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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan greets his supporters during a rally in his support in Yerevan on March 1

Pashinyan Agrees to Snap Elections

By Raffi Elliott

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced his readiness to hold snap elections on the evening of March 1.

Addressing a large crowd in the capital's Republic Square at an event commemorating the March 1, 2008, shooting of 10 demonstrators by the Army, Pashinyan discussed allegations by opposition groups that his previous suggestion for fresh elections were insincere.



Opposition demonstrators rally near the government buildings in Yerevan on February 27 to pressure Prime Minister Pashinyan to resign

"Since the opposition flatly rejected our proposals for snap elections, we concluded that holding one would be pointless without their approval," Pashinyan said, adding that if parliamentary quorum could be assured, his party was ready to call a vote. The prime

minister also reiterated that the only way to change the composition of the current government is through legal, free and fair elections. "You elected me, and only you can oust me," Pashinyan shouted as supporters chanted "Nikol, prime minister."

Armenia's current electoral code features a complex mechanism for dissolving the government. In order to trigger fresh elec-

tions, the prime minister would first need to submit his resignation in accordance with Article 149 of the Constitution at which point Parliament is given two attempts to nominate a replacement candidate before being dissolved and elections triggered. These elections must take place within a period of 30 to 45 days later. Any citizen

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Open Letter to Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan

The advent of a new US Administration and the start of the 117th Session of the US Congress, in the wake of Turkey's and Azerbaijan's six-week war on Artsakh, mark an era of new opportunities to foster stronger US-Armenia relations, check Turkish and Azerbaijani aggression, support the security of Artsakh, and realize the national and democratic aspirations of the Armenian people.

The Republic of Armenia – through her diplomatic representation – and the Armenian American community – as citizens of our great nation – each have vital roles to play in this regard. For her part, Armenia is fortunate to be repre-

sented in Washington, DC by a seasoned ambassador with long years of experience effectively advancing Armenia's national interests at the highest levels of international diplomacy. He and his professional team are well regarded by their US counterparts, the Armenian American community, a broad array of allied organizations, and the Washington, DC foreign policy community.

As a community – deeply integrated into American civil society and with more than a century of experience working with the U.S. government – we have, since the rebirth of an independent

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Boston Proclaims February 26 Khojaly Commemoration Day

Mayor's Office Apologizes
To Armenians

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON (defence.az, Azernews.az, Twitter, Press Herald) - Mayor Marty Walsh of Boston proclaimed February 26 to be Khojaly Commemoration Day. The proclamation quotes Human Rights Watch as stating this was the largest massacre of the 1990s and that it was committed by Armenian armed forces with the support of a Soviet Russian rifle regiment.



Boston Mayor
Marty Walsh

According to Azerbaijani sources, the proclamation was adopted on the initiative of Roza Shahzade, director of the New England-based Azerbaijan Center. In addition, Azerbaijanis held a demonstration at Harvard Square in Cambridge, according to the Azerbaijani State Committee for Work with Diaspora, to commemorate the 29th anniversary of the Khojaly killings organized with the support of the same Azerbaijan Center. Some of the posters displayed used the word genocide to describe the Khojaly event, in contradiction with the accepted definition of this term.

Armenians in turn contacted the mayor's office in large numbers to protest the proclamation, as confirmed by a telephone respondent at the mayor's office.

In response to a question from the Mirror-Spectator about why and how the mayoral proclamation was issued, on March 2 Nick Martin, Chief Communications Officer of the Office of Mayor Walsh, stated: "We receive a high volume of requests for mayoral proclamations throughout the year, and our systems for processing them are currently in flux as part of the mayoral transition. This situation is a reminder that, no matter the challenges, it's important and necessary to scrutinize all of those requests, especially ones having to do with international conflict, more closely before issuing a proclamation. We regret upsetting anyone with this proclamation, and we sincerely apologize to the Armenian

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SAINT LOUIS

Super Grandmaster
Levon Aronian to
Move to Saint Louis,
Represent the US



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NEW YORK

Flame of
Faith



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INTERVIEW

Vilen Galstyan

"My life was spent in
a wonderful creative
atmosphere"



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NEWS from ARMENIA

EU-Armenia Accord Takes Effect March 1

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed by the European Union (EU) and Armenia more than three years ago entered into force on March 1, after being ratified by all EU member states.

The 350-page agreement commits the Armenian authorities to carrying out political reforms that will democratize the country's political system and boost human rights protection. They must gradually "approximate" Armenian economic laws and regulations to those of the EU.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said the CEPA's entry into force "sends a strong signal that the EU and Armenia are committed to democratic principles and the rule of law, as well as to a wider reform agenda."

Oliver Varhelyi, the EU commissioner for neighborhood and enlargement, was quoted in a statement as saying: "The entry into force of the bilateral EU-Armenia agreement on March 1 will allow us to strengthen our work on the economy, connectivity, digitalization and the green transformation as priority areas. These will have concrete benefits for the people and are key for socio-economic recovery and the longer-term resilience of the country."

The Armenian Foreign Ministry last month described the CEPA as a "solid legal basis" for deepening Armenia's ties with the EU in a wide range of areas. The CEPA was signed in November 2017 as a less ambitious substitute for an Association Agreement which Armenian and EU negotiators nearly finalized in 2013. Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan in its place arranged Armenian membership in a Russian-led trade bloc.

Sarkissian Defends Opposition to Army Chief's Sacking

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — President Armen Sarkissian defended on March 1 his decision not to fire Armenia's top army general strongly criticized by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Pashinyan petitioned Sarkissian on February 25 to sign a decree relieving General Onik Gasparyan of his duties shortly after the chief of the Armenian army's General Staff and 40 other high-ranking officers issued a statement accused the government of misrule and demanded its resignation. Pashinyan rejected the demand as a "military coup attempt."

Sarkissian refused to sign such a decree on February 27, saying it appears to be unconstitutional and would deepen the "unprecedented" political crisis in the country.

Pashinyan criticized the refusal as "unfounded" and resent his motion to Sarkissian. A senior lawmaker allied to him suggested on February 28 that the president himself appears to have violated the constitution and therefore might be impeached.

The Armenian constitution allows the head of state to again reject the proposed decree by March 3 evening. In that case, he will have to ask the Constitutional Court to rule on its legality. In a March 1 statement, Sarkissian insisted that he acted "impartially" and in strict conformity with the constitution. He denounced "unacceptable" reactions to his weekend decision. "The president of the republic does not represent the interests of any political force," said the statement.

Pashinyan also held a meeting of Armenia's Security Council which called on Sarkissian to stop blocking Gasparyan's sacking, strongly condemning "all attempts to draw the Armenian Armed Forces into political processes."

Pashinyan Agrees to Snap Elections

ELECTIONS, from page 1

of Armenia — not just sitting parliamentarians — is eligible for nomination provided that they are over 25 years of age, speak Armenian and reside in the country.

Given that only 67 parliamentary votes are required to confirm a replacement prime minister, the government has been seeking guarantees from the opposition that it would not nominate competing candidates in order to go to elections. On Monday, March 1, Edmon Marukyan, who heads the opposition Bright Armenia Faction, signaled his readiness to recuse himself from nomination and greenlight an election if the government agreed to reinstate General Onnik Gasparyan.

Pashinyan promptly sacked Gasparyan after the latter called on the government to resign — an act which the government considers to be illegal. The prime minister called Gasparyan's call a "coup attempt."

Article 14 of the Armenian Constitution states that the armed forces must "maintain neutrality in political matters and shall be under civilian control."

The Army's statement likewise drew concern from the European Union whose spokesperson called for the crisis to be resolved "peacefully and in strict adherence to the principles and processes of parliamentary democracy."

The decision to sack the Chief of the Army General Staff, and the president's subsequent objection have pushed the ongoing political crisis towards a constitutional one. Several constitutional experts and civil society organizations have criticized the president for what they call a violation of Articles 133 and 155 of the Constitution.

Pashinyan reiterated his belief that the Army's statement was the result of pressure from former-President Serzh Sargsyan. He once again insisted on Gasparyan's removal, but said that no retributions would be directed towards the co-signatories. "Thank God that Gasparyan and the Army have not yet crossed any red lines," he said.

Opposition leader Vazgen Manukyan, for his part, praised the general, and reiterated calls for the army, police and national security forces to defy constitutional constraints and join their movement. "We have almost finished what we started," Manukyan declared amidst calls of 'traitor' [referring to the prime minister].

Still, at the rally in downtown Yerevan, Pashinyan took a more conciliatory tone towards Sarkissian. "I hope that our president, given his years of experience and wisdom as a diplomat and politician, will take the best interest of the people into consideration in his decision," he told the crowd, wishing him a speedy recovery. President Sarkissian has remained in poor health since contracting COVID-19 while vacationing in London.

However, the next day, President Sarkissian announced his intention not to sign the order, but also didn't outright reject it. Under the current Constitution, the presi-

dent has 3 days to confirm or reject an order from the National Assembly, failing to take action results in it automatically coming into force. The president did add that he would submit a separate application to the Constitutional Court to clarify the "legally

— the Republican, Prosperous Armenia and Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) parties — formed the government at the time of that incident. Former Chief of the Army General Staff Yuri Khatchaturov and Former Defense Minister Seyran



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan greets his supporters on March 1

problematic" wording on the matter.

Invoking the memory of the victims of the March 1, 2008 massacre, Pashinyan reiterated once more that "tanks cannot change governments, only the power of the people". He also asked the people of Armenia, Artsakh and the diaspora to forgive his government for what he called "many mistakes" since taking office, as well as those of previous administrations, before leading a procession towards Myasnikiyan Square.

At least three other demonstrations took place in the city in connection to the March 1st anniversary, all of which were equally peaceful and without incident. The Armenian National Congress — which had organized the original protests which ended in bloodshed in 2008 — held a church service before laying flowers near the site where most of the killings took place. Near the Matenadaran, another group of protesters, this time the nationalist supporters of the Sasna Tsrer militant group earlier marched under torch light. They blame the current authorities for losing the war but also accuse the previous government of decades of mismanagement and corruption.

Activists of the "Homeland Salvation Movement," a coalition of 16 opposition parties, continued their sit-in in front of the National Assembly building. Supporters have set up tents on the blocked street in a scene reminiscent of the opposition camp which the authorities attacked on March 1, 2008. The coalition's primary leaders

Ohanyan were among the invited speakers. Both men are currently facing charges of toppling constitutional order for their involvement in the 2008 shooting incident.

At the rally, ARF Supreme Body member Ishkhan Saghatlyan reiterated his party's demand that the prime minister resign immediately. "We will not leave this street until our demands are met" he told supporters. The Homeland Salvation Movement — of which the ARF is a member, has repeatedly rejected proposals for snap elections over concerns that it would use administrative resources to skew the results. This in spite of the fact that the Armenian Electoral Code stipulates that the Central Election Committee — not the prime minister — is in charge of organizing the vote. They instead want to see power transferred to a "transitional government of technocrats" for a year. This concept has been rejected by both the ruling party and the opposition Bright Armenia party. The legality of such an arrangement has also been put in question by constitutional scholars.

Of the two parliamentary opposition forces, only the Bright Armenia Party has since accepted the prime minister's request to fast-track snap elections. The Prosperous Armenia Party led by business tycoon Gagik Tsarukyan has yet to accept. Tsarukyan's party is the only member of the 16-party opposition coalition to have parliamentary representation.

Open Letter to Foreign Minister Ara Aivazyan

LETTER, from page 1

Armenia, placed the highest of value on keeping Armenia's international diplomatic engagement on a plane above the domestic politics of our homeland. The stakes are simply too high for anything standard other than professional competence in assigning diplomats abroad. Partisan or parochial concerns — however pressing they may seem in Yerevan — must never drive decision making with regard to how Armenia is represented abroad. Politics must, as they say, end at the water's edge.

It is in this context — at this particularly crucial moment — that we firmly and forthrightly oppose the ill-advised appointment

of Lilit Makunts, a divisive political figure who has no formal diplomatic experience, to replace Ambassador Varuzhan Nersesyan as Armenia's Ambassador to the United States. With this letter, we are requesting that you withdraw her nomination and are also sharing with our own government the reservations we hold regarding her suitability for this position.

ADL District Committee
Eastern USA Central Committee
Eastern USA

Armenian
Revolutionary
Federation



ARMENIA

New Productions, Revivals Bring Life To Yerevan Theatres

By Gerald Papasian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — While protests erupted again in Yerevan on February 25, spectators rushed to the Malian Theatre to enjoy once again my production of Hagop Baronian's "The Dentist ... Again?"

On the same evening, the State Chamber Musical Theatre opened a new play, Marc Camoletti's "Love French Style," which was repeated on February 26, despite continuous massive demonstrations right next to the theatre.

Theatre lovers filled the house notwithstanding chaotic traffic jams created by the riots.

I attended the second performance of "Love French Style" and witnessed how the public enjoyed itself for an hour and a half, non-stop.

Some may find it frivolous to allow oneself such light "entertainment," a typical naughty-naughty French comedy.

Nonetheless, I'm not too sure if the "farce" was not taking place on the other side of the theatre walls, in the street! Mr. and Mrs. Ceausescu's execution was re-enacted next door, on Baghramyan Street, to the "amusement" of the protesters. Perhaps that sort of black humor is more to the taste of some? Different lives on parallel streets! On one side: chaos and hatred, on the other, a celebration of life and love!

The director of "Love French Style" was Karapet Karajyan, who successfully performed in my production of Alan Ayckbourn's "Bedroom Farce" last year (to reopen incidentally on March 5th at the same theatre). This play was his official debut as a director, and he was able to maintain a fast pace, emblematic to French comedies. I was happy to see how the Parisian tempo and dynamics were brilliantly executed, something I had found lacking in Armenia when I first directed an archetypally French Sacha Guitry play and the rapid-fire romp "Dentist" a few years ago.

Karajyan was also able to fully exploit his young actors' physical attributes and athletic/aesthetic gifts. It is so refreshing and encouraging to see this new generation getting rid of past "traditional-Armenian" taboos and archaic bashfulness with such contemporary freedom of body and mind, physical audacity, totally unafraid of goofing around with such unrestrained silliness.

The youthful and enthusiastic cast includes a bunch of wild and attractive actors; Hayk Petrosyan, Arthur Petrosyan, Georg Vardanyan, and hilariously droll (and sexy) comedienne Arevik Avetisyan, Laura Torosyan, and Ani Nikoyan.

The thirst for light-hearted entertainment is palpable on stage and off.

If the reader still thinks this sounds a bit trivial in the midst of what is happening now in Armenia, I insist on the opposite view and say it is vital; a fundamental necessity that must enjoy the full support of the government.

Allow me, on this occasion, to mention just two reproaches. This does not only refer to this particular performance nor this specific company. The contemporary Armenian stage suffers noticeably from a lack of voice and speech training. Diction is mostly rather poor and quite often sentences are more double-guessed by the public than properly heard. The audience should not only fully understand the text but also avoid asking one another "what did he say?" Perhaps audiences are also to blame for being less demanding in this particular field having been used to watching TV shows and not bothering to miss some of the dialogue. After all, speech is the most essential craft to master in the art of theatre. I am hopeful that this deficiency will be corrected shortly.

The second, more dangerous problem, is the fact that most



audience members are still not wearing masks while the performers are risking their lives on stage to provide them with a few hours of art and culture.

Living-art performers ought to be considered as working in high-risk and therefore be fully supported by the Ministry of health and be tested free of charge. They must also be considered priority cases like doctors and medical staff members when vaccination reaches Armenia.

To audiences, in Armenia, all I can say is to stop behaving like irresponsible children lest the theatres are closed down once again.

"Love French Style" was designed by Mary Areyan, the choreographer was Naka Mirzoyan and the musical design was by the director himself.

Congratulations to all and carry on the good and crucially vital work.

Foreign Ministry Issues Statement Marking 33rd Anniversary of Sumgait Massacres

YEREVAN — The Armenian Foreign Ministry has issued a statement in connection with the 33rd anniversary of the Armenian pogroms in Sumgait, Azerbaijan that reads as follows:

"Thirty-three years ago, on February 27-29, 1988, pre-planned massacres of Armenians were carried out in the city of Sumgait (Azerbaijan) amid the encouragement of the Azerbaijani authorities and the permissiveness of the law enforcement bodies. Hundreds of Armenians were killed, including women, children and elderly, and thousands of Armenians were forcibly displaced.

The Sumgait massacre was a response to the aspiration of the people of Artsakh to assert their inalienable right to a dignified and safe life in their historical homeland and to exercise their right to self-determination. Azerbaijan opposed the attempts of exercising human rights with the policy of collective punishment, subjecting the Armenian population of the Sumgait town to severe violence and torture.

The atrocities of Sumgait instigated the ethnic cleansing and massacres of Armenians in other cities of Azerbaijan, such as Baku and Gandzak. Moreover, the unequivocal justification of such crime, the glorification of the murderers for killing Armenians were reflected in the efforts of the Azerbaijani authorities to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with the use of force.

Last year, on September 27 the full-fledged war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh and its people was accompanied by similar war crimes against the Armenian identity, with one difference – the murders of the civilians were not carried out by controlled mobs, but by servicemen of the Azerbaijani armed forces and the relevant videos were uploaded on the Internet.

During the 44-day war, the Azerbaijani armed forces, driven by a sense of impunity, committed numerous violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, which are manifestations of mass atrocities, including ethnic cleansing and war crimes. While adhering to the behavior of terrorist groups, the Azerbaijani armed forces committed violations against prisoners of war, civilians, barbarically destroyed historical-cultural monuments and desecrated sanctuaries. The executions of the Armenian prisoners of war and civilians in the Hadrut region of Artsakh and other settlements fallen under the military control of Azerbaijan are the results of the past uncondemned crimes.

Today, by paying tribute to the innocent victims of the Armenian massacres in Sumgait, we once again emphasize the determination of the Republic of Armenia, Republic of Artsakh and all Armenians to live a free, independent and dignified life in their homeland.'

The Sumgait pogrom targeted the Armenian population of the seaside town of Sumgait in Soviet Azerbaijan in late February 1988. It occurred in the early stages of the Karabakh Movement. On February 27, 1988, mobs of ethnic Azerbaijanis formed into groups and attacked and killed Armenians on the streets and in their apartments; widespread looting and a general lack of concern from police officers allowed the violence to continue for three days.

Armenian Resettlement Coalition Launches to Benefit Displaced Families

YEREVAN — Four Armenia and diaspora-based community organizations have banded together to form the Armenian Resettlement Coalition (ARC) to immediately address the thousands of Armenian families displaced from the Artsakh war that wish to permanently remain in Armenia. Focus on Children Now (FCN), Sahman NGO, Teach For Armenia and the Paros Foundation have entered into a coalition agreement to form the Armenian Resettlement Coalition (ARC). Each of ARC's members have agreed to take on an important aspect of this complete restart for these families in Armenia.

The Paros Foundation is financially responsible for purchasing homes, home renovations and its staff to identify and screen families for resettlement. Sahman NGO, will finance, design and implement a significant economic support effort to enable each family to successfully generate enough income to care for their family. Focus on Children Now (FCN) will completely furnish the family home including major appliances and will supplement each of the family's children with a three-month nutrition. In addition, FCN will underwrite the tuition of any kin-



The Tumanyan Family

dergarten-aged children to attend school and secure the benefit of early education. Teach For Armenia will provide each school-aged child a computer tablet and internet connection. In addition, Teach For Armenia's Emergency Education Program will work directly with school leadership to provide additional educational and psychological support for these children as part of their community transition and integration. Coalition partners will offer final approvals for each aspect of the complete package for each family.

By addressing the critical issue of resettlement in this complete and comprehensive manner, ARC's beneficiary families will have the greatest chance for success in their new communities. The budget for one family resettlement is \$37,500 and ARC partners have committed a total of \$300,000 to resettle the first eight families.

To date, more than 80 families have been initially screened and five have been selected as project beneficiaries. The Tavush Region village of Nerkin Karmir Aghbyur has been selected as the first relocation community and five homes have been purchased and reconstruction is underway. Discussions are taking place with approved family members regarding economic opportunity including agribusinesses. School and village leaders in Nerkin Karmir Aghbyur are engaged and preparing to welcome this new influx of people into their community. ARC hopes to move the first family into their home by early March.

To donate to ARC and its effort to resettle displaced Armenian families from Artsakh, visit:

For more information, contact any of the coalition partners or email armenian-resettlementcoalition@gmail.com



ARMENIA

Unlawful Attacks on Medical Facilities And Personnel in Nagorno Karabakh

New Research on Three Incidents from 2020 Conflict

By Hugh Williamson

MARTAKERT, Karabakh — Three unlawful attacks on medical facilities by Azerbaijani forces during the six-week armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh have come to light in recent Human Rights Watch research in the region.

Human Rights Watch documented multiple unlawful strikes on a public hospital in Martakert in September through November 2020, and an unlawful strike on a military hospital in the town's outskirts in October. The hospitals were very close to the front lines at the time.

The weapon used by Azerbaijani forces against the military hospital — a satellite-guided variant of an Israeli-supplied rocket artillery system called LAR-160 — suggests that the strike was intentional. The strikes on the public hospital, including with Grad rockets and cluster munitions, appeared indiscriminate.

The attacks damaged both hospitals and impeded medical work, but no one was wounded or killed in the attacks.

On-site observations, analysis of videos, most of which were on social media, and satellite imagery analysis enabled Human Rights Watch to identify numerous legitimate military targets in Martakert, some of them close to the two hospitals. By locating military facilities, equipment, or personnel inside the city, and near the two hospitals, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian authorities endangered civilians and put medical workers and their patients at risk.

Human Rights Watch also documented a deliberate attack on September 28, apparently by Azerbaijani forces, on an Armenian military ambulance, in which assailants shot and killed a military doctor.

Human Rights Watch previously documented damage to two hospitals in Stepanakert, the capital city of Nagorno-Karabakh, due to Azerbaijan's indiscriminate strikes in October, and documented damage to a health clinic in the Azerbaijani city of Barda, in an indiscriminate attack by Armenian forces.

Medical facilities and personnel are civilian objects with special protections under the laws of war. They include hospitals, clinics, medical centers, and ambulances and other medical transportation, whether military or civilian. Parties to a conflict are obligated to ensure that they do not endanger or harm medical personnel, and do not attack or damage hospitals and ambulances.

The analysis of these unlawful attacks is not intended to be a comprehensive account of all damage to medical facilities during the armed conflict. The Azerbaijani government alleged, as of October 13, that six medical facilities had been damaged. Armenian authorities told Human Rights Watch that at least nine medical facilities were damaged in Stepanakert, and in the Martakert, Martuni, and Askeran districts of Nagorno Karabakh.

Possible Targeted Attack on Martakert Military Hospital

Azerbaijani rocket artillery hit a military hospital in Aghabekalanj, a village just southwest of Martakert city, along the main road, in an apparently deliberate strike on October 14, 2020.

Before being hit, the hospital had been providing first aid to the wounded — as many as 130 a day, hospital staff told Human Rights Watch — some of whom were then transported to Stepanakert for further treatment.

The nearest military installation is 1.5 kilometers to the south, along the main road. Satellite imagery taken on October 8 shows that one of the installation's buildings had been hit, damaging its roof. The satellite imagery also shows military positions that pre-date the outbreak of hostilities, fewer than 350 meters southwest of the hospital. Earthen berms are also visible about 150 meters north of the hospital.

As Azerbaijani forces frequently shelled Martakert and surrounding areas during the conflict, patients were treated in the two-story hospital's reinforced basement, where medical staff also slept.

Human Rights Watch visited the hospital in November and found that the attack had caused significant damage. A small structure by the gate was largely destroyed, and the medical workers' housing in the back was severely damaged. The outer walls of the main building showed blast and fragmentation damage, and the windows were shattered.

In the yard, there were remnants of several burned vehicles, too charred to identify. The staff said that most were military ambulances.

Sasha Baghiryian, a 63-year-old hospital maintenance worker, and Hayk Aghajanyan, a 20-year-old military serviceman who had been assigned to the hospital to help carry the wounded and run errands for medical workers, said the attack took place between 4:00 and 4:30 p.m. Satellite imagery shows that the attack took place between 11:48 a.m. local time, on October 14, and 11:54 a.m. local time, on October 15. At the time of the attack, both men were in the basement, where medical workers were per-

had never been used for any other purposes, and that the International Committee of the Red Cross had the hospital's coordinates. The front of the admissions building was marked with a large Bowl of Hygieia, a cup with a snake, a pharmacy and medical symbol. According to hospital staff, ambulances were coming and going around the clock.

A hospital staff member showed Human Rights Watch a small, one-story building about 100 meters behind the hospital, which he said had served as a warehouse for landmines. He said that "all the landmines were picked up by the military and moved elsewhere when the fighting began in September." The warehouse as such likely represented a legitimate military target, and by storing landmines so close to the hospital Armenian forces put the hospital, its staff, and patients at risk. However, the warehouse was empty at the time of the attack and there were no military positions on the hospital grounds, the staff member said.



The yard of the Martakert military hospital damaged in the October 14, 2020 attack by Azerbaijani forces, Martakert, Nagorno-Karabakh. © 2020 Dmitry Beliaikov for Human Rights Watch

forming surgery on three wounded servicemen.

Baghiryian and Aghajanyan said that they heard four separate explosions as the rockets hit one after the other. Aghajanyan showed Human Rights Watch four impact craters.

An examination of the impact sites, weapon remnants, and the proximity of the four points of impact suggest that the strike was carried out by the satellite-guided variant of an Israeli-supplied rocket artillery system called LAR-160, using EXTRA rockets. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute lists the transfer of LAR-160 launchers and EXTRA rockets from Israel to Azerbaijan in 2005-2006. An EXTRA rocket is equipped with a unitary warhead containing 120 kilograms of explosives, and its manufacturer claims that accuracy of less than 10-meters (circular-error-probable) can be achieved by the rocket's satellite guidance capability.

In light of the preexisting military positions that were about 350 meters from the hospital, and the constant, heavy shelling of the area near the hospital, the October 14 strike may have been indiscriminate. However, the accuracy of the LAR-160 gives a basis to conclude that the strike may have been deliberate.

The hospital roof was not marked with a red cross to signify that it was a medical facility, but the then-ombudsperson for Nagorno Karabakh told Human Rights Watch that the facility was well known as a hospital,

Indiscriminate Strikes on Martakert Public Hospital

Martakert's public hospital, the R. Bazyan District Medical Association, is on the northern end of Sakharov Street, which suffered extensive shelling damage during the six-week war.

At the southern end of Sakharov Street, 800 meters from the hospital, there is a military installation, with military positions and military vehicles. A local resident said that he and his battalion were based there throughout the hostilities. When a Human Rights Watch researcher examined the site in November, it had been clearly damaged by shelling.

Another military installation that, as of October 8, had visible activity, is about 250 meters from the hospital. A satellite image taken at 11:54 a.m. local time on September 27, 2020, shows new damage to at least five buildings on the north edge of this base, indicating that the site was struck several times hours after the hostilities began.

Dozens of military positions and earthen berms, which were there before the start of hostilities on September 27, some as close as 350 meters from the hospital, are visible on satellite imagery. These positions are especially concentrated in the eastern part of the town and oriented in the direction of the line of contact. As of October 8, there were large vehicles at some of these positions, suggesting that they may have been in use.



ARMENIA

A video recorded on October 6 that credible local sources gave Human Rights Watch shows military personnel and a transport vehicle driving along Sakharov Street, approximately 100 meters south of the hospital entrance.

Due to intense shelling in the area from the first day of hostilities, on October 4 the hospital staff were evacuated to a village some thirty km away and the hospital became a military medical triage center for wounded Armenian forces.

A hospital custodian who regularly checked the facilities after the civilian evacuation said the hospital was hit several times on various days during the six weeks of fighting.

In the October 8 satellite imagery, several impact craters are also visible in the immediate vicinity of the military installation that is 250 meters from the hospital. The October 6 video also shows a large impact crater on the main road, approximately 210 meters west of the hospital.

Three witnesses said most of the damage to the hospital was inflicted on November 9, when shelling in the area was particularly heavy. Satellite imagery shows that the military installation 250 meters from the hospital was also struck sometime between the early afternoon on November 9 and the morning of November 10.

Human Rights Watch visited the hospital on November 24 and noted significant blast and fragmentation damage to the hospital and the adjacent outpatient clinic. Numerous munition fragments were seen at impact sites in the hospital yard, in particular fragments of Grads and cluster munitions carried by LAR-160 rockets. A staff surgeon at the hospital, Dr. Tigran Arzumanyan, and a staff pediatrician, Dr. Khachatur Melikyan, said that the hospital's roof was also damaged in several places.

The two doctors said that when the shelling began on September 27, staff moved all 39 patients, including children and mothers with newborn babies, to the basement. Those whose health allowed it were discharged that day, and the rest were promptly evacuated to Stepanakert, 46 kilometers away.

They said that during the first day of hostilities the hospital also provided first aid to 80 wounded military servicemen, 78 of them with fragmentation wounds, and several wounded civilians.

"We lost electricity, so we had to use flashlights while working on the wounded," said Dr. Melikyan. "When the first munition landed here, it was such a big bang that the tiles in the basement flew up."

Several days into the hostilities, the hospital staff were evacuated to ChdIran village, where they worked as a triage brigade for the wounded.

Due to the sheer number of strikes on the hospital, Human Rights Watch was not in a position to match particular strikes with specific damage. But neither of the explosive weapons that Azerbaijani forces used in these strikes – Grads and cluster munitions – can be targeted with enough accuracy to have avoided damaging civilian structures in the area.

Explosive weapons with wide-area effects may have a large destructive radius, be inherently inaccurate, or deliver multiple munitions at the same time, causing high civilian loss if used in populated areas. Often a single weapon will fall into two of these categories.

Grads are unguided rockets that cannot be targeted accurately and are often fired in salvos from multi-barrel rocket launchers to saturate a wide area. Based on the examination of the fragments and the impact points, Human Rights Watch concluded that Azerbaijani forces used "enhanced fragmentation" Grads, which have a layer of steel spheres imbedded between the explosive substance and the skin of the rocket to maximize casualty-producing effect.

Grad rockets cannot be targeted with sufficient precision to differentiate military targets, which may be attacked, from civilians and civilian structures, such as homes and schools not being used for military purposes, which are protected from attack. So, their use in populated areas violates the laws-of-war prohibition against indiscriminate attacks.

Cluster munitions, in this case carried by LAR-160 rockets – Human Rights Watch found two rocket bodies in the yard, close to one of the impact points – are an inherently indiscriminate weapon banned by an international treaty. They typically open in the air, dispersing multiple bomblets or submunitions over a wide area, putting anyone in the area at the time of attack, whether combatants or civilians, at risk of death or injury. Many of the submunitions do not explode on contact, but remain armed, becoming de facto landmines.

Locations contaminated by unexploded submunitions remain dangerous until the remnants are cleared and de-



View from the window of the Martakert military hospital, which was struck by Azerbaijani rocket artillery on October 14, 2020. Martakert, Nagorno-Karabakh. © 2020 Dmitry Belikov for Human Rights Watch

stroyed. Both Azerbaijan and Armenia used them extensively during the six-week conflict. Use of cluster munitions shows blatant disregard for civilian life and both countries should join the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which bans them, ratified by 110 countries. They should also make an immediate commitment not to use indiscriminate weapons, like Grads, in populated areas.

On September 28, a group of five apparent Azerbaijani servicemen attacked an ambulance on the road in Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan, killing a military doctor, Sasha Rustamyan, 26, and injuring the driver and the accompanying Armenian army sergeant.

At the time, Kalbajar district, now under Azerbaijani control, was still held by Armenian forces. The driver, 26, and the sergeant, 41, interviewed separately, said that the attack took place between 1 and 2 p.m. by the Omar mountain pass, which is very close to the then-line of contact. The ambulance was heading to pick up the wounded at a frontline position, and the sergeant rode in the ambulance to provide directions.

Suddenly, they saw five servicemen, in fatigues and armed with assault rifles, possibly a patrol, blocking the road. The ambulance stopped some 25 to 30 meters away. Dr. Rustamyan jumped out, apparently intending to speak to the servicemen, but they opened fire on the vehicle.

"[Dr. Rustamyan] must have thought they were our



Remnant of a rocket body found on the grounds of the Martakert military hospital, Martakert, Nagorno-Karabakh. Human Rights Watch's examination of the impact sites, weapon remnants, and the proximity of the four points of impact indicate that the October 14, 2020 strike was carried out by the satellite-guided variant of an Israeli-supplied rocket artillery system called LAR-160, using EXTRA rockets. © 2020 Tanya Lokshina/Human Rights Watch

[forces]... and then everything happened so quickly," said the sergeant. Dr. Rustamyan's relatives showed Human Rights Watch his death certificate stating that he had died of multiple bullet wounds. He was a recent graduate of the Armenian State Medical University.

"The windshield was riddled with bullets," the driver said. He recalled touching his head and feeling blood on his hand. He executed a protective maneuver by putting the car in reverse, and then turning it over on its left side, by a gorge. He saw Dr. Rustamyan turning back towards the ambulance. Ten meters away from it, he was shot in the back and fell to the ground. "I knew he was dead," the driver said. "I pushed what remained of the windshield out with my hand, crawled out, shut my eyes, then threw myself into the gorge... While I was rolling down, I heard an explosion."

The driver, diagnosed with a concussion and mild injuries, and severe shock spent a month in a hospital recovering. The sergeant was at a hospital undergoing treatment for his arm wound when Human Rights Watch interviewed him in December.

The ambulance was a regular UAZ-3962 medical service vehicle. Although painted khaki, it cannot be confused with any other type of military vehicle because of the prominent red-cross markings, including just above the windshield, and the "medical service" sign on the side. At the time of the attack, the driver, the sergeant, and the doctor were dressed in Armenian military fatigues, but the doctor wore a medical insignia on his sleeve. The driver had an assault rifle, which the doctor held while riding but left in the vehicle when he got out of the car to speak to the gunmen.

Carrying firearms for self-defense does not constitute an act "harmful to the enemy," and the vehicle retains its status as a medical unit.

Neither the driver nor the sergeant could see identifying insignia on the fatigues of the servicemen nor heard them speak. The overall context strongly suggests that the attackers were Azerbaijani forces.

Ambulances have protected status under international humanitarian law, and the presence of military servicemen and firearms in an ambulance does not remove the protection unless there are grounds to suggest that it is being used for purposes harmful to the enemy, such as conveying soldiers to the front line or carrying out attacks. There is no evidence to suggest either was the case on September 28.

The servicemen on the road should have taken all feasible precautions to ensure that the vehicle and its occupants were valid military targets before carrying out an attack. The attack on the marked ambulance and the subsequent killing of Dr. Rustamyan appear to have been carried out deliberately and may constitute a war crime.

(Hugh Williamson is the Human Rights Watch Director for Europe and Central Asia Division.)

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

No Update on Armenia-Registered Boeing Ending Up in Iran

YEREVAN (PanArmenian.net) — The civil aviation authority on March 1 failed to provide information about an Armenia-registered Boeing 737 which found its way to Iran under unknown circumstances in mid-February.

The Aviation Committee did say that an investigation is underway and that the Armenian authorities are in close contact “with all stakeholders.” The agency on March 1 said that more information will be provided in the near future.

The Foreign Ministry said, meanwhile, that the Armenian side has not received a note of protest from the US Embassy in Yerevan.

Analyst and expert on US foreign policy Suren Sargsyan said earlier that the plane was given or sold to Iran under unknown circumstances. He said it is surprising that the aviation authorities have allowed that to happen, given the international sanctions against Iran. The aircraft was supposed to arrive in Armenia days ago but landed in Tehran instead.

Polish Politician Offers Himself in Exchange for Armenian POWs

WARSAW (Panorm.am) — Polish politician Tomasz Lech Buczek, who actively presented Azerbaijan’s war crimes in Artsakh from the very beginning of the 2020 war, has sent a letter to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, offering himself in exchange for Armenian prisoners of war (POWs).

“In the name of eternal truth, faith and love for others. In the name of humanism, I propose the President that my person, Tomasz Lech Buczek, be exchanged for Armenian prisoners of war detained, humiliated and tortured in Azerbaijan, with the condition of their immediate release,” the letter said.

There are over 300 desperate families waiting for them, Buczek noted.

Earlier in February, the politician sent the first copy of his publication about Azerbaijani war crimes against the Armenians of Artsakh during the recent war to Aliyev and a number of world leaders, including Emmanuel Macron and Joe Biden.

Trilateral Working Group On Nagorno Karabakh to Hold a Meeting via Video-Conference

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The fourth meeting of the trilateral working group (Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia) on Nagorno Karabakh at the level of deputy prime ministers will be held on March 1 in a video conference mode, Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk told reporters.

At their recent meeting, the parties discussed the implementation of agreements on transport and economic relations concluded between the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia and decided to finalize their draft report envisaged in their January 11, 2021 statement.

United States, Turkey Warn Armenian Military Not to Meddle in Politics

WASHINGTON (RFE/RL) — The US State Department has warned Armenia’s armed forces to stay out of politics but stopped short of calling their demands for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s resignation a coup attempt.

The department spokesman, Ned Price, said late on Thursday, February 25, that the United States is “very closely” monitoring political developments in Armenia.

“We urge all parties to exercise restraint and to avoid any escalatory or violent actions,” Price told a daily news briefing in Washington. “We remind all parties of the bedrock democratic principle that states’ armed forces should not intervene in domestic politics.”

“The United States has been a steadfast supporter of the development of democratic processes and institutions in Armenia. We continue to support Armenia’s democracy and its sovereignty, and we urge its leaders to resolve their differences peacefully while respecting the rule of law, Armenia’s democracy, and its institutions,” he said.

The US Embassy in Yerevan issued a similar statement earlier on Thursday amid mounting political tensions in the country.

In an unprecedented statement, the Armenian military’s top brass demanded the res-

Sarkissian was in no rush to sack the chief of the army’s General Staff, Onik Gasparyan, and planned on Friday to meet the latter as part of his efforts to de-escalate the political situation.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned on Friday, February 26, what he described as attempts to stage a military coup in Armenia.

“[Prime Minister] Nikol Pashinyan is already in a situation where the people could achieve his resignation. But if they

are talking about a direct overthrow of the government then our position is clear: we are against such steps,” he said, according to the Anadolu news agency.

“Turkey opposes any coups, including in Armenia,” added Erdogan, who himself was nearly overthrown by Turkish army units in 2016.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoglu made similar comments on Thursday.

“It is unacceptable when the military demands the resignation of an elected government,” he said. “So we condemn the coup attempt in Armenia.”

“WE URGE ALL PARTIES TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT AND TO AVOID ANY ESCALATORY OR VIOLENT ACTIONS,”

NED PRICE

U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON

ignation of Pashinyan and his government, accusing them of putting Armenia “on the brink of destruction” after the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Pashinyan rejected the demand as an attempt to stage a military coup.

Price made clear that the military’s actions have so far not met Washington’s definition of a coup d’etat.

“As you know, the Department of State has a process to determine whether a coup has transpired ... Of course, there has been no such determination in this case,” he said.

Unlike Pashinyan, Armenian President Armen Sarkissian did not describe the military’s demands as a coup attempt. Also,

Dutch Parliament Urges Govt to Recognize Armenian Genocide

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (FAON, Euronews) — The House of Representatives of the Netherlands adopted on February 25 a motion put forward by MP Joël Voordewind (ChristenUnie), calling on the Dutch government explicitly to recognize the Armenian Genocide, reports the Federation of Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands (FAON).

The motion was adopted almost unanimously. This very broad support for the motion shows that for too long there has been great dissatisfaction in the parliament how the successive governments have dealt with the Armenian Genocide.

FAON, the 24 April Committee and all Armenians are thankful to Joël Voordewind and also to the many other MPs, who were committed to the recognition of the Armenian genocide for many years. Many of them showed their commitment by being present at 24 April commemorations, at Genocide monuments, concerts, such as the Armenian Genocide Centennial commemoration concert in the Grote Kerk in the Hague. FAON also thanks the members of the Recommending Committee of 24 April

Committee for their support for years.

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

The failure to identify and recognize historical events as genocide can be considered as the wrong signal.

The FAON assumes that the government will not disregard this very clear statement of the Parliament and will implement it.

In earlier motions (2015, 2018), the Parliament explicitly recognized the Armenian Genocide, after the Dutch Parliament had already recognized it in 2004 in the motion by MP Rouvoet adopted unanimously, which appeals to the government “to expressly and continuously raise the recognition of the Armenian Genocide during the bilateral and EU dialogue with Turkey.”

With the new motion, the parliament announces that it can no longer agree with the

government’s current approach.

Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok had advised against the motion prior to the vote, arguing that the term genocide carried “an enormous connotation,” while caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte previously has stated that the motion would not contribute to reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey.

Karabakh Adopts Statement on Azeri Occupation of Its Territories

STEPANAKERT (PanArmenian.Net) — The National Assembly of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) has declared that Karabakh territories under Baku’s control have been occupied by the Azerbaijani military. The statement drafted by lawmaker Davit Melkumyan was approved by Karabakh’s parliament on Monday, March 1, 2021.

According to the document, Azerbaijan’s aggression against Artsakh and the occupation of said territories can’t have a legal impact on the status of the Artsakh Republic and the process of determining its borders during future negotiations.

The National Assembly also reaffirmed that Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed independence on September 2, 1991, based on the USSR legislation and the norms of international law.

The Karabakh lawmakers also agreed that Azerbaijan has violated its obligations to renounce the use of force or threat of force by launching large-scale hostilities against Artsakh, which has resulted in the death of thousands of people and the deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure and cultural heritage sites.

New Indictment Against Paylan From Ankara

ISTANBUL (Nor Marmara) — On February 27, it was reported in the Turkish press that the Ankara Chief Prosecutor’s Office has considered Garo Paylan, HDP deputy representing Diyarbakir, as a criminal due to his use of the word *sevgili* (Turkish for “dear” - or “*sireli*” in Armenian) prefixed to the names of Selahattin Demirtas, Figen Yuksekdagi, and Leyla Guven. According to the prosecutor’s office, by saying “Dear Selahattin Demirtas,” “Dear Figen,” and “Dear Leyla Guven,” Garo Paylan praised terrorism and those who support terrorism.

Paylan made the statements on March 26, 2019 in the Cinar district of Diyarbakir, in the lead-up to the regional elections. The prosecutor’s office sees criminality in Paylan’s speech and now demands that his parliamentary immunity be dissolved.



Garo Paylan

Community News

Super Grandmaster Levon Aronian to Move to Saint Louis, Represent the US

SAINT LOUIS, Mo. — The Saint Louis Chess Club announced this week that Armenian Grandmaster (GM) Levon Aronian will relocate to Saint Louis, MO and represent the USA in future competitions. “I am sincerely proud to have had the honor of making a significant contribution to the greatest achievements of Armenian chess. Clearly, it is impossible to reach world heights in chess without the huge amount of work

done at home and through the support of my fellow countrymen. I truly appreciate the personal attention and support that I received from the third President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan for many years.”



The 38-year-old grandmaster first made a name for himself by winning the 1994 World Youth Chess Championship. Aronian went on to lead the Armenian national team to three Olympiad gold medals (2006, 2008, 2012) and one World Team Championship gold (2011). Throughout his career Aronian has amassed many individual victories as well, including the World Cup (2005, 2017), Linares (2006), Corus/Tata Steel (2008, 2011), Norway Chess (2017), Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz (2017, 2019) and the Sinquefield Cup (2015, 2018).

Aronian is also a world champion in three formats; he is a former Chess960 World Champion (2006, 2007), World Rapid Champion (2009), and World Blitz World Champion (2010). “Levon played in our first-ever Sinquefield Cup in 2013. I’ve come to know him over the years to be a fierce competitor and true gentleman. He represents the best of our sport,” said Rex Sinquefield, co-founder of the Saint Louis Chess Club. “When he came to us with interest in moving to Saint Louis and representing the U.S., I could think of no one better. We welcome him with open arms.”

The Saint Louis Chess Club has become a second home to Aronian. After winning the 2019 Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz, he spoke fondly of his many visits to the Central West End. At the closing ceremony he remarked, “I love playing in the city of Saint Louis, where chess players are proud to be chess players and we’re loved, and that is mainly thanks to the Sinquefield family.”

Aronian joins dozens of other chess players who have decided to make Saint Louis, the nation’s chess capital, their home. The “Sinquefield Effect” is largely credited with the resurgence of

see MOVE, page 9



Aronian wins Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz, 2019



On the plaza

Flame of Faith

NEW YORK — In a ceremony that connected Armenia’s deeply-rooted traditions with our unwavering Christian faith today, New York’s St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral celebrated the eve of the Feast of the Lord’s Presentation to the Temple (Dyarnuntarach).

The two-part, pre-festal service of prayer and light, presided over by Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan, took place the evening of Saturday, February 13, as a prelude to the badarak the following morning on the presentation day itself. The events were broadcast over the Facebook pages of St. Vartan Cathedral and Vemkar, enabling the faithful to bear witness to this spiritually-uplifting and inspiring service from their homes.

The event began with a brief “anticipatory prayer service” within the warmth of the cathedral sanctuary, where members of the clergy participated in the recitation of prayer, as a small group of lay people observed and prayed while socially distanced from the pews. Worshippers then moved in procession outside to the snow-covered cathedral plaza, braving the frigid temperatures.

Clergy gathered before the bonfire, situated in the middle of the plaza, to continue the second part of the service. Amidst the censing and singing of hymns, the light of the bonfire cut through the darkness of the

cold night, its flames bathing the plaza in a deep orange hue under the night sky. The faithful, who remained appropriately distanced from one another at the foot of the stairs leading from the cathedral sanctuary to the plaza, watched and bowed their heads in reverence, their faces gently illuminated by firelight. The light took on special meaning this year on account of the darkness and fear that the covid pandemic has cast over the world. Yet, despite the freezing temperatures and blowing wind, the fire did not die out, symbolizing our enduring Christian Armenian faith.

see FLAME, page 10



Bishop Daniel Findikyan at the service

Maine Foundation To Tackle Impact of Azerbaijani Aggression On Artsakh Population

WESTBROOK, Maine — Author, lawyer, lecturer and human rights advocate, Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte in January launched the Anna Astvatsaturian Foundation, a nonprofit corporation that will focus its efforts on community initiatives in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh and the Armenian Diaspora. The first project of the foundation will work toward determining the impact of Azerbaijani aggression on the Artsakh population.

Over the past decade, Astvatsaturian Turcotte spearheaded dozens of humanitarian, development, cultural, environmental and educational projects worldwide to support the community and to benefit the vulnerable population in Armenia and Artsakh Republic. These include but are not limited to the following: Renovation of 7 school bathrooms with Paros Foundation in Khndzoresk, Armenia; planting a forest with Armenia Tree Project in Talin, Armenia; supporting the Artsakh Ballet College with 300 ballet costumes, clothing and hundreds of dance shoes; supporting women’s group initiatives across Armenia; providing medical eye care, surgeries and eyewear to two villages in Syunik region of Armenia; bath/kitchen portable unit for Artsakh border post with Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund (AWHF); and hundreds



Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte

of military grade medical kits for Artsakh border posts with AWHF.

To maximize the impact of her work, Astvatsaturian Turcotte took the first steps to formalize the foundation in the spring of 2020. As Artsakh and Armenia begin to rebuild in their post-war reality, the foundation will continue her work to strengthen the Armenian nation independently and in collaboration with her trusted partners.

This first project is a detailed and well-planned initiative to collect empirical data on the displaced and affected population of Artsakh. The project began in December 2021 in partnership with Armenia’s Association of Social Workers, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Republic of Armenia, the Ministry of Housing and Social Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh and the Offices of Armenia’s and Artsakh’s Human Rights Ombudsmen. Individuals interested in contributing to this project should contact the Foundation. The foundation’s website is www.astvatsaturian.org.

Dr. Vartan Ghugasian Becomes Honorary Fellow Of Dental Honor Society

BOSTON — On November 9, the American Academy of Dental Science, the first and oldest honor society for the field in the world, bestowed honorary fellowship to Dr. Vartan Ghugasian for his years of service to the organization.

He has affectionately been referred to as the “patriarch” of the group and been a member for 38 years.

Dr. Ghugasian became involved in humanitarian activities in Armenia in the wake of its independence. He volunteered to go to Armenia and make recommendations on the dental health of children. He shared his recommendations to the Howard Karagheusian Commemorative Corporation. The findings and subsequent recommendation were felt to be overwhelming — building a state-of-the art dental clinic in Nork. The foundation, however, undertook making this a priority. Almost all the cities requested similar faculties to provide free dental care to children. Ultimately, the corporation constructed six modern facilities with staff throughout the country and to this day they continue operation.

Ghugasian would arrange for one dental staff member regularly to come to the Boston area and learn the most modern techniques and procedures to disseminate knowledge to other staff members in regional clinics.

In recognition of his humanitarian actions for the homeland, the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and the government awarded him the Medal of St. Nerses Shnorhali.

Ghugasian has remained active in teaching at Harvard and Tufts dentals schools as well as remaining active in other dental societies.

He is a founding member of the Armenian Dental Society, fellow of the International College of Dentists, a fellow of the American College of Dentists and the Pierre Fauchard Academy as well as others. He maintained a limited private practice in the Boston area until health issues interfered.



Dr. Vartan Ghugasian (Photo by Leo Gozbekian)

AIWA Launches 2021-2022 Scholarship Program

Eva & Jack Medzorian Endowment Fund Added

BOSTON — The Armenian International Women’s Association (AIWA) announces that it is now accepting scholarship applications for the 2021-2022 academic year. The deadline for submission is April 19, 2021.

New this year is the establishment of the Eva and Jack Medzorian Scholarship Endowment Fund in the amount of \$50,000. In accordance with the wishes of the donor, Eva Medzorian, income will be allocated annually to applicants from Armenia, specifically from the Tavush region, including the border town of Berd.

The Medzorian awards will be added to scholarships awarded by AIWA annually, ranging in value from \$500 to \$5,000, to full-time female students of Armenian descent attending accredited colleges or universities. Students from the United States or abroad entering their junior or senior year in college, as well as graduate students, are eligible to apply for the awards, which are based on merit as well as financial need.

In establishing the new scholarships, Eva Medzorian stressed the importance of supporting rural areas of Armenia as well projects in the capital of Yerevan. Ever since the 1988 earthquake in Armenia, she and her late husband Jack have made dozens of trips to the country to meet pressing needs there, medical care and school aid



Eva and the late Jack Medzorian

prominent among their efforts.

As co-founder as well as first president of AIWA, Medzorian has stressed the importance of diasporan support for independent Armenia, and in recent years her attention has become increasingly focused on the northeastern border of the country, whose inhabitants face all the difficulties of rural living as well as constant pressure from their nearby Azerbaijani neighbors.

\$60,000 to \$75,000 Awarded Annually

A total of \$60,000 to \$75,000 is awarded annually by AIWA (including the Central Board as well as its Affiliates) to graduate and undergraduate students from the United States, Canada, Armenia, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, and other countries in fields ranging from mathematics and architecture to government, public administration, medicine, art, and design.

The scholarships are funded by endowments as well as annual donations. Every

year the need for support far outweighs available funds, and AIWA encourages donations for this important means of assistance and encouragement for talented and needy student applicants.

AIWA’s scholarship program was initiated with the Agnes K. Missirian Scholarship, established in 1996 in memory of the professor of management at Bentley University who was an early AIWA member and a strong advocate for women’s rights. Over the years grants have been added in the names of Ethel Jaferian Duffett, Lucy Kasparian Aharonian (for students in the sciences), Nshan and Margrit Atinikian, Dr. Carolann S. Najarian, Hripsime Parsekian (for a student in the field of International Relations), Mary V. Toumayan, Azniv Melidonian Renjilian, and Rose A. Hovannesian.

The AIWA-Los Angeles Affiliate awards annually five to six Hasmik Mgrdichian Scholarships of \$5,000 each to California

residents (see story on this page), and the New England affiliate has established the Olga Proudian Scholarship of \$1,000 annually to a student in the field of diplomacy.

AIWA and its affiliates also grant several tuition scholarships to students at the American University of Armenia, including \$5,000 to fund two Alice Kanlian Mirak Scholarships there.

Applications for all of these awards can be made through AIWA’s new digital scholarship portal whose link can be found on the AIWA website: www.aiwainternational.org. Questions regarding AIWA scholarships can be directed to: scholarships@aiwainternational.org.

AIWA is now celebrating its 30th anniversary year. Information about its network of Armenian women and its programs to connect and elevate women globally can be found on the website or by contacting AIWA at: info@aiwainternational.org

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenia Tree Project: Lifting Villagers Out of Poverty

BOSTON — Armenia Tree Project (ATP) purchased a total of 40,257 trees from its backyard nurseries in the villages of Aghavnavank, Margahovit and Keti in 2020. Thanks to the Backyard Nursery (BYN) program villagers are able to nearly double their family income, attain more financial stability and avoid migrating for work.

The structure of the program is the following: ATP provides seeds, cuttings and seedlings to families in impoverished villages who tend and grow the plants in their own backyards over a two year period. ATP staff trains the landowners, supervises the planting, and monitors the site throughout the process. Each family has a capacity to grow 1,500 to 2,000 tree seedlings in their plots of land. Once the trees reach harvesting stage, ATP pays the BYN owner for the healthy trees that are ready to be replanted. These families then begin the nursery cycle again with a new crop of trees.

The backyard nurseries enable village residents to capitalize on their existing assets, which are mainly small parcels of productive agricultural land. By growing trees, they are contributing to sustainable forest Wmanagement in their community and



Lianna Vshtunts

earning a livelihood that enables them to remain rooted in their communities. Many of the backyard nursery owners are women, which creates a sense of empowerment, equality, and entrepreneurship.

In addition, growing seedlings in the backyard nurseries frees up space to al-

low ATP to focus on growing higher value trees, which require more active care, in its nurseries in Karin, Khachpar, and Chiva villages. The trees produced by BYN have become an important part of ATP's forestry and community plantings. Every year the quality of trees the families produce for ATP

is improved and the quantity is raised.

Currently, 30 families participate in the Backyard Nursery Micro-Enterprise project in the village of Aghavnavank and Keti (Tavush) and Margahovit (Lori).

The coronavirus pandemic and the war in Artsakh added numerous socio-economic issues in Armenia in 2020. Nearly 80 percent of the residents of Aghavnavank village are Armenian refugees who were relocated from Azerbaijan in the early 90's. The recent war forced the residents of Aghavnavank to relive the tragedies of the first Artsakh war, when many of them fled their homes in the Armenian communities of Azerbaijan to start their lives anew in Armenia.

"History is repeating itself just like a merry-go-round. My people were forced to flee again as our village in Artsakh is currently under Azeri control in accordance with the ceasefire agreement. This is indescribable pain and sorrow for all of us," says BYN owner Lusya Poghosyan, who is from the Martakert region of Artsakh. "This program is one of the few things that gives us hope for the future and it's something we can always depend on. We love the work we do and we love working with ATP's beautiful team. They are always welcome guests in our community."

According to interviews conducted by ATP in Aghavnavank village, the approximate average income for a family is \$2,000 per year (less than \$170 per month). This is based on at least one member of the family having a permanent job and receiving a monthly salary, but this is a "best case scenario." Often, families in these villages live off the fruits of their labors, or receive a modest pension or children's allowance from the government. The BYN program allows families to double their income.

"The good thing about this program is that you don't have to spend any money from your pocket. Any other business would require that," says Vahe Malakyan of Margahovit village.

The BYN sponsors donated bonuses for each of the families in January 2021 (in addition to the compensation the families received for the trees) as a reward for their hard-work of the past year and encouragement for the year ahead.

Due to its success in providing critical socioeconomic aid to some of Armenia's most vulnerable communities and the production of healthy planting material essential for Armenia's reforestation, the BYN program is set to expand significantly and will be brought to dozens more families in the provinces of Shirak, Tavush and Lori in the next 3 years.

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Super Grandmaster Levon Aronian to Move to Saint Louis, Represent the US

MOVE, from page 7
American chess over the last decade.

Aronian is currently ranked number five in the world, and he will join fellow world top-20 players Fabiano Caruana, Wesley So, Leinier Dominguez and Hikaru Nakamura to represent the United States.

Aronian informed the Armenian Chess Federation and his followers on Thursday, February 25, 2021 by stating, "I am very grateful to my family, relatives, friends, all the people who know my principles and understand my decision to change federations. I want to assure once again that I am connected to my homeland. By all means, I will continue to do the possible and the impossible for my country even from afar."

Flame of Faith

FLAME, from page 7

Christ's Light Illuminates The Darkness

As embers soared to the heavens, Bishop Daniel passionately described the significance of the fire and what it represents in our Christian faith.

"Sometimes, the most wondrous things appear in the strangest of places," he began, as he looked from the bonfire on the plaza over to the apartment buildings surrounding the cathedral. "On this cold February night, you will see people are looking down on us right now, asking 'Why are they gathered outside around a fire and singing, when they could be inside where it's warm?'"



"What we are doing," he said by way of an answer, "is continuing an ancient tradition held by the Armenian Church — which, according to the Armenian calendar, occurs the night before the 40th day after the birth of Christ." Bishop Daniel then referenced the Gospel of



Bishop Daniel Findikyan

Luke 2:21-40, which tells the story of Mary and Joseph, who, in accordance with the custom of devout Jewish parents of the 1st century A.D., took their newborn son Jesus to the Temple to present him to God.

"They said, 'This child is your gift to us, Lord, and now we give this child to you for your will, your work, your blessing, and for your good in this world,' the Primate continued.

"There at the Temple on that day, an old, pious man named Simeon, just days away for his own death, looked down upon the child and said 'Now my eyes have seen salvation.'" Bishop Daniel referred to this event as a revelation of light for the nations of the world, and described it as a light that shines everywhere so that human beings no longer live in darkness. "We now see the fullness of God's purpose revealed in a wounded and



The bonfire outside on the plaza

ailing world, a great and wondrous gift in the strangest of places."

"We light this fire to commemorate the miracle of salvation," he said.

Bishop Daniel concluded his message with a calling of spiritual reverence: "Let every one of us tremble in awe and fear at the wonder that has been given to all of us. The wonder that feels like the warmth of this fire, yet is greater than us gathering around it. May God open our eyes and hearts and minds to be able to have the faith of all of those who were brave enough to see the Light that is our Lord Jesus Christ."

The actual Feast of the Presentation went forward at St. Vartan Cathedral on the following morning, February 14, with Bishop Daniel presiding over the badarak, celebrated by Diocesan Vicar Fr. Simeon Odabashian. In an unusual confluence of church observances, this year's Feast of the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple fell on the same day as Poon Paregentan, the prelude to Great Lent (Medz Bahk), ushering the faithful into the Lenten period of fasting, penance, and reconciliation.

—Stephan S. Nigohosian



At St. Vartan Cathedral



COMMUNITY NEWS

Arkansas Library Expansion Includes Special Sculpture

By Lara Jo Hightower

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. (*Arkansas Democrat Gazette*) — “I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of a library,” wrote Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges.

Indeed, when the Fayetteville Public Library — closed to the public since late September, when finishing touches on the expansion were being made — opened its doors in January, those viewing the \$49-million expansion may see Borges’ prediction realized. I did, on a recent cold, windy December day when Samantha Herrera, FPL marketing and communications manager, gave my 10-year-old twins and me a tour of the new space. While it’s true I knew they would come in handy to add some human interest to the photos I would take along the way, in reality, they pleaded so earnestly to come along, I couldn’t disappoint them. And Herrera was kind enough to oblige.

As it is for many in Northwest Arkansas, the FPL has always been an important place for our family — a happy destination for all four of us — and that’s remained consistent from the time the kids were toddlers, pawing through board books, until today, as they gobble down chapter books and graphic novels. But like the demographics and interests of my own family, the Northwest Arkansas community is constantly in flux, and the FPL has made a commitment to keep up with that growth. When the Blair Library on Mountain Street first opened its doors in October 2004, it was an 88,000-square-foot, \$23 million project that took visitors’ breath away. A modernized version of the traditional library, it boasted a catalog of 270,000 books, 30,000 audiovisual titles and 500 periodicals, and an Arsaga’s Cafe in its lobby made it even more of a community hub than it had been in its previous space on Dickson Street. The popularity and necessity of the new building became immediately apparent, and the ensuing years found the library constantly expanding its offerings, reaching maximum capacity on most of its events and running out of room for its burgeoning collections. Meeting and study rooms were in constant demand. Multi-use rooms meant chaos when one event immediately followed another. When a special election

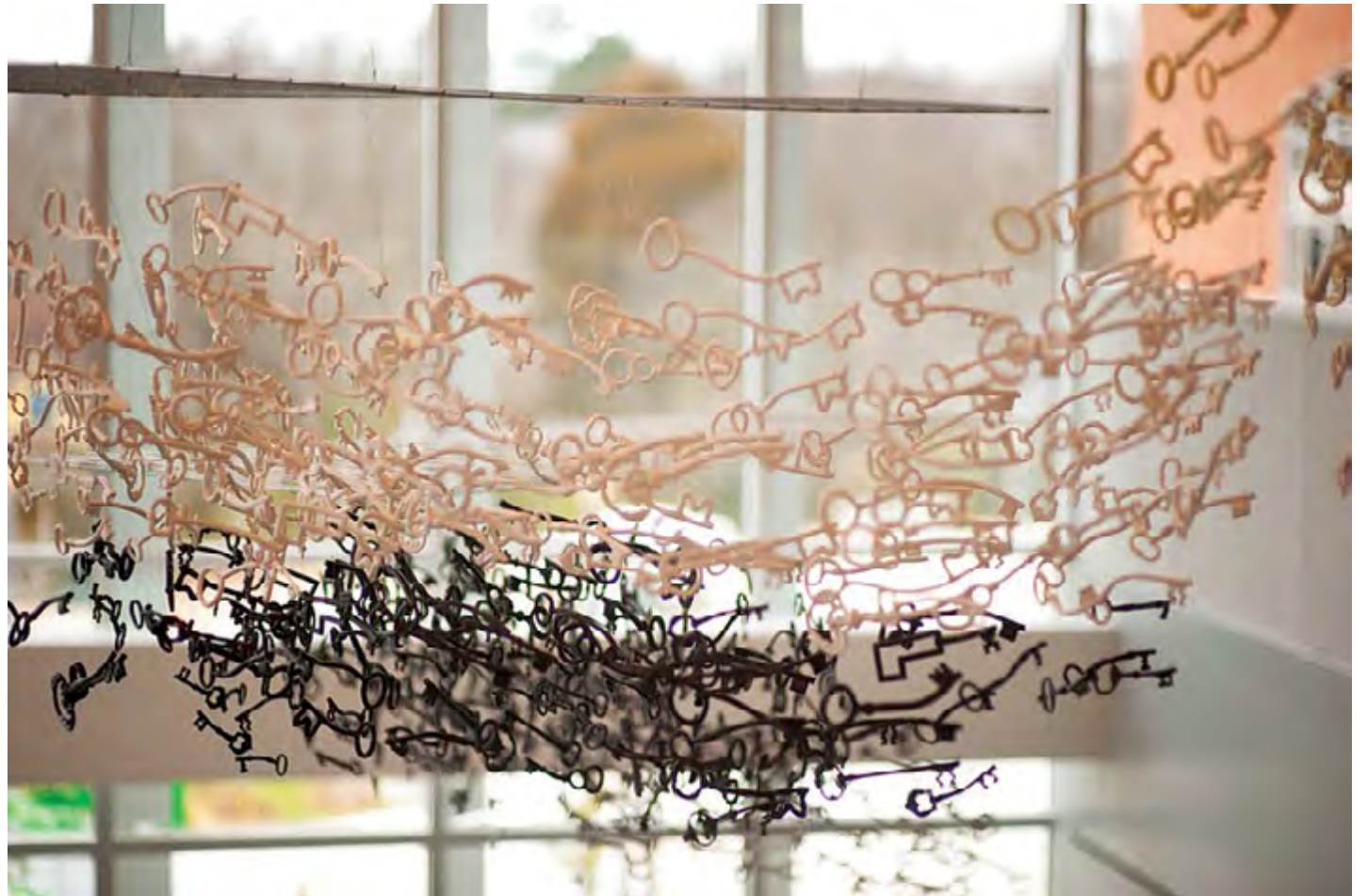
80,000-square-foot-plus expansion.

“The Voyage of Lost Keys” by Aimee Papazian, hangs in the Grand Staircase of the new FPL addition. “When I was growing up, there was a small plaque with a key on the wall of my grandmother’s house in Flushing, N.Y.,” reads Papazian’s artist statement. “That key was what was left of my grandfather’s house after the entire Ar-

As Herrera explained the thoughtful function of each new space, one thing was abundantly clear: The prescient forethought of every choice made has the concept of community in mind. Small nooks and meeting spaces throughout are comfortable spots to gather. The Center for Innovation and community kitchen offer services that could help start or boost careers. A dedicated story

the training,” says Johnson. “Everything from teaching young children how to make healthy snacks to sommelier classes for adults is being considered.”

Johnson adds that access to the teaching kitchen will be open to the community, “including private entrepreneurs and small business owners seeking additional space and capacity for their enterprises. What is



“The Voyage of Lost Keys” by Aimee Papazian

menian quarter of the city where he lived in Turkey was burned down. He fled for his life that day, along with most of the Armenians in the country. He was 18 years old. After the fire, a friend went back to where his house had been and found that key in the ashes, and sent it to my grandfather’s family. “I built a larger version of the key on my grandparents’ plaque out of clay, and then cast it in plaster as a model. This was the first key I made for this piece. Other keys are based on pictures of historical keys. I have also included many other keys, because so many cultures have this violent displacement as part of their history — or their present. This piece is a way to imagine a mass migration — a way to think about a people who have lost their homes and their place in the world, as still being s o m e h o w connected to each other.”

Floor-to-ceiling windows never let us forget the beautiful environment that surrounds the building. There is a new, 8,700-square-foot event center, and the size of the children’s library has doubled. Other additions include a 16-station teaching kitchen, an Art and Movement room, the J.B. and Johnelle Hunt Family Center for Innovation and the J.B. and Johnelle Hunt Family Gathering Place.

time room and craft space give relief to frazzled parents of tots. The Art and Movement room will provide access to free or low-cost dance and exercise classes. A librarian close at hand in each section means questions can be answered quickly and easily. The spacious event center gives additional opportunities for more community members to see special speakers and productions.

And, of course, there are the books, the beating heart of every library, regardless of how modern or technologically advanced it might be.

“Shelving the books in the new youth libraries was a very significant milestone for me,” says Willow Fitzgibbon, director of library services. “While the expansion is so much more than books, seeing the books on shelves in the new spaces reminded me how entwined our traditional values of lifelong learning, accessibility and innovation are in this expansion and all of the new services FPL will now be able to offer.”

Teaching Kitchen

With 16 cooking stations and a walk-in refrigerator and freezer, the 1,500-plus-square-foot teaching kitchen has been carefully designed in partnership with Northwest Arkansas Community College’s Brightwater culinary department in order to offer concurrent college credit opportunities for Fayetteville Public High School students. The library’s new “casual deli” is located right outside the teaching kitchen, allowing visitors to grab a quick sandwich or salad and watch new chefs through the viewing window. Herrera says in addition to the Brightwater training, the kitchen can host culinary programming by professional chefs and cookbook authors, as well as opportunities for the community at large.

“We are planning to offer culinary training for all ages and are in continued conversations with a variety of partners to provide

exciting is the potential for FPL to help meet the demand in this market.”

Art and Movement Room

With its floor-to-ceiling windows, gorgeous softwood dance floor, ballet barre and towering room-length mirror, I just assumed that the pretty grouping of multi-colored pegs at the far end of the Art and Movement Room was another art installation.

“No, those are just pegs for coats,” said Herrera.

It’s an easy mistake to make when you’re standing in the middle of the airy, chic room, which is the first to greet you when you walk into the new expansion. The Art and Movement Room will no doubt draw interested people further into the building, but, as Herrera points out, the billowing curtains can be drawn to offer a bit more privacy.

“You could definitely feel self-conscious doing yoga in here if people can look in and see everything,” she says with a laugh. “You might be able to still see a bit of the movement inside but not, ‘Oh, there’s my friend Sandy, doing Downward Dog.’”

Herrera says the FPL envisions classes like tai chi, yoga and dance will be held in this room, as well as adult art classes when tables are added.

“Personally, I am really excited for the Art and Movement Room,” says Fitzgibbon. “Intellectual wellness and physical wellness are closely tied, and having affordable, unimposing access to movement-based programs provides important health literacy to our community. I am also excited for all of the opportunities the expansion offers my preschool-age daughter, who will grow up with tremendous access to the arts and technology.”

Post-pandemic, Hoover says the room will be available to local organizations as a rental for dance and exercise classes.



Aimee Papazian



to consider a millage increase for an FPL expansion was held in August 2016, voters overwhelmingly approved the increase, and construction officially started in July 2018.

Which brings us back to last month, when Herrera gave us our jaw-dropping tour. From the moment we walked into the atrium-like new entrance and gazed at artist Aimee Papazian’s “Voyage of Lost Keys,” a magical sculpture that seemingly hangs in mid-air, we were awed by the scale of the

Arts & Culture

A CONVERSATION WITH ...

Vilen Galstyan

‘My Life Was Spent in A Wonderful Creative Atmosphere.’

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN

The name Vilen Galstyan encompasses a whole epoch in the story of Armenian ballet.

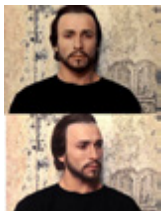
Born on February 12, 1941 in Yerevan, Galstyan graduated from the Yerevan Choreographic School. He started to perform at the Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet Theater, quickly becoming the central figure of Armenian ballet. He danced at the Bolshoi Theater, in England, France, the US, Sweden, Japan, as well as in numerous cities of the Soviet Union. Professor Galstyan is a People's Artist of Armenia, winner of gold medals at the International Competitions in Varna (1968) and Cairo (1971), laureate of the State Prize of the Armenian SSR, holder of the Orders of Movses Khorenatsi and Mesrop Mashtots.

He graduated from the balletmeister department of Moscow Theater Institute, and went on to stage ballets in Egypt, South Korea, Uruguay, Russia, often with his wife, ballerina and dance teacher Nadezhda Davtyan (1951-2019).

For years since 2014, Galstyan has been the chief choreographer of Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet Theater, as well as the director of Yerevan Choreographic College.

In 2000, he founded the balletmeister department at the Yerevan Institute of Theater and Cinema.

And as if his services to art were not enough, he passed on his artistic



Vilen Galstyan in an iconic image from "The Color of Pomegranates" by Sergei Parajanov

talents to his children, daughter Juliet and son David, who today hold aloft the name of Galstyan on the international stage, the former as an opera singer (in Switzerland), the latter as a ballet dancer (in France).

Vilen Galstyan's 80th birthday celebration was a wonderful occasion to bewitch again the stage of the Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet Theater after a one-year break. On February 26, the ballet "Masquerade" staged by Galstyan was performed in honor of the patriarch of the Armenian ballet. Khachaturyan's eternal music and the presence of the best soloists of the Armenian ballet on the stage in

see GALSTYAN, page 14



Katah

Breaking Bread with Armenian *Katah*

A classic bread frequently baked in Armenian-American communities, *katah* is sometimes referred to as an "Armenian croissant." It's flaky, tender, and enriched with plenty of butter. This particular version is inspired by a recipe that was shared with us by a member of our baking community, Tali Gelenian. Tali learned to bake *katah* at the St. Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church in Racine, Wis., where once a year the bread is made in great quantities for the annual Madagh Armenian picnic. As Tali writes in her blog, this is just one rendition of *katah*, and in fact there are many more versions found throughout the Caucasus, sometimes under different names.



Breaking bread with Armenian *Katah*: A story of community, celebration, and resilience

By Tali Gelenian Food builds community. Anyone who loves to cook or bake knows that a shared meal has the unique ability to bring people together. For my Armenian family, the act of "breaking bread" is embodied in a special tradition: the Madagh Armenian Picnic.

With origins in the church, "*madagh*" means "offering" or "sacrifice" and refers to the story of Abraham and Isaac in the Book of Genesis. *Madagh* is also what Armenians have named the stew that is prepared for the event, traditionally made with lamb to represent the ram that God asked Abraham to offer in the place of his son, Isaac. The madagh stew is cooked over open-fire pits and provided for free by the church in the spirit of charity, good faith, and fellowship to all.

For over 80 years, St. Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church in Racine, Wisconsin has sustained this old-country tradition. Armenians and non-Armenians alike gather for the Madagh to enjoy a day of live Armenian music, dancing, church service, and perhaps most importantly, food.

There are many delicious recipes that St. Hagop prepares for the picnic, but for bakers looking to expand their bread repertoire, *katah* is a perfect place to start. It's one of our most popular breads, and baked into this particular *katah* recipe is a story of community and resilience that we continue to celebrate.

There's no right or wrong way to make *katah*.

Katah is a classic Armenian bread. Sometimes called an "Armenian croissant," *katah* is an enriched, flaky loaf with many layers. To borrow an Armenian proverb: *Amen geen eer madzoonzarneloo tsevuh oone*, which translates to "every woman has her own way of making yogurt." Or, simply put, there are many different ways of doing the same thing. In fact, many versions can be found throughout the Caucasus, sometimes under different names. In the Armenian diaspora, in particular, recipes like *katah* have become more unique as various Armenian communities passed them down through generations.

These differences and diversity have led to a whole host of delicious variations in flavor, shape, size, and decoration.

Some of the sweeter versions are more like puff pastry than bread, and others include a filling made of butter and sugar called *khORIZ*. Although eaten year-round, *katah* was traditionally baked for the feast of Candlemas commemorating the presentation of Christ to the Temple before God. *Katah* is also sometimes made with a coin tucked inside the dough, symbolizing good luck to whomever received that special piece.

see KATAH, page 14

Saroyan, Hagopian Discuss Music and Mental Health in Instagram Live Session

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

FRESNO — We often hear that music is good for one's mental health. However we rarely hear this discussed by musicians within the Armenian community. For this reason, the conversation on Instagram Live that took place on the evening of Thursday, February 25, between Dr. Tony Saroyan, a licensed psychologist, and Andrew Hagopian, a young oud virtuoso, was a welcome and novel addition to the stream of online discussions that have only proliferated since the start of Covid.

Saroyan, who grew up in Los Angeles but whose roots on his father's side come from the Fresno Saroyans, and who has recently relocated to the Central California city, enlisted the young lifelong Fresno resident Hagopian in an interesting discussion on music and mental health.

Saroyan started out the discussion with the observation that Armenian Church music, while often sad, possesses a quality that seems calming and spiritual. Without a music background, he commented that the music is often comprised of long notes and asked Hagopian if he could elaborate. Hagopian discussed that church music contains drones and what we in the West would call minor notes, and that it is indeed calming for many and was probably intended to be that way.

In fact, Hagopian, who is almost as well versed in Armenian history as he is in music, discussed some of the Armenian antecedents of what today is called music therapy. For example, medieval Armenian physician Mkhitar Heratsi in his book *The Relief of Fevers* (1184) had suggested that listening to the music of the *gusans* (minstrels who usually played a stringed instrument and sang) was therapeutic. Instruments like the oud and kamon while not native to Armenia have been a part of Armenian music for more than a thousand years.

Saroyan brought up the phenomenon that has been observed in Alzheimer's patients, that when presented with music from their youth, they begin to live up and even remember exact details from when they first heard the song. Hagopian testified that he has literally seen the same thing happen when performing at Armenian events. A particular song that was familiar to a woman with Alzheimer's caused the elderly lady to move around and even dance, apparently remembering the classic piece from the Armenian events of her youth.

Turkish Music Controversial

Saroyan pointed out that, for some, Turkish music can be triggering due to its association with the Armenian Genocide. Hagopian stated that he plays this music on request for the many people who are not triggered by it but associate the music with happy memories of their childhood, because

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ARTS & CULTURE

Vilen Galstyan: 'My Life Was Spent in a Wonderful Creative Atmosphere'

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GALSTYAN, from page 12

this sad period of Armenia's history energized the audience, eager for high art.

Mr. Galstyan, looking from the height of your artistic career, how do you regard it?

In general, I have no reason to be dissatisfied with my artistic destiny. My life was spent in a wonderful creative atmosphere; I was able to do whatever I wanted — there was no role that I wanted to dance and I did not. Nature was so kind to me — I was lucky to perform at the Bolshoi Theater and around the world, with the best ballerinas of the time: Ekaterina Maximova, Raisa Struchkova, Malika Sabirova, Natalia Bessmertnova, Kaleria Fedicheva, Galina Ragozina, Valentina Ganibalova and Liliana Cosi. I was young at that time, so I was thinking it was something very usual, but now, looking back, I realize what a miracle it really was. And now the main interest of my life is to continue to create ballet performances for my theater, for my nation.

It can be said that the Armenian men's ballet performing school has been strengthened by you.

To this day, our boys' school is very strong. At present, there is no leading ballet group in Europe without Armenian young men. There are few famous Armenian ballerinas, while our nation provides gifted boys for ballet. It is a surprising phenomena. Our ballet teachers Hovhannes Davanyan and Hrachik Hovhannissyan are able to train good boys and our school seems to reconfirm that point. Our girls are very tender, very beautiful, very promising, but at the age of 15-16 their bodies begin to change in a way that is less conducive to ballet.

You are the first Armenian ballet dancer to enter the international arena, winning a gold medal in 1968 at the Varna International Competition of classic ballet. The 1960s were the golden age of our ballet. In your opinion, what was the reason for that?

Since we are talking about the past stage, it will not be immodest to say the following. Every job needs a leader and followers. I achieved a certain level in my art, so the others strove to reach that level too. The boys saw that I was bringing some new elements and techniques from Moscow. They were following me and trying to reach that high level too. There was a healthy envy for each other. Unfortunately,



today our dancers cannot live on a ballet salary, but have to "waste" themselves by working in pubs and clubs. Most of them have families, so they should take care of them. One of our leading dancers does not even have an apartment. It happened that in the evening I sit in some restaurant and sadly notice one of our ballet dancers, who instead of relaxing and keeping himself in good shape for tomorrow's rehearsal, earns extra money on the restaurant stage.

This is really very upsetting. Mr. Galstyan, you have worked in a number of countries, staging ballets on four continents. What did that experience give to you?

Each country has its advantages and disadvantages. I loved Uruguay very much, where I staged "Don Quixote" and Aram Khachaturian's "Spartacus" for the first time in that country. The government appointed graduates of the Moscow Theater Institute to work in different countries. Yekaterina Furtzeva, the Minister of Culture of the USSR, highly valued me and sent me to stage or teach in different countries. By the way, it was gossiped in Moscow that singer Muslim Magomaev and I were Furtzeva's lovers! But it was nothing of the kind (laughs).

Perhaps many people ask you about your cooperation with Sergei Parajanov.

It was a surprise for me. I did not think I would make a movie. There was a rumor that Parajanov, who was a powerful name in those years, was coming to Yerevan to make a film about Sayat-Nova. We thought he would choose one of our stage and screen actors. He came to watch our "Giselle" with composer Edgar Hovhannissyan, the then director of the theater. After the performance, I was called to the director's room. When I entered, Parajanov looked at me and exclaimed: "No casting anymore! My Sayat-Nova is standing here in front of us!" I said that I am not a film actor, I have a bad memory, I will not remember the words. Parajanov said: "There will be no words. You will express everything with your hands and eyes." During the shoot, he

was showing movements very well, as he had received choreographic education. It was easy for me to do what he said. I was blessed to be part of that beautiful legendary film, "The Color of Pomegranate." Many did not understand, but after the foreign screenings, everyone accepted that it was an innovative film, a revolution in cinematography.

Were there no other offers to act in films?

Again from Parajanov. Once sitting together, we thought about how to shoot the Armenian epic, "David of Sassoun." He did not know our epic well, so I took the book and read it to him. Another time I took the libretto of Edgar Hovhannissyan's "David of Sassoun" opera-ballet to Parajanov to the hotel. He asked to copy it, then said: "Give me an hour." He went to his bedroom, and an hour later brought his screenplay "David of Sassoun." But as you know, this desire of Parajanov unfortunately has never been realized.

How was the attitude of Soviet Armenia's government toward ballet?

It appreciated ballet very much, always watching our performances. Yerevan's mayor, Grigor Hasratyan, once as a shortcoming of our ballet, mentioned the lesser ballerinas.



Vilen Galstyan with the author, Artsvi Bakhchinyan (Photo by Marianna Meliksetyan)

I said I could bring soloist girls from Moscow and Leningrad, if they provide apartments with basic conditions. Hasratyan immediately provided four apartments in

Yerevan, and I brought nine or ten Russian ballerinas. This was the attitude towards ballet! Karen Demirchyan, the first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party was a great ballet fan too, he knew almost everyone's names. I personally had the right to contact him directly by phone. When there were VIP guests, he would call and order "Gayane" with the best staff. As about today's government... I find it difficult to say.

Your creative life has been full of remarkable episodes. I know that you were also part of the Canadian tour from which Mikhail Baryshnikov did not return. Would you tell us that story?

With pleasure! Misha was a close friend of mine. In Leningrad, I danced "Don Quixote" with Kaleria Fedicheva, who was very tall, of a large physique. After the performance, the leading dancers of the theater, Baryshnikov among them, came to congratulate and said me: "You showed us how a man should lift a woman. We cannot lift Kaleria!" From that day on, my friendship with Misha Baryshnikov started. We went to Canada together. And once, at a banquet in Toronto, Misha approached me, shook my hand and said in a very strange way: "Brother, goodbye." He did not say he intended not to return to the Soviet Union, but I realized that something was wrong. The KGB employee immediately approached and asked me: "What did Misha say?" "He said he was going to the hotel," I replied. The KGB guy also disappeared from that banquet. Before that, Baryshnikov had left a note under the door of his stage partner Irina Kolpakova's room, writing: "Irina Alexandrovna, I apologize a million times, but I no longer want to live in Leningrad and dance in that theater. I am leaving." And since Baryshnikov and I were the leading dancers during this tour, after returning to Moscow, I was summoned for questioning by the KGB every day. A surly employee started to speak threateningly: "Don't mess me about, tell me how it happened!" Then they took me to another surly man, who also pointed a finger

at me: "What did you decide there? Did you also want to escape, you, traitor to the motherland!" So it went... Then, being in the US for the second time, I met Baryshnikov. It was a bit sad meeting in a restaurant outside the city. Saying goodbye, Misha gave me a very expensive diamond ring to take to his mother. I had to refuse because it was clear that the ring would cause me a big headache at the customs.

What other remarkable episode from your biography you can share with us?

I will tell you how I once was captured by [former Azerbaijan President] Heydar Aliyev! That year I was dancing with famous Tajik ballerina Malika Sabirova in Baku. The Baku ballet company was preparing for a tour in France. When Minister of Culture Furtzeva came and watched the performances, she said: "You have no soloists, so Galstyan and Sabirova will leave for France with you." Heydar Aliyev, the then first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, who always brought flowers and drinks to my performances in large baskets (there was no such thing even in the Bolshoi Theater), called me and Malika to him and said: "You are not in Baku to work, you are my peo-

ple, Caucasians, you should be my personal guests." And he took us to his stunning and gilded seaside palace of old eastern royal style near Sumgait, that ill-reputed city in the near future. Malika and I swam in the sea, rested. Lavish dinners were given in our honor. We rested for five days, then started training. Three days later we went to Baku, we rehearsed and danced with the group, thinking we would go back to our daily routine, but Aliyev told us: "This was still the first part, I won't let you go!" They took us to that palace again, where we stayed for one more week. We lived royally, but we realized all this was done so that we would not go to France. We went to Baku again and told Aliyev we have a performance at the Bolshoi Theater. He finally let us go. Malika and I fled to Moscow. Here Furtzeva, learning that we are in Moscow, while the Baku group was already in France, angrily called Bulbul-oghli, Azerbaijan's Minister of Culture, who was in Monte Carlo and said: "After you come back you will have lots of trouble!" They hastily bought tickets for Malika and me and we flew to France without checking in at the airport. Bulbul-oghli started to justify himself, but it did not help, Furtzeva fired him. The Baku ballet group was very upset about our coming, but in the end they realized that we were not to blame. And when Malika and I went on stage in Paris, the audience applauded us for ten minutes.

Years ago we were talking and you said that you connect the future of Armenian ballet with our brilliant young dancers working abroad, who will come and push it forward.

I think so now, too. One of them is my son, Davit, who works in France and is aware of every step of world ballet, and knows much more than me. Even if they do not come here to dance, but let them come to work as a choreographer, teach, lead the ballet. This art, indeed, does not end with me!

At the end of the conversation, Vilen Galstyan said: "Unfortunately, most of our people do not know the value of ballet. It is very gratifying to meet a person in Yerevan who loves and knows ballet: this gives you a great value. How can one do not love ballet, it is the most beautiful art

Breaking Bread with Armenian *Katah*

KATAH, from page 12

Despite the distinct preparations and styles, one element of *katah* that remains the same is the spirit with which it's made. No matter which version you encounter, it will always contain the baker's pride and care.

A recipe that's the pride of a church community

I'm sharing the recipe that I'm most familiar with, perhaps not the most extravagant version but the one closest



Katah (Photo by Liz Neily)

to my heart. This recipe was brought to Racine by Armenian women from the villages of Tomarza, Khapert, and Jujun in the Anatolia region of present-day Turkey. They were part of the displaced Armenians who fled their homeland during the 1915 genocide.

These women and their families found themselves in Racine, a small industrial city in the very southeast corner of Wisconsin on the shores of Lake Michigan. Since then, these recipes have been passed down over generations, largely by word of mouth, until they were finally captured and immortalized in a collective community cookbook, *Cooking Like Mama*.

There are three separate *katah* recipes in *Cooking Like Mama*, but this is the version that St. Hagop follows when baking for the Madagh each year. The original recipe was written for large groups attending the picnic, and St. Hagop now triples it to satiate a growing crowd of over 1,000 attendees. Needless to say, this version has been scaled down to meet the needs of the home baker.

Katah was traditionally baked in an Armenian wood-fired clay oven called a tonir. Today, it's cooked in the ovens of St. Hagop's basement kitchen. For each of the two rises required for *katah*, the bakers close off the kitchen, turn on all of the ovens, and open the oven doors to create the ideal warm, toasty environment for the dough.

The result is a buttery 9" round loaf of *katah*, optionally topped with a sprinkle of nigella or sesame seeds. Its decorations are minimal, as the bakers prioritize the rolling and folding process to achieve the ultimate layered loaf.

St. Hagop has a small designated team of *katah* experts who lead its preparation each year. Working side by side, the *katah* crew wields long wooden tapered dowels called *okhlavoo*s, rhythmically rolling out circles of dough over 24" wide. The work is accompanied by talk, outbursts of laughter, and the occasional good-natured jab at someone's technique.

Long-time *katah* connoisseur Johnny Bu-

chaklian offers this advice to first-time *katah* bakers: "Don't worry if you rip the dough while rolling it out, as the rolling process can be tricky if it's your first time. Ultimately, any tears will be obscured after folding the dough. Aim for an equal thickness as you roll it out, and remember that the thinner the dough, the more times you can fold it and the more buttery layers your *katah* will have."

Keeping traditions alive

The past year has challenged us to find new ways of staying connected with friends and loved ones. Although last year the *Madagh* wasn't able to continue as usual, I still celebrated by rolling up my sleeves and heading to the kitchen.

Hrametzek seghanuh, jashuh badrasd eh (Welcome to the table, the meal is ready)

For my family, these recipes have long helped us transcend physical and cultural boundaries. It's perhaps no coincidence the Armenian word for bread, "*hatz*," is synonymous with "food." Sharing our recipes both literally and figuratively embodies the expression "breaking bread."

Year after year, the meals in *Cooking Like Mama* have brought people together to honor the story of our community. So as you try St. Hagop's *katah* recipe, I invite you to listen to some Armenian music, learn more about Armenian history, and help us keep our culture alive. *Pare akhorjag!* (Bon appétit!)

Cooking Like Mama is available from St. Hagop. If you're interested in purchasing a copy, please contact the cookbook caretaker, Denise Lansing, at (262) 672-9265. The cost is \$25.00 plus shipping & handling, with all proceeds benefiting St. Hagop.

For more personal recipes and baking stories, see our Let Good Things Rise homepage.

(Tali is a foodie and multimedia storyteller, passionate about building community through a well-told story.

She's grown up bicoastal, from the redwoods of Northern California to her current home among the maple trees of Vermont.)

INGREDIENTS

Clarified butter

32 tablespoons (454g) unsalted butter

Dough

6 1/3 cups (760g) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose

Flour

2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon sugar

2 1/4 teaspoons instant yeast or active dry yeast

1/2 cup (113g) water, lukewarm

1 1/3 cups (303g) milk, lukewarm

2 large eggs, beaten

1/2 cup (113g) clarified butter, from above

Topping

1 large egg, beaten

nigella or sesame seeds, optional



Katah bakers in the basement of St. Hagop holding *okhlavoo*s and rolling pins. A tray of risen *katah* is on the table ready to be shaped and baked. (Photo courtesy of St. Hagop)

INSTRUCTIONS

To clarify the butter: Melt the butter over low heat in a large pan until the foam rises, watching closely so that the butter doesn't burn or bubble over the top of the pan. Skim off and discard the foam, then remove the pan from the heat.

Cool the butter slightly, skim and discard the foam again, then pour the butter into a bowl, being careful to prevent the milky liquid at the bottom of the pan from pouring into the bowl; you want only the clarified butter (clear fat).

Cool the clarified butter to lukewarm before using. If you're not making *katah* right away, cover and refrigerate the clarified butter until you need it; you'll need to rewarm it before using.

To make the dough: In a large mixing bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer, combine 4 3/4 cups (570g) of the flour, the salt, sugar, and yeast. Make a well in the center and add the water, milk, eggs, and 1/2 cup (113g) clarified butter to the bowl, incorporating by hand or mixer to form a sticky dough.

Gradually add the rest of the flour and knead — by hand or mixer set to medium-low speed — until the dough is smooth and elastic. Shape the dough into a smooth ball and place it back in the mixing bowl. Cover and let the dough rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 1/2 hours.

Transfer the dough to a lightly floured work surface, gently deflate it, and divide it in half. Shape each piece into a ball and place on a lightly floured or parchment-lined baking sheet. Cover the balls with plastic and a dish towel and allow them to rest for 20 minutes.

To roll out the dough: Working with one piece of dough at a time, flatten it gently with your hands on a well-floured work surface large enough to hold a 28"-diameter dough circle. Sprinkle a little flour on top of the dough, then roll the dough into a circle using a rolling pin.

Once the dough's diameter is as long as your rolling pin, it's easiest to use an *okhlavoo* (or long food-safe dowel) to finish rolling the dough into a thin circle about 28" in diameter; it will be thin enough to be semi-transparent. You can also continue to use a rolling pin (a straight one is preferred), but you'll need to move it around to ensure the dough is rolled out uniformly.

Pour a scant 1/2 cup (100g) of the remaining clarified butter over the dough and use your hands to spread the butter over the entire surface.

Starting with the section of dough that's closest to you, fold 4" of the dough toward the center of the circle. Continue to fold the dough in 4" increments until you reach the opposite side of the circle and you have a roughly 4" x 28" strip of dough.

Spread a little more clarified butter evenly over the dough.

Starting at one 4" end, fold over about 6" of dough. Continue to fold the dough in 6" increments until you reach the opposite side, and you've formed a roughly 4" x 6" rectangle with the seam on the bottom.

Cover the *katah* and set it aside while you roll out and fold the remaining ball of dough; you want the butter to have a chance to firm up before working the dough again.

Brush a little of the clarified butter into the bottom and onto the sides of two 8" or 9" round cake pans.

Roll or pat the *katahs* into 8" or 9" circles and place them into the prepared pans, patting them gently so that they fill the pans. Pierce the surface of the *katahs* with the tines of a fork to create a design, then pierce them a few more times all the way through to the bottom to help release any air bubbles as they bake.

Cover the *katahs* with plastic and dish towels and let them rest in a warm place until the dough rises to the top of the pan, 1 to 2 hours depending on the warmth of your kitchen.

Toward the end of the rising time, position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350°F.

Brush the tops of the *katahs* with the beaten egg and sprinkle with the nigella or sesame seeds. Bake the *katahs*, one at a time if necessary, until the tops and bottoms are nicely golden brown, 35 to 45 minutes; a digital thermometer inserted into the center of the loaves will read about 200°F.

Remove the pans from the oven and allow the *katahs* to cool slightly before transferring them to paper towels to cool completely.

Katahs are best enjoyed freshly baked; serve with olives and cheese (a goat's milk cheese would be traditional).

Store any leftovers, well wrapped, at room temperature for a day or so; or freeze for up to one month.

Cooking Like Mama is available for purchase at \$25.00 each plus shipping and handling, with all proceeds benefiting St. Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church in Racine, Wisconsin.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Armenian Dolma (Sarma)

From San Francisco's Sloat Garden Center

Shake Antaramian, a former long-time employee at Sloat Garden Center in San Francisco, has made this traditional Armenian *dolma* (*sarma*) recipe for decades. It was adapted from *Dinner at Omar Khayyam's*, the cookbook written in 1944 by legendary San Francisco restaurateur, chef, author, benefactor, and philanthropist George Mardikian.

Sloat Garden Center began in 1958 in San Francisco's Sunset District, and has become the largest independent pottery importer in the U.S., with ties to many other independent garden chains that purchase pottery through Sloat.

Shake, born in Baghdad, Iraq, still loves to make a variety of Middle Eastern dishes and specialties from her family's past. She came to the United States over 60 years ago, studied chemistry at the University of Nebraska and Kent State University, and worked at the University of California Medical School (UCSF). Shake eventually settled in Marin County north of San Francisco, married, and had two children. She worked at Sloat Garden Center well into her 80s.

Born in 1903, Mardikian immigrated to the United States in 1922, and was an indispensable influence in introducing shish kebab, *dolma*, pilaf, spinach salad, stuffed cabbage leaves, and dozens of other dishes for the time from Anatolia, Armenia and the Middle East to the American diet for the masses.



George Mardikian

His first job in America was washing dishes in a small San Francisco cafeteria. He eventually bought the cafeteria and built it into a renowned restaurant, Omar Khayyam's, where he hosted many notable people and world leaders including President Dwight Eisenhower and Eleanor Roosevelt.

Named after the Persian epicurean poet, the restaurant operated under the motto "The Food of Good Quality," and debuted in the middle of the Great Depression. Despite the country's economic downturn, Omar Khayyam's became so successful, it led Mardikian to open up another location in San Francisco in 1938, where it continued to operate until a fire destroyed it in the 1980s.

While serving as a food consultant to the Quartermaster General of the United States Army in Germany, he became aware that some 2,000 Armenians who had been displaced by World War II were being held in the slave labor camp, Funkerkaserne. Mardikian went to the camp, where the displaced Armenians honored him with an unforgettable program in the hope that Mardikian would be the link to a future in America. Promising to do his best to assist them, he, along with Suren Saroyan, established the American National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians (ANCHA). Along with Suren Saroyan and General Haig Shekerjian, Mardikian launched a humanitarian effort that enabled thousands of displaced Armenians to settle in the United States. In 1951, President Harry S. Truman awarded George Mardikian with the Medal of Freedom for his work in the Army.

"For over 50 years, George Mardikian stood at the helm of Omar Khayyam's, his world famous restaurant in downtown San Francisco," as journalist Liana Aghajanian writes in *Dining in Diaspora*. Customers from all echelons came to 200 Powell Street not just to indulge in once-exotic dishes like shish kebab and *dolma*, but to mingle with the energetic and passionate Mardikian himself, which LIFE magazine once referred to as "the most favorable man in America."

Mardikian would customarily "break bread" (a special flat bread [lahvash] served at the restaurant) with his diners at Omar Khayyam's as a sign of hospitality and cordiality. The restaurant's menu was unusual for the time, featuring a creative mixture of Armenian, Middle Eastern, and African cooking adapted for American tastes, including *ajem pilaf*, broiled lamb chops, Izmir *kufte*, *vosp abour*, shish kebab, roast Fresno turkey with pilaf, *kuzu kzartma*, *chakhokhnili*, rose-petal ice cream, paklava, *madzoon*, Armenian cheese, and other exotic dishes of the Near East.

In *Dinner at Omar Khayyam's*, Mardikian revealed some of the culinary secrets that made his famed restaurants (in Fresno and San Francisco) so celebrated.

"Mardikian's original recipes were prepared in the Armenian fashion, but flavored to the American taste and palate. His menu and dishes were considered exotic at the time, and different, but they were easy even for home chefs to prepare," adds Shake. "He was America's first celebrity chef."

In 1956, Mardikian published his memoirs, *Song of America*. An excerpt from the book is quoted on a plaque in the entrance hall to the American Adventure Pavilion at Disney's Epcot Center, and was referenced by President Obama during a naturalization ceremony. "One moment you belong with your fathers to a million dead yesterdays, the next you belong to a million unborn tomorrows," Mardikian said about his journey as an Armenian Genocide Survivor to lauded American. A highly respected philanthropist and benefactor, Mardikian passed away in 1977, and is buried at the historic Armenian Ararat Cemetery in Fresno, California. His wife Nazenig, his brother Archie and sister-in-law Minnie, and nephew Gregory are buried with him in the Mardikian family plot. Other prominent figures of Armenian American history including the Seropian Brothers, Soghomon Tehlirian, Victor Maghakian, Gazair Saghatelian, Varaz Samuelian, and William Saroyan are also buried there.

Here is Shake's treasured dolma recipe:

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup olive oil
- 5 cups onions, chopped
- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 1 cup parsley chopped finely, more to taste (Shake adds chopped cilantro and mint leaves, too)
- 1/2 cup currants (optional)
- 1/2 - 3/4 cup pine nuts
- 1/2 cup tomato sauce (Shake uses fresh tomatoes, peeled and seeded)
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 16-oz jar grape leaves in brine (about 60 to 70 leaves, such as Orlando brand)
- Lemon wedges or slices, fresh sprigs of parsley as garnish

PREPARATION:

Pour oil in cooking pot. Add the onions and sauté until golden. Add rice and simmer, covered, for 30 minutes. Then add all other ingredients and cook for 5-10 minutes, stirring. Remove from stove and allow to cool.

While the stuffing is cooling, prepare the grape leaves. Add 1 teaspoon of salt to two quarts water and bring it to a boil. Immerse the grape leaves (a few at a time) in the hot water for 30 seconds or until the leaves change color. Take grape leaves out of the boiling water and allow to cool. Now they are ready to be stuffed.

Place a teaspoonful of rice stuffing on each grape leaf and roll it up like a package. Arrange them side by side into a large pan lined by three or four layers of grape leaves (in order to prevent the dolma from burning). Place a large plate over them (as a weight to hold them down). Pour 1 cup of water in the pan and cook on the stove top or in a preheated 350 degree oven for 1 hour (check to ensure rice is fully cooked).

Allow them to cool completely, then cover and refrigerate overnight in the same pan. Serve as an appetizer or cold entrée, and garnish with lemon and fresh sprigs of parsley.

Note: Shake adds: When using fresh grape leaves, it is important to blanch the leaves briefly in heavily salted boiling water before stuffing.



Family owned for 60 years, Sloat Garden Center celebrates other locally owned and grown companies throughout Northern California through sourcing their plants and products. Dedicated to serving Bay Area gardeners for the last five decades, Sloat Garden Center is an independently owned garden center with 13 locations. For more information, go to: <https://www.sloatgardens.com>

*Dining in Diaspora, *Dinner at Omar Khayyam's: How George Mardikian Introduced Middle Eastern Food to America*

Natalie Qasabian Wins Sundance Institute/ Amazon Studios Producers Award

LOS ANGELES (Deadline) — At a virtual ceremony in January, Natalie Qasabian was awarded the 2021 Sundance Institute / Amazon Studios Producers Award for Fiction Filmmaking for her film, “Run.” The awards honor bold vision and a commitment to continuing work as a creative producer in the independent space.

Qasabian’s husband/partner Sev Ohanian won the award two years ago for his work on “Searching,” which they produced together. Qasabian was presented by the award with her frequent collaborator, director Aneesh Chaganty (“Searching,” “Run”).

“As producers, we may doubt whether or not we can do something; but we can’t ever doubt if it’s worth doing,” Qasabian said in accepting the award. “If we don’t cast the people that haven’t been cast before, if we don’t hire the crew member that hasn’t been hired before, tell the story that hasn’t been told before, or work with that first-time director who’s never been produced before...we’ll never know what could be on the other side. So, thank you again to the Sundance Institute and Amazon Studios for recognizing a job that we ourselves doubt sometimes. It helps us see what can be on the other side if we can just push through.”

Qasabian produced “Run” with Ohanian from a script co-written by Ohanian and



Poster for “Run”

director Chaganty. The film starred Sarah Paulson and Kiera Allen for Lionsgate, which premiered on Hulu in fall 2020 and became the most-watched film on the platform.

Previously, Qasabian produced “Searching” (Sundance 2018), directed by Chaganty, which was released by Sony. Searching was made on a sub-one-million-dollar budget and grossed \$75M+ at the box office. Additional credits include “All About Nina” (Tribeca 2018), written and directed by Eva Vives, which was released by The Orchard, and three films for the Duplass Brothers, including “Duck Butter,” directed by Miguel Arteta. She also produced Snapchat’s first scripted series, “Co-Ed.”

Currently, she’s working on a sequel to Searching for Sony and a streaming series called “The Future” for HBO Max.



Natalie Qasabian

CALENDAR

ON-LINE EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

MARCH 24 – Wednesday at 10am Celebrating What Unites Us! A virtual cooking series, a collaboration of City of Boston Age-Friendly Boston, OLDWAYS and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park to keep us connected, coming together. To register, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org Seafood! Executive Chef Kathy Sidell Owner, Sidell Hospitality, Saltie Girl, Met Back Bay, Stephanie’s on Newbury

APRIL 7 — CELEBRATING ART, SCIENCE, SERVICE & COMMERCE: LEADERSHIP, SHARING EXPERIENCES. Wednesday at 5 pm. A public program in a series to celebrate contributions to our life and culture in Art, Science, Service and Commerce, the words etched around the Labyrinth’s Circle This virtual program features influencers - each leading by extraordinary example - who will speak about their experiences and commitment to social good and making a difference. Ann Zacarian will offer the Welcome, Chief Marty Martinez, City of Boston Office of Health and Human Services, Greetings. Cindy Fitzgibbon, WCVB TV, is Host. Participants include Edward Casabian, investor, early Uber employee; Julia Grove, Picture Editor, “This is Us,” NBC series; Avak Kahvejian, PhD, General Partner, Flagship Pioneering; Councilor Julia Mejia, Boston City Council; Berj Najarian, Director of Football & Head Coach Administration, New England Patriots; and Tracey Zhen, President, Zipcar. For the link to register, please visit [ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Events](https://www.ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Events)

RHODE ISLAND

MARCH 12 – APRIL 30 – “The Greater Worcester Armenian Chorale” – 7th annual Gala concert Armenian Cultural Hour, Providence RI. Every Friday at 7:30 p.m. Whether or not you have a Facebook account, you can find the LIVES-STREAM of the event through the parish’s Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/armenianchurchprovidence>

MARCH 12 - “The Greater Worcester Armenian Chorale”- 7th annual Gala concert

MARCH 19 - “Our Yerevan”- Film Presentation in English

MARCH 26 – “The Birth of Sassuntsi David” Oratorio by Garbis Aprikan. From the large amphitheater of the Sorbonne, France

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

April 16 – “Cultural Genocide” - Film Presentation in English

April 23 – Memorial Concert, dedicated to Armenian Genocide

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

Saroyan, Hagopian Discuss Music and Mental Health In Instagram Live Session

HEALTH, from page 12

the early Armenian immigrants who were the parents of today’s elder generation came over with few worldly possessions and only memories of their home villages. Often songs which described the lifestyle of their hometown might be sung in Armenian or they might be sung in Turkish, but regardless of language these songs brought that early generation good memories of their lives before the horrors of 1915.

Hagopian went on to say that this music was not associated with the Turkish government as some might think today, but with the Armenian inhabitants of Anatolia who often spoke Turkish as one of their daily languages. The music represents positive attributes of life in Anatolia and not the negative ones. In addition, many of the Turkish songs that emanated from the countryside were written by Armenians, Hagopian pointed out. The bottom line is, many people still love these songs which are associated with their childhood or family background, and it is for those people that Hagopian performs such material.

Music Brings Back Memories

Saroyan pressed Hagopian to play some pieces with ties to his (Saroyan’s) own family’s regional background, including the village of Kessab. Hagopian complied with a “Kessab Bar” or dance along with various other Armenian folk songs. Saroyan attempted to observe his own reactions to these songs and stated that hearing such music brought him back to happy times at Fresno Armenian picnics and other events.

Saroyan also asked Hagopian to discuss Gomidas, a figure who looms large in Armenian history both for his musical contributions and his mental health issues. Hagopian noted that Gomidas had a mental breakdown during the Genocide and had to live the rest of his life in an asylum. In addition, he had been an orphan who had been raised at the monastery of Echmiadzin, and therefore must have had other mental health issues as a result. Saroyan commented that in the post-World War I era, such asylums did not provide for the best of mental health care, as conditions like post-traumatic shock disorder (PTSD) were not widely understood.

The topic of PTSD was a recurring one due to the many hardships Armenians have gone through, in addition to generational trauma, which has recently been studied with children of Holocaust survivors.

Hagopian discussed the many songs which are associated with the Armenian Genocide. Oftentimes these are village folk songs which were intended to speak of deep love and loss of that love for one reason or another, perhaps due to the loss of the loved one. In the post-Genocide era, such songs, due to their sad nature and themes of loss, were repurposed as songs to be sung at Genocide commemoration events. One of the best-known of such songs is *Dele Yaman*. At Saroyan’s request, Hagopian performed this well-known piece. Visibly moved, Saroyan commented afterward that hearing the song made the hair on the back of his neck stand up. Saroyan likened the style of *Dele Yaman* to Armenian Church music and that such melodies are extremely emotional.

Dr. Tony Saroyan is a psychologist in the state of California with a degree from the University of San Francisco. He is continuing his Instagram Live discussions with one next week focusing on cultural taboos against mental health in Armenian and other Middle Eastern communities.

Andrew Hagopian is a college student pursuing a career as a marketing consultant, but whose true passion is Armenian music, culture and history. With a lack of live music events during Covid times, he can be found holding court at his newly popular sessions on the app “Club-



Andrew Hagopian



Dr. Tony Saroyan

house” (available on Apple products) where he gives free concerts and answers audience questions about Armenian music and its historical background. He can be found using the online handle “MrOudJr.”

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

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EDITORIAL

Armenia's Domestic Crisis Has Regional, International Ramifications



By Edmond Y. Azadian

In an interconnected world of politics, no crisis can be considered solely local. Reverberations cross the boundaries of any country in question. We may consider Armenia's current domestic crisis as a local squabble at our own peril, because reactions arriving from many world capitals make abundantly clear that many distant parties have a stake in the situation brewing in Armenia.

Many of Armenia's current problems are now sidelined by political bickering by many factions which are trying to draw the attention of their constituents to their own agenda.

The challenge to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was initiated by a coalition of more than 16 parties which have rallied around Vazgen Manukyan, a former prime minister, demanding Pashinyan's resignation as the sole responsible person for the defeat in the 44-day Karabakh war.

Pashinyan is retaliating against those demands by rallying his own partisans in Republic Square, to demonstrate that he still enjoys popularity among Armenia's voters. Indeed, he and his My Step alliance were elected with a landslide of more than 70 percent of votes in 2018.

Most recent polls show that while his popularity has plunged, he still has an edge over other contenders with 45 percent popularity.

The problem with Vazgen Manukyan's camp is that ghosts from the old regime dominate his ranks, in particular, the former presidents and Ishkhan Saghatelyan and Gegham Manukyan from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, a party which has never crossed the threshold of two percent in any parliamentary election.

A powerful voice and force is former president Robert Kocharyan, who plans to throw his hat in the ring for the next elections without the backing of a party.

The recent standoff between the army brass and the prime minister could have bolstered Manukyan's situation but the army refuses to lend its support to any particular group. Therefore, the standoff helps Manukyan's claim only marginally, if at all. Although the coalition of 16 parties has made some inroads, it lacks full traction yet.

Now, the political drama is centered around President Armen Sarkissian, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Army Chief of Staff Onik Gasparyan.

The recent Karabakh war which looms in the background is the root cause of this tripartite crisis.

It all began with on February 23, when Pashinyan, during an interview, said that one of the major weapons at the disposal of the Armenian Army, the Russian-made Iskandar Missile, had exploded only 10 percent of the time. He was ridiculed publicly by Gen. Tiran Khachatryan, the First Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Armenia, who was then summarily sacked.

But a most powerful rebuke came from Russia's Defense Ministry Spokesperson Igor Konashenkov and Pashinyan apologized, saying that he had been misinformed. That did not end the controversy, because latent tensions, which had been brewing in the ranks of the armed forces, exploded. The next demand came from the army chief Gasparyan, 10 generals and 30 officers who signed a declaration requesting that the prime minister resign, accusing him of putting Armenia "on the brink of destruction."

The officers also stated that their "patience had run out."

Pashinyan retaliated by demanding Gasparyan's firing and sent his request to President Armen Sarkissian to sign within the three days prescribed by Armenia's constitution.

The president refused to sign the decree and sent it back, arguing that it is not in the best interest of the republic.

The process could have taken a longer time, because after the president's refusal, Pashinyan could have appealed to the

Constitutional Court. Instead, Pashinyan chose a public show-down, accusing the army of threatening to stage a military coup, which he later mitigated by stating that under Article 155 of Armenia's constitution, the army has to obey civilian rule and cannot get involved in partisan politics.

The army's grievances sprang from Pashinyan's undue interference in military matters during the war and his obvious plans to purge the ranks of the army. Generals are not come by easily because it takes many years of education and training to attain that rank, and thus, they are not disposable.

As the evolving political developments will demonstrate, there is a virtual tug-of-war behind the scenes. Army brass in Armenia are mostly trained in Russia and are believed to be influenced by Moscow. Therefore, purging the army is not only Pashinyan's doing. There are outside forces who would like to see Russia's influence diminished or dissipated in Armenia.

The March 1 commemoration turned out to be an opportunity to stage a show of force by many parties. The 16-party coalition rallied on Baghramyan Street, across from the parliament. The Armenian Popular Pole (Bever) comprising Sasna Tserer and the European Party demonstrated in front of the Matenadaran and their demand to revoke the Russo-Turkish Friendship Treaty of Moscow (1921) was covered in the Russian and Turkish media.

The most populous rally was in Republic Square, featuring Pashinyan, who in the days previous had promised to make an



important declaration. Instead, it turned out to be a harangue against Onik Gasparyan, often apologizing for his mistake and those of his ruling My Step coalition. He accused Gasparyan of ignoring his own responsibilities of defending Armenia's borders, and instead meddling in politics under the guidance of Serge Sargsyan, without producing any evidence. Sargsyan is being used as a convenient and effective scarecrow. Once his name is uttered, the public does not seek any proof.

Beating the dead horse of the March 1, 2008 clashes which cost the lives of 10 citizens serves as convenient subterfuge for Pashinyan to duck the more pressing current issues, specifically, the loss of 5,000 youth on his watch.

On the sidelines, a parliamentarian from My Step, Vahagn Hovakimyan, has called for the impeachment of President Sarkissian, based on Article 141 of the constitution. It seems that the constitution allows the president to sign decrees and he cannot refuse to sign them.

Pashinyan turned the rally into a launch of his reelection campaign. None of the burning issues facing the country were addressed, including the return of the POWs, the plight of the wounded, compensation for the displaced, defense of Armenia's borders, nor the threats still coming from Turkey and Azerbaijan.

It looks as if Pashinyan had recovered from his despondent mood after the reactions from the major capitals of the world, echoing his warnings of an impending army coup.

When war was raging in Karabakh and on Armenia's borders, when 5,000 young Armenian soldiers were being killed see CRISIS, page 19



COMMENTARY

My Turn



by Harut Sassounian

‘Unexploded’ Russian Missiles In Artsakh Cause a Political Explosion in Armenia

Words have meanings and consequences as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan found out when he told a journalist last week that the powerful Russian Iskander missiles, supposedly fired by Armenia during the Artsakh War last November, “did not explode or exploded 10 percent.” This surprising statement was in response to an interview by previous President Serzh Sargsyan in which he asked why Pashinyan had not ordered the use of the Iskander missiles during the early part of the Artsakh War.

Several days after the prime minister’s highly controversial statement, his spokeswoman announced that Pashinyan “was not briefed correctly regarding the Russian missiles.” But it was too late. The damage was done.

No one could have predicted the chain of unexpected events that followed Pashinyan’s words questioning the merits of the Iskander missiles that Russia had exported exclusively to Armenia. A large number of Russian military experts and political leaders reacted very harshly to Pashinyan’s statement viewing it as disparaging of the prized missiles of Russia and the prestige of its defense industry.

However, the reaction within Armenia was no less devastating. When First Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Tiran Khachatryan, a Lieutenant General, was asked to comment on Pashinyan’s statement about the Iskander missiles not exploding, he responded with a chuckle that it was not possible and not serious.

Upon hearing of this slight, Prime Minister Pashinyan immediately ordered the firing of the Deputy General Staff. His dismissal was endorsed by President Armen Sarkissian, according to the process outlined in the constitution. The prime minister had surely overreacted to Khachatryan’s snub, particularly since Pashinyan himself had appointed him in June 2020 and awarded him the prestigious “National Hero” medal for his outstanding role during the Artsakh War.

In retaliation, dozens of top Armenian military leaders released a joint statement on February 25, 2021, demanding the resignation of the prime minister and his government. The statement was signed by Onik Gasparyan, chief of the General Staff and 40 other high-ranking military Officers, including 17 generals and commanders of all five army corps. Later, several other military and police officials added their signatures.

The military’s statement expressed its “resolute protest” against the “short-sighted and baseless” dismissal of the first deputy chief of the General Staff “without taking into account the national and state interests of the Republic of Armenia, solely based on personal and pretentious sentiments.” The statement added that “in such difficult conditions for the country, such a decision is an anti-state and irresponsible step. The prime minister and his government are no longer able to make adequate decisions in this critical and fateful situation for the Armenian people. The Armed Forces, for a long time, patiently tolerated the ‘attacks’ by the incumbent authorities to discredit the Armed Forces, but everything has its limits.... The current authorities’ unproductive governing and the most serious errors exhibited in foreign policy have brought the country to the brink of collapse. Based on the created situation, the Armed Forces demand the resignation of the prime minister and the government....”

Pashinyan immediately announced on his Facebook page the firing of the chief of the General Staff. The prime minister called the military’s statement “an attempted military coup,” urging his supporters to gather at the Republic Square where he joined them and marched in Yerevan streets holding a megaphone. This was a highly irresponsible act on the part of Pashinyan, venturing to the streets during what he described as an attempted military coup, which could have led to tragic consequences for the country had anyone harmed him.

After Pashinyan ordered the firing of Onik Gasparyan, chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, President Sarkissian, having consulting all sides of the political spectrum, refused to sign the prime minister’s order, calling it unconstitutional. The prime minister then submitted a second dismissal request to the president.

Should the president refuse to sign the order for a second time, then the issue will be submitted to the constitutional court for its final decision. It is curious as to why the president endorsed the prime minister’s earlier order to sack the first deputy of the General Staff but refused to sign the order to dismiss the chief of the General Staff. After all, the first deputy chief of the General Staff’s wrongdoing was simply chuckling at the prime minister’s statement about the Russian missiles, whereas his boss, the chief of the General Staff, demanded the Prime Minister’s resignation.

In the meantime, the Armenian military took no further steps beyond its call for the resignation of the prime minister which the prime minister wrongly described as an attempted coup. However, the statement could be viewed as interference in political affairs which violates the constitution. It is clear that the military’s intent is having the prime minister resign without taking any military actions.

Turning to the unconstitutionality of the military’s statement, there are counter points to this argument. The military stated that they could no longer remain quiet while the country is on the brink of collapse. The national interest of Armenia has to be of paramount importance. After all, the military is the guardian of the nation’s security. Furthermore, Pashinyan and his supporters cannot all of a sudden claim to be defenders of the constitution, when they have been violating many of its provisions in the past three years. The prime minister has repeatedly pressured the courts and has stacked the Constitutional Court with his allies to get verdicts desired by the government. Pashinyan and his supporters similarly pressured Pres. Sarkissian to force him to sign the prime minister’s order. Ironically, the democratic principles endorsed by Pashinyan when coming to power have dissipated turning the country into a one-man rule, a dictatorship. Given the prime minister’s partisans’ overwhelming majority in Parliament, other voices have been mostly muzzled. All suggestions to form a government of competent experts have been ignored, leaving Pashinyan with a mediocre and incompetent cadre of officials and advisors.

Pashinyan’s only important attribute is that he is not corrupt — which is very positive, but that alone is not enough to lead the state through such turbulent waters. After all, Armenians are not looking for a saint, but a competent leader who can solve the country’s complex problems.

Furthermore, Pashinyan and his followers did not always practice what they are preaching now. Back in 2018, when there were widespread street protests by Pashinyan and his supporters, a large number of Armenian soldiers illegally left their barracks and marched with the demonstrators. Even though this was a violation of military rules and interference in politics, Pashinyan did not take any action against these soldiers. In a similar situation occurred in 1998, when Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsyan forced then President Levon Ter-Petrosyan to resign. No one complained that it was unconstitutional.

Shortly after this new crisis in Armenia, leaders in Azerbaijan and Turkey issued self-serving statements on the situation in Armenia. In my opinion, both of these countries, led by dictators, are in no position to comment on developments in Armenia, let alone give Armenians lectures about democracy. They should look at themselves in the mirror and keep their mouths shut.

Having suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of our enemies in the Artsakh War, Armenians cannot afford now to attack each other. We need to place the national interest above all else. Having lost most of Artsakh and thousands of soldiers, let’s not risk losing Armenia itself.

Pashinyan, the leader of the ‘Velvet Revolution,’ should not have told his followers last week that there will be no more ‘velvet’ which could be interpreted as a threat to anyone who disagrees with him. Should the military also adopt a no velvet approach, the outcome would be tragic for the entire Armenian nation. The best solution would be for the prime minister, having lost territories and thousands of soldiers, to resign by his own volition without facing any threats or protests. Other-wise, having demanded Pashinyan’s resignation, the military leaders may carry out their demand by force, to ensure that they themselves are not arrested. Such a group arrest would deprive Armenia of its entire military leadership. Months from now, under calmer conditions, new parliamentary elections should take place with a clean slate, hopefully excluding Pashinyan and the other former leaders. The people have the right to decide by a majority vote who their new leader should be.

America Must Contain Azeri-Turkish Aggression

By Varuzhan Nersesyan

As a leader in the advancement of human rights and democracy, America is respected around the world for effectively deploying its diplomatic and economic influence to solve global problems and find peaceful solution to regional conflicts.

With the Biden administration pledging greater diplomatic engagement, defense of democracy and prioritization of human rights, we hope more attention will be given to the fragile situation in Nagorno Karabakh.

In late September, amid a global pandemic and the hotly contested election season, Turkey and Azerbaijan launched a war in Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Artsakh, that left thousands dead and displaced tens of thousands more.

As one of the three co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, set up in 1992 to help resolve conflicts in the region, the United States recently called for a “negotiated, comprehensive, and sustainable settlement” for Artsakh. We ap-

plaud this call but, with no consequences for their aggression, Turkey and Azerbaijan will learn the wrong lessons from this conflict.

Azerbaijan, with Turkey’s backing, disregarded the US role as a peacemaker, flaunting its disdain for even the most basic of international norms. Using Azerbaijan as a client state for conducting war, Turkey openly admitted to subverting an active peace process co-chaired by its NATO allies, the United States and France.

Turkey employed NATO’s AWACS system, as well as American F-16s in support of Azerbaijan in open violation of its agreement to refrain from deploying these aircrafts. Turkey was credibly accused by both Western governments and respected media outlets of recruiting and transporting Syrian jihadist fighters into the region.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan repeatedly shelled maternity hospitals, markets, and cathedrals far from the frontlines and used internationally prohibited cluster munitions in residential areas and incendiary weapons like white phosphorus bombs.

In an effort at ethnic cleansing, there has been wide-

spread desecration of Armenian cultural and Christian religious heritage in the occupied territories. Since the latest ceasefire, Azeri soldiers have posted torture of Armenian POWs to social media. Horrific videos posted online featured the ISIS-style beheading of elderly civilians by Azeri forces.

Lasting peace is not possible if Azerbaijan and Turkey go unpunished. They will continue their aggression toward Armenians and beyond.

Recently, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev claimed that areas within the Republic of Armenia — including capital city Yerevan — all belong to Azerbaijan. Without strong international repudiation, such statements can lead to renewed violence. Given the history in the region, including the Armenian genocide of a century ago that Turkey continues to deny, these claims cannot go unnoticed.

In the latest demonstration of hostility, Turkey and Azerbaijan have conducted military exercises along Turkey’s border with Armenia, far from Nagorno Karabakh.

Armenians in the United States and across the world
see AGGRESSION, page 20



COMMENTARY

'Kavala Case Is Emblematic of The Crisis Facing The Rule of Law In Turkey'

Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Commission of Jurists and Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project have demanded the release of businessperson and rights defender Osman Kavala, who has been arrested in Silivri Prison in İstanbul for 1,217 days.

"The Turkish government's failure to comply with a binding European Court of Human Rights order to release the human rights defender Osman Kavala should prompt the Council of Europe action against Turkey," the organizations have said in a written joint statement.

The three nongovernmental organizations presented the recommendation in a submission to the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's intergovernmental body responsible for overseeing the implementation of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe is to review Turkey's noncompliance with the Strasbourg court's judgment on Kavala's case for the fourth time at its March 9-11, 2021 session. Kavala has been held in pretrial detention since November 2017.

'This Case Is Part of a Systemic Practice'

"Turkey's flagrant disregard for the European Court of Human Rights order to release Osman Kavala should trigger the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to start infringement proceedings against Turkey," said Aisling Reidy, senior legal adviser at Human Rights Watch.

"It is crucial for the Committee of Ministers, at its March session, to leave the Turkish government in no doubt that European Court of Human Rights judgments are binding on Turkey and that persistent failure to im-

plement the ruling in Osman Kavala's case constitutes a serious breach requiring exceptional measures," she added.

"The Kavala case is emblematic of the crisis facing civil society and the rule of law in Turkey," said Helen Duffy of the Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project, briefly adding the following:

"We recognize that infringement proceedings are exceptional, but if there is a case where they are justified, it is this one.

"Turning a deaf ear to the Strasbourg court's clear order to release and the Committee of Ministers's repeated calls for compliance, Turkey's government and courts have worked hand in glove to prolong and deepen the crisis and the violation of Mr. Kavala's rights.

"Infringement proceedings against Turkey provide the strongest legal mechanism to signal the shame of not complying with European Court of Human Rights' binding judgments."

"Separating cases or merging them again will not correct the injustice to which Turkey's courts and government have subjected Osman Kavala for over three years," said Róisín Pillay, Europe and Central Asia director of the International Commission of Jurists.

"This case is part of a systemic practice in which the Turkish courts, which are not independent, apply criminal law and procedures arbitrarily against critics of the government. The action plan needs to address these structural failings in the judicial system," she added.

What could be the sanction?

According to the joint statement of the organizations, the Committee of Ministers may opt to take infringement proceedings against a Council of Europe member state that refuses to implement European Court of Human Rights judgments. It was used for the first time in 2017 when the government of Azerbaijan continuously refused to secure the unconditional release of a wrongfully jailed opposition politician, Ilgar Mammadov.

Infringement proceedings are provided for under Article 46/4 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Their commencement requires the vote of two-thirds of the Committee of Ministers. Once the process is triggered, the case is referred back to the European Court of Human Rights for a further opinion on the legally binding obligation to comply.

If the Court confirms that Turkey has failed to im-

plement the ruling, the Committee of Ministers may then take additional measures, including ultimately suspending Turkey's voting rights or membership of the Council.

Kavala's detention prolonged for 4 times

As indicated by the NGOs, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has already considered the status of Turkey's compliance with the judgment on multiple occasions, issuing two decisions and, in December 2020, an interim resolution that each strongly urged Turkey to comply with the court's judgment by unconditionally releasing Kavala.

However, since the December resolution, local courts in Turkey have prolonged Osman Kavala's detention four more times. A court of appeal has overturned his acquittal in the Gezi Park protests trial, and Turkey's Constitutional Court has also flouted the European Court of Human Rights judgment by finding no violation of Kavala's right to liberty.

Next hearing on May 21

NGOs said in the submission that, "throughout the criminal proceedings against him, judges and prosecutors involved have abused criminal procedural rules to unlawfully extend Kavala's detention based on allegations that he organized and financed the 2013 Istanbul Gezi Park protests and that he was involved in the July 15, 2016 attempted military coup."

"A key aspect of this effort has been the practice of different courts over the three years and four months of Kavala's detention successively joining, separating, and rejoining case files against Kavala to justify prolonging his incarceration," they added further.

At the most recent local court hearing against Kavala, on February 5, 2021, the Istanbul 36th Assize Court ruled that the case against him concerning the coup attempt should be joined with the Gezi Park protests case, which is before the Istanbul 30th Assize Court. A hearing of the newly joined cases will take place on May 21. (DŞ/SD)

(Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Commission of Jurists and Turkey Human Rights Litigation Support Project have submitted a recommendation to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe regarding the Osman Kavala case. This commentary appeared on Bianet.org on March 1.)

Armenia's Domestic Crisis Has Regional, International Ramifications

CRISIS, from page 17

and tens of thousands were wounded, including civilians by illegal phosphorous and cluster bombs, and facing armed combat from 2,700 Syrian mercenaries, there was a conspiracy of silence around the world, except for lip service from France and cynical statement by then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo ("we hope that Armenians can defend themselves") but as soon as the news about a potential military coup circulated, a profuse outpouring of defense for Armenia's democracy spewed forth.

These expressions of support and warnings are cynical and meaningless, suggesting that as long as it is not a military coup, the fate of the country did not matter.

The Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) warned that Armenia's constitutionally elected government has to be respected. "We continue to support democracy," read the statement.

NATO headquarters, whose F-16 fighter jets and other munitions were used against Armenia, warned against "the further escalation of the crisis."

The US State Department's warning was indirectly referring to Moscow. It cautioned "Armenia's armed forces to stay out of politics."

State Department Spokesman Ned Price said that the US "very closely" monitors developments in Armenia. "We remind all parties of the bedrock democratic principle that states the armed forces should not intervene in domestic politics."

The most revealing comments came from Ankara and Baku, those staunch defenders and practitioners of democracy.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned what he described as attempts to stage a military coup in Armenia: "Nikol Pashinyan is already in a situation where the people could achieve his resignation. But they are talking about a direct overthrow of the government. Our position is clear. We are against such steps. Turkey opposes any coup, including in Armenia."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu issued a similar statement.

In turn, President Ilham Aliyev was concerned that a military coup in Armenia could jeopardize the application of the tripartite declaration of November 9.

It was not convenient for Moscow to dig further into the situation. Thus, it was satisfied by a statement issued by a member of the Duma that the problem was a diplomatic issue for a sovereign country like Armenia.

"We hope that Armenia's internal developments will not reflect on the tripartite declaration," he said.

Analyzing the complete silence of all these parties during the war, during which numerous violations of the Geneva Convention took place, where POWs, soldiers and civilians were tortured and killed on camera and civilian targets bombed, suddenly we saw expressions of concern. We can only conclude one thing: The West "owns" the democracy in Armenia and by extrapolation, it lumps the Velvet Revolution in Armenia with all the other color revolutions it encouraged in Ukraine, Georgia and very recently in Belarus. Therefore, we can see very clearly that a tacit war is being conducted in Armenia

between Western and Russian interests. Consequently, Armenian citizens and their leaders cannot precipitate any domestic change without endangering the interests of those camps. Each politician and each party is a pawn on the chessboard of world politics.

This situation may be considered as the normal course of politics. But what goes beyond normal is Turkey's interest in this cobweb.

Now that Turkey has helped Azerbaijan to crush the backbone of Armenia's armed forces and has reduced the country to a basket case, it considers this period the most opportune time to extract concessions from Armenia. Armenia has nothing but the moral power of the Genocide, which Turkey denies and wishes to see dissipate as a liability.

Now that the Biden Administration seems amenable to recognizing the Armenian Genocide, President Erdogan is planning to reenact a performance of the country's "football diplomacy" that took place between Serzh Sargsyan and Abdullah Gul in 2009, a charade of signing protocols in Zurich in the presence of then-Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Thus, Erdogan can scuttle any recognition by the Biden Administration by stating that third parties should not interfere as the country is negotiating with its Armenian counterparts.

This is not a conjecture nor guesswork, as Erdogan's emissaries have been sighted in Yerevan, conducting backdoor negotiations. The editor of the Yerevan-based Azg weekly, Hagop Avedikian, has even mentioned the name of one emissary. Indeed,

every time Turkey tries a rapprochement with Armenia, a Turkish citizen of Armenian descent named Samson Özararar emerges. He has been spotted in Armenia, talking to politician Hovhannes Igityan.

We do not want to speculate about what may happen. Now that Armenia is in a weak position and Pashinyan is even weaker, more details may emerge.

No one doubts Pashinyan's patriotism, but political expediency might override his better nature.

Any concession to Turkey by the Armenian government will set back for decades the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Plus, it will pit Armenia against the diaspora, since Erdogan claims that the Armenian government is a hostage to the "fanatical" Armenians in the diaspora.

The trauma of the Genocide is heavier for the diasporan Armenians, many of whom are the direct descendants of the Genocide survivors. Plus, Armenia's citizens were banned for decades from learning about the Genocide or referring to it because the Soviets entertained a policy of not offending Turkey. Therefore, the impact of the Genocide is not as strong on the citizens of Armenia. This does not mean that Pashinyan can sell out the cause, but he needs to be careful as even a simple conversation can overthrow Genocide recognition.

In view of the perspective and the parameters of world political affecting Armenia and Turkey's intentions in this given situation, political forces in Armenia can exercise caution and foresight to derive the proper conclusions.



A New and Improved Mirror-Spectator

WATERTOWN — Starting with this issue, readers will notice some changes to the newspaper's appearance.

The changes to the fonts and format have been made to freshen up the look of the paper.

While we have been happy with how the paper has looked, we felt it was time for a change, as we have added many new writers and correspondents from various parts of the world.

Mark Mgrditchian, our longtime graphic designer, is responsible for the new look.

“Change is good. Sometimes the simplest changes can have a huge impact. Bold, simple, and unencumbered were my goals in updating our presentation of the news. The *Mirror-Spectator* is currently blessed with a diversified staff, together with long-standing and new-to-the-scene contributors. The simple updates that we made, like changing the text font to the universally recognized New Times Roman, along with our on-going efforts to accommodate our online audience, hopefully, will better serve all of our English-speaking readers for

many years to come,” he said.

In addition to the changes to the paper's appearance, tremendous strides have been made online. Our website (www.mirrorspectator.com) has an ever-increasing number of hits monthly. We maintain a presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Now, we are proud to announce that an app for the *Mirror-Spectator* (<https://apps.apple.com/uy/app/mirror-spectator/id1529754235>) is available for iPhones and iPads. It is free to download and will allow readers to keep up with the latest news effortlessly.

Finally, with this issue we want to introduce officially the latest addition to the staff, Harry A. Kezelian III, joining Alin K. Gregorian and Aram Arkun. Harry was born and raised in Metro Detroit where his family has been active in church and community activities for four generations. He grew up at St. John's Armenian Church and has been an active member and leader in the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America locally and nationally and is currently active in the Armenian General Benevolent Union Young Professionals.

He attended the University of Michigan where he studied Armenian under Prof. Kevork Bardakjian and Armenian history under Prof. Jirair Libaridian and holds a B.A. in History, J.D. from Michigan Law School, and Master's in Teaching from University of Michigan, Dearborn, in addition to having taken courses at St. Nersess Seminary. He currently serves as a subdeacon in the Armenian Church as well as assistant to the director of the Manoogian Museum and Mardigian Library in Southfield. Harry is passionate about Armenian history and culture, especially folk music, and performs as a singer and oudist with his own Armenian band.



America Must Contain Azeri-Turkish Aggression

AGGRESSION, from page 18
hope the United States will take a principled stand by supporting a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict. This cannot happen as long as the root cause of the conflict — the issue of the status — has not been resolved.

As a starting point, America must join us in demanding that Azerbaijan unconditionally return an estimated 200 Armenian prisoners of war. Absent this basic humanitarian gesture, dialogue and negotiation cannot succeed.

Second, the Biden administration can cut off foreign assistance to Azerbaijan's military. In FY 2018 and 2019, the Trump administration provided more than \$100 million in military and security aid to Azerbaijan — resources that were likely used

against Armenian civilians and soldiers.

Further, all arms export licenses to Turkey and Azerbaijan must be rejected. Global economic and political sanctions need to be imposed on the Erdogan and Aliyev governments.

The US Congress should follow the principled example of both houses of the French Parliament and a number of other European parliaments, which have voted in favor of the self-determination of the Republic of Artsakh.

As part of its co-chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk Group, we urge the United States to support de-occupation by Azerbaijan of the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh. This includes the safe and dignified return of the recently displaced population of Artsakh to their homes.

Finally, the United States must oppose any role for Turkey in either peacekeeping or the peace process in Artsakh. The international community cannot reward Ankara for outright aggression that undermines a globally mandated peace process.

If Azerbaijan and Turkey are allowed to hijack the OSCE Minsk Group peace process that America co-chairs — using force to twist regional security architecture toward their expansionist aspirations — they will not stop.

As we are now seeing in Syria, Libya, Cy-

prus, the Aegean and Artsakh, Turkey is becoming a regional menace, using mercenary armies of jihadists and states like Azerbaijan to project and expand its power.

To contain belligerent behavior by Turkey and its clients like Azerbaijan, the United States must enforce international norms through economic and diplomatic means. The alternative is a more dangerous world for everyone.

(Varuzhan Nersesyan is the ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the US. This originally appeared on Newsweek.com.)

Boston Proclaims February 26 Khojaly Commemoration Day

PROCLAMATION, from page 1
ommunity. Mayor Walsh is proud to stand in support of Armenians in Boston.”

A similar proclamation issued in Portland, Maine, was backed by the Azerbaijan Society of Maine, but it called the event a genocide, not massacre. Audrey Altstadt, a history professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, who has written books about Azerbaijan, noted that the event did not fit the internationally accepted definition of genocide.

Approximately 50-60 Azerbaijanis live in Portland, along with an estimated 100-200 Armenians. Altstadt said that a campaign backed by the Azerbaijani embassy in Washington to promote Khojaly Remembrance Day began around ten years ago, and added: “It's interesting to me that you would have a small community of 50 to 60 Azer-

baijanis and it would cross their minds to approach the mayor for something like this. That used to not be the case.”

Portland Mayor Kate Snyder, after Armenians criticized the Portland proclamation as historically inaccurate and part of an international propaganda campaign, apologized and promised to change the review process concerning proclamations. She declared, “One of the many lessons learned over the course of the last few days is that, in the case of international issues, especially when there's a conflict, there needs to be much deeper scrutiny of how and if the city of Portland is weighing into that issue.”

She also said she would find a way to recognize the Armenian Genocide on its anniversary date of commemoration on April 24.

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