

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932

Volume LXXXI, NO. 38, Issue 4680

APRIL 10, 2021

\$2.00

‘Songs of Hope’ Lift Cleveland-Area Armenian Community

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

CLEVELAND — The Covid-19 pandemic has been hard on everyone. Among those who found this time the most difficult have been religious communities whose members were not able to congregate in person, and musicians and music fans who have been unable to experience the joy of live performance, as well as the Armenian communities around the country which have not been able to come together to mutually support one another in the typical way during this time of need.

The “Songs of Hope” concert, offered on March 28 by St. Gregory of Narek Armenian Apostolic Church after this year’s Palm Sunday Divine Liturgy, took care of all three missing elements for many Cleveland-area Armenians.

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Amb. Nersesyan Calls For Azerbaijan to Return Armenian Captives

End Destruction of Monuments, and Negotiate Artsakh Status

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WASHINGTON — Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United States Varuzhan Nersesyan highlighted the problems of Azerbaijan illegally retaining and abusing Armenian captives and destroying Armenian cultural monuments after last year’s Artsakh war in an April 2 interview with the *Mirror-Spectator*.

Nersesyan stated that the Armenian side has returned all Azerbaijani prisoners of war, including two convicted murderers, during the first two exchanges of hostages in accordance with its commitment to the November 9, 2020 trilateral Armenian-Azerbaijani-Russian statement on the ceasefire. Azerbaijan has not, however, respected the all-for-all principle. It returned only 75 Armenian captives, but still is keeping an estimated 200 prisoners of war and civilian captives, the ambassador said.

In order to justify this, Nersesyan said that Azerbaijan tried to misrepresent the very nature of the remaining Armenian prisoners of war by invoking a fake “anti-terror operation” and portraying the Armenian prisoners of war as “terrorists.”

More than a month into the ceasefire, Azerbaijani special forces launched an attack in the direction of two villages of the Hadrut region that remained under the Armenian control. As a result of this unprovoked aggression, Azerbaijan captured 64 Armenia see CAPTIVES, page 3

Portland Mayor Rescinds ‘Khojaly Remembrance Day’ Proclamation, Offers Apology

By Aram Arkun
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PORTLAND, Maine — Mayor Kathleen M. Snyder on April 1 rescinded and apologized for the mayoral proclamation of “Khojaly Remembrance Day,” which had been adopted in February. The proclamation upset Armenians in particular because it characterized the deaths at Khojaly as genocide, declaring that “the perpetrators of this genocide are still at large and have not been brought to justice yet.”

Snyder had previously apologized for the proclamation but had declined to rescind it, instead promising that all future mayoral proclamations would receive closer review. For the Armenians, she offered to recognize the Armenian Genocide on April 24.

Gerald Kiladjian, president and cofounder in 2003 of the Armenian Cultural Association of Maine (ACA) said that the local Armenians found out after the fact about the proclamation, which had been prepared by the small see PORTLAND, page 11



Nvak — Amplifying the Female Voice in Armenia

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — Even before she founded the nonprofit Nvak Foundation in 2016 and took the helm as CEO of the innovative record label Nvak Collective, Tamar Kaprelian was already a star. In fact, by then this charismatic Armenian-American artist, activist, and music industry veteran had signed major recording contracts with RCA & Interscope Records and honed her craft with some of LA’s top songsmiths. Along the way, for good measure she also graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Columbia University, double majoring in English and comparative literature. She released her debut album, “Sinner or a Saint,” in 2010 on Interscope Records and was then selected to represent Armenia in the 2015 Eurovision contest as part of the supergroup Genealogy.

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Tamar Kaprielian and Alex Salibian
co-founders of Nvak collective



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San Fernando Valley Students Win Prizes in C-SPAN Competitions



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SOAR Extends Efforts to Families of Soldiers Killed in Latest War



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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Volunteer Fire-Rescue Base Opened In Syunik

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — A volunteer fire-rescue base was opened in Syunik region with 25 volunteers from Shikahogh, Srashen, Tsav, Nerkin Hand and Chakaten settlements.

The fire-rescue base in Shikahogh settlement was established by the “Khustup” rescue detachment NGO registered in Syunik region with the funding of the “Protected Areas Support Program-Armenia” (RAP-H) program implemented by the Ministry of Environment. Reconstruction and improvement of the building was carried out at the expense of the allocated grant funds, training of volunteer fire-rescuers, as well as the acquisition of appropriate equipment, equipment necessary for firefighting works, equipment. The major donor to the project is the German bank KfW.

Kremlin Confirms that Putin, Kocharyan Spoke

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov confirmed that Russian President Vladimir Putin had held a telephone conversation last week with former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan while the latter was visiting Moscow to attend a meeting of the board of directors of Sistema, a financial corporation where he serves as independent director. “I can confirm it; they indeed held a phone conversation,” Peskov told reporters when asked to confirm or deny the report. “You know that they’ve had good relations for a very long time, and it continues, and they are in contact rather often,” Peskov said according to RIA Novosti on April 6.

Slovakia’s National Council Adopts Resolution on Artsakh

BRATISLAVA (Panorma.am) — During its April 1 25th plenary session, the National Council of Slovakia unanimously passed a resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) submitted by Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee Marián Kéry (SMER-SD/Social Democrats), with 120 votes in favor, the Armenian Embassy to Austria reported. The resolution strongly condemns the killings of civilians, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, monuments and cultural and religious sites, expresses concerns over the military involvement of third countries in the conflict and their destabilizing role and emphasizes that the process of achieving a lasting peace and determining the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh should be carried out under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs. It expresses deep concern that prisoners of war (POWs) and other detainees, including civilians, have not been released in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, particularly the 1949 Geneva Convention. It urges the government of Slovakia, the EU and international organizations to ensure a proper investigation of all allegations of war crimes, including the use of cluster munitions, immediate release of all POWs and civilians, and unrestricted entry of international humanitarian organizations into Artsakh.

Kocharyan Cleared of Coup Charges

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — A judge in Yerevan threw out on April 6 coup charges against former President Robert Kocharyan which Armenia’s Constitutional Court had earlier declared unconstitutional.

Kocharyan and two retired generals were charged in 2018 with “overthrowing the constitutional order” under Article 300.1 of the Armenian Criminal Code. The accusation rejected by them as politically motivated stems from the 2008 post-election unrest that left ten people dead.

The current Criminal Code was enacted after the dramatic events of March 2008. In a March 26 ruling, the Constitutional Court backed defense lawyers’ arguments that it cannot be applied retroactively against Kocharyan and the other defendants.

Citing the court ruling, the lawyers demanded last week that the Anna Danibekyan, the judge presiding over their two-year trial, throw out the coup charges. Danibekyan accepted the demand.

The judge ruled that Kocharyan and his former chief of staff, Armen Gevorgyan, will continue to stand trial only on bribery charges which they also strongly deny. She fully acquitted the two other defendants, retired Generals Yuri Khachaturov and Seyran Ohanyan, who were prosecuted only in connection with the post-election unrest.

Prosecutor-General Artur Davtyan last week appealed to the Constitutional Court to also declare unconstitutional legal provisions that do not allow the prosecutors to alter the coup accusations leveled against the defendants. The trial prosecutors said the coup trial should therefore be suspended, rather than discontinued altogether, pending a high court ruling on the appeal.

One of them, Petros Petrosian, said after Danibekyan’s decision that the prosecutors could again indict Kocharyan over the 2008 crackdown on opposition protesters in Yerevan if the Constitutional Court

grants Davtyan’s request.

One of Kocharyan’s lawyers, Aram Orbelyan, insisted, however, that the high court exonerated the ex-president from all responsibility for the bloodshed. “There are no grounds for bringing new [coup] charges,” Orbelyan told reporters.

Meanwhile, a lawyer representing the families of nine victims of the unrest deplored the development. Tigran Yegoryan

Kocharyan’s second and final term in office. Riot police used force to end the protests on March 1-2, 2008. Eight protesters and two police servicemen were killed as a result.

Pashinyan and dozens of other opposition figures were subsequently jailed for organizing what the former Armenian authorities described as “mass disturbances” aimed at overthrowing the government.



Former President Robert Kocharyan

hit out at the Constitutional Court, saying that its March 26 ruling was politically motivated and violated the Armenian constitution.

Five of the court’s nine judges were installed after the Velvet Revolution of April-May 2018 which brought Nikol Pashinyan to power.

Pashinyan was one of the main speakers at daily opposition rallies held in Yerevan in the wake of a disputed presidential election held in February 2008 at the end of

Law enforcement authorities radically changed the official version of events shortly after the 2018 regime change. They first arrested Kocharyan in July 2018. He was twice freed and twice rearrested before Armenia’s Court of Appeals released him on bail in June 2020.

The 66-year-old ex-president has said that his prosecution is part of a “political vendetta” waged by Pashinyan. The Armenian prime minister denies any interference in the probe of the 2008 violence.

Legendary Military Commander of Karabakh Liberation War Dies

YEREVAN (RFE/RL, News.am) — Major General Arkady Ter-Tadevosyan (Komandos), a legendary Armenian commander during the Karabakh war for liberation in the 1990s, died on March 31 at the age of 81.

Ter-Tadevosyan is best known as the commander of the military operation which liberated Shushi in 1992.

Defense Minister Vagharshak Harutyunyan told reporters after the Requiem Service for him on April 3 that Ter-Tadevosyan was a patriotic man who was devoted to the army.

The minister said he had known the legendary commander since the war in the 1990s. “When the army of Nagorno-Karabakh was being formed, the military-political situation was very intricate. The Defense Committee decided to send Ter-Tadevosyan to Nagorno-Karabakh, and he left at the most difficult moment. He started participating in the military operations and formed the army at the same time. After that, when I was appointed Minister of Defense in 1999, he served as Special Assignments General, and we worked together. I had very close ties with him. I know him very well, appreciate his contributions and, most importantly, he made a great contribution to the functioning of the army of Karabakh and the military operations in the initial stage.”



Major General Arkady Ter-Tadevosyan

Asked if he had talked to the Komandos after the recent war, Harutyunyan said the following: “He objectively assessed the situation. I’m certain that he only wanted to see the Armenian army as an efficient army and to see the country get out of the situation victoriously.”

Asked what Armenia has to do to have

the homeland that the Komandos dreamed about, taking into consideration that he was one of those who liberated Shushi and Shushi is currently under the adversary’s control, Harutyunyan said the following: “When we were starting the Karabakh movement, Karabakh was in a blockade, and Azerbaijan always had more military equipment than Armenia did. Now Armenia is in a better situation than it was in 1998. We need to stand united as one, have the will and aspire for victory.”

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan offered his condolences over the death.

“It was with deep sorrow that I learned about the passing of Hero of Artsakh, legendary military commander, Major-General Arkady-Ter Tadevosyan – our dear Komandos.

“Hero of Artsakh Arkady Ter-Tadevosyan is the embodiment of patriotism and high professionalism. His name will remain with eternal glory in the Armenian history as a worthy son to the Armenian nation and a devoted military serviceman whose entire career has given pride and the joy of victory to the Armenian people.

“My condolences to Major-General Arkady Ter-Tadevosyan’s family and friends, and us all.

Eternal glory to his memory,” Pashinyan said in the message,” Pashinyan said in his message.



ARMENIA

Amb. Nersesyan Calls for Azerbaijan to Return Armenian Captives

End Destruction of Monuments, and Negotiate Artsakh Status

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n servicemen, in violation of its ceasefire obligations under the trilateral statement. Nersesyan said, “They are clearly prisoners of war, falling under the full protection of international law and the Geneva Convention. They are supposed to be treated in a humane manner and returned unconditionally.”

If Azerbaijan truly wants to restore long-term stability in the region, the first step, he said, is the return of all prisoners of war. However, he said, “The reason why Azerbaijan is not returning them is clear: Azerbaijan keeps them as hostages trying to gain advantage in other matters.”

A second indication that Azerbaijan is not serious about restoring peace, Nersesyan said, are the videos that members of the Azerbaijani military have been releasing. He said, “The Internet is flooded with these extremely disturbing, horrendous videos, in which the Azerbaijani military has been treating Armenian prisoners of war inhumanely, through beatings, torture and even beheadings. These are not members of paramilitary formations who have videoed these acts, but servicemen in the regular chain of command of the Azerbaijani army.”

He noted that while there is some information that Azerbaijan is investigating them, in reality some of the perpetrators have already been awarded by the high-level leadership, which is a clear sign of encouragement. Maybe this is the reason why the servicemen depicted in the videos are in uniform and do not even feel the need to hide their faces. Instead, they proudly are posting on the Internet. Nersesyan said, “What can one call this if not encouragement by the Azerbaijani government. This is the environment in which we are living.”

A third indication of Azerbaijani attitude is the destruction and desecration by the Azerbaijani military of Armenian cultural and religious monuments. Nersesyan gave the examples of the bombardment of the Sourp Ghazanchetsots or Holy Savior Cathedral in Shushi during the recent war, and its later desecration, as well as the destruction of the St. John the Baptist Church, commonly known as Kanach Zham [Green Chapel] in the same city. The BBC reported on the flattening of the site where the Zoravor Sourp Astvatsatsin Church existed in Mekhakan (Jebrayil), while Internet images emerged of Azerbaijani soldiers vandalizing the St. Yeghishe Church in Mataghis.

Nersesyan said, “All this is nothing but orchestrated by the Azerbaijani government. When it talks about ensuring the rights of the Armenian people in Karabakh, it should

try to misrepresent Armenian churches. Nersesyan said, “People who are aware of the history of the South Caucasus would simply laugh when Azerbaijanis attempt to present these churches as anything but Armenian. These churches have a clear Armenian identity supported by inscriptions and features, and are documented in world historiography as such.”

He said that these Azerbaijani actions deserve full condemnation by the international community and immediate action to stop any further attempt at destruction, desecration or distortion of the Armenian heritage in the territories that fell under the Azerbaijani military

comes up with its own claims in the appropriate time and venue.

Armenian Genocide Factor

With various rumors floating around about the effect of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the US president on Armenian foreign policy, Nersesyan declared unconditionally that the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is a priority for Armenia’s foreign policy. He said, “We very much hope and expect that President Biden on the forthcoming April 24 will call things by their proper names and recognize the Armenian Genocide. The recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the US government



Zoravor Sourp Astvatsatsin Church near the town of Mekhakan, before and after Azerbaijani destruction



Amb. Varuzhan Nersesyan

be clear that this is how Azerbaijan will behave against the people of Nagorno Karabakh. This is the reason why their fight for freedom and self-determination started in the first place. Nothing has changed over the years in the attitude of Azerbaijan and Turkey toward the Armenian people and their religious and cultural heritage. We see these obvious demonstrations of hatred and the desire to eliminate all traces of Armenian presence.”

He gave as supporting evidence the complete destruction of Armenian *khachkars* (cross stones) or other Christian monuments in Nakhichevan during peacetime and far from the conflict zone and a reemphasized attempt to

control after the recent aggression. While there have been some statements to this effect by international organizations and structures, he said that so far, there has been no serious attempt by the Azerbaijani government to stop this behavior.

Perhaps the most serious indication that Azerbaijan is not serious about peace, Nersesyan said, is that it is trying to present the conflict as resolved. Nersesyan said, “The core issues of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remain unresolved. Amongst them is the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination which entails the issue of the status and territories of Nagorno-Karabakh which are currently under the Azerbaijani occupation. The conflict can be resolved with a lasting, stable peace only after determination of these issues.”

Consequently, Nersesyan said that Armenia expects and hopes that the Russian, French and American co-chairmen of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group will activate their efforts to find a lasting solution to the issues that have not been addressed by the trilateral statement on ceasefire. Nersesyan observed that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken affirmed at his Senate confirmation hearing that the US would resume its activities within the Minsk Group co-chairmanship. He said that the co-chairmanship “is the only internationally mandated format for the resolution of the conflict.... We do not see any alternative and any change in format is unacceptable.”

Apart from this forum, Armenia has initiated interim measures in the Human Rights Court of the Council of Europe concerning the prisoners of war. Armenia is not merely able to defend its stance on NK conflict but also

can help in any possible future normalization attempt, and we hope and expect that Turkey will reconcile itself with its past before we talk about normalization.”

Nersesyan noted that at this point, there were no processes of such normalization underway. He said, “Turkey has conducted a very aggressive policy towards Armenia and has been directly involved in recent aggression by Azerbaijan which inflicted enormous suffering on the Armenian people.”

The Path Forward

Nersesyan declared that until a full political resolution of the conflict is achieved, there remains a risk of war. He pointed to the territorial claims on Armenia publicly made by Azerbaijan’s president after the end of the war, the references by Turkey’s president to controversial statements of Ottoman leaders, and constant threats to Armenia made by the leaders of these two countries.

He stressed that “Azerbaijan has the false perception that its fait accompli and a temporary military advantage can constitute a solution. This is not a solution but self-deception. If you pretend the issue is resolved, one day it may appear in a completely different perspective.”

Ultimately, he said, the people of Nagorno Karabakh, like any other people around the globe must be able to enjoy basic human rights. He said, “This has been at the cornerstone of the peace proposals by the Minsk Group co-chairs. The right of the Nagorno Karabakh people to self-determination is reflected in numerous statements of the leaders of Russia, France and the United States. No war or aggression can deprive them of this right. It is high time not to pretend that the status issue has been resolved, but to genuinely look to the reality and address it.”

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Charles Aznavour Statue to Be Installed in Varna

VARNA, Bulgaria (Panorama.am) — A statue of Charles Aznavour will be installed in Varna, Bulgaria, the Aznavour Foundation said on Tuesday, April 6.

The project will be carried out through the cooperation of the Aznavour Foundation and the AGBU chapter in Varna.

The memorandum has already been signed and will be implemented soon, the foundation added.

Legendary French-Armenian singer Charles Aznavour passed away in 2018 aged 94.

United Nations Has Provided \$1 Million to Azerbaijan for Demining

NEW YORK (PanArmenian.net) — The United Nations has allocated \$1 million to Azerbaijan for demining operations, the Permanent Representative of the United Nations Development Program Charu Biste, writes in Moscow Baku-States on April 5.

Biste noted that a new agreement was signed two weeks ago and that the UN Central Emergency Response Fund provided the \$1 million. “These funds will be used to support staff costs,” he said.

In the territories under the control of Azerbaijan after the 44-day war in Artsakh, there are regular casualties due to mine explosions among the Azerbaijani military and others.

Erdogan to Visit Shushi

ISTANBUL (Nor Marmara) — The Cooperation Council of Turkish-Speaking States held an unofficial summit meeting on March 31 using an online platform.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan participated in the meeting and announced that Turkic-speaking countries must help Azerbaijan to rebuild the territory conquered during the 44-day war against Armenia. He also noted that would be visiting Shushi after the Ramadan holidays.

Friends Help Last Armenian in Derik to Celebrate Easter

ISTANBUL (Nor Marmara, Hurriyet) — The only Armenian living in the village of Derik in the province of Mardin, Turkey, Zekeriy Sabuncu, celebrated Easter on Sunday, April 4.

The 64-year-old Armenian, who had moved to Istanbul 40 years ago and moved back to his birthplace of Derik eight years ago to start a natural soap business, celebrated the Feast of the Resurrection with his neighbors. Sabuncu himself rang the bells of Derik’s 371-year-old St. Kevork Armenian Church on Easter. He lit a candle and prayed in the ancient sanctuary. Due to the pandemic, Sabuncu was alone this year in his prayers, but his Muslim friends came to the courtyard of the church where Sabuncu distributed boiled red eggs and sweets to both adults and neighborhood children.

Sabuncu noted that due to the pandemic he has not been able to visit Istanbul this year.

Bright Garden Voices Opens Communications Between Azerbaijanis and Armenians

By Paul Vartan Sookiasian
Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

The recent war in the Nagorno-Karabakh region has had some unexpected outcomes, with many on both sides asking, after all the death and destruction, where do we go from here?

One of the biggest issues underlying this formerly “frozen conflict” is the similar freezing of any interaction between ordinary Armenians and Azerbaijanis. There are many reasons for this, not least of which is suspicion on both sides of anyone who would have communication with “the enemy.” Though social media has been full of hatred and propaganda, some Armenians and Azerbaijanis found each other through the noise, seeking to understand the roots of the conflict via each other’s perspective.

One of the platforms that grew from this is “Bright Garden Voices,” which was organized by people who met each other in discussions on Twitter as a result of the war.

Background

The centuries of co-existence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis have largely been obscured by the past three decades of bitter conflict, even though members of the older generation can still speak the other’s language and enjoy aspects of their cultures. Track II diplomacy between private citizens from Armenia and Azerbaijan was severely limited to meetings facilitated by nongovernmental organizations, mainly in Georgia. However, at the outbreak of the war, Armenians from those circles found their former counterparts for peace suddenly awash in an enthusiastic war fever, while they themselves were feeling pressured to stay silent at home.

Paradoxically, the outbreak of war gave Armenians and Azerbaijanis something to share for the first time in so long – loss and pain. With thousands of soldiers killed on

Bright Garden Voices has seized this unique opportunity to exchange views across that deep gulf of silence to those on the other side. Bright Garden is about bringing the human side of the conflict and reminding that there are real people on the

proached the other two with his idea and the team was formed.

Establishing Communications

The unexpected ease of organizing the group was seen as further evidence that it was something that should be done, despite



An example of the Bright Garden meeting topics

other side, not just a source of fear.

It is headed by a trio from different backgrounds. Arnold Alahverdian is an Armenian-American doctoral candidate in history at University of California, Irvine. Aydan Gasimova is an Azerbaijani native of Baku now living in the Netherlands and working in the field of data science. The third member, Diego Ardouin, is neither Armenian nor Azerbaijani, but an Argentinian who has studied Armenian issues for many years, as his hometown of Buenos Aires has long boasted a vibrant Armenian population. He was inspired to advocate for recognition of the Armenian Genocide and also for building bridges between Turkish and Armenian civil society.

Ardouin saw the need for such a group, as interesting social media exchanges between Armenians and Azerbaijanis time and again would be interrupted or overshadowed by troll attacks, interjections of “whataboutism,” and a general environment which was not conducive to people having open and honest dialogue.

the pushback its members knew would follow.

The notion of talking to the “enemy” is a fraught one, and there are some who would call those who do traitors or claim that they are playing into the hands of the enemy. It should be made clear that the group receives no funding from any outside organization or individuals.

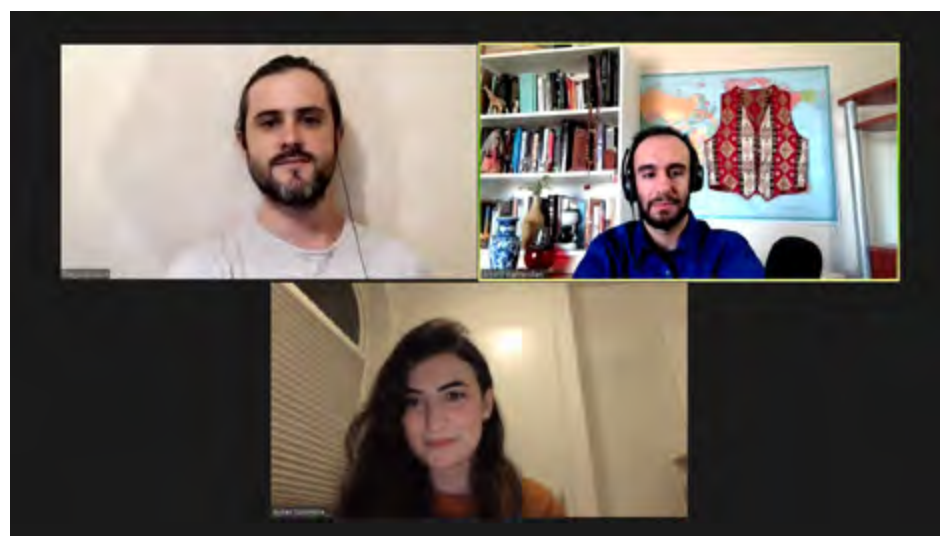
Co-organizer Arnold Alahverdian has no illusions about the difficulty of such a platform so soon after the war, explaining: “The wounds of the war are still very fresh and it also doesn’t help that the POW situation still hasn’t been resolved. Most of the criticism came as a reaction to the announcement of the project, even before the first meeting. After our first two meetings, however, we received an increasing amount of positive feedback. Even some people who had criticized us later changed their minds and expressed their support.”

Most participants admit they had never even met a member of the other ethnic group before joining. Bright Garden allows for a neutral safe space to gather and see each other’s faces, which gives a human face to a conflict that has seen a great deal of dehumanization.

In each Bright Voices meeting over the Zoom platform, a specific topic is discussed by two guests, one Armenian and one Azerbaijani, often presenting their relevant work on the conflict or building bridges. A recent episode featured photographer Orkhan Abbasov and filmmaker Arpi Bekaryan, who discussed the importance of films, photographs, and iconic visuals in shaping the conflict. They noted the role of visual media in showing the human side of the story; that the conflict is not just about armies fighting each other but innocent people being killed and forced to flee. At the end of the war there were videos of Armenian and Azerbaijani soldiers speaking normally with each other and even sharing tea, but these were shared far less than the ones of atrocities, and indeed there is a fear of sharing them lest one is seen as a traitor.

Bekaryan said that in her experience, people are willing to share their memories of co-existence when prompted, and it is important to making room for these stories. Bekaryan pointed out something which is

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The three organizers of Bright Garden Voices together on Zoom

each side as well as civilians, this shared tragedy in a way gave insight into and even curiosity about who these people are on the other side. While it might sound counterintuitive, many young people who might not even remember the first war have remarked that despite everything, it was the pain of this recent war which helped them see the opposing side as human for the first time.

As Ardouin explained, “there was a communicational gap in terms of representation: academics answering questions but not really engaging with each other, and normal citizens unable to interact with each other normally without being exposed to attacks from either side.” Recognizing there were many well-intentioned people who wanted to engage respectfully, he ap-



INTERNATIONAL

Online ‘Auctions’ of Yazidi Captives Speak Of Ongoing Islamic State Activity in Turkey

By Fehim Tastekin

ANKARA (Al-Monitor) — Six years after its gruesome assault on the Yazidi minority in Iraq, the Islamic State (IS) continues to sell Yazidi captives online on what is known as the “deep web” of criminal activities. A number of such sales have taken place in Turkey, indicating that IS militants are still able to take shelter in the country.

Most recently, a 7-year-old Yazidi girl was rescued by police posing as buyers. According to Turkish journalist Hale Gonultas, who closely follows the fate of IS captives, police took action after an advertisement in Kurdish and Arabic, complete with the girl’s picture, appeared online February 23. Posing as relatives of the child, the police made the highest bid and were able to detect the address of the advertiser. They raided a home in Ankara’s Kecioren district the following day and rescued the girl.

According to the official account of the incident, police and intelligence services established that a suspect, who was a ranking member of IS in Mosul, Iraq, had made it to Ankara, bringing along a Yazidi child as “war booty.” The man, identified only as S.O., was detained along with a suspected accomplice.

After such online “auctions,” the captives are usually delivered via “safe middlemen” who are typically criminals involved in the trafficking of drugs, arms and humans. The rescued girl remains in state care in Ankara, as Iraqi commissions dealing with missing Yazidis are working to trace her family.

In July 2020, a 24-year-old Yazidi woman, held captive in Ankara’s Sincan district, was rescued by relatives in Australia who “bought” her in an online sale. According to Gonultas, the Yazidi woman’s captor — a Turkmen IS member from Mosul — had bought her from an online slave market in 2018. The man, who moved frequently between Iraq and Turkey, kept a home in Sincan with his two wives, four children and the Yazidi woman.

Another Yazidi woman was rescued in Ankara in October 2019. She was held by a senior Iraqi Turkmen member of IS, who was so audacious as to rent an apartment near a police station in Kecioren. The young woman, abducted as a 14-year-old in 2014, lived with the family of the IS militant and had a baby as a product of rape. The man, who had been an IS emir in Tal Afar, Iraq, traveled frequently to Iraq, which allowed the woman’s brother to track him down to Ankara. The brother managed to take a picture of his sister and her captor, seizing a rare moment the man took the woman out, and went to the police. Eventually, the woman was rescued. The authorities, however, took no legal action against her captor as she did not file a complaint against him, although they had enough findings to pursue a criminal case for abduction and rape.

Another rescue saga unfolded in Kirsehir, a city not far from Ankara, in 2017, when an Iraqi Turkmen made an unsuccessful attempt to register two children as his own at a police bureau dealing with refugees. The two siblings were taken into state care, while their pictures were sent to Iraqi centers dealing with missing Yazidis. This eventually brought their adult sister to Kirsehir — a woman who herself had been an IS captive before relatives bailed her out. Her parents, husband, son and a sibling were also missing. The woman faced legal barriers in claiming her siblings in Kirsehir, including having to provide DNA tests and proof that their parents were dead. Ultimately, the two children, ages 9 and 11, were handed over to Iraqi Kurdistan President Nechirvan Barzani when he visited Ankara in September.

The Turkish police’s press bulletins paint a relentless struggle against IS, with dozens of suspects rounded up on a monthly basis. Yet those efforts have failed to prevent IS militants from taking shelter, transferring money and selling people in Turkey. The bitter reality is that the IS presence in Turkey is much more

entrenched than meets the eye. The police target mostly foreign members of the group, while locals remain untouched unless they stick their necks out or become the subject of complaints.

Turkish nationals from various parts of the country had heeded IS’ call to Muslims to join its self-styled caliphate in Syria and Iraq. Those who returned home became the helpers of Iraqi and Syrian members who sought refuge after the “caliphate” began to crumble.

IS members found a convenient habitat in Ankara and Kirsehir, according to two sources knowledgeable of the issue. About 200 Iraqi nationals, all Turkmen from Tal Afar, made it to Kirsehir in 2016, when IS began to disintegrate. More of them, including the IS deputy emir of Tal Afar, came in ensuing years.

Kirsehir had its own recruits. A former member of a Turkish militant Islamist group lured locals to IS, including his own son. In 2015, however, he reported his own daughter and grandchildren to the police to stop them from going to Syria, laying the ground for the first court case against IS in the city. His son and six other Kirsehir natives were killed in Syria in 2016. Yasar Kocadan, another recruiter in the area, was sentenced to seven years in 2018 following complaints by recruits’ families.

Anti-IS operations in Kirsehir resulted in the detention of 12 suspects in 2017, seven in 2018, 16 in 2019 and 57 in 2020. Seven alleged relatives of IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were among the predominantly Iraqi suspects. One of them was imprisoned, pending trial, in February 2020, while the other six were sent to the deportation authorities.

In Ankara, a group of shopkeepers financed recruitments in the district of Sincan, known as one of the capital’s Islamist strongholds. Abdulkadir Ercan, a former al-Qaeda suspect, stood out in the recruitment effort. He had been detained in a 2011 police raid on a house full of explosive materials, but was released six months later, along with 13 other suspects. Ercan arranged for scores of jobless or struggling young men to go to Syria, including 21 relatives. Later, foreign IS members would take refuge in Sincan, including widows of slain militants who received financial support through the local networks of IS.

Kecioren was another Ankara district that came under the spotlight. Its outlying slums were teeming with Syrian refugees, which made it easier for IS to gain a foothold for recruitment. The promise of economic benefits also lured young people of unlikely profiles such as boozers, drug abusers and nightclub bouncers. The neighborhood of Hacibayram was also a major recruitment ground.

Gonultas told Al-Monitor that impoverished neighborhoods rife with drug-peddling and arms-trafficking were the main IS recruitment grounds in Ankara and that the recruits were drawn mainly by “the promise of lots of money and lots of women.” She singled out Oguzhan Gozlemecioglu as a leading figure, noting he had no Islamist background but would “change ideologically” to become an emir in Raqqa. “He was killed, while his brother Halil Ibrahim was captured by [Kurdish forces]. Their father served six months in jail for recruitment for IS,” she said.

“Buses were running from Sincan to Raqqa in 2016 and 2017. People would even go [to Syria] to see their children,” she recounted. A clan known as “the Tatlibal group,” which was involved in the recruitment of fighters, has erected an apartment block in Ankara that houses mostly Syrian and Afghan tenants, Gonultas said. “People who have been with IS are residing there as well,” she said.

Atilla Kart, a former legislator for the main opposition Republican People’s Party who closely followed IS recruitments at the time, puts the blame on the government. According to him, the inadequate efforts against IS have to do with the climate the government has created and the institutional erosion in the country.

Kart told Al-Monitor that police had grown reluctant to take on Islamist groups unless they receive explicit orders from Ankara. He recalled an incident in 2015, when a family, trying to trace a son who had joined IS, failed to set the police into action even after providing the address of a cell house in Gaziantep near the Syrian border. Kart contacted a local police chief to help the family. “He told me, ‘You are right. The parents want us to raid the place but we cannot do so without instructions from Ankara.’ All the information was there — how many people stayed in the house and from which provinces they had come. So, that is how Turkey came to the current point,” Kart said.

IS militants in Turkey continue also to transfer money through jewelers and exchange offices, using the “hawala” method. The detentions are just the tip of the iceberg, with the IS network much larger than it is generally imagined.

Bright Garden Voices

from previous page

often the undoing of attempts at dialogue on social media: the difficulty of finding neutral terminology when each side has their own vocabularies.

One side sees the Karabakh war as a liberation, the other as aggression. Each side has its own names for particular locations, and the use of one or the other, or even an attempt to use both at once, is usually an invitation for attack. As Bekaryan described: “It is very difficult to have a discussion without triggering the other side and causing them to shut down. Yet even being neutral isolates you from many on your own side and will cause them to turn away from you. Terminology in ways is at the core of the conflict, so it is about find-

ing ways to engage while understanding there will inevitably be these roadblocks.”

She noted that while it sounds strange, she has seen more people on the Armenian side open to peace than ever before, attributing it perhaps to the fact that having now seen what war really is, they want to prevent another. She hopes this is an opportunity people will take before that window closes again.

As Alahverdian points out, making peace between nations is up to governments. Individuals have their own role to play. “I think Bright Garden Voices is filling a void in the sphere of Armenian-Azerbaijani communications, and more people are realizing that there is no harm done in trying to engage in dialogue with ordinary people from the other side. Personally, I would like to help rehumanize each side

to the other. Decades without contact after the First Nagorno-Karabakh War led to much dehumanization and we have all recently witnessed the terrible consequences of that, both on the battlefield and across all platforms of interaction.”

Gasimova further elaborated on the dynamics this medium brings to dialogue: “We hope that with Bright Garden we are able to provide a platform for more personal and thoughtful conversations between people who are already engaged in respectful dialogue on social media. Having them sit down for a video call alleviates the limits of 280 characters on Twitter and the destructiveness of the disrespectful commentators.”

She said, “Of course there is a much larger group of people who are not yet engaged in any form of exchange with the

other side, and for them we hope stumbling upon one of our videos on YouTube could be a demonstration of sorts, an example of how constructive dialogue can be held between regular people. We hope that they will see that it is indeed possible to talk with the other, hear about their experience, their opinions and learn from each other.”

Gasimova concluded, “I hope that in some small way this project can contribute to tearing down those walls that have kept both of our societies separated for so long.”

Ultimately, Bright Garden Voices’ fundamental goal is to demonstrate its motto of respect, understanding, and empathy between peoples is possible and make such exchanges more welcome, helping ordinary people better understand their neighbors across the lines of contact.

Community News

AAF Delivered \$5.6 M in Aid to Armenia/ Artsakh in Last Three Months

GLENDALE, CA -- The Armenia Artsakh Fund (AAF) delivered \$5.6 million in humanitarian assistance to Armenia and Artsakh during January to March 2021. Of this amount, the AAF collected \$5.5 million in medicines and other supplies donated by Americares (\$2.9 million) and Direct Relief (\$2.6 million).

Other organizations which contributed valuable goods during this period were Armenian American Medical Association (\$50,000) and Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center (\$1,000).

The medicines, medical supplies and equipment donated during this period were sent to the AGBU Claudia Nazarian Medical Center for Syrian Armenian Refugees in Yerevan, Arabkir United Children's Foundation, Armenian Eyecare Project, Muratsan Children's Endocrinology Center, Nork Marash Medical Center, St. Grigor Lusavorich Medical Center, and the health ministries of Armenia and Artsakh.

During the first three months of 2021 AAF delivered much needed Hyperbaric Oxygen Chambers, a full container of supplies for treatment of COVID-19, as well as medicines and medical supplies for oncology, cardiovascular, eye disease and gastrointestinal patients.

Armenian-Americans for Artsakh Bag to Help the Homeland

By Cynthia Bosnian

WASHINGTON — As an Armenian-American living in Washington, DC who's been blessed in so many ways, I've been seeking a way to give back. I wanted to help Artsakh.

While sitting quietly one evening at home, I just knew I needed to organize my own fundraiser. And hence "Armenian-Americans for Artsakh" was born with a bag. What better way to show the world my support than by literally wearing it on (er, under) my sleeve. Just imagine what such a statement could do to raise awareness as well as funds

especially among those who may not have even heard of this tiny territory.

Each bag costs \$20. All proceeds from the sale of the bags will go to Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) and its fundraising platform Ayo!, established in 2013 as a way in which Armenian and Artsakh citizens could assess the situation on the ground and utilize the funds most appropriately.

All funds raised will support Ayo!, established in 2013 as a fundraising platform for Fund for Armenian Relief or FAR (rated 4 stars on Charity Navigator) by which Armenian and Artsakh citizens can raise money for local projects — including humanitarian assistance. Ayo's administrative costs are covered 100% by a FAR board member. For project updates, visit: weareayo.org



SOAR Extends Efforts to Families of Soldiers Killed in Latest War

PHILADELPHIA — In March 2020, the Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) created the Families of Fallen Soldiers Relief Fund (soar-us.org/ffsrf) to assist the families of fallen Armenian service personnel by providing direct financial support and children's enrichment assistance. The fund aims to build strong and loving bonds with each family and to follow the widows and children through the years to assure that no children of fallen Armenian soldiers are ever institutionalized.

In fall 2020, SOAR mobilized its efforts and immediately addressed the humanitarian crisis in the region. Among SOAR's many initiatives included providing support to the orphans and institutional staff displaced from Artsakh to SOS Children's Village in Kotayk, Armenia, where they remain. SOAR also shipped two sea containers of food, clothing, medicine, and personal hygiene supplies.

To proactively address the overwhelming post-war need in Armenia, SOAR has established a Fallen Soldiers Support Center in Yerevan (Vagharshyan Street 24/6, Apt. 38) coming April 2021 as a non-residential facility that provides economic assistance, grief counseling, academic tutoring, job placement, and other services to families of soldiers killed or severely injured in battle. The overarching goal of the Center is to offer compassionate and holistic support to spouses, children, and families grieving the death of an Armenian soldier killed or wounded in battle.

see SOAR, page 9



SOAR Fallen Soldiers Support Center



Family of Fallen Soldier Armen Grigoryan Supported by SOAR

LA Consul General Meets with Washington State Officials

GLENDALE — On March 29, Consul General of Armenia in Los Angeles Ambassador Armen Baibourtian held a virtual meeting with the Secretary of State of Washington Kim Wyman.

The Consul General noted that the establishment of close cooperation with the State of Washington is considered to be among the important priorities for the Consulate General of Armenia, as Washington is one of the leading US states in very many respects. Washington is on the top of the list of most prosperous, wealthiest, liberal, and technologically advanced states in the US.

Baibourtian presented Armenia's scope of interests in connection with the State of Washington. This relates to the business sector, clean and other top-notch technologies, the state legislative field, etc. Washington's extremely successful experience in developing tech industry and agriculture simultaneously deserves to be studied and applied. Those sectors of the economy in Washington are being developed on the basis of legislation that ensures environmental protection and sustainable development in compliance with the established high standards of nature protection.

Baibourtian presented the educational base and technological progress of Armenia, the huge potential and prospects for the advancement of high and information technologies sector. Washington is known for its achievements in the field of high-tech. Headquarters of the largest US companies such as Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks, Costco and Boeing are there.

Baibourtian outlined the opportunities for cooperation in the manufacturing sectors of transportation and communication equipment, metals and metal products, chemicals, and machinery. He told Secretary Wyman that Armenia, having a dynamically developing sector of agriculture and food processing industry, is interested in cooperation with Washington in those spheres as well. He mentioned that a conducive bilateral legal framework for cooperation can be forged through a framework agreement on cooperation based on the precedent of such an agreement that Armenia has with California.

Wyman expressed her satisfaction with the initial steps of cooperation and expressed her interest in the outlined areas of cooperation. She was hopeful that the forthcoming discussions dedicated to developing bilateral cooperation would take place during the visit of the Consul General of Armenia to Washington. The Secretary of State invited the Consul General to visit Olympia, capital of Washington, expressing hope that the pandemic lockdown will be removed in the near future. She also expressed her appreciation of the Armenian-American community, which stands out for its effective involvement in all spheres of American life. Wyman is the only Republican statewide elected official in Washington.

On March 30, Baibourtian held a see MEETING, page 11



COMMUNITY NEWS

Cranston Market, Armenian Community Hope to Help Toddler Get Kidney

By Sam Read

CRANSTON, R.I. (WJAR) — A popular Cranston market and deli is hoping to help a local one-year-old in desperate need of a living kidney donor.

Garen Yepremian was born with end-stage chronic renal kidney disease and has been on dialysis since he was four months old.

Garen’s family is originally from Lebanon but live in Cranston.

“When my wife was pregnant, they noticed there was an issue with the kidneys. The urine was shooting up instead of down. The fluids were damaging the kidney tissues,” said Sebouh Yepremian, Garen’s dad. “They kept monitoring it. The doctors were like when he’s born, we will fix it, everything will be fine. But then five days later, it was different.”

“They didn’t know the kidneys would be that damaged,” added his wife, Annie.

Garen has to be fed through a tube and he can’t eat solids. He’s on oxygen at night and takes about 12 medications to keep his electrolytes stable.

Now, the family is searching for a living kidney donor.



Garen Yepremian

“He’s going to have a second transplant in his life, so we want to postpone that by at least having his first transplant be a living kidney donor because that lasts longer,” said Annie. “We just hope we can find a matching donor for him. One kidney would be

enough, and he can have a normal life and be happy.”

Garen’s family has wanted that for him since he was born. About six months ago, they started their search to find a donor.

“We have a flier that circulates on social

media with my wife and my email address on there,” said Sebouh.

“Some people were not a match, some were not qualified, we still haven’t found a matching donor,” added Annie. “We had two non-matching donors that were willing to swap the hospital because they can do that, give our donor to another person and take from another donor to give to Garen but that didn’t work out.”

The owner of Sonia’s Near East Market and Deli, Ara Janigian, is actively involved in the Armenian community, knows the family, and saw the flier.

“We’re a big community here in Rhode Island but nationwide, we’re not big and we need to stick together,” said Janigian. “The Armenian community here is tight, and I knew the community would rally around it. In fact, everyone seems to have stepped up and it’s great.”

Hundreds of people head into his market daily for lunch, so he decided to use that to the Yepremian’s advantage.

“We’re trying to use our platform here to spread awareness so we made fliers and on Monday the 29th, every customer that comes in will get a flier and all the profits from the day will be donated to their GoFundMe account,” said Janigian. “We’re fortunate enough to be able to help, so why not?”

The Yepremians were hesitant to take the help but told NBC 10 News the success of what’s already happening through word of mouth is amazing.

“We weren’t expecting anything, they approached us. We don’t expect anything from anybody, so for them to step forward, it’s like, ‘Wow,’” said Sebouh. “It’s overwhelming. You always hear stories and you become a part of other people’s stories, but you never think you would be in this position that we are in.”

“WE’RE A BIG COMMUNITY HERE IN RHODE ISLAND BUT NATIONWIDE, WE’RE NOT BIG AND WE NEED TO STICK TOGETHER. THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY HERE IS TIGHT, AND I KNEW THE COMMUNITY WOULD RALLY AROUND IT. IN FACT, EVERYONE SEEMS TO HAVE STEPPED UP AND IT’S GREAT.”

—ARA JANIGIAN
OWNER OF SONIA’S NEAR EAST MARKET AND DELI

“We’ve had great responses. Everyone is excited for Monday,” said the couple. “We’re very hopeful the right person will come along, it’s not easy to give up a kidney and we know that.”

Sonia’s Near East Market and Deli is open Monday from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m.

“The only way to look after our future is the children and if you can help you should,” said Janigian.

Qualifications to become a donor for Garen include an adult male or female age 50 or under with a blood type of A or O. If qualified, the donor’s medical expenses will be covered by their health insurance so the donor will incur no cost.

The Yepremians can be reached at Syep20@gmail.com or anny5678@gmail.com.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Eastern Diocese Holds Online Youth Retreat

NEW YORK — On March 27—Lazarus Saturday, according to the Armenian Church calendar for 2021—the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America held a daylong online retreat for ACYOA Juniors and Seniors. Some 25 young faithful from across the Diocese took part in the event, which was organized by the Diocesan Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries.

Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel began the retreat by leading participants in a Morning Hour prayer service, aided by Dn. Michael Sabounjian. The day's opening presentation followed, with Bishop Daniel offering inspirational words on the retreat theme: "The Lord is Near."

Participants then got to know one another through various "icebreaker" activities. In the afternoon session, Dn. Timothy Az-

ing of Jesus' beloved friend foreshadowed the resurrection of Christ himself.

To conclude the day, Jennifer Morris and Kathryn Ashbahian of the Diocesan youth ministries department led a Bible Study on Philippians 4:4-9, in which participants reflected on their anxieties, the things for which they are thankful, and the things that bring them peace. Personal prayers were shared among the participants, which were encouraged to lift each other up in prayer through the coming days of Holy Week.

Like the other virtual youth gatherings, the ACYOA Lenten Retreat met over the Zoom conference platform. The Eastern Diocese's Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries and the ACYOA have been holding online youth events as part of the #FellowshipFromHome initiative.



Primate Bishop Daniel opened a day-long virtual retreat for Armenian youth from across the Eastern Diocese on Saturday, March 27, 2021.

navourian led participants through a scripture and icon study on the meaning behind Lazarus Saturday, describing how the rais-

For up-to-date information on all Diocesan youth, e-mail DiocesanYouthMinistries@gmail.com.

Hye Pointe Men's Club Supports Artsakh Families

By Robert Serabian

HAVERTHILL, Mass. — The recent 44-day war in Artsakh caused unimaginable death and destruction to our people and their homes. This is the story of how a small church helped in a big way in providing assistance to 11 families who were recently affected as a result of the conflict.

The Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe Men's Club in Haverhill, at the suggestion of its pastor, Fr. Vart Gyozyan, dedicated its spring outreach project to assisting families in Artsakh by raising more than \$2,000 from its members, and the church community. The group then reviewed the best options for delivering the



Fr. Hrachia Gyozyan, the pastor of the Holy Cross Church in Nerkeen Charbakh, Yerevan, and the families of the fallen soldiers

aid to the people in need. At first it was decided to purchase the supplies and send them to Armenia. However, it was determined that the transportation costs would be expensive and the delivery timeline would be three months or longer — not an option. The Hye Pointe's Men's Club was able to obtain names of 11 families which were in most need from the Armenian Ministry of Defense through the help of Fr. Hrachia Gyozyan, the pastor of Holy Cross Armenian Church in Yerevan.

Among the 11 families were the names of parents and women whose sons and husbands had died in the Artsakh conflict.

Fr. Hrachia visited the 11 families and asked what their immediate needs were, whether it be financial or basic food necessities. He told the families that a church Men's Club in America would help with their needs but not provide direct financial assistance. Hye Pointe's Men's Club was able to provide necessary assistance to these families, paying their utility bills, and in addition, each family received one bag of personal hygiene supplies and four bags of food consisting of cooking oil, flour, grains, and other non-perishable food items.

At the March 11 Hye Pointe Men's Club meeting, which was held over Zoom, Fr. Vart read the letters from the 11 families thanking the Hye Pointe Men's Club, and the Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe community for their help and generosity in their time of need. Der Hayr along with others became emotional as the letters were being read. It was gratifying and poignant especially during our time of Lent that the adage "help to our fellow brethren" was manifested by our act of kindness 5,000 miles away from the conflict in Artsakh.

OBITUARY

Khatchadour 'Kay' Batalian Camera Exchange Proprietor

WATERTOWN — Khatchadour "Kay" Batalian, 89, passed away on April 5, 2021.

Beloved husband of the late Chenorig (Tavitian) Batalian.

He was the father of Sona Chookoorian and Taleen Batalian; grandfather of Armen and Ara Chookoorian; brother of the late Marie Chichmanian, Eugenie B. Hagopian, Ovssanna DerSimonian and Zarouhie Hollisian. He was also the father of Raffi Batalian.

Khatchadour lived in Beirut, Lebanon until 1969 at which time he came to the United States and settled in Watertown.

He was the owner and operator of Camera Exchange of Waltham for 34 years. He and Chenorig enjoyed traveling, one of their most special trips being to Armenia in 2006. They hosted many large family gatherings over the years where they would prepare fantastic Armenian and Lebanese foods.

Private funeral services will be held at St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church,



Watertown to be followed by private cemetery services at Newton Cemetery, Newton.

Due to the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic, current public health and safety measures will be followed. Social distancing and face-masks will be required for everyone's safety.

Donation

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* thanks Barsam Brown for a donation of \$50 in support of the newspaper's operations.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Books

University of Minnesota Professor to Discuss New Book on Armenian Genocide

BELMONT, Mass. — The Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will present a webinar with Prof. Joachim Savelsberg discussing his newly published book, *Knowing About Genocide: Armenian Suffering and Epistemic Struggles* (Univ. of California Press, 2021) on Friday, April 23, 2021, at 8 p.m. (Eastern). The program will be accessible live on Zoom (registration required) and on the SAS YouTube channel.

How do victims and perpetrators generate conflicting knowledge about genocide? Using a sociology of knowledge approach, Joachim Savelsberg answers this question



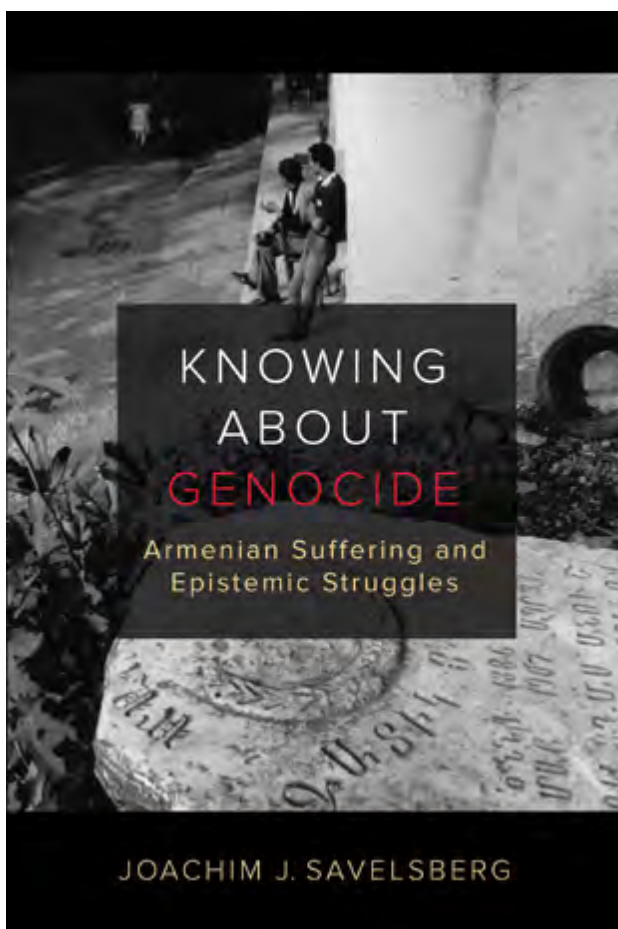
Garen Yepremian

for the Armenian Genocide committed in the context of the First World War. Focusing on Armenians and Turks, he examines strategies of silencing, denial, and acknowledgment in everyday interaction, public rituals, law, and politics.

Drawing on interviews, ethnographic accounts, documents, and eyewitness testimony, Savelsberg illuminates the social processes that drive dueling versions of history. He reveals counterproductive consequences of denial in an age of human rights hegemony, with implications for populist disinformation campaigns against overwhelming evidence.

Savelsberg is professor of sociology and holder of the Arsham and Charlotte Ohanessian Chair at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of *Representing Mass Violence: Conflicting Responses to Human Rights Violations in Darfur*.

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



Ümit Kurt to Present Webinar on 'The Armenians of Aintab' on April 20

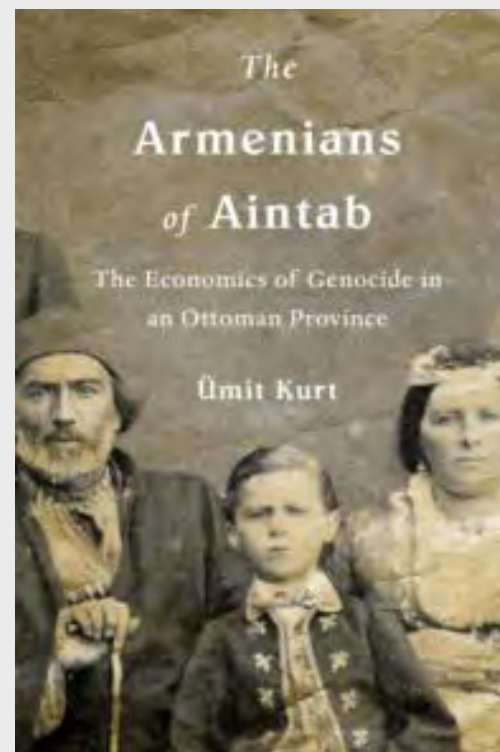
BELMONT, Mass. — The Armenian Center at Columbia University and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) with the co-sponsorship of Research Institute on Turkey will present a webinar with Dr. Ümit Kurt who will discuss his recent book, *The Armenians of Aintab: The Economics of Genocide in the Ottoman Empire* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2021), on Tuesday, April 20, 2021, at 6 p.m. (Eastern). The program will be accessible live on Zoom (registration required) and on NAASR's YouTube Channel.

Kurt, born and raised in Gaziantep, Turkey, was astonished to learn that his hometown once had a large and active Armenian community. The Armenian presence in Aintab, the city's name during the Ottoman period, had not only been destroyed — it had been replaced. To every appearance, Gaziantep was a typical Turkish city.

The Armenians of Aintab draws on primary sources from Armenian, Ottoman, Turkish, British, and French archives, as well as memoirs, personal papers, oral accounts, and newly discovered property-liquidation records. Together they provide an invaluable account of genocide at ground level.



Kurt digs into the details of the Armenian dispossession that produced the homogeneously Turkish city in which he grew up. In particular, he examines the population that gained from ethnic cleansing. Records of land confiscation and population transfer demonstrate just how much new wealth became available when the prosperous Armenians—who were active in manufacturing, agricultural production, and trade — were ejected. Although the official rationale for the removal of the Armenians was that the group posed a threat of rebellion, Kurt shows that the prospect of material gain was a key motivator of support for the Armenian genocide among the local Muslim gentry and the Turkish public. Those



who benefited most — provincial elites, wealthy landowners, state officials, and merchants who accumulated Armenian capital — in turn financed the nationalist movement that brought the modern Turkish republic into being. The economic elite of Aintab was thus reconstituted along both ethnic and political lines.

Kurt is the Polonsky Fellow at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and an Australian Research Council Fellow. He is the author of several books in Turkish and English, including *The Spirit of the Laws: The Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide* (with Taner Akçam) and *Armenians and Kurds in the Late Ottoman Empire* (co-edited with Ara Sarafian).

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

SOAR Extends Efforts to Families Of Soldiers Killed in Latest War

SOAR, from page 6

In post-war Artsakh and Armenia, SOAR now provides families of fallen soldiers with financial assistance, emotional support, improved housing, and vocational training. "While the loss of our fallen Armenian soldiers is itself a tragedy, the war has had the secondary effect of leaving children fatherless and mothers and families without their primary breadwinner," says SOAR Executive Board Chairman George S. Yacoubian Jr. "We invite all Armenians to join SOAR to assist these families so that the widows of our fallen Armenian soldiers can withstand their darkest hours and emerge as confident and resilient caregivers for their children."

In commemoration of SOAR's new center and the 106th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, honored artist Hayk Melikyan will perform a virtual piano recital on April 25 premiering the piano transcription of *Whispering to the Wind* from Alessandro Scarlatti's Tigrane Opera. To purchase tickets, visit soar-us.org/haykforheroes.

The Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief is the world's only charitable organization devoted exclusively to providing humanitarian relief to orphaned Armenian children. To learn more about SOAR, visit soar-us.org.



Family of Fallen Soldier Gevorg Gasparyan Supported by SOAR

'Songs of Hope' Lift Cleveland-Area Armenian Community

CONCERT, from page 1

Organized by Deacon Ari Terjanian, organist and choir director of the church, the purpose of the concert was in his words, "twofold — to give our community hope, and to encourage people to come back to church. It was also a way to celebrate Palm Sunday."

In his opening remarks, Terjanian reflected on the "immensity" of the fact that those present were together in person. For most, he said, it was the first time they had been to church in a year; the first time they had seen their Armenian friends from the community as well as been able to find spiritual fulfillment in the church setting. For the musicians, it was the first time they had been able to perform for a live audience in a year, and for the audience, it was the first time in a year they had been able to hear live music. Terjanian noted that the purpose of the concert was to spiritually uplift the audience as well as promote Armenian culture. He added that while music has been available through the pandemic on streaming platforms and even streamed live performances, nothing can replace a live performance. Musical performance takes at least two people, he said — the player and the listener. The musician is stirred to greater heights by the responsiveness of the audience and the audience is inspired by listening to the music, which is the reason for playing in the first place.

Terjanian stated in an interview that he was overwhelmed by the positive response when he first reached out to the performers. They all agreed to do the concert on a strictly charitable basis and only one person who was asked to play had to be replaced by a stand-in, which was only due to fears of public gathering on that individual's part.

The star of the show was undoubtedly Mher Mnatsakanian of Boston, who is quickly becoming the most in-demand duduk player on the East Coast. He has a solid relationship with the Cleveland community and espe-



Group photo from Cleveland "Songs of Hope" concert

Narek Church's Narekatsi Choir joined the concert as "backup singers" on a few of the selections. The participating choir members were Maral Antonyan, Soprano; Naira Azatyan, Soprano; Louise Demirjian, Alto; Anita Arpajian, Alto; Serop Demirjian, Tenor and Peter Zahirsky, Bass.

The concert's content was wonderfully surprising to this writer. The set opened up with an arrangement of *Amazing Grace* for duduk, string quartet, piano, and cho-

a soul-stirring rendition of *Amen Hayr Soorp* from the Magar Yegmalian version of the *Badarak*, which again showcased the duduk's ability to mirror the human voice, with all the smoothness and microtonal inflections particular to Armenian liturgical music. Continuing with the program were *Es Kisher*, *Lousnag Kisher* (Tonight, Moonlit Night) by Komitas, which Terjanian accompanied on the piano, and Parsegh Ganatchian's *Oror* (also known as *Koon Yeghir Balas* (Sleep My Child), perhaps the most well-known Armenian lullaby) which was given an odd 19th-century feel by Terjanian's use of the organ.

Dudukist Mnatsakanian was given a break as pianist Terjanian performed his one solo piece, *Prelude no. 24 in D minor* by 20th century Soviet-Armenian composer Eduard Baghdasaryan. Terjanian notes that Baghdasaryan is little known in the West, but in his opinion deserves as much recognition as Komitas and Khachaturian. The performer's regard for this composer was evident in his heartfelt rendition of the piece, which to an untrained ear was perhaps reminiscent of the music of Babajanyan.

The duduk returned to center stage with three more pieces from Komitas. The first, *Dzirani Dzar* (Apricot Tree), is almost always presented as a vocal piece; the duduk is perhaps one of the few instruments that could do justice to the song's melodic line. Mnatsakanian took the opportunity of the very Eastern nature of the melody to interpret it with a little more freedom and improvisation than is usually the case in concerts of this type; he played from the soul rather than note for note, and the ability to do so and stay within the feel of the music is a difficult skill which Mnatsakanian has mastered. The same approach was taken to the next song *Hov Arek, Sarer Jan* (Let the Winds Blow, Dear Mountains), and this time the Eastern Armenian spirit predominated in Mnatsakanian's interpretation. The finale *Habrban* was played much in the sprightly style of the dance tune which this melody originated as.

Finally, the audience was given a "surprise" in the form of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* for duduk, string quartet, and voices, arranged by Martin Ulikhanian. The soulful number combined the North American and Armenian cultures magnificently with this rendition placing the duduk center stage again with Mnatsakanian's semi-improvisational style, in fitting with both rock music and Armenian folk, as well as the classical backing of the string quartet and choir.

The concert concluded with Fr. Hrach Sargsyan giving a message of hope, as well as defiance to the powers of the world, exclaiming that Armenians will never give up, despite all the enemies that want them destroyed. Weaving together a message of Christian faith as well as the slogan "next year in Shushi" — with reference to Armenian ancestors who have given their lives for the nation — Sargsyan gained a loud round of applause from the crowd.

The Cleveland Armenian community, formed of a tight knit group with diverse points of origin were brought together by the concert and the powerful emotions in the room were also palpable for anyone who viewed the performance as it was streamed on social media.



Dudukist Mher Mnatsakanian and string quartet at the Cleveland "Songs of Hope" concert

cially its pastor, Fr. Hrach Sargsyan, a fellow native of Armenia. Mnatsakanian had first come to Cleveland two years ago for a concert celebrating the 150th birthday of Komitas Vartabed, the day before he appeared in concert in Chicago. Recently he also participated in a New England area concert to raise funds for Artsakh. Another top notch performer was violinist Haig Hovsepian, also from Boston, but who has been living in Cleveland the past few years, where he is in his senior year at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Hovsepian has formed a group, the Almas Quartet, composed of fellow students with whom he performs in public and who performed with him on the 28th. (The quartet's violist was unable to attend due to Covid-related concerns.) Those who performed were Emera Gurath, Violin; Claire Peyrebrune, Viola; and Lydia Rhea, Cello. (The Almas quartet also performed the following Wednesday in an AGBU-affiliated benefit concert for Artsakh and Armenia). Terjanian himself served as MC and accompanist on piano and organ, as well as performing a piece of his own. Finally, St. Gregory of

rus, by Martin Ulikhanian. The classic American hymn gave an opportunity for the duduk to showcase its fabled calming tones, which have so often been likened to the human voice. In Mnatsakanian's hands, the duduk sounded like a mother gently singing this familiar melody as a lullaby to her child.

The next portion of the concert featured the Almas Quartet performing the well-known string quartet arrangements by Sergei Aslamazyan of four pieces from the Komitas repertoire. The ever-popular *Al Aylughs* (The Scarlet Handkerchief) was masterfully interpreted by the string quartet, followed by *Chinar Es* (You Are Like a Plane Tree), *Yerginkn Ambel A* (The Sky Is Cloudy), and *Gakavig* (The Little Partridge).

Perhaps the most moving part of the concert came as dudukist Mher Mnatsakanian came back in front of the audience to play a group of songs usually interpreted by piano or organ and vocal. Terjanian accompanied on organ while the vocal lines were performed on duduk by Mnatsakanian. The talented musician began with



COMMUNITY NEWS

Portland Mayor Rescinds 'Khojaly Remembrance Day' Proclamation

PORTLAND, from page 1

Azerbaijani community and approved by the mayor. It was the first time that something like this was done by the Azerbaijanis, he said, and it was especially hurtful after the Artsakh war a few months ago. He said that the Azerbaijanis "really underestimated our community, how committed we are to our cause, and that we are not willing to accept any false representations or inaccuracies on the public record here in the state of Maine."

Portland, according to ACA board member Paul Proudian, is among the oldest Armenian communities in the US, dating back to 1895. Today there are probably 50 or 60 Armenian families in Portland itself, he estimated, with a total of several thousand people living in different parts of the state with at least one Armenian grandparent or strong Armenian presence in their immediate ancestry. An Armenian Genocide Memorial was erected in Portland in 2003.

Kiladjian said that ACA is non-partisan, with its primary mission being to promote and preserve Armenian culture and bring together the Maine Armenians.

As soon as the Armenian community became aware of the proclamation, Proudian said, they pushed back strongly. Many local Armenians contacted the mayor to try to find out what happened and they had an initial meeting with her to discuss it. Kiladjian said, "We as a group wanted to give the mayor room for her to be able to make the right decision and rescind it. Initially she indicated that she was not willing to rescind but the Armenian community in Maine, though a small one, really banded together."

They sent emails and made multiple phone calls. They held strategy meetings amongst themselves to decide how to best explain the issue and resolve it. They made it clear to the mayor that the Armenian community was very disappointed. Armenians have been present in Portland for over 100 years, Kiladjian said they explained to her, and had made numerous contributions to the city. They highlighted all the benefits of the community and its history.

They told the mayor what a misrepresentation of history the proclamation was. Proudian said, "They are taking one incident in the first Artsakh war and they have spun it completely out of context. They are

using it to completely delegitimize the Armenian Genocide, to try to make it sound as though the Armenian Genocide is no different than this so-called Khojaly genocide."

Kiladjian said, "We were able to make the point to the mayor, through the emails and everything else we had done, that her decision not to rescind was not the right one. It was not in the best interests of the city and the community to have information that is inaccurate on the record and in her name."

The mayor was made aware that the Armenians would continue to actively pursue this issue, Proudian said, but they also sent her a letter to explain the situation in terms that she would understand. Proudian exclaimed, "I think that was the key to it. One of the things we have tried to do over the years is to explain things to non-Armenians in a way that they would understand. The situation in Artsakh is very complicated and is very obscure to a lot of Americans."

The Azerbaijanis' own actions may have clinched the Armenians' case. Proudian said, "They immediately posted the Azerbaijani proclamation news on their own

government media websites. They were exploiting this proclamation. They immediately posted that city of Portland approved this proclamation and mentioned Mayor Snyder by name and spoke very approvingly that this was a good thing and a great victory."

In the Armenians' letter to Mayor Snyder they simply pointed out this political exploitation and provided the links to the Azerbaijani government websites. Proudian said, "It is my feeling that this really struck home with her. It opened her eyes to the real purpose of this proclamation. It was just a question of communicating with her just how betrayed the community felt by the city of Portland issuing this thing and letting the mayor know that she was actually being used as pawn by the Azerbaijanis."

Kiladjian concluded, "It wasn't one thing or two things. It was a number of things that we did. We put it together, the mayor saw the light, saw all of the reasoning and agreed with it. She then decided to change her mind and rescind."

"Every Armenian in America is probably aware that some effort like this is going on

somewhere right in our own backyards," Proudian said, citing similar proclamations in Boston, Minnesota, California and Florida. "We all know that this is an extension of the Artsakh War. It is no accident that this is happening now," he continued. "The Azerbaijanis are very aggressive and chose to exploit this moment of what they perceive as Armenian weakness when we have suffered this defeat in Artsakh and we are not feeling very great. We can't let it go by without pushing back strongly. That is our obligation as Armenians in America. That is what we need to do. We always need to push back."

Proudian said he remains proud of his local community for this small victory, while always remembering the true heroes who died in Artsakh recently on the battlefield.

Kiladjian observed another positive outcome from the recent confrontation: "The silver lining is that this allowed us to get the Armenian community together, including a few of us who have not connected that much, though we may have known about each other. When this thing happened, everybody came out and we all bonded together."



Tekeyan Cultural Association, Inc.

With Donations Matched Up to \$20,000
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SPECIAL FUNDRAISER
for
HRANT DINK SCHOOL of Istanbul



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

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

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

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

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



LA Consul General Meets with Washington State Officials

MEETING, from page 6

virtual meeting with Washington State House of Representatives Speaker Laurie Jinkins, attended also by Alex MacBain, Chief of Staff at the Washington House Democratic Caucus. Baibourtian presented some key points relating to Armenia, focusing on historical milestones and the external and domestic political and economic landscape. Special reference was made to the Armenian diaspora as an integral part of the Armenian nation. Taking into account that the State of Washington stands out for its significant achievements in the field of high-tech, Baibourtian presented to Jinkins Armenia's great potential and interest in developing cooperation in that sphere. The interlocutors touched upon the prospects of cooperation in the manufacturing sectors of transportation equipment, food processing, metals and metal products, chemicals, and machinery. Jinkins expressed willingness to initiate such cooperation. The participants of the meeting agreed to continue their discussions during the Consul General's future visit to the State of Washington.

Please make your tax deductible donation and mail it to:
Tekeyan Cultural Association
755 Mt. Auburn Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Memo: Hrant Dink School

or give online at <https://givebutter.com/OBK5z0>.



SCAN TO DONATE ONLINE

Arts & Culture

Daughters of Vartan D.C. Fundraiser Features Chef Aret Sahakyan's Menu

By Christine Vartanian Datian

WASHINGTON — The Daughters of Vartan Dikranouhie Chapter here, composed of 32 sisters, held a special carry-out luncheon event at St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church on January 30, 2021, to raise funds for 1000Plus, a charitable foundation in Armenia that provides financial assistance to soldiers who died or were disabled while protecting the borders of Armenia and their families.* (See: <https://armenianwoundedheroes.com/1000plus/> and <https://www.1000plus.am/en>).

Guest Chef Aret Sahakyan, the executive chef at Macakizi Hotel in Turkey, who was visiting his family at the time, volunteered to help with cooking and kitchen duties for the event. Sahakyan created the menu with the assistance of his brother, Raffi Sahakyan. This dynamic duo along with the Daughters of Vartan sisters, friends and supporters, pitched in ahead of a looming snowstorm and produced three exceptional organic entrees: Harissa Salmon with Prune and Dill Rice, Marinated and Spice Rubbed Chicken with Broccoli, Carrots, and Potatoes, and finally, Portobello Lasagna with Lentil-Beet Salad.

The Daughters of Vartan spearheaded the event, and the St. Mary Gift Shop participated by selling jams, wines and dried fruits as part of a fundraiser which went to benefit the church. There were 155 orders sold in one day, and \$4,400 was raised to



Chef Aret and his assistants prepared the Portobello Mushroom Lasagna with Kale

benefit 1000Plus. Homemade Lentil Noodle Soup and three tasty desserts were donated for the luncheon, reports Malvina Brown.

Born in Istanbul, Aret Sahakyan is from an Armenian family where food and cooking was part passion and part profession. When he travelled to the United States to study, he worked in a variety of restaurants to support himself. He quickly found fulfillment and success in the kitchens of Roberto Donna and Yannick Cam, some of the most respected chefs in Washington D.C. He trained with Francesco Ricchi at I Ricchi and Jean Louis Palladin at the Watergate before going to the Cities Restaurant where he created distinctive dishes and menus

see FUNDRAISER, page 14



Armenia Celebrates International Theater Day with Artavazd Awards

By Gerald Papasian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Armenia celebrated International Theater Day on March 27, with proper pomp and circumstance fit for the occasion. The 20th jubilee ceremony called the Artavazd Awards, dedicated to the memory of its founder director Yervand Ghazanchyan, took place at the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater, attended by the Republic of Armenia Minister of Education, Science, Culture, Sports Vahram Dumanyan and Deputy Minister Ara Khzmalyan.

This was the first major event by far after so many months of confinement and a disastrous war! For Armenia, its artists and the new generation of actors and actresses, this event comes as an uplifting, much needed dose of optimism and positivity.

As Dumanyan correctly said in his address, “Under our present circumstances, this is a powerful stimulus and tool for overcoming post-war fatalistic and disheartened public frames of mind. The extent of your [theater representatives’] responsibility today is great and your mission is unprecedented.”

Next, the address to the theatrical world of this year’s representative of the International Theatre Institute, Helen Mirren, was read. The evening continued with high quality entertainment provided by some of the best soloists of the Yerevan Opera House and its orchestra conducted by Maestro Harutyun Arzumanyan.

Among the theater companies which won many awards was the Sos Sargsyan Hamazganyan Theater for Best Play (“Genesis of Victory” written by Sara Nalbandyan) and Best Young Actor (Narek Baghdasaryan in “Paplik”). It won Best Actress with Tatev Ghazaryan, Best Actor with Arman Navasartyan, Best Director with Narine Grigoryan, and Best Production with “Paplik.”

Another Best Director award was given to Vahe Shahverdyan (Apelian Drama Theater – City of Vanadzor).

A much-deserved Best Children’s Play Award went to the famous Henrik Malyan Actor’s Theatre for “Inverted Dream,” directed by Narine Malyan.

The most moving moment was when a special jury award was given to Ruzanna Khatchatryan director of the Papazyan Theatre of Stepanakert)

Among the other winners let us mention Davit Yeghiazaryan in “N 6” as best young actor (Drama Theatre of the City of Abovyan); Hripsime Nahapetyan (“Romeo and Juliet” – Stanislavsky Theater) and Marika Dovlatbekyan (“Black Cat” -Metro Theatre) as Best Young Actress’s; Best Young Director Gor Margaryan for “12”- Individual Theatre; Best Youth Performance “Onegin” - Stanislavsky Theatre, directed by Nora Grigoryan; Best Sets - Garegin Yevangulyan, National Theater; Best Musical Composition Gemma Minassyan – Metro Theater; Best actress for secondary role Heriknaz Baghdasaryan (Apelian Drama Theater – City of Vanadzor); and Best Actor for Secondary Role Andranik Zakaryan (National Theater, Yerevan).

Special awards were given to Honored Cultural Worker of the Republic of Armenia Sergey Arakelyan, People’s Artist Irina Marchenko, Honored Artist Boris Pepanyan and People’s Artist Ara Yernjakyan.

It should be noted that the award ceremony was organized by the Union of Theatrical Workers of Armenia with the support of the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the Public Television of Armenia, under the auspices of the Yerevan Municipality.

Congratulations to all winners.

Bravo to all colleagues and friends!

Armenian Museum Of America Launches Genocide Education and New Online Concert

WATERTOWN —The Armenian Museum of America recently announced a series of programs planned for April, with several focused on Genocide Education since the world recognizes April 24 as the date when the extermination of the Armenian people began in 1915. The Armenian Genocide resulted in the deaths of more than 1.5 million people and the displacement of many more from their homeland at the hands of the Ottoman Empire.

One of the major offerings from the museum will be a virtual exhibition titled “Campaign for Compassion: Lady Anne, General Azgapatian, and Near East Relief.”

Many around the world remained silent during the Genocide, however there were some who worked feverishly to aid survivors and to raise awareness about the crimes occurring in the region. This exhibition focuses on a husband and wife who led such a campaign for Near East Relief.

The exhibition was sponsored by a grant from the Cummings Foundation, and it is an excerpt from a new exhibition on the museum’s second floor gallery curated by visiting scholar Dr. Alisa Dumikyan.

Curator Gary Lind-Sinanian offers a series of weekly “Object Show and Tell” videos on the museum’s website and Facebook page, and several have themes related to Genocide Education in April. These include Near East Relief fundraising posters, a costume worn by a boy who survived the Genocide, and village dioramas created by survivors of the Genocide who provided visual evidence of Armenian family and village life. This video series with the curator is sponsored by a generous donation from Michele Kolligian, resident of the Armenian Museum.

The museum is participating in several community events to commemorate the Genocide, from Armenian Heritage Park in Boston to a joint event with The Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA School of Law and other organizations. This event will take place via Zoom on April 20, and MIT’s Lerna Ekmekcioglu and UCLA’s Melissa Bilal will follow the story of a friendship between two Armenian women in Istanbul that endured the hardships of World War I, the Armenian Genocide, and Turkey’s repressive minority politics.

“During the month of April, we remember and honor those who were lost, celebrate the strength of the survivors and the communities they built or rebuilt, and warn the world of the possibility for this kind of atrocity to occur again,” says Executive Director Jason Sohigian. “The story of the Genocide and the world’s reaction is not an isolated one tucked away in history. This is painfully obvious as we witnessed anti-Armenian ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure in Artsakh in recent months.”

see MUSEUM, page 14



ARTS & CULTURE

Nvak

Amplifying the Female Voice in Armenia

VOICES, from page 1

A Novel Idea

It was that same year, after spending several months in Armenia preparing for Eurovision, that Kaprelian discovered a talented underground music scene. These remarkable performers, however, remained relatively unknown outside their immediate circles due to the lack of a strong support system. This same lack of infrastructure exists in many parts of Armenian society, as well as in other developing nations.

These artists simply needed a platform to amplify their voices, Kaprelian explains: “Without the infrastructure to support that talent, their voices remained silent. Having spent a decade writing and performing in the United States, I developed a network of powerful professionals in the music industry and wanted to put those contacts to good use.” So Kaprelian began soliciting donations from industry executives as well as a handful of Armenian donors — obtaining enough funding to launch a 2016 beta program of Nvak in Armenia.

In Armenian, the noun “nvak” means “song” or “music,” and shares roots with the verb “nuh-vaak-elle,” to play (music). Kaprelian’s vision is for Nvak to provide world-class music education and resources to female and non-binary musicians living in underserved communi-



Nvak Foundation kids

ties: “We aim to use music as a tool to amplify our artists’ voices, build community, and prepare them for careers in the industry. We serve the rest of the world by bringing previously absent narratives into the mainstream market, using art as a means for empowerment and economic development.” The organization has quickly gone from local to global. Since launching in 2016, it has already fostered year-round creative communities in Armenia, Israel and Malawi. With the help of a small but dedicated staff, Nvak has also developed a committed global network of professionals who align with its mission.

Kaprelian’s passion for the project quickly becomes clear as she describes its unique role in helping underserved or neglected segments of society: “Our programming is hyper-localized. The work that we do in Armenia is unique to Armenia. But traditional gender roles have left women and the LGBTQ community with less opportunity for career development both in Armenia and in the rest of the world. And while women in Armenia do have access to education, it often doesn’t lead to fulfilling career opportunities.”

Indeed, the situation in the Armenian music world mirrors what one finds in dance and theater as well in this post-Soviet republic, as music education still follows the same rigid, classical ideology as during the USSR. “We’re here to change that!” Kaprelian exclaims. Kaprelian explains that prior to Nvak, no infrastructure existed for artists in Armenia to write their own music, nor was there a place where gender minorities could learn con-



Young girls working with Nvak

temporary music production skills. Production equipment and recording studios in Armenia are both scarce and expensive, so that local musicians have often find it difficult to grow their music beyond the “basement band” stage. They eventually give music up for another more mainstream career or undertaking.

Continued Growth

Nvak has grown organically and steadily since its inception to become one of the most impactful young organizations in Armenia. Apart from discovering new talent, the organization offers songwriting and music production workshops, as well as an experienced staff and advisors whom its young artists can access year-round for information, advice and feedback.

To great excitement, in July 2020, the Nvak team launched its beta-test of the first year-round remote program in Malawi. The program works in 4 phases: Songwriting, Music Business and Mental Health, Production, and Amplification. This creates what Kaprelian terms “a holistic approach to making music.”

Nvak plans to launch a similar year-round program in Armenia in the Summer of 2021, and then expand into new markets in 2022. Unfortunately, since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic broke out funding has been difficult for non-profits around the globe, and Nvak is no exception, as many families and organizations do not have the disposable income anymore to contribute to non-profit causes. Kaprelian is quick to add that as a result it’s now more important than ever to invest in young artists, in order to “connect musicians through community, and thus give them the tools to excel in their careers.” Nvak is a real winner to my mind and already proving its worth in spades.

Vanadzor’s Hit Singer, Rosa Linn

Nvak’s first new song release through its recently minted distribution deal with SONY/The Orchard — *King* by rising star Rosa Linn, convinces, as does Rosa Linn’s vocal range and versatility.

Born in Vandazor, the 20-year-old artist brings her own twist to ‘80s and ‘90s indie pop — in both English and in Russian, no less. She is breathy at times, crystal clear at others.

The Nvak strategy will be to release the song first in Russia over the summer, then worldwide.

A sampling of the lyrics is a first teaser, to a rhythmic, catchy club tune that ranges in tone and volume: “Baby I know you a saint and I’m a gangsta/High on me but we could never be together/Cause you’re a king and imma imma gansta... We’re like fire melting into ice/I love the way that we collide.” The fact that Rosa Linn and other Nvak stars will be distributed through a global distribution deal with The Orchard augurs well for their future success, as does the fact that they are being taught the business savvy needed to navigate a very tough industry.

As an aside, I am also a fan of another Nvak singer Brunette — whose gentle cooings and rhythms belong as much to the Parisian cabaret scene of the 1940s and ‘50s

as they do to electronica or house music. But more about her later.

Meanwhile in Los Angeles, Nvak has teamed up with Spotify and with Ali Tamposi’s non-profit Creative Waves in order to create a new, easily accessible e-learning platform for music education called Song Start. The new venture will include original videos recorded specifically for Song Start by leading artists and industry professionals. They will cover songwriting, as well as music production and the music business, from A to Z. These e-classes and expertise would be prohibitively expensive and inaccessible to young people in many parts of the world, including the United States where music education has been cut



Rosa Linn

from many public school systems.

Listening again to Rosa Linn’s debut album, one can easily imagine that other young women in Armenia and around the world will be inspired by artists of her caliber. Thanks in part to Nvak’s dedication and vision, they may be one step closer to achieving professional success — and perhaps even fame. Proof positive as well that supporting arts organizations and creative ventures can be just as important as the brick-and-mortar approach more typically prioritized in the world of philanthropic giving.

To learn more about Nvak, go to <https://www.nvak.org/> or email: info@nvak.org.

Daughters of Vartan D.C. Fundraiser Features Chef Aret Sahakyan's Menu

FUNDRAISER, from page 12
based on a menu concept that featured the cuisine of different cities every six months. In 2000, Sahir Erozan requested that Aret join him to open Macakizi on the Aegean coast of Turkey near Bodrum. The sumptuous Mediterranean menu at Macakizi, created by Sahakyan, is served in an open-air restaurant beneath 100 year-old olive trees.

Sahir and Sahakyan also opened Tuus restaurant in one of the most elite sections of Istanbul in 2006.

The Daughters of Vartan is a charitable Armenian sisterhood dedicated to promoting Armenian heritage and faith. Founded in 1933, it is a non-sectarian, non-political, and non-denominational organization, with 18 chapters nationwide. In the United States, the Knights and Daughters of Vartan collectively raised \$250,000 in the month of October for Armenia/Artsakh. For Washington, D.C. Daughters of Vartan membership, contact: margiesatian@icloud.com.

Here are three signature recipes Chef Aret created for this carry-out fundraiser luncheon:

Prune and Dill Rice

1 cup basmati rice
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 teaspoons kosher salt

1 1/2 cups vegetable stock or water
1/4 cup fresh chopped dill, or to your taste
1/2 cup chopped Armenian red prunes, or any dried prune
Lemon juice

Preparation:

In a sieve, rinse the rice under cold running water until water runs clear.

In a medium pot, heat the olive oil and butter over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until translucent, tossing, for about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and salt and sauté for 1 more minute.

Stir, add the rice and the stock, increase the heat to medium-high, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until the water has evaporated, about 12 minutes. Fluff with a fork, then fold in the dill, prunes, and a squeeze of lemon juice. Serve hot.

Harissa Crusted Broiled Salmon

Ingredients:

4 (6-oz.) wild salmon fillets
Harissa:
5 large red bell peppers
2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
1/2 cup olive oil
1 bird's eye chili
1 large clove garlic, peeled
1 teaspoon cumin seeds, toasted in a dry pan
1 teaspoon coriander seeds, toasted in a dry pan
1 teaspoon sweet paprika

1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon Spanish smoked paprika

Preparation:

Set oven to broil. Line baking sheet with aluminum foil. Add red peppers to pan. Toss with 3 teaspoons olive oil. Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt. Broil until skin is charred so you can peel easily.

For the harissa: In a blender or food processor, combine all the ingredients and blend until the mixture forms a smooth paste.

Meanwhile, remove salmon from refrigerator, sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon salt and let stand at room temperature for 15 minutes. Brush the salmon fillets with harissa.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, brush the baking paper with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Place the salmon skin side down. Roast to desired level of doneness, 8 to 9 minutes for medium. Serve with Lentil-Beet Salad and Prune and Dill Rice.

Lentil-Beet Salad

Salad:

3 small beets, peeled
1 1/2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 1/2 tablespoons honey
1 1/2 strips orange zest
1/2 teaspoon coriander seeds
1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
1 cup French lentils, rinsed
1 bunch fresh cilantro, finely chopped (optional)
1 shallot, finely chopped
1 cup chopped toasted almonds

Dressing:

2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses
1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
Grated zest of 1 lemon
1/2 garlic clove, minced
1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon chili flakes
1/4 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Preparation:

Make the salad. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a medium bowl, combine the beets, vinegar, honey, orange zest, coriander seeds, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/2 tablespoon water. Toss to coat.

Arrange beets on a rimmed baking sheet and cover the beets with baking paper; tightly cover the tray with foil.

Roast until the beets can be easily pierced with a knife, about 45 minutes. Remove foil and swirl the beets in the sticky sauce to coat. Once the beets are cool enough to handle, cut then in 1/2-inch cubes.

Meanwhile, rinse the lentils under cold water. Place them in a medium pot with 2 1/2 cups of water and remaining 1 teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce to simmer, and cover. Cook lentils over medium-low heat until they are tender but not mushy, about 20 minutes. Drain well and allow to cool slightly.

In a large bowl, toss together the lentils, beets, cilantro, shallot and almonds.

Make the dressing: In a medium bowl, whisk together the pomegranate molasses, vinegar, lemon zest, lemon juice, garlic, salt, chili flakes, and black pepper. Continue whisking as you stream in the olive oil. Whisk until the dressing is emulsified. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more lemon juice, chili or salt. Drizzle the dressing over the salad, and toss.

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CALENDAR

ON-LINE EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

APRIL 11 — Virtual Concert Featuring Nairyan Vocal Ensemble. Sunday, 2 p.m., EST.

Join the Armenian Museum for the fourth of our bimonthly Online Concert Series featuring the Nairyan Vocal Ensemble, which consists of five young women with professional music training and was created in 2015 to popularize Armenian composers, spread classical and spiritual music, and to help empower women. This concert series is supported by a generous grant from the Dadourian Foundation and it is curated for the Armenian Museum by Maestro Konstantin Petrossian, artistic director, composer, and conductor. It is free, open to the public, pre-registration is not required, and the video will be made available the day of the concert on the museum's website, YouTube Channel, and social media pages.

CONNECTICUT

APRIL 24 — The Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Connecticut's program on the 106th anniversary of the Genocide will take place on April 24 at 10:30 am, virtually on Zoom. The program will begin at 10:30 a.m. with the Martyrs' Service which was created in 2015, on the occasion of the centennial of the Genocide and the canonization of the Martyrs. Clergy from all four Armenian Churches in Connecticut will participate in the service. Presenters at the program include Tatul Hakobyan speaking on "Why did the 44 day war take place" and Lilly Torosyan speaking on "From New England to old borders: A Connecticut Armenian's personal account of the 44 day war." Pre-registration is required to obtain the zoom link. To register go to : <https://bit.ly/3ti5iJ5>. If you are unable to pre-register online or do not have zoom capability, call 860-651-0629. This year, the Committee's fundraising efforts will support Fund for Armenian Relief House/Farm project in the southern Armenia city of Sisian for families from Artsakh. Checks should be payable to: "FAR Sisian AER" (Artsakh Emergency Relief), and mailed to: Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of CT c/o Diana Dagavarian Colpitts, Treasurer 236 Oxford St., Hartford, CT 06105 or by the following link: www.farusa.org/agcc

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

RHODE ISLAND

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

Armenian Museum Of America Launches Genocide Education and New Online Concert

MUSEUM, from page 12

Earlier in the month, the museum will present its fourth Online Concert. The performance by the all-female Nairyan Vocal Ensemble, will be released on

Sunday, April 11 at 2 p.m. EST (11a.m. PST and 10 p.m. in Armenia). The performance was recorded at Yerevan's Komitas Chamber Music Hall exclusively for the Armenian Museum. This concert series is supported by a grant from the Dadourian Foundation and is curated by Konstantin Petrossian, artistic director, composer, and conductor. It is free, open to the public, pre-registration is not required, and the video will be made available on the Museum's website, YouTube Channel, and social media pages including Facebook.

The goal of the Nairyan Ensemble is to popularize Armenian composers, spread classical, spiritual, and folk music, and to help empower women. The ensemble consists of five young women with profession-

al musical training. They sing polyphonic songs, mainly a cappella, and some of the songs are performed with clarinet, tambourine, and other instruments.

Their aim has been to make music available, especially in places where classical music is not typically performed or heard. In 2018, the ensemble began performing songs in sign language. By 2019, the ensemble had translated 32 songs by Armenian composers into sign language so they can be enjoyed by people with hearing impairments.

"With everything that has transpired in Artsakh and Armenia in recent months — and as we turn to remembrance of the Genocide in April — we are pleased to present this concert by the Nairyan Vocal Ensemble," concludes Sohigian. "I think you'll agree that the Nairyan Choir conveys a sense of hope and optimism in these challenging times, and we celebrate and honor their talent and creativity."





ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Roberta Kochakian's Pakhlava

"When we walk into a kitchen, we are not alone. We bring with us the memories of our mothers and grandmothers and the food served at their tables. For Armenians, preparing and serving food has always been a demonstration of love for our families and respect for our guests." This is part of the introduction to the *Armenian Cuisine, Preserving Our Heritage Cookbook*, published by the Women's Guild of St. John Armenian Church in Southfield, Mich. in 2019 (Fourth Printing). This Armenian pakhlava recipe from Yeretgin Roberta Kochakian is featured in the cookbook, which is a comprehensive collection of Armenian recipes from the Detroit metropolitan area made current for the 21st century. Yeretgin Roberta, a long-time member of the Women's Guild, has devoted much of her life to chronicling and documenting traditional Armenian recipes, culinary history, and cooking techniques, and teaches the importance of carrying on the heritage of Armenian cuisine.

Her husband, Rev. Fr. Garabed Kochakian, was the pastor at St John Armenian Church for 17 years, and he retired in 2015. Following his final badarak, an exceptional banquet was held in his honor. The banquet, titled "Celebrating a Life of Service," provided an opportunity for members of the parish community to come together and honor their longtime pastor and his wife, Yeretgin Roberta, as they embarked on their retirement. Throughout the afternoon, tributes to Rev. Fr. Garabed and Yeretgin Roberta had as common themes the couple's devotion and commitment to the community, and how their contagious devotion to faith has enriched countless individual lives.

Over 700 people attended the retirement event at St. John's Cultural Hall. Diocesan Vicar the Very Rev. Fr. Simeon Odabashian read a tribute which included: "Today marks the beginning of a new path not only for Der Garabed, but also for his dear wife, Yeretgin Roberta, who has been the true partner and support of his ministry throughout their life together. With grace and charity, Yeretgin has been a model of Christian faith to people throughout our Diocese — not the least of these being the wives of other priests, who regard her as a mentor and friend. She has been a blessing in our community life, and we convey to her our warm congratulations and gratitude."

For many years, Yeretgin Roberta has been cooking, teaching, baking, and documenting Armenian cooking techniques and recipes for the Women's Guild as it prepared and planned for its annual bazaars, luncheons, dinners, and other church events that draw huge crowds from the local Southfield community. Attendees at these events spare no time in enjoying and purchasing the amazing variety of Armenian food specialties and baked desserts and breads lovingly prepared by the Women's Guild over a period of many months. Along the way, Yeretgin Roberta has continued to play a major role in the Women's Guild's success and accomplishments at St. John Armenian Church.

As author and journalist Liana Aghajanian wrote in her Food & Wine story (January 28, 2021) about Yeretgin Roberta, "Descended from a family of Armenian Genocide survivors, Yeretgin Roberta was born in Detroit. It was there that her grandparents found refuge, after leaving their homeland in present-day Turkey, and

where they established a tiny restaurant that helped fill the bellies of hungry factory workers coming off their shifts during Detroit's car-manufacturing heyday. While one set of grandparents was serving food to the masses, she would sit in her paternal grandmother's kitchen and watch her cook all day, learning the essentials of Armenian cookery."

"As a young woman, Roberta Kochakian knew that if she wanted to preserve Armenian recipes that had been passed down orally for generations, she needed to do what many often neglect to: ask a lot of questions and write down detailed directions. That foresight cemented her role as a rare chronicler of familial culinary heritage, a documentarian of a cuisine with a timeline cut short, derailed, and fused together again due to transformative events like genocide, forced migration, and war," added Liana. "Roberta Kochakian preserves Armenian recipes so essential to the culture, they're almost museum pieces."

As Yeretgin Roberta says, "If we (Armenians) have to keep together with our food, if that's what's going to keep us together, then so be it." She plans to continue "to cook, to create, to preserve, to teach, and to share with others who want to learn how to create these traditional and essential recipes."

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts
1 lb. phyllo dough*
1 1/2 cup clarified butter
Sugar Syrup

PREPARATION:

Place nuts on a baking sheet and "toast" in a 300° oven for 10 minutes, stirring often. Cool.

Bring phyllo dough to room temperature. (Thaw phyllo in the refrigerator, if frozen.) Unroll phyllo dough and lay on a clean, dry towel. Cut dough in half lengthwise so sheets measure approximately 9"X10". Cover with waxed paper or parchment, then with a damp towel.

Layer half of the dough on a 9"X13" baking dish, brushing every other layer with clarified butter. Spread the toasted, cooled nuts evenly over the entire surface. If you need to trim the dough, scatter scraps between the layers. Layer remaining sheets, again buttering every other layer. Brush the top generously with butter. Cover and refrigerate for 1/2 hour.

Remove from refrigerator and cut into diamond shapes by cutting equal width rows lengthwise, then widthwise on a diagonal. Bake in a preheated 375° oven for 5 minutes; lower heat to 325° and bake another 15-20 minutes until golden.

If serving the same day, let cool 15 minutes before spooning cooled syrup over pakhlava.

If serving other than the day it is baked, cover cooled pakhlava with foil and keep in a cool place, not the refrigerator or freezer. When ready to serve, warm in a preheated 350° oven approximately 10 minutes. Then pour room-temperature syrup over it.

Sugar Syrup

(for pakhlava, bourma, kadayif and other Armenian desserts)

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups water
3 cups sugar
Juice of 1/2 lemon

PREPARATION:

Combine the water with the 3 cups of sugar in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil and lower heat to simmer; simmer for 10 minutes. Add juice of 1/2 lemon and boil another 10 minutes. Cool. Keep under refrigeration.

There are other syrup recipes in various dessert recipes. However, 4 parts sugar to 3 parts water, or 2:1 may also be used, depending upon desired sweetness.

*Notes:

The enemy of phyllo dough is air. Keep phyllo dough sealed in the package until ready to use.

Have your filling, such as nuts, etc., already prepared before exposing the dough to air.

Always keep dough covered with a damp cloth over a protective dry paper or plastic wrap.

When adding syrup to phyllo dough sweets, either the pastry or the syrup should be warm – not both.

ORDER TODAY: To purchase *Armenian Cuisine, Preserving Our Armenian Heritage*, visit www.stjohnsarmenianchurch.org. A link to order the cookbook can be found under Community.

San Fernando Valley Students Win Prizes in C-SPAN Documentary Competition

CANOGA PARK, Calif. — Sofia Gevorgian and Anahit Malumyan, students at AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School in Canoga Park, are first-prize winners in C-SPAN's national 2021 StudentCam competition.

Middle and high school students were invited to create short documentaries that addressed the public affairs network's theme of "Explore the Issue You Most Want the President and New Congress to Address in 2021."

Gevorgian and Malumyan sent in their documentary "Dear Congress and Mr. President, Recognize Artsakh." The budding filmmakers were awarded \$3,000 for their

work. The video will be shown on C-SPAN on April 18 throughout the day.

The 17th annual StudentCam competition attracted more than 2,300 students to participate with more than 1,200 entries submitted from 43 states and Washington, D.C.

The competition is sponsored by the C-SPAN Education Foundation. The documentaries were judged on how well the students followed this year's theme, the artistic expression, how well they explored all sides of their topic and how they used aspects of C-SPAN programming.



Sofia Gevorgian and Anahit Malumyan

MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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

Baikar Association, Inc.

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

Telephone: 617-924-4420

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www.mirrorspectator.com

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.S.A.	\$80 one year
Canada	\$125 one year
Other Countries	\$200 one year

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

**Other than the Editorial, views
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Editorial

Armenia-Israel-Turkey: The Toxic Trio



By Edmond Y.
Azadian

Turkey's foreign policy establishment is working overtime to convince the Biden Administration to abstain, like its predecessors, from using the term genocide during the annual commemoration on April 24.

Relations between the US and Turkey continue to be frigid, as there are several outstanding issues between the two parties that need to be resolved. Ankara prioritizing and concentrating its efforts towards stopping the recognition of the Armenian Genocide indicates the importance of the issue for Turkey. When Turkey invests so much in this problem, the Armenian side — particularly those who question and dismiss the issue by questioning what difference recognition makes — need to also recognize its political currency and consequences for the future of Armenia.

The pro-government Turkish newspaper *Sabah* has announced on its site that President Erdogan's Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin has reached out to the White House through Jack Sullivan, the national security advisor, to warn against the use of the term genocide, advancing four points, as if lawyers and historians needed any tutorials on the issue.

Mr. Kalin maintains that the Armenian massacres do not qualify to be termed as genocide because no court ruling exists about the issue, such as those regarding the more recent horrors in Rwanda and Srebrenica, ignoring the rulings of the 1919 Istanbul Military Tribunals.

He next suggests that the term genocide was officially adopted in 1948, perhaps referring to the UN resolution, which is retroactive anyway. Third, he suggests that the use of the term may affect Turkish-American relations, which are already damaged; really, it is that Turkey that must be more worried about repairing the frayed relations than the US. The fourth point is the same old rhetoric that a new situation — in this case in the Caucasus — may be disrupted as a result.

Regarding his last point, a cautionary warning should be included: the Armenian government must not fall into a Turkish trap which has caused previous attempts for recognition to fail, allowing Ankara to spread the false narrative that negotiations are ongoing between Armenia and Turkey, and that any third-party involvement may jeopardize the outcome.

We have to analyze Turkey's relations with the US and Israel to find out the conditions created which led both legislative branches of the US government to adopt the Genocide resolution with a wide margin last year. That was a period when Turkey had bombed and massacred NATO's Kurdish allies in Northern Syria. That operation coincided with a particularly rough spot in Turkish-Israeli relations, at which time pro-Israeli lobbying forces publicly announced that they would refrain from helping Turkey, as they had been doing for a long time. Therefore, the convergence of those two events helped the passage of the resolution.

Today we are facing a different picture. The Turkish government is hard at work to repair the relations with the US and Israel. It would be naive to assume that the drive behind this move is only preventing the recognition of the genocide, as there are many outstanding issues between those countries. Still, certainly for Ankara, recognition of the Genocide is a major issue on its foreign policy agenda.

Menekse Tokay, in the March 31 edition of *Arab News*, writes, "From the Turkish side, any diplomatic reconciliation with Israel would try to break its regional isolation and also please US President Joe Biden's administration."

Ankara has tried to ingratiate itself to Washington by taking other political and military initiatives in other regions of the world. Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 missiles and its joint action with Russia to create a new political order in the Caucasus, bypassing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group format, had angered Washington and strained relations with Europe, as these actions were considered to be catering to Russian interests. Now, however, Ankara is teaming up with Ukraine to challenge Russian forces in the Black Sea region, specifically Donbass and Crimea.

The US has placed its forces in Europe on high alert in anticipation of a confrontation with Russia. Turkey has interjected itself into this developing crisis, to regain its NATO credentials in the eyes of the Biden administration.

Recently, the defense and foreign ministries of Turkey and Ukraine started holding consultations to create a common forum in view of the gathering storm. Rick Rozoff published in the March 26 issue of antiwar.com site that these consultations are meant "to serve as the institutional Turkish-Ukrainian efforts to consolidate the Black Sea region for NATO and in the

process, drive out Russia. ... During the meeting, the Turkish diplomat confirmed his country's readiness to take part in the work of the Crimean Platform, which will serve as a platform for consolidating international effort to de-occupy Crimea."

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that Moscow will take appropriate measures to reply to those provocations. Western observers have already noticed Russian tanks are rolling towards its borders with Ukraine, while President Vladimir Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, has indicated with barely-disguised cynicism that no one should be alarmed when Russia holds war games within its borders.

These developments not only amount to war rhetoric, but rather a warning, and Ankara is prepared to reap dividends from this confrontation.

Some analysts in Yerevan warn that Russia, once again, may reach some compromises with Turkey at Armenia's expense, like it did in the Karabakh war.

On the other front, Turkey has engaged with its continuing love-hate relations with Israel.

This type of political engagement is characteristic of post-Cold War international relations. During the Cold War, political boundaries were marked through ideological paradigms. After the collapse of the Soviet empire and the advent of a multi-polar world, almost all major powers had to micromanage their foreign policies, as they had conflicting and con-



verging interests at the same time. Thus, for a long, long time, Turkey was the only Muslim country that had established diplomatic relations with Israel and they cooperated in many areas of common interest.

With the emergence of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Islamist policies, divergences emerged in the relations of the two countries. As Israel was neutralizing Arab antagonism to its Palestinian policies, with Washington's muscle, Turkey found itself in isolation, particularly after the Abraham Accords, which established diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

But for a long time, Erdogan was able to dupe the Arab and Muslim world, pretending to espouse the Palestinian cause, sometimes comparing Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu to Hitler and calling back his ambassador from Israel, but continuing its trade relations with the latter and particularly cooperating with its intelligence gathering against Palestinians.

Israel seldom retaliated against Erdogan in kind since Netanyahu was convinced that Erdogan's tantrums were part of his political theatrics. This was also the reason why Israel never recognized the Armenian Genocide, because there was much more to jeopardize behind the scenes.

Erdogan is a shrewd politician and he knows any change in Washington's Middle Eastern policy has to have Israel's blessing. That is why he has been eager to mend relations with Israel to pave his way towards Washington. Arab News on March 31 wrote that "Turkey may have stepped up normalization efforts with Israel in the wake of press reports saying that Biden

continued on next page



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Saudi Arabia Should Sue Turkey For Stealing Prophet Muhammad's Relics

The Arab News published on March 28 an article titled, "Book by Saudi Author Unravels Ottoman Atrocities in Madinah." The book was written by Saudi historian Muhammad Al-Saeed who exposed Ottoman

atrocities against the Muslim population of the holy city of Madinah in Saudi Arabia in 1918 when it was part of the Ottoman Empire.

Al-Saeed, in his book, *Seferberlik: A Century on from the Ottoman Crime in Madinah*, tells the seldom-known story of the deportation and killings of the population of Madinah by Ottoman General Fakhri Pasha. The city was pillaged and its holy relics looted by the Ottoman army.

The journalist of the Arab News article, Mohammed Al-Sulami, explained that even though some historians use the Turkish/Arabic word *Seferberlik* — meaning mobilization or collective deportation — when referring to the Armenian Genocide, this term is also used to refer to the mass displacement of the population from Madinah.

Fakhri Pasha laid siege to Madinah when the city was under attack by the British-backed Arab fighters of Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Makkah. Fakhri Pasha deported 40,000 people from Madinah by trains to present-day Syria, Turkey, and Iraq, abandoning them to their fate. Only 140 residents remained in Madinah who suffered from famine.

Furthermore, the Ottoman army removed the valuable personal effects of Prophet Muhammad from his sacred chamber and smuggled them to Constantinople (Istanbul). Fakhri Pasha converted the Prophet's mosque into a weapons depot, thus endangering the tomb of the Prophet. Fakhri Pasha also demolished many buildings, starved the remaining population of Madinah and confiscated their possessions, such as farms and crops, reserving the food for his soldiers.

"The stolen treasures arrived in Constantinople, the Ottoman Empire's capital, and have been on display for many years at the Topkapi Museum," author Al-Saeed said. The Arab News article explained that the stolen holy relics included "old copies of the Quran, jewelry, golden candlesticks and swords. Besides the 390 artifacts, visitors to the [Topkapi] museum can see the following possessions of Prophet Muhammad: the Blessed Mantle, the Holy Banner, his sword and bow, a jar, a piece of his tooth and a hair from his beard."

Al-Saeed also revealed that "Fakhri Pasha even attempted to have the body of Prophet Muhammad exhumed and shipped to Constantinople. An Egyptian engineer, who was summoned to Madinah to modify the minarets of the Prophet's Mosque to support the weight of Ottoman artillery, claimed he was ordered to open the tomb, but he refused. Fakhri Pasha asked for his help to exhume the body of the prophet and move it to Constantinople, according to the historical documents written by the French representative in Cairo and sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The French representative vouched for the account of the Egyptian engineer, who fled the city and did not carry out the crime, thus confirming that the grave in question did indeed house the prophet's body and the goal was to move the body to Constantinople."

Al-Saeed told the Arab News that "Madinah reached the point of famine, forcing its citizens and orphaned children to eat cats, dogs and what remained on the farms and in the streets."

Importantly, Al-Saeed said he wrote about the Ottoman Empire's atrocities in Madinah "because he believes modern Turkey is trying to whitewash its im-

perial past. He plans to translate his book into several languages to raise awareness of this little-known chapter of Ottoman history."

Al-Saeed further said: "I wrote an article in 2015 about the passage of 100 years since this crime and provided details that few people knew about. Reactions to the article varied between people shocked at the information and those who could not believe it, given the Turkish publicity ahead of its publication which attempted to whitewash the Ottoman Empire's ugliness and its heinous crimes against Arabs. The public was oblivious to the Ottoman crimes. Following the article, the idea of documenting the event was established, so that history would not forget it like other events in Arab history, particularly since the few historical sources that documented Seferberlik are in the Ottoman, English and French archives. Moreover, the sources of information are very limited and the grandchildren of those who were in Madinah at the time do not have many documents. A lot of the city's inhabitants were displaced. Many of them did not return."

In a second publication, Saudi Arabia's *Okaz* newspaper, Saudi journalist Khaled Abbas Tashkandy, wrote in a 2017 article that "his own grandfather was one of the victims of the mass and forced displacement crimes of the people and sons of Madinah by the orders of the military governor Fakhri Pasha during the Seferberlik and how the Turkish soldiers broke into his family's house and kidnapped him from his mother's arms and deported him to Astana." The Saudi journalist confirmed the details of the persecution of the people of Madinah by Fakhri Pasha and the looting of Prophet Muhammad's personal effects.

In a third publication, The NewArab published an article by Kemal Afzali on March 11, titled: " Saudis Claim Last Ottoman Governor Planned to 'Steal Prophet Muhammad's Body.'" This article "provoked uproar among Saudi social media users, many of whom believe it to be characteristic evidence of alleged Turkish animosity towards the Kingdom's holy cities." The Arabic hashtag #desecration_of_the_prophets_grave has appeared in over 7,500 posts on Twitter and Facebook as of early March. Many Saudis have decried "the historic act of 'Turkish blasphemy.'" Some have drawn parallels between Fakhri Pasha's barbaric actions and Pres. Erdogan's "contemporary support for 'insurgent activity against Arab states.'" One social media post read: "Turks are a nation of thieves. They are bandits and criminals."

It is incomprehensible to me that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, after more than a century, has not demanded that the Turkish government return the looted sacred relics of Prophet Muhammad. While Turkey brazenly demands that museums in other countries return antiques that were taken out of Turkey, even though many of these items are of Greek or Armenian origin, the Turkish government has not returned the stolen Saudi artifacts. Should Turkey refuse to do so, Saudi Arabia should file a lawsuit against Turkey in the World Court and publicize the Turkish theft worldwide.

In the past, Turkey and Saudi Arabia enjoyed normal or friendly relations, but that is not the case now. Due to President Erdogan's dictatorial and military actions in some parts of the world, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are on the opposite sides of various disputes. As a result, Saudi Arabia has blocked the transmission of Turkish programs from its TV stations and has banned the import of Turkish products. This is the right time for Saudi Arabia to act more decisively against Turkey and demand the return of the sacred religious items belonging to the Kingdom. The display of Prophet Muhammad's personal effects in a Turkish museum is an insult to all Arabs and all Muslims worldwide. These sacred items belong to Saudi Arabia.

Armenia-Israel-Turkey: The Toxic Trio

from previous page

would refer to the 1915 massacres of Armenians as 'genocide' on the upcoming April 24 anniversary. Turkey might be hoping to win back support of the Israeli lobbies in the US congress in this regard."

In response to Turkey's rapprochement with Israel, the latter may request the expulsion of Hamas leaders being hosted in Turkey; Hamas rules the Gaza Strip, with which Israel is in uneasy relations.

Turkey has toned down the hostile rhetoric with another Middle Eastern ally of the US, Egypt. Relations between the two soured after Abdel Fattah al-Sisi overthrew Mohammed Morsi's Islamist government, which enjoyed Erdogan's support.

For many years, when Cairo and Ankara enjoyed normal diplomatic relations, Turkey had turned Egypt into a hub for anti-Armenian propaganda, sponsoring publications, media agencies and academic centers. After Erdogan's fallout with al-Sisi, many newspapers, talk shows and academic publications highlighted the Armenian Genocide and the issue was even placed on the agenda of the Egyptian parliament.

Israel has treated Armenia in a cavalier manner. Despite calls from academic circles and from the halls of the Knesset to recognize the Armenian Genocide, the government has not taken any action. Even in the face of this position, and the deep Israeli and Azerbaijani relations, Yerevan took a half-hearted step by opening its embassy in Israel without reciprocation.

That did not serve any useful purpose. It only helped

to anger its Arab and Iranian neighbors. After the debacle of the Karabakh war, with Israel's active participation, in answer to Armenia's recall of its ambassador and some Israeli-Armenian demonstrations, official and unofficial quarters in Israel bluntly stated that Israel has to tend to its own interests, never mind the deaths of 5,000 Armenian youth by Israeli and Turkish drones.

Israeli drone sales to Azerbaijan proved to be self-serving, as Israel expanded its surveillance capabilities from the newly captured territory by Azerbaijani forces from Armenian control. This was in addition to petrodollars earned for shedding Armenian blood.

The newly-extended access to the Iranian border also became a gift to Israel from Turkey, which conducted the war against Armenia. The Karabakh war was one of the few theaters where Turkish and Israeli interests converged as they became involuntary bedfellows.

In view of the bloody outcome of the war, one is hard-pressed to understand the ironic jubilation that the Iranian Foreign Ministry demonstrated by congratulating Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev for recovering "its territory" from the Armenians. The Iranian regime is certainly aware that in addition to the spying capabilities from Azerbaijani territory, the latter had provided military airport facilities to Israel, when the latter plans an attack against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Turkey is posing an existential threat to Armenia. Ottomanist territorial expansionism is the centerpiece of its foreign policy. Erdogan has skillfully managed that policy by calibrating its message to its audience. When Erdo-

gan's megaphone is directed at the Islamic countries, he is the champion of political Islam. When that megaphone is directed at the West, he becomes the champion of Western democratic values.

A research paper in *Strategic Assessment* by Gallia Lindenstrauss and Remi Daniel states, "Turkey's actions in Northern Syria and Northern Iraq show that while Ankara claims to be respecting territorial borders of those countries in practice, it is undermining their sovereignty over considerable sections of their respective borders."

Turkey is at Armenia's borders and in recent months, it has concentrated its forces not only within its borders, but also in Nakhichevan, an exclave ruled by Azerbaijan. It is too close for comfort.

Since the start of the year, Turkey and Azerbaijan have held four war game exercises near Armenia's border. The intention of these games could just be to intimidate Armenia, yet the silence of Moscow, Armenia's strategic ally, renders the issue more ominous.

If it can violate the territories of its neighbors with impunity, nothing can hold it back from taking a chance against Armenia — again. After all, Erdogan is no different than his Ittihadist ancestors. If it was conceivable for them to wipe out an entire nation, to take over its historic homeland, and remain unaccountable to the world community, there is no reason for Erdogan not to do the same.

Armenia, Israel and Turkey form a trio and a toxic one at that. Their interactions are influenced by the US, Russia and Iran. Improved relations and cooperation between Israel and Turkey on the one hand, and the latter three countries on the other, will increase the toxicity. Ironically, strained relations between these two latter groups of countries may lower the level of that toxicity.



COMMENTARY

What Can We Learn From Israel?

By Marlen Eordegian

The shock and the built-up anger from the recent Artsakh war stirred in me, as I am sure with many other Armenians, painful moments of self-reckoning. At the height of the war my thoughts went back to 1980, one summer evening in Jerusalem when I proudly demonstrated before my parents my knowledge of the history of the Genocide. As a fresh graduate from the now closed Melkonian Educational Institute in Nicosia (Cyprus), I was deeply moved by Kersam Aharonian's *Medz Yerazi Djampun Vra*, my sixth-grade Armenian history textbook. That summer I threw myself into studying the Armenian Genocide, voraciously scouring the rich literature at the Armenian Patriarchate's Gulbenkian Library. I wanted to know why, after centuries of coexistence, the Ottomans would turn against the Armenians.

The aha moment came one afternoon while reading in our backyard. As if it was yesterday, I can still hear the birds nestled in the ancient pine tree, their chirping sound breaking the silence of the vast grassland that separated our house from Christ Church on Mt. Zion. My thoughts crystallized into a single and clear answer. The obvious. My *gyavur* ancestors were massacred because of their Christian faith. As a result, my *Urfatsi* mother and *Marashtsi* father lost immediate family members in the Genocide and their orphaned parents arrived Aleppo in 1920, surviving the death marches of Der Zor.

The recent war reminded me, with a deep sense of shame and piercing guilt how, with a typical teenager's naivete, that evening I had bragged to my parents that such a tragedy would never befall our nation again, because "I will make sure the Christian world will stand up for us." After all, it only made sense that Christians would support each other to avoid such a humiliating tragedy.

I had betrayed my parents. I had failed to deliver my grand promise. Even worse, I had betrayed my people. The somewhat intentional choices I had made in my life seeking higher and more challenging grounds had naturally distanced me from the Armenian world. The convicting guilt of indifference toward my people pierced deep through my heart.

The recent Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh and Armenia was a shocking reminder that today we are as vulnerable as we were a century ago, and that the bloody policies of Sultan Abdul Hamid and the imperialistic and pan-Turkic dreams of Ataturk are not things of the past but are alive and well today. To make matters worse, the Christian and democratic west watched this war of aggression against Christian and democratic Armenia with the same indifference and silence as a century ago.

Added to this rude awakening was the painful sense of helplessness. Except for some occasional European reports, there hardly seemed to be any international media coverage of the war. The world kept mum in the face of a humanitarian disaster in the making.

But the ultimate blow came with the news that Israel, my native country, was actively selling state-of-the-art weapons to Azerbaijan tipping the military balance to the latter's favor. Further, American think tanks and PR agencies were actually waging pro-Azeri and anti-Armenian propaganda war. Clearly, this could not have happened overnight. It must have been carefully planned over the years, if not decades.

Naturally, the next puzzling question became: But what about the Armenian leadership? What about Armenia's intelligence? How is it possible for a nation that has produced world class chess players to have such poor intelligence? How is it that we find ourselves in such a helpless situation? I am confidant of the exceptionally brave soul of the Armenian soldier, but against such advanced weapons?

And then ... why Armenians have not been more vociferous about a cause that is a matter of our nation's very survival? Here, of course, I was equally guilty of inaction and indifference towards our cause.

Somehow I mustered strength to write an article for the *Times of Israel*. But my anger and frustration resulted in a piece full of criticism of Israeli policies — especially the intensified arms sales to Azerbaijan during the

war and recruiting the Israel lobby in the U.S. to advance pro-Azerbaijani interests. Ultimately even the toned-down version of the article entitled "Israel on the Side of Turkey and ISIS in the Nagorno Karabakh War - Where are Israel's Voices of Conscience?" never got published. Later I learned about an emeritus scholar of Armenian Studies who had encountered a similar experience in the U.S. That scholar had written a detailed critique of an anti-Armenian article but had his piece published in another journal because the journal that had published the original article would not accept his piece. Not only the media did not remain neutral, but it actively supported the pro-Azeri smear campaign against Armenia and silenced voices for Armenia.

What could be done? Inevitably my thoughts settled on Israel. How would Israel tackle issues of such a magnitude? After all, my research in Israel addresses some of the strategies the nascent state undertook to counter the vicious attacks of nations hostile to the creation of Israel, and to recognizing Israeli control over Jerusalem. Current Israeli policies have evolved mostly from those strategies to address the challenges of the times. A strategy that can benefit Armenians most and relates to Diaspora Armenians is targeted propaganda campaign.

The unique circumstances surrounding the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, warranted a unique set of strategies to address the gargantuan challenges that the country faced on international and regional levels. From the very inception of the state the Israeli leadership understood the importance of propaganda work (hasbara, literally "explaining," defending the Israeli point of view and policies) in the West where the media played a critical role in disseminating knowledge and shaping public opinion. Propaganda work became of such major importance in Israeli foreign policies that a separate Hasbara office was created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, followed by an independent Public Diplomacy Ministry, and in the last decade the National Public Diplomacy unit within the Prime Minister's Office. Propaganda work, as such, has never been limited to the media. Rather, like intelligence, it became a highly sophisticated apparatus that through various government branches operated within religious, academic and all other spheres of the western society. It was through intense, coordinated, and targeted propaganda campaigns that Israel could secure international support and thrive as a western-style democracy in a predominantly Islamic Middle East.

Unfortunately, Israel's former regional ally, opportunistic Turkey, followed by Azerbaijan, have successfully tapped into Israel's resources and benefited from the experienced American Jewish institutions in the U.S. in waging a vicious propaganda war against defenseless Armenia. Realpolitik knows no moral or ethical boundaries. It overrides any ideals of democracy or religious values—this has been true even for Israel, a nation that miraculously emerged out of the ashes of the Holocaust, and especially under the hawkish policies of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

What can Diaspora Armenians do? A major shortcoming during the recent Artsakh war was the missing voice for the Armenians in the western media. Brilliant articles are published in Armenian journals and newsletters. However, this war demonstrated that discussion of Armenian issues and concerns must have international coverage as well so that in times of crises our pleas will not fall on deaf ears. It is not sufficient to sign a one-time petition condemning Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh and Armenia. This war showed that last minute individual or group actions fade in the face of vicious, organized, and powerful anti-Armenian propaganda campaigns. Similarly, reminding the world of Armenia's Christian identity during a crisis will not ensure Christian support. We must educate the society through sustained efforts at times of peace. Establishing a voice for Armenia in the western media must be an intentional and an ongoing effort to alert the society of political, social, or religious developments in the region that endanger Armenia's national security and threaten its territorial integrity.

Like Diaspora Jews, Diaspora Armenians, too, particularly academics, writers, and journalists must view themselves as ambassadors to Armenia and spokesmen for the Armenian cause. The role of Armenian academics cannot be emphasized enough. Academics in the Diaspora are the watchmen to sound the alarm and to coordinate and strategize work together with various Armenian groups. It is imperative for Armenian scholars to become more proactive and, to relate better to western interests, perhaps consider broadening the scope of their research to place Armenia's geopolitical concerns in its regional and even international context. Armenia's rich history, high civilization, the special place of Christianity in the nation's history and culture, the centuries-long interactions with Is-

lam and the struggle in defense of Christianity, as well as its geopolitical significance offer ample ground to support such research.

Today, the most pressing issue that must be dealt with is to avoid another war. Azerbaijan's recent taunting of Armenia and making demands regarding the "Zangezur corridor" indicates Washington's readiness for renewed military operations in the region. In essence, the name Zangezur, an otherwise remote mountain range in the Caucasus, has been in use within U.S. intelligence circles to advance western interests in the region at the expense of Armenia's very existence. Aliyev's threatening Armenia with war (along with the escalating tensions between Ukraine and Russia which, in the event of a renewed war, will weaken Russian support for Armenia) must raise the alarm for Diaspora Armenians to take immediate action and flood the international media with analytical writings exposing Azerbaijan's (and Turkey's) cynical plans against Christian Armenia, the repercussions of their dangerous policies for the region, and perhaps propose convincing alternatives to the extra-regional actors so that to accomplish their goals in the region without endangering Armenia's national security and territorial integrity.

As daunting a task as this may seem to be, it is the moral obligation of Armenian scholars and writers to establish a visible presence in the international arena through analytical writings, turning our challenges into opportunities, and even presenting Armenia's geography as a strategic asset in the region. A major lesson that can be learned from the Israeli experience is that we can expect international support only if we are being proactive and use every opportunity to promote our cause and educate the society about Armenia and Armenian history. Examples of such opportunities include Azerbaijan's recent threats in violation of the armistice agreement of November 9, 2020, the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide and the Sumgait pogrom, the kidnapping and treatment of Armenian POWs in Azerbaijan, the desecration of Christian Armenian sites in Turkey and Azerbaijan, the recent developments in the Middle East that send strong signals to Erdogan that the new regional alliances will not tolerate religious fanaticism in the region, the anti-Christian and anti-Jewish school curriculum in Turkey, etc. Genocide scholars can publish articles in major media outlets that expose Erdogan's chauvinistic and imperialistic policies in the region. All these topics have a Christian and human rights dimension and must be brought to public attention as threats to fundamental values. In short, we can build positive perceptions about Armenia by presenting our concerns in a way that is of interest to the international community and by seizing every opportunity to align our interests with those who oppose intolerance and religious fanaticism in the region.

In the last decades Turkey and Azerbaijan have been relentlessly fighting an anti-Armenian propaganda war on the academic front as well. Politics has infiltrated area studies turning some faculty into political stooges thus compromising the integrity of the academia. Armenia may not engage itself in similar acts. Nevertheless, Armenian scholars can counter such slander by defending the truth in the public arena. It is essential to add academic weight to the battle for the truth. It is only a second nature for a Jewish scholar to step out of the ivy towers of the academia into the public square and fight for a righteous cause, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

Besides scholars, Armenian university students can play an important role as well, especially those majoring in political science, history, and public policy. In the last decade, the National Public Diplomacy unit within the Israeli Prime Minister's Office came up with a practical and cost-efficient plan. The unit allocated NIS 3 million to recruit, organize and fund the activities of hundreds of university students with knowledge of foreign languages as part of the country's public diplomacy effort. The Interactive Media Unit coordinates the public diplomacy efforts of the Prime Minister's Office on the Internet and social networks. Through senior coordinators, the organized student union follows directives issued from the Prime Minister's office, while maintaining its independent student image on websites (<https://www.haaretz.com/premium-social-media-hasbara-worth-millions-1.5320153>). Also, young Armenian scholars can be encouraged to undertake research projects to expose online disinformation. One such program is the European Media and Information Fund created recently by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the European University Institute (<https://www.eui.eu/news-hub?id=european-fund-established-to-build-resilience-against-online-disinformation>). The Artsakh war, just as a century ago, has been justified especially in the American media by labeling Armenia as pro-Russia. It is up to Armenian and pro-Armenian

continued on next page



COMMENTARY

Diaspora-Armenia Relations: Are We Ready For a Serious Discussion?

By Vicken Cheterian

The 2020 defeat was not only that of Armenia, but also the failure of Diaspora politics. For the Armenian Diaspora it should be a starting point for a radical reappraisal of policies followed in the past thirty years. Only after that we can start a serious dialogue – not folklore! – about Armenia-Diaspora relations. But are we ready for that?

There is a sense of bitterness within Diaspora communities. It has short-term reasons, the emotional shock caused by the war, by the large Diaspora mobilization, and by the massive human and material losses. The official propaganda coming out of Yerevan made people believe, making disappointment even more bitter. But it also has long-term causes: the three-decade long Diaspora mobilization to help strengthen independent Armenia, and support Karabakh Armenian's security and political rights, is now shattered.

If Diaspora Armenians want to understand the causes of this dual defeat – the military defeat of Armenia, and the failure of the Armenian Diaspora to become a “strategic partner” of Yerevan, then it is time to ask difficult questions: how did political choices taken by Diaspora institutions produce the 2020 defeat and failure.

Diaspora organizations never openly discussed their policies or evaluate the consequences. Key Diaspora institutions, such as the three traditional parties the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), the Social-Democrat Hunchagians, and the Ramgavar, the Armenian Church, and major foundations such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), and others, need to discuss past choices, identify failures, and then draw a new road-map. Since the emergence of independent Armenian republic in 1991 the sum of those efforts is what I call “Armenia First” policies.

If one summarizes the political choices made by the major Diaspora institutions it can be roughly summarized around three major lines:

First, the Diaspora failed to become the strategic depth of Armenia. When the ultimate moment of truth came, when the 2020 Karabakh War erupted, the Diaspora failed to weight over the balance. Attempts to lobby in key countries like the US, France and Russia, where important Armenian communities reside, did not hinder neither the restart of the Karabakh war, nor Armenian military defeat. Similarly, international organizations – such as the UN, OSCE, or the European Union – did not express much solidarity with Armenia politically, or adopt favourable positions regarding the conflict in Karabakh. The US, at the time in the last days of the Trump administration, did not do anything significant. European states as well as the EU were equally absent. Russia, the military ally of Armenia, intervened in the war only after 44 days when Armenian armed forces had lost much ground including the strategic town of Shushi. Most of all, “Recognize Artsakh” campaign, massively supported by Diaspora activists, did not reach any tangible results.

Second, Diaspora invested massive efforts in the development of Armenia and Artsakh. Millions of dollars were diverted from Diaspora organizations to replace the weak social services of Armenia, provide cultural subsidies, renovate schools, repair roads, etc. Diaspora organizations also supported funds to create housing for Armenian refugees from Baku, Ganja, or Shahumyan to be resettled in regions conquered from Azerbaijan between 1994 and 2020, mainly in Lachin and Kelbajar provinces. The total amounts transferred per year – or since the independence of Armenia – remains unknown. Armenia Fund vaguely mentions that “Over the past ten years (...) helped raise more than 100 million dollars for projects in Armenia and Karabakh” yet it is not clear how much of this sum came from the Diaspora. Those investments alleviate the difficulties of Armenia's underprivileged, constructed hospitals or renovated schools, but it did not succeed in developing Armenia. Nor did it bring social justice to a post-Soviet society suffering from the impact of wild capitalism. The reasons why Diaspora efforts to develop Armenia failed needs serious evaluation.

Third, Armenian Diaspora organizations struggled for the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. This was also the policy of Yerevan since Robert Kocharyan came to power (1998). The open Turkish participation in the 2020 war against Armenians poses the question: what was achieved by decades long struggle for Genocide recognition? How come Turkey with its genocidal past dared to use violence against Armenians again without any reaction from the international community? Here, again, there is a need to formulate the place and the sense in which justice for an unrecognized genocide in the future Diaspora political struggle. Is it worth continuing militancy for Genocide recognition, and for what aim? Is it enough to struggle for decades to receive “declarations” or is it time to think about how to achieve concrete results? Is the struggle for the international recognition of the 1915 Genocide a moral, a legal, diplomatic, or political struggle? Is it the struggle of the Armenian Diaspora or that of the Armenian Republic? Finally, what

are our demands from Ankara to settle the question of Genocide?

In sum, the three essential struggles in which Diaspora was engaged in the last three decades needs to be questioned today.

The type of support the Diaspora gave to Armenia not only fell short of Armenia's needs, but was also counter-productive because it continuously weakened the Diaspora and impoverished its institutions. While Diaspora organizations were investing time, money and energy on “Armenia First” projects, they were abandoning their other obligations: developing Diaspora institutions themselves, and pass our rich Diasporic heritage to the next generation. Thirty years of “Armenia First” policies came at the expense of weakening and impoverishing Armenian schools, media institutions, sports clubs, political parties, cultural associations, book publishing, and so on. Each dollar sent from Diaspora to Armenia was a dollar not invested in the Diaspora institutions, and contributed to its weakening.

Moreover, during those years, the Diaspora was metamorphosing under the pressure of mass migrations from where Armenians historically lived, from the Middle East and the Caucasus to new countries including North America, Australia, Western Europe and Russia. New Armenian communities did not have the necessary institutional infrastructure to pass Armenian language, culture, political engagement to the next generation. The result is that the Armenian Diaspora institutions are weaker today than at the moment Armenia accessed independence. A weak Diaspora with obsolete institutions, political leadership, and institutions that are unable to reflect on policy and strategy, is inadequate to support Armenia and help solve its problems.

Those political choices were associated with slogans like: “Armenian identity cannot survive outside the Armenian homeland.” What ignorance of Armenian history and culture! Such a slogan negates the entire modern Armenian history, from the Mekhitarian congregations of Venice and Vienna, to the history of the birth and development of Armenian print press starting from *Azdarar* — published not in Armenia but in Madras in India! — to the birth of Armenian political parties themselves. This mentality also abandoned the Armenian Diaspora, instead of re-imagining an Armenian Diaspora culture in the globalized and digitalized age — the relative advantage of Armenians in comparison with other communities.

One of the historic failures of the last 30 years is that Yerevan did not understand, organize or mobilize the potential of the Diaspora in state-building process. The four leaders of Armenia since independence have articulated different Diaspora policies, which all in the end boil down to the same idea: send us money and don't ask embarrassing questions. In this, the majority of Diaspora structures did not confront Yerevan, did not propose an alternative policy. The reason is that those weakened Diaspora institutions today are unable to produce leaders and leadership, and simply followed Yerevan's diktat.

What does the Diaspora institutions need to do to overcome the current situation described above, and provide real support to Armenia and Karabakh?

First, Diaspora institutions need to invest in their own organizational setting to reinforce and modernize them, if not create new much needed ones. This should be done first of all in investing in Diaspora leadership and the intellectual productivity by opening up those institutions to the young generation. Concretely, existing Diaspora institutions should reinvent themselves to attract young generations, recruit in their ranks bright young people who can formulate questions of their own generation and not of past times, invest in Diaspora political struggles, universities, think tanks, schools and mass media. In the information age, we need Diaspora institutions capable to think, reflect, discuss and plan. We need modern institutions to convince young generations that Diaspora Armenian culture belongs to our times, and is not a relic of the past. The Diaspora cannot help Armenia, if Diaspora institutions are in obsolete state.

Second, Diaspora-Armenian relations need to be redefined, based on partnership between Armenia and Diaspora. Diaspora should stop being Yerevan's surrogate, sending subsidies to replace Armenia's failed social services. It should stop pouring asphalt on Armenia's highways. Instead, Diaspora should provide real aid to Armenia and Karabakh in the form of knowledge transfer and institutional support, modernizing its universities and school curriculum, bringing to Armenia new technologies, capital investments, and finding markets for its exports. The Diaspora must become the major partner in Armenia's quest for reform, modernization, and development. Help transform and modernize Armenia's institutional setting by creating collaborative, complex institutions that can answer to the complex challenges of our times, instead of one-man-institutions that we have today. It is time to stop sending kopeks to Armenia by becoming a real partner in a common developmental project.

Third, Diaspora should become simultaneously more political, but also know the limits of the scope of its political activities. To become partners, Diaspora institutions should not try to “replace” the state in Armenia, neither by attempting to take over some of its functions, nor attempting to take over the leadership role in Armenia. Diaspora organizations should engage in politics in the Diaspora, not in Armenia. Diaspora and Armenia need division of labour, by clarifying the political field of one and the other.

Before 1991, for several decades, the centre of Armenian political activism was in the Diaspora, not in Soviet Armenia. When the independent Armenian nation-state emerged, all attention was concentrated on it. After the 2020 war, with Armenian influence over Karabakh much reduced, where Armenian security is now dependent on Moscow, there is a need for rethinking what are the global Armenian political challenges, and what part of those challenges the Armenian Diaspora should shoulder. This task cannot be met without a critical discussion of what went wrong in the past decades.

We need a new policy that aims not at winning insignificant battles, but to win the next war.

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scholars and knowledgeable and motivated students to make Armenia's existential concerns known to the world.

Lastly, it is of utmost urgency for a group of concerned American Armenian scholars from across the disciplines, as well as writers and journalists to get together in a conference-like setting to discuss ideas and suggestions, to establish contact with the appropriate offices in Armenia, and come up with a strategic plan to address the dire challenges Armenia is facing in the international arena. Whether such a conference will be hosted by a university department, ANCA, or a legal or business en-

tity, any agreed upon plan can be carried out effectively only through cooperative efforts and well-coordinated and strategized work that will override ideological differences between the groups. The modern history of Israel has shown that only through concerted efforts and coordinated and strategized work a shared goal can be implemented in a meaningful and effective way.

In the concluding remarks of his above-mentioned book Kersam Aharonian warns future Armenian generations never to forget the Genocide. We can only reiterate that the lessons learned from the Genocide, and now the Artsakh war should never be forgotten by Armenians, this gener-

ation and beyond, because at issue is our very survival as a nation. Perhaps the greatest lesson learned from the Artsakh war is that if we choose to relapse into our dormant state, we will allow foreign actors to determine Armenia's fate, but if we choose to be proactive and effectively educate the public about Armenia and Armenian concerns, we will honor the memory of our martyrs and secure a safe and strong Armenia for our children and the future generations.

(Marlen Eordegian has formerly taught at Vanderbilt University and holds a Ph.D. in Armenian/Middle Eastern history from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.)



A Message from the ADL Press

If Snap Elections Cannot Heal Armenia's Wounds, Then Establishment of Legitimacy and Securing a Mandate from People Will Remain Fruitless Exercises

Armenia and Artsakh were struck a heavy blow of historical significance as a result of the 44-day war. If the regional great powers supported this terrible calamity, the responsibility of the ruling authorities in Armenia was also not inconsequential. Their military shortsightedness, diplomatic failure and administrative incompetence became factors in this great defeat.

Any honorable person or statesman would logically have resigned because today's situation is more complex than that of the pre-war period as far as ruling the country is concerned.

If we have been able to conclude a truce with the enemy, we as a nation must find the strength to reach a truce among ourselves, restraining the polarizing internet and press and ending the reciprocal insults which have reached unspeakable proportions.

The time has come to put an end to the tired labels of old and new, black and white, plunder and legitimate, and on all fronts only seek values, political, scientific, military and economic. It is time to form an Armenian pan-national coalition with the consolidation of values and only in this fashion approach the snap elections.

In today's Arshakavan of a labyrinth of political lexicon, men of state must be found who can understand and bring to life the principle "necessity can resolve legality" so that what is necessary is made to conform to what is legal, and in this way arrange the elections.

The goal of snap elections must be to heal Armenia's wounds and bring the country back to its feet; and not to ascertain which group can form a majority and destroy its enemy or enemies. What has been lost cannot be regained in today's circumstances. What is possible is to defend what remains.

The current president, Armen Sarkissian, and five previous presidents of Armenia and Artsakh have provided the first signs of the path to national unity. It is sufficient to continue and complete this unification process.

Our five thousand young martyrs will not be able to vote in the snap elections, and the ten thousand who have become handicapped or their relatives are not in the mood to go to the polls. The country has had a stroke and is crippled. The majority of citizens remain indifferent to the elections, having lost confidence in the suitability of any entity to the seriousness of the task.

Probably only citizens who are despairing or politically immature will participate in the voting – in other words, only a minority of the voting masses. The majority that will be formed out of that minority could theoretically elect an administration which would lay claim to legitimacy yet lack the authority and ability to govern the country.

The current administration is responsible for the present state of failure. Its reelection can not promise more than what it was able to do under better conditions.

Yes to calling snap elections in order to bring the homeland out of today's calamity, and no to affirming theories which will remain fruitless exercises.

The Representatives of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party Press
April 2, 2021

Armenian Academics Up In Arms Against 'Unconstitutional' Bill

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Armenia's leading university and National Academy of Sciences condemned the government on Monday for pushing through the parliament a bill that could give it direct control over all state universities.

They described as unconstitutional the bill's most controversial provision which would empower the Armenian Ministry of Education to appoint five of the nine members of the governing boards of the universities.

The boards elect university rectors and make other key decisions. Most of their current members were chosen by university faculties as well as student councils.

In a joint statement, Yerevan State University (YSU) and the National Academy of Sciences said the bill would effectively enable the government to appoint rectors and end their competitive elections.

"As a result, public institutions of higher learning would become fully dependent on political authorities," said the statement.

"The election [of rectors] is turned into the appointment," Edik Minasyan, the dean of YSU's History Department, said. University staffs would not have a decisive say in the choice of their chief executives, he said.

Serob Khachatryan, an independent education expert, agreed, saying that board members appointed by the Ministry of Education would almost certainly execute government orders.

"A good thing about democracy is that the authorities may be very bad but you must always have a system of checks and balances. These new rules would strip the universities of checks and balances," said Khachatryan.

The YSU statement said the new rules run counter to a clause in the Armenian constitution which entitles state-funded



Yerevan State University

universities and colleges to a high degree of autonomy.

Responding to the statement, the Ministry of Education said that only the Constitutional Court can determine whether a particular law is unconstitutional. It did not comment further.

The Armenian parliament controlled by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's My Step bloc passed the controversial bill in the final reading on March 24. President Armen Sarkissian has yet to sign it into law.

Pashinyan and his associates, among them young scholars, pledged to give universities more freedom from the government when they swept to power three years ago.

In May 2019, they succeeded in forcing YSU's long-serving rector, Aram Simonian, to resign. They accused Simonian of placing YSU under the strong influence of the former ruling Republican Party of Armenia.

The university, which is the largest and oldest in the country, has still not elected a new rector. Some critics say this is the result of the current government's inability to replace Simonian with a figure loyal to it.



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