behind the scenes’ doing important but generally unacknowledged work. I have worked for the Diocese for decades in Christian Education and knew Ed as a deeply thoughtful, wholly dedicated, very loving leader, part of a generation of men and women who once drove the work of the church.”

For others who did not know the man himself, the gift is a deeply appreciated gesture of support.

“For several years I have been the voice on our staff inquiring about a Diocesan Assembly resolution to offer a retirement benefit for Diocesan staff who are not clergy,” said Jennifer Morris. “Therefore, I was overjoyed to learn of the beautiful gift from the Onanian family to bring this to fruition. This annual contribution will be a great benefit to the Diocesan staff, and offer an incentive to those who have committed their lives to the service of our beloved church.”



A vintage photo of Mr. Onanian among fellow leaders of the Washington, DC, community, during the 1987 visit of Catholicos Vasken I. Among those standing with the departed catholicos are the late Diocesan Primate Abp. Torkom Manoogian, and the late St. Mary pastor Fr. Vertanes Kalaydjian, all of blessed memory.

City of Burbank Recognizes Independent Republic of Artsakh

BURBANK, from page 6
years to come.

Armenians make up more than 10 percent of Burbank’s population. The total population at the 2010 census was 103,340. Since 1990, the number of Armenians in Burbank has nearly quintupled, from 2,780 to 13,846, according to the most recent census data. This number is likely much higher now as it does not reflect the results of the most recent census conducted in 2020.

“Early last month, I spoke with Vic Gerami about the steps taken by our regional partners (e.g., Los Angeles, Glendale and West Hollywood) to formally recognize the Independent Republic of Artsakh. He encouraged the Burbank City Council

to take action and I am thankful that he brought it to our attention. He was quickly joined by many members of our community,” said Councilmember Schultz.

He added, “Tonight the Burbank City Council unanimously requested that city staff bring back a resolution to finalize this recognition. This step will be incredibly meaningful to the Armenian members of our community who have been directly and indirectly impacted by the violence and loss of life stemming from the military aggression by Azerbaijan in the region. I look forward to formalizing this recognition of Artsakh in furtherance of promoting democracy and the right to self-determination.”

Approximately 900,000 Arme-

nians live in California, 700,000 of whom in the greater Los Angeles area, including West Hollywood, Hollywood, East Hollywood (Little Armenia), Glendale, Burbank, Pasadena, and throughout the San Fernando Valley.

Ten states across the US have recognized the Independent Republic of Artsakh so far. They are California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota and Rhode Island. Cities that have recognized Artsakh include Los Angeles, Glendale, West Hollywood, Fresno County, Highland, Gardena, Fort Lee Borough, Fowler, Englewood Cliffs, Clark County, Ridgefield, Cliffside Park, and Orange County.

In addition to dozens of cities

across the US, hundreds of cities and principalities in France and Italy have recognized Artsakh, as well as cities in the United Kingdom, Spain, Uruguay, and Guatemala.

On November 25, 2020, the French Senate voted 305-1 recognizing the independence of the Republic of Artsakh, calling upon the US administration and Congressional leaders to take similar action.

Following the Senate’s vote, on December 3, 2020, France’s National Assembly approved a resolution calling on the government to recognize Artsakh as a “republic.” The resolution was adopted in the Assembly with 188 “yes” votes against three “no” votes, while 16 deputies abstained from voting.



OBITUARY

Robert Mugar Yacoubian

Dedicated to Helping Students Attain Higher Education

BOCA RATON, Fla. — Robert Mugar Yacoubian died peacefully February 22, 2021, at the Boca Raton Regional Hospital in Florida, following a brief illness. He was 84 years old.

Born to Armenian immigrants Kourken and Alice (Mugar) Yacoubian, Robert was the middle child between older sister Gloria and younger sister Susan. As children, his parents immigrated to the United States in the early years of the twentieth century to escape the Armenian Genocide by the Ottoman Turks.

The family's ancestral roots were in Harput and Malatya, in what is now eastern Turkey. Robert spent childhood summers with his grandmother Vosgitel Mugar in Watertown, and picked up Armenian in her house. Like many who flee ethnic violence, his elders wanted to forget their haunted memories. "Don't play that sad music," they used to say about plaintive Armenian songs.

As he grew up, Robert cultivated a mischievous sense of humor and a love of life that defied any ancestral persecution. He delighted those around him with imitations and malapropisms and colorful Armenian phrases. He, too, did not have time for sad songs, but he savored classical music concerts, especially joyous composers like Hayden and Mozart. He also frequented musicals that would preview in Boston before hitting Broadway, and sat on the Board of Directors of the UMass Fine Arts Center.

Robert met his lifelong friend Richard Weil in the early 1970s. Richard shared

Robert's love of music and fine art, of gourmet food and travel, and of sunshine on the beach. The two traveled extensively in this country and abroad, often with dear friends.

Like so many immigrant families, the Yacubians emphasized hard work, education, and helping others, and Robert's career as Transfer Coordinator at Greenfield Community College combined these virtues in a distinctive way. He helped thousands of students transfer to four-year institutions, including several highly selective colleges and universities like Smith, Mount Holyoke, Amherst, Williams, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He was particularly effective in sending women to Smith College via the Ada Comstock Scholars Program for students of nontraditional college age.

Even in retirement, Robert continued to be devoted to his students, establishing a yearly transfer scholarship at Greenfield Community College. He served two terms on the Board of Directors of the College Foundation and was honored as its first director emeritus. The Advising Center at the College now bears his name.

Robert himself earned a master's degree at UMass Amherst after graduating from Babson College and Belmont High School, with a postgraduate year at Tabor Academy. In Greenfield, he settled into a house that matched his colorful personality—the deep red Saltbox on Newell Pond, an iconic structure that dates to 1730.

He was proud of his American upbringing, but Armenia was also always present



in his life, in different ways at different times. He took a sabbatical leave from the college to spend the 1996 spring term in Yerevan, where his sister, Susan, was working. Times were difficult, with the recent collapse of the Soviet Union leaving an earthquake-torn country struggling to rebuild. But Robert established the Career Services Office at the American University of Armenia, forging lasting friendships and refreshing his Armenian language skills.

Robert's family was deeply important to him. He encouraged his younger sister Susan's education and unorthodox career, which took her from secondary school administration to non-governmental development work in Armenia, India and Uganda. Her children, Nicole and Alex, remained devoted to him, as he was to them. He took

great joy in their lives and accomplishments, and in their families.

Especially in retirement, Robert would spend increasing time during the summer with his older sister, Gloria, on Cape Cod in Cotuit, enjoying close-knit friendships at Riley's Beach. He spent winters in Boca Raton. His dear Aunt Helen was his original connection to Florida, and he eventually bought a condominium in her building. Gloria passed away in late 2019. After a final trip to Puerto Rico to help handle her affairs in early March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic confined Robert to Boca Raton for the final year of his life. During this difficult time his beloved caregiver Maurio François looked after him night and day, showing compassion, patience, skill and understanding that had already aided and comforted Robert for more than five years.

Robert was predeceased by his sister Gloria Yacoubian Myers and is survived by his younger sister Susan Yacoubian Klein of Princeton, NJ; his niece Nicole Klein Sims and her husband Ethan Sims, along with their children Zoe and Téa of Boise, ID; his nephew Alex Klein and his wife Joanie Ellen, along with their children Roscoe and Clyde of Belfountain, Canada; his longtime friend Richard Weil of Boston; his caregiver Maurio François; his cousin Carolyn Mugar of Cambridge; and many other loving cousins and friends.

Those wishing to remember Robert may make a gift to: Robert Mugar Yacoubian Transfer Scholarship, Greenfield Community College Foundation, One College Drive, Greenfield, MA 01301-9739

Given the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, funeral arrangements and a celebration of Robert's life will be deferred to a later date.

St. Nersess Seminary Receives Generous Donation

SEMINARY, from page 6
education of clergy and lay people was presented and reviewed for his consideration. Dean has donated additional funds for this purpose.

"I am deeply humbled by Dean's commitment to the seminary and to the continuing education of our clergy," stated Chevian. "His trust and confidence in our mission will serve as a role model for others," he concluded.

In addition, he has also donated towards the procurement of scholarly books for the seminary's library. This donation will allow the Seminary to expand its collection for students and researchers. "Dean's additional gift

will enrich our library collection and allow for more scholarly research," Chevian noted.

Shahinian, a lawyer who has been elected as delegate to the 1995 and the 1999 National Ecclesiastical Assemblies (to elect the Catholics) and to the Diocesan Council, served on the St. Nersess Board of Directors from the late 1990s to mid-2000s. For 16 years, he worked for the Chairmen of the U. S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs on numerous bills and laws, including the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the Dodd Frank Act, staffed over 100 hearings, and negotiated numerous legislative issues with regulators and participants in the financial services

industry. He retired from the committee as Senior Counsel and Chief Securities Policy

Advisor to manage the care and the affairs of his mother and uncle about six years ago.



The plaque bearing the Shahinian name

DENNIS M. DEVENEY & SONS

Cemetery Monuments

Specializing in
Armenian Designs and Lettering

701 Moody St. Waltham, MA 02543
(781) 891-9876 www.NEMonuments.com

Telephone (617) 924-7400

Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Inc.

Continuous Service By The Bedrosian Family Since 1945

558 MOUNT AUBURN STREET
WATERTOWN, MA 02472

MARION BEDROSIAN
PAUL BEDROSIAN
LARRY BEDROSIAN

Giragosian

F UNERAL

H OME

James "Jack" Giragosian, CPC
Mark J. Giragosian

Funeral Counselors

576 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472, TEL: 617-924-0606
www.giragosianfuneralhome.com

COMMUNITY NEWS

AGBU 91st General Assembly Goes Virtual Due to Global Pandemic

NEW YORK — On February 27, 2021, and for first time in its more than a century-old history, the biennial AGBU General Assembly broke tradition by taking its proceedings entirely online. Given the lingering presence of Covid-19, now in its second year and still persisting in hotspots across the globe, the AGBU Central Board agreed to harness the power of virtual technology to unite its worldwide membership remotely.

Thanks to the expertise of the AGBU Armenian Virtual College (AVC), hundreds of participants from 32 countries were able to connect through Zoom with the benefit of simultaneous translation from English to Armenian, French and Spanish.

“Ever since the Coronavirus outbreak last year, AGBU has proven itself an agile and inventive force online. Since then, we learned that we not only could continue our mission but also extend our reach to ever larger segments of the communities we serve,” said Central Board Member and Secretary Sarkis Jebejian, who served as the meeting’s Master of Ceremonies.

Following the welcome remarks, Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, conveyed his blessing wishing the Assembly a successful meeting and emphasized the

important role of the AGBU in the life of the Armenian Nation.

As usual, the official agenda included a report of the consolidated financials for the period 2018 and 2019 by AGBU Central Board Treasurer Nazareth Festekjian and an activities report for the same cycle by Central Board member and Assistant Secretary Arda Haratunian. A report highlighting AGBU’s work in education, in particular the immense contributions of AVC to Armenian education over the past ten years since its inception, was presented by Central Board member Lena Sarkissian. A brief question and answer session followed addressing issues raised by the membership in advance of the meeting.

There were also salutes to three AGBU groups, for which AGBU President Berge Setrakian took pride in recognizing for their extraordinary sacrifices of time and



Berge Setrakian

expertise during critical moments in 2020. This included District Committee and its Chairman Gerard Tufenkjian, and entire AGBU Lebanon community who redefined the meaning of civic engagement in Lebanon after the explosion at the Port in Beirut

last August. In addition, Setrakian thanked AGBU scouts across the globe for their hard work and community service throughout an incredibly challenging time locally and globally. “We are lucky to have them wear the badge of AGBU and represent us so well,” Setrakian, a former AGBU scout leader himself, remarked. Finally, the AGBU Young Professionals were singled out for their display of leadership when the pandemic hit, proactively finding ways to keep connected, as well as provide forums for important exchanges on timely topics.

In his official biennial address, Setrakian acknowledged straightaway that the impressive gains and achievements by AGBU in the 2018-2019 cycle were soon overshadowed by the crises that ensued in 2020. He acknowledged how these calamities necessitated a major shift in priorities to intensive humanitarian relief, an area for which AGBU has long burnished an impressive and trusted reputation.

Setrakian took this time to remind participants of the numerous historical turning points in Armenian history that catapulted AGBU into greater involvement in developing the modern Armenian state, starting with the foundational work of AGBU visionary founder Boghos Nubar in educating impoverished and oppressed Armenian communities in Hamidian Turkey at the turn of the 20th century as well as the repatriation of Armenians to the newly established soviet Armenia. He referenced key decisions made by his predecessors such as Alex Manoogian’s call to support the establishment of Holy Etchmiadzin as the seat of the Armenian Church and Louise Simone’s efforts to establish the American University of Armenia (AUA) shortly after Armenia won its independence in 1991.

Cognizant of the immediate concerns of those in attendance, Setrakian outlined what he envisions for AGBU and for Armenia going forward. “AGBU’s leadership, out of serious concern for the dangers facing our nation, has called on all Armenian people to unite and bring their expertise, their engagement and their formidable will to build the future in the aftermath of the events of the past year,” he stated.

He concluded his remarks with an optimistic but tempered vision of the years ahead. “We are confident of the important role that AGBU can fulfill in the mission of strengthening the core of our nation which is global, with its homeland and its Diaspora. This will require the participation of each and every one of you, as only together can we achieve the national prosperity and stability we profoundly wish to see.”

The full text of the speech can be found on page 20.

AIWA Accepting Applications for Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships

SCHOLARSHIPS, from page 6
Proudian, Ethel Jaffarian Duffett, Agnes Missirian, Lucy Kasparian Aharonian, Hripsime Parsekian, Dr. Carolann S. Najarian, Rose A. Hovanessian and others. Applications are available at: scholarships@aiwainternational.org. Applications may be submitted to the AIWA Central Scholarship Committee, Armenian International Women’s Association, 65 Main Street, Waverly, MA 02472.

Applications for all AIWA scholarships for the 2021-2022 academic year can be downloaded from the AIWA website: www.aiwainternational.org. Young women are urged to apply for both scholarships.

Tekeyan Cultural Association

SPONSOR



20th

ANNIVERSARY

a TEACHER

IN ARMENIA AND ARTSAKH



SINCE ITS INCEPTION
IN 2001, THE TCA
SPONSOR A TEACHER
PROGRAM HAS
RAISED \$734,590
AND REACHED OUT
TO 6,829 TEACHERS
AND SCHOOL STAFF
IN ARMENIA AND
ARTSAKH



☐ Yes, I want to sponsor teachers in Armenia and Karabagh to continue helping them educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the teacher's name and address.

☐ \$200 ☐ \$400 ☐ \$600 ☐ other _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Make check payable to:
Tekeyan Cultural Association—Memo: Sponsor a Teacher

Mail your check to:
TCA Sponsor a Teacher
5326 Val Verde, Houston, TX 77056

Your donation is Tax Deductible

The 2021 SRFF Presents Six Armenian Films

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

NEW YORK —
Founded in 2014 by
actress and filmmaker

Nora Armani, the Socially Relevant Film Festival (SRFF) in New York is celebrating its eighth edition with its most exciting and slate to date: in all 65 films from 33 countries including Armenia will be screened this upcoming March 15-21. Armani dedicated the festival to the memory of her cousin, Vanya Exerjian, who died as a result of a hate crime in Egypt. Hence, from the beginning its goal has been to bring audiences everywhere positive, life-affirming, socially relevant films—in counterpoint to the gratuitous violence that one sometimes sees in contemporary mainstream releases. “My hope,” says Armani, “is that these films will collectively and individually bring about some positive change in the world. If SRFF contributes in even a small way to making such change possible, then I will feel that I have completed my mission on this planet.” Every year Armani also includes films from the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian diaspora, seamlessly curating them into the different series and panels presented. Here is a brief roundup of what to look for this year, without giving too much away in the form of spoilers:

French Armenian actor and director Serge Avedikian, most recently seen in the 2013 tour-de-force “Paradjanov,” and “Return to Armenia” (2016), has created a highly personal film shot during four visits to his family’s ancestral village of Sölöz in Turkey, from 1987 to 2019. The resulting 65-minute documentary feature, “Back to Sölöz,” is being screened here in its US premiere as part of the festival’s Genocide and Survival series, highlights the themes of identity, historic truth and reconciliation.

Located 170 kilometers south of Istanbul, Sölöz is now bereft of Armenian life, the only remains being in the form of Armenian letters inscribed on discarded stones and steps of ruined monuments and churches.

The documentary’s great strength lies in the fact that Avedikian has few expectations: he doesn’t preach or expect repentance from anyone involved. The reactions of the locals, most of whom were either relocated by the government or moved to Sölöz years after the events of 1915 range from puzzlement to regret about a painful history for which they themselves were not personally responsible.

Nora Martirosyan’s 2020 feature film, “Should the Wind Drop” (Si le vent tombe) has been making

waves: it was included in L’ACID, on the Official Program selection at the Cannes Film Festival 2020 and also screened at the Toronto Film Festival and Tokyo Filmex. Its plot involves an international auditor Alain (Grégoire Colin), arrives to appraise the tiny airport of the self-proclaimed Caucasian republic of Artsakh, in order to greenlight its eventual reopening. He soon meets the energetic and winsome young Edgar (Hayk Bakhryan), a local boy running a make-shift business on the airport grounds. Through his friendship with Edgar, Alain develops an attachment to the land and dedicates himself to help this isolated Armenian enclave develop. Colin delivers a bravura performance, and Bakhryan shows youthful promise. But in the end the film’s main character is really a people fighting for survival, as Martirosyan told *Variety magazine*: “The main character of the film is a country, one that didn’t officially exist in legal terms, but which was there in front of my camera in order to host the story that it inspired in me: Should the Wind Drop. But the wind didn’t drop: instead it became a storm that took away people’s lives, their hopes, and their future.”

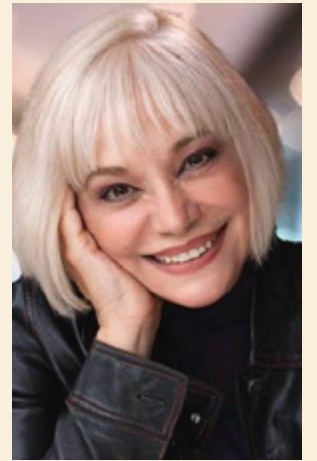
Pair this film with Mariam Avetisyan’s 17-minute documentary short, “The Desire to Live,” which looks at the forced population displacement during the recent 44-day war in Artsakh (September-November 2020), and you get a good feel for what has occurred recently in this embattled republic. “Desire to Live” is being presented as part of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights series.

Mariam Ohanyan’s short documentary, “The House That Built Tsoghik,” (22 mins, US Premiere) recounts the story of a remarkable female architect, Tsoghik Arabyan, who worked mainly in 1950s Soviet Armenia. Told through archival footage, the film is being shown as part of the Empowering Women series.

Harlan Bosmajian’s “In Transit” documents a son’s rebellion against paternal law and his father’s attempt to impose on him traditional, restrictive family obligations. Bosmajian is an American-Armenian filmmaker and cinematographer with some 20 films to his credit, whose work has previously been showcased at SRFF.

Finally Nora Armani’s “iMigrant Woman,” (35 mins, USA), is also being shown as part of the Empowering Women series and will be featured at the NGO CSW 65th Forum Exhibit Booth at the UN, followed by a panel discussion. A finalist for the Women Film Critics

Circle Award, “iMigrant Woman” was directed by Armani on Zoom in July 2020 with a cast that spanned six cities (including London, Chicago, and LA) in the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown. Armani then edited the footage and is presenting it as a film that encompasses four intertwining monologues that tell the diverse stories of immigrant and migrant women. So in total: six thought-provoking films by Armenians from around the world, all well worth tweeting and hashtagging to interested friends and contacts.!



Nora Armani

Some Festival Notes:

All films can be viewed at any time during the festival from March 15-21.

The only scheduled events are the “Meet the Filmmakers” live talks and our special workshops and panels. The live talks will be broadcast from the festival’s YouTube Channel, and simulcast on the SRFF Facebook page @SRFFny.

“Meet the Woman Filmmakers” is scheduled on Monday March 8th, in celebration of International Women’s Day. (Link may be found in the online festival schedule and here.)

A special “Focus on Lebanon” session scheduled on Wednesday, March 17 will cover the current developments and events in that embattled society. Moderated by LAU Executive Director Nadim Shehadi, the discussants will be Lebanese filmmaker Carole Mansour and activist Gino Raidy.

Industry workshops will cover topics such as the importance of PR, Press and the Media in any successful film distribution campaign; a SAG-AFTRA low budget film production webinar which will cover the new trends and platforms in film production; and one-on-one consultations with Aspect Ratio acquisitions agency founder Jordan Matos.

Learn more about the festival at www.ratedsr-films.org and click on selections of your choice.

Fresno State’s Armenian Studies Program Meets Covid Challenges Head On

By Michael Rettig

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

FRESNO — The pandemic has been especially challenging for colleges and universities.

Professor Barlow Der Mugrdchian, the Berberian Coordinator of the Armenian Studies Program (ASP) at Fresno State, has met the challenges due to the pandemic head on when California first went on lockdown and events transitioned online. “People wanted to feel connected and that’s why I felt that I could not just shut everything down, though that would have been the easy route. I took the opposite approach and decided we needed, at the very least, to continue to schedule regular events, or even to increase the number of events per semester.”

For more than 40 years, ASP has played a unique role in the Fresno community; it not only educates a variety of students on Armenian culture, literature, language, art, and history, but it provides avenues for the students and community to engage with one another and with other prominent Armenians from around the world. Since its inception, the program has regularly held events including concerts, lectures, film festivals, banquets, exhibits, and more for students and the community. Each event

brings prominent Armenian scholars, directors, and authors to Fresno.

“We bring people to the university and fulfill an educational role that no other institution in Fresno fulfills,” said Der Mugrdchian. “Students, their parents, their grandparents, and their family become tied to the university through the program.”

Since he began teaching at Fresno State in 1985, Der Mugrdchian has sought to maintain that role.

During the pandemic, ASP has maintained a rigorous calendar of online events to keep the year as normal as possible for students. Classes are held synchronously over Zoom and the program continues to hold some 20 community online presentations each year. In some ways, the online setting has given the program a greater reach than ever before. “Now our events are bringing people from literally all over the world because all you have to do is get a link to participate,” Der Mugrdchian stated.

Before the pandemic, ASP events fulfilled not only an educational role, but a social one, bringing Fresno Armenians together from across political, social, and religious divides.

Ariana Garabedian, vice president of the Armenian Students Organization (ASO) at Fresno State, especially misses being

able to socialize and network after events. “They’re not just lectures or programs that we attend and then and forget about. These events are something that people really engage with after the fact.”

Fellow student and ASO President Dustin Vartanian echoed these sentiments, noting that the level of learning has not been disrupted thanks to Der Mugrdchian’s efforts, but the social and networking opportunities have inevitably diminished. “To be able to meet and interact with the visiting lecturer in person and spend time visiting with community members over coffee and snacks is something I truly miss,” said Vartanian. It is this social aspect of the program that coronavirus has most disrupted over the past year as courses and community lectures transitioned online.

For Vartanian, the Armenian Studies Program became central to his college experience soon after he became involved. “Even though I’m a business management major, I feel like my entire college experience has been centered around Armenian studies. It’s made me think about my Armenian-American identity in new ways and introduced me to some of my closet friends,” said Vartanian.

Garabedian similarly established a close bond with her classmates. “I miss sitting in class with like-minded individuals know-

ing that they’re on the same path of learning our language and history together. It’s special to have those learning moments with classmates that you end up becoming best friends with.”

In a normal year, ASP students would have had the opportunity to participate in a study abroad trip to Armenia. Over the years, Der Mugrdchian has taken nearly 100 students to Armenia, many for their first time. A planned trip to Armenia in the summer of 2021 was postponed due to the pandemic; however, the trip will be rescheduled when conditions permit.

The Armenian Studies Program’s upcoming events include Dr. Dzovinar Derderian’s presentation on “Migrants from Van and the Transforming Politics of Representation in the Ottoman Empire, 1850s-1870s” on March 19. For more details on upcoming programs, visit <https://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/armenian-studies/>.

(Michael Rettig is an adjunct instructor in the History Department at Clovis Community College. He graduated from California State University, Fresno with a Master’s in History in 2017. As an active member of the Fresno Armenian community, Rettig serves on the executive board of the Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee.)



COMMUNITY NEWS

Hagopian World of Rugs and the College for Creative Studies Announce Winners of Annual Student Rug Design Competition

BIRMINGHAM, MI. — Recognizing the need for community involvement during these challenging times, Hagopian Family of Companies, maintains their commitment to local educational endeavors.

Observing Covid-19 protocols, a small group convened at the Hagopian World of Rugs Birmingham showroom to judge the entries submitted by College for Creative Studies students for the 32nd annual Student Rug Design Competition. Judges for this year's competition were Suzanne Hagopian, Edmond Hagopian and Angela Hagopian Snow, hosts and owners of metro Detroit's Hagopian Family of Companies. Matt Chung and Prof. Don Kilpatrick from CCS were also present to view the entries and be a part of the judging process.

The 2020-21 criteria asked students to use the concept of "wellness" and to consider the importance of image,



Second place winner by Joseph Cardenas

statements, three winners were determined. First and second place were awarded to Joseph Cardenas, Graduate Student in Color and Material Design; third place was awarded to Cecelia Caputo, Senior, Communication Design.

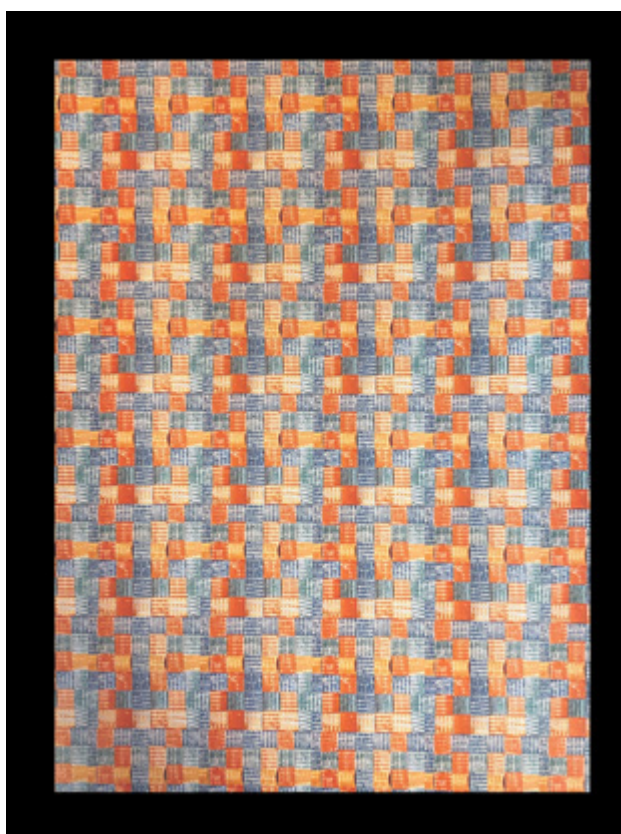
The competition is a long-standing collaboration between the College for Creative Studies and Hagopian World of Rugs and gives students the chance to submit designs based on specific criteria and compete for scholarship moneys sponsored by Hagopian. In addition, the first place design is made into a rug and displayed at the annual CCS Student Exhibition in May each year. The competition was conceived to mentor students and encourage interest in the textile arts. The experience has proven meaningful for all; students, instructor's and judges.

The Hagopian Family of Companies are long-time enthusiastic supporters of education and the cultural arts in metro Detroit. In addition to this competition; they are long-time hosts for the Detroit Chamber Winds "Night Notes" series bringing fine music to local venues at an affordable cost; and, Hagopian World of Rugs / Hagopian Cleaning Services is a Major Benefactor to the Detroit Institute of Arts.

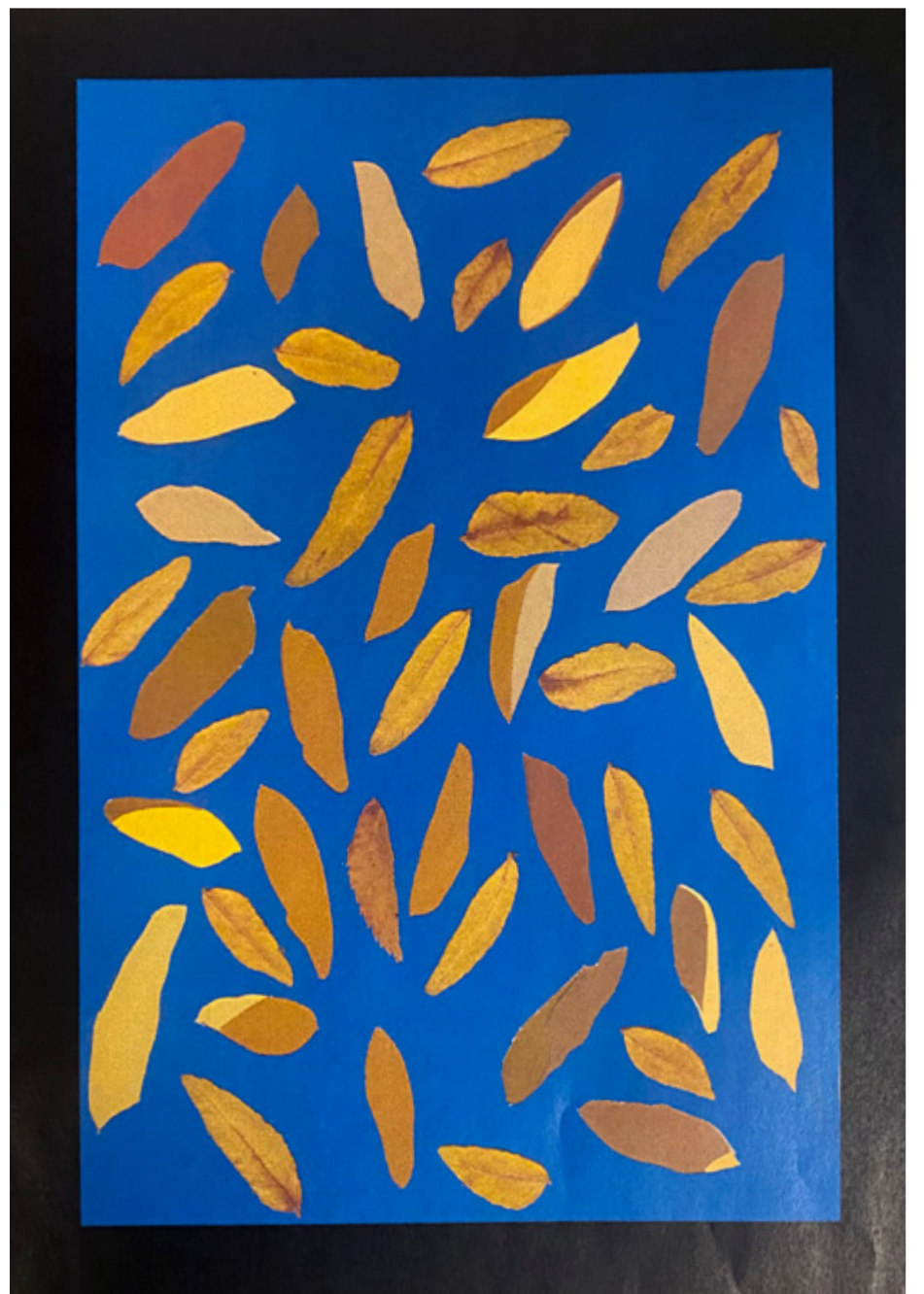


The judges, Matt Chung, CCS, on left, and Angela Snow

color and pattern as a link between our surroundings and our mental health, when creating their design. After careful analysis of the criteria, the designs submitted and the student's accompanying



Third place winner by Cecelia Caputo



First place winner by Joseph Cardenas

Arts & Culture

A CONVERSATION WITH ...

Alexis Pazoumian

Photographing the Margins of Society

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/PARIS — Photographer and director Alexis Pazoumian was born in 1988, in Paris. He graduated from a graphic school in 2012, and now specializes in documenting communities living on the margins of society. Pazoumian's works have been shown in group shows internationally – Los Angeles, Bratislava, Paris, Lyon, Kuala Lumpur, Melbourne, Vancouver, and Zurich and he was a finalist in several competitions: Fondation lagardère, Paris Match Emerging Talent Awards, Life Framer, Foto filmic, Lucie Foundation, Off Festival of Bratislava and he was the winner of the Hip Award in 2020 for his book *Sacha*. His work was featured in numerous publications worldwide including the *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *National Geographic*, *Der Spiegel*, *Vanity Fair*, *Télérama*, *Grazia*, *Vogue*, *NZZ* and *Libération*.

In 2018, he published his first book, *Faubourg Treme*, about the daily lives of residents of Treme, the legendary district of New Orleans, the birthplace of African-American culture. The same year, he produced a TV advertisement internationally for Action Against Hunger and his first short film *Mineur* is finalist at the Nikon film festival.



Dear Alexis, in the 21st century, photography became something everybody could do, yet being a professional photographer is totally different.

Indeed, today everyone can take pictures. But being a professional photographer requires years of work, research and reflection. Photography is not simply taking beautiful pictures separately; it is knowing how to unite images to make a whole and tell a coherent story. It requires a huge amount of work in editing and experience.

Do you take photos with cell-phones? Do you think photos done with new technologies can have the same effect as the photos done with professional camera?

I take pictures with my cell phone only for location scouting for movies, see PHOTOS, page 13



Anahit Simonian Expresses Herself through Music and Film

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

PARIS — French-Armenian Anahit Simonian is a creative polymath, performing on the piano in various genres, composing music and writing film scripts, while moving back and forth between Spain and France each year. This year she was chosen to participate in the Berlinale Talents of the Berlin International Film Festival. She says that this week, she is really enjoying it, having meetings with filmmakers like Apichapong Weerasethakul (Thailand) or Mohammad Rasoulof from Iran.

Born in Yerevan, she presciently declared somewhere between the ages of four and eight years that she would one day live in Paris and become a filmmaker, Simonian said in a recent interview.

When she was 20, she entered the “Mozart du 7ème Art” prize created by CANAL+ at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival, a competition for music for a movie, by chance, she said. She won, but it took a lot of effort. After also winning during the same year a SACEM (Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique) prize and the Sony Music Special Prize for Young Composers, she went on to write over 25 original soundtracks for films, collaborating with well known filmmakers such as Bertrand Tavernier, Isaki Lacuesta, Jean-Bernard Marlin and Meritxell Colell.

Making Music Like Drinking Water

Her parents are both professional musicians, with her father, Felix, a composer, cellist and member of the famous Komitas Quartet, and her mother a doctor of musicology (and also of psychology). As a teenager, she moved to Moscow with her family for two years. Then she went to Paris to finish her conservatory studies and stayed there some 12 or 14 years.

She said she became tired of the rainy weather and wanted to explore the south. She met her husband, Guillaume Poussou, who is a French photographer, in Barcelona. Both of them have various artistic projects, in France, Spain and Switzerland, and sometimes also work together. Simonian said, “We are very lucky because this is possible, and we have good artist friends with whom we can do projects.”

With her family background, she said, “I began to play music because it was very easy. Music was a part of my life just as much as water to drink. I didn’t even ask why music is there.” She studied music in Armenia, Moscow and Paris.

She composed music from childhood, completing her first composition at the age of three or four. She began to compose and play professionally from the age of nine or ten, and used to play a lot of concerts with her father Felix. She studied classical piano but she always worked on improvisations too. She collaborated as pianist and

see SIMONIAN, page 14

Burbank for Armenia Public Art Project Calls For Young Artists

BURBANK, Calif. – Burbank for Armenia is calling all young artists to participate in the first-ever Burbank for Armenia Public Art Project, an opportunity for young talent to create a first of its kind mural art piece for a Burbank Armenian-owned small business. The theme of the art project is Armenian Roots. Burbank youth ages 13-21 are invited to submit their proposals at www.burbankforarmenia.com starting now through March 19, 2021.

The Burbank for Armenia Board, consisting of a variety of professionals including a Commissioner from the Burbank Cultural Arts Commission, will review the artist applications and mural proposals and select one artist



that best represents the theme and mission of Burbank for Armenia. The selected artist will be matched with a Burbank Armenian-owned business, given a stipend, and timeline to complete the mural. Upon completion of the mural, an unveiling event will be organized commemorating this historic project.

“We are excited to host this public art project for the community. Our goal with this event is to highlight a young artist and give them the opportunity to create a lasting art piece for the City of Burbank. We’re hopeful that this event will increase civic engagement amongst the youth of Burbank and increase awareness about Armenian art and culture,” said Burbank for Armenian Chairman Romik Yaghoobimashi.

Burbank for Armenia is a volunteer organization made up of a diverse group of leaders passionate about increasing civic engagement within Burbank’s Armenian residents, supporting Armenian causes, and raising awareness about local and global Armenian-related issues. To learn more about Burbank for Armenia’s efforts or to submit an application for the Burbank for Armenia Public Art Project visit, www.burbankforarmenia.com.





ARTS & CULTURE

Alexis Pazoumian: Photographing the Margins of Society

PHOTOS, from page 12

but never in a professional way, and a portable camera will never replace a professional one, especially since I work mainly with film, so I think it will be impossible to find this rendering with a cellphone.

A year ago you published your second book, *Sacha*, about the daily life of a reindeer herder in Yakutia, in the middle of the Russian taiga. Yakutia is considered as one of the coldest regions of our world. Why did you choose that place and what was most memorable in that experience?



In Karabakh (Artsakh). Photo by Alexis Pazoumian

I exhibited this project in Paris in February 2020. I chose this place because I had been interested in Russia for many years and I learned that I had distant family from Gyumri in Yakutsk. Indeed, there is a large Armenian community in Yakutsk. They work there for a few years but most of them go back to Armenia because life is too hard there. The most memorable thing was to find myself with a rein-



In Karabakh (Artsakh) Photo by Alexis Pazoumian

deer herder in the middle of the Taiga for several weeks alone and cut off from the world. But it is a long story that I develop in my upcoming book.

Yes, in 2014 the Armenians of Yakutsk opened their own church, Surb Karapet, which is considered to be the most northern one in the world ... Alexis, now let's talk about your family. In 2005 in Paris I was happy to meet your grandfather, the wonderful artist Richard Jeranian, who passed away in 2019 at the age of 98. I assume he played a role in your development as a professional.

My parents, Michel and Betty Pazoumian, were born in France. Richard Jeranian was my maternal grandfather, whom I loved deeply, but above all I have immense respect for his work and his career. He taught me rigor, diligence and of course, he gave me an outlook. All his life he got up at the same time, he shaved every morning, he painted for hours and hours every day, he had an irreproachable zest for life and a real balance thanks to his family. He always told me that it is the routine of life and discipline that allows an artist to break through. So I try to follow his example as best as I can. Moreover, since my childhood I

have been surrounded by his paintings, and I am convinced that my grandfather has inspired me a lot in my personal work even as a photographer.

This year it is the 100th anniversary of Jeranian's birth. Are you going to organize an exhibition on this occasion?

It is not planned because we are still looking for space to store his paintings — it is a lot of work. But we are going to work with my brother Raphael, who is the art director, on the design of a book of his paintings and the day when it will be published, we will organize an exhibition.

As a photographer have you thought about visiting your grandfather's birthplace, Sepas-dia (now Sivas in Turkey) and documenting what might have survived from the Armenians?

I have had this project in mind for several years. I wanted to go there in 2016 but shortly afterwards the event in Turkey and Erdogan's policy became more rigid. I plan to accomplish my *Black Garden* project on Artsakh and then I will start this project in Western Armenia for a more personal work.

Last December your new documentary about Artsakh was broadcasted on the Arte TV channel in France. Unfortunately, no matter how loudly we yell about the right of self-determination of the Artsakh population

and it being a part of historical Armenia, the "civilized" world remains indifferent and faithful to its double standards — this is not a case of Kosovo for them. What was the reaction to your film and are you going to develop the subject?

My film I think has advanced a bit the thinking in this matter, but unfortunately the television channel programmed a film just after mine called "The other pain" about a photographer in Baku. I was very sad to see that despite all our suffering the media are under pressure and eventually give in under the pretext of parity of information. I believe that we must continue to fight ceaselessly. Every action is important and what is certain is that Ar-



A reindeer herder in Yakutia, in the middle of the Russian taiga. Photo by Alexis Pazoumian

menian solidarity is stronger than ever. I was happy to see all the protests carried out around me by Armenians in the diaspora, the demonstrations and the donation revolts. We are all united and that is what makes our strength. With time, I am sure we will be able to move forward. For my part, I will continue to make artistic projects all my life on Armenia and Artsakh in order to inform the maximum on the situation and to sensitize people. By the way, I am going to participate in a group exhibition in Yerevan with my Artsakh project. It is organized by the embassy of [France](#) in Yerevan and will take place on March 19.

You are always welcome to your homeland! It seems you find inspirations in distant locations – New Orleans, Yakutia, Artsakh. What is the common thread between African-Americans, Siberians and Armenians in your mind?

The common point is that what I am interested in is the communities on the margins of society, whether it is the African-American population in New Orleans or the reindeer herders in Siberia and today the gypsy community in France. I am passionate about communities fighting for their identity, and this certainly echoes my Armenian roots!



In Karabakh (Artsakh) Photo by Alexis Pazoumian

ARTS & CULTURE

Anahit Simonian Expresses Herself through Music and Film

SIMONIAN, from page 12

composer with various musicians such as Stefan Bauermann, Greg Cohen and Henry Texier.

Simonian was always very eclectic when composing. She said, “I like to explore different fields of sound creation. I have some creations for contemporary music, folk, jazz and classical orchestra.”

Writing Scripts for Film

In parallel with her musical development, Simonian was already writing scripts for the theater from childhood. Around seven years ago, Simonian said she felt she really wanted to work in film. She said, “Sometimes I need to cook to express myself, and this is one more way to express important things. There are stories I want to tell and things I want to share and shadows I want to film. So I began to write a script and make films.”

She confessed, “I am not a script writer. I am an autodidact. Maybe that helps me to be more free because sometimes I don’t know the rules.” She usually writes scripts in French, but sometimes also has written scripts in Spanish.

She is interested in the liminal, the space between real and imaginary, visible and invisible, so she tries to mix the real and invented in her works.

This is true even when she works on documentaries. For example, she is preparing a film on homeschooling, moved by the experience of homeschooling her own children. Her focus is what would be the perfect dream or ideal homeschooling.

She said that it is a political film in some ways. “It is a reflection on what school means today, how we can do it better and adapt to the new reality.” What makes it deeper in significance is that she asks children what they really need. She said, “In French schools, most of the time they never ask children what they want or need. My strength is to say, what could be the alternative, the dream. So I film different children, like my son and others, and ask them. I try to create a part where they try to imagine a situation in which all adults leave for two months. How would they construct a school among themselves? We need a dream from which we can construct reality... It is not about homeschooling alone, but how to construct our future society.”

Simonian is not interested particularly in commercial acclaim. She said, “I cannot know what I will do later, but right now it is not that important to be in the industry. I was just speaking with my partner this morning, saying some projects we do for only 100 people, and others for 100,000 or even 1,000,000, but all are in the same place for me. If the project I make can help make life better for one hour for 100 people, it is so precious and that is great. If another project can go to more people and be shared, that is great too.”

She said she only wants to be happy and “my happiness is in its place when I am trying to share something, with my dreams, and if it works, it is wonderful.”

At the same time, she said, “I like simplicity in things. It is very important that a project can reach different kinds of people, not just a specific audience with a certain cultural level.”

She said that she was always looking to keep the balance between all her fields of endeavors. For the last one-and-one-half years, however, she was not able to give concerts, but fortunately, she said, she could still work in other ways.

Armenian Projects and Background

Simonian has done several Armenian-themed composition projects. She had received a commission from Arte

France to write the score for a long silent movie. In the beginning, Arte wanted a Russian movie but she suggested an Armenian one, “Namous.” Arte restored the film to make it look like new, and she suggested doing the recording of the music in Armenia.

be realized next year. She said, “The new film script is marvelous. It is very interesting how he is speaking about genocide. He found a very interesting and universal point of view.”

Simonian said, “I would like to work more with Arme-



Image from “Last Round in Istanbul” animated film



Guillaume Poussou, from “The ABCs of Being in Love with a Photographer”

Simonian said that it would have been easier for her to do it in France but it was an opportunity to bring work to Armenian musicians and for her to discover new people there. She said, “It was a beautiful experience for me with the musicians. It was so inspiring, so professional, that I was really very happy to do this.” The soundtrack included classical instruments, jazz and three traditional Armenian ones.

With her new composition, “Namous” came out in 2005 and people in France were able to hear the musicians’ talented work, she said.

Simonian worked with director Serge Avedikian and composed music for some of his documentaries. On his initiative, she rewrote the music for the “Anoush” opera by Armen Tigranian entirely. Avedikian meanwhile rewrote the libretto, attempting to restore more original text by Hovhannes Tumanyan. She said that they were only able to recover a few pages of the original score, so instead, “I tried to imagine his mentality. It is not a Stalinist one.” This project was carried out in France and Armenia.

She is also going to work with Avedikian on another one of his films, this time animated, called “Last Round in Istanbul.” It involves a Turkish boxer and an Armenian boxer in 1946. If covid-19 conditions permit, it will hopefully

nians. He [Avedikian] is the one Armenian who called me to work.”

She remarked that her father’s side is originally from Kars and Erzurum, and was forced to leave due to the Armenian Genocide. Her grandfather was put in an orphanage in Armenia and his family only found him two years later. Her mother’s family, on the other hand, comes from Shushi in Karabakh.

Simonian said, “It is important for me to go to Shushi to show my children this incredible air and energy. I went twice as a child and I remember it to be a paradise. Going to the forests, you can see everything, and everything is flowing.” She said she is optimistic about the current political situation there but accepts that at least for a few years she cannot bring her children to the place her great-grandfathers were born and married and died.

‘The Fifth String’

As an Armenian, though living in Europe, she said, “I am very influenced by Armenia before Christianity.” She also is interested in Grigor Narekatsi (Gregory of Narek), as an example of a poet, philosopher and even mathematician, perhaps even more than in the pagan Armenian heritage. She said that as a child in Armenia, “going to church was to find a place of silence, a moment you can be with yourself. Some came to pray but others had this intention to find a special place where you can feel better... I feel very close to the Armenian Church. It gives you the possibility to find your own way to believe and to find a connection.”

Simonian said that she is interested in old civilizations because “I am interested in how we lost harmony on earth and how we can find it again. Of course there are no simple answers, but it is important to think about this for everybody. I ask myself what I can do for my small place in the universe, and one of my answers – because I have a lot of answers and more questions than answers – is music.”

She has written a script for a new film, “The Fifth String,” which posits that “the world is out of tune, like a musical instrument,” and explores, she said, “how we can tune it again, for us and for the earth. Music can tune the world.”

The idea for the film came from her father Felix, who will star in the film. She asked whether he had any dreams left in life he had not realized and he said yes, to play concerts in space. Simonian said, “The answer at the end is not really to go up there to play but more to find your own cosmos. Your own cosmos is there when you are in harmony with yourself and the rest of the planet and life.”

Her father is writing most of the music for the film, which is very influenced by Armenian medieval melodies of the 5-8th centuries. Anahit Simonian said, “It is very powerful, this echo from that time, from a time when we were closer to nature and knew better how to live in harmony.” She also will compose some music, primarily filler, for the film.

As this film is still in the early development stage, she is looking for partners. There is already a very good Spanish producer, she said, and a French one is being sought. The film begins in Armenia and ends in Armenia, but it passes through Mexico, Italy and even Siberia, if the budget will

continued on next page



Image for “The Fifth String”



ARTS & CULTURE

from previous page
allow it. American partners are also helpful, as there will be a portion filmed in the US.

Teaching, Publishing, Bringing Together the Generations, Writing
Simonian teaches in cinema in a high school, a fine arts school, and a university in Barcelona. She said that she is invited to each place for a workshop or master class for one or two weeks usually, with the longest stint being three months. This gives her flexibility. She said, “So when I come up with an idea of constructing scripts or sounds, I have all my freedom.”
She and her husband run a project called the Invisible Travel Agency. Today there are a bit less than 100 members. She said this is a philosophy of life and perhaps also

The idea was to bring together younger artists with older generations of creative people. It allowed a lot of people who could not afford to pay for certain work to help one another and exchange their services as if it was a collective.
It also includes a publishing arm in order to be able to publish books or audio-visual projects, mostly short format video. Sometimes it is interdisciplinary, she said, and they edit everything together. There are both digital and physical versions. “We like that and think it is important to defend the physical format,” she said.
Aside from scripts, Simonian has written some short stories and poetry. She hasn’t published the stories but can use the poetry with her songs. Most recently she began to write a book with Spanish journalist and writer Ivan Pinto. “It is about the



Felix Simonian

a joke that we all we do are invisible travels. In Barcelona they had a very big art working space so they invited artists once or twice a month to share their films, music and art in a very underground and informal



From “Namous,” for which Simonian composed new music

creative process and where it begins, and how to find a way to the inner world.” It discusses what kind of creativity can make people feel in harmony. She said it is based on their experiences and that of their colleagues and students, and for now, the project is called “Inner Mirror.”
Aside from her many projects, she is helping her husband and partner in his work to construct the “Time Machine,” which she says is “a way to reinvent memory and travel to another time, maybe to another dimension.” Her husband is also a visual artist making installations, video art and sculptures. He is developing his ideas with people who work with technology in order to put sounds and images from our memory into this machine and thus travel through our memories.
Simonian said, “It is more of a philosophical construct, and it was our son Tigran’s idea.”



Image from “The ABCs of Being in Love with a Photographer” (Anahit Simonian director, composer, screenwriter, sound designer, co-producer)

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Su-Beoreg & Monta Factory Contributed by Joshua Lurie at Food GPS

Su-Beoreg & Monta

The following restaurant review is courtesy of Joshua Lurie at Food GPS, published on December 28, 2015:

“Su-Beoreg & Monta Factory, a tiny family-run business in the Armenian-American stronghold of north Pasadena, is about as far away from a factory than the mind can wander. Yerevan native Evelina Yegiazaryan makes almost every morsel of food by hand. The space hosts only three tables.
Husband Grant and son Jack are her only co-workers. Yet despite all the limitations, they make the situation work very well.

“In Armenia, this is every child’s favorite food,” Grant Yegiazaryan waxed poetic about monta, a specialty of his family at Su-Beoreg & Monta Factory in the Armenian hotbed of north Pasadena. “When you say monta, many customers start to shake.” It’s not like I started having convulsions when my tray of Sini-Monta (\$8) arrived hot and steaming. However, it is accurate to say that these tiny beef dumplings caused me to enter a fit of joy.



Sini-monta at Monta Factory. Courtesy of Joshua Lurie at Food GPS.

Grant, wife Evelina, and Jack have made su-beoreg (cheese pies) and monta for the past decade, and the family added a grab-and-go option in the past year. The tiny space touts a red sign and houses a single half-moon-shaped table on the patio. The Yegiazaryans originally

hail from Yerevan, Armenia’s capital. Monta is a popular comfort food in their homeland, but requires a lot of work. Grant said, “Mother never had time to make this, so grandma had to make it.”

Sini-Monta are tiny, open-topped, ship-shaped beef dumplings seasoned with sumac and red pepper that crisp at the edges during baking. When I ordered the dish, Evelina asked, ‘Would you like me to make it the way I like?’ Of course. That meant slathering the interconnected dumpling network with spicy pepper paste and pungent garlic cream sauce folded with yogurt. Delicious. It’s hard to imagine ordering monta another way moving forward.”

*Joshua Lurie created the Los Angeles-based website <<http://www.foodgps.com/>> Food GPS in 2005, and continues to showcase the best food and drink, regardless of price or cuisine, while sharing stories of people behind the flavors.

Jack Yegiazaryan explained why they have wild Alaskan salmon sandwiches and authentic beef-based “street tacos” on the menu, saying, “It’s something I thought people could relate to. If they like this, maybe they’ll come back and try some of our specialty dishes.” That said, the wild Alaskan salmon sandwich is no throw-away item. A delicious juicy slab of pink fish is served on toasted ciabatta with spring mix and homemade house tahini spread.

- Locations:
- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Monta Factory | Su-Beoreg & Monta Factory |
| 1208 Glenoaks Blvd. | 1531 E. Washington Blvd. |
| Glendale, CA 91201 | Pasadena, CA 91104 |

A CRITICAL EXCLUSIVE

Romina Katsikian Is Ready For Her Close-up

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

ATHENS — Greek-Armenian actress Romina Katsikian exudes charisma and enthusiasm. A veteran of TV, theater and film although she is still in her thirties, Katsikian's latest project is a hilarious series of TikTok comedy sketches titled "I went



on a date with..." (@iwentonadate). The short 45-second vignettes always involve Katsikian in closeup talking to her on-line audience as if they were her best friends about various dates scenarios. These include going out with a porn star; a guy overconfident of his abilities in bed, and another who "disappeared...or died," i.e. he never called her back.

The show has a bit of a "Sex in the City" ring to it, but Katsikian quickly makes the material her own. In fact, she successfully channels a bit of both the Samantha and Carrie characters from that hit US series — no small shakes for any comedienne, but she pulls it off. The sketches are simple and lovely — the actress dispenses date and sex advice the way others peel an orange or discuss the day's weather.

Katsikian herself is a slim, fabulously intelligent woman with looks at once feminine but androgynous that lend her extra points on the sexy meter — maybe that is one more reason the skits are so successful. When discussing this series, Katsikian notes: "Furthermore, the taboo of women going on many dates, meeting men and having sex with some of them, was something

that I felt needed to be faced." The show opened up a variety of scenarios for her to respond to as a woman and as an actress. The TikTok channel is in fact a continuation of a YouTube channel called "I went on a Date with a Guy" which she discontinued in favor of the shorter 45-second TikTok clips.

Born in Rome — hence her name, to fourth- and fifth-generation Greek Armenians, Katsikian has led a cosmopolitan life. This has included moving to Egypt as a child for six years and then to Switzerland due to her father's profession. "Home," she says firmly, "was and has always been Athens, Greece."

Katsikian attended English-speaking schools in both Egypt (Cairo American College) and Greece (St. Lawrence College) before studying drama and English literature at Brunel University in London, so she is fluent in English, Greek and Armenian. Katsikian has been acting since the age of 12, having entered competitions here in Greece as well as winning the Drama Prize at St. Lawrence College. Her work includes a successful theatre play, a sold-out comedy titled "Remind Me Why We Came Here Again,"

where she played a conservative, snobby woman who goes to a nudist beach.

But most of Katsikian's work is in fact quite serious and deals with the marginalized in one way or another, perhaps a result of her international background and her



Scene from the play "Remind Me Why We Came Here Again?" (photo Pinelope Gerasimou)

CALENDAR

ON-LINE EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

MARCH-APRIL — The Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church of Providence holds a series of events every Friday at 7.30 p.m. To watch the programs, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/armenianchurchprovidence>

March 12 - The Greater Worcester Armenian Chorale - 7th Annual Gala Concert

March 19 - Hasmik Leyloyan, Queen of Kanon

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

Armenian roots. She most notably played a Muslim woman on a Greek TV show called "Ethniki Ellados."

"This show," explains Katsikian, "revolved around four women who, in their own separate ways, stepped out of their comfort zone in order to find their true identity through the game of curling. It dealt with social discrimination and racism. My character didn't talk back and kept her mouth shut in order for things to run smoothly in her life...We live in a world where discrimination, bullying and racism of still exists: I find this completely unacceptable in this day and age."

In another project, a play by the title of "Mechanical Falls," Katsikian plays the sister of the protagonist and hero, who is on a road trip to a hospital in order to undergo gender transformation: "Although he also felt pain and rejection, in this case our hero was happy and secure with himself because knew that he was doing the right thing for

him and his soul: he listened to his heart," says Katsikian. "I felt proud to be part of these two projects because they both revealed pathways in which these characters fought through negative reactions and who, in the end, did the right thing for themselves and their own inner peace." Katsikian has also starred in a few feature films including "Hike" (2014) and "Mavra Mesanyhta" (2008).

Working as an actress in Greece during COVID-19 has been trying because Athens is still on complete lockdown, but Katsikian hopes to take on more theatrical and film roles once life hopefully goes back to normal. Having grown up in a tight-knit Armenian-Athenian community, she also hopes to perhaps work on Armenian-related projects in the future.

Watching Katsikian act for the first time is truly energizing. She has a unique delivery, intelligence and talent that will hopefully take her far in the years to come. *Ella yasou!*

Dr. Dzovinar Derderian to Discuss Van Migrants and the Transforming Politics of Representation in the Ottoman Empire

FRESNO — Dr. Dzovinar Derderian will discuss "Migrants from Van and the Transforming Politics of Representation in the Ottoman Empire, 1850's-1870's" on Friday, March 19, at 7 p.m. (Pacific time). The presentation is part of the Spring 2021 Lecture Series of the Armenian Studies Program and is co-sponsored by the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS).

Migrants or itinerants from provinces like Van, or more precisely "pandukhts" in Armenian, are often characterized in the existing scholarship and popular discourse as destitute and melancholic people. Rather than discussing this disempowering image of Armenian *pandukhts*, this talk will

demonstrate how voices of the *pandukhts* became a site of power and their very physical presence in the Ottoman capital in large numbers represented a lever of negotiation. Not only the *pandukhts* of Van, but also Armenian inhabitants still in Van referred to *pandukhts* as representatives of their voice and mentioned the *pandukhts* in their petitions to put further pressure on the Constantinople Armenian Patriarchate. The acceleration of movement and communication through newspapers and collective petitions, along with the large presence of Vanets' in Constantinople provided the *pandukhts* the opportunity to step forward as the public voice of Van and thus engaged in novel practices



Dr. Dzovinar Derderian

received her PhD from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her dissertation is titled "Nation-Making and the Language of Colonialism: Voices from Ottoman Van

of political representation in the Ottoman Empire.

Derderian is currently teaching at the American University of Armenia. She

in Armenian Print Media and Handwritten Petitions, 1820s to 1870s." She has co-edited a volume entitled *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics* (I.B. Tauris, 2016). She currently serves on the editorial board of *Études arméniennes contemporaines* and is the editor of *Entries* of the Society for Armenian Studies website.

The Zoom Registration Link is: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiesderderian>

For information about upcoming Armenian Studies Program presentations, please follow us on our Facebook page, @ArmenianStudiesFresnoState or at the Program website, www.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies.



An ADL Publication

EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

SENIOR EDITORIAL COLUMNIST

Edmond Y. Azadian

STAFF WRITER

Harry Kezelian III

CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Atamian, Florence Avakian, Taleen Babayan, Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Raffi Bedrosyan, Christine Vartanian Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald Papasian, Harut Sassounian, Hagop Vartivarian

**REGIONAL
CORRESPONDENTS**

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian, Michelle Mkhlian
YEREVAN: Raffi Elliott
BERLIN: Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
PARIS: Jean Eckian
SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian
CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jirair Hovsepiyan, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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

Baika Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472-1509

Telephone: 617-924-4420

FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

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

Editorial

Turkey, Azerbaijan, Pakistan Form New Axis of Evil



By Edmond Y. Azadian

The decades after World War II constituted a period of global decolonization. Many countries in Africa, Middle East and South-east Asia attained independence in that period. The Ottoman Empire collapsed in the wake of World War I and only thanks to the friendship between Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and Russian leader Vladimir Lenin was Asia Minor saved as the home of the modern Republic of Turkey.

During World War II, Turkey, as a tacit collaborator with Nazi Germany, was put on the chopping block again, to be dismantled by Stalin's Red Army, when a rescue came from British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at Fulton, Missouri, where he delivered his famous speech about the Iron Curtain, marking the start of the Cold War.

After being saved twice from being annihilated, Turkey has emerged in recent years as an unapologetic colonizer.

In a recent book, *Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of Neo-Ottomanism*, historian M. Hakan Yavuz credits former Prime Minister/President Turgut Ozel with initiating neo-Ottomanism, whose footprints President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been following to build the historian describes as "Islamic Kleptocracy."

In a book review in the *London Times Literary Supplement*, Gerald MacLean further develops the topic by writing: "Yavuz shows how Erdogan's devotion to [Ottoman Sultan] Abdelhamid was partly inspired by the writings of Necip Fazil Kisakurek, a "fascist political Islamist ideologue" whose influential periodical, *Buyuk Dogu*, (1943-1975) was steeped in resentment of Turkey's westernizing reforms. Advocating a restoration of Ottoman Islamic values, Necip Fazil taught that "hatred ... is the defining feature of the good believer," giving rise to "a passion-based political activism."

It is important to recognize the origins of Erdogan's world view and what motivates his drive to chase a neo-Ottomanist future. It is also interesting to discover the source of his disdain for Western-style democracy. Only then can we understand his hatred of those values and his motivation to destroy them.

When historians and analysts describe Erdogan as being on Hitler's path, they don't do so to ridicule him; they are simply highlighting his hate-driven philosophy fueled by a weaponized religious zeal to conquer back the territories the Ottoman Empire lost.

Reports and analyses emerging in the aftermath of the recent 44-day war in Karabakh reveal that the intentions of Turkey and Azerbaijan were not confined to the sliver of land that they reconquered; their ambitions went far beyond, reaching global dimensions in carving a pan-Turanic empire in Central Asia and engaging even major powers in their plans.

For a long period, Armenia viewed the conflict through the prism of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. As the Bayraktar drones destroyed its air defense systems within the first 15 minutes of the war, we realized the extent of the involvement of the Turkish military in the war. We believed that the Armenian army was facing the combined forces of Turkey and Azerbaijan, with the collaboration of some 2,700 mercenary jihadists from Syria. Little did we realize that an additional powerhouse — Pakistan, with its freelance jihadists and official air force — were fully engaged in the war.

We may criticize the Armenian side for its lack of preparedness and intelligence regarding the size of the forces it was facing, but we cannot blame its defeat against the combined regular armies of three nations, aided with a battalion of terrorists.

Turkey, under Erdogan, has legitimized the use of terrorists in all of the conflicts it has fomented or engaged in, within the full view of the United Nations and the world community.

Pakistan is a hub for terrorists. The reason the war in Afghanistan has dragged on for decades is that Pakistan harbors and trains Taliban terrorists to keep US forces tied down in that war-torn country, while pretending to be an ally.

Pakistani terrorists are particularly busy in Jammu and Kashmir, enclaves which have pitted Pakistan against India since 1947.

Tufail Ahmad writes in the March 2 issue of MEMRI, "International issues are of no importance to Azerbaijan, Turkey and Pakistan, since all these three states seem to be guided solely by Islam. Since the late 1980s, the state of Pakistan has nurtured Jihadi terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan's refusal to withdraw its troops from Kashmir is not only a transgression of the UN Security Council Resolution, but Pakistan refuses to vacate Kashmir."

There is ample evidence that Pakistani jihadists have fully participated in the Karabakh War in addition to the Pakistani air force. Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world which has not recognized Armenia and has voted consistently against it at the UN as well as other world forums. After the war, Ilham Aliyev profusely praised Pakistan for its "brotherly support of Azerbaijan."

Now that this axis of evil has won the war in Karabakh, it has been targeting other trouble spots of the world. Tufail Ahmad writes on the same site that "after the Pakistani military helped Azerbaijan's armed forces defeat Armenia in Nagorno Karabakh war, it appears that Azerbaijan is seeking an act of



reciprocity to assist Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir. This reciprocity — growing out of a trilateral military alliance also involving Turkey, that engineered Azerbaijan's military victory — is now driving these war partners to target Kashmir as the next military objective."

Azerbaijan's involvement in the Kashmir conflict sets it squarely against India, a huge nuclear country, which is also noted for its arms exports.

We seldom witness Armenian diplomacy meaningfully engaged with India, which may provide not only diplomatic support to Yerevan, but most probably also military and economic aid.

While Armenia grieves for the forced concession for passage through the Zangezur region (which Azerbaijan's leader Ilham Aliyev recently called historic Azerbaijani land) there is a celebration about it through the Islamic world, in the first place, evaluating that corridor as a path for pan-Turanic plans and second as a passage for Turkey to access the Caspian Sea.

Turkish warships are already challenging the Russian fleet in the Black Sea. The Caspian Sea will become another flash point between the navies of Turkey and Russia.

Turkish colonization of Azerbaijan has turned that country into a launching pad for Turkey to extend its forces into Central Asia, yet additionally Baku will become the beneficiary of Turkish exploits in other parts of the world.

Turkey and Azerbaijan not only continue benefitting from Pakistani jihadist forces, but they also have boasted to have become with the latter partners in Islamic nuclear capability.

see AXIS, page 18



COMMENTARY

Quick Action on Politicized Khojaly Resolutions Can Lead to Quick Results

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

THE LAST FEW WEEKS left many Armenian Americans taken aback as a number of American cities adopted resolutions commemorating the deaths of Khojaly Azerbaijanis on February 25-26, 1992, at the hands of Armenians. Several of the resolutions, such as that of Skokie, Ill., termed the incident a “genocidal act” or, as those of the mayors of Portland, Maine, and Hallandale Beach, Fla., and, initially, of the governor of Minnesota, outright “genocide.”

In the cities of Boston and Aventura and Sunny Ayles Beach, Fla., the proclamations were more circumspect and used the word massacre. Often the proclamations assert Azerbaijani claims to the Armenian-populated territories of Nagorno Karabakh and appear part of an orchestrated political campaign supported by the Azerbaijani government.

Yet these proclamations should not have been that much of a surprise. There have been similar resolutions, with varying wordings, sporadically issued by several US governmental bodies on the state and local level, for over a decade. Most of the places issuing these resolutions do not have large Armenian populations, with the exception of Boston, but even there, in 2010, the Massachusetts House of Representatives had issued a similar proclamation. Many of the prior resolutions are connected to junkets, campaign contributions and other sorts of bribes given to American politicians by individuals or groups connected to the Azerbaijani government or oil companies doing business in Azerbaijan.

The Khojaly event itself is a tragedy, however we understand it, because of the deaths of a good number of people. There is evidence, including Markar Melkonian’s brief description in his biography of his brother, Monte, that Armenian soldiers killed at least over one hundred, and possibly hundreds of Azerbaijanis and Meskhetian Turks. However, the circumstances of the shootings remain disputed, with Armenians stating that Azerbaijani soldiers took advantage of a corridor allowed for fleeing civilians and endangered the lives of those fleeing, while Azerbaijani ex-president Ayaz Mutalibov claimed the massacre was organized by his Azerbaijani political opponents to discredit him. Furthermore, there is some testimony and visual evidence of mutilation to corpses occurring after they already were on Azerbaijani territory.

In any case, it is clear by both the numbers and context that this was not a case of genocide. Khojaly also has to be understood alongside the series of pogroms or massacres of Armenians that began in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, in 1988, and continued in Kirovabad (Ganja) the same year, Baku, 1990, Maragha, Karabakh, in April 1992, and constant bombardments of Stepanakert and other civilian targets. That is of course aside from various brutal individual acts of violence and massacres by both sides throughout the first Karabakh war in the 1990s, itself an attempt by local Armenians to escape oppression extending over decades if not longer, and claim their political rights. That conflict turned into a war due to the violence of the Azerbaijani reaction both at the end of the Soviet Union and the beginning of an independent Republic of Azerbaijan.

The politicization of the Khojaly killings this year appears more striking because of the recent Karabakh war. Defeats leading to a supine Armenian leadership make broader Azerbaijani territorial claims to not only the remainder of Armenian-controlled Artsakh but to the territories of the Republic of Armenia, even to Yerevan, more menacing. More immediately, Azerbaijan seems to be expanding its control of territories on the borders of Armenia proper, while Armenian churches in Artsakh are being claimed as Caucasian Albanian.

Lobbying in the US and internationally paid for by the Azerbaijani government intensified during last year’s war. The Azerbaijani and Turkish diasporas, perhaps with the help of their governments, have been much more publicly active recently than in the past. Billboard ads were bought by an organization of Turkish-American businessmen and industrialists in Philadelphia this February calling into question the peaceful intentions of Armenians. In parallel, articles with similar motifs appeared in American news outlets over the past few months. Meanwhile, recently poster ads

appeared at bus stops in Washington D.C. calling Khojaly the largest massacre of Azerbaijani civilians.

Conflicts are occurring not only in the political realm and the media, but in the arts and architecture. For example, the Berlin International Film Festival was accused of promoting “anti-Azerbaijani propaganda” by screening “Black Bach Artsakh,” a film on the Karabakh conflict. The original description of the film by its makers described the 1990s conflict as “a struggle for liberation and self-determination,” and the recent 2020 war as an “invasion by Azerbaijan’s dictator.” The festival announced on March 2 that it would write its own description but defended its inclusion in the program.

On the other hand, according to Turkish government news reports, Turkey and Azerbaijan will co-produce movies and television series on the Khojaly massacre, as well as on the “liberation” of Baku in 1918 by the Ottoman Islamic Army of the Caucasus.

Somehow even the beloved game show “Jeopardy!” became ensnared in this media battle this month with a clue implying negative connotations about the Artsakh independence struggle.

In various parts of the United States, Europe and Russia, clashes sometimes ended in violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis last year. For the first time, in places like Boston, even Armenian restaurants were harassed. During the summer 2020 attacks on Armenia’s border, Armenian demonstrations were countered by Azerbaijani ones in Boston. Armenian institutions were defaced in the San Francisco area, while clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis took place in Los Angeles.

The danger in this heated atmosphere is that Armenians and Azerbaijanis will keep sponsoring their respective resolutions and this may create in the eyes of the less informed a false equivalency between the Armenian Genocide and the Khojaly massacre. It may also seem like a tit-for-tat situation, even with the Sumgait, Baku and other pogroms.

Providing context is always more difficult than presenting simple slogans or proclamations. Unfortunately, this places a burden on Armenians in the diaspora to constantly clearly explain various aspects of Armenian history, but this is not something new. This was the case from the late 19th century on.

Over the decades, Armenian Americans have bewailed the lack of think tanks or media centers which could deal with such issues. Academics are called upon to enter the fray. Ideally, there should be such independent centers as well as increased resources placed into Armenian studies both in and outside universities.

However, the technological revolution in social media and access to more sources makes it possible for every individual to play a part more easily than in the past when letters to congressmen or visits to political representatives took much more effort.

One positive lesson from the current situation is that if Armenians and their supporters remain alert, they still can have their voices heard and counter political distortions. The “Jeopardy!” show representative declared that it did not mean to imply that Armenian policy is actually irredentist, or that irredentism is necessarily something to be condemned. The Philadelphia freeway billboard was removed by the billboard company, most likely in response to Armenian complaints. The Washington D. C. bus stop posters also disappeared after two days, possibly for the same reason.

The governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz, withdrew the initial version of the proclamation characterizing Khojaly as genocide after representatives of the local Armenian community, including pastor Fr. Tadeos Barseghyan and the parish council of St. Sahag Armenian Church of Saint Paul, with support from the Armenian Assembly of America, took swift action. Instead, an anodyne proclamation calling February 25 Azerbaijani Day, was issued without any mention at all of Khojaly.

Kate Snyder, the mayor of Portland, apologized to Armenians for the pain she caused by her proclamation and promised to more carefully review requests for proclamations in the future. The chief communications officer of the mayor of Boston similarly apologized, in a statement given to the Mirror-Spectator, for upsetting the Armenian community with the mayoral proclamation.

It remains to be seen whether Boston mayor Marty Walsh, nominated as President Joseph Biden’s secretary of labor, will rescind his proclamation. Ideally, local Armenians should contact the authorities of Skokie and the three aforementioned cities in Florida about their proclamations in the same fashion as elsewhere.

The several examples of successful action given above indicate that government-sponsored campaigns by apparently only small numbers of Azerbaijanis in most locales can be countered by the Armenian-American community with a little vigilance and effort. Ideally, Armenians should be proactive with their government representatives and local and state officials, keeping them informed as individual constituents as well as through their local community organizations and advocacy groups. Individual voices still can make a difference in the US, and even more so when working together as part of organizations and communities.

Turkey, Azerbaijan, Pakistan Form New Axis of Evil

AXIS, from page 17

Pakistan has proven to be an expansionist country, most of the time ruled by the military. It is not a signatory to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Therefore, it is not legally bound to withhold its nuclear arms technology from Turkey. President Erdogan has been claiming for a long time that a major political force like Turkey must be entitled to possess nuclear weaponry. As an expansionist leader, Erdogan may develop its own nuclear arsenal, after Russia completes two atomic power plants, which it has agreed to build in Turkey, but Pakistan’s ready-made bombs be-

come more attractive at this stage.

With Turkey’s aggressive posture in the Middle East and beyond, the military-political configuration in the region will be going through a transformation.

Vali Nasr, in an “argument” published in the March 2 issue of *Foreign Policy*, states that “the Middle East’s next conflicts won’t be between Arab states and Iran.” He predicts, instead, that the region will be shared by Turkey, Iran and Israel. All three of them have conflicts amongst themselves.

Iran is supposed to be more friendly towards Armenia. But all the plans and

promises of economic cooperation with Armenia have not amounted to much. Additionally, Iran’s clergy and foreign policy establishment have been bending over backwards to congratulate Azerbaijan for “liberating” territories from Armenia. Iranian leadership is fully aware and prepared to face the mischief that Turkey and Azerbaijan are plotting against its territorial integrity. Also, the Iranian leadership is fully aware that Israel has been asking Azerbaijan to gather intelligence and one day, to plan a preemptive strike from Azerbaijan on Iran. It should not sound facetious to ask whether Armenia should have

emulated Azerbaijan policy to deserve similar deference. Perhaps in that case, Israel would not be motivated to seek Azerbaijani border extended if Armenia had provided the same facility.

With the emergence of Turkey as a major power, the region will become a more dangerous neighborhood. Turkey has been taking advantage of the rivalries between major and minor forces to promote its own agenda. Ankara is at a point of no return if it is not stopped now.

Unfortunately, in this scenario, the Karabakh war may not be the last tragedy for Armenia.



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Why Are Aliyev, Erdogan and Putin Siding With Armenia's Prime Minister?

As the situation in Armenia is getting more chaotic on a daily basis, baseless accusations are becoming a common practice. It is no longer possible to distinguish fact from fiction.

Sadly, words like “traitor” and “bought by Turks or Azeris” are being used by Armenians to accuse fellow Armenians without a shred of evidence. We have all heard multiple times that the territories around Artsakh were given up by the former presidents long before the war and that Armenian traitors helped the enemy by disclosing our military secrets or urged soldiers to stop fighting during the war. These accusations have been repeated so often that a lot of Armenians believe them to be true. Never mind that no evidence has been presented, tarnishing the reputations of those they disagree with. If there were so many traitors during the war, how come not one such traitor has been arrested and convicted for treason? Normally, traitors during a war are immediately arrested, convicted and shot by a firing squad.

I do not believe that there are any traitors among us nor are there Armenians who sold their soul to the enemy for a handful of dollars. These are made up stories just because we disagree with each other. Regrettably, most Armenians do not know how to carry out a civilized conversation without insulting those they disagree with.

In this analysis, I will avoid using such terms as traitor and sold out, and stick as much as possible to the facts, no matter how difficult they are to discern.

One issue that keeps coming up is the fact that the presidents of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia seem to prefer Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan over the opposition. This does not mean that Pashinyan is a traitor or is working for the interests of Armenia's enemies. I believe that Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia are siding with Pashinyan for two main reasons:

1) All three realize that Pashinyan, defeated in the Artsakh war and having signed a capitulation document, is in no position to go against the wishes of Azerbaijan and Turkey, and especially Russia. Whereas, as a former member of the opposition, Pashinyan was totally anti-Russian, he changed his tune and supported all Russian initiatives even before the war. After the war, he is completely beholden to Putin and does not dare to deviate one bit from the Russian President's directives. This became

even more so after Pres. Putin repeatedly praised Pashinyan for signing the Nov. 10, 2020 trilateral agreement and abiding by its terms. Azerbaijan and Turkey are also satisfied that, after their defeat of Armenia, there is a leader like Pashinyan who is fully going along with the terms of the agreement.

2) Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia also realize that should Pashinyan's rule topple, his successor may not be as amenable to comply with the terms of the trilateral agreement. While a defeated country is in no position to contest these imposed terms, the fact that Pashinyan's opponents are expressing their opposition to that agreement means that Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia may have to deal with a new Armenian leader who will question the terms of the agreement that the three countries consider a fait accompli. So, Aliyev, Erdogan and Putin naturally prefer to deal with Pashinyan based on their own interests rather than because Pashinyan is their ‘agent.’ At best, we can say that Pashinyan is reluctantly going along with these three leaders. At worst, he truly believes that the ceasefire agreement is in the best interest of Armenia, paving the way to the lifting of blockaded transportation routes, thus potentially boosting Armenia's economy.

We can be on different sides of the above analysis, but one thing is very clear. Pashinyan should not cross any red lines which are totally contrary to Armenia's national interests. It is one thing to be obligated to go along with your enemies after your defeat, but it is a whole different thing to enthusiastically comply with their wishes, mistakenly believing that the enemy's imposed actions are in Armenia's own interest. Aliyev and Erdogan have repeatedly stated that they are willing to allow Armenia to use their transportation routes under certain conditions which were: 1) Return Artsakh territories to Azerbaijan (which has been mostly accomplished through the use of force), 2) Recognize the existing borders of the Republic of Turkey (no more territorial demands from Turkey), and 3) Discontinue the international pursuit of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. More recently, Aliyev added a new demand: signing a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan which means that Armenia will give up claiming Artsakh as an Armenian territory.

In my view, these Azeri and Turkish demands should be rejected by Armenia's current leaders. These are red lines that no Armenian government should cross, depriving future Armenian generations of their right to pursue the nation's just demands.

It remains to be seen if Armenia's next leaders will be able to find a way to minimize the losses from the war. But one thing is certain: Pashinyan must resign immediately allowing a new and more competent leadership trying to manage the catastrophic situation Armenia finds itself in.

Herkan

Remembering the Power of Indigeneity

By Dr. Talin Suciyan

Herkan. She had one of those special names I had never heard before... It must be one of those old Armenian names, like the ones which I had only come across in the mid-19th century archival documents. She was the mother of four children and my admiration of her started when I got to know her one and only daughter. I had first met her daughter more than 25 years ago, when I was 16 and she was 48. We lost track of each other until reconnecting recently all these years later. I had not remembered her name,



Herkan

I had not remembered where I first met her, but I remembered how much I loved her. A heart full of love, which she inherited from her mother Fatma-Herkan. Now on the occasion of the 8th of March, I write to bring Herkan's legacy into the present, as it whispers a long-lost song into our ears, one that we all recognize.

Herkan was born in 1919 in Dersim's Kızılkilise (Red/Crimson Church) town. In those years, the village still had five churches, and its

name has since been changed twice; to Nazımiye and Haydari. There were no Armenian schools in her village, and if there had been, it would not have been possible for her to attend. She had a sister she hardly knew, as they had been separated when Herkan was a baby. This

sister, Filor, had been taken by their aunt when she left Turkey to seek refuge in Argentina. The sisters had to wait most of their lives until they were finally reunited there in 1961, where Herkan later settled and is buried.

Shortly after Fatma-Herkan was born, her village suffered a massacre. Herkan's mother found a baby, Minas, still alive under the corpses. His parents had been killed, and so she breastfed him along with her own child. Once they were 15, Herkan's parents did not have options for who to marry them to, so they were married to each other. There was no legal marriage in the village, so they were simply together and Herkan had their first child Yusuf-Arturo at the age of 16. A second son Mustafa later adopted the name of his father Minas. Herkan and her husband were together for 4 years until he died of hepatitis.

As Herkan's father and husband were dead, she was in need of a male guardian and so needed to be remarried. She was sent to Kütahya with her two sons to meet the man who was to be her second husband, Ibrahim-Khoren, who had recently lost his wife with whom he had six children, three male and three female. He was an Armenian who had been exiled with his family from their hometown of Halvori in Dersim in 1938 after the massacres. They resettled in the villages of Kütahya, earning a living there through agriculture and animal husbandry. Khoren needed a wife to help care for his children. So were Herkan and Khoren married, this time legally.

Some of Khoren's children were adults at this point, and his oldest son was just three years younger than his new step-mother. Herkan gave birth to two children with Khoren, making them a family of ten children. Ibrahim-Khoren worked in many trades, and was known as “şapigci Khoren” [Khoren the weaver] as well as “iron-smith Khoren,” a name still familiar to the Armenian families of Dersim. According to his daughter he was a brave, fearless man, and the villagers were afraid of him. He sent his three daughters to the school, which meant accompanying them back and forth every day in order to protect them from kidnapping. History repeated itself as Khoren too died at an early age. Thus, after a total of 13 years of marriage between two husbands, Herkan again found herself a widow at the age of 33, this time with ten children in the midst of a Turkish village with no relatives.

In 1956 she gathered the entire family and brought them to Istanbul, to that Istanbul of dire poverty for these kaghagan [perpetually exiled] families. There Fatma-Herkan released the burden of the secret she had been carrying for decades, telling her many children the

truth of their origins. She revealed that they were Armenians, believing that amongst their fellow Armenians in the district of Gedikpaşa they were finally safe. But were they really?

Back in the village the division had been clear: They were the “infidels,” those who ate with pitchforks (as meals in the village were eaten with a wooden spoon rather than the steel forks Herkan's family used), and were taunted as “Kurds with tails” [kuyruklu Kürtler]; dehumanizing labels the children never understood why they were called. Upon arrival to the big city, everything changed. The family had never had a shortage of income in the village, as they produced and sold butter, yogurt, milk, eggs, and chickens, and they had plenty of them. The urban landscape of Istanbul swallowed the tight-knit village family. Herkan had the four youngest children to care for while the older ones had their own families and houses. Her youngest son attended the Turkish school and the rest had jobs, including herself. Gedikpaşa Armenians were not welcoming towards the kaghagan Armenians [emigrant survivors from the provinces], who felt alien to them because they were Islamicized, had Turkish names and did not speak Armenian. It was not easy for Herkan to marry her children with Armenians, to send her son to Armenian school or to be part of Armenian life in Istanbul.

Yet somehow she managed to do it all. She found a job in a Turkish school, cleaning it and serving the students, where she was given a room of just 10 square meters to stay with her four children. She took care of all her children's dowries, including those of her step-children. During the weekends she helped her relatives who worked as servants at the Joghovaran boarding school in Gedikpaşa, which was attended by orphaned Armenian children coming from the provinces. In 1961 Herkan discovered her sister Filor living in Buenos Aires, where she moved in 1968 and lived until her death in 1993. Three of her sons also emigrated to Buenos Aires and thus for the last 25 years of her life she took care of her grandchildren. She spent the week with her grandchildren and on weekends would go to the Buenos Aires Armenian old age home, helping the nurses and accompanying the elderly Armenians, her fellow countrymen.

Herkan never attended a school, and probably thanks to that lack of formal education she was able to adapt herself to any condition that she found herself in: from Kızılkilise in Dersim to the villages of Kütahya, from Kütahya to Istanbul's Gedikpaşa, and from Istanbul to Buenos Aires, she established a life and kept it going in environments completely unfamiliar to her. While doing

see HERKAN, page 20

AGBU President Setrakian's Speech at 91st General Assembly

(The following speech was delivered by AGBU President Berge Setrakian at the first virtual AGBU General Assembly on February 27. It is edited for space.)

We are gathered here today under extraordinary circumstances. We have all gone through the experience of the Coronavirus pandemic, which has not spared any country or community.

In the meanwhile, we do our best to continue celebrating life and praying that our lives will return to normal.

However, life within the AGBU community has not stopped.

My fellow Board members will elaborate on the financials details from the two-year period, 2018-2019. I can share that they were years of great achievement, due to the effort and participation of each and every one of you. It was a period of international highs and unified successes. It seemed at the time that the world was behind us as a people, and that we were finally seeing the progress we have deserved within the community of nations.

Unfortunately, 2020 was painful for all of us. In August our Lebanese community faced the impact and consequences of a major explosion at the port of Beirut. It directly hit the Armenian areas of the city.

However, in response, our community set a new high standard for civic engagement in Lebanon. Within hours our AGBU District Committee established a volunteer emergency infrastructure, supported by staff and bolstered by our scouts. They immediately mobilized a philanthropic response, rebuild-

ing people's homes (already over around 400), putting food on their tables and literally and physically giving their own blood to sustain their fellow citizens. Their work was made possible by the unified efforts of all of you who supported them with swift and vast fundraising measures. It was truly an inspiration to see us work together.

Soon after the catastrophe in Beirut, the Armenian nation faced one of its darkest moments: the war, which left behind wounds that will take quite some time to heal. On September 27, a devastating attack by Azeri forces, backed by Turkish military assets and intelligence, resulted in the loss of a large portion of our historic lands in Artsakh. Most tragically, it caused the death of roughly 5,000 soldiers and more than 10,000 suffered injuries.

In their memory, to give meaning to their sacrifice, we must unite all of our forces and all of our means to overcome the challenges we face ahead. The future of Armenia is at stake today. If we come together, bring our best to the table and use our personal strengths to serve each other, then with hope and faith, we will build a bright and successful future for the Armenian nation.

We will survive, as we have for thousands of years, through massacres and persecution, through every kind of upheaval and devastation.

For more than a century, AGBU has been the cornerstone of our global community, committed to humanitarian aid but, above all, to safeguard our national development and integrity. When the fate of the nation is

at stake as it is today, we act as a national organization, concerned with ensuring the safety and future of our homeland.

From the days of our founder, Boghos Nubar Pasha, who headed the Armenian National delegation in the negotiations with the then major European powers in the early part of the 20th century and which led to the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920, defending the rights of an independent Armenia at the international conference. He initiated the establishment of a medical center in 1924 (under the worst time of Communism) and the creation of Nubarashen in 1931, a town presently with a population of more than 12,000. In the mid-1930s, our President Calouste Gulbenkian, managed a relationship with Soviet leadership to maintain the AGBU office in Armenia to assist the population and safeguard Holy Echmiadzin.

Our President Arshak Karagyozyan, under whose leadership AGBU financed the repatriation of Armenians from the western diaspora in 1946-1947 in the aftermath of World War II, secured the establishment of statehood status among the Soviet Republics, which became today's independent Armenia.

By the same token, in the aftermath of the split within the Armenian Church, in 1956 President Alex Manoogian stood by Holy Echmiadzin with the belief that a national church must and can survive and prosper only in its homeland. And you all remember the courageous intervention of President Louise Simone during the 1988 Spitak earthquake and the first Karabakh war, lending her hand to the nation. She went beyond the call of duty and led the establishment of the American University of Armenia, educating generations of leaders and becoming one of the nation's most respected institutions.

All of this brings us to recognize the urgent needs of today. AGBU's leadership, out of serious concern for the dangers facing our nation, has recently called on all Armenian people to unite and bring their expertise, their engagement and their formidable will to build the future in the aftermath of the events of the past year.

We have called for an independent team of capable experts from Armenia and from the Diaspora -- to come together to form a government and shape our policies for the future. Armenia's Parliament, as well as the past and present leaders, should put their partisan interests aside and unite behind such new leadership first to restore the trust and confidence of our people themselves,

then that of the international community, so that they can reverse the negative impact that this war created, to the detriment of Armenia and all Armenians. They must adopt and implement a sound, coordinated set of policies starting with the development of diplomacy skills to shape the long-term survival and role of Armenia within the context and the realities of the new geopolitical environment. They should further focus on the implementation of objective socio-economic programs, short and long term, which could sustain the infrastructure of the country and its population.

All of us, together, must form a moral and practical leadership that can unite the country and bring us back to prosperity. We need a new mature and experienced generation, educated and well-trained in their fields, open to the world, ready to serve and step up and lead our nation into the future. As AGBU, we must do what we can to bring these experts and empower and encourage them to work together, not compete in parallel.

We remain faithful to the Armenian Church, which now and in centuries past has served as our main bastion of faith, culture and survival. We call upon all Armenians to support our national Church, as an institution which holds our precious spiritual lineage and shines a light on who we are within the community of nations.

We remain optimistic about our future. We are confident of the important role that AGBU can fulfill in the mission of strengthening the core of our nation which is global, with its homeland and its Diaspora. This will require the participation of each and every one of you, as only together can we achieve the national prosperity and stability we profoundly wish to see.

On this occasion of the meeting of the AGBU's General Assembly, I also call upon all of our Chapters and members to work more closely with the Central Board and the various regional Committees. Bring your best ideas and best efforts to create a new wave of innovative programs. Don't wait for the initiatives to come from the top. Explore new initiatives together. We may not agree on every decision or outcome. But we all make our decisions in good faith, aiming to serve the good of our people. We should give our community leaders and members the benefit of the doubt, look upon each other with sympathy and appreciation, and always remember that our unity is our strength.

We can work hand in hand to heal the Armenian nation.

Remembering the Power of Indigeneity

HERKAN, from page 19

that, she was still able to keep an eagle eye on her children and grandchildren, checking on their safety, security and happiness.

She cherished her one and only daughter, always watching over her. Out of all the children, she fed only her with raw milk's rich cream, and she never permitted her to kiss anybody's hands, as elderly people expected young girls to do. Herkan provided her with a childhood that gave her the strength to face life's trials, and while this daughter did not have an easy life either, she has continued to find inspiration from her mother's legacy to endure those difficulties. When the daughter's husband passed away at an early age, from her deathbed Herkan asked her to promise she would not remain alone, but to find another partner to share her life with. And so she did.

Herkan had a wholesome, satisfying and affectionate life. The strength she found in herself must have been that of an indigenous woman. She had the rare "luck" to be born and raised where her parents had been; a destiny deprived of many Armenians in those days. She worked the soil of her ancestral homeland, and must have shared her happiness with the mountains, her sorrow with the rivers. The skill she



Ibrahim-Khoren in Kütahya with his family

learned, everything she took in with her heart and with her senses, all the experiences she drew from home, all prepared her to keep herself, her children, and her grandchildren alive, even when spread all over the world. We all have that part within ourselves, that particular part we shall yet re-awaken.

'Jeopardy!' Show Clue Calls Armenia Irredentist towards Karabakh

JEOPARDY, from page 1

Whatever the original intent was of the show's writers, the reactions of Armenians were heard. According to an article by David Taub in gwire.com, the show expressed its regrets on March 6, stating: "Our clue stated that Armenia 'has been accused of irredentism, the reclaiming of old territory.' We didn't

mean to imply either that Armenian policy is actually irredentist, or that irredentism is necessarily something to be condemned...'Jeopardy!' clues often involve reducing complex situations to a brief summary, and we always regret it when our clues come across as oversimplified and even as inaccurate or insulting to any person or group."

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 (640) 590-7117 or
mobile (201) 562-9902