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## Vartan Gregorian, Savior of the New York Public Library, Dies at 87

By Robert D. McFadden

NEW YORK (New York Times) — Vartan Gregorian, the ebullient Armenian immigrant who climbed to pinnacles of academic and philanthropic achievement but took a detour in the 1980s to restore a fading New York



Public Library to its place at the heart of American intellectual life, died on Thursday, April 16, in Manhattan. He was 87.

The death, at a hospital, was confirmed by his son, Daren Gregorian. No cause was given.

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## Karabakh Official Fired After Criticizing Armenian Authorities

STEPANAKERT (RFE/RL) — A senior Nagorno-Karabakh official was sacked on Monday, April 19, hours after criticizing Armenian authorities' efforts to secure the release of Armenian soldiers and civilians remaining in Azerbaijani captivity.

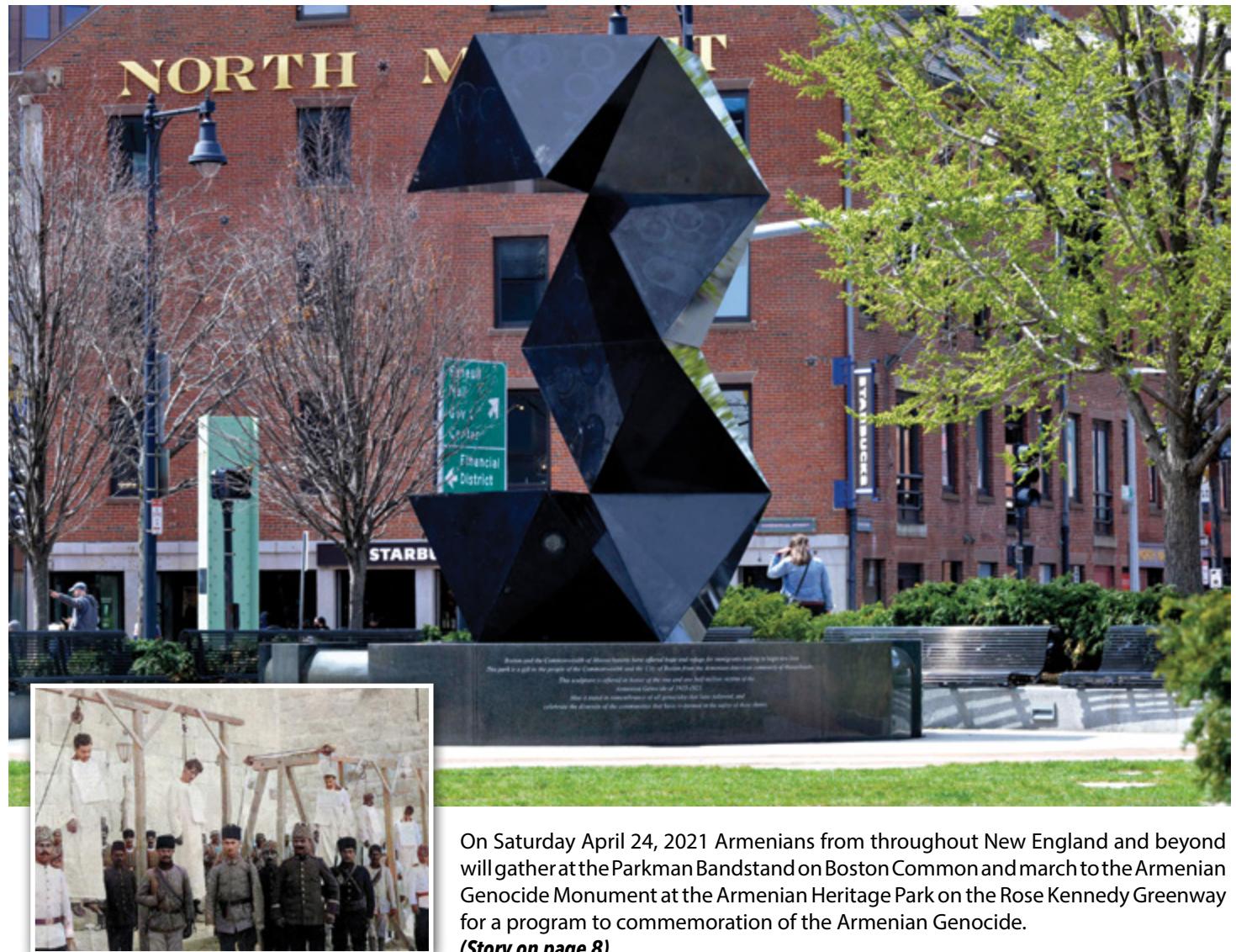
Boris Avagyan, a deputy chief of Karabakh's State Emergencies Service, effectively blamed pro-government members of Armenia's parliament for Azerbaijan continuing refusal to free them when he spoke at a public discussion organized in Yerevan by other lawmakers.

Avagyan also said he does not know which officials represent Armenia in negotiations on the fate of more than 100 Armenian prisoners believed to be held by Baku.

"If you, deputies of Armenia's National Assembly, do not know that person, how can I, the holder of a state post in the Republic of Artsakh, know that person?" he asked.

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## NEVER AGAIN 1915-2021



On Saturday April 24, 2021 Armenians from throughout New England and beyond will gather at the Parkman Bandstand on Boston Common and march to the Armenian Genocide Monument at the Armenian Heritage Park on the Rose Kennedy Greenway for a program to commemorate of the Armenian Genocide.

(Story on page 8)

## US Catholic Bishops Issue Statement On the Armenian Genocide

WASHINGTON — This week, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued a strong statement in anticipation of Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day on April 24.

In the document dated April 19, 2021, Bishop David J. Malloy, chair of the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, highlighted the tragic loss of Armenians in the first genocide of the 20th century, echoing the spirit of concern and solidarity the Catholic Church has held with the Armenian Church. The statement builds on that history, which includes the November 2000 joint statement of Pope John Paul II and Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and the 2003 delegation of US bishops to Armenia, led by Cardinal William Keeler at the invitation of the Catholicos.

Bp. Malloy of the  
US Catholic Bishops  
Conference

ment of Pope John Paul II and Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and the 2003 delegation of US bishops to Armenia, led by Cardinal William Keeler at the invitation of the Catholicos.

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## Israel Charny Looks Back on The Momentous Conference That Almost Wasn't

By Alin K. Gregorian  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

JERUSALEM — Prof. Israel Charny, a long-time champion of recognition of the Armenian Genocide, is looking back at the uphill battle he has waged in his country for the recognition of that genocide, the cost to him personally and professionally, and why he keeps on doing what he does.

In a recent interview from his home, Charny, 90, spoke with enthusiasm about his new book, titled *Israel's Failed Response to the Armenian Genocide: Denial, State Deception, Truth Versus Politicization of History* and his reasons for writing it.

The book (see accompanying review with continuation of story) details the efforts by the Israeli government to thwart the first International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, organized by Charny, in 1982. The conference was notable for including for the first-time scholars presenting papers on the Armenian Genocide in a conference on the Holocaust.



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### TURKEY

Last Remaining  
Armenian Home in  
Moush May Be Torn  
Down



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Achod  
Schemavonian,  
French-Armenian  
Activist, Dies at 85

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### NEW YORK

"Voices of Truth"  
Puts a Human  
Face on the  
Artsakh War

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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Armenia President: No Peace Is Possible Without Fair Karabakh Settlement

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian President Armen Sarkissian said this week he believes it is impossible to establish lasting peace and stability in the region without achieving a fair resolution of the Karabakh conflict.

Addressing reporters after a meeting with his Georgian counterpart Salome Zourabichvili, Sarkissian stressed the importance of resuming the peace talks within the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship.

Sarkissian said he and Zourabichvili discussed issues of security and stability in the region, taking into account the reality after Azerbaijan, with Turkey's support, launched a war against Artsakh (Karabakh). Sarkissian said he has also detailed his Georgian counterpart on issues of preserving Armenian cultural heritage in territories that have gone under Azerbaijan's control.

### Large Number of Armenian Migrants To Be Affected by New Russian Immigration Regulation

MOSCOW (Panorama.am) — Russia has asked migrants from post-Soviet states living there illegally to leave the country by June 15, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported Friday, April 16.

In mid-December, President Vladimir Putin extended the residence status of foreign citizens living in Russia until June 15, 2021, due to the coronavirus pandemic. This covered migrants from Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries living in Russia without proper documentation.

According to Interior Ministry data, more than 332,000 illegal migrants from Uzbekistan currently reside in Russia, along with 247,000 from Tajikistan, 152,000 from Ukraine, 120,000 from Azerbaijan, 115,000 from Kyrgyzstan, 61,000 from Armenia, 56,000 from Moldova and 49,000 from Kazakhstan.

Russia is experiencing a labor shortage due to pandemic-related border closures and is looking to simplify entry requirements for migrant workers in industries like construction and agriculture. More than a year since the start of the pandemic, only a handful of countries' citizens are permitted to enter Russia.

"A large number of Armenian migrants in Russia will be affected by the new regulation, requiring illegal workers to leave the country by June 15," the Head of Public Relations department at the RA Migration Service Nelli Davtyan said at a press conference on April 20 in Yerevan. "The notification has been sent out, and Russia is currently preparing sanctions which will be applied against those groups of people," Davtyan said.

# Armenian President Opposes 'Hasty' Changes to Electoral System

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — President Armen Sarkissian has refused to validate major amendments to Armenia's Electoral Code which some opposition parties say are aimed at helping Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan win snap parliamentary elections expected in June.

The government-backed amendments passed by the National Assembly early this month changed the legal mechanism for electing the country's next parliament.

Armenians have until now voted for not only parties and blocs but also their individual candidates running in nationwide constituencies. In the last two general elections, parliament seats were equally distributed among candidates picked through national party lists and individual races.

The amendments backed only by lawmakers representing Pashinyan's My Step bloc mean that the forthcoming elections will held only on a party list basis.

One of the two parliamentary opposition parties, Bright Armenia (LHK), denounced the changes to the electoral system as partisan gerrymandering. The other opposition force, Prosperous Armenia (BHK), did not publicly back or oppose them.

Sarkissian announced over the weekend that he will not sign the controversial bill into law, saying that it was passed hastily and without proper debate.

"The Venice Commission [of the Council of Europe] believes that changes to elec-

toral legislation must be enacted at least one year before an election," Sarkissian's office said in a statement.

The statement also questioned the wisdom of scrapping individual races in the constituencies, arguing that Armenia still lacks an "established parliamentary political culture" and political parties with "clear programs."

At the same time Sarkissian decided not to challenge the legality of the bill in the Constitutional Courts. This means, that the parliament's pro-government speaker, Ararat Mirzoyan, can sign it into law later this month.

A senior My Step lawmaker, Hamazasp Danielyan, criticized the president's stance on Monday, April 19.

"A quick validation of this very concrete change would have allowed us to carry out the electoral reform ahead of the elections with fewer shocks," Danielyan told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. "Unfortunately, the president opted for a different path for some reason."

Pashinyan effectively reaffirmed plans to hold the snap elections in late June when he visited Armenia's southeastern Vayots Dzor province on Saturday.

Under the Armenian constitution, such polls will have to be held within two months if the prime minister resigns and the National Assembly twice fails to elect another premier. The BHK and LHK lead-

ers are understood to have assured Pashinyan last month that their parties will not nominate prime-ministerial candidates in the event of his tactical resignation.

### Former Army Chief Demands Release Of Transcript Of Security Meeting

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Onnik Gasparyan, Armenia's former top general controversially replaced last month, demanded on April 20 the declassification of some security documents in response to fresh government allegations that he lied about last year's war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan again attacked Gasparyan when he spoke in the Armenian parliament last week.

Pashinyan denied Gasparyan's November 17 claim that three days after the September 27 outbreak of the war he warned Pashinyan that Armenia and Karabakh are

heading for defeat and that the fighting must be stopped as soon as possible. Pashinyan insisted that Gasparyan made a statement to the contrary at a September 30 meeting of his Security Council.

The Security Council released, meanwhile, some excerpts from Gasparyan's remarks made at that meeting. It went on to publicize on April 20 a short audio of those remarks in which the general can be heard saying that Armenian forces are successfully repelling Azerbaijan's offensive military operations in and around Karabakh.

Gasparyan responded by reaffirming his earlier claims and accusing the authorities of distorting his remarks. He demanded that they release the full transcript of concluding statements made by him as well as President Armen Sarkissian at the Security Council meeting.

The office of the Security Council secretary, Armen Grigoryan, rejected the demand. It said the transcript contains sensitive details of Armenian military operations and its disclosure would seriously damage Armenia's and Karabakh's security.

Incidentally, Pashinyan did not refute Gasparyan's claims when he was interviewed by RFE/RL's Armenian Service in December.

The general was controversially sacked as chief of the Armenian army's General Staff immediately after initiating a February 25 statement by the army top brass that demanded the government's resignation. Pashinyan rejected the demand as a coup attempt.

In his April 14 speech in the National Assembly, Pashinyan also blamed former Presidents Serzh Sarksian and Robert Kocharyan for Armenia's defeat in the six-week war stopped by a Russian-brokered agreement on November 10.

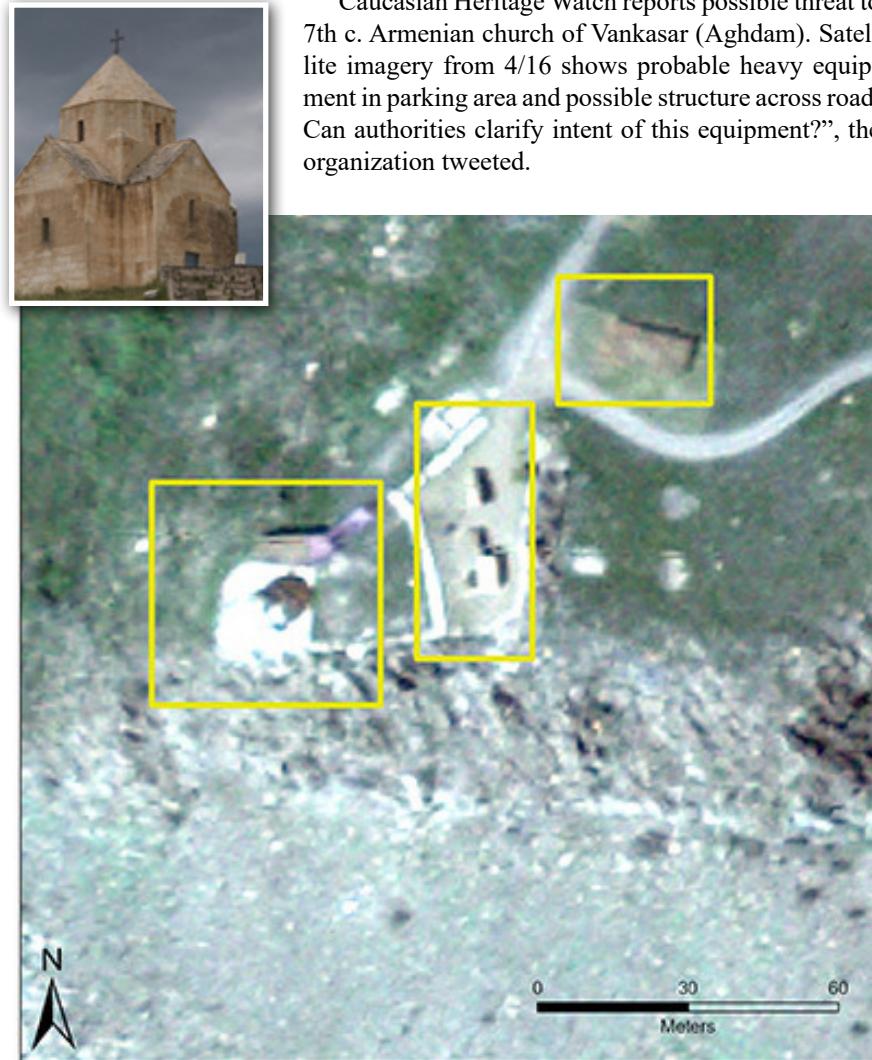
The Armenian opposition holds Pashinyan responsible for the outcome of the war. Virtually all opposition groups have demanded his resignation.

### CAUCASIAN HERITAGE WATCH:

## Azerbaijan Accumulated Heavy Equipment at Armenian Church In Aghdam

Caucasian Heritage Watch has voiced alarm about threats to Armenian church of Vankasar, in Aghdam, Nagorno Karabakh. The organization has shared on its Twitter satellite imagery showing Azerbaijani probable heavy equipment near the church.

"Caucasian Heritage Watch reports possible threat to 7th c. Armenian church of Vankasar (Aghdam). Satellite imagery from 4/16 shows probable heavy equipment in parking area and possible structure across road. Can authorities clarify intent of this equipment?", the organization tweeted.



# First High-Level Greek-Turkish Diplomatic Talks Descend into Verbal Spat during News Conference

ANKARA (RT) — A press conference by the Turkish and Greek foreign ministers after a key meeting on Thursday, April 15, quickly descended into an exchange of mutual accusations, suggesting the two states still have plenty of issues to settle.

Tensions have been running particularly high between the two NATO members since last August, when Ankara sent a research vessel into disputed waters in the Eastern Mediterranean, believed to be rich with natural resources. The move saw both countries escalate and mobilize military vessels and planes. Ankara eventually recalled its research ship, but Athens kept actively campaigning for the EU to slap "meaningful" sanctions on Turkey over its aggressive behavior.

And this is not the only point of contention between the sides, which also have conflicting claims over air space, the island of Cyprus, and the status of several islands in the Aegean Sea, among other things.

The first visit of Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias to Ankara since the outbreak of the Mediterranean crisis was seen as an opportunity to start improving bilateral relations, but things didn't go totally smoothly.

The press conference after his meeting with Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu started in a positive manner, with the Greek guest offering support to Turkey's bid to join the EU and speaking positively about resetting ties.

But moods changed instantly when Dendias stressed that violations of Greek sover-

ignty by Turkey would be countered with sanctions.

"Greece's position is clear. Turkey has violated international law and maritime law in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean," he said, while also blaming Ankara

The Turkish FM insisted that his country hadn't infringed on Greek sovereignty in its exploration and drilling work, and also accused Athens of pushing back migrants in the Aegean.

"When we get into mutual accusations,



Nikos Dendias and Mevlut Cavusoglu during their talks in Ankara on April 15, 2021 (Credit: Twitter/Nikos Dendias)

for repeatedly flying its aircraft through Greek airspace.

Cavusoglu didn't mince words in his response, rejecting Dendias's claims and labeling them "unacceptable."

"You come out here, and try to accuse Turkey, to give a message to your country. It is not possible for me to accept this," he said.

we have a lot to tell each other. If you want to continue these arguments, tensions, you can [and] we will do so as well," Cavusoglu added.

Despite the exchange, both ministers expressed a readiness to continue their efforts to resolve the differences at the negotiating table.

## Azerbaijani Park Sculptors Admit Deliberately Making Armenian Figures Ugly

BAKU (azvision.az) — According to an article by Sahane Rehimli in AzVision.az, three sculptors made the wax figures of Armenian military men displayed in Azerbaijan's new War Trophy Park in Baku. The article includes an interview with two of the sculptors, Rashid Maharramov and Kamran Asadov.

They and Müşfig Heydarov were asked to quickly create 26 figures, which they accomplished in three and a half months. Maharramov explained that he did research about Armenians in the media but did not use the images of actual individuals.

Asadov declared, "We tried to have the images as realistic as possible. We generally try to do something as beautiful as possible. This time it was the opposite. It was a time consuming and difficult process. We prepared them using aquiline nose forms, skull bases absent and other features."

The two sculptors declined to say how much they were paid for their work.



A dehumanizing scene of Armenian prisoners at the Baku park (photo from official website of the president of Azerbaijan)

## Karabakh Official Fired After Criticizing Armenian Authorities

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Karen Sargsyan, the Karabakh interior minister, fired Avagyan in a move announced later in the day.

A statement released by the State Emergencies Service said Avagyan was not authorized to comment on "topics beyond the scope of his powers" and that most of his comments "do not correspond to reality."

The roundtable discussion was organized by independent lawmakers who left Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's My Step bloc following the Armenian side's defeat in the war with Azerbaijan stopped by a Russian-brokered cease-

fire in November. One of them, Taguhi Tovmasyan, said Avagyan's comments on the authorities' handling of the prisoner issue are a cause for concern.

"We must also hear from other officials who are supposed to deal with the prisoners' return," Tovmasyan told reporters.

The Armenian government caused controversy after some of its senior representatives said late on April 9 that a new group of Armenian captives is about to be set free and repatriated. However, none of them was on board a Russian plane that arrived from Baku to Yerevan that night.

Andranik Kocharyan, a senior pro-government lawmaker, accused Baku of not

honoring an agreement which he said was reached as a result of Russian President Vladimir Putin's latest conversations with Armenia's and Azerbaijan's leaders. He claimed that Lieutenant-General Rustam Muradov, the commander of Russian peacekeeping forces deployed in Karabakh, travelled to Baku to "escort the prisoners back to Armenia."

Muradov categorically denied that, however, saying that officials in Yerevan are "misleading the population."

Armenian opposition leaders accused Pashinyan's government of botching the prisoner release in a failed attempt to score political points.

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### Cyprus Park Dedicated to Memory of Artsakh Heroes

NICOSIA, Cyprus (Armenpress) — A small park dedicated to the memory of heroes fallen at the recent Artsakh war has opened in Cyprus, *Greek City Times* reports. The initiative belongs to the members of the Cypriot party Movement of Solidarity led by party leader Eleni Theocarous. A ceremony on April 12 was also attended by members of the Armenian community of Cyprus.

### Azerbaijanis Destroy 18th-Century Mosque in Karabakh

STEPANAKERT (PanARMENIAN.Net) — An 18th century mosque was destroyed during the construction of a road connecting Khudaferin, Kubatlu and Lachin in Karabakh territories that went under Azerbaijan's control after the Second Karabakh War, *JAMnews* reports. Located in the village of Yusifbeyli, Kubatlu region, the mosque was granted a status of an architectural monument of local importance by Azerbaijan.

The government press service noted that President Ilham Aliyev has ordered the builders who allowed the destruction of the monument to take place to be punished.

Azerbaijani forces have destroyed several Armenian Churches. During the recent military hostilities, Azerbaijani forces launched two targeted attacks on the Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi. Azerbaijan earlier "restored" a church by replacing its Armenian inscription with glass art. Furthermore, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited the region of Hadrut in territories occupied by Azerbaijan and declared his intention to "renovate" a 12th century Armenian church, which he claimed to "an Albanian church." Aliyev went so far as to accuse Armenians of leaving "fake inscriptions" in the Armenian language.

### Israel and Greece Sign Record Defense Deal

ATHENS (Reuters) — Israel and Greece signed their biggest ever defense procurement deal, which Israel said on April 18, would strengthen political and economic ties between the countries, and the two countries' air forces launched a joint exercise.

The agreement includes a \$1.65 billion contract for the establishment and operation of a training center for the Hellenic Air Force by Israeli defense contractor Elbit Systems ([ESLT.TA](#)) over a 22-year period, Israel's defense ministry said. The training center will be modelled on Israel's own flight academy and will be equipped with 10 M-346 training aircraft produced by Italy's Leonardo ([LDOF.MI](#)), the ministry said. Elbit will supply kits to upgrade and operate Greece's T-6 aircraft and provide training, simulators and logistical support.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Halvadzhyan Family Escaped Genocide to Create New Lives in Bulgaria But Soon Faced Communist Persecution

By Margarita Ivanova

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

PLEVEN, Bulgaria — Armenians and Bulgarians have had close relations since the time of Byzantium and the creation of the first medieval Bulgarian kingdoms. In modern times, this relationship was reinforced from the early 19th century, when both peoples began a struggle against oppression by the Ottoman Empire. Soon mass immigration to Bulgaria created even closer ties.

After Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule in 1878, 4,000 Armenians came to Bulgaria. This was the start of the many waves of Armenians that fled to Bulgaria. Among the events triggering this immigration were the 1896 Hamidian massacres, the start of the Armenian Genocide in 1915, and the end of the 1919 Greco-Turkish War.

Borders in Bulgaria were opened to refugees in 1922 by the Alexander Stambliiski government. A total of 25,000 Armenian refugees came, but at the cost of leaving their lives behind.

Among these many refugees were the grandparents of Ahavni Halvadzhyan, a former Bulgarian-Armenian journalist. Her two grandparents, Ahavni and Magarditch Halvadzhyan (the spelling reflects different transliteration systems for the same surname), escaped genocide. They walked for months before finally arriving in Ruse, a large city in Bulgaria.

Most of the other Armenians they were with continued on to France, but Ahavni and Magarditch took the risk to stay nearby and settle in the city of Pleven, Bulgaria. The two 16-year-olds were welcomed by the Bulgarians around them and became immersed in the culture. They not only had to rebuild a home from scratch, but also their entire lives, including a business. They easily made friends and were helped by their Bulgarian neighbors who provided them with resources to build a house.

"Bulgarians helped my grandparents," Halvadzhyan said. "These strangers didn't owe them anything but they respected them. They made an effort to bring the Armenians' new culture into their society, and it was not something my grandparents were used to."

Their future no longer seemed miserable and hopeless for Ahavni and Magarditch. They opened a factory for Armenian Oriental desserts. It was a dream they did not think was possible after they were forced to flee Armenia.

The members of Armenian communities eventually integrated into the lives of ordinary Bulgarians. They created factories, churches, schools, and many other businesses.

"My grandfather hired many Bulgarians to work for him and his business continued for years," said Ahavni.

As larger numbers of Armenian refugees appeared in Bulgaria, the number of Protestant Armenians grew alongside members of the Church of Armenia and they in turn formed Evangelical churches and communities.

The establishment of the Communist regime impacted the Evangelical churches. The new authorities promoted policies of atheism on a state level. Halvadzhyan's business also suffered detrimental changes.

"The communists took my grandfather's business and arrested him because he was a capitalist. He ended up being put in a communist camp for three years," Ahavni said. "They tortured people, and there was a lot of disease too. Many people died in these camps. Unfortunately, my grandmother also died at a young age because of stress



Ahavni Halvadzhyan in the center, her husband Magarditch Halvadzhyan to the right, and their son to the left of them.

when he was sent away."

The loyal workers employed by Halvadzhyan's business took a stand against Magarditch's arrest. He had many Bulgarians on his side. "When he was arrested, the people that worked for him tried to testify for him and tell the police and communists that he was a good man and wasn't exploiting them, but even that wasn't enough," she said.

Ahavni says that her grandfather didn't like to talk about these kinds of past experiences because of the obstructions those three years created for all of the ensuing generations in the family.

"My grandfather's arrest even changed my father's chances of marriage," Ahavni said. "When my dad married his first wife, her parents made her end the marriage only weeks afterwards because she couldn't have a father-in-law who was considered 'an enemy of the state'."

The trickling effects of communism and the Genocide even still affect Ahavni to this day.

"The sad thing is that I have a lot of family in the [Ottoman] Empire and in the United States that I can't trace. Little children in my family were left orphans, and every-

one lost their connection. We can't find records, especially from that time," Ahavni said. "It is almost impossible to find someone now even if you have the time. Families are broken and lost."

Michael Arlen is also an example of a successful Bulgarian Armenian. His Armenian parents moved to Plovdiv after escaping Turkish persecution, and Arlen moved out of Bulgaria during the 1920's. The novelist fled to England to pursue his career in writing novels, and became most famous for his satirical romances.

Arlen is one of the many famous Bulgarian-Armenian figures that have made a significant impact on the world. Armen Ambartsumyan is a renowned Armenian football national team goalkeeper. Philipp Kirkorov is a Bulgarian Armenian who moved to Russia to pursue his path in music.

These individuals' successes have come with a price; constant escape and countless losses. Life-long success is something that was achieved through their independence, but no amount of wealth can find their lost family throughout the world. Additionally, no amount of publicity can alter the course of history.



## Last Remaining Armenian Home in Moush May Be Torn Down

ISTANBUL (*Nor Marmara*) — According to a report from the Mesopotamia News Agency, TOKI (Housing Development Administration of Turkey) is trying to tear down the last remaining Armenian house in Moush (Muş) and erect a large building in its place. However, the owner, Ercan Cete, is opposing this move and attempting to save the house at all costs. He has already complained that the large buildings built by TOKI have destroyed everything left from the Armenians.

The correspondent wrote that a large number of Armenians lived in Moush before the Armenian Genocide. However the municipality is currently tearing down every building that remains from the Armenians one by one. When some complained that these houses should be registered for historical preservation, the mayor famously said, "They are all built of rock and earth. What antiquity are we protecting?"

He adds that the Ministry of Culture should take over the house and preserve it, but that the authorities are trying everything, including threats, to get him to give up his property.

# Community News

## *ANI Launches Arabic Language Version of Website On Armenian Genocide*

WASHINGTON — The Armenian National Institute (ANI) announced the launch of an Arabic version of its website on the Armenian Genocide, which will continue to be expanded over the coming months. The site can be accessed at [arabic.armenian-genocide.org](http://arabic.armenian-genocide.org) or through the main ANI site at <https://www.armenian-genocide.org/>.

The ANI website contains extensive records on the history and affirmation of the World War I-era Armenian Genocide, when 1.5 million Armenians fell victim to the Young Turk government's policy of mass deportation and annihilation. The initial release of the Arabic language site includes the Chronology of the Genocide, FAQs, original documentation, archival material, references on international affirmation, and contemporaneous photo evidence, as well as links to the online Armenian Genocide Museum of America, legal documents, focused exhibits, teaching resources and more.

"These resources have not been available to Arabic speakers in the past, yet the role many Arab states played in mitigating the effects of the Armenian Genocide and the dangers posed by the Turkish government's efforts to deny and rewrite that history are as alive as ever. We know the consequences of Turkey's censorship on its own history and are pleased to provide these resources to Arabic reading scholars, teachers, and the public," stated ANI Chairman Van Krikorian. "During the Genocide, of course the Ottoman Turkish government used Arabic script, including to record the government's own post-war trials where Turkish leaders were convicted of planning and executing the extermination of the Armenian race. We will be adding original Arabic script documents in time as well. Most of all, we thank all those who contributed to this project's development and look forward to its expansion," Krikorian noted.

Large diaspora communities formed across the Arab world after the Armenian Genocide. In contrast to the destruction of ancient Armenian centers across Ottoman Turkey, newly-formed Middle East communities created by survivors and refugees recovered and flourished over the following decades, and substantial Armenian communities continue to exist across the region. Countries like Lebanon and Syria are also among the list of 30 countries that have formally recognized the Armenian Genocide.

Among the earliest critics of the Young Turk policy of genocide was the Sharif of Mecca, Al-Husayn ibn 'Ali, who called upon fellow Muslims to protect, help, and defend the deported Armenians. This remarkable pronouncement by the guardian of the Holy Places of Islam was

see ANI, page 9



## **AGBU "Voices of Truth" Series Puts a Human Face On the Artsakh War**

NEW YORK — Modern-day historians, journalists, and human rights advocates tend to agree that eyewitness testimonies by ordinary civilians and victims of war are a valuable dimension of the multi-faceted process of documenting and analyzing evidence for the purpose reporting news, prosecuting war crimes, settling historical disputes, or identifying causal factors of natural or manmade disasters.

The 44-Day Artsakh War of 2020 is one such event that demands a thorough accounting of the realities that unfolded in the fog of combat, the chaos of emergency evacuations, and the emotional traumas of losing loved ones or being torn from a deeply rooted way of life as a refugee.

"AGBU's Voices of Truth is an initiative designed to put a human face, name, voice and life story behind the cold stats of a war whose perpetrators have repeatedly manipulated to demonize and dehumanize an entire indigenous ethnic minority," said Arda Haratunian, a New-York based strategic communications expert and member of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Central Board. "It also serves to provide the victims with a safe space in which to process their traumas, grief, and deep frustration that the world has turned a blind eye to their plight," she added.

California-based human rights activist Bonnie Abaunza points out that oral history projects like Voices of Truth are essential "not only to gather and record historical narratives, but also to offer insights into how violence and trauma affect every aspect of individual and communal life after the violence and conflict end."

She goes on to say, "Audio, video and text interviews with survivors serve as a vehicle for healing and to educate the international community on the lasting effects of civil wars, ethnic cleansing and genocide. The hope is to compel the world to take the moral responsibility to prevent future crises and hold those who commit war crimes and crimes against humanity accountable for their actions," Abaunza stated.

Recognizing that time is a critical factor in gathering reliable accounts of wartime victims, AGBU took swift measures to obtain numerous first-hand accounts among a diverse group. "We interviewed women and men of varied ages, locations, occupations and familial status," said Anouch Dzagoyan, the deputy mayor of Paris and executive director of the AGBU Paris office, who spearheaded an outside observer group from across Europe called AGBU YERIA. Journalists, young human rights activists, cultural personalities, and local officials from diverse countries made two trips to Armenia and Artsakh (the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh) with the goal of reporting back to their home countries the first-hand knowledge they gained from tours and interviews conducted on the ground.

The on-camera testimonies — edited for time and viewer comprehension — are recounted in the native Armenian language and translated to English and French subtitles for the purpose of reaching a spectrum of stakeholders across the globe — from historians and diplomats to human rights agencies, international media, students and genocide prevention activists—essentially all those who value factual accuracy in the quest for truth, justice, accountability and, ultimately, peace and reconciliation.

The 16 individuals interviewed appeared eager to share their experiences and perspectives starting from the day of the first attack by Azeri forces on Armenian controlled Nagorno-Karabakh to the final days before the Russia-brokered ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan was signed on November 9, 2020. Also interviewed are a volunteer physician from California and a young Armenian soldier healing from a battle wound.

The organization is also making a concerted effort among Armenian communities worldwide to encourage them to share these accounts through their own circles and networks. Back in New York, Haratunian said, "It is essential that the world

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## **With Donations Big or Small, Everyone Can Help Armenia**

NEW YORK — Ed and Janet Mardigian were both raised knowing the importance of giving back to their communities. As an immigrant from Istanbul, Ed's father, also named Edward, started his family's philanthropic foundation, The Mardigian Family Foundation, in 1955 after building a successful new life in the United States. Janet's mother, also from Istanbul, was active in the Armenian church and had a deep compassion for others, which she passed onto her daughter.

But it was Janet's first trip to Armenia about 15 years ago, as a council member for the Armenian Diocese, that really changed everything.

Touring the country, she saw its drastic need for better schools, housing, food security, improved infrastructure, and economic development. And her visit to Fund for Armenian Relief's (FAR) Children's Center in Yerevan was truly transformative.

During the visit, the Center held a reception for the guests. The expressive faces of the children there, many of whom had suffered more in their short lives than one could imagine, resonated with Janet. Childhood, with its joys and boundlessness, its brief and precious moments, is what all children deserved and what none should ever be denied.

She returned home to Michigan called to act.

"I remember telling my husband and my mother-in-law that it just wasn't right for any child to be suffering," she said. "We had to do something. You cannot go to Armenia and not be affected by the children there, especially if you love children."

It was a cause close to her heart, and one that would pave the path to Janet and Ed's long-term quest to support real and positive change in Armenia. They contacted FAR immediately after Janet's return to see how they could help support the FAR Children's Center, and eventually signed up for a five-year pledge. They have been some of the Center's most dedicated supporters ever since.

When Janet and Ed made the decision to support the FAR Children's Center, they did so out of their compassion for children and a calling to help one of the world's most important, but most vulnerable, populations.

There was a reason that they decided to channel their support to Armenia through FAR.

When Janet saw firsthand the level of professionalism that exists at the Children's Center, she believed it was a worthwhile place to support. The experts on staff were compassionate and knowledgeable about how to provide the proper care to this particular population of children, and they were supervised by a competent and dedicated director, Dr. Mira Antonyan.

The experience of that first visit was incredibly impactful, recalled Ed. "We think the Center does an see DONATIONS, page 9



# Vartan Gregorian, Savior of the New York Public Library, Dies at 87

GREGORIAN, from page 1

Dr. Gregorian liked to tell the story of "the most painful experience of my entire life." It happened in 1980, when he was provost of the University of Pennsylvania, its top academic official. Powerful trustees told him that he was a shoo-in to replace the outgoing president. He was so sure of the post that he withdrew his name from consideration as chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley.

He heard the bad news on his car radio. The Penn trustees had chosen another academic star. The next day, he resigned. The outgoing president tried to dissuade him, but it was no use.

"I told him that I could cope with rejection, but not insult and humiliation," Dr. Gregorian said in a memoir, *The Road to Home: My Life and Times* (2003).

Indeed, Dr. Gregorian was a fighter: proud, shrewd, charming, a brilliant historian and educator who rose from humble origins to speak seven languages, win sheaves of honors and be offered the presidencies of Columbia University and the Universities of Michigan and Miami. He accepted the presidency of Brown University (1989-1997), transforming it into one of the Ivy League's hottest schools, and since then had been president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a major benefactor of education.

But he was best known for resurrecting the New York Public Library from a fiscal and morale crisis. It was a radical, mid-career change from the pastoral academic realm, and a risky plunge into the high-profile social and political wars of New York City, where the budget-cutting knives were out after decades of profligacy, neglect and a brush with municipal bankruptcy in the 1970s.

By 1981, when the feelers went out to Dr. Gregorian, the library — the main research edifice at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue and 83 branches in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island — was broke, a decaying Dickensian repository of 7.7 million books (the world's sixth largest collection), many of them rare and valuable, gathering dust and crumbling on 88 linear miles of stacks.

The underpaid, overworked staff was demoralized. The beautiful Gottesman Exhibition Hall had been partitioned into cubicles for personnel and accounting. Tarnished chandeliers and lighting fixtures were missing bulbs. In the trustees' board room, threadbare curtains fell apart at the touch. Outside, the imperious marble lions, Patience and Fortitude, and the portals they guarded, were dirt-streaked. Bryant Park in the back was infested with drug dealers and pimps and unsafe after dark.

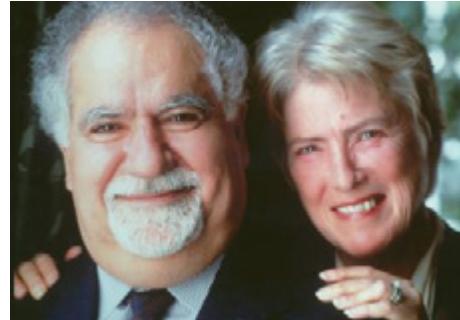
But the main problems were not even visible. The library faced a \$50 million deficit and had no political clout. Its constituencies were scholars, children and citizens who liked to read. The city had cut back so hard that the main branch was closed on Thursdays, and some branches were open only eight hours a week.

To Dr. Gregorian, the challenge was irresistible. The library was, like him, a victim of insult and humiliation. The problem, as he saw it, was that the institution, headquartered in the magnificent Carrère and Hastings Beaux-Arts pile dedicated by President William Howard Taft in 1911, had come to be seen by New York City's leaders, and even its citizens, as a dispensable frivolity.

He seemed a dubious savior: a short, pudgy scholar who had spent his entire professional life in academic circles. On the day he met the board, he was a half-hour late, and the trustees were talking about selling prized collections, cutting hours of service and closing some branches. He

asked only for time, and offered in return a new vision.

"The New York Public Library is a New York and national treasure," he said. "The branch libraries have made lives and saved lives. The New York Public Library is not a luxury. It is an integral part of New York's social fabric, its culture, its institutions, its media and its scholarly, artistic and ethnic communities. It deserves



The late Clare Gregorian, with her husband, Vartan Gregorian

the city's respect, appreciation and support. No, the library is not a cost center! It is an investment in the city's past and future!"

## Friends in High Places

His personality was so engaging, his fire for restoring the library so compelling, that the board endorsed him unanimously as its president and chief executive. So long as he succeeded, he would be given time. He needed money, too, but he was an experienced university fund-raiser.

More than money, he needed allies. He found them in Andrew Heiskell, the incoming library chairman, who had just retired as chairman and chief executive of Time Inc.; Richard B. Salomon, the library's vice chairman, who had been chairman since 1977; and Brooke Astor, the widow of Vincent Astor and doyenne of society who was presiding over bequests of \$195 million to charitable causes.

Dr. Gregorian wrote: "Richard Salomon paved the way for individual giving and business and Jewish philanthropy; Andrew Heiskell went after individuals and major corporations, his former pals; Mrs. Astor opened the doors of New York society and its philanthropy. They helped me make the case for the New York Public Library, making it a civic project that was both honorable and glamorous."

Mrs. Astor gave a black-tie party to introduce Dr. Gregorian and his wife, Clare Gregorian, to New York society. Weeks earlier, she had given a party for President Ronald Reagan and the first lady, Nancy Reagan. When Dr. Gregorian voiced surprise that the guest list for both dinners was substantially the same, Mrs. Astor told him, "The president of the New York Public Library is an important citizen of New York and the nation."

"Literary Lions" dinners at \$1,000 a plate were soon underway, attended by the likes of Isaac Bashevis Singer and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Dr. Gregorian met corporate and foundation leaders to drum up support and spread good will. He gave and attended dinner parties, and with Mrs. Astor, who made the library her top philanthropic priority, organized charity balls and other functions.

In the news regularly with his appeals, Dr. Gregorian often sounded like a voice of conscience. He called the library "a sacred place," telling *The New Yorker*: "Think of a lone person in one of our reading rooms, who has just read a book, a single book that has perhaps not been read in 20 years by another living soul, and from that reading comes an invention of incalculable importance to the human race. It makes a man

tremble."

Results began to show. The main library and many branches restored days of service. The card catalog was computerized. Temperature and humidity controls were installed, public rooms were air-conditioned, facades were cleaned, and a \$45 million renovation was launched. Partitions and cubicles were removed, marble walls were restored, and carved wooden ceilings were refinished. Scores of projects began. One was a cleaning of the books and stacks, undusted for 75 years.

Tides of tourists and visitors returned. Exhibitions, lectures, concerts and other cultural events made the main library a beehive of intellectual life, day and night. Afternoon and evening activities in Bryant Park drew crowds that chased the ne'er do wells. Out front, Patience and Fortitude were bathed, and people of all ages lounged on the broad steps to bask in sunshine.

Dr. Gregorian campaigned as if running for election. Mayor Edward I. Koch, who knew a good thing when he saw one, climbed on the bandwagon, and former Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr. said of Dr. Gregorian: "He reminded us that libraries were engines of hope that move people into the middle class and to worlds beyond themselves."

He was masterful in dealing with the City Council and the Board of Estimate, which in those days held the purse strings. On the job less than two years, he told the council's Finance Committee that it was demeaning for him to annually defend the library's right to exist. He said he would no longer come hat-in-hand and would only present the library's case for a fair share of the money.

By the end of his tenure, in 1989, Dr. Gregorian had raised \$327 million in public and private funds for the library, placing it on a firm footing.

"What he did was put the library in the spotlight," Mr. Heiskell told *The New Yorker*. "He had to change the mood of the city for the library, of the people in the city for the library, and of the people in the library for the library.

"In essence, he had to change the future."

## Armenians in Iran

Vartan Gregorian was born on April 8, 1934, in the Armenian quarter of Tabriz, in northwest Iran, to Samuel and Shooshanik (Mirzaian) Gregorian. His father was an accountant for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Vartan's older brother, Aram, died in infancy, and his mother died of pneumonia when he was 6. His father was drafted in World War II and later became an often-unemployed office worker.

Vartan and his younger sister, Ojik, were raised by their maternal grandmother, Voski Mirzaian, an illiterate but gracious storyteller whose allegorical fables instilled in the children lessons in morality: about telling the truth, possessing integrity, and the dignity to be found in stoicism and good deeds.

"She was my hero," Dr. Gregorian said in an interview for this obituary in 2019. "I learned more about character from her than from anybody I ever met or any book I ever read."

Vartan was a voracious reader and spent much time in the extensive library of his Armenian Church, where he had a part-time job in the stacks. "It was heaven," he said. "There were translations of all the Western classics, and I read Russian literature, so I became familiar with Shakespeare, Lord Byron, Tolstoy, Dumas and Victor Hugo."

Languages came to him easily. "We had Armenian at home, Russian at school, and we grew up with Turkish and Persian," he said. He recalled that after his father remar-

ried, he could not tolerate his stepmother and ran away from home at 15.

He landed in Beirut, Lebanon, with a teacher's letter of introduction to the Collège Arménien, a lycée founded in 1928 to educate Armenian refugees. Simon Vratzian, the Armenian Republic's last prime minister, was the school's director. He enrolled the boy and became his mentor. Vartan learned French, Arabic and smatterings of English before graduating in 1955 with honors.

In 1956, he won a scholarship to Stanford University. Despite starting with shaky English, he became fluent and, majoring in history and humanities, earned a bachelor's degree with honors in two years.

In 1960, he married Clare Russell, a fellow student at Stanford. In addition to Dareh, they had two more sons, Vahé and Raffi, all of whom survive Dr. Gregorian, along with his sister and five grandchildren. He lived in Midtown Manhattan.

A Ford Foundation fellowship took Dr. Gregorian to England, France, Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. He earned a dual doctorate in history and humanities from Stanford in 1964. He taught European and Middle Eastern history at San Francisco State College, U.C.L.A. and the University of Texas before joining the University of Pennsylvania in 1972.

At Penn, he was a professor of Armenian and South Asian history for eight years, the school's first dean of what is now the College of Arts and Sciences, from 1974 to 1978, and then provost until his departure in 1980 after being passed over for the presidency.

After his acclaimed work to save the New York Public Library, Dr. Gregorian, as the president of Brown University, led a five-year campaign there that raised \$534 million, the most ambitious in Brown's history. He raised the endowment to \$1 billion from \$400 million, doubled undergraduate scholarships, hired 270 new faculty members, endowed 90 professorships and built a student residence that bears his name. In his last year, there were 15,000 applicants for 1,482 places in the freshman class.

It was in 1997 that Dr. Gregorian assumed the presidency of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the foundation created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote education and peace. After decades as a supplicant, raising \$1 billion for universities and libraries, he became a benefactor, starting with an endowment of \$1.5 billion that grew to \$3.5 billion over his tenure.

His grants strengthened education, international security, democratic institutions and global development. Domestically, he emphasized reforms in teacher training and liberal arts education; abroad, he stressed scholarships for social sciences and humanities.

Dr. Gregorian also advised philanthropists, including Bill and Melinda Gates, Walter H. Annenberg and officials of the J. Paul Getty Trust. In 1998, President Bill Clinton awarded him the National Humanities Medal, and in 2004 President George W. Bush conferred on him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Besides his memoir, he wrote *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946* (1969); *Islam: A Mosaic, Not a Monolith* (2004) and many articles on history and global affairs.

Dr. Gregorian, who often recalled the kindness of strangers, said that after landing in New York in 1956 to start life in America, he lost his plane ticket to San Francisco. He was due to register the next

*continued on next page*

## COMMUNITY NEWS/OBITUARY

**Vartan Gregorian Dies at 87***from previous page*

day at Stanford. His future seemed to hang in the balance. In faltering English, he poured out his desperation to an airport ticket agent.

The man hesitated, saying something about regulations. Then he softened.

"I have never done what I am about to do," the agent said. He stamped the young man's empty ticket envelope and told him to stay on the plane — a four-stop, 14-hour flight — to avoid discovery.

"I never forgot that man," Dr. Gregorian said in the 2019 interview. "He gave me my future. For years I wanted to thank him but couldn't find him. I told the story in my book to thank him — and now my conscience is clear."

**Star in Armenian World**

He and fellow Armenians Dr. Noubar Afeyan and Dr. Ruben Vardanyan founded the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative in 2015 to allow Armenians to pay forward the kindness they had seen from others in the dark days of the Armenian Genocide, when survivors had to flee to other countries.

Of Gregorian's passing Afeyan wrote, "Vartan Gregorian was a proud Armenian, patriotic American and the ultimate man of the world. Never have I known a more accomplished, wise and immensely revered figure: a respected academic, globetrotting statesman, cultural icon and connector extraordinaire. He was a guiding light, my mentor and my hero. For me and so many other fellow immigrants, he was a compass and inspiration and showed us what was possible for foreign-born Americans. He will live on vividly in our memories and continue to guide our footsteps long after his own have ceased their travels. May he rest in peace, rejoined with his beloved Clare."

Aurora issued a statement, saying in

part, "We are deeply saddened by the loss of Aurora Co-Founder and member of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee Vartan Gregorian (1934–2021) — an outstanding Armenian-American humanitarian, scholar, author, educator and mentor and a dear friend to many of us.

"In 2015, together with Noubar Afeyan and Ruben Vardanyan, he co-founded the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors. The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and its flagship program, the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity, seek to transform this experience into a global movement by addressing on-the-ground humanitarian challenges around the world with the focus on helping the destitute.

"As Co-Founder of Aurora and member of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee, Vartan Gregorian has worked tirelessly to help bring that vision to life and give a second chance to those who need it the most. We are forever grateful for his expertise and vision and his invaluable contribution to the creation and development of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

Aurora mourns the passing of Vartan Gregorian's and sends prayers and support to his family and to everyone who has benefited from his remarkable work and wisdom. His legacy lives on and will live on in eternity."

He was a frequent visitor to the Boston area, where he sat down for an interview with the Armenian Mirror-Spectator in 2019, when he attended the opening of the new headquarters for the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), which had been named for him.

During a previous visit to Tufts University, he received a medal from the dean.

**Alice Festekjian***Dedicated to Family, Spreading Positivity*

FORT LEE, N.J. — Alice Festekjian, age 81, passed away unexpectedly on April 10, 2021 in Englewood, NJ. She was the wife of 56 years to Artoun Festekjian, who died on April 6, 2016.

Alice was the mother of Nazareth and his wife Nila Ekmekji of Englewood, NJ, Raffi and his wife Nina Metrebian of Winchester, MA, Zaven and his wife Nancy Semerjian of Beirut, Lebanon, and Taline and her husband Kevork Babikian of Cresskill, NJ; grandmother "Medzmama" to her ten grandchildren, Artoun, Alek, Andre, Armen, Allan, Aram, Jack, Maria, Anthony and Alina, and cherished relative to her extended family, including nieces,



nephews, and cousins.

Born in Aleppo, Syria on November 10, 1939, she was the daughter of the late Haroutiun Guidanian and Araxie Akkelian. Aleppo is where she was raised, received her education, married Artoun and started a family. The family relocated to Beirut, Lebanon in 1965, where she set her roots and raised her four children. After the passing of her husband, she permanently settled in Fort Lee in 2017.

Her family was the center of her life. She and Artoun faced many difficulties and setbacks over the years, which they overcame together through her glowing optimism, intelligent insights, strong will and unwavering support. Artoun simply adored her, crediting her throughout his life for all their success and that of their children. She was truly the backbone and unifying force of the family.

Alice was an elegant and graceful lady who wore her kind heart on her sleeve. Her

**Achod Schemavonian, French-Armenian Activist, Dies at 85****By Jean Eckian**

PARIS — On Sunday, April 18, a key figure in the Armenian community in France, Achod Schemavonian, died of Covid-19 at the age of 85.

Schemavonian was a veteran standard bearer of the National Association of Armenian Veterans and Resistance fighters and president of Association de Soutien

Melkonian.

He joined the Armenian National Movement in the 1970s and after its dissolution founded ASPA in 1988 to support combatants in the struggle against Turkey such as Mardiros Jamgotchian and Monte Melkonian.

For more than 30 years, this man whose heart was 100-percent French and 100-percent Armenian, like that of Charles Aznavour, sent tens of thousands of parcels to



Achod Schemavonian, at right wearing his military medals in 2015 at Versailles, France, with Jean Chaghoughian (photo Jean Eckian)

aux Patriotes Arméniens (ASPA; Association for Aid to Armenian Patriots). He was present at all military ceremonies, greeted by all presidents from François Mitterrand to Emmanuel Macron. On his jacket he always wore the medals of his victories, including the Croix de Guerre from the Algerian War, and that of his hero, Monte

Armenia containing humanitarian material which he collected all over France. Recently he also sent aid for the bereaved families of Artsakh.

His wife Elena had passed away earlier this April.

The Armenian community in France has lost a very great servant of the cause.

humility was genuine, and her thoughtfulness was unmatched, along with her caring and loving nature. An integral part of her identity was to preserve the Armenian family values and traditions that were passed down from her mother, which she in turn — leading by example — diligently instilled in her own children, along with the virtues of love, compassion, generosity, hope and forgiveness.

She was meticulous in everything she did. Everyone who knew her loved her and felt at ease to open up to her. She had an uncanny ability to always keep those

around her entertained and make even a small story seem like a mystery thriller, not to be surpassed by her goal of always making sure her grandchildren were fed a warm meal whenever they visited — no visitors ever left her home with an empty stomach.

She was immensely proud of all her children, their spouses, and her grandchildren in whom her legacy now lives.

Funeral services will be held on Saturday April 17, at St. Thomas Armenian Church, 174 Essex Drive Tenafly NJ. Condolences at 10:30 a.m. followed by Service at 11:00 a.m.

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# Annual Reconfiguration of the Boston Armenian Heritage Park Abstract Sculpture

By Kenneth Martin  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

BOSTON — On a clear and bright Sunday morning that can only be experienced in Massachusetts in April – in this particular case April 18 – a small and special group of volunteers, some preferring to work with little recognition, managed another reconfiguration of the sculpture at the Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway in Boston. The abstract sculpture is a split dodecahedron that sits on a reflecting pool, and can be changed into twenty-six shapes.

What many don't realize is that the shape changing process is not automated and that the many elements of the sculpture must be lifted by a tall sky crane in pieces and rearranged, replaced and secured by an experienced work crew.

Onlookers and visitors were few at 7:30 in the morning, but their presence for Armenians was meaningful because they were the connection to the past and the memories of their ancestors who perished in the many long years of persecution, murder, and genocide by the government of Turkey against its own national minority citizens before, during and after World War One. For others, the sculpture represents the pulling away, sometimes forcible, from their country of origin, though the connection is kept and continually changes.

The formal 106<sup>th</sup> annual commemoration of the Armenian Genocide will take place on Saturday April 24, 2021 when Armenians from throughout New England and beyond will gather on at the Parkman Bandstand of Boston Common at 6 p.m. and then march to the Armenian Genocide Monument at the Armenian Heritage Park on the Rose Kennedy Greenway for a program planned by the Massachusetts Committee to Commemorate the Armenian Genocide.



## AGBU 'Voices of Truth' Series Puts a Human Face on the Artsakh War

**VOICES**, from page 5  
 community sees Armenians for who they really are—not as objectified targets of enemy propaganda but as human beings with extraordinary resilience who got caught up in the jaws of war."

Over a century ago, the survivors of the Armenian Genocide lacked the resources, tools and outlets to bring their stories directly to world attention until many decades later when oral histories became an accepted tool to support scientific historical documentation. By that point, the survivors were well into their elder years and Turkey's revisionist history campaign was well entrenched in the international media. "For this reason, it was imperative for us to act quickly to capture these first-hand accounts while still fresh. Equally important was translating the accounts for global consumption," she emphasized.

For some of the subjects interviewed, it was difficult to suppress involuntary eruptions of raw emotion while recounting the smallest details—like a boy's attempt to shield himself from missiles by hiding under a small umbrella or describing a once picture-perfect forest decimated by white-phosphorous chemical weapons. Those interviewees who experienced the Artsakh War of the 1990's and the 2016 Four-Day War were still in shock over the high-tech weaponry used by the enemy this time around, especially the chemical weap-

ons and the sustained shelling guided by precision drones.

Dzagoyan's net takeaway focuses on the victims: "At the core of this exercise is showing these innocent civilians that what they experienced and how they feel about it actually matters to others. Through their narratives, they are participating in their

own redemption. This gives them a sense of agency that helps mitigate the typical feeling of helplessness and victimhood."

She also posited that sharing these stories raises deeper awareness and insight on the severe consequences of war on innocent lives, emphasizing how so many Armenian children witnessed this merciless

war waged by Azerbaijan. "They will bear the invisible scars and unhealed emotional wounds for a long time to come. The high price of war is often paid by future generations."

To watch the interviews and share them with appropriate viewers, go to: [www.agbu.org/voicesoftruth](http://www.agbu.org/voicesoftruth)

**DEMONSTRATE & COMMEMORATE:  
A MARCH FOR JUSTICE**

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START: PARKMAN BANDSTAND IN THE BOSTON COMMON

END: ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK

FOLLOWED BY A BRIEF PROGRAM AT THE PARK

MARCH BEGINS PROMPTLY AT 6 PM  
MASKS + SOCIAL DISTANCING REQUIRED

106th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# With Donations Big or Small, Everyone Can Help Armenia

**DONATIONS**, from page 5  
incredible job there in helping these kids, with their nutrition, their education — everything.”

Each year the Mardigians would increase their donation. Eventually, they were asked if they would provide a five-year pledge. They did. It was their first long-term commitment to FAR.

#### Making a Long-Term Commitment

Since then, the Mardigian Family Foundation has expanded its involvement to support other FAR projects, including the soup kitchen in Berd and the renovation of Octet Music School in Gyumri, which was completely rebuilt in 2013, 25 years after having been demolished by the 1988 earthquake.

“We believe that FAR is a great organization and that they are hands-on with immediate results. We’ve found that to be true with everything we’ve supported,” said Ed.

With competent and dedicated staff, along with administrative costs that do not exceed more than 10 percent of its overall budget, the Mardigians said they are confident that their support through FAR makes an impact.

“The money goes to the cause,” said Janet. “We don’t worry about our donation and whether it’s being spent well. FAR makes every dollar count.”

#### Taking Their Support to a New Level

After becoming loyal and long-term supporters of several FAR projects, Janet and Ed Mardigian were ready to take their in-

vovement to a new level. They ended up backing FAR’s largest and most multi-faceted project to date, the Breaking the Cycle of Poverty Program, better known as BCPP.

After traveling to Armenia’s impoverished Tavush Province, they saw the needs firsthand — things like schools in desperate need of renovations just so children could avoid using outhouses in the dead of winter, or families struggling to make a living, convinced them of the urgency and their agency to help make a change.

“The results were fabulous,” Janet said of BCPP.

BCPP, which tries to address the systemic poverty in the Berd in the Tavush Province through simultaneous projects in education, health, economic development and child protection, is now entering its eighth year. BCPP is so multi-faceted that it includes projects like the Mardigian Scholarship Program, which enables many students from low-income families to go to college, the renovation of schools and daycare facilities and a school nutrition program, as well as a soup kitchen.

The Mardigians didn’t hesitate to support FAR’s emergency relief response to COVID-19 and to the war in Artsakh.

Through their more than \$300,000 in donations they became the biggest contributors to FAR’s Emergency Relief Response, as well as one of the biggest supporters of Ayo!’s [#WeAreArtsakh](#) campaign. Their support enabled FAR to help hundreds of people in need from Artsakh, those who have needed shelter, food, medical supplies, and other types of assistance as they resettle in Armenia, either permanently or

temporarily.

“We’re blessed that we’ve been able to help,” said Janet. “We do the easy part. Everybody in FAR does all the hard work.”

In addition to their support of several of FAR’s programs, they are also contributors to the Armenian church, hospitals, their local dog shelter, and more.

And while the couple is in a unique position to generously give, Janet said that she believes there is always a way that one can to make a difference, whether it’s through donations or volunteerism.

“I think that sometimes people hesitate. They may say to themselves, ‘I’m just getting out of school. I can only give 25 dollars, what good does that do?’ Well, 25 dollars can do a lot!” Especially when one dollar can be even more effective in a place like Armenia. The key, she said, is trusting the mission and the transparency of the organization to which one gives.

“People want to know where their money is going,” said Ed, who emphasized the importance of organizational transparency and consistent communication, both of which have greatly influenced his choice of giving to FAR and other organizations through the years. With FAR, the Mardigians have been able to clearly see the direct impact of their support.

“FAR is an efficient and hands-on organization. There’s no waste; the money goes to the cause,” he said.

Both Ed and Janet try to lead by example as well. They have taken their two sons, Grant and Matthew, to Armenia and have encouraged them to join FAR’s Board of Directors and fundraise for other local causes. For the couple’s 50th wedding an-

niversary celebration they asked friends to either donate to FAR or to their local dog rescue center instead of giving them gifts. The two also speak about the importance of philanthropy as much as they can.

“You don’t have to be financially wealthy to make a difference,” said Janet. “You can always help out—renovate a house, put on a roof. You don’t just have to give dollars, you can give of yourself. You can always do something.”

## US Catholic Bishops Issue Statement On the Armenian Genocide

#### BISHOPS, from page 1

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Diocesan Legate and Ecumenical Director of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian church of America, said of the USCCB statement: “Having worked with the Catholic bishops for many years, I am grateful for their



Abp. Aykazian, Diocesan Legate of the Eastern Diocese

## ANI Launches Arabic Language Version of Website on Armenian

#### ANI, from page 5

largely heeded and stood in sharp contrast to the proclamation of jihad by the religious leadership in the Ottoman capital of Istanbul.

The ANI site also includes links to memorials around the world, including to the “Armenian Genocide Memorial Church” in Der Zor, Syria which was intentionally destroyed by terrorist forces coordinating with the Erdogan regime in Turkey in 2014.

Once again, a first-rate team of supporters and volunteers helped ANI’s professional staff realize the production of the Arabic language version of the ANI website. Genny Chekerjian took on the task of translating substantial portions of the large quantity of information posted on the site. Hagop Vartivarian provided editorial support, while Vatche Sarkissian closely collaborated with Chekerjian to provide as accurate a rendition of vital records as possible, and coordinated with longtime ANI

webmaster Mark Malkasian to upload the site in the Arabic script.

“The continuous expansion of the ANI website and its translations have been the collaborative project of numerous supporters across the Armenian diaspora and our non-Armenian friends who appreciate the importance of making the critical records on Armenian Genocide affirmation easily accessible,” stated ANI Director Dr. Rouben Adalian. “From across the continents they have shared their time, talent, and encouragement. The Arabic version is a work in progress, and we welcome constructive comments from scholars and the community of concerned individuals working to defend human rights and protect human life everywhere in the world.”

ANI maintains a broad range of online resources about the Armenian Genocide. The [online museum](#) is an interactive site allowing visitors to proceed at their own pace and includes a very popular introductory video. Several digital exhibits re-

leased by ANI since the centennial of the Armenian Genocide cover many aspects of the experience of the Armenian people starting in 1915. The ANI [digital exhibits](#) are based on photographic collections from U.S. archival repositories and document the extensive humanitarian intervention of American volunteers, who arrived in Armenia and across the Middle East in the immediate aftermath of the genocide.

The leading institutional website on the Armenian Genocide since its inception 24 years ago, the ANI website annually registers millions of hits. Widely consulted by educators and students, the site is also a major source of information in preparation of April 24 commemorative activities utilized by journalists, government officials, and the public. The creation of the Arabic language ANI site follows the earlier successful launch of the [Turkish](#) and [Spanish](#) language versions of the site. More information on the Armenian Genocide can also be ascertained via the [ANI Twitter](#) handle.

strong and timely message, which strengthens our calls for forthright, international recognition of the Armenian Genocide.”

Bishop Malloy’s full statement appears below.

April 24 is Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, marking the 1915 start of a campaign that resulted in the death of as many as 1.2 million Armenian Christians — victims of mass shootings, death marches to distant camps, torture, assaults, starvation, and disease. Thousands of Armenian children were torn from their families and forcibly converted. This horrific tragedy was intended to eliminate the Armenian people and their culture in what has been called the ‘first genocide of the 20th century.’

But Armenia and the Armenian people survived and endured despite their suffering and persecution. I echo the prayers of our Holy Father, Pope Francis when he offered his prayers for justice and peace following a trip to Armenia in 2016: ‘A people that suffered so much throughout its history, and faith alone, faith has kept this people on its feet. The fact that [Armenia] was the first Christian nation is not enough; it was the first Christian nation because the Lord blessed it, because it had its saints, it had its holy bishops and martyrs...’

As we rejoice in the Resurrection during this Easter season, may all people of good will join together on this solemn day of recollection to pray and work for justice and peace and remember anew that eternal life in Christ reigns supreme and forever.

April 19, 2021

## Armenian American Numbers Rise in Town Government of Belmont, MA

BELMONT, Mass. — The local Armenian Americans have continued their energetic participation in town government with the April 6, 2021 election.

Newly elected Town Meeting members are Ed Berberian, Carol Kennedy Berberian, David Boyajian, Deran Muckjian and William Musserian.

They will join current members Arto Asadoorian, Joan Terlemezian Drevins, Karen Barmakian Herosian, Jirair Hovsepian, Vera Iskandarian, Mary Ann Ka-

zanjian, Raffi Manjikian, Karnig Ostayan and Judith Ananian Sarno.

Several of these persons have served on other town bodies such as the Belmont Media Advisory Board, Belmont Cultural Council, Department of Public Works/Belmont Police Building Committee, Human Rights Commission, Planning Board, and Warrant Committee.

Belmont Town Meeting has 288 elected members representing eight precincts. It debates and votes on issues such as

town budgets and local bylaws. Town Meeting recently passed zoning bylaws for affordable housing (both age-restricted and non-age-restricted) and assisted living.

Belmont also has a three person elected Select Board that helps to develop the town budget and the Town Meeting warrant.

On the initiative of Jirair Hovsepian, the Select Board annually issues a proclamation on the Armenian Genocide.



# Arts & Culture

A CONVERSATION WITH...

## Tamara Hinchco

*'Live in the Present with Passion!'*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN / SAXMUNHAM, UK — British actress and playwright Tamara Hinchco was born in 1938. Between 1954 and 1956 she studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in London. From 1959 to 2002 she acted in 37 TV Series ("The Fast Show," "Ruth Rendell Mysteries," "The Bill," "Screenplay," "Joint Account," "Blind Justice," "Rockliffe's Babies," "Lizzie's Pictures," "Crown Court," etc.), as well as in movies like "The Private Right" (1966) by Michael Papas, "Justine" (1976) by Stewart Mackinnon. She is also an author of plays, that have been staged in UK.

From her first marriage with TV director David Andrews Tamara has a daughter, Bronwen, and son, Rowan, and three grandchildren from them. For the past 48 years she has been married to stage and screen actor Tom Marshall, with whom she has a daughter, Lucin.



Tamara Hinchco with her husband, Tom Marshall

Dear Tamara, I first read about you in the July 9, 1960 issue of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*. It was a story about your successful participation in "Twentieth Century Theatre: The Price of Freedom" episode of the "BBC Sunday-Night Play." After so many years I am interviewing you for the same newspaper, the *Mirror-Spectator*. Isn't it symbolic?

Yes, Artsvi, it is symbolic. "The Price of Freedom" was a play by Troy Kennedy Martin, written for refugee year, and I played a Polish Jewish girl, who got separated from her love because she had contracted consumption. Troy and I teamed up three more times.

see HINCHCIO, page 15



## Alan Hovhaness

### Armenian Composer, Universal Spirit

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

ARLINGTON, Mass. — "I welcome you to this special event dedicated to the 110th anniversary of the birth of Alan Hovhaness, one of the greatest composers of the 20th century."

This is how Dr. Ara Ghazarians, curator of the Armenian Cultural Foundation (ACF) opened a moving tribute on April 17. Conducted over zoom, the commemoration was organized by the Board of Trustees of the ACF, and co-sponsored by Amaras Art Alliance and the Friends of Armenian Culture Society and Alessandra Pompili.

For an hour and a half, participants from the US and Europe would hear from scholars as well as personal acquaintances of Hovhaness, learning not only about his extraordinarily vast compositional achievements but gaining insight into him as a person. Renowned musicians contributed performances of his works, on the violin, clarinet and piano. A special guest would be Hovhaness himself, in a video recording of the composer playing his "Shalimar" on the piano.

As Ghazarians noted in his introductory remarks, much of his early work has unfortunately been lost, as he reportedly destroyed 1,000 of his compositions in 1940. The extant works include chamber operas as well as works for soloists, chorus, and orchestra. He wrote for keyboard instruments as well as chamber ensembles, composed over sixty-six symphonies and other orchestral compositions, including scores for films.

For many reasons, it was fitting for the Armenian Cultural Foundation to be among the organizers; it is located in Arlington, Massachusetts, which was the home of Hovhaness. In addition, Ghazarians said, the ACF "is proud to house one of largest archives on Alan Hovhaness in the world, which is available for academic researchers and musicologists." Other important collections of the composer's materials, Ghazarians continued, "made up of scores, sound recordings, photographs and correspondence, are located at several academic centers, including [Harvard University](#), [University of Washington](#), the [Library of Congress](#) in Washington, D.C., [Yerevan's State Museum of Arts and Literature in Armenia](#)."

The first to speak was Dr. Jack Johnston, who had known Alan Hovhaness since childhood. Johnston, a long-term resident of Arlington, grew up in the same neighborhood as Hovhaness.

In fact, they lived on the same street, Johnston began. Johnston did know the family very well and still maintains contact with the composer's wife. In the 1930s and 1940s, Alan Hovhaness "taught my sisters music, violin and piano," he recalled. Although one sister turned into an accomplished pianist, the would-be violinist "sounded as though she were strangling a cat," as family members put it at the time.

Alan Hovhaness enjoyed sharing music with the neighborhood. As Johnston recalled, he would open three large living room windows wide and then play a variety of pieces, from classical to popular and his own works on the piano. There would be 20 to 30 neighbors sitting on their steps or lawn chairs, grateful participants in an open-air concert.

After Johnston lost his own father while still a teenager, Hovhaness became "a surrogate father." Hovhaness studied at Tufts University and the New England Conservatory of Music, after which he became the choir director at St. James Armenian Apostolic Church in Watertown.

Hovhaness rose to prominence, performing at Boston Symphony Hall (while his father sat in the balcony), receiving an invitation by Jack Kennedy to the White House and celebrating his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday at Carnegie Hall. Though gaining fame for his music, Hovhaness did not forget Johnston; he showed a page from a score of "Mount St.

see HOVHANESS, page 11

## Dr. Ara Sanjian to Speak on Armenian Church in Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh) In Modern Times

FRESNO — Dr. Ara Sanjian, director of the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, will speak on "The Armenian Church in Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh) in Modern Times" on Thursday, May 6, at 7 p.m. (Pacific time). The presentation is part of the Spring 2021 Lecture Series of the Armenian Studies Program and is co-sponsored by the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS).

The lecture dwells on the development of the structures and activities of the Armenian Church as an institution on the territory of Nagorno Karabakh and the adjacent territories of the historical Armenian province of Artsakh from the early nineteenth century to the present, with special emphasis on the Soviet era from 1920 to 1991.

Sanjian is associate professor of history and the director of the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan, Dearborn. From 1991 to 1994 he did his PhD in modern history of the Middle East at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London. From 1996 to 2005 he was the Chairman of the Department of Armenian Studies, Histo-



ry and Political Science at Haigazian University in Beirut. In fall 2003, he was the Henry S. Kanzadian Kazan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies at California State University, Fresno. He joined the University of Michigan-Dearborn in January 2006. His research interests focus on the post-World War I history of Armenia, Turkey and the Arab states of Western Asia. He is the author of *Turkey and Her Arab Neighbors, 1953-1958: A Study in the Origins and Failure of the Baghdad Pact* (2001), as well as two monographs and a number of scholarly articles and book chapters, published in English, Armenian, Russian and French.

Zoom Registration Link: <https://bit.ly/armenianstudiessanjian>

For information about upcoming Armenian Studies Program presentations, follow us on our Facebook page, @ArmenianStudiesFresnoState or at the Program website, [www.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies](http://www.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies).



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Alan Hovhaness: Armenian Composer, Universal Spirit

HOVHANESS, from page 10

Helen's Symphony", a gift the composer had given him on his 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday, with best wishes from his "Arlington neighbor and lifelong family friend."

Following this rare look into the personality of Hovhaness, the participants heard the first piece selected for the program, *Yeraz* (Dream) No. 2, Op. 56, played brilliantly



Levon Chilingirian

by Levon Chilingirian, founding member of the world Chilingirian Quartet. Chilingirian is a faculty member and Chamber Music Artist in Residence at the Royal Academy of Music and professor of violin and Chamber Music at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, both in London.

## A 'Musical Polyglot'

To introduce the next speakers, Ghazarians turned to the different cultural influences on Hovhaness from South Asia and the Far East, India and Japan in particular. The first to address this theme was Dr. Craig Parker, professor of music history at Kansas State University. Parker is the author of numerous articles and has served on the advisory Board of *Dictionary of American Music* (2013) and was the College Music Society Board Member for Musicology (2014-16). He is the recipient of the Society for American Music Distinguished Service Citation "in recognition of his sustained contributions to the society and its appreciation for nurturing our national music."

Dr. Parker characterized Hovhaness as a "musical polyglot," one who could communicate musical ideas in many different languages, from the modal sounds of Armenia to the ragas of India, and avoided atonal music. During his studies at Tufts University and the New England Conservatory, Dr. Parker said, Hovhaness became acquainted with Greek painter and mystic Hermon di Giovanni, who introduced him to the music of Greece, Egypt and India. After meeting the older brother of sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar in Boston, Hovhaness became more interested in Indian music and decided to take up this classical Indian string instrument.

Hovhaness had studied his Armenian heritage, especially through the music of Komitas, while he was working as choir director of the St. James Armenian Apostolic Church, and later, he related this heritage to elements of the Asian musical culture. In 1959-1960, he studied in India as a Fulbright Resident Scholar, and was the first western composer at the Musical Festival at the Academy of Music in Madras in 1960.

His compositions, which combine diverse cultural elements, speak a universal language and can transport listeners into distant musical universes. Parker said that his *Symphony No. 8*, composed in 1948, may have been based on Armenian modal music, but was perceived by Indians as partaking of their musical culture. He was the first western composer for an Indian orchestra, and composed Indian ragas himself. His *Symphony No. 7 Opus 178*, inspired by the Himalayan mountain peaks, led one concert attendee to exclaim that he had "brought the Himalayan mountains to Pittsburgh." His 1966 *Symphony no. 19*, the *Vishnu*, was said

to "circulate divine energy throughout the universe." By the 1960s, largely through the efforts of Hovhaness, Indian music became well known in the United States.

His fascination with Eastern music took him also to Japan, where he composed with Japanese-like melodies and Armenian themes.

Following Dr. Parker's presentation, participants heard a piece Hovhaness wrote in 1935. The composition for solo clarinet, *Lament No. 2, Op. 25*, was played by Einar Jóhannesson from Iceland, in a recording from April 15 in the Reykjavik Cathedral.

The renowned clarinetist is a graduate of Reykjavik College of Music and the Royal College of Music in London with Bernard Walton and John MacCaw. He is the winner of several competitions among them Sir Yehudi Menuhin's Live Music Now in 1976, and three years later the Sonning Prize for young Nordic Soloists. He has appeared as soloist and chamber musician all over the world and recorded for various radio and television networks, often presenting pieces especially written for him. Einar Jóhannesson was principal clarinet of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra from 1980-2012 and is a founding member of the internationally recognized ensemble, the Reykjavik Wind Quintet.

## Enriching Western Music from the East

The second speaker, Dr. W. Anthony Sheppard, picked up where Dr. Parker had left off – in Japan. Dr. Sheppard is Marylin and Arthur Levitt Professor of Music at Williams College. He is the author and editor of several books and articles and has served as the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* and is currently Series Editor of *AMS Studies in Music*.

Dr. Sheppard said that in the 1950s and 1960s American and European composers became interested in Japanese music, especially ancient ensemble music of the court. Hovhaness stands out among them for his active approach, learning to play Japanese instruments. In a letter he wrote to the Rockefeller Foundation for a grant, Hovhaness expressed his intention to enrich western music with Japanese elements.

When he travelled to Japan in 1960, he studied 6 traditional instruments. Together with his wife Hinako Fujihara, a virtuoso soprano, he would play gagaku, a traditional genre of court music, every night. As always in his dialogues with a new musical culture, he adopted the principles, but not the melodies, in his own compositions. Dr. Sheppard stressed that while he drew on earlier musical traditions with Indian, Arabic or Japanese elements, his compositions always displayed his mark of originality. In Japan, it was not only the music, but also historical sites, cultural events like NO theatre, and poetry that influenced his creative output.

In 1962 he composed sonatas for the *jho*, a traditional Japanese wind instrument, and incorporated related musical elements, like the sliding between pitches. In two orchestral works from 1964, he expressed the Japanese concept of changes through pitch clusters. The Japanese influence is present also in operas Hovhaness composed between 1959 and 1969, be it certain harmonic sequences or traditional drum rolls (which prefigured Benjamin Brittan's use in the 1960s).

In discussing Hovhaness's compositions in this period, Dr. Sheppard spoke of a syncretic approach, in which diverse elements come together; Hovhaness wrote Japanese and Indian ragas, works for Japanese instruments, and developed "neo gagaku," in

which influences from India, Korea, Japan, Armenia and Indonesia play a role. There is a religious expression, a kind of mysticism, that pervades the music throughout.

To conclude the program, a piece which Hovhaness wrote back in 1944 was performed, the first movement from the *Greek Rhapsody No. 1 Op. 63*. Introduced by Ghazarians, renowned pianist Alessandra Pompili played with profound expression and sensitivity. She has performed for years as a soloist to critical and public acclaim in Italy, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Iceland, Germany, Poland and the US. In addition to the traditional repertoire, Alessandra is an advocate of the music of Alan Hovhaness often performing and/or recording it as premières (for example, Hovhaness's *Sonata Cougar Mountain op. 390* and *Fantasy op. 15*).

## Return to the Alma Mater

An appropriate conclusion to this tribute to Alan Hovhaness came from Dr. Pasquale Tassone former director of music program of Arlington High School, which Hovhaness attended and graduated from in 1929. Tassone is a graduate of the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan, has an honors diploma from the Chigiana Academy in Siena, Italy and a PhD from Brandeis University. He has composed a number of pieces among them an opera, which have been performed on major stages, and is the winner of a number of national and international awards.

He began his series of amusing anecdotes with the recollection of an event that took place in the old alma mater he shared with Hovhaness. The famous composer had received an invitation to the high school for a weekend music festival, and Tassone was to



Alan Hovhaness

conduct one of his compositions, the *Symphony for Band*. At the end of the piece, all was quiet. When Tassone turned around, he found Hovhaness standing silently on stage. Tassone remembered that when the harpist did not show up, Hovhaness settled in at the piano and played the harp part on the keyboard. He also remembered the restaurant they went to afterwards for lunch. Hovhaness stayed in Arlington for the whole weekend, and Tassone spoke admiringly of how gracious he had been to the students there.

Though 40 years passed and he had no further direct contact with the composer, Tassone had several encounters with other people that involved Hovhaness: it might have been a colleague he knew after his graduation from Brandeis, who had taken piano lessons from the maestro; or his dentist, whose father had hired Hovhaness to play, back in the years when he was choir director at St. James church. In 2009, Tassone

was a member of the committee set up to sponsor a commemorative plaque for Hovhaness and composed a piece, *Dzon* (Ode) for the occasion, inspired by Hovhaness.

Now, it turns out that Arlington High school, where Tassone and Hovhaness completed their pre-college studies, is to be torn down and rebuilt. What better way to honor that school's most famous musical graduate, than to name the performing arts center of the new building after him?

## The Voice of the Artist

Alessandra Pompili offered closing remarks, in which she communicated the highly moral understanding of art that motivated Hovhaness and did so by letting him speak. She referenced *Symphony no. 11, All Men Are Brothers*, which premiered in 1961, and read a passage Hovhaness had quoted in his introduction to the score: "And the voice of the Lord Buddha was heard like the sound of a great gong hung in the skies, saying that though one met a thousand men on his way they would all be one's brothers." The composer then wrote: "The symphony is an attempt to express a positive faith in universal cosmic love as the only possible ultimate goal for man and nature. Let all unite in peace on our tiny planet, our floating village, our little space ship, as we journey across mysterious endlessness."

Again, letting us hear the words of the composer himself, she quoted from one of his Guggenheim applications: "I propose to create a heroic, monumental style of composition simple enough to inspire all people... It is not my purpose to supply a few pseudo-intellectual musicians and critics with more food for brilliant argumentation, but rather to inspire all mankind with new heroism and spiritual nobility. This may appear to be sentimental and impossible to some, but it must be remembered that Palestrina, Handel and Beethoven would not consider it either sentimental or impossible. In fact, the worthiest creative art has been motivated consciously or unconsciously by the desire for the regeneration of mankind."

Lastly, she read from an interview he gave in 1971, in which he addressed the dangers of human self-destruction, and the rebellion among youth against this danger. Expressing his sympathy with the younger generation and at the same time, rejecting any appeal to violence, Hovhaness stated: "the older generation is ruling ruthlessly. I feel this is a terrible threat to our civilization. It's the greed of huge companies and huge organizations which control life in a kind of brutal way.... I hope something can be done about it. It's gotten worse and worse, somehow, because physical science has given us more and more deadly weapons, and the human spirit has been destroyed in so many cases, so what's the use of having the most powerful country in the world if we have killed the soul. It's of no use."

Such reflections by the composer, Pompili said, demonstrate why he is so relevant. Through the ethical tension thus created, Hovhaness makes clear what role music and art should play in our society.

If hearing his own words brought that ethical tension close, experiencing the composer as musician heightened it even more. The evening closed with perhaps one of Alan Hovhaness's best known pieces, *Shalimar op. 177*, played by Alan Hovhaness himself in a 1988 video recording.



# Israel Charny Looks Back on the Momentous Conference That Almost Wasn't

CHARNY, from page 1

In the end, the conference went on, but not without a bruising fight from Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Remembrance Center, and Elie Wiesel, noted Holocaust survivor and human rights advocate, acting at the behest of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs led by Shimon Peres.

The book presents the chain of events through cables to and from the Foreign Ministry, to try to disrupt the conference.

Charny recalled that the impetus for the book came from one of his graduate students who had been participating in his monthly seminars and had successfully dug up once-classified government communications regarding the event.

The student, he said with a smile, "made a youthful discovery. I never even thought of looking for it. She dug up the cables in the archives of the Israel Foreign Ministry from that period of the conference which had been locked up as secret. It's fun to look at them and see 'secret,' 'top secret,' 'classified.'"

She sent him the "hundreds of pages" and he "lay in bed a few nights reading these cables and oohing and ahing and discovering all sorts of angles I had not known from their point of view, the inside of their efforts to close the conference and then I hit on the smoking gun. The smoking gun was a cable from the chief consul of Israel in Turkey to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem about two days before the conference was scheduled to open. He [the consul] wrote, 'Nice going on all of your tactics to close the conference down. Maybe it will even bust out completely still. But there is one thing I don't understand. I am the chief consul here in Turkey and you've been claiming all along that Turkey has threatened to close off the escape route of Jews escaping Syria and Iran through Turkey, which would mean their death if the route was closed down but I don't know anything about it. I haven't picked up a single signal here in Turkey for any such threat,' he said."

Seeing the exchange of all the cables between the officials in Turkey and Israel, as well as with Yad Vashem, Wiesel and others, lit a fire in Charny. "They had really gone all the way, including making up the threats to justify their behavior. And then I couldn't do anything but pick up a pencil and start writing," he said.

But what would cause that?

Again and again, he spoke about the duality of the issues which cause him great pain: his love for the state of Israel and his paramount wish for its safety and existence, while recognizing the immoral stance it had chosen to take regarding the Armenian Genocide. That same duality — or ambivalence — applies to his interaction with Wiesel, of whom he remained very fond, despite seeing a side of him which deeply disappointed him.

As for the former's actions, he explained, "I have to answer rationally about rotten, irrational behavior. Israel's horrible policy for years has been to court favor with Turkey and maintain a relationship with her. We understand the practical reasons for it but I and many people strenuously object to the immorality of it when it comes to issues like the simple basic truth of recognizing the Armenian Genocide."

But, he realized, that was not the only reason. "Turns out there is a further inside reason. When you study the correspondence of the period," for many Jews and Israelis, the official position of Yad Vashem is, "there really has never been anything that really qualifies as genocide to the extent of the Holocaust and any attempt to refer to other genocides in a major kind of way is an insult that degrades, belittles, reduces, the significance of the Holocaust. This irration-

al position is what I think lies at the heart of the matter in addition to the realpolitik position," he added.

## From Psychology to Genocide

Unlike many scholars involved in genocide studies, Charny is a clinical psychologist and not a historian. That academic background brings a different interpretation to history.

Charny received his PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Rochester in 1957. He established and directed the first group psychological practice in the Philadelphia area (1958–1973), where he was also the first Professor of Psychology at the newly founded Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia.

He, along with Helen Fein, Robert Melson and Roger Smith, founded the International Association of Genocide Scholars in 1994, an affiliate of the Institute for the Study of Genocide.

He has written several books on genocide, including the *Encyclopedia of Genocide, Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review, and Fascism and Democracy in the Human Mind*, each of which were elected "Outstanding Academic Book of the Year" by the American Library Association.

He is a clinical psychologist and practicing psychotherapist, was Professor of Psychology and Family Therapy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he was the founder of first director of the Program for Advanced Studies in Integrative Psychotherapy. In addition, he was the founding and first president of the Israel Association of Family Therapy and later a president of the International Family Therapy Association.

He turned to genocide studies after a particularly awful dream soon after attaining his board certification. "I passed and was very happy about that. I went to sleep and had a dream. I woke up from the dream and I had seen the Nazis killing Jewish children in my dream and I woke up thinking how can human beings do things like that? That was the day I realized I would be studying those questions the rest of my life."

When asked what would drive various governments and populations around the world, in societies with no religious or ethnic commonality, to single out a minority for extermination with clinical precision, he replied, "I believe we human beings are universally sick with the need for too much power over others. I think the need for power in itself is a perfectly normal and healthy things. When that power extends to becoming superior to others and exploiting others, it leads to much of the ugliness in this world, including genocide. What is happening in the denials of the Armenian Genocide by Israel and Israel's general failure to be a real leader in empathy and caring about all peoples who suffered genocide is that Israel is acting out the very kind of striving for power that led to the disaster that befell us. It's a tough answer, isn't it?"

He further added, "I have come to believe that every one of us human beings is endowed from birth with two sets of instinctive machinery. One is to care about life, our own and others, and one is to destroy, including our own lives. Look at how many bad things people do to themselves. I believe that every group, that includes nations, has to do what every human being has to do, namely, to work out a philosophy and methodology of combining these two instincts where the instinct for living is given the winning position and the instinct for destroying is translated to the ability to use power constructively when necessary."

As examples, he cited surgeons, who need to be aggressive enough to slice through a living body, but clearly for the

purpose of healing, or engineers building dams who blow up rocks and structures, for the noble purpose of making better the lives of citizens.

"Societies that commit genocide are one after the other, examples of collectives that have failed the challenge in the task to become decent societies, where caring for life is stronger than the urge to destroy. America is going through a variation of it struggle these days. January 6 is a very clear example of the rottenness that awaits us," he noted.

## Elie Wiesel Dilemma

Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel holds a special place in the hearts of many Holocaust survivors. The Romanian-born Wiesel, who died in 2016, survived horrors beyond imagining in Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

Therefore seeing Wiesel as a disruptor of a conference dedicated to the Holocaust and other genocides, is jarring.

The role of Wiesel in trying to disrupt the conference was one that truly hurt Charny. He repeated frequently during the interview his heartfelt respect for what he had experienced and how that must have shaped him as a child.

"When I think of Elie Wiesel, for me and many people it is a classic photograph of this little boy in one of those rotten, wooden beds in the concentration camps and I think of this man who survived that, something I don't think I could have survived for one hour. I understand his drive, in subsequent years, to do everything possible to support the development of the state of Israel as the new and absolutely necessary refuge for the Jewish people," Charny said. "That, then, combined with the personal aspect of Wiesel, which is a real weakness of character, like we all have, was boy, did he like being favored by the leaders of Israel! There was an egotistical little boy inside him that was delighted that the prime minister and foreign minister feted him. When they gave him a direct order to close the conference down in the name of the state of Israel, which he loved and honored and cared about, he had no choice, even though you and I believe that with greater maturity, he should ... not have done something that was so horrible, in terms of its impact on another people," Charny said.

Instead of judging Wiesel, he chose to try to understand him. "It's a real human story and I do believe that his basic legacy as the most prominent Holocaust survivor who periodically issued really caring statements about other people will last. A lot of Holocaust survivors couldn't see [the suffering of other people] in this world and I understand them," Charny noted.

In one communication with Charny, Wiesel had written, "Don't you dare use the word genocide in the plural, because that would mean there were more genocides than the Holocaust," Charny recalled.

Charny's father was from Russia and had arrived in New York in the 1920s. "During World War II, I remember the day my father received the information that his entire family in Russia had been taken out to Babi Yar [Ukraine] and had been murdered there by the Nazis. I will never forget, the overwhelming experience from my strong daddy on learning that," Charny said.

## Holocaust v. Genocide

The government of Israel still has not recognized the Armenian Genocide, nor has it recognized others that have tragically happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, including those of the Yazidis.

"In my judgment the majority of the people of Israel are very caring people. I believe the majority of the people in Israel very much recognize the Armenian Geno-

cide and at the same time a very strong majority of people in Israel believe that there was never anything that could compare with the Holocaust. Not all of them make the mistake of ... not recognizing the genocide."

He then spoke about a much more recent genocide, that of the Yazidi people in Iraq. "It is a minority that has been seriously genocidally persecuted by ISIS," he said. "A member of the Knesset introduced a resolution for Israel to recognize the genocide of the Yazidis and express our empathy and her proposal was voted down. There's another example of the inability as yet of the decisive mass of the Israelis and the political system to extend itself beyond the ancient 'We suffered the most, nobody's suffering can compare with ours.'"

He also suggested that for some survivors of a genocide, it is hard to believe others suffered as they did.

"I will always remember vividly a survivor of the Armenian Genocide who came over to me after I had spoken and he said to me with the full felling of a human being who had suffered terribly, 'Professor, isn't it true that what happened to us never happened to anyone else and was the worst event in the world?' You know what I did? I put my arm on his arm and I said the Armenian genocide was terrible. I didn't argue. I would never argue with a survivor. Their experience is totally understandable."

Charny still works, offering both family and individual therapy.

When asked if delving into the very darkest aspects of humanity is not overwhelming, he said he is able to rise above it through his family.

"I live my life going to the gym every morning, loving my wife very much, loving my children very much, having fun, making jokes, when I am not studying the rottenness of us human being," he noted.

He said he was delighted with the response to the book so far. "Pre-publication response is just growing very strongly. There have been hundreds of orders for the book before it was published based on the information about it," he said.

About three years ago, a committee in the Knesset voted to recognize the Armenian Genocide. "I had the pleasure of being one of the witnesses. There were only two objections to the recognition during the witness part of the process. One was from a very weak representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the other was from a Jewish Azeri person with strong commercial ties to Azerbaijan but our position prevailed overwhelmingly in that committee. The vote was for recognition."

Again, the government intervened and the bill never reached the full Knesset. "If it had reached the deliberation stage, it would have passed. The majority would have passed," Charny said.

Will Israel ever change course regarding the recognizing of the Armenian Genocide? "Would Israel ever get liberated enough to overcome the government policy about Turkey and Azerbaijan and you know what I wish and what I am working for and what this book stands for but I can't give you a final prediction in the world of corruption of policies."

Charny stressed his sadness about the Karabakh war of 2020. "I am in grief along with the Armenian people at the loss in Nagorno Karabakh. I've seen what 5000 deaths feel collectively after a war. The sadness, the pain, goes on for years and years and years. Five thousand in a small population. My god!"

And, he added, "I feel a deep, deep shame and anger in Israel's participation in that war, as the major supplier of arms to

*continued on next page*



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## REVIEW:

# Israel's Failed Response to The Armenian Genocide

By Alin K. Gregorian  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

The new book by Prof. Israel Charny, [Israel's Failed Response to the Armenian Genocide: Denial, State Deception, Truth Versus Politicization of History](#), is a brave effort taking on wrong doing in one's own backyard, among one's own people, who for a variety of reasons, thwarted — or tried to thwart — justice.

Charny has succeeded in presenting the background of a major conference that was almost derailed but went on thanks to the moral backbone of several actors. It is an important addition to the study of the Armenian Genocide and genocides in general, showing how good people can make very bad decisions. It is



also important in offering an insider's view of how the Israeli government regards the Armenian issue.

The book, published by Academic Studies Press of Boston this month, tries to untangle the web of tactics deployed by the Israeli government to scupper the 1982 landmark "First International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide," in June in Tel Aviv, whose primary organizer was Charny, with the participation of several other Israeli scholars and organizations.

The conference was historic as it was the first known major international academic conference on genocide to link the Holocaust and other genocides, specifically the Armenian Genocide. It was also the first ever to feature Armenian scholars, including Professors Vahakn Dadrian and Richard Hovannisian.

While the conference went on, the size and scope of the conference was narrowed, with major sponsors and speakers dropping out, including Yad Vashem Holocaust center in Jerusalem and Elie Wiesel, the noted Holocaust survivor and human rights activist.

The story thus far has been that the Israeli government was worried about the safety of Jews in Israel, as well as Jews in Iran and Syria who were trying to leave and arrive on the relatively safe shores of Turkey. And because of specific threats, they were trying to get rid of the Armenian component of the conference.

But was that true?

The answer, Charny arrives after much research, is a resounding no. Charny writes that if there were credible evidence on actual threats, he and his fellow organizers would have agreed to postpone it, but those citing the threats were not able to produce any evidence to support it.

He also proverbially wags his finger at the government of Israel for so easily acquiescing to demands to exclude the Armenian Genocide. "Just imagine our Jewish-Israeli response to a non-totalitarian government that would promote Holocaust denial and exclude Jewish speakers from a bona fide academic conference!"

The book paints the Israeli government in a negative light, juxtaposing its moral high ground as a nation composed of survivors of attempted mass extermination, with a government that wants to curry favor with a nation that has built its fortunes on the back of implementing the very same act of near-extinction of a minority.

In his preface, Prof. Yair Auron, professor emeritus at Open University of Israel, writes, "This book is a major contribution to the study of the Armenian Genocide and the process of denial of known genocides altogether."

He receives major help in writing and compiling the book by oft-persecuted Turkish publisher Ragip Zarakolu, eminent historian Prof. Richard Hovannisian and US Holocaust Museum Board Member Michael Berenbaum.

"Bringing in these three leaders in their various ethnic groups is a very symbolic, meaningful and wise decision, each of them being a distinguished representative both of their identity groups and of the quest for human decency," Auron writes.

The book is based primarily on declassified cables and telegrams from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs which showed that Turkey pressured Israel to remove the subject of the Armenian Genocide from the conference. The story that Wiesel and the other opponents got was that the Turkish government will harm Jews there as well as those in Syria and Iran. Except, that did not happen.

"It was Israel that set out on the cruel juggernaut effort to cancel the conference based on entirely fabricated stories of Turkish threats to Jewish lives. At first the threats were defined as aimed at Jews in Turkey and this was what appeared in early New York Times stories, but then the ministry clarified — though at first as top secret until this too became international news — that the most serious threat was that Turkey might stop giving safe passage to Jewish refugees escaping from Iran and Syria through Turkey and therefore their lives were at risk."

One character who gets a thorough going over in the book is the late Elie Wiesel, a legendary scholar and defender of human rights, who just happened to do everything possible to shut down this conference. Wiesel originally had agreed to serve as the official president of the conference. Not only did he resign, but he used every weapon in his arsenal to try to stop the conference from going forward if the Armenians' participation continued. Those actions included canceling a grant from his foundation for the conference that he had promised.

While Charny made clear in his interview (See page 1) that he does not blame Wiesel and understands the pressures he was receiving from the Israeli government, the readers can draw their own conclusions when seeing Wiesel was so readily able to not only back out of this seminal conference, but do everything in his power to try to cancel it altogether.

In the book he details his lingering devotion to Wiesel as a man and scholar, as well as someone who endured unspeakable tragedy, though he makes sure

to detail his shortcomings.

"Is the Holocaust unique? Of course it is — very much so. But so are other cases of genocide unique in other ways, each in its own story of development and executing and aftermath. But there is also a basic and horrendous commonality: In all genocides, people are being cruelly tortured and murdered en masse. For me, this commonality is the largest fact and no intellectualization whatsoever — what I have called 'definitonism' or an endless obsessive controversy about the proper definition of genocide — can be allowed to obscure these masses of dead bodies or fail to give them a meaningful category name," he writes.

The book treats the issue like a detective story.

"What is now being revealed for the first time is that previously classified documents of the IMFA make it entirely clear that the alleged threats to detain or to possibly return the escaping Jews from Iran and Syria to their countries of origin were fabricated — made up — no less than by the Israeli government and attributed to the Turks," he writes.

It seems the primary difference between Charny and several fellow Israeli scholars is how they see the Holocaust in the global context of other genocides.

Charny walks a tight line between spelling out the ugly sins of Wiesel while pointing out that on the whole, his legacy should survive intact.

"Without taking away from Wiesel being a hugely heroic symbol of Holocaust agony and survival, as well as his going on to be a courageous promoter of the meaning of the Holocaust as calling for the life safety of all peoples everywhere, we report here the extensive damages Wiesel's actions did to the conference and our own hurt, frustration and anger, but we still offer a thoughtful and not entirely unsympathetic analysis of his motivations in doing so and of his basic greatness," Charny writes.

A tight rope walk indeed.

As for Yad Vashem, "They were clearly uncomfortable but they were also adamant and put their finger directly on the key issue for them. It was not Turkey's demands to get rid of the Armenian Genocide subject. It was the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the fact that some of their own staff gave them hell for ever agreeing to host our Opening, for we were, after all, quite unkosher, notwithstanding their 'respect for the conference.'"

Regarding his own treatment, Charny lists the personal hurts he endured, not only in terms of friendships affected and being put in a moral quandary, as well as even developing cancer, but also how his own livelihood was affected by being denied tenure at Tel Aviv University as a result of the conference.

He does note, however, "I still feel I was privileged to live out such a basic challenge between self-interest and critical ethical values. I am also happy to add that I sued Tel Aviv University and won a substantial out of court settlement, let along that there soon came five years when I was simultaneously drawing my Tel Aviv pension while serving as a professor and head of an innovative department that I had been invited to establish at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It was a 'Turkish delight.'"

The book often offers not so much a narrative but offers essays in addition to documentation of all that was included — or expected to be included — at the conference, including speakers, sections, as well as communication from the participants afterwards.

Charny writes that the policy of Genocide non-recognition does not help Jews or Israelis.

"However, the story of Israel's failures to recognize the Armenian genocide, which in plain English constitute denials of the authenticity of the genocide, go back a long way before this specific conference, to many instances when there were no concerns about Jewish lives begin lots that were invoked to justify the denials. Israel's informal policy of non-recognition of the Armenian Genocide through all the years continues to this day, though most Israeli people and the culture as a whole very much recognize and honor the Armenian Genocide."

Only time will tell if the Israeli government will change its position.

from previous page

Azerbaijan. We have succeeded in creating some demonstrations about Israel's arms policies, some degree of

demonstrations regarding the policy with Azerbaijan. It is almost like talking about selling arms to Nazi Germany during the Holocaust. Many, many of us are upset."

*Israel's Failed Response to the Armenian Genocide: Denial, State Deception, Truth versus Politicization of History* is currently available on [Academic Studies Press](#).



# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



## Nancy Sarkisian Berryman's Award-Winning 14-Carat Cake

This is the recipe that won Nancy Sarkisian Berryman the first prize award in the Cake Baking Contest at St. John Armenian Church of Greater Detroit Annual Picnic on August 16, 2009. An eagerly awaited event of the year's picnic was the cake baking contest chaired by Dolly Matoian. From 24 entries, the three judges narrowed the semi-finalists to six, and awarded the first prize honors to Nancy's 14-Carat Cake in a unanimous decision. Readers will love this incredibly moist and easy carrot cake recipe with ultra-creamy cream cheese frosting.

"St. John Armenian Church, named in honor of St. John the Baptist & Forerunner of Christ our God, has for 90 years been at the very heart and center of Armenian-American religious and cultural life in Metropolitan Detroit. Since the beginning, the parish has flourished and also reaches out to the Armenian Orthodox faithful who are scattered throughout the state of Michigan. Through the efforts of past and present pastors sacramental services now have begun in both Lansing and Grand Rapids where new Armenian communities have taken root. The history of

St. John Armenian Church reflects the inspiring growth of a small, weak flock into a great and thriving community. While there were Armenians in Detroit before the turn of the century, it was not until 1909 that an Armenian community as such could be recognized. The Detroit Armenian community, which numbered some 3,000 in 1915, has since grown to become one of the larger Armenian communities in the United States, with an estimated 30,000 members."

"The Women's Guild of St. John Armenian Church brings together women of the parish in the faith of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. The Women's Guild strives to provide its members with the opportunity to take an active role in the life of the Church, to share in fellowship and service, promoting the moral, spiritual and material growth of the parish."

### INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups flour, sifted
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 1/2 cups vegetable oil
- 4 large eggs
- 2 cups finely shredded carrots, peeled
- 1 (8 1/2 oz.) can crushed pineapple in juice, drained
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts, more to taste
- 3 1/2 oz. flaked coconut

### PREPARATION:

Sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and cinnamon in large mixing bowl. Add sugar, oil and eggs. Beat at medium speed with electric mixer for one minute. Stir in carrots, pineapple, walnuts and coconut. Turn into a greased 9" x 13" oblong pan or tube pan. Bake in a pre-heated 350 degree oven for 40 minutes or until the cake tests done.

### Cream Cheese Icing

- 8 oz. cream cheese
- 8 oz. butter
- 1/2 - 3/4 box powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Mix together, refrigerate until thickened and then frost.  
For this recipe, go to:  
<http://www.stjohnsarmenianchurch.org/images/TB10012009.pdf>

**ORDER TODAY:** Here's a comprehensive collection of over 450 Armenian recipes from the Detroit metropolitan area made current for the 21st century. We have introduced the ease of modern techniques, tips in preparation, and use of equipment as well as a full description of all cooking and baking methods. To purchase *Armenian Cuisine, Preserving Our Armenian Heritage*, visit [www.stjohnsarmenianchurch.org](http://www.stjohnsarmenianchurch.org).

A link to order the cookbook can be found under Community.

# Discovering Komitas' Unknown Nocturne

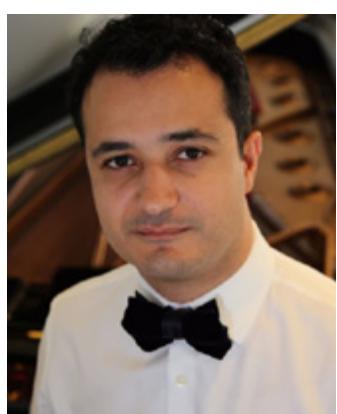
By Christopher Atamian  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

*Nocturne:* a short composition of a romantic or dreamy character suggestive of night, typically for piano.

NEW YORK — When most people think of classical Armenian composers, Khatchaturian and Babajanyan spring to mind, along with perhaps Tigran Mansurian. Komitas Vartabed, the man who saved an entire musical tradition from the flames of genocide, is perhaps un-

derstandably seen by many as a composer of folk music or liturgical hymns. Hayk Arsenyan, himself a talented pianist and composer of note, is out to change that perception.

Arsenyan has always loved Komitas, so imagine his excitement two years ago when looking through a publication of works written during Komitas' so-called "German years" he came upon



Hayk Arsenyan

a nocturne — unknown to the outside world. Published by Diran Lokmagözyan, the nocturne is only one piece in a treasure chest of little-known works by Komitas, born Soghomon Soghomonian in Kütahya in 1869.

Arsenyan has incorporated the piece in a program titled "Nocturnal France," which was set to premiere and tour in November 2020 but was postponed until September 7, 2021 due to COVID-19. The tour will now hopefully begin with a performance at the Old Westbury Mansion in Long Island and continue throughout the Spring of 2022.

Chopin's nocturnes of course remain the standard that others are judged by, but the program includes other Gallic composers such as Poulenc and Fauré, as well as newly discovered variations on a Chopin nocturne by Robert Schumann.

To the surprise of many perhaps, the Komitas *Nocturne* isn't based on Armenian folk material. Rather it's a subtle piece that incorporates Western harmonies and places Komitas more squarely within the European classical tradition: "Considering Komitas' importance as the Father of Armenian classical music and arranger of much of our folk material, this discovery is a real breakthrough," explains Arsenyan.

The nocturne reflects Komitas' own compositional style, although presumably that of his younger, student years. Arsenyan notes: "It's incredible how comfortable he feels within this concept and how easily he implements post-romantic elements, sometimes looking back to baroque ones, and at times using experimental and non-functional harmonic progressions." All this in a nocturne, one of the most beloved European styles of the era.

In fact the decision to build a program around the Komitas nocturne was strategic. The French program includes another surprise in the form of recently-discovered variations on a Chopin nocturne as well, by Robert Schumann: "So this beautiful nocturne by Komitas will make an interesting addition to these European works. It will be



seen under a totally different light and will bring a more global perspective to his style," Arsenyan adds. On tour, he will perform these newly-found compositions, including Komitas chamber works and songs based on German poems.

Armenyan was a child prodigy of sorts in his native city of Yerevan where he made his orchestral debut at the Armenian National Philharmonic performing his own see KOMITAS, page 15



# Tamara Hinchco: ‘Live in the Present with Passion!’

HINCHCO, from page 10

**My next “meeting” with you was in a review of “Unman, Wittering and Zigo,” a TV episode of BBC 2’s “Theatre 625” series. Is there any role you separate in your career?**

“Unman, Wittering and Zigo” was a famous story of three boarding school boys coming to a teacher’s house to murder his young wife, but she treated them as friends, offering them cigarettes and drink and they could not go through with it. I suppose the two parts I enjoyed playing the most in television was the Armenian girl Anna in “The Interrogator” again by Troy and playing the deformed girl in The House of Bernada Alba.

**You have been acting on television more than 60 years. If you compare the development in British TV film, what radical changes you see? Both negative and positive ones.**

Well I was not on television all that time, the 1960s and early 1970s were very busy, but after that it was a few a year. I was involved with the theatre; new plays were being written at the time and I was

also employed by The National Theatre for three years playing in modern and classical plays. I think acting and directing in filming has got so much better, but some of the plays in my time were more inventive.

**Did being a British actress and having Cypriot-Armenian roots confine you to act mainly ethnic roles?**

Well, that is a very good question, because I did play French, Polish, Armenian, but as I got older, I must have looked less foreign. Laurence Olivier turned me down for a part, that had been written especially for me and also the director was very keen for me to do it, but Olivier said my name was too exotic.

**Very interesting. What play it was? And could you please tell more about your cooperation with Laurence Olivier?**

The play was “The Workhouse Donkey” by John Arden and the part was Wellesley. The Theatre was part of the Chichester festival Theatre that Sir Laurence was running at the time early 1960s. John Arden dedicated the play to me and I did get to play it a few years later at Nottingham Playhouse.

Stuart Burge directed. John Arden and his wife became lifelong friends and I am godmother to their eldest son. John died a few years ago, but his wife Margaretta is still alive.

**You were born in Cyprus, to an Armenian mother. Where does her family hail from?**

My mother’s roots were in Armenia; my grandfather escaped the Genocide together with his brother. They were in their teens. My grandfather, Minas, ended up in Cyprus and his brother in Boston, in the US. My mother gave me a passion for stories, generosity and a certain amount of trouble. My mother’s name was Vartouhie Katchadourian. She was one of six children in family. Her eldest brother was Ardash. He was the deacon in St Sarkis church in London for many years. Her second brother, Katcho, had his own printing business. The third, Levon, was an architect, who made a life in New Jersey, in the US. Her sister, Sarah, stayed in Cyprus and looked after grandmother. The youngest sister was Anahid; she came to England to get married. My mother was born in Nicosia, Cyprus; I do not know the town in Armenia where her father came from, but she told me they were rich farmers.

After the war in 1945 I was seven and my father and grandfather had died so my mother took me to Cyprus to stay with her mother and two sisters. We sailed on a battle ship and we were there for a year. I attended an Armenian school. At the end of the year I could speak and write in Armenian. I’m afraid the skill has gone but I can understand a little.

**Please tell us about your play “The Sentence” on Armenian subject you co-wrote with Christina Balit. How it happened, that two British ladies who has Armenian mothers, unified and wrote that play?**

Christina Balit married a friend of my husband, who is actor Thomas Marshall. Christina is a very successful book illustrator but she likes writing plays too, so we got together to write an Armenian story. During our research we came across the magazine Ararat and read many stories and we came up with the idea for “The Sentence.”

**“The Sentence” was staged at The Old Red Lion Theatre in 1996 with partici-**

pation of British and British-Armenian actors like Vic Tablian, Adam Hussain, George Savvides, Nanar Vorperian. Among them there was also veteran actress from Armenia Jenia Nersisyan, acting as Mariam. It was unexpected to learn she acted in English in England. What did you think of Nersisyan’s acting?

Yes, some of the actors were only involved with the preliminary reading, which was at The Riverside Studios in a festival of play-readings produced by the Redgraves. The Armenian Centre introduced me to Jenia Nersisyan, and she was perfect casting for Mariam. I helped her with English pronunciation, and she was a total delight to work with.

**Do you have other writings on Armenian subjects?**

I have only written one play and one film script, “Jews Pass It On,” based on my experience at boarding convent school. It was not filmed, but an option was bought. At the moment I am writing stories for a memoir.

**It will be very interesting to read your memoirs! My impression is you have been active in activities of London Centre for Armenian Information and Advice. How recognizable is the Armenian culture in such a huge cosmopolitan megapolis as London is?**

That is a difficult question. Certainly, in Acton, where the Armenian Centre is located, Armenians are very well known owing to the many activities they are involved with. Generally, I would say people are more aware of Armenian news, and friends call me to ask for information.

**Have you ever been in Armenia or have you visited other Armenian communities of world?**

We were to go to Armenia last year with my youngest daughter and a granddaughter but unfortunately the pandemic happened.

**Based on your life and work experience, do you have a message for Armenian readers worldwide?**

If anyone is interested in what an old Lady has to say, I think one cannot predict the future and one cannot erase the past, so live in the present with passion!

## CALENDAR

### ON-LINE EVENTS & PROGRAMS

#### MASSACHUSETTS

##### JUNE 16 — SAVE THE DATE: BUILDING FOR ETERNITY~ NAASR’s Virtual Gala.

Join us as we honor Edward Avedisian, NAASR Board member and philanthropist, during NAASR’s Building for Eternity Virtual Gala, on Wednesday, June 16, 2021, at 7 p.m. Eastern, 4 p.m. Pacific. Avedisian is the principal benefactor of NAASR’s new Vartan Gregorian Building and will be recognized for his outstanding dedication and distinguished service in advancing education in the United States and Armenia. He is Director of NAASR, a Trustee of the American University of Armenia, and a Director of the Armenian Missionary Association of America. Special guest, New York Times bestselling author Chris Bohjalian in a unique conversation with Dr. Khatchig Mouradian, Armenian and Georgian Specialist at the Library of Congress.

#### 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 fund-raising 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](http://www.farusa.org/agcc)

#### RHODE ISLAND

APRIL 27 — Armenian Historical Association of RI presents a zoom lecture by Asya Darbinyan, PhD on Tuesday, at 7p.m. Refugee Experiences: Investigating the Plight of the Armenian Genocide Refugees in the Caucasus. Virtual-Zoom and Facebook Live streamed on Facebook page: For Zoom link, contact AHARI at [info@armenianhistorical-ri.org](mailto:info@armenianhistorical-ri.org)

MAY 7-28 — Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Church of Providence continues programming the Armenian Cultural Hour programs, every Friday at 7:30 p.m. The program can be livestreamed on the church’s Facebook page by everyone at <https://www.facebook.com/armenianchurchprovidence>

May 7 - ARMENIA The Land of Noah, Documentary in English

May 14 - Armenian music and songs (Concert from Montreal, Canada)

May 21 - Our Youth Talents, issue two

May 28 - Celebration concert, dedicated to 100th Anniversary of the First Republic of Armenia

KOMITAS, from page 14

*Requiem* at the tender age of 11. At 17 he made his European debut as a soloist with the Radio France National Philharmonic Orchestra in Paris. A long-time professor at New York University Tisch School of the Arts, he holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy from the University of Iowa and a master’s degree from the Gnessins Music Academy in Moscow. Not one to rest on his academic laurels, in 2007 he received the prestigious Yevgeny Kissin Award at Manhattan School of Music and gave a debut performance with Pinchas Zukerman at Zankel Hall.

Arsenyan is also amassing a rich collection of performance recordings: as a lifetime member of the French Union of Composers (SACEM) two collections of his original works were published in Paris in 1993. He is also scholar of Iberian Baroque Music and has compiled a Performance Guide to Antonio Soler’s *Keyboard Sonatas* published by the University of Iowa Press, scheduled to be published in

2022 in both Spanish and English by Boileau Editorial Publishing in Barcelona.

In a recent virtual concert on February 14 at the Armenian Library and Museum, Arsenyan performed several works by Komitas accompanied by sopranos Hasmik Mekanejian, Alvard Mayilyan, and Anahit Zakaryan. Among other highlights, he delivered a sensitive and jaunty interpretation of Komitas’ rarely performed *Msho Shoror* suite for solo piano. If the Komitas *Nocturne* is languid and melancholic, *Msho Shoror* is light-hearted, almost jazzy at times, with quick transitions and light flowing sections that might indeed recall the village of Moush in Western Armenia, where the folk tune it is based on originated. It has been 85 years since Komitas passed away in Paris, psychologically traumatized by what he has experienced in 1915: but his music lives on, as does the Armenian culture of which he was so genuinely enamored.

Listen to Arsenyan play the Komitas *Nocturne*: <https://youtu.be/KaitTdz19fk>  
Listen to Arsenyan interpret *Msho Shoror*: <https://youtu.be/l1fTF4nRvIY>

## Discovering Komitas’ Unknown Nocturne



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**EDITOR**

Alin K. Gregorian

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Aram Arkun

**ART DIRECTOR**

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

**SENIOR EDITORIAL COLUMNIST**

Edmond Y. Azadian

**STAFF WRITER**

Harry Kezelian III

**CONTRIBUTORS**

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

**REGIONAL  
CORRESPONDENTS**

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

**PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

**VIDEO CORRESPONDENT**

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA  
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Telephone: 617-924-4420  
FAX: 617-924-2887  
[www.mirrorspectator.com](http://www.mirrorspectator.com)

E-Mail: [editor@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:editor@mirrorspectator.com)  
For advertising: [mirrorads@aol.com](mailto:mirrorads@aol.com)

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## Editorial

# Armenia Between Second Genocide and Deliverance



By Edmond Y.  
Azadian

In anticipation of adverse publicity against Turkey, its government has gone to great lengths, every year, on the eve of April 24, to soften its image before the world.

We should be reminded that on April 24, 2015 — the centennial of the Armenian Genocide — the Turkish government celebrated the centennial of the Gallipoli Campaign, a dubious victory against the Allies awarded to Mustapha Kemal by the German generals during World War I.

We wish Turkey's efforts did not yield dividends, but the truth is different. Given Turkey's political stature on the world scene, many centers of power support Turkey, regardless of the moral implications of that choice.

This year is no different, particularly in light of political developments which see the US administration dropping major hints to Ankara that President Joseph Biden may use the magical term "genocide" in the traditional US comment on the anniversary.

Indeed, Turkey's presidential office organized a symposium on April 20 to discuss the issue in three different panels. Among the participants in the first panel is President Erdogan's advisor, Seyit Sertçelik, a Genocide denier.

Of course, the goal of the three panels is not to arrive at the truth about the Genocide, because the monopoly of that truth rests with President Erdogan, who challenges Armenians to come up with "one single document" to prove that Turkey has ever committed a genocide. Therefore, what remains for the panelists to do is to manufacture historic facts to justify Mr. Erdogan's historic truth.

In addition to these antics, Turkey has invested other resources to forestall recognition by the US president through expensive lobbying groups and a tireless media campaign.

One of the reasons for Turkey's haste in mending fences with Israel is to continue receiving the services of Israeli lobbying groups in the US, which have traditionally supported Turkey's drive to avert any recognition by the US government.

Since the issue has such fundamental consequences for Turkey, we should not be surprised if Ankara comes up with an alluring last-minute offer or concession to Washington that the administration cannot afford to turn it down. We need to keep our fingers crossed yet be realistic.

In addition to its traditional tools, this year Turkey has resorted to a new measure, that of threatening Armenia with another genocide.

Turkey's actions in the recent Karabakh war, its continued concentration of troops on Armenia's border and its demand for a piece of Armenian territory — Syunik — amount to a new genocide. And it asks that as a reward for undoing its criminal blockade of Armenia, Ankara receive absolution for the genocide.

Last year in Baku, Erdogan's invocation of Enver Pasha, one member of the triumvirate that planned and executed the Armenian Genocide, marked the culmination of the threats that Ankara regularly directs at Armenia. To laud the original butcher while rejoicing over winning a war of aggression against Armenians connected the historic dots from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey and its little brother, the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Erdogan is not the only Turkish leader who has threatened Armenia, though he may be the boldest one. Many other Turkish leaders in the past threatened Armenia and Armenians in one form or another.

In 1992, during the first Karabakh war, Turgut Ozal, then Turkey's prime minister, suggested a Cyprus-style blitzkrieg against Armenia. On other occasions, he asked the rhetorical question, "What if we drop a bomb over Yerevan during one of our war games?"

In an indirect reference, Ozal warned Armenians if 1915 was not lesson enough for them! Again and again, Turkey practices a roundabout logic of "we committed no genocide" while adding "they should have learned their lesson."

President Suleyman Demirel had characterized Armenia as a "thorn" in its geographical position between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Thus, in 1993, former President Bulent Ecevit suggested the notorious land swap, then advocated by CIA shill Paul Goble, of Meghri with the Lachin corridor.

Another confession was made in Brussels on the sidelines of a NATO meeting by the former chief of staff of the Turkish armed forces, Gen. Ilker Basbug. He had bragged about his country by openly asking the rhetorical question if Turkey could enjoy such a unified state "had we not expelled the Greeks and Armenians from Turkey."

It was not enough that Turkey took over historic Armenia, expelling and murdering its people, its leaders continue their hateful policy of threats and now genocide.

President Erdogan's spokesperson, Ibrahim Kalin, had tried to convince President Biden's National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan that since the term genocide did not exist in 1915, therefore neither could the act. However, even at that period, US Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, a witness to the events, had come closest in defining the Turkish government's actions. Indeed, in July 1915, Morgenthau had cabled Washington that "race murder" was underway — "a systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian populations and to bring destruction and destitution upon them."

Mr. Kalin had also argued that there was no court verdict in the Armenian case. Winston Churchill writes, "the clearance of the race from Asia Minor was about as complete as such an act, on a scale so great, could well be. ... There is no reasonable doubt that this crime was planned and executed for political reasons. The opportunity presented itself for clearing Turkish soil of a Christian race..." (*The World Crisis* (vol. 5) by Winston Churchill).

Addressing succinctly the issue of the court verdict, the late eminent genocide scholar, Dr. Vahagn Dadrian, wrote, "The Tribunal's key indictment and key verdict ... were published in the Ottoman government's gazette, the *Takvimi Vekayi*, numbers 3540 and 3604, respectively. It needs to be emphasized here that all the verdicts of this military tribunal were just like in the case of the Nuremberg Tribunal, nearly entirely predicated upon official Turkish documents."

In view of overwhelming legal and historical documents, the denialist Turkish government can only resort to threats and distortions. Turkey's refuge in these maneuvers indicates the enormity of the consequences of Genocide recognition by the international community. Most analysts and statesmen in Armenia's political ghetto underestimate the significance of that recognition, and the danger of the country falling into the Turkish trap and undermining the historical and political value of the case for short-term economic gains.

To say that there is no morality in politics is nothing new. Any government will venture to recognize the Armenian Genocide only if that recognition coincides with its own interests. That is why no more than 30 counties have recognized our Genocide. Over time, we have witnessed the Israeli government using the Genocide issue for its own political ends. Every time that government intends to extract some concession from Turkey, the media begin to report that one of the subcommittees of the Israeli Knesset is considering the issue. The Armenians get excited and the Turks get alarmed, but Ankara somehow reaches out to the Israeli government and the issue never makes it to the Knesset floor for a full vote. This is the traditional game of politics and we should not be disappointed.

The *New York Times*, which had published 145 stories and commentaries in 1915 about the Genocide, moralized after the House and Senate subsequently voted in 2019 to recognize the Armenian Genocide. We all recognize the political background that had brought the legislative branch of the US government to pass the appropriate resolutions.

Following the adoption of the House resolution, the *Times* wrote, "The House of Representatives did the right thing last week, but it gets no credit for courage. Lawmakers acted only because opposition to Turkey had suddenly become popular. Its recent invasion of Kurdish Syria provoked bipartisan patronage in Washington. ... The victims of 1915 deserve better than to be memorialized merely as a symbolic rebuke to the regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan."

Although matching legislative anger with the Genocide resolution is the natural course of politics, Erdogan deserved the rebuke anyway, because for so long as he had been using the cover of NATO and US patronage to engage in self-serving adventures around the world. That is why in addition to the passage of the resolution, sanctions were used to contain Turkish misbehavior.

President Biden's recognition of the Armenian Genocide could not have come at a better time. Gloom and doom mark the mood in Armenia following the 44-day war. Many remains of the 5,000 casualties are being brought home gradually. The trauma of defeat is oppressive and the disillusionment with Armenia's strategic ally, Russia, is at an all-time high.

Biden's recognition will complement the actions taken by the legislative branch of the US government. It will also draw red lines around Turkey, which is openly threatening Armenia's borders.

It will serve as a ray of hope in this darkest hour of Armenia's history. It will mean a deliverance which will emancipate Armenians all over the world from this historic trauma.

## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Catholicosate of Cilicia Refiles Lawsuit Against Turkey

In 2015 the Catholicosate of Cilicia (headquartered in Antelias, Lebanon) filed a lawsuit against the government of Turkey seeking the return of its historic seat in Sis, Turkey (present-day Kozan district of the Adana Province), which

was confiscated in 1921.

The Catholicosate had initially filed its lawsuit directly with the Constitutional Court of Turkey because the claim raised issues of historical property rights that lower courts would not have jurisdiction over. At the urging of the Justice Ministry, the Constitutional Court referred the lawsuit to a lower court. The Catholicosate then appealed the ruling to the European Court of Human Rights in 2016. The European Court rejected the Catholicosate's 900-page lawsuit in 2017, finding it inadmissible because it had not first exhausted all local legal remedies, such as the lower courts in Turkey.

Therefore, the Catholicosate refiled its lawsuit in 2019, this time with a lower Turkish court in Kozan (Sis). After two postponements due to the coronavirus pandemic, a pre-trial hearing finally took place on March 30, 2021 in the Kozan Civil Litigation Court to decide whether a viable cause of action existed to proceed to trial.

The Catholicosate's lawsuit against the Municipality of Kozan and the Turkish government's Treasury Department is being defended by a group of international law experts, as well as Turkish lawyer Jem Sofouoglu and Turkish Armenian lawyer Setrag Davouthan, who is serving as a consultant.

The Istanbul-based *Jamanak* Armenian newspaper reported that according to attorney Sofouoglu the March 30 hearing was intended to clarify the applicant's qualifications and authorizations and the possibility of the expiration of the statute of limitations. The Municipality of Kozan and the Treasury Department presented their counter-evidence claiming that the applicant does not have standing — is not a legal entity — and is a foreign litigant. The defendants also stated that, before the

hearing could proceed, the applicant as a foreign entity must provide a letter of guarantee corresponding to 15% of the demand's value, as required by the Turkish legal system. Sofouoglu was quoted by *Jamanak* telling the Judge that the Catholicosate had already submitted the required documents to the court. The Judge agreed to go ahead and consider the substance of the lawsuit, meaning that the court rejected the objections raised by the Municipality and Treasury Department, and ruled that the lawsuit could definitively proceed. The next hearing is scheduled for May 6, 2021. Sofouoglu said that he considers this a very positive development.

Now the trial will go through several presumable phases. Sofouoglu anticipates that the court will first assemble the evidence presented by the Catholicosate of Cilicia. For this purpose, the corresponding work will be carried out through the official archives and property registers at governmental bodies. The investigative-exploratory phase then follows the collection of evidence. According to Sofouoglu, the court, most probably later on, will reach the conclusion that it will be necessary to appoint an expert to carry out this task. Such experts are usually academics from one of the universities in the Adana region. Even though the courts always have the authority to carry out this work on their own, they prefer to appoint an expert.

At the end, should the Catholicosate's lawsuit be rejected, as expected, by the lower Turkish Court, it will then be appealed to the Constitutional Court of Turkey and after its probable rejection there, a new, and this time proper, appeal could be filed in the European Court of Human Rights which hopefully will not dismiss it because of a technicality.

Even though this lawsuit is filed by the Catholicosate of Cilicia to recover its historic seat, it is in fact much more significant than this particular case. The lawsuit is related to the Armenian nation's larger efforts to pursue its legal demands for the return of all properties and assets confiscated by the Turkish government during the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. As Catholicos Aram I has rightly pointed out: "This is the time that we move from the stage of [Genocide] recognition to reparation." He told the *New York Times* in May 2015: "After 100 years, I thought it was time that we put the emphasis on reparation. ... This is the first legal step. This will be followed by our claim to return all the churches, the monasteries, the church-related properties and, finally, the individual properties."

## The Armenian Genocide Centenary: Six Years Later

By Dr. Arpi Sarafian

Six years ago, it was the euphoria of *Gank, bidi mnank*. I remember reflecting on the Centenary of the Armenian Genocide in a mood of extreme pride and jubilation, of non-chalance almost. Yes, there were countless unresolved issues regarding the welfare and the future of our homeland, but there was also the certainty that nothing could hinder our determination to keep on. Armenians around the world were celebrating a hundred years of the triumph of life over death. The mood was one of "rebirth from ashes." We had the luxury to "remember and demand." The systematic attempt to wipe a people off the face of this planet had failed. Nothing could threaten our identity as Armenians. We would get what we wanted. Our ongoing creativity evidenced it. History was clearly on our side.

Then something terrible happened. History changed course. In September 2020 the Azerbaijanis, with the support of Turkey, attacked the Armenians living in the mountainous enclave we call Artsakh. The horror of the massacres and the deportations of the years 1915-1919 was, once again, unfolding right before our eyes. In forty-four days we lost over four thousand lives, a significant part of our territory, and had to sign a most humiliating cease-fire agreement. It felt as if the natural course of things had reversed. Instead of moving forward towards the good and the just, as history must, we were reverting to a reign of evil. The beast had taken over.

We now find ourselves in the defendant's seat, needing to argue that the mass murder of one and a half million Armenians living in Ottoman Turkey in the First World War years was the crime of genocide, committed under the pretext of deportation. Also, despite the piling evidence that what occurred in the recent Artsakh War — along with the ongoing vandalizing and desecration by Azerbaijan of our cultural artifacts and religious monuments — is ethnic cleansing, we have to go to Human Rights Courts to "prove" that the destruction of entire villages and the aerial attacks on the civilian population was a genocidal act.

Human Rights Organizations don't seem to be able to do much to stop the perpetrators in their violations of right and law. To all appearances, the international community has compromised on its moral obligation. Perhaps they have chosen not to intervene because, to borrow renowned critic Edward Said's words, we are not "worthy victims." If the courts are "useless" one could argue, why not proceed as though the verdict has been pronounced in our favor? To say that the world is against us and to despair would be an invitation to doom. Constantly invoking our defeat and focusing on our, only a few months ago non-existent, existential fears would paralyze us.

Indeed, the deep shock of our military defeat could be a source of inspiration. Pain is known to enhance one's perceptions and one's imagination. Artists have used their life-changing illnesses to tap into their creativity, making their pain part of their "recovery." We too could use our calamity to keep going forward, with even more determination.

Most amazing in our current reality is the ability of Armenians to go about their daily business as though nothing has happened. There is a sense of "normalcy" in the country. We read about the national soccer team's surprising lead in the World Cup Qualifying Games. We also read about a beauty from Vanadzor participating in the upcoming Miss Universe Pageant. Armenian designers are featured in *Vogue Italia*. Three new collectors' coins have been released by Armenia's Central Bank. The Armenian rap group, *Orinak*, have started a program in a village in Artsakh to teach local kids to rap. On March 27, Armenia celebrated International Theatre Day "with proper pomp and circumstance fit for the occasion," writes Gerald Papasian from Yerevan. The list grows longer every day. These are not matters of urgency or of emergency. Folks engage in such activities

only when they can claim a stable, prosperous, and peaceful everyday life.

No less significant is the input from the non-Armenian world. Editorials, urgent appeals, online petitions call for pressure on Turkey for its human rights violations. The protection of Armenian Cultural Heritage was discussed at the National Commission for UNESCO. Organizations around the world are involved in saving from destruction the thousands of cultural and religious monuments which are the material evidence of the centuries-old history of the Armenian people in the region. "Francesco", a new documentary on Pope Francis, features the Pope's efforts to "raise awareness about the Armenian Genocide despite geopolitical pressure to stay silent," notes Eric Esrailian, one of the producers of the film. Here again, the list keeps getting longer.

There has been much talk recently about Genocide recognition by the United States government. Despite the broken promises of past presidents, anticipation is high. In 1919, the US Senate unanimously adopted a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide committed by Ottoman Turkey. Earlier, the House of Representatives had recognized the deed as genocide. The resolution now awaits ratification by the Executive Branch to become law. "What's important is the truth and honest recognition of history. President Biden needs to call the Armenian genocide by its name," writes the LA Times Editorial Board in a recently published editorial: "Yes, it was Genocide."

Recognition is not something to be overlooked or derided, as is sometimes done. Even if it changes nothing on the ground, to be seen and to be heard is extremely helpful for us. The international community's solidarity with our cause will give our leaders and political analysts the moral power and the stamina to critically examine where we went wrong and what we can do to avoid a repeat of the same. Making detailed and thoughtful recommendations requires a clear vision of what life could be like in a rehabilitated homeland, and the support of the world community would help create the mood to construct those visions and bring them to fruition. We have an obligation to use every tool at our disposal to make Armenia livable again. Thus, rather than focus on how to evade a terrible doom, we could focus on how delightful life could be in a healthy and strong Armenia. "Enough of death," would say dear old Virginia Woolf. "It is life that matters."

If Turkey dared use violence in Artsakh it is not because our efforts at recognition failed. (More than two dozen governments have already formally recognized the Armenian Genocide.) The Turkish government has never signaled a desire for peace or for harmony. More importantly, in a morally bankrupt world, in other words, in a world devoid of ethical or spiritual values, one can commit acts of violence with impunity. Rather than regret or repent, Turkey is unabashedly threatening and acting on her threats. Her growing power has become an existential threat to Armenia. Receiving the solidarity of the world community would boost our sense of worth and give us the confidence needed to prosecute Turkish and Azerbaijani human rights abuses against Armenians in the courts. That confidence is something we cannot afford to lose.

Moral values are easy to dismiss because they are not tangible commodities like an arms arsenal or material wealth. They are, nonetheless, the driving force behind every worthwhile human endeavor. If we find ourselves at the edge of the abyss today, it is because we have reneged on those values and have allowed greed to take over. At the turn of the century, it was still possible to believe with French writer and statesman Andre Malraux that the twenty-first century would be a spiritual century. That prediction is becoming more and more difficult to maintain.

Time and time again we have shown the world that beauty transcends despair. If we have fallen and risen throughout the centuries, it is not because of our strategic geographical position or of our rich natural resources. It is because of our rich cultural heritage and our beauty as Armenians. We have so much to be positive about. This awareness is our most effective weapon as it is something no one can take away from us. Along with the concrete plans and the specific recommendations needed to rebuild Armenia, it is the key to our survival. Let us confidently say then that, rather than weaken us, the recent Artsakh War came to reaffirm our identity as Armenians.

(Arpi Sarafian is the author of *Endless Crossings: Reflections on Armenian Art and Culture in Los Angeles*.)



# On the Legal-Political Status of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh)

## Preface by Dr. Arshavir Gundjian

*Ever since the declaration of the independence of Armenia in 1991, the recovery of historically Armenian lands of Karabakh, otherwise known as Artsakh, by its Armenian owners has been at the center of preoccupation of all Armenians and most particularly Armenians in Artsakh and the Republic of Armenia.*

*The latest calamity of the war of Artsakh has undeniably had dramatic consequences, potentially threatening now the very existence of Armenian statehood.*

*The article below is a reminder of recorded legal facts that have a central and crucial importance in repositioning the entire Artsakh issue discourse on the international political landscape. Armenian and Artsakh diplomacy have missed this far the opportunity to make prevail within the international community the fundamental fact that Artsakh has actually legally already been a sovereign country since December 10, 1991.*

*Consequently in total contradiction to how the Azerbaijani-Turkish propaganda machine has succeeded in presenting the Artsakh war as Azerbaijan's "justified liberation" of its lands from separatist Armenian fighters, this article emphasizes and reminds readers of the powerful and legally defensible thesis that the reality is quite the contrary. In fact, during this last war, it was the already legally sovereign country of Artsakh that was the subject of aggression and occupation by Azerbaijan. Therefore, Artsakh is the side which is legally entitled to recuperate all of its lost lands (notice that this includes all regions) and to receive compensation for its material and human losses.*

*The article is authored by Dr. Vahagn Vardanyan who holds a doctorate in Political Geography received from the National University of Singapore. His research interests, among others, include national identity, nation/place branding, and diaspora-homeland relations.*

*Dr. Vardanyan currently resides and works in Hong Kong, he is a leading active member of the recently created "New Armenia Network State" association. This article was recently published in the Greek City Times on April 08, 2021.*

By Dr. Vahagn Vardanyan

**O**VER THE PAST DECADES, discussions on the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh's (Artsakh's) sovereign status have been taking place. As the main framework of the talks and political negotiations, the aspects of Artsakh's self-determination and Azerbaijan's territorial integrity have been seen as two contradicting ones. The invasion of Azerbaijan in Artsakh on September 27 in 2020 further escalated and complicated the conflict, despite the unilateral statements by the political leadership of Azerbaijan on having the conflict resolved. The de facto partial occupation of the Republic of Artsakh's territories, as an outcome of the Second Artsakh War of 2020, does not abolish the Republic's legal-political status.

The status of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), as argued, should be viewed from the perspectives of the presented conceptually new approach. Information given below will be of significant help for larger audiences to understand Nagorno Karabakh's (Artsakh's) legal-political status. It guides the formation of understanding about: 1. The way Artsakh's political status and rights are perceived in the region (including in Azerbaijan) and the rest of the world; 2. The legal basis and the legality of proceedings that are connected to the actions Artsakh may undertake in the future.

The following consecutive ten points help formulate the foundation and justification of the status of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh):

1) As of 1990, both Nagorno Karabakh (then the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast/Province or NKAO) and Azerbaijan (the rest of then-Soviet Azerbaijan) were parts of one sovereign entity – the Soviet Union (USSR). It is essential to determine the extent to which the development of Nagorno-Karabakh's status has complied with the acting legislation.

2) On April 3, 1990, the USSR adopted a law (N 1409-I titled "On the Procedure for Resolving Issues Related to the Exit of a Union Republic from the USSR" regulating the conditions for the secession of union republics and autonomous units (including autonomous oblasts/provinces) from the USSR. This right was extended even to non-autonomous regions with ethnic groups of dense inhabitation.

3) According to Article 3 of the above-mentioned Law, each autonomous unit included in a Soviet republic's territory (for example, NKAO in Soviet Azerbaijan) was provided with an independent right to hold a referendum on secession from the USSR. This right prescribed a referendum as the only legal path to achieving sovereignty. To put it simply, each autonomous unit (NKAO, for instance) had an independent right to withdraw from the USSR following the referendum results.

4) On December 10, 1991, in full compliance with the acting legislation, a referendum was held in Nagorno Karabakh (then-NKAO), following which the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (present: Republic of Artsakh) was proclaimed.

5) According to Article 6 of the Law mentioned above, the referendum results were to be reviewed by the Supreme Council (the parliament) of Soviet Azerbaijan, together with Nagorno Karabakh's authorities. However, from the day the referendum's results

became public until the very moment the USSR stopped existing (00:00 on December 26, 1991), no actions to consider the results of Nagorno-Karabakh's referendum were initiated by Azerbaijan. The acting legislation in the USSR prescribed no other settlement of this issue. Thus, following the USSR's dissolution, two sovereign nation-states were formed on Soviet Azerbaijan's territory: the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (present: Republic of Artsakh) and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Additionally, on October 18, 1991, Azerbaijan declared its sovereignty through the Constitutional Act of the State Independence, which stated that the (modern) Republic of Azerbaijan was the legal successor of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-1920). A noteworthy detail was that the latter never had Nagorno Karabakh included as a part of its territory. Moreover, the Act classified the Soviet rule as "annexation". Such legal definition prescribes cancellation of all legal actions initiated by the occupying/annexing power, in particular, the inclusion of Nagorno Karabakh in Soviet Azerbaijan in the early-1920s. Last but not least, Azerbaijan held a referendum on secession from the USSR (to repeat: the only legal path to exercise sovereignty from the Union) only three days after the USSR's end: on December 29, 1991. This fact clarifies that before the USSR stopped existing as a sovereign legal-political entity (00:00 on December 26, 1991), Azerbaijan continued to remain a republic within the USSR and, as of then, had failed to fulfil its obligations stipulated by law.

6) After gaining de jure independence (note: up to that moment, no former territorial unit of the USSR might have its independent army), Azerbaijan unleashed an undeclared war against Nagorno-Karabakh. The latter defended itself, preserved most of its territory (within the NKAO borders), and liberated the adjacent areas. Territories acquired during the war through the counter-offensive cannot be considered "illegally occupied" but become a subject of future peace treaty negotiations, similar to, for instance, the modern French region of Alsace-Lorraine, acquired from Imperial Germany after World War I, or Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast/Province, acquired from Nazi Germany after World War II.

7) As of 1994, when the representative of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), along with representatives of Armenia and Azerbaijan, put his signature on the cease-fire agreement (cease-fire in force from May 12, 1994), the sovereign status of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) expanded over the former NKAO and the newly-liberated territories, before the status of the latter was to be determined exclusively through peaceful negotiations. Here it is worth referring to the four UN resolutions of 1993 (April 30, July 29, October 14, and November 12), which Azerbaijan points to as its justification for considering Nagorno-Karabakh as its territory. All the four resolutions were issued in 1993, when Karabakh's defence forces, through the counter-offensive, were liberating the security belt – the regions surrounding the former NKAO. In all the cases, the crucial pre-condition set by the resolutions was calling Azerbaijan for "cessation of hostilities" first, which Azerbaijan never did (until the mediated cease-fire in May 1994). By ignoring this fact and taking other conditions out of context is nothing but manipulating the international public opinion.

8) Within its borders, as mentioned under point 7), Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) reserves a right to exercise its sovereign political decisions. Based on the information presented above, Nagorno-Karabakh's (Artsakh's) current status lies higher than the nations' universal right for self-determination. It extends the territory of the Republic beyond the borders of the former NKAO by fixing it within the de-facto borders (cease-fire demarcation line) as of May 12, 1994. Thus, for Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), the case is of *exercising its own right for self-determination and protecting its territorial integrity*.

9) Since 1992 and until September 27, 2020, sovereign (Republic of) Azerbaijan, along with all other parties involved in the conflict (as its sides and mediators: specifically, Armenia, as a guarantor of Artsakh's security, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group and its co-chair states of Russia, United States, and France, as mandated to the OSCE by the United Nations) had repeatedly and consistently insisted on the unacceptability of military solution to the conflict and that its peaceful resolution was the only acceptable solution. With this principle stated consistently for nearly three decades, after each negotiation session, any side initiating a military campaign to resolve the conflict becomes legally responsible for breaking the format of the conflict resolution process (as mandated to the OSCE by the UN). By committing the act of aggression on Artsakh on September 27, 2020, thus, Azerbaijan became legally responsible for breaking the peaceful resolution path.

10) On November 26, 2020, the Senate of the French Republic issued a resolution calling "on the French authorities to take all possible measures to ensure the restoration of the borders established in 1994, which were enshrined in the term-less trilateral cease-fire agreement signed by the Republic of Artsakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan." This statement emphasises that Artsakh's legally-established borders, before peace treaty negotiations take place, are those de facto existing by the time of the cease-fire (as of May 12, 1994).

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has not been resolved, despite Azerbaijan's current rhetoric, which is more a propaganda language aiming at presenting and promoting itself as the only party of the conflict committed to long-term peace. Coherent peace can be established only by exercising the rights of the people who inhabit Artsakh. Consistent efforts by the official diplomacy of the Republic of Armenia and Republic of Artsakh, by Armenian diaspora institutions, as well as public diplomacy and the use of 'soft power', assume a long process aiming to achieve recognition of Artsakh's already-exercised sovereignty (from 1991), i.e., to protect its people's right for self-determination and the Republic's territorial integrity.



## COMMENTARY

## Network State Initiative Declaration On Armenian Genocide

The Network State Initiative uniting the Armenians of the world, taking into account that:

The Armenian Genocide is a terrible crime against Armenian people and all humanity;

The Armenian Genocide commenced in 1915 continues until today, since the Republic of Turkey has been denying the fact of the Armenian Genocide for about 100 years, and the denial is a stage of genocide;

The historical memory of the Armenian Genocide is the key component of the collective identity of the Armenian people;

The recognition of the Armenian Genocide is essential for continuous vital activity of the world's Armenians;

The Armenian ethnos is deprived of its cradle of civilization - the Armenian Highlands, in consequence of the Armenian Genocide,

The current government of the Republic of Armenia has no right to represent the position and interests of the world's Armenians;

Declares that:

Demands from all UN member states, including the Republic of Turkey, and international intergovernmental organizations to officially recognize the Armenian Genocide;

Demands the Republic of Turkey to assume the obligation of unconditional compensations for the political, economic, financial, and moral and psychological damages caused by the Armenian Genocide;

Considers as invalid the Treaty of Moscow (of March 16, 1921) and Treaty of Kars (of October 13, 1921) signed between the entities that are not recognized as the subjects of international law and emphasizes that the Republic of Turkey has occupied the territories of the Armenian state for already 100 years with all the ensuing political and legal consequences;

Recognizes as invalid any document signed or to be signed by the former, present and future Governments of the Republic of Armenia with the Republic of Turkey, which overshadows the demand of official recognition of the Armenian Genocide and ensures the application of the aforesaid unlawful treaties of 1921;

Demands the criminalization and application of criminalization of the denial of the Armenian Genocide to be ensured in the territories of the Republic of Armenia and UN member states;

Demands from the UN member states and international intergovernmental organizations to include the history of the Armenian Genocide in the public education programs.

Network State Initiative, Yerevan,  
April 2021

Vahram Ayvazyan, Founder, Network State

(The Network State Initiative has by now more than 200 members from Armenia and the diaspora, including both in the younger and older age groups, who are mostly professionals with diverse backgrounds [see "The Network State: New Armenia Vision" in the *Mirror-Spectator*, online February 24, 2021])

# A Fork in The Road

By David Phillips

One and a half million Armenians were killed between 1915 and 1923 during the waning years of the Ottoman Empire. The overwhelming majority of historians refer to their deportation and murder as the "Armenian Genocide" but Turkey refuses to recognize the events as Genocide.

In the immediate aftermath, Ottoman courts tried and convicted some of the perpetrators. Today, however, Turkey adamantly denies the Genocide and actively campaigns against its recognition. US President Joe Biden's recognition the Genocide on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, April 24, would help Turkey face this tragic chapter in history. It would also send a signal of solidarity with progressive members of Turkish civil society who demand transparency and accountability.

President Biden repeatedly called for the US to recognize the Armenian Genocide in his decades as a US Senator. As a candidate, he reaffirmed his commitment to Genocide recognition in a letter to the Armenian Assembly of America on September 16, 2019:

"The United States must never forget or remain silent about the systematic and horrific campaign of extermination that resulted in the deaths of 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children, and the mass deportation of 2 million Armenians from their homes. If we do not fully acknowledge, commemorate and teach our children about

Syrian Kurdish militias were killed and 23,000 wounded fighting the Islamic State (ISIS) at America's behest.

Erdogan undermined support from the US evangelical community by jailing Pastor Andrew Brunson in 2016, accusing Brunson of assisting the failed coup against him that year, and sponsoring jihadists proxies who murdered Armenian, Chaldean and Assyrian Christians in Syria.

In September 2019, Turkey deployed jihadi gangs in the Hamza and Sultan Murad brigades from Syria to Artsakh (the Armenian term for Nagorno-Karabakh, a historic Armenian land in Azerbaijan) where they committed war crimes that include decapitating civilians, mutilating bodies, and driving hundreds of thousands of ethnic Armenians from their homes. These crimes can be linked right back to Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) given the agency's remit over organizing Syrian proxies to fight Erdogan's wars abroad in place of Turkish soldiers.

Though former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu heralded a policy of "zero problems with neighbors", Turkey is at-odds with almost all of its neighbors now. Turkish forces are deployed to Syria, Iraq, and Libya while Turkish war ships patrol the eastern Mediterranean, confronting Greece, Cyprus and Israel over natural gas claims.

Erdogan ignores opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation. If Biden uses the "G-word", Erdogan threatened to deny US access to Incirlik Air Force Base, a NATO facility, as well as other military bases in Turkey.

A perfect storm of problems results from Erdogan's Genocide denial, purchase of sophisticated weapons from Russia, and attacks on the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP). Freedom House downgraded Turkey from "partly free" to "not free" in response to its abuse of political and civil rights, as well as denial of Internet freedoms in recent years as a result.

Erdogan wants to avoid sanctions, which would undermine popular support for his Justice and Development

## BIDEN'S RECOGNITION OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE WOULD underscore RECENT CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTIONS IN BOTH HOUSES. MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUBMITTED RESOLUTION 296, "AFFIRMING THE UNITED STATES RECORD ON THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE"

genocide, the words "never again" lose their meaning."

Biden's recognition of the Armenian Genocide would underscore recent Congressional resolutions in both houses. Members of the House of Representatives submitted Resolution 296, "affirming the United States record on the Armenian Genocide", states that it is US policy to "1) commemorate the Armenian Genocide, the killing of 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923; 2) reject efforts to deny the Armenian Genocide; and 3) encourage education and public understanding about the Armenian Genocide." The resolution was adopted overwhelmingly by a vote of 405 to 11 on October 29, 2019.

Senate Resolution 150, adopted by unanimous consent on December 12, 2019, mirrors the House resolution. It confirms U.S policy "to commemorate the Armenian Genocide through official recognition and remembrance."

Turkey has managed to slow U.S recognition of the Genocide by leveraging its NATO membership and strategic geography. It hires a phalanx of lobbyists for its denial campaign. While it relied on the so-called Jewish lobby and arms industries to advocate its case, Erdogan has undermined these relations by labelling Israel's treatment of Palestinians as a "genocide" and acquiring Russian surface-to-air missiles in violation of NATO protocols.

A confluence of factors has taken a toll on US-Turkey relations.

Islamist jihadis, under Turkey's control, invaded north and east Syria in October 2019, killing hundreds of Kurdish fighters in the Syrian Defense Forces (SDF) who serve as America's boots on-the-ground. More than 11,000

Party (AKP). The Turkish Lira has collapsed from the AKP's economic mismanagement. The Turkish Lira was trading at 2 Lira to 1 U.S dollar in 2002 when the AKP won its first election. That is far-cry from today where 8 Turkish Lira buy 1 U.S dollar. Businesses are defaulting as creditors call in their notes and Turkey's foreign currency reserves have dwindled dramatically to support the Lira.

Turkey can ill afford an economic war with the U.S and Europe. It is already sanctioned under the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) for purchasing S-400 missiles from Russia. Working with Congress, the Biden administration could intensify CAATSA sanctions.

The US could also apply sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act for Turkey's human rights abuses and support for jihadis. Turkey's intelligence agency and defense ministry could also be sanctioned under Magnitsky as well.

European officials have been waiting to see what the US does before finalizing its approach. The E.U may respond with comparable sanctions of its own if Washington makes the first move.

President Biden's expected reaffirmation of the Armenian Genocide will be a bitter pill in the short term. However, it will lay the foundation for restoring relations over time. Reform and recognition will put Turkey on track to becoming a respected member of the international community once again.

(This commentary originally appeared in Ahval.)

# Set Momjian, US Ambassador to UN, Ford Motor Washington Rep., Passes Away at 91

HUNTINGDON VALLEY, Penn. — Set Charles Momjian, 91, of Huntingdon Valley, well-known antiques collector and advisor to presidents, died on Monday, April 12, after a long illness.

He was born in Atlantic City on April 9, 1930 to Julia and Charles Momjian, both orphaned refugees from the Armenian Genocide who were raised by American missionaries. The two parents were born in Malatya in the Ottoman Empire. Charles died at an early age and the family, which included younger brother Albert, had a difficult time during the Depression era.

Set Momjian attended Atlantic City High School, LaSalle College and Charles Morris Price School of Advertising. After school, he joined the Army, where upon learning that the platoon photographer would have his own private quarters, he spent a weekend learning all he could about photography. Returning to Atlantic City, he used this skill again, as the official photographer for the Miss America pageant.

He began and ended his long professional career at Ford Motor Company, including years as a marketing executive at Philco-Ford, Ford Aerospace and ultimately as



a Washington liaison for the company.

Momjian is best known and remembered for his dual passions of antique collecting and politics. A serendipitous find of an

old gun under the Atlantic City boardwalk when he was a young boy inspired his lifelong love of antiques. During a 1987 interview about his collecting on the Today show, he said "collecting is in the marrow of my bones." His son Chris said his father "spent every free minute he had digging through stalls at flea markets, talking with dealers at antique shows or attending auctions. I'd go along with him, leaving before dawn; my 'reward' at the end of the long day was usually an antique pocket knife for my collection."

Early in his collecting career, following advice from the Grolier Club, he pursued first-edition books, but his obsession quickly expanded into other areas, as he built his Americana collection that spans genres from soda fountain fixtures and coin-op machines, to rare historical manuscripts and early photography. He is nationally known for his collection of White House and presidential china,

much of which has been on loan to presidential libraries. Momjian loved sharing his passion for collecting with others and was in demand as a speaker many groups throughout the country. Today objects from his collections are on loan to numerous museums and historic sites.

A chance encounter with Jimmy Carter during his presidential campaign led to decades of service and advice to presidential campaigns and presidents from both political parties. Momjian served the Carter Campaign as Director of Special Projects. Merging his passion for art and politics, he worked with modern artists including Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, commissioning artwork to be sold to raise funds for the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Through the sale of the Inaugural Impressions portfolio, funds were raised to keep the DC museums open late for visitors to the nation's capital. Following the election, President Carter nominated Momjian as a US representative to the United Nations with the rank of ambassador, the first person of Armenian descent to hold the position. He later served as a delegate to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva and chairman of the DNC's Ethnic-American Committee.

He supervised presidential gifts to heads of states, often combining a special printing of a presidential speech presented in a fine binding. He had miniature Liberty Bells cast from an old chip from the crack in the original bell and presented one to the Queen of England when she visited Independence National Historical Park on America's Bicentennial. He made sure there was always American art in the White House, often lending works from his own collections.

In 1981 President Ronald Reagan nominated Momjian as the only non-Jewish member of the US Holocaust Memorial Council. As an original member of the Council, he was very proud of his work in developing the US Holocaust Museum. During the terms of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton he continued to work on special projects for both presidents, the preservation of the collections at the White House and the restoration of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

Momjian was equally passionate about his Armenian roots and was committed to the Armenian-American community, holding leadership positions with the Armenian Missionary Association of America, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Armenian Assembly, the Armenian Sister's Academy and Knights of Vartan. In 1976, during this country's Bicentennial he recognized America's generosity to the Armenian community by raising \$1 million to buy a set of tapestries designed by Christian Herter celebrating significant events in American History. The tapestries were purchased from the Armenian Sister's Academy and then donated to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Also in 1976, Momjian participated in the erection of the Meher statue in Philadelphia by the Knights of Vartan.

Over the years Momjian served on many non-profit boards; among them the Ellis Island Restoration Commission, Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, African-American Museum, National Holocaust Museum, International League for Human Rights, the Liberty Museum, First Ladies Library, Capitol Children's Museum, Brandywine Museum and the National Symphony Orchestra. He was a member of the Library Company of Philadelphia, Poor Richard Club, the Union League of Philadelphia and the Huntingdon Valley Country Club.

He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Joan (Reed), sons Bruce (Christine) and Christopher (Gail) and six grandchildren.



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## 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 (Artur) 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.



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/0BK5z0>.



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