

38 Senators Urge President Biden to Recognize Genocide

WASHINGTON — A total of 38 Senators, led by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ), urged President Joe Biden to officially recognize the truth of the Armenian Genocide, reported the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly).

The Senators noted President Biden’s record on affirming the Armenian Genocide and highlighted his April 24 Armenian Genocide Commemoration Day statement in 2020, wherein he stated:

“It is particularly important to speak these words and commemorate this history at a moment when

we are reminded daily of the power of truth, and of our shared responsibility to stand against hate — because silence is complicity.”

In the letter to President Biden, the Senators also stated: “We join the Armenian community in the United States and around the world in honoring the memory of

these victims, and we stand firmly against attempts to pretend that this intentional, organized effort to destroy the Armenian people was anything other than a genocide. You have correctly stated that American diplomacy and foreign policy must be rooted in see RECOGNITION, page 20

Mission Eurasia Brings Humanitarian Aid and Evangelism to Refugees From Artsakh War

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

DETROIT — The disaster of the 2020 Artsakh War led to as many as 100,000 refugees to initially flee Artsakh to Armenia. While many returned after the war, the humanitarian needs remain great and the resources of the Armenian and Artsakh governments limited. Aside from Armenian organizations throughout the world, various international institutions began to provide aid, including religious organizations. Mission Eurasia is one that has become active in Armenia, with Don Parsons, its ministry director for unreached people groups, taking three trips there since the end of October last year, and arranging for food, clothing, and other aid to be sent through various partner organizations.

Mission Eurasia (formerly called Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries) was founded in 1991 after the collapse of the



Don Parsons with refugee children

Soviet Union to, according to its current website, “react quickly and decisively to new opportunities for evangelism and see MISSION, page 2



‘Rapping Under Fire’ The Story of 3 Young Heroes from Artsakh

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

NEW YORK — In 2017, writer and journalist Taleen Babayan turned her efforts to directing a short documentary in Martakert, a village in Artsakh which now stands divided between Armenia and Azerbaijan after the 44-Day War. Her subject is an unlikely trio of young men in their late twenties — Spartak Osipyan, Eric Poghosyan and Lyoka (Valeri) Ghazaryan — who form the Armenian rap group Orinak (“Example”). Unlikely as well, that a first documentary on this particular subject matter should be quite so successful but “Rapping Under Fire” fascinates from start to finish. The boys from Orinak have, after all, survived their entire lives amidst the ruins of the long-simmering conflict, in a region of the world that few people care about. At one point in the documentary, Spartak points to a rusty Ferris wheel where two generations of Martakertsis have now played on a daily basis, a metaphor for the condition of Artsakh: abandoned yet unwilling to give up.

see RAPPERS, page 11



Turkey Prosecutes HDP Party, Attempts To Ban Paylan’s Political Activity

ISTANBUL (Combined Sources) — Since March 17, a political crisis has erupted in Turkey. Erdogan and the Turkish government has taken steps to shut down the pro-Kurdish HDP political party, of which Garo Paylan is a member and deputy in the Turkish Parliament representing Diyarbakir.

On that day, the Chief Prosecutor of the Court of Cassation, Bekir Sahin, opened a case against the HDP. Sahin claimed without evidence in his indictment that the HDP works as an arm of the PKK (the Kurdistan Worker’s Party). He additionally claimed that the European Court of Human Rights had decided in a previous case that “not condemning a terrorist organization was sufficient grounds for closing down the operations of a political party.”

The indictment demands that the HDP party be shut down in light of its alleged ties to the PKK and its “moving contrary to the duties of political parties.” The indictment also demanded a ban on the political activities of 687 persons, including Garo Paylan.

The case is to be decided by Turkey’s Constitutional Court.

The HDP, which is the third-largest party in Turkey’s parliament, denies any links to the militants.

The party said the case against it was “a heavy blow to democracy and law.”

“We call on all the democratic forces, the social and political opposition, and on our people to join a common fight against this political coup,” the party said on Wednesday.

In recent years many HDP lawmakers have been investigated or jailed - including its former leader, Selahattin Demirtas.

The issue has caused an uproar and public debate in Turkey.

see HDP, page 5

CALIFORNIA

Fresno Arax Dancers Embark on Video Project



PENNSYLVANIA

Sisters Academy Successfully Weathers Covid Challenge



MASSACHUSETTS

Artist Ani Jermakian’s Message Is “I’ll Be Your Voice”



NEWS from ARMENIA

Armenia Reports 26 Covid-19 Deaths

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia has confirmed 801 new cases of coronavirus in a 24-hour period, bringing the national tally to 185,020 as of 11 a.m. on Tuesday, March 23, the Ministry of Health reports.

A total of 451 more patients have recovered from the disease with the total number of recoveries now standing at 169,172.

The COVID-19 death toll has increased by 26 to 3,360. The figure does not include the deaths of 862 other people carrying the virus. According to the health authorities, they were caused by other diseases.

The number of active cases is 11,602. As many as 812,076 tests have been performed in the country since the disease outbreak.

Parliament to Discuss Lifting Martial Law

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The National Assembly was scheduled to discuss lifting martial law in the country on Wednesday, March 25 at the initiative of the opposition Bright Armenia party.

Ararat Mirzoyan, the speaker of the parliament, has proposed to support the initiative and vote in its favor.

According to Bright Armenia leader Edmon Marukyan, the martial law “has completely exhausted itself” and it is maintained for one purpose only — to prevent the launch of a no-confidence vote in the parliament.

Mirzoyan dismissed the political motives cited by Marukyan and said that the process would begin “one way or another” as the country is heading to snap parliamentary elections.

Armenia first declared martial law in late September 2020 when Azerbaijan launched a large-scale military offensive against Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh).

Official Says Dam in Turkey Has Massively Reduced Armenian Reservoirs

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia faces a problem of water shortage in Araks-Akhuryan section due to a dam in Turkey, the director of the Center for Hydro-meteorology and Monitoring Levon Azizyan said at a news conference on Tuesday, March 23.

“It is no coincidence that today, we have 100 million cubic meters less water resources in Akhuryan reservoir than last year. It is because starting from 2012, active dam construction has been carried out in Turkey which has resulted in 30-40 percent decreased of the overall water resources of Araks river,” Azizyan said.

Azizyan added that climate change is another factor that impacts the dramatic decline of water resources as the temperature continues growing since 1994, there is no snow accumulation in the mountainous areas, while the precipitation is mostly in the form of rains.

Mission Eurasia Brings Humanitarian Aid And Evangelism to Artsakh War Refugees

MISSION, from page 1 church-planting in this former communist empire.” At present it is under the leadership of Sergey Rakhuba, who was originally from Ukraine but lived in Moscow for many years before moving to Illinois. Rakhuba attended the Moddy Bible Institute, a fundamentalist Christian institute of higher learning in Chicago. Mission Eurasia, the website continues, along with its in-country affiliate Mission Eurasia Field Ministries, works “to train, equip and mobilize the next generation of Christian leaders to transform their nations for Christ through strategic, holistic ministry.”

Parsons and his wife Esther lived for more than twelve years in the former Soviet Union, including eight years in Ukraine, starting in the late 1990s. Parsons, who grew up as an Evangelical Baptist, worked as a missionary and learned the Russian language. He did the same work in Kazakhstan. Parsons was director of Globalization and International Personnel at Send International, based in Farmington, Mich. He moved back to the US but last year decided to start working with Mission Eurasia. The organization has an international office in Franklin, Tenn., but its main field ministry office is outside of Kiev.

Parsons, who lives in the Detroit area, started September 1, and a month later was still trying to figure out during a covid year what work would be like for him, he said, when the president of the organization called and spoke about the situation in Armenia. He wanted to send a delegation to see what kind of support could be provided. Unexpectedly, Rakhuba asked whether Parsons would be able to leave for Armenia the next day. Having already recovered from a bout of covid, Parsons did not shy away from traveling and agreed to go.

This first trip of around ten days starting at the end of October was exploratory but boxes of food and the scriptures were also distributed. With a team including



Food to be distributed to the Artsakh refugees in Abovyan

members from Ukraine and Russia, Parsons traveled up and down Armenia while the Artsakh war was still raging. When he went to Goris, a city of 20-22,000 people, he said he found more than 10,000 refugees from Artsakh. The mayor of Goris pointed to a school which was initially closed due to covid but now held women and children refugees using makeshift beds. The adult men at that point were still in Artsakh. The city government had difficulties in feeding an increase practically overnight of fifty percent of its population and later, Mission Eurasia was able to send some food to help.



Distributing aid

He said of that trip: “It was a tough situation, and we heard tough stories from so many women. We visited homes where we knew people lost their husbands, brothers and sons.”

Parsons’ second and third trips brought aid and also introduced people from Western partner organizations to the situation in Armenia. Parsons pointed out that they were not familiar with the language or culture so Mission Eurasia helped them understand the context. Two such organizations are Samaritan’s Purse, the international Christian relief and evangelism organization led by William “Franklin” Graham III, and headquartered in Boone, NC, and Christian Aid Ministries, based in Millersburg, Ohio, which is, according to its website, a “channel for Amish,

Mennonite, and other conservative Anabaptist groups and individuals to minister to physical and spiritual needs around the world.”

Parson’s second trip took place post-war, from December 15 to 24. Among the Armenian cities he traveled to was Vanadzor, where he and his team provided aid to a family that had lost so much in Artsakh. Its patriarch, who spoke Russian with them, was distraught, Parsons said. He was an older gentleman with multiple generations of family members. He had lost his farm with over 1,000 pomegranate trees, mul-

tiple cars, farm equipment, a house, and staff. They had fled quickly only with the clothing on their backs, thinking that the situation would be short lived as during the April 2016 war and they would quickly return. In Armenia, the government at that point was only providing subsidies for children from Artsakh but not for adults, so the family used these subsidies to help pay for rent and utilities.

Parson’s most recent trip took place from February 19 to March 3. On this trip, among other things, he met a woman who had lost her brother and her husband. The local evangelical church prayed with her that they would be found, and the husband was seen on television, but then the news came that he had been killed. Parsons said, “One thing I saw with her is that people had come around her from the church. She was actually joyful – even with that deep pain she had a smile on her face – because she had experienced the love of the body of Christ in a way she had never experienced before.”

Parsons and Mission Eurasia have not gone directly into Artsakh, but some of its local partner churches have. Parsons gave the example of one Baptist church that sent 1,000 boxes of food there and was planning to send more soon. Parsons thought that entry to Karabakh could be a problem for him, as well as for the Ukrainian team members, due to strained Russian-Ukrainian relations.

Backstory

Mission Eurasia already had been doing work in Armenia. It did not have a physical office there but had partnerships with local evangelical churches and groups.

According to its 2019-20 report, it helped establish two churches in Armenia



ARMENIA

through its training of leaders in its School Without Walls program, which had 74 students and 26 graduates in three locations in Armenia in this period. Mission Eurasia also had 42 Bible day camps in Armenia which involved 560 children. It worked not only with Armenians, but also preaches the Gospel and provides humanitarian aid to Yazidis in the Republic of Armenia

Parsons revealed that among other things, Mission Eurasia partnered with an Armenian evangelical church in Abovyan, a city around half an hour outside of Yerevan, called Abovyan City Evangelical Church. Mission Eurasia had done training



Distributing aid

with some people from Vanadzor who were part of the same Armenian Evangelical association and President Rakhuba knew the local pastor, Vazgen Zohrabyan, from that.

When the bombings and attacks by Azerbaijan against Artsakh began on September 27, the church immediately announced on social media that it was open to help any refugee looking for a place to live and food. Zohrabyan did not expect what happened next, Parsons related. He got over 100 phone calls within the first 24 hours, which represented around 2,000 people, since the callers all had families.

This little church of only 200 or 300 people in Abovyan decided that it was not going to turn anyone away, though the pastor

In the end, the church did help 2,000 people in Abovyan and the surrounding communities. People stayed within the church building plus they found hotels and other places to host the refugees.

Humanitarian Aid

Other organizations also helped the Abovyan church. Samaritan's Purse, a partner with Mission Eurasia, airlifted 50 tons of winter clothing, blankets and other winter supplies to Armenia in early November, some of which came to the church. Another shipment of blankets should be arriving soon to Armenia. Parsons explained that Mission Eurasia believes the crisis will extend for a long time, so though late in the season, the additional blankets will help not only for this year but the next.

Mission Eurasia raised funds through partners and purchased food in Armenia, Parsons said, which was boxed by volunteers in various cities. Many of the volunteers were themselves refugees from Artsakh while others were church members. Over 10,000 boxes of food assistance was prepared (over 160,000 tons of food). Each box will sustain a family of four for up to a month and also contain scriptural writings. Parsons said that some of the most needy areas where refugees are living were targeted for this assistance.

A new shipment arrived from Canada in early March in a 40-foot container with dried vegetables and soup packets. Parsons said that the last week he was in Armenia he and his team visited a shelter for some 50 refugees, which was a converted five-star hotel. The Armenian government subsidized the refugees' housing but they were only given rice and noodles to eat. The new shipment of vegetables and other nutritious foods will be sent to them just in time.

Another type of aid Mission Eurasia is facilitating is bread through the establishment of five bakeries in different areas that will be established in conjunction with Armenian evangelical churches. Flat lavash bread will be provided to refugees either for cost or even for free, Parsons said. The bakeries are given the name "bread of life," based on Jesus' identification of himself with this term in the scriptures. While funds have been raised to establish five bakeries, it is taking time to set them up, Parsons said, but the first one should be



Preparing aid boxes

Samaritan's Purse, working with the Armenian Ministry of Health, used the Abovyan church building to provide Artsakh refugees with initial health examinations, consultations and first aid from a team of doctors who had come from the US for this purpose on November 22.

During all this work, Mission Eurasia helped the local evangelical churches establish a nongovernmental organization in Armenia to facilitate the aid it was bringing, Parsons said.

There was no formal coordination with the Armenian government on aid, but Parsons said that all aid was provided through official channels so that the government knew what was going on. Whoever receives a food box has to sign a receipt for it. If a local church receives aid boxes to distribute, the boxes come with the seal of state authorization, and the church has to sign for them. The church also keeps tabs to see that refugee families only get as much as they need and not more.

Furthermore, on a local level, the local pastors have good informal relations with the mayors of their respective cities, especially in Vanadzor and Abovyan. In Abovyan, Parsons said, Mayor Vahagn Gevorgyan asked the church for help for refugees on various occasions, and later formally thanked him and his church for this.

Spiritual Work and Evangelism

Parsons made it clear that for Mission Eurasia, humanitarian aid against crises was combined wherever possible with spiritual, declaring: "We are trying to provide the physical aid and in every context that we work, we are trying to shine the light of Christ and share the hope of Christ in a hopeless situation."

He did not want to speak ill of the Armenian Church and declared: "We always try to have good relationship with everyone we possibly can. ... I know some of our partners on the ground have a very positive relationship with the Apostolic Church [of Armenia]. If God wants to work through the Apostolic Church I am very thankful for that. If God wants to work through the different brothers and sisters we are partnering with, praise the Lord for that too."

On the other hand, Mission Eurasia's website is more critical, stating: "Although Armenia is the world's first officially Christian nation, the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church has become more of a cultural, rather than spiritual, institution. Most Armenians consider 'Armenian' and 'Christian' to be synonymous, but many of them have never even heard the gospel. In order to share the hope of Christ with the unreached, we are preparing our School Without Walls (SWW) students in Armenia

for ministry in their own communities, transforming their schools, workplaces, and families with the gospel!"

It goes on to ask: "Please pray that God would grow the evangelical church in Armenia so that even more Armenians would realize that their nationality doesn't make them real Christians, but rather, they must put their faith in Christ."

Parsons said that as short-term visitors, he and his team were trying to make connections for the local Armenian national evangelical churches so that they in turn could follow up with more physical aid and spiritual assistance.

During his visits with Artsakh refugees, Parsons said, he sometimes could speak Russian, as many people from Artsakh know that language, but his group generally also had an Armenian translator with them, who often was a local Armenian evangelical pastor. The group would bring food to a home and had religious literature available.

For the Armenian speakers, Parsons said, "If they wanted to talk with us – we didn't force anything upon them – we would share from the word of God. Either the pastor would speak directly in Armenian, or he would say, would you share the word, to me, or to someone else on our team, and we would share and he would translate."

Mission Eurasia is also printing Bibles now both for young children and for teenagers in Armenia.

Parsons did some training work at the SWW center in Vanadzor, that had been set up before the war, and in Abovyan. He said that Mission Eurasia was planning to set up new centers, including one in Yerevan in a few months. On his third trip to Armenia, he brought with him Alexandr Belev, the coordinator of the SWW program to help in this work.

Parsons said, "We are trying to increase the abilities and the skills that our team as well as our partners – and in this case it would be the [evangelical] church in Armenia, has to be able to deal with people who are struggling with post-traumatic stress and other kinds of traumatic issues. Primarily it will be a spiritual approach to those kinds of things. The training will include aspects of biblical counseling which is not just spiritual assistance and encouragement but a deeper approach to traumatic issues."

He concluded: "Our purpose is always to provide physical assistance, provide hope and encourage people to look up to Christ in the midst of a crisis, in the midst of difficulties, in the midst of struggle. We have seen time and again, even in the short term, how that is effective."

For more information, see <https://missioneurasia.org/>.



Don Parsons, far right, standing next to an Artsakh patriarch and his family in Vanadzor, with a care package in the foreground

had no clue as to how he was going to take care of so many refugees. Parsons recalled during his first visit to Armenia that the pastor related the story of their attempting to prepare for so many people to be cared for and fed. It was the third week of October. Out of the blue, Rakhuba called the pastor and said his organization would like to come and help. The Abovyan pastor began to cry out of happiness.

running soon.

Some medical aid is being provided also. During Parsons' trips, he and his team visited some hospitals, which, especially in the villages, have great needs. A hospital in Germany that is renovating its facilities donated all its beds, bedding and equipment like wheelchairs. Mission Eurasia is trying to raise money for the shipping in order to bring these items to Armenia.



Snap Elections Run into Electoral Code Reform

By Raffi Elliott

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Almost a week since Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced a date for upcoming snap parliamentary elections, pro-government and opposition political parties are debating whether or not to implement a planned electoral code reform in time for the vote scheduled for June 20.

Following months of intrigue, Pashinyan struck a deal with the two parliamentary opposition factions late last week. While the prime minister had dropped hints of his readiness to hold a new vote as early as last December, the format and timeline has remained a subject of much debate. The liberal-leaning Bright Armenia party and business tycoon Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia agreed not to field rival prime ministerial candidates once the current prime minister resigns in order for the country's complicated parliamentary mechanism to trigger a snap election. According to Bright Armenia leader Edmon Marukyan, his party's requirement that Pashinyan reinstate former Chief of the General Staff Onik Gasparyan was withdrawn once the issue became moot — Gasparyan's replacement, Lieutenant General Artak Davtyan has already taken office.

The scheduled elections are expected to relieve simmering tensions in the country following the defeat against the Turkish and Azerbaijani armies in Artsakh last November. Pashinyan, who rode a wave of popular discontent with the previous administration into power back in 2018, has been facing mounting calls to resign from various segments of Armenian society and the diaspora. Others have pointed to holding fresh elections as a legitimate egress for the prime minister's party seeking to regain the mandate it lost during the war.

The announcement of fresh elections was not enough to satisfy the demands of the Homeland Salvation Movement — a street opposition alliance largely composed



Opposition demonstrators in Yerevan camped outside parliament

of, and financed by, the former regime deposed in the 2018 Velvet Revolution. This coalition's leadership instead demands that Pashinyan resign and hand power to their candidate, the septuagenarian mathematician and one-time Prime Minister Vazgen Manukyan who would helm a "caretaker government" for a one-year period before organizing its own elections.

This proposal hasn't managed to garner much support from the general public however. According to a recent poll commissioned by the International Republican Institute, only 6 percent of voters would definitely trust the Homeland Salvation Movement to lead a transitional government, while 76 percent were opposed to the idea. Analysts say the Movement's leadership — largely composed of figures considered "tainted" by their involvement in the previous regime — has not resonated well with voters. The IRI poll places this coalition in the low single digits for voting intentions, well behind the governing Civil Contract Party and its allies which command some 30 percent of voting intentions. The match up isn't much more favorable to these parties when listed individually either.

Still, voter distrust hasn't dissuaded the Homeland Salvation Movement from

blockading Yerevan's main thoroughfare, Baghramyan Avenue, for almost two months. Tents pitched on the road in an aborted attempt to block access to the Parliament Building were only removed on Tuesday afternoon after the movement's leadership announced a new strategy to "expand the geography" of their campaign to topple the elected government. Manukyan, the movement's prime ministerial candidate, who has called the prospects of elections organized under the current government "the most disastrous in history," has already announced his intention to boycott the vote. The movement's leadership has also elected to stick to their original demands despite parting ways with its biggest faction, Prosperous Armenia.

But with less than 70 days until the election, the political parties are divided over the issue of implementing a long-planned electoral code reform before the vote. The electoral code overhaul package, which has been under consideration since 2018, primarily deals with the elimination of the controversial "electoral ridings" in favor of an all-proportional voting system. The mixed system has long been criticized for allowing local government-affiliated oligarchs to use their influence in order to win safe seats without directly implicating the

ruling party in corruption rackets.

The new package would also lower the threshold for party representation from the current five percent to under three percent. However, the cutoff for electoral alliances would be raised in a bid to encourage the consolidation of political parties as the main units in Armenian democracy.

An earlier version of this proposal was voted down by the then-ruling Republican and Armenian Revolutionary Federation parties which ironically did not make the higher five-percent cut in the subsequent elections.

Another major change in the original reform bill — lifting the gender quota for women being every fourth candidate on party lists to every third — no longer appears in the updated proposal, having been made redundant when that new criteria automatically came into effect on January 1 this year. However, the updated bill does include a new provision which would provide the Central Election Committee with guidelines on conducting elections during major public health scares such as pandemics, such as mandating the use of personal protective equipment for voters.

Despite the electoral code overhaul effort being a non-partisan issue, the Bright Armenia party has expressed its opposition to adopting the bill before June's election. Party leader Marukyan cited concerns that enacting these changes so soon before a vote might lead to administrative challenges and confusion at a crucial moment. He also suggested that the implementation of this new code could serve as a pretext to delay the impending election. "To adopt new rules of the game means imperiling the announced election date, hence, deepening the crisis in the country," Marukyan said.

Nevertheless, other parties and prominent civil rights organizations have framed the adoption of the new electoral code as an imperative for holding free and fair elections. Danniell Ioannisyann of the Union of Informed Citizens responded to Marukyan's criticism of the bill, stating that while some of his concerns are valid, holding elections before the new code is passed would be "disgraceful."

This sentiment was echoed by the start-up social-democratic Citizen's Decision party which insisted that the code must be overhauled before the election to ensure a proper democratic contest. However they affirmed their willingness to take part in the vote regardless.

Russian Peacekeepers Accompany Karabakh Pilgrims to Amaras, Dadivank

STEPANAKERT (PanARMENIAN.Net) — More than 100 pilgrims from Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), accompanied by Russian peacekeepers, visited the Armenian monasteries of Amaras and Dadivank in the past two, the Russian Defense Ministry reported on Monday, March 22.

"As part of the implementation of the trilateral statement of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia dated November 9, 2020, Russian peacekeepers continue to assist in the restoration of peaceful life in Nagorno-Karabakh," the Ministry said in a statement.

As a result of the agreements reached, Amaras monastery has now found itself in close proximity to the line of contact in Karabakh. Dadivank, meanwhile, which is one of the oldest Christian monasteries ever, is located in Kelbajar region, which, in accordance with a trilateral statement, came under the control of Azerbaijan in November 2020.

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

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



Pilgrims accompanied by Russian peacekeepers



INTERNATIONAL

Turkey's Erdogan Quits European Treaty on Violence against Women

ANKARA (Reuters) — President Tayyip Erdogan pulled Turkey out of an international accord designed to protect women, the government said on Saturday, March 20, prompting protests and criticism from those who said it was necessary to tackle rising domestic violence.

The Council of Europe accord, called the Istanbul Convention, pledged to prevent, prosecute and eliminate domestic violence and promote equality. Turkey signed it in 2011 but femicide has surged in the country in recent years.

Concordia University Cancels Turkish Envoy's Conference on Karabakh

MONTREAL — Concordia University cancelled an event scheduled on March 19, during which the Turkish Ambassador to Canada, Kerim Uras, was to speak on Karabakh.

The cancellation of the event was organized by International Relations Society and the Strategic and Diplomatic Society, two subsidiaries of Concordia Political Science Students Association — PSSA, reported the Quebec Armenian Students' Association.

"The ASAs acknowledge the efforts made by the aforementioned organizations to rectify the errors of inviting a Turkish official to spread misinformation and propaganda on the subject, in addition to the clear Armenophobia that is codified in Turkish policy," the ASAs said in a Statement on Saturday, March 20.

"Following our efforts to restructure the biased event into a more diplomatic dialogue presented as a series of conferences on Nagorno-Karabakh, the societies sought permission from the Turkish Embassy to invite her Excellency, Anahit Harutyunyan, the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Canada, for a completely separate event. Furthermore, by deleting Armenian students' comments which questioned the ethics of this event on Facebook and Instagram, the moderators countered their declared neutrality, obstructed free speech, and exhibited clear favoritism. In an academic setting, we condemn any efforts to present a biased and one-sided argument, all while silencing the other party.

"It is important to note that any steps taken to raise awareness on Nagorno-Karabakh is praiseworthy, but this awareness cannot come from the side of the aggressor's accomplice, the misinformation spreader, and genocide perpetrator. The ASAs remind their audience that the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict is not a matter of controversy or contention; rather, it is a matter of human rights violations, a denial of inalienable right to self-determination, and cultural genocide. By choosing to provide a free platform to a representative of a State with an official policy of Armenian Genocide denial, and invite them to speak about the Artsakh conflict, the IRS and SDS failed to evaluate the harmful and offensive consequences of the "perspective" of the Turkish official."

No reason was provided for the withdrawal in the Official Gazette, where it was announced in the early hours on Saturday. But top government officials said domestic law rather than outside fixes would protect women's rights.

The convention, forged in Turkey's biggest city, had split Erdogan's ruling AK Party (AKP) and even his family. Last year, officials said the government was mulling pulling out amid a row over how to curb growing violence against women.

"Every day we wake up to news of femicide," said Hatice Yolcu, a student in Istanbul, where hundreds of women carrying purple flags marched in protest at the withdrawal.

"The death never ends. Women die. Nothing happens to men," she said.

Marija Pejcinovic Buric, secretary general of the 47-nation Council of Europe, called Turkey's decision "devastating."

"This move is a huge setback ... and all the more deplorable because it compromises the protection of women in Turkey, across Europe and beyond," she said.

Many conservatives in Turkey and in Erdogan's Islamist-rooted AKP say the pact undermines family structures, encouraging violence.

Some are also hostile to the Convention's principle of gender equality and see it as promoting homosexuality, given the pact's non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

"Preserving our traditional social fabric" will protect the dignity of Turkish women, Vice President Fuat Oktay said on Twitter. "For this sublime purpose, there is no need to seek the remedy outside or to imitate others."

Family, Labour and Social Policies Minister Zehra Zumrut said the constitution and current laws guarantee women's rights.

Critics of the withdrawal have said it would put Turkey further out of step with the European Union, which it remains a

candidate to join. They argue the convention, and related legislation, need to be implemented more stringently.

Germany said Turkey's decision sent the wrong signal. "Neither cultural nor religious nor other national traditions can serve as an excuse for ignoring violence against women," the foreign ministry said.

Turkey does not keep official statistics on femicide.

But the rate roughly tripled in the last 10 years, according to a group that monitors femicide. So far this year 78 women have been murdered or died under suspicious circumstances, it said.

World Health Organization data shows 38% of women in Turkey are subject to violence from a partner in their lifetime, compared to 25% in Europe.

"Shame on this bigotry, patriarchy, heartlessness that protects bullies and murderers instead of women," Turkish author Elif Saffak said on Twitter of the withdrawal.

Istanbul's mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, of the main opposition party, said ditching the pact was "painful" and disregarded women's struggle over years.

Turkey is not the first country to move towards pulling out of the accord. Poland's highest court scrutinized the pact after a cabinet member said Warsaw should quit a treaty that the nationalist government considers too liberal.

While critics say his government has not done enough, Erdogan has condemned violence against women and said this month it would work to eradicate it. Ankara has tagged violent men and launched a smartphone app for women to alert police.

Erdogan's decision comes after he unveiled judicial reforms this month that he said would improve rights and freedoms, and help meet EU standards.

Talks over Turkey's membership in the bloc have been halted for years over policy differences and Ankara's record on human rights.

Turkey Prosecutes HDP Party, Attempts To Ban Paylan's Political Activity

HDP, from page 1

Former President of Turkey, Abdullah Gul, stated he finds the indictment to be a mistake and has asked, "don't they see that such an unwise decision will bring danger upon both the country and the government?"

Meanwhile, by March 18, HDP deputy Faruk Gergerioglu's status as a member of Parliament was rescinded. Gergerioglu announced on that day that he would not leave the Grand National Assembly building as long as this injustice against him was not corrected.

Turkey's move was criticized by the West, particularly the United States and the European Union. In response, the Turkish Foreign Ministry called upon the West not to get involved in Turkey's internal affairs.

However, Western leaders and institutions continued to criticize Turkey, with Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Marija Buric giving an interview to German newspaper Die Welt.

According to Buric, the move to shut down the HDP is suspect. Buric pointed out that the rights of political parties are protected by the European Court of Human Rights, which guarantees the right to assemble and to form organizations.

"The ECHR clearly underlines the role

of political parties in the preservation of democracy. For a court to close down or disperse a political party is an extreme measure that may only be justified as an instrument of last resort in very exceptional circumstances in a democratic society," Buric said, adding that a political party cannot be shut down just because it attempts to bring to public attention the situation of a certain group within society.

Buric also noted that political parties have been shut down regularly in Turkey in the recent past. Seven similar cases have been examined by the ECHR, in six of which the court found the Turkish government guilty, concluding that Turkey has violated European Convention on Human Rights. Buric predicted that the ECHR would be able to come to a similar conclusion in the case of the HDP.

Gergerioglu, whose parliamentary status and parliamentary immunity had been taken away, was taken into custody while in the restroom on March 22. Police officers didn't even allow him to put his shoes on and took him barefoot to the police station. After a few hours of interrogation, he was set free and went to join the Nevruz celebrations taking place in Ankara. Legal action continues against the HDP party.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

1,700 Hectares Cleared Of Explosives By Russian Sappers in Karabakh

STEPANAKERT (Panorama.am) — The personnel of the humanitarian demining company of the Russian peacekeeping contingent continues to work on clearing the area of explosive objects in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian Defense Ministry reported, March 23.

Since November 23, 2020, 1,739 hectares of territory, 541 km of roads, 1,614 housing structures (including 30 socially significant objects) have been cleared of unexploded ordnances. In total, 25,349 explosive objects were found and neutralized by the Russian peacekeepers.

The explosive objects found by the sappers were removed and destroyed at the specially equipped Ballydza landfill. Ammunition that cannot be moved is destroyed on the spot, the source said.

Armenians, Jews Rally in Front of Elbit Systems

JERUSALEM (Public Radio of Armenia) — Members of the Armenian community in Israel and dozens of Jews rallied this week in front of the building of the military corporation Elbit Systems, which produces weapons supplied to Azerbaijan.

The protesters demanded to stop the supplies to the Aliyev regime, which uses weapons against civilians, blogger Alexander Lapshin informs. The rally was organized by the Union of the Armenian Communities in Israel.

The blogger presents the translation of what the protester chanted:

-Azerbaijan is ruled by a dictatorial regime.

-Azerbaijan is spreading Armenophobia and promoting intolerance towards national minorities.

-Azerbaijan uses Israeli weapons to strike at the peaceful civilian population in Karabakh.

-Azerbaijan is an unreliable ally for Israel with its growing Islamic fundamentalism.

-Thousands of Armenians saved Jews from the Nazis during World War II.

Lavrov Says Russia-EU Relations Destroyed

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The entire infrastructure of relations with the European Union has been destroyed as a result of unilateral steps from Brussels, so Moscow has no relations with that organization now, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters on Tuesday, March 23 at a joint news conference with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, TASS reports.

"There are no relations with the European Union as an organization. The entire infrastructure of these relations has been destroyed by unilateral decisions made by Brussels," he said.

Russia will be ready for contacts to scale up cooperation with the EU when Brussels deems it necessary to eliminate anomalies in bilateral relations, according to Lavrov.



Community News

Official Genocide Commemoration In Connecticut to Focus on Karabakh War Repercussions

HARTFORD, Conn. — The Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Connecticut program for 2021 will take place on April 24 at 10:30 a.m. virtually.

The program will commemorate the 106th anniversary of this horrific event and will remember the Holy Martyrs and survivors of the Genocide. Further the program will also provide insights into recent critically important events in Armenia and Artsakh.

The program will begin with the Martyrs’ Service which was created in 2015, on the occasion of the centennial of the Genocide and the canonization of the Martyrs. Clergy from all four Armenian Churches in Connecticut will participate in the service. The commemoration program will begin immediately after the service.

The flag of the Republic of Armenia will fly over the Connecticut state capitol for a week and the raising of the flag will be shown to attendees by video.

The program will begin with both the American and Armenian national anthems being sung by the choirs of Connecticut’s four Armenian churches: Armenian Church of the Holy Ascension in Trumbull, Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection in New Britain, St. George Armenian Church in Hartford and St. Stephen’s Armenian Church in New Britain.

Tatul Hakobyan will speak on “Why did the 44 day war take place” and Lilly Torosyan will address the topic “From New England to old borders: A Connecticut Armenian’s personal account of the 44 day war.”

Hakobyan is an Armenian reporter, independent political analyst and author, based in Yerevan, specializing in the Karabakh issue and Armenia-Turkey relations. He is an author of three books — *Karabakh Diary: Black and Green, Armenians and Turks, The Valley of Death: 44-day catastrophe*. He worked as a correspondent for the newspapers *Yerkir*, *Azg*, *Aztag*, *The Armenian Reporter* and as a political observer on regional issues of Radiolur news program of Public Radio of Armenia. Most recently, he was a reporter and an analyst at the independent Civitas Foundation. He holds a degree in journalism from the Yerevan State University.

Torosyan is a first-generation New Englander and moved to Armenia two days before the Artsakh War began on September 27, 2020. She was assistant project manager of h-pem, Hamazkayin’s online platform to engage young diasporans in Armenian

see COMMEMORATION, page 7



Tatul Hakobyan



A student has his temperature taken by Principal Sister Emma upon arrival to school, one of many safety measures in place that allows the school to operate in person

Philadelphia Armenian Sisters Academy Successfully Weathers Covid Challenge

By Paul Vartan Sookiasian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

RADNOR, Penn. – Masks. Zoom. Temperature Checks. Social Distancing. Outbreaks. Being a student or teacher has always had its fair share of difficulties, but this past year has unleashed more new hurdles and unfamiliar concepts to learning than could have been imagined. Couple this with the existing challenges faced by institutions creating a space for the Armenian language and culture to be taught while boasting a rigorous and competitive American educational curriculum, and you can begin to understand the moment which the Armenian Sisters Academy outside Philadelphia has had to rise to meet. Nobody said it would be easy for this preschool through 8th grade day school with over 120 students and 30 teachers and aides, but it has diligently done so in A+ fashion.

Like schools around the world, the Academy had to abruptly transition to Zoom—see SISTERS, page 7

Students from first to eighth grade are flanked by Vice-Principal Daniel Commale and Sister Emma Moussayan



National Council Of Churches Calls For Humanitarian Aid to Armenia And the Release of Armenian Soldiers

WASHINGTON — After fully recognizing the ongoing crisis in Armenia, an ancient Apostolic Christian nation, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) joins the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Orthodox Church of America to reiterate the importance of the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) peace process.

NCC calls for the United States to provide urgently needed humanitarian aid for the people of Artsakh who were forced to flee their homes during the unprovoked attack by Azerbaijan and Turkey that displaced more than 50,000 ethnic Armenians in the region. We plead for the United States to actively negotiate the safe return of Armenian soldiers and citizens who are being held in violation of the ceasefire agreement signed on November 9, 2020. We also urge the broad recognition of the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century by all political and faith leaders throughout the United States.

NCC applauds [the letter](#) signed by 101 Members of Congress that was sent to U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to stress the importance of addressing the “ongoing humanitarian crisis in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh).” We commend the strong bipartisan support of this letter toward insuring the well-being of the displaced Armenian people from Artsakh. The United states must address the immediate and significant problems of feeding, housing, and protecting these displaced families during the COVID-19 pandemic and insuring their long-term settlement into permanent residences.

We call on President Biden and the Secretary of State to take direct action and negotiate the release of all Armenian soldiers and civilians held by Azerbaijan. Even though the cease fire agreement mandated that Azerbaijan must free all Armenian prisoners of war and apprehended citizens, Azerbaijan has refused to abide by the agreement. An unknown number, believed to be over 200 Armenians, continue to be held captive. Many were captured after the military hostilities ended. Due to the release of videos, we fear the mistreatment and torture of those who are detained.

We lament of the destruction of the churches and religious monuments during the conflict. When United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) attempted to send a committee to visit the religious sites, both of their requests were denied. According to the 1954 Convention for the Protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, Azerbaijan is required to protect cultural heritage during their aggression. UNESCO’s

see NCC, page 7



COMMUNITY NEWS

Philadelphia Sisters Academy Successfully Weathers Covid Challenge

SISTERS, from page 6

based distance learning in March 2020 due to the threat of the coronavirus pandemic. Unfortunately, many of its beloved community events such as its annual year-end *Hantes* performance had to be canceled for the first time in the school's history of over fifty years. While students acclimated to distance learning through June, an ambitious project was set in motion to allow students to safely return to campus in time for the new school year. This was not easy, and would require major financial investment, at a time when quarantine restrictions prevented it from carrying out its typical fundraising events and activities. Yet as past generations sacrificed much in order to establish the Philadelphia community and the school itself, there was no question that it had to be done.

"This year has presented many challenges, not only for our school, but for the entire world," commented school principal Sister

a safety plan for in-person instruction. By the end of August 2020, a written plan was in place and all CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] guidelines were either met or exceeded."

Every aspect had to be considered and no expense could be spared, from replacing all classroom windows and the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning filtration systems, to allowing for increased ventilation, hiring a full-time cleaning staff to do continuous disinfection throughout the school and increasing the number of security cameras. In addition, a whole new approach to daily practices in school life would need to be taken. The school day starts with temperature checks and mandatory masks, students arrive based on staggered drop off times and plexiglass dividers are provided for each student's desk. Students remain with their homeroom class all day and no parents or visitors are allowed inside. Outdoor spaces are utilized when weather permits, and windows are kept open at all times, even in winter with the building's heat turned up to maintain proper airflow. A lot of new rules to be sure, but vital in regaining a degree of normalcy.

Classes were able to resume on time in September as planned and have continued relatively smoothly till now. It has been a lot of work but well worth it, due to the students' joy to be back with their friends and no longer having to attend school by computer every day. An important factor in making it work was the initiative taken by the school's faculty, as Sister Emma noted:

"I commend our teachers for accepting the challenge to safely return to school, without hesitation, for the students. Their commitment and dedication are noticeable



Plexiglass dividers, individual baskets for supplies at each desk, hand sanitizer, and proper spacing are all part of the classroom setup which has allowed the school to remain open through the pandemic

Emma Moussayan. "The Armenian Sisters Academy responded wisely and prudently to the pandemic by creating a COVID-19 Response Advisory Committee to develop



Academy students display some of the boxes of humanitarian relief they collected and sent to Artsakh during the war

through their daily enthusiastic instruction. I also commend the teachers for their diligence in helping to maintain the cleanliness and sanitization of the building throughout the course of the school day."

In fact, word got out about the Academy's preparedness and it was inundated with applications from non-Armenian families eager to take advantage of it. The local elite public schools surrounding the Academy are still only conducting classes remotely and so the opportunity for in-person instruction has been highly sought after.

While an enrollment boost would have helped with preparedness expenses, there were other matters to consider. At present, class size is fairly small, with about ten students per class from first to eighth grades. As Director of Admission Legna Santeri-

an described: "We had a large number of new students interested in enrolling at the Academy, but due to all the necessary protocols we decided not to accommodate any additional students this year. The safety of our students is our number one priority, and we were not willing to do anything to jeopardize that." As of March, thanks to these careful precautions the Academy has had no cases of COVID transmission and only a few students ever contracted COVID, in all cases outside the school environment and successfully quarantined.

While it is hoped the pandemic subsides soon, it's impossible to say when that might happen. Until then though, the Armenian Sisters Academy has proven it is up to the task of weathering the storm while always providing an excellent education.

Official Genocide Commemoration in Connecticut to Focus on Karabakh War Repercussions

COMMEMORATION, from page 6
art and culture, and has previously written for the *Armenian Weekly* newspaper. She currently writes for EVN Report in Armenia. She holds a master's degree in human



Lilly Torosyan

rights from University College London and a bachelor's degree in international relations from Boston University, where she served on the ASA Executive Board.

John G. Geragosian, Connecticut State Auditor, will serve as master of ceremonies.

Melanie Brown, chairperson of the Genocide Commemoration Committee, stated "We regret that the circumstances of the pandemic will not allow us to gather in person at the historic Hall of the House of Representatives as we usually do, but are grateful that we can assemble electronically to commemorate the Martyrs of the Genocide and help the world learn from this tragic event in human history. Moreover, the recent events in Artsakh underscore the need for the world to be ever vigilant, to remember and to condemn continuing human rights atrocities."

The mission of the Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Connecticut is to honor the memory of the one and a

half million victims and also the survivors, of the Armenian Genocide begun by the Ottoman government in 1915.

The committee supports programs, events and the establishment of monuments, itself or with other organizations, in educating the public and remembering the Genocide. The committee also assists in the legislative mandate to provide Genocide related curricula in the public schools. Additionally, the committee seeks to present information about developments in the Diaspora and in Armenia.

Members of the Committee are: Melanie Brown chairperson, Rita Soovajian secretary, Diana Colpitts treasurer, Rev Fr. Archpriest Untzag Nalbandian, Rev Fr. Voski Galstyan, Rev Fr. Archpriest Aram Stepanian, Rev Fr. Garabed Telfeyan, Deacon Michael Sabounjian, Dr. Svetlana Babadjanyan, Hon Evelyn Mukjian Daly, Professor Mari Firkatian, Hon. John Geragosian, Professor Armen Marsoobian, Sonia Gulbenk, Richard Arzooonian, Attorney Greg Norsigian, Attorney Harry Mazadoorian, David Paparian, Richard Hamasian, and Kit Kaolian.

Pre-registration is required to obtain the zoom link. To register go to : <https://bit.ly/3ti5iJ5>

If you are unable to pre-register online or do not have zoom capability, call 860-651-0629.

This year, the Committee's fundraising

efforts will support FAR's (Fund for Armenian Relief) House/Farm project in the southern Armenia city of Sisian for families from Artsakh.

FAR is acquiring 25 abandoned houses/farms, renovating them, providing furnishings including appliances, heaters, etc. and settling 25 families to work the land for income (domestic animals/poultry, plantings, etc.) to sustain themselves.

To motivate them to stay in Armenia, if they remain successfully for at least 5

years, FAR will give them ownership of the houses.

Anyone wishing to make a contribution to this effort, whether or not attending the Connecticut Virtual Program, may do so.

Checks should be payable to: "FAR Sisian AER" (Artsakh Emergency Relief) and mailed to: Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of CT, c/o Diana Dagavarian Colpitts, Treasurer 236 Oxford St., Hartford, CT 06105

NCC Calls for Humanitarian Aid to Armenia And the Release of Armenian Soldiers

NCC, from page 6

independent mission of experts must be permitted to produce a preliminary inventory of significant cultural properties in order to begin safeguarding the region's heritage.

We commend President Biden for pledging to support a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century. Approximately one and a half million Armenians were killed from 1915-1923 during the Ottoman Empire. We applaud both the House and Senate for passing resolutions recognizing the fact of the Genocide during the 116th Congress. As Armenians continue to be displaced and killed, we call for the President to keep his pledge and formally recognize the Armenian Genocide on April 24, 2021, Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, in order to further the US commitment to human rights.

We call for prayers to comfort those held prisoner, their anguished families, and those displaced from their homes, so that they may all know God's true compassion and find strength to persevere during this time of persecution.



St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral Announces Schedule of Holy Week and Easter Services

NEW YORK — Ordinarily, Holy Week signals the end of the Lenten period of separation, and a return to the full life of the church. The coming Holy Week will go forward in the Eastern Diocese under strict observance of local safety regulations, with provision for in-person worship as well as online broadcasts of services.

Public health considerations in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic remain a major concern, and will limit the activities surrounding the celebrations, and the public's access to them.

St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral will be open to the public throughout Holy Week, March 28 through April 4, in accordance with all New York regulations regarding public gatherings—which include mask-wearing, social-distancing, and limits on the number of worshippers permitted in the sanctuary. The series of special Holy Week services, culminating in Easter Sunday on April 4, 2021, will be broadcast to the public over the St. Vartan Cathedral Facebook page. The Easter liturgy will also be broadcast over the Eastern Diocese's YouTube platform.

The schedule of services at the cathedral is as follows:

Palm Sunday, the commemoration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, falls on March 28. Fr. Davit

Karamyan (Vicar of St. Vartan Cathedral) will be the celebrant for the services, which will begin streaming over Facebook at 10 a.m. The Turen-patzek or "Door-Opening" Service will be held after the Divine Liturgy. A special Pam Sunday Children's Blessing service will take place on the cathedral's outdoor plaza following the Turen-patzek service. Children are invited to take part in this meaningful service and receive gifts.

On Holy TUESDAY, March 30, a Vespers service in remembrance of the Ten Virgins, will begin at 6 p.m.

April 1 is Great and Holy THURSDAY, and the day's services memorialize the Last Supper, Jesus' vigil in the Garden of Gethsemane, his arrest and trial. Two separate services will be celebrated on this day. In the morning, the Divine Liturgy will begin at 10 a.m.

In the evening, the "Washing of the Feet" ceremony will start at 6:30 p.m., with the Khavaroom or Vigil Service following at 8 p.m. This year during the Washing of Feet ceremony, only three individuals from the community will stand in place of the apostles.

The crucifixion and death of Christ will be marked on April 2—Great and Holy Friday—and two ser-

vices will take place. The Order of the Crucifixion of Christ will begin at 12 noon. That same evening, at 6 p.m., the Order of the Entombment of the Lord, or Taghoom Service, will take place.

On Great and Holy Saturday, April 3, the scripture-reading ceremony will begin at 6:30 p.m., followed by the Jrakalouyts ("Lamp-Lighting") Badarak.

Finally, the drama of Holy Week will culminate on Easter Sunday, April 4: the central holy day of the Christian calendar, commemorating the discovery of Christ's empty tomb and the news of his resurrection. The Divine Liturgy will begin at 10 a.m., with Bishop Daniel Findikyan, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, celebrating the liturgy and delivering the homily.

A light reception for the public will take place on the cathedral plaza following the Easter Sunday Badarak.

All of the Holy Week services at St. Vartan Cathedral will be broadcast over the cathedral Facebook page, with East Sunday services broadcast in addition over the Eastern Diocese's YouTube platform. Parishes around the Eastern Diocese may have their own schedule of in-person and online services; contact your local parish for details.

Melkon Yessailian Self-made Successful Engineer

WESTWOOD, Mass. — Melkon Yessailian, a longtime resident of Westwood, passed away peacefully at home on March 10, 2021. He was 91.

He was born in the wheat fields of historic Armenia to Aghavni and Garabed Yessayan, who were miraculous survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

His father baptized him in the Euphrates river.

After his birth, his parents fled to Aleppo, Syria seeking a better future. To their surprise, they faced tremendous hardship due to a lack of employment opportunities for Christian minorities. Despite this, his parents never gave up hope.

The eldest of five surviving children, Melkon lived a life of courage, compassion, perseverance, and faith. At age 6, his father secured Melkon admission to the Calouste Gulbenkian School for Armenian children. He convinced the admissions board that his son had innate talent by showcasing his own beautiful calligraphy handwriting. While at Gulbenkian, Melkon mastered the French language and was awarded the Prix de L'Alliance Francaise, which recognized the top student of French among all students in his grade in the city of Aleppo.

When he was 11, Melkon was admitted to the prestigious Mekhitarine Armenian Catholic School, which was reserved for elite families. With no money to pay for his

tuition, his mother told the head priest that she was Catholic and recounted stories of her father regularly hosting Armenian nuns at their home before the Genocide.

Despite being at the top of his class, Melkon was forced to drop out of school at age 15 to support his struggling family. He took a job at a textile factory where he worked on a loom for 5 years — 12 hours a day, 6 days a week for \$5/week while relying on a kerosene lantern as his only source of light. He did this until the Syrian Army drafted him.

After his stint in the Syrian Army, Melkon worked in Baniyas, Syria for Iraq Petroleum. Discovering that the company would send young employees to London for 12 months of training, Melkon taught himself English, relying on a dictionary and practicing his vocabulary nightly with a friend. He was fluent in three months. After reciting his favorite poem (Rudyard Kipling's "If") to his manager, he was granted the opportunity to go to London.

In 1956 he returned to Syria only to face repeated interrogations by the Syrian Secret Police who thought he was a spy for the British Government because he lived in London and spoke perfect English. Fearful he was going to be falsely accused and jailed for life, he decided to come to America for the sake of his family, who continued to rely on his support. He immigrated to the



United States on a student visa.

Upon arriving in Boston, he attended Newman Prep. He subsequently carried a full engineering course load at Wentworth Institute, while working the night shift as a medical orderly at the Peter Bent Brigham hospital. During this time, he continued to send a portion of his earnings to his family in Syria. One night, he befriended an Armenian patient at the hospital which led him to meeting his future wife, Arpi.

With family as his highest priority in life, he and Arpi helped Melkon's parents and siblings immigrate to Toronto during the early years of their marriage. They made their home in Westwood. He enjoyed a career that included many years as a nuclear and construction engineer at Boston Edison.

Devoted to his community, Melkon served his church as a member of its board of trustees, a Sunday school teacher, and principal of the Armenian school. He helped many newly arrived Armenian immigrants to the Boston area get their start in the U.S. through various acts of kindness.

Living a life of humility, Melkon's children only learned about their father's good

deeds many years later through stories told by those he had helped. Melkon had an incredible way with words and counsel as many sought his wisdom when faced with big decisions or troubled times.

An infectious smile, love of life, and a "green thumb" were his signature trademarks. He relished nurturing his vegetable garden and fruit trees at his home in Westwood.

He never missed an opportunity to celebrate a family milestone by coaxing Arpi to host a party in their backyard filled with a large crowd, lots of love, and his famous shish kebab.

One of his greatest legacies was teaching his children the true definition of success, as exemplified by the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote:

To laugh often & much

To win the respect of intelligent people & the affection of children

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty

To find the best in others;

To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a re-deemed social condition;

To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

Melkon made many lives easier. His boundless enthusiasm for life, his eternal happiness, and sunny outlook stem from the life lessons he learned growing up in a situation which most people would consider hopeless.

He leaves behind his wife Arpi (Hachikian) and his children: Gary Yessailian and his wife Lina of Westwood, Ani Yessailian of Boston, and Seta Davidian and her husband Raymond of Watertown. He was the grandfather of Michael & Andrea Yessailian and Gregory and Nairi Davidian; brother to Sarkis Asailian and Avo Asailian of Toronto, Margaret Asailian of Natick, and late Azniv Poladian. He leaves behind two generations of nieces and nephews.

Funeral services were private due to gathering restrictions.

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COMMUNITY NEWS / OBITUARY

Hovhannes Donabedian

Son of Genocide Survivors

BOSTON — Hovhannes Donabedian died peacefully on March 5, 2021 at the age of 96. He was the son of Armenian Genocide survivors and was born in 1924 in the village of Ramallah, just 6 miles north of Jerusalem during the British Mandate of Palestine. Architect, artist and poet for more than 55 years, his talent for art and drawing the human figure was evident at a very young age.

By the 3rd grade, Hovhannes began attending the Ramallah Friends Boys' School, founded by Quakers. Upon graduation from the Friends' School, Hovhannes chose his father's alma mater, the American University of Beirut (AUB) with a practical goal of studying medicine. Come course registration day, a last-minute change of heart led him to switch lines and register instead for Architecture and Engineering courses. He went on to earn a dual degree: a B.A. in Architecture (in 1945) and a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering (in 1946). During summer holidays, he returned to Ramallah to visit his family and continue his art studies with Belgian art teacher Gislaine Lambert until her eventual return to Belgium after WWII.

Upon graduation from AUB, Hovhannes returned to Jerusalem working for the British Government of Palestine as an Apprentice Engineer in the Department of Public Works. In 1948, the Arab-Israeli War broke out and necessitated his quick departure. He returned to Beirut where he found success as both an architect and engineer undertaking a wide range of (often simultaneous!) projects that included designing apartments, villas and furniture. In addition, Hovhannes worked from 1951-1956 as AUB's Assistant to the Director of Buildings and Grounds where he was the Engineer in Charge of New Construction (most of it by the office of McKim, Mead, and White). By 1954, he had also estab-

lished his own successful private practice and was well poised for a bright future in Beirut.

In December 1951, Hovhannes met his future wife, Hermine Ohannessian, also an employee of AUB and an Armenian native of Jerusalem. From the outset, one might say there was a definite "spark" between them as from the moment they first shook hands the lights in the building went out! And so began an "electrifying" love story. On October 27, 1952 (just 10 months after they met) Hovhannes and Hermine were married. Their loving and supportive marriage would endure for over 60 years until Hermine's death in 2013.

In the year following the birth of their first child (their daughter Aline), the couple, at Hermine's urging, registered with the American Embassy to come to the United States. Hermine felt there would be greater stability in the US for raising a family and more opportunities for their children. As processing such applications typically took years, Hovhannes went along with the idea, but in just 3 months their application was approved. Reluctant to leave behind the security of their established life and his thriving practice, but having faith in Hermine's vision, the family set off for the United States, settling in Boston in 1956. There, relatives were already well established, and they quickly entered a new way of life.

The Donabedians soon adapted to the Boston area, welcoming the birth of two additional children (David and younger sister Meg) over the next seven years. In fact, it would only be a matter of one week after arriving in the US before Hovhannes secured full time work marking the beginning of a productive US career that would span the next 43 years. Beginning as a structural engineer at Stone & Webster, his talent for architecture won out and he continued on at various prominent firms



that included Samuel Glaser & Partners, Campbell Aldrich & Nulty and The Architect's Collaborative, (where he joined their burgeoning Abu Dhabi hospital team, developing an expertise in healthcare design). Hovhannes then joined Shepley Bullfinch and the Boston office of Cannon, where he retired at the age of 75.

Hovhannes' major contributions during these years as a Project or Staff architect include two Abu Dhabi hospital complexes, Boston's Lahey Clinic Medical Center, Long Island's Jewish-Hillside Medical Center (Children's Facility), Cincinnati's St Francis-St. George Hospital, the review of Design Development Documents for I.M. Pei & Partners Federal Triangle Project in Washington DC, University of CT's John Dempsey Hospital Support Building, and innovative Magnetic Resonance Imaging additions for New England's Danbury and Mt Auburn Hospitals.

Throughout his working years as an architect, however, it was always Hovhannes' passion for drawing the human figure and love of life that sustained his art-making and was his *raison d'être*. Over the last prolific decade he completed over 400 color collages, on an intimate scale, based on drawings from the model.

Beyond Hovhannes' creative accomplishments, he will be most remembered for his loving presence and his immense kindness. He was, in truth, an extraordinary human being. To meet him was to be embraced by him. He was honorable, humorous, and humble. He was passionate about what was right and wrong for humanity. He was able to create emotional intimacy with each person he knew.

Hovhannes was devoted to his beloved wife, Hermine, the cherished love of his life. He selflessly cared for her at home during her many years of suffering from Alzheimer's, always with dignity and respect.

His love and care for his three children,

Aline, David, and Meg, were evident in every exchange and gesture. He treasured being with them and sharing what he loved through trips to the beach, art museums, and even pumpkin patches.

He adored his granddaughters, Kaitlin and Julianne. As a toddler, Kaitlin, gave him the affectionate name of "Penpa" for the pens he carried in his shirt pocket along with index cards so as not to miss a moment to capture a person in a drawing or the playful thought for a poem. He drew life from his granddaughters, delighting in their mischievousness, sitting back in patience and relishing their liveliness. He asked about them every single day and wanted to know every detail of their lives. We are grateful for the family vacations to Kennebunkport where he and their Grandma shared dedicated time with them.

He expressed his love of wordplay through witty conversation and poem making and delighted in photographing his loved ones, sensitively attuned to matters of light and composition. Taking his time with all of this he would often note "photography cannot be rushed."

One of his life lessons to us was "do what you love," and for him, that meant making art. He shared his love of beauty through his portraiture of loved ones and by working from the human figure, producing art on a regular basis until 2020.

Another lesson he passed down to us was realism and acceptance. He called himself a realist and expressed the importance of accepting what is and not dwelling on what cannot be changed.

His essence sparkled and those sparkles landed on all those he loved and encountered, staying with them always to be remembered and cherished.

Hovhannes was the beloved husband of the late Hermine (Ohannessian) Donabedian and the son of the late Samuel and Maritza (Der Hagopian) Donabedian. He is survived by his 3 children: Aline, David and Margaret "Meg" Donabedian. He was the loving grandfather of Kaitlin Donabedian Shimer and Julianne Donabedian Shimer. He was the brother of the late Avedis Donabedian, Margaret Bechar and Christopher Donabedian. He is also survived by many nieces and nephews, cousins and friends.

A Graveside service was held at Newton Cemetery, 791 Walnut Street, Newton on Monday, March 8. A Celebration of life will be held at a later date and will be announced.

In August 2019, the filmmaker, John Thornton, who makes movies about artists and art shows, released his film about Hovhannes entitled "The Art and Life of Hovhannes S. Donabedian."

Robert Goshgarian

Lover of Life in the City and the Arts

BOSTON — Robert Goshgarian passed away from cancer on March 10, 2021 at the age of 88. He was born and raised in Boston to parents Timothy and Yeranouhi Goshgarian, survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

He served in the US Army during the Korean War.



He worked for Filene's Corp. for many years, and then in fundraising for non-profit organizations, eventually starting his own company.

Adrianne Amirian, a longtime friend, wrote, "I have known Bob since I was 18, and old enough to join ACYOA Seniors, for which he was the advisor. I have always looked up to Bob. He was the man with the solutions. They didn't always work; some

things in life are more complicated, like his last illness. But most of the time he prevailed."

She added, "He lost his father when he was still a kid. He worked from a young age; making money was important - not a huge amount, but enough to take care of his mother and himself. And he took good care of his mother until her death."

Amirian noted that her friend "loved life; he loved the city. His apartment had a spectacular view of the Christian Science Mother Church, a view he proudly showed off to visitors. He kept abreast of what was happening in the world of the performing arts, and would travel a significant distance to catch a performance of something that caught his eye. He loved the theatre, movies, the ballet, and ballet dancers with their lithe, toned bodies. He looked forward to his periodic trips to New York and had a list of the things he wanted to see and do. He did the same for his trips abroad."

In his later years he met the love of his life, Irena Balgalvis, a reference librarian at the Boston Public Library where he spent a lot of time. He spent the last years of his life with her between her home on the South Coast and his Boston apartment.

Funeral services were handled by the Rogers and Mann funeral home in Jamaica Plain, and on March 17 he was buried at Mount Hope Cemetery with his mother and infant brother. Religious rites were provided by Father Vasken Kouzouian of the Holy Trinity Armenian Church.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Liberty Orchards Company, Makers of Aplets & Cotlets Candies, to Close

CASHMERE, Wash. — After more than 100 years of business, Liberty Orchards Company, the Washington State family-owned makers of Aplets & Cotlets candies, will close operations by June 2021. The company will continue to seek a buyer for the assets, including the brands, the production equipment, and the factory and warehouse buildings.

The company’s Board of Directors and Shareholders wish to thank its many employees, its long-time suppliers, the people of Cashmere, Washington, where the factory and retail store are located, and its customers from around the globe for their

loyalty over the last century. The company was founded in 1920 by two Armenian immigrants, Mark Balaban and Armen Tertsgian, who bought a small apple orchard and were inspired to use their surplus fruit to create Aplets, an apple and walnut confection based on Locoum, the famous Near East candy popularly known as Turkish Delight. A few years later, a second product, Cotlets, made with apricots and walnuts, was introduced.

Three generations of family members have managed the business since 1920. The founders’ legacy was carried into the second generation by John Chakirian and



Photo from the early 1920's showing packing of candies, you can spot founder Mark Balaban's wife, Ibraxie Balaban, 2nd from the left in the foreground.

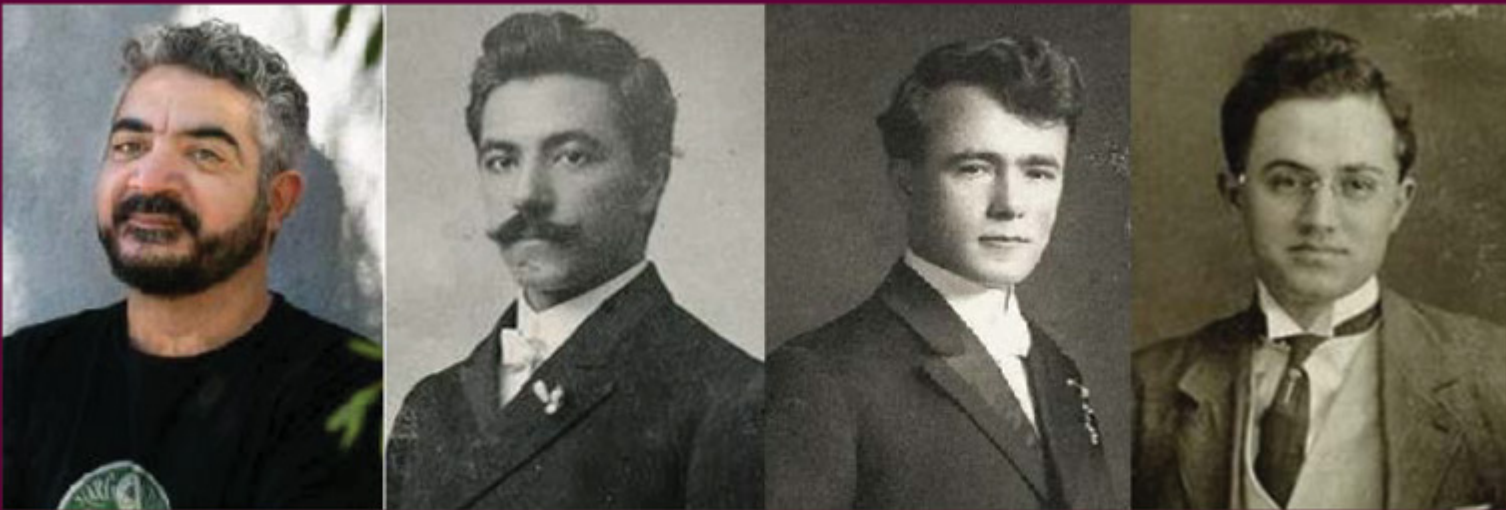
Richard Odabashian, who ran the business from 1956 into the 1980s. Since then, Greg Taylor, the grandson of Armen Tertsgian, has served as the company’s President.

Besides Aplets & Cotlets, the company produces Fruit Delights, Dessert Delights, and Fruitlets, to name just a few of its products. More recently, the company created Orchard Bars, a nutritious fruit-nut-seed bar, to meet the growing demand for gluten-free, non-GMO snacks. The company was founded by immigrants who came to this country as refugees, filled with gratitude, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a willingness to work hard. The family is immensely proud to have carried forward the founders’ legacy in providing more than 100 years of the highest quality products



Mark Balaban and Armen Tertsgian founded Liberty Orchards

and employment to generations of families in its community.



The Tashjian Brothers and the Birth of Armenian Recordings in America

A webinar with music researcher and collector Harout Arakelian

Thursday, April 1, 7:30pm EST, 4:30pm PST
Free, registration required

Join us for a live virtual presentation and discussion (via Zoom) of the earliest known Armenian sound recordings produced in the United States. This event is the latest addition to our virtual programs which include *Sound Archive*, “Object Show and Tell,” concerts, exhibitions, and more!

For more information and to register for this free webinar, please visit www.tinyurl.com/tashjianbrothers

Special thank you to Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives for providing images for this presentation.



COMMUNITY NEWS

‘Rapping Under Fire’

The Story of 3 Young Heroes from Artsakh

RAPPERS, from page 1

The three discover rap music and adopt its style — “Proud. Defiant. Rapid-Fire,” as the film poster announces — three voices that express the fears and desires of a generation eager for change. They have even started a program to also teach local kids to rap — and how happy they look these primary school children as they strike poses and rap out loud.

What makes for a successful documentary? As with any film, strong filmmaking technique along with a seamless storyline are a good start — and “Rapping” has both. But the film also succeeds in drawing in the viewer and making him or her identify with its protagonists: in the process, the story goes from the particular to the universal.

A beautiful opening aerial pan of Martakert shows off the region’s verdant, natural beauty. Next the film cuts to Spartak, a handsome fellow who is engaged in hand-fashioning wooden coffins, of all things. At one point he looks up and explains that he and his fellow Martakertsis have known only war since their birth: “It’s always been this way, we’re used to it.” And then, in a statement that is both black humor and highly serious, he adds, “One thing never changes... There is always a need for a coffin here.”

One marvels at how these three previously unversed musicians from Artsakh managed to adopt and adapt a musical style created by young inner-city African-Americans to the Armenian language and local dialect.

Of course, today rap music exists in many languages including French, Spanish and Russian, but Armenian culture has remained somewhat isolated and traditional, so Orinak’s music in a way represents something even more remarkable.

“At first people around here thought that this type of music was shameful,” Spartak explains. “Now they love it.”

Lyoka adds that “Rap has a message. ... It lets you ex-



Director Taleen Babayan, seated, at left, can be seen with a subject being filmed.

we’re down on our knees.

Somewhere in the middle of the film, one of their proteges, Vika, speaks about the importance of learning to rap as a young woman in a place that still clings heavily to a patriarchal way of life.

In several places humor cuts through an otherwise serious atmosphere, as when the director shows us the successful Artsakh soccer team that competes in the CONIFA

tors’ paths had once crossed.”

Overall, there are four main elements that make this film a success: the Orinak members as they tell their own story; the music clips themselves and the scenes where the director enters into conversation with the rappers. Finally, Grammy-nominated artist Sebu Simonian of the band Capital Cities narrates the film, filling in viewers about the history of Artsakh from ancient times to the first war in 1988 after the Soviet Union collapsed to the present. He has a deep, relaxing voice and provides useful information but at times the narration seems to interrupt the wonderful storyline flow that Babayan otherwise achieves.

The protagonists also show hideouts designed to protect children and the elderly.

As Babayan writes elsewhere: “They’re young and they have a life to live and stories to tell.”

In the abstract their lyrics seem overly sentimental, but not given what they have experienced: “This is a good place. The colors are brighter here/Stand with us. The connections are tighter here/Birthplace of our fighters are here/Embrace your land and your ancestors will smile/Drink the purity of mountain rivers. Stand here beside me. It’s all yours if you come back home with us.”

Babayan’s film seems prescient in retrospect: a group of Armenians building their own coffins in anticipation of a war that did indeed come and ravage Artsakh. For those who don’t follow politics, at the onset of the 44-Day War fewer than 200,000 people lived in Artsakh, a land almost completely surrounded by hostile Azeri territory. During the war, oil-rich Azerbaijan led a drone-led army to a crushing victory over an unprepared Armenia that had grown smug after its initial 1988 victory. Five thousand young Armenian conscripts were murdered in the process, and as many Azeris — an appalling death toll in a fight over an area roughly the size Rhode Island.

At one point, Lyoka tells the filmmaker (should we note he said this is the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi?): “Of course we have faith... We believed we would win the ‘92 war and we did. We believed we would be independent and we are. We believe.”

How ironic. Perhaps the best coda can be found after the bombs have fallen and the bodies have been cleared comes in the words of Lyoka who poignantly told Babayan from the hilltop: “You hear that? There is life here.”

“Rapping Under Fire” (27 mins, 2020): A film by Taleen Babayan. Cinematography: Suren Ter-Grigorian. Editor: Artur Petrosyan. Writers Christopher Zakian and Karine Abayan. Distributed by Indiepix.

Watch “Rapping Under Fire” on Amazon Prime (link https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B08WR1LM-LB/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r).



The three rappers in Artsakh

press who you are: Your thoughts. Your ideas. Your vision of the world. And rap sets you free — You can stand. You can sit. You don’t even have to sing to the beat. You do it the way you want it.”

The message is not always upbeat. Alluding to the government in Yerevan, Spartak sings: “Our country’s in crisis and everyone knows it. ... The resistance can’t drive — they surrendered the keys. There’s a crisis in Armenia but

League, made up of internationally unrecognized states such as Abkhazia, the Isle of Jersey and Québec.

For Babayan, making the film was an almost religious experience: “We weren’t lifelong friends in that car (driving from Stepanakert). In fact, we’d only exchanged a few messages on WhatsApp. But we certainly felt like we knew each other all our lives — maybe because somewhere in our history, somewhere in our personal stories, our ances-



Arts & Culture

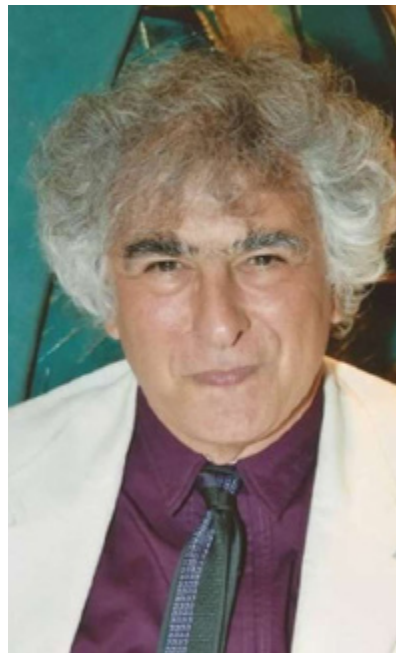
A CONVERSATION WITH....

Juan Yelanguedian

Writing, Painting, Composing
In Armenian Spirit

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/BUENOS AIRES — Argentinian-Armenian composer, musicologist, writer, translator, and artist, professor Juan Yelanguedian was born in 1950 in Buenos Aires. In 1972-1973 he studied journalism at the Catholic Institute of Social Studies; in 1974-1975, stage Philology at the University of Yerevan; in 1982 he graduated from the Catholic University of Argentina (history of music, plastic arts and literature), in 1984 from the Department of Musicology of the Yerevan State Komitas Conser-



vatory, in 2001 from the Composition Department and in 2004; PhD of the same Conservatory. He has been a professor at the Institute of Culture of the Catholic University of Argentina and in the University of Buenos Aires in the present with the course “The Armenian Civilization and his Influence in Occident” He is member of the Writers’ and Composers Union of Armenia.

His musical compositions have been performed in Buenos Aires, Yerevan, Paris and elsewhere. Yelanguedian has composed symphonic and chamber works: *Hetanós Idololatris* (Pagan 1974, cello piece), *Catharsis* (1977, for piano and actors), *From my Ancestors* (1981 plastic, poetic and musical performance) *Adolescence Songs* (1981), *Songs of Fading Lights* (1981) *Dialogues* (1983, Trio), *Madagh* (1983, strings quartet), *Songs of Fading Lights* (1983), *Aquarelles* (1983, piano) *Arean Suite* (1991), *From the Blood Suite or Cycles*, dedicated to the victims of the Artsakh war, for piano, *Thraki* (1993, Fugue for violin and violoncello), *Armenian Gods or Vahagn’s Room* (2001, Symphonic poem), *Mission* (2004, Flute and Strings Orchestra), etc.

He has published literary works in Spanish: *Anthology of Armenian Poetry* (1984), *Arian, Poetic Anthology* (1994), *Armenian Culture*, see YELANGUEZIAN, page 13



The current group of dancers at the David of Sassoon statue. From left, Alexis Nahigian, Ariana Garabedian, Zar Der Mugrdechian, Kara Statler, Andrew Hagopian, and Matthew Der Mugrdechian.

Fresno Arax Dancers Embark on Video Project

By Michael Rettig
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

FRESNO — For over 40 years, the Arax Dancers of Fresno have played an integral role in preserving traditional Armenian dances in California’s Central Valley. Before the pandemic, the Arax Dancers regularly held dancing workshops for the public and showcased traditional dances at community multicultural events. Now, in light of the global shutdown, the Arax Dancers are preparing a video project to preserve and make accessible their rich repertoire of Western Armenian dances.

In October 2020, as the pandemic showed no signs of ebbing, Director Zar Der Mugrdechian decided she did not want to leave her five current students idle for long, declaring: “I wanted to find an activity that would keep their interest in the group alive while also fulfilling our mission to promote Armenian dance.” She decided on a project that would both engage her students and the community at large; to video record traditional dance lessons.

Der Mugrdechian noted that Fresno’s rich Armenian history makes it an ideal setting for such a project. After the genocide, Fresno became an attractive destination for Armenians from a variety of different villages because of its agricultural land and climate. “Because of this, we have a large diversity of Armenian village dances represented in Fresno,” Der Mugrdechian explained. “Not only do we have this rich diversity of dances, but we have the knowledge of oud master Richard Hagopian, who learned his craft from genocide survivors and is now passing it on to his grandson Andrew.”

According to Der Mugrdechian, Hagopian’s knowledge of the full repertoire of songs that accompany each traditional dance ensures that the Fresno community has ample opportunity to practice them at church picnics. In this way, the Fresno Armenian community has been able to maintain its diverse dance scene over multiple generations.

The Arax Dancers decided to highlight Fresno’s rich Armenian history by recording their video lessons at landmarks such as the David of Sassoon statue, the Armenian Genocide Monument at Fresno State, the Soghomon Tehlirian monument, and the bust of William Saroyan in Fresno’s Old Armenian Town. Der Mugrdechian begins each video lesson by explaining the significance of the location and the history of each dance the group will be teaching. “This will help document our local history and our folk dances that were brought over from our homeland. It will be a tool for people to learn and hopefully enjoy them as much as we do,” Der Mugrdechian explained.

see DANCE, page 16

Armenian Museum Of America Launches Fourth Virtual Series with Focus on Early Recordings

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America has launched its fourth online program called the “Sound Archive,” which is featured on its website and social media pages every month. The debut offering presents the full catalog of Mardiros Der Sarkis Tashjian and his brothers for the first time and is considered to be the earliest known Armenian sound recordings produced in the United States in the early 20th century.

To kick off the launch of the Sound Archive, the Armenian Museum is hosting its first-ever webinar with music researcher and collector Harout Arakelian on Thursday, April 1 at 7:30 p.m. EST (4:30 pm PST). This online Zoom event is free and registration is required via Eventbrite at the following link: www.tinyurl.com/tashjianbrothers.

The content of the Sound Archive is supplemented with vintage images from the collection of Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, and their archivists have worked closely with volunteers from the Armenian Museum to create this original multi-media content.

“The music collection of the Armenian Museum is extensive, comprising of more than 3,000 records donated by members over the past 50 years,” notes Executive Director Jason Sohigian. “Volunteer Jesse Kenas-Collins has been digitizing and cleaning up the sound on these old recordings, some of which date back to the beginning of Armenian music in America. We are excited to preview this work online in an event with Harout Arakelian.”

Arakelian worked with Kenas-Collins, Harry Kezelian (staff writer for the *Mirror-Spectator*) and other researchers to document the stories behind some of these recordings, and the museum has begun posting these online, starting with the Tashjian Brothers. Arakelian will present some of this material during the webinar, including songs that have been restored. Some of the artists will include the Tashjian Brothers, Karekin Proodian, Armenag Shah-Mouradian, Torcom Bezazian and Nevart Dzeron Koshkarian.

“Harout has done similar events live at Abril Bookstore in Glendale,” adds Sohigian, “and these were hugely popular. So we are excited to host this public event on Zoom. We are sure it will be of interest for our members, fans of Armenian music, and collectors who have taken a renewed interest in these early recordings that were being lost to time.”

“This introduction to the first Armenian recordings in America will highlight music in the Armenian Museum’s holdings and I will use the Tashjian story as the vehicle to discuss other musicians and recordings of the 1910s,” explains Arakelian. “All audio files to be played will

see RECORDINGS, page 15



ARTS & CULTURE

Writing, Painting, Composing in Armenian Spirit

YELANGUEZIAN, from page 12
Science and Tradition (2001), *Esmirna, 1922...The Dr. Hatcherian diary by Dora Sakayan* (Montreal 2001, translation), *Zim Kilikia* (2011), and others. He has published his musicology researches into the many academics magazines in the world. His musical, literary and painters works have been awarded and distinguished with a number of very important prizes in Argentina and Armenia. He is the author of the “Orphans of Armenia, Angels of Heaven” mural at the Saint Paul Armenian Church in Buenos Aires homage to the centenary of Armenian Genocide (2014-2015). Dr. Yelanguезian was the only guest from Argentina to present his dissertation at the 4th National Congress of Western Armenians in Paris, in 2015.

Juan, a brief acquaintance with your biography shows how your Armenian heritage is present in all three of your professions — music, literature and painting. Being a third-generation Argentinean Armenian, how have you managed to keep your Armenian identity so vivid?

Well, it is a question that is always asked me, but the prejudices of society indicate that you will be nothing if you do not dedicate yourself to one of the virtues you inherited and professionally trained by your own decision.

The truth is that in order to create, I need to go from one art or trade to another, at the creative moment. I write poetry that takes me to music and then to art or in different orders.

I first trained professionally with my parents, my father Hovsep-Joseph, born in Beirut, who painted, was a professional actor and singer under the stage name Reinaldo J. Yelan, while my mother Arshalouys Kasparian, born in Athens, was a fashion designer with a boutique and also was an excellent pianist. But I come from many generations of musicians, militarists and religious people from four churches (Armenian Apostolic, Evangelical, Catholic and Greek Orthodox). In my genealogy there is even a Scribe monk from the Cilician Middle Ages. American composer Alan Hovhannes Chakmakjian was a relative from my grandfather’s mother’s side. Benefactor Boghos Najarian was my mother’s cousin, who sponsored building of churches and schools in Lebanon.

I inherited the names of my paternal grandfather: Ohannes-Hovhannes-Juan; Reinaldo was the artistic name of my father and Samuel was name of my maternal grandfather Samuel Kasparian, an architect, who erected many buildings in Tarsus, Adana, Greece and Buenos Aires: also a great musician, who played the oud, accordion, piano, sitar, etc. So it was destined, yet I did not feel it as a mandate but as a blessing. I was the first grandson and the first to be born in these latitudes. Ohannes, my grandfather, was a patriotic Armenian who in addition to having been an architect, built part of the port of Beirut. His biography can be found in the book published by the Lebanese Embassy (*Lebanese roots...* 2010) He was an excellent violinist, he gathered his family and interpreted that beautiful hymn (*sharagan*) “*Ur es, mayr im*” (“Where are you, my mother?”). When he was playing, everyone was excited and they cried with their pain expressed on his violin, as he had seen his mother and sister get murdered by his best Turkish friend from the French high school in Marash with a sharp dagger, according

to his partner, so that they would not suffer and die quickly. My parents educated me and my siblings in Armenian schools, and my father spoke to us like my grandparents in Armenian. Also, as you know, from a very young age I researched and studied in Armenia – at the University, the Institute of Fine Arts, the Madenataran and the Komitas Conservatory.

You distinguished yourself as an Armenianologist, but your biography said you are also a Hellenologist.

My mother educated us in that sense too, sending us to study Hellenic dances and culture at the Buenos Aires Collectivity. On my maternal side, there is also Greek blood from Xanthi, Thrace, but her roots are from Patras in the Peloponnese and her ancestors’ surname is Papandreacopoulos. Later I worked for the Embassy of Greece and the Greek Institute of Culture of Buenos Aires, offering conferences, courses, and concerts, etc. I was distinguished with the award of the “Friends of Music Association” and as “Greek Musician” in the Legislature of the City of Buenos Aires.

Cilicia is often present in your works. What do your Cilician roots mean to you?

I come from traditional Cilician families: Marash on the paternal side and Tarsus ‘Xanthi’ and Adana on the maternal side. I explain very poetically about my ancestors in my book *Zim Kilikia* (2011), which had the privilege, together with all my work, of

said my poetry and songs on the stage of the Armenian Center, and our director sent them to Armenia, where they were translated by Vahagn Davtyan, Shake Varsyan, and that’s how I met them, then all the Armenian intelligentsia: artists, musicians and representatives of culture, science and much more. The aforementioned committee offered me a scholarship to study at the Faculty of Philology at Yerevan University, which I later made tangible in 1974. The rest is history.

You received the first prize at the poetry festival in Yerevan in 1975. What festival was this?

When I was studying at the University of Philology in Yerevan, a traditional Spring Festival and the Great Victory of 1975 festival were held. I presented a poetic cycle entitled “Ararat, Oedipal Symbol.” I received the first prize and was later published in German and Armenian in Vienna and forms the first cycle of “Arian, Poetic Anthology” (1994).

I think you were lucky to know such 20th century Armenian music as Eduard Mirzoyan. Please share some of your most memories of that iconic artist.

Without any doubt, he was not only my teacher but my second father. Although I must say that I was formed by composers of great prestige in Argentina, before meeting him, such as Roberto Caamaño, dean at the Argentine Catholic University, and Guillermo Graëtzer, director of the Colle-



Juan Yelanguезian, Sunny Mural

being declared “Of Cultural Interest” by the same legislature mentioned above.

You have established professional contacts with Armenia and Armenian artists dating back to Soviet times. How did you manage it?

My acquaintance with Armenian composers started when I was a child. When I was only 7 and was a singer at the Buenos Aires church choir, Aram Khachaturyan visited our church. It was unforgettable to see that great composer, whom I later met again at the Yerevan Opera in 1974.

Grandfather Ohannes dreamed of moving to Armenia in those years when the Motherland offered the repatriation of Armenians scattered around the world: this feeling was latent in my family, and my father transmitted it to me. In the third year of high school we thought to prepare our end-of-year trip. Being always immersed in a poetic flight, I expressed the desire to know Armenia to my classmates, which we finally presented to our director, Archimandrite Harutjun Moushian. Thus a three-year journey began and we managed to reach Armenia on the first of January 1970, invited by the Armenian Committee for Cultural Relations with the Armenian Diaspora.

From my childhood, I wrote and later

gium Musicum. I showed him my youthful works and he wrote to me: “Music requires sacrifices...” This is how I understood and followed his advice, when studying Armenian Musicology with Margarit Brutyan and Nikoghos Tahmizyan. I asked Eduard Mirzoyan for permission to be part of his classes because I admired him, he was not satisfied with foreign students, and it was very difficult for me, even more overcoming my shyness. I remember that I had to show him a work. I sat down in front of the piano, and he leaned his elbow on the bass part of the keyboard. I didn’t know how to tell him to take his arm out of there. So I pushed his arm down and hit my low notes at just the right time. Far from being angry with me, he congratulated me because I overcame the obstacle he had imposed. Then we became very close. He allowed his students with great freedom to express themselves with the originality and this made my work much more bearable, much more because I was a student who had come from the most distant country to Armenia. Later I returned to finish my career as a composer. I received my Diploma in front of twelve professors and the post-graduate studies, later with a Red Diploma, Summa cum laude with high praise. My work for flute and string orchestra *Badkam* (Mis-

sion), was performed in the Aula Magna of the Komitas Chamber Music Hall, by the Alan Hovhannes Orchestra led by Merujan Simonyan. Mirzoyan was very pleased. The last time I saw him was at the Philharmonic in 2007, but we talked on the phone until his last days.

In 2014, the Tekeyan Cultural Association called on Armenian artists to create a mural inspired by the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. Your work, “Armenian Orphans, Angels of Heaven” won the competition and now hangs in St. Paul Armenian Church in the Linniers neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

I feel proud because there is a story behind it that refers to a poem written in 1985 entitled “Orphans of Armenia.” “Could a genocide destroy the Armenian Soul?” which was also presented in the Golden Hall of the Legislature and was declared “Of Cultural Interest” in 2005: it was also translated into many languages. “Orphans of Armenia, Angels of Heaven” evokes that emblematic poem. The project also had the support of the San Pablo Church and the Archdiocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church. It was a watercolor that I presented in 2014 for the aforementioned contest for painters of Armenian origin. “As a great premonition, these orphaned angels appeared in Heaven inspired by their author and who made the Genocide massacred Holy Martyrs and anticipated the canonization of the martyrs that His Holiness the Catholicos Karekin II sanctified on April 23, 2015. Considered of great ethereal beauty, spiritual and mystical. I had the collaboration of Claudio, my brother, a plastic artist, and a fashion designer. I also anticipated the flower “Forget me not” as a symbol, in my book *Arian, Poetic Anthology* (1994) published by the patronage by AGBU Alex Manoogian Cultural Fund. In a written poem I related this flower to the Armenian Genocide.

As you remember, first we met in 1992 in Yerevan. Have you returned to Armenia during those almost 30 years and what are the main changes you have seen in Armenian society and culture? Both positive and negative.

Naturally, I have returned to the homeland repeatedly. And you gave me the honor of being part of your book on known peoples of Armenian origin in the world, just as you referred to my father in it. In 1992 the country underwent great changes, perhaps not so substantial, but the situation was different, the war for the defense of Artsakh was different, there were other heroes. I think there is a decadent feeling in society and it is necessary that the cultural heritage is reborn. It could be glorious. There is a morality subject to social and political immorality that remains. I believe that Western civilization was born in Armenia, but if we want to survive we will have to learn the enemy’s subliminal language and learn in-depth the game that it imposes on us. I remember in the 70’s the youth of the pioneers (boy-scouts) had so much information about South America. Those men and women of culture laid the foundations of the contemporary Armenian renaissance.

What do you consider your biggest achievement in your professional life?

My greatest achievement is having remained in my art, and I believe that art saved my life. As well as that of my grandparents, my parents, and my ancestors, with joy; and above all obstacles and suffering. I remember that I was asked to speak about a composer in my graduation exam at the Komitas Conservatory, I thought about Komitas who survived the Genocide and left us a large part of the Armenian musical art, but I chose Beethoven and they asked me why. I answered: Because he defeated his destiny.



ARTS & CULTURE

Artist Ani Jermakian's Message Is:

"I'll Be Your Voice"

By Harry Kezelian

Mirror-Spectator Staff

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — Ani Jermakian is a talented young artist with a cause: making people's lives better through her artwork.

She says, "the motive of art is healing."

The 23-year-old native of the Wilbraham, a suburb of Springfield, has a positive attitude and a sweet, caring personality that immediately comes across. She has tackled very serious issues in her work, from the Armenian Genocide to the Black Lives Matter movement with her project #Illbeyourvoice. By profession, she is an art teacher who has dedicated her career to nurturing the next generation in the public school system.

Jermakian, a third-generation Armenian-American who comes from a close-knit family heavily involved in the Armenian community (particularly at St. Mark's Armenian Church in Springfield), started private art lessons at age 8. Her elementary school teachers noticed that she had a serious talent for art, and informed Jermakian's mother, who found her a private teacher, Donald Blanton. Blanton, a prominent artist in Springfield, is especially known for his work with children and youth in teaching art. Jermakian took lessons from ages 8 to 18 and still keeps in touch.

"He nurtured my talent," she said. "He taught me things like looking at something and practicing your eye — it's super important." Her sharp eye for the world around her led naturally to Jermakian's adoption of a Realist style.

Unlike many contemporary artists, Jermakian's work tends toward realism and portraiture. "I was taught classical art," she said, by Blanton, noting that an early inspiration was Americana realist painter Norman Rockwell. But perhaps the most important reason is that it helps her connect with the people that are going to be enjoying her works.

"I feel like it's more relatable. I get a lot of commissions for portraits. And I feel that the person is commissioning me because they want a painting [that they can enjoy]," she noted.

Jermakian employs her own style of brushwork to draw out the expression in the painting. Her portraiture, which is realist but in a modern way and with Jermakian's own flair, somewhat reminds one of the work of Frida Kahlo (minus the surrealist aspect) and her hus-



Artist Ani Jermakian



Painting of Armenian Woman in the Genocide, done in high school

band Diego Rivera. She adds, "I enjoy flowing, rounded lines, where everything is smooth and calming."

Armenian Roots and 'I'll Be Your Voice'

"Armenian stuff has been my go-to since high school," Jermakian says.

For an AP Art class, she was required to put together a portfolio; she chose the Armenian Genocide as a theme and created 10-12 pictures. They had to be "super realistic," she says, because they had to tell the true story of what happened. "I had to show the human body. I wanted it to be real, and my skills were portraiture and realism." She adds that the more creative aspect came in "changing the backgrounds and manipulating [light and color] to show how devastating it was." Some of the paintings did include symbolism which was not quite realistic in content, but realistic in style. "I painted a woman with her hands up at the front of the scene, as if she is pushing up against glass and can't escape," Jermakian says. "I always had the mantra that I'm the voice of my ancestors. They can't speak and talk about what happened to them now because they've passed on, but I can tell their story."

When the racial justice movement of the summer of 2020 began, Jermakian felt that her Armenian heritage compelled her to stand up for Black lives. "I was noticing everyone was talking about it online, but Armenians not so much. We don't talk about this as much as we should and it bothers me. I started thinking about our identity." Jermakian pointed out that though she was raised to consider herself "white," her fellow students in college did not consider her white, based on her dark Armenian complexion and ethnic



"African Beauty" — Painted At Age 15

features. "They used to try to guess what I was, Hispanic, half-black half-white...I told them I'm Armenian and we're considered white, but everyone was like 'Oh, you can't be white.'"

Jermakian's parents were surprised when she came home with this information. Generations of Armenians who have been born and raised in the US, particularly on the East Coast, have been classified as white by society for many years. Yet many millennial Armenians, particularly with a darker complexion, are not considered white by their peers — a change that Jermakian attributes to the fallout of 9-11, when Middle Eastern ethnicities were held in greater suspicion throughout the country.

"We think of ourselves as white, but others say we aren't. That got the wheels turning about how we think of ourselves. We are marginalized in our own way."

Jermakian noted that while many or most Armenians in US benefit from white privilege, certainly Armenians were an oppressed ethnicity in other countries in the past — particularly in Ottoman Turkey, and in today's Republic of Turkey. If Armenians have been persecuted, then "we should be speaking up" about racial injustice, Jermakian argued. "We are connected to our suppressed past. And advocacy isn't just about

continued on next page

ARTS & CULTURE

from previous page

advocating for your own group. You can advocate for things that don't affect you."

Jermakian began to think about ways to take a stand

in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, as an outgrowth of her advocacy for her own people throughout her high school and college years when she would always educate others on the Armenian Genocide. Jermakian has another deeply personal reason to support the movement. Her teacher and mentor Blanton, is Black.

"When I was 15-16 I painted a picture of a black woman," Jermakian said. She noted it wasn't necessarily a specific person, but represented the beauty of Black people with whom she felt a connection because of her teacher.

"In college I used that picture in every class," she said.

Jermakian felt compelled to do portraits of "the three most prominent victims of police brutality," George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, in order to "celebrate that person's face." "I actually got some backlash for it, like I shouldn't be using their images or painting their faces. But I'm an artist. Everyone talks about 'say their name,' but I think of faces, it's my way of saying their name." Whatever her detractors were accusing her of, Jermakian was not using these images for personal gain. Instead, she initiated what she calls the #IllBeYourVoiceProject. Taking a cue from friends, she had her artistic images of the victims along with her idealized image of black female beauty printed on stickers and T-shirts. She sells these items and all proceeds go to the cause – specifically the Center for Racial Justice in Education ("I wanted to support them because I'm a teacher") and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization.

When the war broke out in Artsakh, she added the Armenian cause to her "I'll Be Your Voice Project." Her website delineates how she relates the two causes and that of oppressed people everywhere. She wrote: "Armenians can be visually racially ambiguous people — often being mistaken for other ethnicities. However, we now live in a country where we are protected under white privilege because our skin color is



George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor by Ani Jermakian

agreeable to the majority. We need to use this privilege and heavily impactful voices as white-identifying people to speak up and be loud. Now is the time to spread the love that we live by in our faith for which we were once persecuted. If we are so passionate about the injustice that happened to our people, we need to be passionate about the injustice that is happening in front of our eyes today." For the Armenian-themed stickers and T-shirts, she uses designs and artwork that she did in high school relating to the Genocide and Armenian culture. The proceeds from these products go to Armenia Fund. She also donated some of the proceeds to her parish's fundraiser for Artsakh, which raised \$1,500 that was then matched by another organization.

For the rather small Springfield community, that was a lot. Ani is proud of her contributions to both causes.

A Sensitive Portraitist

Aside from her philanthropic/human rights activity and her teaching, Jermakian's biggest calling card is her portrait painting, which also appears on both of her

websites, and is also imbued with the spirit of helping people tell their stories – helping to be their voice.

"In high school I started doing portraits and when I showed them to people, I started getting requests. A lot of it was from family and church members, Armenians." But this past year, as schools were closed down due to Covid, Jermakian found portrait painting as an alternative way to gain some income. "I wasn't employed so I didn't have anything to do. All my portraits are also posted on Instagram, so that leads to more commissions." Over the summer, Jermakian had a sale - \$20 per portrait. "That's really cheap, way less than what anyone charges

to paint a portrait." But it helped kick off interest in her work. Then she got a very special commission. Someone who found her via Instagram wanted a picture done of his two grandmothers. The family, who live in Worcester, are immigrants from Cameroon.

"He wanted a picture of the two foundations of the family," says Jermakian, and it was important to the grandson because his grandmothers are getting up in years. He sent Jermakian a photograph. "I really loved the picture," she said. "I got a vision of a huge painting. The colors were what was in the photo."

The portrait became Jermakian's passion project over the summer. "I was due for a big project, and this took me all summer." Just as with her approach to most of her art, she wanted to help the family tell their story. She regrets not knowing more about the two women. "Both are from Cameroon, and one of them had 8 kids." She added, "It meant a lot to me. I was invested in telling the story of these women; capturing the story through their eyes."

Jermakian worked hard on the women's eyes in the portrait. "The eyes can draw you into the painting. They seemed like such powerful women and pillars of the family and I felt I had to do them justice. There was strength in their eyes. And I had to paint them as real eyes, looking at you."

Ani Jermakian's artwork, created with love, will always serve the purpose of making people's lives better – whether in her career as a teacher, her uplifting the voice of the oppressed, or her telling the story of everyday people through her sensitive, glowing portraiture. As she says, "the motive of art is healing."

To see her work, visit www.artworkby-ani.com or her Instagram account which is also titled Artwork By Ani.

CALENDAR

ON-LINE EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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

APRIL — The Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church of Providence holds a series of events every Friday at 7.30 p.m., see <https://www.facebook.com/armenianchurchprovidence>. All programs dedicated to Victors and Saints of the Armenian Genocide. April 9 – "Sayat-Nova" Kousan Song Ensemble from Armenia April 16 – Yerevan Chorale, Memorial Concert April 23 – Armenian Chorale of Rhode Island, Memorial Concert April 30 – Cultural Genocide, Film Presentation in English

Armenian Museum Of America Launches Fourth Virtual Series with Focus on Early Recordings

RECORDINGS, from page 12

be from the Armenian Museum of America's archive, and we will explore these long-forgotten tunes and hear stories about the creators of culture."

Like most cultural institutions, the Armenian Museum quickly made the shift to virtual programming such as this over the past year. While galleries had to remain closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, members and families began participating in online events.

These programs have been growing at the Armenian Museum and now include an Online Concert Series sponsored by the Dadourian Foundation and a monthly Virtual Exhibition highlighting objects from its collection. In addition to the new Sound Archive, the Museum has been featuring a weekly "Show and Tell" video hosted by Curator Gary Lind-Sinianian, where he

shares informative and often amusing stories about objects in the collection. This popular video series is sponsored by Michele Kolligian, president of the Museum's Board of Trustees.

"Since we have not been able to open the Museum galleries to the public, or present live events such as lectures, book talks, and concerts, our team has done a wonderful job curating virtual offerings to keep people connected during the time the Museum has been closed," concludes Sohigian. "While we look forward to reopening in the second half of the year, we will continue posting online content so our members across the country and internationally can remain engaged and enjoy learning about our vast collection, and beyond."



Mardiros Der Sarkis Tashjian, along with one of the record labels from his 1909 recording for Columbia Phonograph Company (Photo Credit: Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives)

ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Muhammara

(Red Pepper and Walnut Dip) From *Memories of Aleppo*

“Aleppo, Syria can boast one of the richest, most diverse cuisines in the world. Syrian cuisine mainly uses eggplant, zucchini, garlic, meat (mostly from lamb and sheep), sesame seeds, rice, chickpeas, fava beans, lentils, cabbage, cauliflower, vine leaves, pickled turnips, cucumbers, tomatoes, olive oil, lemon juice, mint, pistachios, honey and fruits. Despite its wide acclaim, only a handful of Aleppo dishes are ever served at Middle Eastern restaurants today, including in Los Angeles,” says retired engineer and author, Alec Ekmekji. “It remains a cuisine of many great home cooks and chefs.”

A few years ago, Aleppo natives Seta Ekmekji (Alec’s mother), and her sister-in-law, Rhoda Margossian, compiled some family recipes to leave to their children, a project that devel-



The authors, Rhoda Margossian and Seta Ekmekji

oped into a life of its own, and turned into an impressive ethnic cookbook. Seta and Rhoda worked together to document each recipe, and their cookbook, *Memories of Aleppo*, was published in 2016. *Memories of Aleppo* is a treasured collection of the family’s favorite Aleppo recipes that can be enjoyed for many generations.

“These recipes represent the cooking style and cuisine of the Armenians who lived in Aleppo for centuries,” adds Rhoda. “Many recipes are vegetarian and vegan, including this Muhammara. Aleppo pepper is an important ingredient in Middle Eastern cuisine. It is a Syrian variety of hot pepper, characterized by its fruity, cumin-like flavor with moderate heat that builds over time. It is used as a spice in numerous dishes in order to provide them with some heat.” Each of the recipes was beautifully photographed by their son/nephew, Raffi Alexander at Spiderbox Photography, in La Canada, California.

“We were schoolmates in the American High School for Girls in Aleppo,” says Seta. “Later on, one of us married the other’s brother and we became relatives as well as very close friends, and we are still close, and continue to talk with each other on the telephone every day.”

“This recipe,” adds Rhoda, “is a delicacy of contrasting flavors: olive oil, red pepper, pomegranate molasses, and walnuts. Its magical qualities lie in the fact that when you eat it, you taste all of the wonderful flavors simultaneously. Although Muhammara is usually eaten as a dip, it goes well with turkey, especially left-over turkey. Muhammara and turkey between two slices of toasted bread makes the perfect sandwich.”

INGREDIENTS:

6 medium red bell peppers, coarsely chopped and seeded
 1/2 cup corn flake crumbs
 1 teaspoon cumin powder
 1/2 teaspoon salt to taste
 2 teaspoons Aleppo pepper to taste
 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 2 tablespoons pomegranate syrup
 1 tablespoon red pepper paste (optional, found in Middle Eastern stores)*
 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
 1 cup walnuts, chopped (pulse 10 times in the food processor)
 Pine nuts to garnish

PREPARATION:

In a food processor, add the chopped bell peppers and process until smooth. Put them in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Cook uncovered for about 10 minutes. (Six bell peppers will make 1 cup of pepper sauce). Remove from stove top and cool.

Mix red pepper sauce with the corn flake crumbs (do not use bread crumbs). Add the cumin powder, salt, Aleppo red pepper, granulated sugar, lemon juice, pomegranate syrup, and the optional red pepper paste. Mix well. Then add the olive oil and chopped walnuts. Sauce will taste sweet, hot and sour. If it is too thick, add some water gradually until it has the consistency of a dip. Serve on a plate or in a bowl garnished with pine nuts.

“**You can also purchase red pepper from Korean markets and at Amazon,” adds Rhoda. “Labeled ‘Premium Korean Red Pepper Coarse Powder,’ it is coarse ground, less expensive, and has a nice aroma of dried peppers.”

Memories of Aleppo, Our Favorite Middle Eastern Recipes by Seta Ekmekji and Rhoda Margossian.

Fresno Arax Dancers Embark on Video Project

DANCE, from page 12

Kara Statler, a fourth generation Fresno Armenian who joined the Arax D

ancers three years ago, echoed these sentiments in describing her enthusiasm for the project. “It’s so important for me to not only learn these dances and connect with my culture myself, but to be able to spread the knowledge as well,” Statler said. “It will make traditional Armenian line dancing more accessible and will hopefully inspire more people to join in at the next picnic.”

Der Mugrdechian drew inspiration for this project from a similar one some 30 years ago when the Arax Dancers

recorded video lessons for a Fresno State student’s MBA project. In the process of uploading this footage to YouTube, Der Mugrdechian realized there were not enough video tutorials online for Armenians to learn the traditional dances. “I could not find anybody else that taught the dances slowly, step by step, and filmed from various angles such that it would be easy for people to learn from home,” stated Der Mugrdechian. Her aim is to build upon the first video from the group’s early years to record the full repertoire of the Arax Dancers.

Though the group has changed members multiple times over the past 45 years, Der Mugrdechian has remained an active member of the Arax Dancers since its founding. In that time, the group only had one 6-year hiatus while Der Mugrdechian, then the group’s director, was the principal of the local Armenian Community School. “For me, dancing is a way to show whoever thinks that they could kill the Armenians that they can’t, and that we are still doing what we have always done,” she explained. “This is one small way for me to ensure that a very beautiful aspect of our culture remains alive for future generations.”

The forthcoming video lessons will be posted on the “Arax Fresno” YouTube profile. The profile currently holds the original 1990s video lessons with 4 dances: the 3-Step Bar, Halch, Pompooreg, and Greek Certo. Link: <https://youtu.be/g-U5HSnMm58>



The Arax Dancers from 2012



The Arax Dancers’ female members in 2013 in front of St. Mary’s Church in Yetttem, California

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Editorial

Armenia's Snap Elections: Solution Or Delusion?



By Edmond Y.
Azadian

A fatalistic mood has descended upon Armenia; this is a time when the families of some of the 5,000 victims of the recent disastrous war rejoice if they find the remains of their loved ones. Ten thousand wounded soldiers are facing a tough road to recovery and mobility through the help of prostheses. The entire country is caught in the grips of a raging pandemic, pinning its hopes on herd immunity rather than the promised vaccines which have yet to arrive.

Life, as we see, is upside down in Armenia, except for political life, which is preparing for snap elections to be held on June 20.

The ruling My Step coalition of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, which has 83 seats in the 132-seat parliament, had previously hesitated to pull the trigger on snap elections as pressure was mounting from the opposition as well as other quarters. Members did not know how they would fare. At first, the party announced that there was no public clamor for elections when it was clear Pashinyan's popularity was dwindling. Then, after they were reassured that the opposition had not garnered enough momentum, they started holding negotiations with Edmon Marukyan, the leader of the docile opposition party Bright Armenia in the parliament.

However, one of the deciding factors for snap elections was the realignment of the Prosperous Armenia Party. Its leader, Gagik Tsarukyan, earlier had joined the Homeland Salvation Movement, headed by former Prime Minister Vazgen Manukyan. It is not the first time that Tsarukyan has shifted allegiances. When his party quit the opposition movement of 17 parties and publicly stated that Prosperous Armenia would not propose a candidate for prime minister, Pashinyan's party went ahead and announced the date for elections. The second blow to the opposition movement came from the Homeland (Hayrenik) Party, headed by the former Security Services Chief Arthur Vanetzyan. It is likely that Vanetzyan's party may join Prosperous Armenia in an alliance, otherwise it does not stand a chance to have a representative in the parliament. The opposition movement lost popularity also, when its leader, Vazgen Manoukyan, allowed the ARF leader Ishkhan Saghatelian to upstage him.

The local ARF chapter in Armenia does not enjoy much popularity; its conduct even caused a split in the ARF ranks in the diaspora.

All these defections have resulted in the occupiers of the tents on Baghramyan Street, erected by the opposition to block entry to the parliament, to abandon their posts.

While the opposition was losing influence, a third party did not emerge to give an alternative choice to the electorate, further reassuring Pashinyan's party that it did not face a serious challenge.

There are many fringe parties which plan to take part in the elections; Levon Ter-Petrosian's Armenian National Congress, Levon Shirinyan's Christian Democratic Party, the Worker's Party, the Heritage Party and many other groups whose names are not familiar to the public.

One important development which needs to be marked is the rise of the popularity of the National Popular Pole (Bever), which comprises Sasna Tserer and the European Party, headed by filmmaker Tigran Khzmalyan. No party in the past dared publicly to side with the West and NATO. The public rally held by this group on March 16 gathered a large crowd, which along the Armenian tricolor, waved the US and French flags. Speakers also stated that "from now on, the winds blow from the west, not from the north."

They outright called for alignment with the European Union and with the US. This was the result of frustration from Russia's treatment of Armenia during the 44-day war. Indeed, Moscow had supplied Armenia's army with Iskandar missiles, which did not fire and with SU-30 fighter jets without their missiles.

To top it off, some authoritative voices in Moscow blamed the Russian side for instigating the war. Constantin Zatulin, the

head of the Russian Duma's Foreign Policy Commission, accused Russian actions of contributing to the start of the war, while the Kremlin leadership expected gratitude from Yerevan for having stopped the war, suggesting "otherwise Armenia would have faced the worst."

In his plan to purge the army from its Russophile element, the prime minister had fired the chief of the army general staff Onik Gasparyan, who, along with 40 other officers, had demanded the former's resignation.

The prime minister's decree sacking Gasparyan was not signed by President Armen Sarkissian and it has been submitted to the Administrative Court, which found the prime minister's order illegal and reinstituted Gasparyan to his position.

Meanwhile, Pashinyan appointed Artak Davtyan to replace Gasparyan. This is an anomaly in the political situation and the prime minister cannot push through his decisions.

There is certainly a political crisis, which the ruling party believes it can mitigate with snap elections. Pashinyan himself symbolizes the defeat but he will benefit from the apathy crated by the last war.

Recent polls indicate that only 40 percent of the electorate plans to vote.



Unfortunately, during the thirty years of independence, Armenia was not able to develop political parties around ideas and philosophies. Instead, the voters follow individuals of influence and switch allegiance for no reason.

In all probability, Pashinyan's My Step alliance will win the elections by default, because no alternative force has emerged and above all, because of the political immaturity of the voting public.

Any new government which wins will face a very daunting agenda: to prepare the army for the next inevitable war, to develop the economy, to sustain the modernization of the armed forces, to discourage the speedy outflow of emigrants, to restore the wounded psyches of the public and face tough negotiations with the enemy for the implementation of the nine-point declaration of November 9.

In the meantime, deteriorating relations between the US and Russia have to be factored in as well as negotiations around Iran's nuclear deal.

Besides these external political factors, there are some domestic problems that need to be addressed: since September 27, 2020, martial law has been in place and it has to be lifted before the elections.

A draft law has been submitted to change the electoral code, that has to be addressed because the configuration of the next parliament depends heavily on whether the election is held under current law or the one which is awaiting approval.

Pashinyan's task is cut out for him. He could not handle the war and yet he will be tasked to lead the recovery of a devastated country.

Under the most optimistic scenario, the election will fall short of solving the political economic, psychological and diplomatic disaster. At best, it will provide a delusion to the public.



COMMENTARY

Time to Get Serious: Tomorrow Is Too Late

By Dr. Suren T. Sargsyan

My generation, which is considered among the old today, lived in the Soviet system for more than half of its life. Today it is confused, angry and surprised by everything that is happening in our country. I do not want to praise those years; I do not suffer from nostalgia. I am a historian, I know all the painful calamities that have befallen us, when Russia did not help, made mysterious retreats and won at our expense in the Balkans or elsewhere.

But let me ponder what a radical change, what incredible achievements we would have had today if the whole of Western Armenia had joined the Russian Empire in 1828, even if it had been subjected to tsarist exploitation.

It is a big question that if that happened, and naturally no Genocide, wouldn't we have an Armenia with 40-50 million today and be the main player in the South Caucasus?

Why did I suddenly remember the Soviet years?

We used to attack the memories of the intellectuals who had miraculously survived the years of persecution, absorbing them, digging into the press of the time, and then only our topics ... When we saw the shops full of goods and colorful lights, when we were surprised that the streets were illuminated by advertisements, when blue jeans were worshiped, when ... there were a thousand and one restrictions and prohibitions, but not only was my generation not depressed by all that, it was waiting for the right moment with clenched teeth.

When it came, it immediately fought and won. It won in 1991-1994, when the Armenians, almost without generals, with a fully formed army, forced the Azerbaijanis to recognize the de facto independence of Artsakh and to ask for a ceasefire. And in 2020, when we had the most efficient army in the region with more than 40 active generals, we lost and "returned" not only the occupied seven regions, but also gave 75 percent of Artsakh to the enemy, leaving the rest of Artsakh to the mercy of the "peacekeeping ally."

And the most interesting thing is that instead of uniting all the political forces in the defeated state, restoring the army and raising the level of defense of the rest of the homeland, almost nothing is done to reveal the reasons for the defeat and the treacherous facts to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Moreover, in this case, too, the polarized opposition

continues. Forgetting the problems facing the country, the government makes consecutive concessions left and right, and the opposition is busy with the demands of glorifying the defeated generals and discrediting the resignation of the prime minister.

An involuntary question arises. Why is it that the generals who dismantled the front and lost it are not fired and are awarded the title of hero? And the saddest thing is that, as always, this time the parade is led by foreigners with famous and unknown Armenian friends. Are the Armenian people so old that they will not give birth to other Nejdehs?

There is no doubt that the General Staff is the brain of the Armed Forces, one of the most informed structures in any country. Especially in a country like Armenia, which has been at war for 30 years, the headquarters has greater information-analytical capabilities than in many other countries that have never been at war. And if the General Staff demanded the resignation of the prime minister, then he has finally destroyed the army, the supply of weapons and the economy in general, and has insulted the honor and dignity of the entire Armenian people.

In other words, the demand for his resignation has serious grounds. They have certain information, on the basis of which they presented the demand for the resignation of the prime minister. "They do not have to share that information with the public, people just have to realize that if the HQ demands something, then the issue is urgent and well-founded" (former officer of the General Staff of the RF Armed Forces, ZOI colonel, military expert Mikhail Khodariouk).

In addition, almost all military commanders claim that the commander-in-chief ruled the entire armed forces during the war in an unbearable, deadly and simply untalented manner. Those who were more efficient, who had studied in the Russian military academies, were specifically dismissed from service.

In other words, he is completely against the alliance with Russia.

Before and after the war, no training exercises or tactical tricks were organized.

And where does this confrontation between the prime minister and the General Staff lead? It is an issue that has in fact become a decisive and cornerstone of further developments. One can assume that if the president does not approve the decision of the prime minister, he will also be considered a supporter of the coup; the regime will demand the resignation of the president of Armenia. And the opposition will support the president and will demand the resignation of the prime minister again. The prime minister will announce that he does not want to disturb the country and renounce the decision he signed.

Judging by the "anxiety" of the main players in the region, other scenarios can be imposed from outside, according to which Onik Gasparian will resign and thus will shed the unpleasant burden of considering himself fired by the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, it can be unequivocally stated that no change of government is possible in Armenia without an external factor, and it is difficult to say what will be planned in Russia together with Turkey.

One thing can be unequivocally asserted that if Gasparian chooses a sensible strategy to resign for the sake of

the country's security, then the government and the opposition are so full of hatred for each other that it will hardly solve the problem. A military coup in Armenia is out of the question, because we have almost lost the last manifestations of our independence, especially after the last war in Artsakh. So the resolution of the problem depends more on the external factor, a circumstance which we point out with terrible pain and bitterness.

In the background of these developments, in my opinion, the most dangerous reality is that Turkey, which did not openly interfere in the internal affairs of Armenia during our thirty years of independence, made it clear that we are at their mercy.

I understand that we have not been and will not be friends, but hostile statements from them are a gross violation of international law, yet they do happen. The most dangerous and powerful thing here was that the Armenian authorities did not respond in any way and seemed to accept the remark like a student punished by their silence. It is extremely dangerous that even our media, not realizing the great danger of these statements, by repeating them regularly, make it normal and creates a mental state of reconciliation with them.

I have a good idea of the outrage, the noise and the thousands of accusations made by Russophobes if such statements were made by high-ranking Russian officials. An involuntary question arises: what is all this really, pro-Western, pro-Soros or what is the same, it is in the heart of the pro-Turks? This is where the dog's head is buried, which is why at the beginning of the article I presented the approaches of my peers on the issue. In order not to sin against the reality, I must say that I carefully followed the speeches of the opposition; to my great pain, they did not say anything significant about this issue except for a few references.

Azerbaijani President Aliyev, without any hesitation, threatened: if Armenia does not agree to provide a corridor through the territory of "our former land Zangezur," Azerbaijan will force it to do so.

The director of the Network Research Institute, political scientist Gagik Harutyunyan, is right when he writes: "The Armenian government is acting not in the interests of Armenia and the Armenian people, but in the interests of the owners they have recruited." Their task is to eliminate the Iran-Armenia-Russia axis, carrying out parallel work against Greece. In the context of all this, it is natural that the Armenian government agrees to occupy not only Artsakh with its physical and military force, but also Armenia with economic and geopolitical methods.

"The policy of Azerbaijan and Turkey in general," says Harutyunyan, pursues that goal towards Syunik. In other words, they do not serve the interests of Armenia, but of Turkey and Azerbaijan, that is why, naturally, they do not respond to the insults coming from Azerbaijan."

I would like to mention that we are in an extremely dangerous political and economic situation, so we all need to sober up, otherwise tomorrow will be late ...

(Dr. Suren Sargsyan is a historian teaching at Yerevan Gladzor University. This commentary was translated from Armenian.)

Do Armenians Have Any Friends in Turkey's Civil Society?

By Harout Ekmanian

It is human nature to turn to friends and dear ones in difficult times. For Armenians who built friendships with Turkish colleagues in civil society, art, journalism, academia and other related fields, these friends were out of sight for the 44-day-long aggression and ethnic cleansing against their kin in Artsakh. They were nowhere to be found to counter the State mandated hate propaganda against Armenians. They weren't even able to send a couple of comforting words let alone any public action.

As much as this is a personal observation, it was also a shared sentiment among the Armenian civil society in Armenia and diaspora, from celebrity activists to young students. With all due respect to a minority faction in Turkey who did what a friend would do in time of trouble, for Armenian civil society the following question has been brewing in the last few months: Do Armenians have any friends left in Turkey's civil society?

If we do not count the persecution of the tiny Armenian community in Turkey and the continuous destruction of their cultural heritage, the Turkish participation and support to Azerbaijan in the genocidal campaign against the Armenians of Artsakh in 2020 was the first time in almost a century when Turkey, without showing a scintilla of remorse about its criminal past, openly engaged in a yet another attempt of annihilation of Armenians as a group living on their ancestral land.

During the last 2-3 decades, many Armenian and Turkish journalists, activists, and academics met frequently to discuss the issues between both nations and countries, starting from the denial of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, to border issues, and other historic and political problems. They also cooperated on various civil society, filming, reporting and academic projects as well. They tried to build bridges between both societies. Most of those bridges are now bombed just like Armenian schools, churches and homes in Artsakh.

However, the Turkish government is not to blame for the deafening silence of these supposed Turkish allies, and even worse, their bothsidesism in some instances. It is a well-known fact that Turkey is an authoritarian country with abysmal human rights record and almost no freedom of speech. Thus, fears of persecution for expressing solidarity with Armenian friends or even a message of peace could be detrimental. However, in the age of advanced encrypted private communication apps, only a handful of such Turkish allies and friends voiced non-committal messages of non-violence. A couple of my Turkish friends even expressed full solidarity and support with the fundamental rights of Armenians in Artsakh. However, the vast majority of these Turkish colleagues were either silent or posting about the beautiful sunsets on Marmara, or even worse, some were repeating the fascist Turkish government line.

Many of these Turkish colleagues are legal scholars, lawyers, journalists, human rights activists, NGO representatives, filmmakers,

historians, social scientists, and academics, who have done work related to Armenia and Armenians, including work related to the Armenian Genocide. Unfortunately, the majority of them treated their Armenian peers as lepers or buried their heads in the sand when their government perpetrated yet another genocidal campaign along with Azerbaijan against Armenians in Artsakh. Their past work was reduced to dust when they missed the boat by ignoring their Armenian peers suffering during the war in Artsakh. And they missed the boat knowingly.

Many Armenian activists wonder now what the solidarity of those so-called Turkish allies is worth with the memory of the Armenian Genocide and annual remembrances of Hrant Dink's murder, especially knowing too well that it is easier to express solidarity for an event like the Armenian Genocide that happened 105 years ago, that is today of no detriment to their comfort and privileges arising directly from that very same event.

see FRIENDS, page 20



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Why Did the Superior Court Reject Governor's denial of Sassounian's Pardon?

Last month, California Superior Court Judge William C. Ryan rejected Gov. Gavin Newsom's refusal to accept the Parole Board's decision to release Hampig Sassounian from jail. I was under the wrong impression that the Governor's decision on pardons was final and not subject to a review or reversal by the courts. It turns out that the law requires the Governor to consider "all relevant, reliable information available" and his parole decisions must not be arbitrary or capricious. This article is based on a copy of the Judge's 19-page ruling.

Hampig Sassounian, not related to this writer, was convicted on June 29, 1984 of first degree murder and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, but was resentenced to a term of 25 years to life in 2002, making him eligible for parole. Sassounian assassinated Turkish Consul General Kemal Arikan in Los Angeles on January 28, 1982 when he was 19 years old. He is now 58.

On December 27, 2019, the Board of Parole Hearings, found Sassounian suitable for release on parole. However, on May 25, 2020, Governor Newsom rejected the Board's decision based on the prisoner's crime, "outsized political import," and that his insight was "relatively new."

On August 14, 2020, Sassounian filed a petition to the Superior Court challenging the Governor's reversal of the Parole Board's decision. He argued that the Governor's decision is not supported by evidence that he posed an unreasonable danger to society, if released. Sassounian also contended that the "Governor imposed an unlawfully heightened standard of parole suitability illegally founded upon the circumstances of Sassounian's life crime." He contended that there is no evidence that he lacked "insight" and "the Governor's conclusion that Sassounian has not demonstrated insight 'for a sufficiently long period' is an illegal reason to deny parole."

On October 7, 2020, the court issued an Order to Show Cause. The Governor's office filed its response on January 11, 2021, repeating the reasons why he refused parole for the prisoner. Sassounian then submitted his response on January 26, 2021 rejecting the Governor's claims against him.

Judge Ryan ruled that Sassounian's record does not contain any evidence to support the Governor's contention that he is not suitable for release on parole. In addition, the Judge found that the Governor used an improper standard when considering both the "import" of Sassounian's offense and the notoriety of his victim, as well as the recency of his insight. Therefore, the Judge ordered the release of Sassounian from jail.

Judge Ryan, in his verdict, mentioned Sassounian's description of his background "as an Armenian born and raised until the age of 13 in Lebanon. During this time, they lived in an 'active war zone and would routinely see dead bodies,' including those of women and children. His father was an alcoholic who was often gone for weeks at a time, though Petitioner [Sassounian] had a good, loving relationship with his mother. He lived with his many siblings and extended family members, including his grandparents who were victims of the 'Armenian Genocide.' His grandmother often told Petitioner of how she lost her entire family to the genocide and that she only narrowly escaped death herself."

The Judge continued: "At 13, his [Sassounian's] family immigrated to the United States to escape the violence in Lebanon, but the family dynamic remained challenging. They moved to Pasadena where there was a large Armenian population. He joined the Armenian Boy Scouts and the Armenian Youth Federation. This is where he met his crime partner, Krikor 'Koko' Saliba. They became friendly a year or two before the crime and would discuss politics and the history between Armenia and Turkey, including the genocide. They also noted and discussed that there were 'a lot of political assassinations going on' at the time. That is, 'Armenians were assassinating Turkish diplomats in Europe mostly because they were angry that ... after the

genocide Turkey would deny the genocide.... Young Armenians were upset about this and — they thought that — Turkey should step up and acknowledge the genocide...and get into dialogue with the Armenian people or make peace with them.' Because this was not happening, 'young Armenians decided to resort to violence.... [They had] given up that... peaceful dialogue with Turkey was... going to happen.' During this time Petitioner [Sassounian] and his crime partner, who was a few years older than Petitioner, discussed going to Europe to carry out an assassination like they had been seeing take place. At some point, Arikan, however, made a public address calling all Armenians 'liars' and declared there was no Armenian genocide. Saliba showed Petitioner an article regarding Arikan's statement. 'Being the grandsons of survivors of the Armenian genocide, we took that to be very insulting. And we took very deep offense about that.'"

Judge Ryan decided that "there is no evidence in the record to support the Governor's finding of lack of insight, such the commitment offense of nearly 40 years is still probative of Petitioner's current dangerousness."

The Judge challenged the Governor's contention that Sassounian's insight into his crime was "very recent." Judge Ryan stated that "the case law establishes there is no predetermined amount of time an inmate must demonstrate or possess insight such that it is sufficient for the purposes of suitability." The Judge ruled that "the insight standard the Governor used to guide his decision was incorrect... and held Sassounian to a different 'arbitrary' standard."

Regarding the issue of Sassounian being a danger to society, "the court notes that the psychologist found Petitioner to represent a low risk of violence upon release," wrote the Judge. "Petitioner wrote a victim apology letter to Mr. Arikan's family, friends, and colleagues, as well as one to the 'Nation of Turkey, the Turkish government, and Turkish Communities of the World,'" stated Judge Ryan. "The court finds the Governor's decision was both arbitrary and procedurally flawed," ruled the Judge. He also noted that Sassounian "has comprehensive release plans for both the United States and Armenia." This is in reference to Sassounian's statement that he may relocate to Armenia after his release from prison.

At the end, the Judge pronounced that Sassounian "committed a murder for which he has been appropriately punished.... The Governor's reversal is vacated, the Board's grant of parole from December 27, 2019, is hereby reinstated. The Board is directed 'to proceed in accordance with its usual procedures for release of an inmate on parole unless within 30 days of the finality of this decision the Board determines in good faith that cause for rescission of parole may exist and initiates appropriate proceedings to determine that question.'" Gov. Newsom decided not to appeal the Judge's ruling, allowing the pardon go into effect which would set Sassounian free shortly.

In my opinion, violence is never justified regardless of the reason. Consul General Arikan was not guilty of committing genocide against the Armenian people. He was not even born during the genocide. Armenians have demands from the Government of Turkey, not individual Turks. Sassounian committed a crime for which he was punished by serving almost 40 years in jail. The complaints by the Turkish government about Sassounian's release are not credible. The Turkish government pressured the federal government to urge Governor Newsom in 2020 and previously Governor Brown in 2017 to reject the Parole Board's decisions to release Sassounian. Even less credible, not to say completely shameful, are the protests of the Azerbaijani government against Sassounian's release. Azerbaijan awarded Azeri axe murderer Ramil Safarov the title of national hero for butchering an Armenian soldier while he was sleeping. Safarov served not a single day in jail in Azerbaijan after his extradition from Hungary.

Finally, it is completely unacceptable that the Turkish Government would demand excessive punishment for an Armenian who murdered a Turk, while Turkey itself continues to deny the mass murder of 1.5 million innocent Armenians. Only after the Turkish government acknowledges the Armenian Genocide and makes appropriate amends for it, Armenians can consider apologizing for the murder of a single Turk!

LETTERS

Two of a Kind

To the Editor:

The article featuring George Mardikian, on March 6, 2021, by Christine Vartanian Datian, brought back happy memories of dinner at Omar Khayyam's, his restaurant in San Francisco, and visits with my father to Mardikian's luxurious apartment on Nob Hill. Mardikian was a good friend of my father and once asked my father if he (Mardikian) could cook a meal at our house in Glendale for Rudy Vallee, a popular singer in the 1930s who loved Mardikian's food. We watched him as he toiled over my mother's stove cooking something called "ragu" for his guest.

Mardikian was a showman who attracted famous people to Omar Khayyam's. He was, as your article said, "America's first celebrity chef." His specialties included Rose Petal Jam, Royal Soup, and Chicken

Tchakhokhbelli, a Georgian chicken dish that my wife learned to cook but never to pronounce correctly.

Mardikian served for a time as a food advisor to the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps, a surprising appointment, I thought. Soldiers loved chicken, beef, and pork but not lamb, the mainstay of the Armenian cuisine.

Across the country from San Francisco was another fine Armenian restaurant called the Golden Horn. Unlike many ethnic restaurants located in run-of-the-mill store fronts, the Golden Horn's front door opened in the midst of Rockefeller Center, just a block or so from Radio City Music Hall. Its chef and owner was Aram Salisian, an amateur wrestler and rug auctioneer from Pasadena. Growing bored with what he was doing, he moved with his wife Mary and his two sons and daughter to New York where he opened his restaurant.

You knew you were somewhere important the moment you walked in. George Istomin, his bartender, was located near the entrance shaking the martini cocktails and perhaps thinking about his son Eugene,

who became a renowned concert pianist. A group photo on the wall featured my father, Aram Saroyan, Willy's colorful uncle, the celebrated author Michael Arlen, and Salisian.

Aram and Mary lived in a nice apartment above the restaurant. Often, they would host small gatherings late in the evening. Aram fancied himself as a singer, and his guests wanted to hear "The Volga Boatman," "Ole Man River," or "On the Road to Mandalay" in his deep manly voice. One evening when I was there, Armand Tokatyan, a leading tenor at the Metropolitan Opera, was one of the guests. As Aram took a deep breath before singing the demanding final note, Tokatyan, standing in the corner of the room, sang the note an octave higher in his glorious operatic voice before Aram had finished inhaling. Everyone applauded, Aram took a bow, and Tokatyan favored the guests with an aria from Pagliacci.

My favorite time at the Golden Horn was hanging around the kitchen with Aram after the diners had left. He would fondle one of his prized artichokes that he had

personally selected at the wholesale market downtown. He would stoke the burning embers of the wood grill in a pensive mood, thinking perhaps of the delicious lamb cubes cooking there earlier in the evening: "emotion recollected in tranquility," as Wordsworth might have said. Sometimes, he would pick up a small paintbrush, dip it in a tub of melted butter, and "paint" the walnut and honey-filled paklava for tomorrow's diners.

Alas, the Golden Horn is now long gone, replaced by yet another skyscraper. Also gone is George Mardikian's palace of fine art cooking. There are no Armenian restaurants in Washington, D.C. where I live, but St. Mary's Armenian Church offers traditional delicacies a couple of times a year thanks to local men and women who prepare the food, watched over not by a celebrated chef but by the Church's own pastoral leader.

— Paul R. Ignatius

(Paul R. Ignatius is a former government official, who served in the administrations of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.)



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38 Senators Urge President Biden To Recognize Genocide

RECOGNITION, from page 1
values, including respect for universal rights. Those values require us to acknowledge the truth and do what we can to prevent future genocides and other crimes against humanity.”

Recalling the historic passage of legislation in the Senate and House last Congress, affirming the fact of the Armenian Genocide, the letter called on the executive branch to make its position clear as Congress has already done.

Speaking at the Assembly’s Virtual National Advocacy Conference last week, Menendez reflected on the historic and unanimous passage in December 2019 of the Armenian Genocide resolution, S.Res.150.

“We persisted, and finally the Senate stood up to Turkey’s lies and passed the resolution unanimously,” Senator Menendez said. “It was a truly historic day and made possible in large part by the advocacy of the Armenian Assembly and the greater Armenian American community.”

The legislation states in part that it is

the sense of the Senate that it is the policy of the United States: (1) to commemorate the Armenian Genocide through official recognition and remembrance; (2) to reject efforts to enlist, engage, or otherwise associate the United States Government with denial of the Armenian Genocide or any other genocide; and (3) to encourage education and public understanding of the facts of the Armenian Genocide, including the role of the United States in humanitarian relief efforts, and the relevance of the Armenian Genocide to modern-day crimes against humanity.

The bipartisan letter was signed by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), and Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Bob Casey (D-PA), Susan Collins (R-ME), John Cornyn (R-TX), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Ed Markey (D-MA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Gary Peters (D-MI), Rob Portman (R-OH), Jack Reed (D-RI), Mitt Romney (R-UT), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Tina Smith (D-MN), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Ron Wyden (D-OR).



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The Hrant Dink School is located in the basement of the Armenian Evangelical Church in Gedikpaşa. Most of the students are children of natives of Armenia who have moved to Istanbul temporarily for work. The school’s volunteers’ work is under the leadership of Harutyun (Arto) and Talar Hisarli Horozoğlu. The principal is Heriknaz Avagyan.

Every year the graduating class goes to Yerevan for an examination certifying that they have passed 9th grade, and enroll in colleges in Armenia.

During the first wave of the pandemic, 20 students left with their families for Armenia. Last November, 22 more students returned to Armenia with their families. Now the total number of students is about 80. They receive free education, free breakfast and free lunch.

On January 28 of this year, by the request of the Hrant Dink School, divine liturgy was performed in the church in memory of the 14th anniversary of Dink’s assassination. After the church ceremony, the school presented its financial needs, and donations were solicited. It was clear from the report that the school needed financial assistance. The parents could not afford to pay full tuition, although they worked full time.

The Tekeyan Cultural Association will transfer all donations to the school immediately. Donations received by April 15, 2021 will be matched up to \$20,000 by a benefactor who last month also donated \$15,000 to the TCA *Sponsor A Teacher in Armenia and Artsakh Program*.



Do Armenians Have Any Friends in Turkey’s Civil Society?

FRIENDS, from page 18

Seeing what we are seeing today, there could be no doubt that after 100 years again there could be new “Turkish allies” who will provide the necessary dose of lachrymose speeches for the ethnically cleansed Armenians of Artsakh and perhaps more Armenian regions by then, depending on the Azerbaijani-Turkish appetite for land grab and the level of international apathy. It seems that the solidarity of such Turkish friends and allies of Armenians is exclusive for when Armenians are poor victims, orphaned, uprooted, massacred, torn apart, and subjugated. No empathy is shown when Armenians are still standing, even on one foot, and with one arm, resisting Turkish and Azerbaijani fascism. This latest experience only revealed how the Turkish friends and allies of Armenians are deeply entrenched in a supremacist worldview, not capable of seeing Armenians as independent sovereigns, but only as lesser beings.

With all what is said, Armenians who are traumatized by yet another genocidal campaign against them, will find enough resilience and gather their strength. That is inevitable. I hope they will also draw the necessary lessons from this experience. But the same cannot be said about the so-called Turkish friends and allies who not only are tainted with hypocrisy but also irreparably damaged any future potential for healthy relations between Armenian and Turkish thought leaders that could have been based on mutual trust and respect.

(Harout Ekmanian is a New York attorney specializing in international law and human rights. This commentary originally appeared on civilnet.am.)

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