



Harvard Square Protestors Call for Release of Armenian POWS, End to US Military Aid to Azerbaijan, Page 11

Members of Congress Urge US to Suspend Military Aid to Azerbaijan

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) welcomed a bipartisan letter on May 24, spearheaded by Congressional Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Rep. David Valadao (R-CA), along with the Caucus leadership, calling on the Administration “to suspend any existing military or security assistance to Azerbaijan,” given the war it launched last year against Artsakh, reported the Assembly.

In a statement released today, Rep. Valadao remarked: “Not a single American tax dollar should be sent to the armed forces of oil-rich Azerbaijan - a country that ethnically cleansed Artsakh, holds Armenian POWs, and now occupies territory in the Republic of Armenia.”



Rep. David Valadao

Highlighting concerns over the Administration’s decision to waive Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, the letter states in part: “We are concerned that the State Department did not fully consider Azerbaijan’s lack of progress in ceasing its blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), and instead moved forward with this waiver without detailing serious national security concerns. This year’s waiver comes despite last year’s 44-day war, Azerbaijan’s embrace of Al Qaeda-linked Syrian mercenaries, and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s renunciation of further diplomacy to resolve outstanding issues. These actions are inconsistent with provisions of the Section 907 waiver and demonstrate the dire need for changes to the Administration’s waiver process to prevent further aid from going to Azerbaijan until they make demonstrable changes to their behavior.”

see AID, page 20

Armenia Rules out Border Demarcation Talks until Azerbaijani Forces Pull out of Armenian Territory

By Raffi Elliott
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Armenia will only agree to start border demarcation negotiations once Azerbaijan fully evacuates the area around Lake Sev and ceases further intrusions into Armenian sovereign territory, officials announced this week.

Azerbaijan sparked this ongoing stand-off two weeks ago when several hundred Azerbaijani soldiers infiltrated on foot some 3.5 kilometers (2.1 miles) the international border area around the remote Ishkhanasar in Armenia’s Syunik province before being halted by Arme-

nian forces around Lake Sev (Sev Lidj). A similar intrusion was also halted south of the village of Verin Shorja in the Gegharkyunik province.

At a press event on Friday, May 18, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anna Naghdalyan insisted that in addition to Azerbaijani withdrawal to their positions as of May 11, the processes of border delimitation and demarcation between Armenia and Azerbaijan should be part of the comprehensive peace settlement of the conflict. Naghdalyan added that this framework would include the “de-occupation of the territories of the Artsakh Republic” as well as a final settlement to the unrecognized nation’s legal status under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk group.

The Foreign Ministry’s statement seemingly corresponds to an earlier comment by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan concerning a leaked document purportedly exposing plans to cede more territories to Azerbaijan. Pashinyan confirmed the authenticity of the document which was first shared on social media by Mikael Minassian, the exiled son-in-law of former President Serzh Sargsyan, but insisted that it was “100% pro-Armenian.”

see WITHDRAWAL, page 2

Gardner Museum Robbery Gets Netflix Treatment



Stephen Kurkjian

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON — It is not often one gets to talk to the star of a Netflix series, but Stephen Kurkjian is not a typical star. The veteran reporter is responsible for keeping alive the story of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum robbery in 1990 through his book, *Master Thieves*, which came out in 2015. Now, the story of the single largest art robbery in the world is told in the four-part Netflix series, “This Is a Robbery.”

Very late on the night of March 18, 1990, two men, dressed as Boston Police officers, knocked on the door of the museum, where a night watchman, against protocol, opened the door. One of the thieves entered and said, “Gentlemen, this is a robbery,” putting into motion a crime that has yet to be solved.

see HEIST, page 10



BOSTON GLOBE / GETTY IMAGE

PARIS
Bust of Charles Aznavour Inaugurated in Paris



MONTREAL
Edoyan’s Film Explores Aftermath of Lebanese Civil War



MASSACHUSETTS
Medical Group to Present Healing Power of Music





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Armenian Soldier Dies After Azerbaijani Attack

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Foreign Ministry of Armenia issued a statement on the occasion of the death of an Armenian serviceman as a result of Azerbaijani shootings on Armenia-Azerbaijan border in Gegharkunik Province. Its press service statement runs as follows.

“On May 25, Armenian serviceman, junior sergeant Gevorg Khurshudyan was fatally wounded by the fire of the military units of Azerbaijan in the direction of the Upper Shorzha of Gegharkunik region of the Republic of Armenia. We strongly condemn the blatant armed encroachment against the sovereign territory of Armenia - the UN member state, which is a violation of the norms of international law. Despite calls from the international community, Azerbaijan refuses to withdraw its armed forces from the sovereign territory of Armenia, by further escalating the situation and undermining regional security and stability. The hostilities carried out by Azerbaijan in the sovereign territory of Armenia give the right to the Republic of Armenia to undertake the necessary and adequate steps to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity and to ensure the security of its population. It's noteworthy that Azerbaijan tries to cover up these illegal military activities in the territory of Armenia by disseminating disinformation. The Armenian side is ready to engage in an international investigation to find out all the circumstances of this fatal incident.”

Foreign Ministry Condemns Criminal Prosecution of Armenian POWs in Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Parnorama.am) — Armenia's Foreign Ministry strongly condemned Baku's criminal prosecution against Lyudvik Mkrtchyan and Alyosha Khosrovyan, who were captured during the recent aggression of Azerbaijan against Artsakh. As the Ministry said in its May 25 statement, under international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions, the latter are considered prisoners of war and should have been immediately released after the end of hostilities. Azerbaijan has filed sham criminal cases against them, thus openly violating both the norms of international humanitarian law and its obligations under the trilateral statement of November 9, 2020: “Despite numerous calls from the international community, Azerbaijan continues to use Armenian prisoners of war as political hostages, and continues the policy of torture and psychological pressure on them. It should be noted that Azerbaijan has not yet prosecuted those who have committed atrocities and inhuman treatment towards Armenian prisoners of war and captured civilians, including killings, despite the fact that the perpetrators themselves documented their crimes and made them public.”

Armenia Rules out Border Demarcation Talks Until Azerbaijan Pulls out of Armenian Territory

WITHDRAWAL, from page 1

The heavily-redacted document, accompanied by allegations from Minassian himself that Pashinyan had agreed to hand over chunks of Armenian sovereign territory to Azerbaijan including half a dozen villages, sparked more protests in the Armenian capital as well as condemnation from opposition politicians. During an emergency parliament session held on Thursday, May 17, Bright Armenia Party leader Edmon Marukyan insisted that a bilateral agreement could not be signed by an interim government and insisted that the Prime Minister hold off until after the June 20 election.

This call was also supported by Transparency International's Armenian branch as well as several other civil liberties watchdogs. Human Rights Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan called on the government to publish the uncensored draft in its entirety to “prevent the outflow of information of such exclusive importance from unofficial sources, and avoid an irreversible loss of public trust in state bodies.”

The fully declassified draft agreement, which was published later that same day, revealed none of the attributions made by Minassian. Rather than an agreement to cede Armenian territory, the document commits Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia to form a border demarcation committee “in accordance with their respective national laws.” This committee would meet at the end of June at the earliest to discuss a framework for conducting future demarcation activities along the two countries' border. The document provides no timeline as to when such activities will commence or end.

Despite the innocuous nature of the draft agreement, some have expressed concern that Armenia would not be on an equal bargaining position as the loser of the recent war against a vengeful Azerbaijan. Three soviet-era exclaves of Azerbaijan, which lie entirely within Armenian territory, in Tavush and Ararat mazes respectively, have been the center of particular attention given their proximity to two of Armenia's

major international highway connections. During Thursday's parliamentary session, Security Council chairman Armen Grigoryan refuted the idea as being impractical. Indeed, none of those three exclaves, which have been under Armenian control since 1991, would be viable if handed to Azerbaijan. They are not accessible to mainland Azerbaijan which would make infrastructure projects and administrative tasks impossible. Grigoryan also reminded listeners that Azerbaijan also controls the Armenian exclave of Artsivashen which is larger than all three Azerbaijani exclaves combined, and holds strategic value due to its altitude.

During the same question period, Pashinyan also suggested that one likely outcome of the border demarcation is that the de facto frontier, which mostly follows a system of trenches across mountain tops built in during the First Karabakh War, might simply remain as is. A similar solution to the exclaves question had been part of the aborted 1996 peace treaty. “Azeri military positions remain on territory of the Republic of Armenia since the 1990s, similarly some Armenian trenches sit within the soviet-era boundaries of Azerbaijan,” Pashinyan said. Agreeing on an international border would be one way to solve this issue according to the prime minister, who suggested that negotiations may go on for years.

Currently, only Armenia's borders with Turkey and Iran are fully demarcated as both coincide with the former Soviet Union's international boundaries along the Arax river. A similar delimitation committee to the newly proposed one has yet to complete demarcation of the Armenian-Georgian border after almost thirty years of work.

While Pashinyan has deemed border demarcation to be a necessary process as part of the reintegration of regional trade routes, and thus providing easier access to new markets for Armenian goods, he has made it conditional on Azerbaijan respecting its commitments to the November 9

ceasefire agreement. “There's a chance that we might not even sign [the document]” Pashinyan announced to Parliament, adding “Nothing will be signed until Azeri troops withdraw from Armenian territory.”

Responding to the crisis, Baku denied that its troops were even inside Armenian territory, claiming instead that the entirety of Sev Lake falls within its own borders. In an attempt to soften decades-worth of racist and denigrating comments towards Armenians, Azeri dictator Ilham Aliyev told the Russian state-owned TASS agency that “Azeri and Armenian peoples need to learn to live side-by-side again.”

Despite faux-conciliatory rhetoric coming from Azerbaijani leadership, international pressure has continued to mount on Baku to pull its troops out of Armenian territory, free Armenian POWs from captivity and cease its belligerent rhetoric. The United States, Canada, Greece, India, Iran and France have all condemned Azerbaijan's aggression. The European Union recently voted to demand that Azerbaijan release Armenian prisoners of war. The EU's representative in Armenia, Ambassador Andrea Wiktoria, who visited Sev Lake as part of a delegation of European ambassadors and military attachés, confirmed Armenia's sovereignty over the area, saying “It's obvious from the maps that the greater part of Lake Sev is located in the territory of the Republic of Armenia.”

The ambassador also confirmed that the EU was using all levers at its disposal to support Armenia's sovereignty.

Back in Yerevan, Security Council Chair Gevorgyan explained that while Azerbaijan provoked this incident as a deliberate attempt to escalate tensions, Armenia has not yet exhausted its diplomatic means to solve the stand-off in its favor peacefully. The Ministry of Defense, for its part, confirmed that “the Armed Forces reserve the right to resolve the issue by any means, including force.” On Sunday, the Ministry reported that a portion of the Azeri forces in the area had already left, but some still remain.

Geghashen Launches Cultural Encounters

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

GEHASHEN, Armenia — Since early 2020, life has changed everywhere. The limitations imposed by public health measures to contain the Covid-19 pandemic have severely affected daily life, at work, at home and in school. In place of classroom instruction, students have learned to study by computer, not only math and history, but even music and dance.

Geghashen is no exception. The small town about 30 kilometers from Yerevan has a population of 4,000, and the basic infrastructure it requires. Like many small towns and villages in Armenia, it not only has a public school from grades 1 to 12 (a new kindergarten is in the works), but also offers musical education, for a monthly fee. There used to be library in the Geghashen Cultural Center, but lack of heating made it uninhabitable. A proposal was floated in late 2019 to turn the library over to the school and Mariam Kazaryan, head of the cultural center as well as director of the music school, immediately agreed.

She developed the idea of a loft-style facility that would offer the services of a

library and also function as a center for cultural activities. Youngsters and adults could use it as a reading room, but, with the appropriate technical equipment, like wi-fi, computer, television and a large viewing screen, they could see opera and ballet productions; art students could watch films about famous painters and so forth. If adequately furnished, the room could also host seminars and lectures.

Kazaryan launched a fundraising drive in the community and also received support from private foundations; enough money was raised by March 2020 to secure the financing and in May renovation began. The new reading room is the only loft-style library in the Kotayq region. First the area had to be fully renovated, heating installed, the walls plastered and painted. Kazaryan's colleagues and students mobilized to get the job done.

“Our colleague Suren helped a lot,” she wrote, “implementing all our ideas. He painted, renovated certain things so we would not have to purchase them.” The art teacher brought her baby with her to the renovation site, so she could also lend a hand. The students did the painting and

decorating, the local authorities donated books, classical as well as modern works, and the librarian arranged all the books on the shelves. The cleaning lady also pitched in.

By June 2020, the new furniture arrived, by August the place looked good and by Christmas it was finished. Due to public health considerations, they could not hold an official opening ceremony, but the news went out on Facebook and through the community. Kazaryan was the one who developed the concept for the facility, selected the furniture, proposed the decorations and oversaw the entire project. (She managed also to tend to her second child, a son born in February 2021.)

Now the library/reading room is officially open. From the beginning of the project to its completion, the pandemic hovered like a dark cloud over everyone and everything. Those who were not directly affected by sickness suffered the psychological impact, then came the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Geghashen's citizens have made the best of a difficult time, building their way out, so to speak, and establishing new material conditions for reviving cultural life in the community.



ARMENIA

Human Rights Defenders of Armenia and Artsakh Present Evidence on Azerbaijan War Crimes to PACE Rapporteur

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — On May 25, the Human Rights Defender of Armenia Arman Tatoyan and the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh Gegham Stepanyan hosted the representative appointed by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Paul Gavan and the PACE Migration Committee Secretary Mark Neville, who were in Armenia for the preparatory work of the report titled “The humanitarian consequences of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.”

As the Ombudsman’s Office reported, Mr. Arman Tatoyan emphasized the importance of the CoE Rappeurture’s initiative and visit to Armenia. The Human Rights Defender also emphasized the importance of the visit of the Rappeurture to the border areas of the Gegharkunik and Syunik regions, since the report would not be objective and complete without getting acquainted with the situation created on the ground and holding meetings with the border residents.

In his turn, the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh Mr. Gegham Stepanyan noted that international human rights organizations should visit Artsakh to protect the rights of the people living there. The PACE has resolutions through which it considers the protection of human rights important in the territory of the CoE, irrespective of the recognition of the independence of a state. G. Stepanyan also referred to the Azerbaijani policy of isolating Artsakh; however, the international community should consider that the political status of a territory should not have an effect on the protection of human rights (women, children, persons with disabilities, etc.).

Tatoyan and Stepanyan presented a report on the war crimes committed by the



The Armenian and Artsakh delegation, left, speak with the PACE representatives.

Azerbaijani armed forces during the September-November 2020 war based on the analysis of around 300 videos and photos of Azerbaijani atrocities against Armenian servicemen and civilians, the destruction and desecration of the Armenian historical, cultural and religious heritage, and the use of banned weapons, which were sent to international organizations.

The Human Rights Defenders of Armenia and Artsakh underlined that the highest bodies of the Azerbaijani authorities continue the policy of Armenophobia and enmity towards Armenians. This is evidenced, for example, by the opening of the so-called “exhibition-park” in Baku on the September-November 2020 war.

Moreover, the fact the Azerbaijani crimes against Armenians are ethnically motivated, and encouraged the authorities, is also confirmed by a number of European Court of Human Rights decisions.

Tatoyan called the attention of the PACE representatives on the Armenophobic speeches of the President of Azerbaijan, and stressed that those speeches further incite Armenophobia in the Azerbaijani society. Within this context, the Defender presented the most used Armenophobic statements of the President of Azerbaijan, and showed videos depicting certain representatives of the Azerbaijani armed forces using the same terminologies while torturing Armenian servicemen and civilians.

During the meeting, Tatoyan and Stepanyan referred to the urgency of the return of the Armenian captives in Azerbaijan, noting that the policy of the Azerbaijani authorities grossly violates the international requirements of the protection of the rights of the captives, and has caused mental suffering to their relatives.

It was specifically emphasized that the Azerbaijani authorities are artificially protracting and politicizing the process of release and return of the captives.

Tatoyan referred to the tense situation on the borders of the Gegharkunik and Syunik regions. He presented the results of the fact-finding activities of the Office in the Gegharkunik and Syunik regions, in relation to the gross violations of the rights of the border residents of Armenia as a result of the illegal presence of Azerbaijani armed servicemen in the sovereign territory of Armenia since May 12, 2021.

Presenting the illegal actions of the Azerbaijani armed forces, Tatoyan concluded that the evidences obtained by the Defender of Human Rights of Armenia confirm the absolute necessity of creating a security zone to ensure the rights of the border residents of Armenia, as proposed by the Defender.

Stepanyan called the attention of the PACE Rappeurture on the humanitarian situation in Artsakh after the war, noting that 120 Artsakh communities remain under Azerbaijani control, and more than 38,000 persons have been displaced from those communities, including 11,000 children. A part of the displaced population, around 13,000 persons have returned to Artsakh, while 25,000 persons are outside the territories of Artsakh.

Stepanyan presented the issues related to the minimum living conditions and the social situation of the displaced persons, and underlined the urgent need for international humanitarian assistance. The Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh referred to the policy of destroying the Armenian cultural and religious heritage in the areas under Azerbaijani control, presenting concrete examples.

Stepanyan emphasized the role of the bodies of the Council of Europe in the restoration of human rights in the post-war period and prevention of new atrocities.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the parties reached an agreement of future collaboration.

Monument Watch: Academics Join Forces to Save Armenian Heritage in Artsakh from Destruction

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Historian and archaeologist Hamlet Petrosyan (Yerevan State University) and Anna Leyloyan-Yekmalyan (State Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations, INALCO, Paris) have brought together archaeologists, architects, cultural anthropologists and many other experts to launch Monument Watch, a project dedicated to the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage in the parts of Artsakh which was captured by the Azerbaijani military during the course of the 2020 war, given the Azeri state-sanctioned destruction or distortion of the Armenian monuments documented on several occasions.

Both during and after the 2020 war, the Azeri authorities have deliberately targeted Armenian cultural and spiritual monuments. For example, the iconic Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in the city of Shushi was bombed twice during the war, and now many months since the fighting ended and the Azeris took control over the city, they started distorting the cathedral in what the Armenian foreign ministry described as “manifestations of vandalism, aimed at depriving the Shushi Mother Cathedral of its Armenian identity.”

The Armenian Church in Mekhakavan was also targeted, with Azeri authorities completely demolishing it — a fact proven by a [BBC investigation](#).

Since the specialists at Monument Watch don’t have the opportunity to inspect the monuments in-person, they will conduct the monitoring online on various platforms. “It is clear that [our monuments] will either be demolished or distorted. The destruction of Armenian monuments is part of Azerbaijan’s government policy. They are trying to appropriate Armenian heritage also,” Leyloyan-Yekmalyan said.

The official website of [Monument Watch](#) lists the following goals: to map and inventory (the condition before the war) the immovable cultural heritage, museums, cultural centers of Artsakh-Azerbaijani border zone and of those territories of the Artsakh Republic, which as a result of the 44 day war passed under the control of Azerbaijan; to ratificate the current state (destruction, alteration, reuse, deletion and modification of sculptures, images, inscriptions, use of new symbols, etc.), as well as; to introduce the changes to the international scientific and cultural community.

Leyloyan-Yekmalyan says there are more than 4,000 monuments in Artsakh, and more than 1,700 are now in danger.



Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in the city of Shushi after being bombed

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Dutch Parliament Passes Resolution Demanding Azerbaijan Withdraw from Armenia

THE HAGUE (Armenpress) — The Dutch parliament this week adopted a resolution, calling on the government to make efforts so as the EU should demand Azerbaijan to immediately withdraw troops from the Armenian territory. The Armenian Embassy in the Netherlands reported that the resolution particularly runs as follows, “After hearing the debates, recording that Azerbaijani troops had invaded the Armenian territory, and aiming to prevent a possible escalation of the conflict, the Chamber calls on the government to insist in the (European) Council to join French President Macron’s demand addressed to Azerbaijan for immediate withdrawal of troops.”

Mongolian Ambassador Presents Credentials

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Newly-appointed Ambassador of Mongolia to Armenia Davaa Dulamsuren (residence in Moscow, Russia) presented his credentials to President Armen Sarkissian, the Presidential Office announced on May 25. Sarkissian congratulated the ambassador on his appointment. The two discussed the development prospects of the Armenian-Mongolian relations. Given that there are good cooperation traditions between the two countries in particular in the fields of education and science, they both emphasized deepening the mutual partnership in particular in the fields of information and high technologies. Dulamsuren said Mongolia is interested in developing the relations with Armenia and stated that he himself is ready to contribute to the deepening of the ties between the two countries with his activity.

No Provocative Actions Against Peacekeepers in Artsakh in Past Week, Russia Says

MOSCOW (Panorama.am) — Military personnel of the Russian peacekeeping contingent continue to monitor compliance with the ceasefire and ensure the safety of motor transport, transportation of food and various goods along the Lachin corridor, the Russian Defense Ministry reported on May 25. Over the past week, no ceasefire violations were recorded in the area of responsibility of the peacekeeping contingent, no provocative actions against Russian servicemen were noted. All observation posts of the Russian peacekeeping contingent are equipped with Blockpost fortifications designed to protect military personnel from small arms and shrapnel, as well as to conduct circular surveillance of the nearby territory. “Our main task is to monitor compliance with the ceasefire agreement, as well as to ensure the safety of civilian transport along the route,” said post commander Sergei Ivanov.

Bust of Charles Aznavour Inaugurated in Paris



From left, Ambassador Hasmik Tolmadjian, Mayor Anne Hidalgo, Aida Aznavour, and Chantal Lambert-Burens, deputy mayor of the 6th sector of Paris in front of bust



Nicolas Aznavour speaking

By Jean Eckian

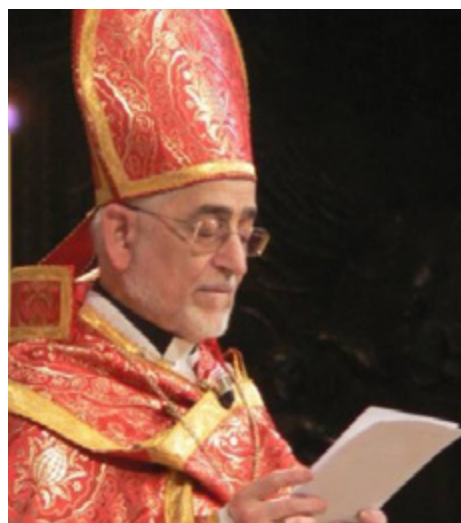
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PARIS — On Saturday, May 22, the anniversary of the birth of the famous singer Charles Aznavour in 1924, a bust in his image, offered by the Aznavour Foundation, was inaugurated in Paris by the mayor of the French capital, Anne Hidalgo. The family of the artist, including Charles’s sister, Aida Aznavour, 98, and Nicolas, the younger son of Charles, was present along with Hasmik Tolmadjian, ambassador of Armenia in France.

The inauguration took place emotionally in the memory of the man with 1,200 songs, near Rue Monsieur Le Prince, where the singer lived as a child with his sister Aida. On May 21, 2019, a plaque was inaugurated at No. 36 on the same street.

Many public figures from the Armenian community in France were present for this event covered by a swarm of journalists.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, preceded by Nicolas Aznavour, paid tribute to the artist. Nicolas indicated that another bust of Charles Aznavour was unveiled the same day in Stepanakert. In her speech, the mayor also called for “universal recognition of the Armenian genocide, a dark page in our history,” which the parents of Charles Aznavour had fled. She denounced “negationism, this propaganda which reappears, here and there, including on our territory [in France].”



BEIRUT (Armenpress) — Krikor Bedros XX Gabroyan, the Catholicos-Patriarch of Cilicia of the Armenian Catholic Church has died at the age of 86 in Beirut, Lebanon, on May 25.

Gabroyan had been inaugurated Patriarch in 2015.

Also known as Gregory Peter XX Gabroyan and Grégoire Pierre XX Ghabroyan was elected on July 24, 2015 and was enthroned on August 9, 2015.

He replaced Nerses Bedros XIX Tarmouni.

Lavrov Praises Russia’s Ties With Armenia

MOSCOW (RFE/RL) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has praised the current state of Russia’s relationship with Armenia, speaking of unprecedented “political dialogue” between the two states.

“Russian-Armenian relations have passed the test of time and I have no doubts that they will continue to develop in the spirit of mutual trust, strategic cooperation and allied partnership,” Lavrov told the *Argumenty i Fakty* newspaper in an interview published on Monday, May 24.

“Our country is always ready to stand by the brotherly Armenian people,” he said. “This is evidenced by mediation efforts by Russia and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin personally thanks to which hostilities [in Nagorno-Karabakh] were stopped and a process of settling the situation in the region was launched.”

“There is an unprecedentedly active political dialogue based on mutual trust between us at the high and other levels. There have already been two meetings and numerous phone calls between the leaders of Armenia and Russia this year,” he said, adding that bilateral commercial ties are also expanding.

Lavrov insisted that the Russian-brokered agreement that stopped the Armenian-Azerbaijani war in November is being

implemented despite Baku’s continuing refusal to release more than 100 Armenian soldiers and civilians remaining in Azerbaijani captivity.

The agreement calls for the unconditional release of all prisoners held by the conflicting parties.

Armenia maintains that Azerbaijan further violated it by sending troops across several sections of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border earlier this month. It says that at least 500 Azerbaijani soldiers remain within Armenia’s internationally recognized borders.

The resulting standoff between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces has led the Armenian government to formally ask Russia and the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for military assistance.

Moscow has responded by calling for a delimitation and demarcation of the border and offering to act as a mediator in that process. A relevant Armenian-Azerbaijani drafted by it has caused a stir in Yerevan, with opposition politicians and other critics of the government accusing Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of being ready to cede Armenian territory to Baku.

Lavrov did not comment on Yerevan’s request of Russian military support.



Community News

GoFundMe Campaign for Lebanese-Armenian Diner Who Protected Jews in L.A. Attack Raises \$36,000

By Tabby Refael

LOS ANGELES (*Jewish Journal*) — On the evening of Tuesday, May 18, a pro-Palestinian mob attacked a group of diners at the Sushi Fumi restaurant on La Cienega Boulevard. Video footage showed the assailants shouting racial slurs and throwing glass bottles before physically assaulting several diners, three of whom were young Jewish men; the fourth, a local photographer, was a young man who identifies as an Armenian-Lebanese Christian. The group was at the restaurant to discuss planning a wedding. A witness told CBSLA that dozens of assailants stepped out of their vehicles and asked diners, “Who’s Jewish?”

When he witnessed other members of his group being physically assaulted, the non-Jewish diner tried to defend them. He was taken to the hospital and treated for his injuries, and has since been released. But in the span of two short days, word of his bravery has spread across the world, from the United States to Israel. The Los Angeles Police Department is investigating the incident as an antisemitic hate crime.

When Michael Yadegaran, a Santa Monica-based attorney specializing in labor and employment law, heard that the diner had been hospitalized, he decided to help. Though he didn’t know the man personally, Yadegaran was able to speak with him and, hours after the assault, received his permission to create a GoFundMe campaign for his recovery, which has currently raised \$36,000 in less than 48 hours.

Yadegaran’s family escaped Iran on the eve of 1979 Islamic Revolution, in hopes of raising their future children in a democratic society free of antisemitism. He is a co-founder of 30 Years After, a non-partisan, non-profit local organization which promotes the participation and leadership of 30 Years After in American civic, political and Jewish life. The Journal spoke to Yadegaran about his recent actions.

Jewish Journal: What motivated you to create a GoFundMe campaign on behalf of someone you had never met?

Michael Yadegaran: My brother sent me a viral video of the attack soon after it happened Tuesday night. I know one of the diners personally; the three Jewish diners were all Iranian American Jews. Initially, I was furious and disturbed when I watched the video, and I wanted to make sure this sort of attack didn’t metastasize. At first, I didn’t know who he [the non-Jewish diner] was.

The next morning, I saw posts that he was Armenian-Lebanese, and that’s what really stood out [to] me, the fact that someone else was really standing up for us [Jews], that it wasn’t just us alone. I watched more of the video and saw how brutally the attackers came and tried to beat him.

see CAMPAIGN, page 7



Rancho Cordova, CA, Recognizes Artsakh’s Independence

By Andranik Poladyan,
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

RANCHO CORDOVA, Calif. — Prior to the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the Rancho Cordova City Council, with the leadership of Mayor Garrett Gatewood and Councilman David Sander, unanimously adopted a resolution on April 19, 2021 recognizing the right to self-determination and independence of the citizens of the Republic of Artsakh, at the request of Andranik Poladyan, Naomi Matevosyan Poladyan, Habet Poladyan, and Arman Antonyan. Furthermore, Mayor Garrett Gatewood issued a proclamation on January 28, 2021 recognizing Artsakh as a free and independent country.

Rancho Cordova is a city located in Sacramento County and was officially incorporated as a city in 2003 and was granted the 2019 All-American City Award. The city is home to a sizeable Armenian-American community, many of whom immigrated in the early 1990s from the Republics of Artsakh and Armenia.

Andranik Poladyan told the city council: “I, on behalf of your Armenian-American constituents, express my appreciation and gratitude for the City Council’s time, consideration, and cooperation in accomplishing this important victory. It is an honor to accept the resolution and proclamation from the city on behalf of the community, and the greater Sacramento region. It is promising to see Rancho Cordova uphold the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for the citizens of Artsakh. We are pleased to know that the city’s leadership is with us.”

After the passage of the resolution, Councilman David Sander declared: “The right of a people to self-determination is at the very root of our democracy and our cherished freedoms in the United States. In Rancho Cordova, a relatively new city where our own residents declared their freedom from Sacramento County just a few short years ago, that message of freedom and self-determination rings true and is a cause we fully understand. That is why we in Rancho Cordova are proud to support the request of our quite numerous Armenian residents to rally opinion and support for the right of

see PROCLAMATION, page 6

Azerbaijan and Turkey on USCIRF Special Watch List For Concerns Over Religious Freedom

WASHINGTON — Azerbaijan and Turkey have been placed on a Special Watch List for concerns over religious freedom and cultural desecration, particularly in relation to the Armenian people, according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2021 Annual Report released last month, reported the Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly).

The 108-page report recommended placing both Azerbaijan and Turkey on the “USCIRF Special Watch List” on account of egregious violations of religious freedom in both countries, including “recent violations committed amid renewed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territories.”

In the section on Azerbaijan, the report detailed findings in the context of active fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh in late September 2020 that “prompted serious concerns about the preservation of Armenian places of worship and other religious sites in those areas,” including the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi, which was “targeted and shelled” by Azerbaijani forces two times, “resulting in extensive damage to that building and possibly constituting a war crime.”

Despite the November 2020 ceasefire agreement, the report stated that the “recent vandalization and destruction of Armenian cemeteries and gravestones” by Azerbaijan were documented by media outlets.

Recommendations to the U.S. Government by the USCIRF include, among others, adding Azerbaijan on the U.S. Department of State’s Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), and for the U.S. Congress to hold public hearings to investigate Azerbaijan’s religious freedom and broader human rights abuses.

Key findings in Turkey regarding religious freedom conditions “continued to follow a troubling trajectory,” according to the report. Religious sites, including places of worship and cemeteries, were “subject to vandalism, damage, and, in some cases, destruction, which the government regularly fails to prevent or punish.”

The report specifically cited two incidents in May 2020, in which “an individual attempted to set fire to an Armenian church” and another “scaled the gate of another Armenian church and tore down its cross.”

USCIRF recommendations included adding Turkey on the U.S. Department of State’s Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), requiring a thorough review regarding the inclusion of objects that constitute the religious and cultural heritage of religious and ethnic minority communities - previ

see WATCH LIST, page 7

COMMUNITY NEWS

Prof. George Bournoutian Receives Society For Armenian Studies Lifetime Achievement Award

FRESNO — On May 14, the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) sponsored a special event in honor of Prof. George Bournoutian, a prominent scholar of Armenian Studies. Prof. Bournoutian was recognized by the SAS for his outstanding service and contribution to the field of Armenian Studies during his more than forty-year career in the field. Born and raised in Isfahan, Iran, Bournoutian is the author of more than 30 books, particularly focusing on Armenian, Iranian and Caucasian history. His books have been translated into Armenian, Farsi, Turkish, Polish, Japanese, Spanish, and Arabic.

Bournoutian is one of 40 editors of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* as well. He has taught Iranian history at UCLA, and Armenian history at Columbia University, Tufts University, New York University, Rutgers University, the University of Connecticut, Ramapo College, and Glendale Community College and Russian and Soviet history at Iona College.

The special event took place via Zoom and featured Prof. Sebouh Aslanian, Richard Hovannisian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History and Director of the Armenian Studies Center housed within The Promise Armenian Institute (University of California, Los Angeles), Dr. Asya Darbinyan (Clark University), and Prof. Stephen Badalyan Riegg (Texas A & M University). The scholars spoke about Bournoutian's contribution to the field of Armenian, Iranian, and Russian studies.

Aslanian discussed Bournoutian's contribution to the field of early modern Armenian history. He specifically discussed Bournoutian's most of important translations



and commentaries of early Modern Armenian texts: *The Travel Accounts of Simeon of Poland* (2009), *The History of Arakel Vardapet of Tabriz* (2010), *Armenians and Russia, 1626-1796: A Documentary Record* (2001), and Katoghikos Simeon of Erevan's *Jambr* (2009). Aslanian situated these works in the larger context of understanding the early Modern Period. "More than any other scholar in our field, Bournoutian has not only identified the key Armenian-language primary sources of this period but more importantly made them accessible to a larger body of scholars through his reliable and readable English-language translations," said Aslanian. "The upshot of a lifetime of dedicated translation work is a set of foundational texts that has informed and inspired numerous scholars in fields auxiliary to Armenian studies who have long known of these sources but were unable to profit from them due to the obstacles of language."

Darbinyan highlighted Bournoutian's contribution to the understanding of Transcaucasia from political and socio-economic perspectives. She specifically concentrated on his *Eastern Armenia in the Last Decades of*

Persian Rule, 1807-1828 (1982) and *The Khanate of Erevan under Qajar Rule, 1795-1828* (1992). "Prof. Bournoutian's tremendous body of research allows us to look at the past of the South Caucasus in its intricate details," stated Darbinyan. "The research opens a door to understanding Transcaucasia in its past relationships with the local imperial powers, as well as in the larger context of 'The Great Game,' and draw some conclusions about the present geopolitical interests of the Western and regional powers."

Badalyan Riegg spoke about Bournoutian's contribution to the history of Russian imperialism in the first decades of the 19th century. He discussed the ways in which Bournoutian's translations of rare primary sources have elucidated various aspects of the Russian administrative, social, political and military machinery in the South Caucasus for scholars. He specifically concentrated on Bournoutian's latest work *From the Kur to Aras: A Military History of Russia's Move into the South Caucasus and the First Russo-Iranian War* (2020) which is military history of the Russo-Iranian War between 1801-1813. "To my knowledge, no other scholar, writing in English or Russian, has examined this conflict in such detail," commented Badalyan Riegg. "Bournoutian meticulously documents every armed unit, movement, skirmish, and tense debate between the two combatants and among the various allies."

"I am extremely honored to receive the SAS Lifetime Achievement Award," stated Bournoutian. "Being acknowledged by your peers is the best satisfaction one can hope for. I am also happy to know that our new generation of scholars are better equipped and have already produced significant works. I can sleep well knowing that the torch is in capable hands."

In his concluding remarks, SAS President Prof. Bedross Der Matossian thanked all the attendees who attended, albeit virtually, to honor one of the esteemed scholars of Armenian Studies. He said that the fact that three important scholars spoke about Bournoutian's contribution to the field is itself a testimony to Bournoutian's impact on and legacy to the field.

"Bournoutian's scholarship has always been relevant. However, today it is much more needed as Armenia and Artsakh are facing monumental challenges due to the 2020 War," stated Der Matossian. "One of these challenges deals with falsification of Artsakh's history by Azeri scholars. Bournoutian has been on the forefront of combatting this revisionist history which has now entered western academia."

Rancho Cordova, CA, Recognizes Artsakh's Independence

PROCLAMATION, from page 5
self-determination for their brethren in the Republic of Artsakh, and also point out the horror of the failure of such rights around the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. It's our sincere desire that other governments and world attention be focused on these human rights issues that are so dear to Armenians everywhere, and to the residents of the Republic of Artsakh in particular."

Mayor Garrett Gatewood said: "The City of Rancho Cordova recently passed a resolution recognizing the independence of the Republic of Artsakh. We passed this to recognize the independence of the citizens of the Republic of Artsakh, to encourage them to continue to develop as a free independent nation, and to lend support for freedom, justice and lasting peace to the Armenian Highlands Region."

Let this be one more example to other cities and towns all over the nation where Armenians reside, that recognition at the grass-roots level is very doable and highly important in putting pressure on the federal government to officially recognize the independence and self-determination of the Artsakh Republic. As stated in the Resolution, "the Armenian people's will to survive, to flourish, and to contribute to humanity remains resolute." Our survival is the great victory. God Bless Rancho Cordova, CA, the USA, and the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh.



From right to left, Mayor Garrett Gatewood, Arman Antonyan, Habet Poladyan, Andranik Poladyan, Councilman David Sander, Councilwoman Siri Pulipati



COMMUNITY NEWS

GoFundMe Campaign For Lebanese-Armenian Diner Who Protected Jews in L.A. Attack Raises \$36,000

CAMPAIGN, from page 5

That part really got me. I just wanted to make sure he knew that we support him and appreciate what he did.

JJ: How were you able to reach this young man?

MY: I asked my friend who was part of the group of diners to put me in touch with him. I messaged him directly, and we connected on Wednesday afternoon [less than one day after the attack]. He was out of the hospital and sounded really tired and overwhelmed.

JJ: What did you tell him?

MY: I told him that he did something that was touching people on both sides and was especially bringing together our community.

JJ: How did he respond?

MY: He just kept saying, "I didn't do this for money. I just saw my friends getting attacked. One was on the pavement and about to get kicked, so I had to do something to take attention from the others." He basically sacrificed himself. I believe he understands exactly what his actions have meant to us.

I told him that I wanted his permission to create a GoFundMe campaign and that his information and picture would be anonymous to protect his safety. I wanted to raise funds as part medical expenses and part gratitude. I'm not sure if he has medical insurance, and these sorts of injuries don't fully present themselves until a little while after the fact. I just want to make sure that all the victims have more than enough to cover any medical expenses, though the vast majority of the funds will go to the fourth diner.

JJ: How can others help?

MY: There are always ways to help. We made an initial fundraising goal of \$10,000. When we met that, it became \$26,000. We're going to stop the campaign at \$36,000. For my part, I just clicked a couple of buttons. Someone needed to take the initiative to do it. It was clear how touched people were by his actions. We haven't had many people by our side for one reason or another, and it was wonderful to see that he just leapt into action. It was one of the very few moments in this recent conflagration that things were very black and white.

I think it would be nice to patronize his business. What he did should serve to rehabilitate the connection between our community and the Armenian community, because a lot of my Armenian friends in Los Angeles felt betrayed that Israel seemed to

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take sides with Azerbaijan over the summer...

JJ: What kind of person is this young man?

MY: He's just a very humble, decent guy. He wants to basically push away any recognition of what he did. It's probably very overwhelming, but he said he's getting hundreds of messages of gratitude. I told him that once he's recovered, I want to come over with some friends and a box of pizza and to make sure he's okay. He agreed and said that he'll make the baklava.

The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada would like to thank the following individuals for their donations to its Sponsor a Teacher Program in memory of Nora Azadian, along with the individuals mentioned in last week's *Mirror-Spectator*.



Douglas Manoogian, Albion, MI, \$150

George and Debra Alexanian, Ann Arbor, MI, \$100

Alice Asadoorian, Adam Asadoorian, Hazel Kabodian, Rochester Hills, MI \$100

Dr. Jack Chelebian, Corpus Christi, TX, \$100

Mihran and Roslyn Minassian, Burlington, MA \$100

Richard and Mona Kurjian, Farmington Hills, MI \$50

Ilda Misirlyan, Southfield, MI, \$50

Azerbaijan and Turkey on USCIRF Special Watch

WATCH LIST, from page 6

ously or currently residing within the territory of the Republic of Turkey - in any designated list of materials subject to import restrictions under a bilateral cultural property agreement between the United States and Turkey, and supporting cultural and educational exchanges that highlight the histories and contributions of those communities. In addition, recommendations called for the U.S. Congress to incorporate consideration of Turkey's treatment of religious minorities and broader human rights issues into its continued evaluation of the U.S.-Turkey bilateral relationship.

"We remain deeply concerned about Azerbaijan's ongoing desecration of Armenian cultural heritage and religious sites as well as the plight of minority communities in Turkey," said Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan. "We look forward to seeing USCIRF's recommendations put into action."

COMMUNITY NEWS

Able to Save Eight Tons of Food in a Single Day

By Andy Newman

NEW YORK (*New York Times*) — By the time Jon Stepanian pulled his beat-up Dodge van out of a Trader Joe's parking lot on Long Island late one recent afternoon, it contained more than eight tons of scavenged food: romaine and romanesco, Bulgarian yogurt and Key lime mousse, flats of organic strawberries and cartons of frisée, dragonfruit and kumquats and olive-size baby kiwis, wedges of \$28.99-a-pound Gabietou cheese and balls of local mozzarella and cases of vanilla Almond Breeze. Not just plain old whole-wheat bread but sourdough bread and olive bread and Balthazar baguettes, plus challah and pretzel rolls and blueberry scones, paleo “noodles” made from julienned rutabaga, Soothing Touch Tuscan Bouquet brown sugar scrub and prebiotic cleaning foam with rose-stem cells, a 30-pound box of prunes — “like a box of bricks,” Mr. Stepanian said as he hefted it — and more than \$1,000 worth of oranges.

Stepanian, a co-founder of a nonprofit called Community Solidarity that feeds 15,000 people a week, had spent the day hopscotching across the mallscape of central Long Island from one giant supermarket to the next. He was headed to a pop-up food pantry to give it all away.

“When we unload,” he said, “the crazy part is, within 45 minutes, all this food is gone.”

Fifteen months into the pandemic, hunger still grips the region. Government food programs remain in overdrive. Big, well-known distributors like City Harvest, which move salvaged food by the tractor-trailer load, have doubled their deliveries. But need persists: In late March, nearly one in 10 households with children in the New York Metro area — more than half a million families — said they “sometimes” or “often” did not have enough to eat, according to a census survey.

At the same time, grocers discard enormous quantities of food each week, much of which has never even made it onto the shelves. Enter the volunteer food rescuers.

Food rescue groups come in all shapes and sizes. But their members share a conviction that for a single can of beans to go to waste at a time of crisis is a moral crime.

“My friend will text me and she’ll say, ‘My boyfriend was riding his bike home from work, and he just rode past a dumpster full of zucchini,’” said Lucy Lesser, who volunteers with an anarchist network in Brooklyn called In Our Hearts. She was headed to the East New York headquarters of Agape Food Rescue, a shoestring operation run out of a decommissioned ambulance, to pick up a load of pastries from a bakery in Bushwick and produce from a distributor at Brooklyn Terminal Market.

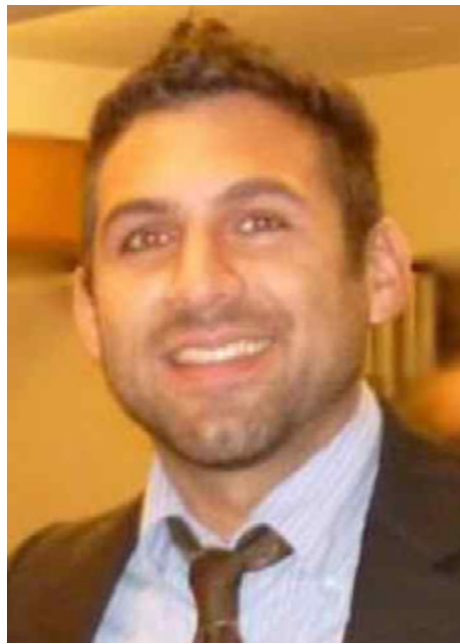
“It becomes a lifestyle,” said Agape’s founder, Jeanette Lugo, a retired Marine with a salt-and-pepper brush cut. “At first it becomes something you volunteer for, then it’s something you do, then it becomes a feature of who you are. I stopped being Jeanette about three years ago and now I’m just Agape Food Rescue.”

Some people in the world of hunger relief are skeptical about feeding people supermarket rejects rather than food bought by charity dollars or government programs. “The poor don’t deserve the rich people’s garbage,” said Alex Rapaport, executive director of the kosher Masbia Soup Kitchen Network.

But rescue also has its place in his operation, which runs round-the-clock pantries in Brooklyn and Queens. On St. Patrick’s Day, he sent a truck to the Hunts Point food

hub in the Bronx to pick up 47 cases of hot dogs, salami, kielbasa and chicken parts from a high-end kosher meat purveyor, Grow & Behold. The kielbasa was being donated because the texture was slightly too soft. “I’m not going to sell it at a premium price to my customers, but I’m not going to let it go to waste,” said Naftali Hanau, Grow & Behold’s C.E.O.

Masbia’s driver took it to the group’s pantry in Forest Hills, Queens, where it was set out on tables alongside staples like eggs, cooking oil, apples and sugar and a seemingly limitless supply of Manischewitz cold-brew-coffee-flavored maca-



Jon Stepanian

rooms. “They didn’t like the flavor so they gave us nine or 10 pallets of it,” Rapaport said.

Often, Rapaport said, rescue is more trouble than it is worth. “A lot of food rescue puts more gasoline on the street than the value of the food,” he said. But Ms. Lugo, who specializes in pop-up pantries outside public-housing complexes that sometimes serve only a dozen people, said that efficiency was not the point.

“It can be three boxes of something,” she said, “but what we keep in our mind is there’s three people that got food that day. The point is there could have been someone who woke up that morning and they had nothing and they wished they had something.”

The landscape of surplus food is impossibly vast; waste is built into the whole business model of the food industry. People hear “food rescue” and picture loaves of day-old bread and bags of bruised apples, but that’s just a very small part of it, Stepanian of Community Solidarity says.

Stores throw out fruit because it’s actually ripe — shoppers seem to prefer their avocados rock-hard. Grocers throw out case after case of “mispicks” — cartons that say one thing but contain another. Stepanian’s haul that Thursday in early March included pineapple juice mislabeled as pickles, barbecue sauce labeled as jerky and potato chips in a box that said macaroni and cheese.

If a big store gauges demand slightly wrong and takes delivery on a couple more pallets of bananas than it has room for, they will go directly to the dumpster. Sometimes, Stepanian said, a store will get a new product before its official release date and have no room to hold it. This is how Community Solidarity’s food-pantry clients received pints of the nondairy version of Ben & Jerry’s Americone Dream ice cream weeks before it appeared in your bodega’s freezer.

Sometimes an entire truck will be a

mispick — a delivery to the wrong store. When that happens, Stepanian says, “They’ll say, ‘You have two hours to get down here and clear out this tractor-trailer.’”

(Such profligacy is hardly unique to the grocery industry. “This level of waste that’s here, this is with everything,” Stepanian said. “This is with clothing, this is with school supplies, with toys.” A seasoned dumpster diver, he described fishing new laptops and projectors out of the garbage at Staples. He said that a national housewares chain has a policy of detonating paint bombs inside its trash containers to make excess merchandise worthless.)

Community Solidarity has built its network of donor stores painstakingly, one connection at a time, befriending employees, learning to ride the waves of food that flow in and out the back door. The group has achieved a level of access that would not seem possible in the locked-down world of corporate supermarket behemoths. Most chains, Stepanian said, decline to donate food because they can simply write off what they toss. “It’s more efficient for them and more cost-effective to throw it out than to donate it, unless I’m here,” he said.

At a Whole Foods in Jericho, Stepanian, a scruffy 36-year-old with piercing blue eyes, wheeled a hand truck through the labyrinthine corridors of the store’s backstage like a junkman of old, stopping at Produce and Dairy and Prepared Foods and calling out greetings to familiar faces. He has supplied the stores with sturdy plastic bins that say “Donation” on them, and he often takes out their garbage.

“As long as you’re not in people’s way, they’ll start giving you more and more and more until eventually you get this much,” he said, gesturing at his stacks of boxes.

Stepanian, who typically works from 7 a.m. to midnight, has taken only two days off since the pandemic started. He receives a modest salary as the C.E.O. of Community Solidarity but when asked how he supports himself, he answered: “This is Long Island. I live with my parents.”

While he made his rounds, from Westbury to Commack to Plainview, a half-dozen other Community Solidarity volunteers were calling at stores in Merrick and Sayville and Lake Grove. They converged at dusk on a traffic triangle across from a strip of Mexican restaurants and storefront churches in Farmingville, a hamlet in the middle of the island with a big immigrant population. Volunteers put on headlamps and filled boxes with fresh fruits and vegetables, cartons of eggs, vegan brownies and Bundt cakes and three or four kinds of bread. “Jesus got nothing on us,” one volunteer cracked.

The line of cars waiting for food snaked down Horseblock Road and around a corner. Just after 8, the food share opened for business and volunteers raced from car to car like a pit crew at Indianapolis. “All right! Two in here!” “Four here! All the way down!” “I need two gluten-free!” “Back seat or trunk?” When the dust cleared, 261 people had each received at least a week’s worth of groceries.

At a Foodtown in Jackson Heights, Queens, on a Wednesday morning in early April, pickings were slim for the Agape Food Rescue crew. The manager wheeled out a stack of Streit’s Passover matzo, some jerk-flavored Old El Paso World Taco Kits and a couple of cases of pasta. That was about it.

Half an hour later the Agape ambulance pulled up in front of the Ocean Hill public housing complex in Brownsville, Brook-

lyn. Up went the yellow awning and the folding table. Eugenia Maisonet, 72, a retired clothing-store worker, said she would have no problem consuming a five-pound case of matzo. “I would have it with cheese, coffee, butter,” she said. “I could crush it and put it when you’re doing the meatloaf, like bread crumbs.”

Priscella Edwards, 35, took several packages of black squid-ink spaghetti. “I’ve got four kids, make it work,” she said. “I’ll just tell them it’s the healthy kind of noodles.”

Ms. Lugo’s phone rang. Her ringtones are sorted by category. A snippet of “My Favorite Things” means a call from a supermarket. “God Is Love” means a fellow chaplain. The hiccupping five-note hook from “Mi Gente” means a food pantry. This one was “Mi Gente.” She picked up. “Hi, Rev!”

It was Hector Lozada, who runs a Wednesday pantry at a Pentecostal church in East New York. He had several dozen bags of groceries left. Ms. Lugo said she’d be right over. She had been wondering what she could offer the next day at her regular pop-up outside a school in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

“That’s the spiritual part of what we do,” she said. “It’s just having faith in the universe that it will come to you.”

Like Stepanian, Lugo, 54, attributes her success in flushing food out of the cracks in the system to her ability to build partnerships, in her case, with anyone, regardless of politics: anarchists, capitalists, Pentecostals, cops. Lugo is herself a sort of one-person diversity-and-inclusion campaign, an Afro-Latina lesbian ordained chaplain with close ties to the Community Affairs Bureau of the N.Y.P.D.

“Rev is very conservative,” she said outside Lozada’s church. “He definitely knows I’m openly gay. He’s met my partner, and it’s not a problem. At the end of the day, he knows the work that I do, so he doesn’t mind.”

“Who you serve doesn’t make a difference,” Lozada agreed. “At the end of the day, we’re still children of God.”

The next morning was a dash to fill the truck. The first stop was a church in Ridgewood, Queens, where the Rev. Mike Lopez, a bearded, heavily tattooed, cigar-smoking priest who presides over the vast Hungry Monk pantry network, folded back a screen, Monty Hall-like, to reveal a table groaning with groceries. The Agape crew took 25 bags. Then it was off to a bread warehouse on an industrial stretch of Flushing Avenue, and a Frito-Lay distributor down the street.

“With food insecurity, people think it’s just rice and beans,” Lugo said. “But it’s not just meals. You got kids standing in your house all week. They need snacks. I call it fun stuff, but it gives dignity to families.”

Outside P.S. 23 that afternoon, mothers and children lined up at the Agape tent and loaded up: bags of groceries from the two clerics, loaves of bread, dried strawberry-banana chips from Frito-Lay, cans of Perrier from another rescue.

A young woman with a kindergartner in tow approached. “Excuse me, is this the pantry?” she asked. She had just moved to a domestic-violence shelter near the school, she said. Someone handed her an extra-large reusable shopping bag, and she filled it up.

She hoisted the heavy bag up to her shoulder, took her son’s hand and headed back to the shelter.

In March, more than half a million families in the region did not have enough to eat at least some of the time.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Harvard Square Protestors Call for Release of Armenian POWS, End to US Military Aid to Azerbaijan

By Ken Martin

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Volunteers descended on Harvard Square on Sunday, May 23, as they answered the call by co-organizers Global Network to Free Armenian POWs and the Zoravik [“in solidarity”] Armenian Activist Collective, to take part in a late afternoon silent protest against Azerbaijan for continuing to hold prisoners of war and other captives. The Armenian Assembly of America (Massachusetts), Armenian General Benevolent Union Young Professionals of Boston, and Armenian Renaissance – Boston joined as co-hosts. The event was part of a global silent protest held in 25 cities demanding the release of more than 250 Armenian POWs, both civilians and soldiers, held by Azerbaijan.

Demonstrators held signs and handed out informational flyers to Harvard University students and professors as well as the general public. According to Zoravik, by not returning the POWs, Azerbaijan is violating international law. The organizations Human Rights Watch, Vice News, and others have reported inhumane treatment and torture of Armenian POWs, of whom 19 have been killed during incarceration by Azerbaijan.

Dr. Lisa Gulesserian, lecturer on Armenian in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University, spoke briefly at the end of the otherwise silent protest (see the *Mirror-Spectator* website for video coverage).

Zoravik urges citizens to call their elected officials and tell them to support the enforcement of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act to stop US military aid to Azerbaijan. People should also email elected officials and visit <https://free-pows.carrd.co/>, www.marchtojustice.org or <https://www.armenian-assembly.org/advocacy> and stay informed.

Zoravik, a non-governmental organization, promotes new avenues for grassroots and political organizing for progressives and friends.

(All photos by Ken Martin.)



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COMMUNITY NEWS

Gardner Museum Robbery Gets Netflix Treatment

HEIST, from page 1

The thieves tied up the two guards on duty and walked out with 13 items. Especially hard hit was the Dutch Masters' section, including "The Concert" by Jan Vermeer and Rembrandt's only seascape, "Storm on the Sea of Galilee." Also stolen were five sketches by Edgar Degas and an Eduard Manet portrait.

The stolen works are priceless and precisely because of their fame, unsellable on the market. Thus, it was hoped at the time, that the crime would be solved. Yet, 31 years later, the authorities are no closer to solving the case, and the frames remain empty on the walls of the Gardner.

ing. As I continued to work the story, I saw that clash, being a clash I knew very well having grown up in Boston, in a city that was very tribal, where you had to know someone to get something. Whose friend are you, can you be trusted?"

He added, "While it was a story of the streets, it wasn't the story of my family or the larger Armenian community."

Again, it is the connections, both big and small, and the identity of the city, especially in the last decades of the previous century, that have drawn Kurkjian to the story. What led to the crime, he has found, might have led to it not being solved.

Kurkjian continued, "I thought if I could tell the story in the detail of the investigation and in the broader way, beyond the

would be too frustrating for them. I told them I had tried since 1997 and I still know nothing about who did it, why they did it and most importantly, where the paintings had been stashed," he said. "But I said it there is a terrific story therein about how frustrating the motivations are and the characters in the story."

During his tenure at the *Globe*, he had done stories on the robbery, but after retirement, he decided to dedicate more time to it, even thinking at one point he could solve it.

Yet, he realized, "It's impossible, I'm not the FBI. I can't force people to talk to me" he said.

He added, "It's not going to be solved that way. The only way to solve it is to call on the people of Boston to help them in the

many families and groups were jostling for power and position.

One central character in that war was Robert Gentile, a low-level mob associate in Hartford, Conn., whom Kurkjian interviewed in 2014.

"He was terrific and gave me access," he said. "He denied, denied, denied" any involvement

"He had a floor [in his shed] and when you ripped up the floor, it had been re-laid down and you saw a ditch and your saw a Rubbermaid bin. The Feds absolutely believe that two of the masterpieces rested in that bin for who knows how long," Kurkjian said. He added that the authorities surmise that those paintings had been ruined during a flood and thrown out.

Much attention focuses on the guards, including Abath, on the night of the robbery. He had opened the museum's door not only to the robbers but before that, for no apparent reason. Also, the motion detector in the museum showed that only one person had gone into the room from which the Manet had been stolen, and that had been during Abath's route during the nightly check.

"The guards that they hired were kids and all they had to do was show up and put their uniform on," Kurkjian explained. "He [Abath] was absolutely uncommitted to guarding."

"This one fellow, Rick, who was a rock and roller, always on the edge as far as drugs and alcohol. When I first interviewed him, he didn't apologize," he recalled.

"I told him, 'Rick, you better get some contrition in,'" Kurkjian recalled.

He added, "We're not responsible for putting the handcuffs on anybody. Our job is just to reveal the depths of a person's negligence or criminality," he said. "I have thought upon, reported on or looked into where Rick could have intersected with the criminal world. ... He did take drugs and he told me late in the interviews that he took cocaine, which raised my suspicion.

"When you're doing cocaine in the 1980s or 1990s, you are into the criminal element. And he said he did owe his network money but not to any great thousands of dollars. Because he had this rock and roll band, he visited bars in nefarious neighborhoods. There is one bar I have specific interest in, The Channel, in South Boston. They brought in pretty good rock and roll bands. It did have criminal element ownership. Rick thinks he did go there. If you put Rick at a bar, snorting cocaine, he is going to be rubbing elbows with the criminal element," he explained.

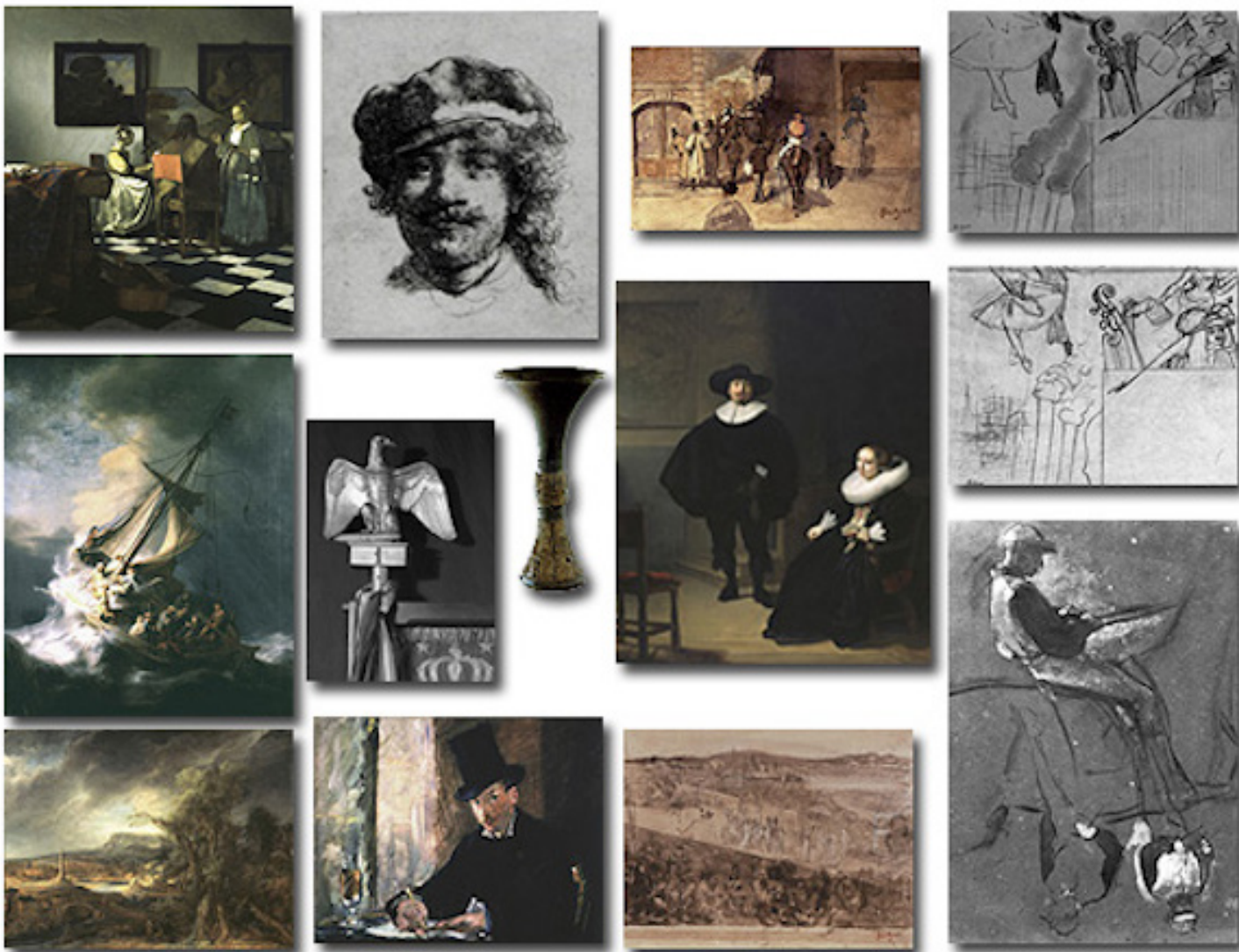
He may have inadvertently given the bad guys an idea for an easy yet lucrative score.

"Rick said he was very vocal. He would say 'it's terrible.' He would always complain about security," he said.

"They cock their ear so quickly. They can get out of him the information they need to pull off this. Rick being responsible does not have to be willfully responsible. His negligence could have been the reason this went down," he said.

Not only were the guards incompetent, but the directors and trustees of the museum were careless, even "lackadaisical." The arrival of Anne Hawley, the museum director hired in 1989, had started changing attitudes, but not in time to prevent the robbery.

"That's what things were like throughout the 1980s. Art began to rise in value in order of magnitude in the 1980s. It became a rich person's possession," he said. "Therefore the place you held the masterpieces became far more important."



A compilation of all the stolen art

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

The Gardner is a venerable Boston institution and the second largest privately-owned museum in the country. The building is a replica of a Venetian palazzo, almost matching in beauty the art it contains, collected by the museum's namesake, one of the city's original grandees. Gardner opened the museum at the turn of the last century in order to house her vast and eclectic collection of art so that everyone could enjoy them.

The filmmakers, brothers Colin and Nick Barnacle, sons of Boston *Globe* columnist Mike Barnacle, hope that by reminding a greater viewing public that the crime is still unsolved, as well as dangling before them the \$10-million reward offered by the museum, some memories might be jogged or some tongues be loosened.

Like Kurkjian's book, the series compares and contrasts the rarified art world in Boston with mobsters and drug dealers enjoying the paintings as so much collateral.

"There is a heck of a story here; it is a terrific story about the clash of Boston, the haves and the have-nots, the haves being those people who not only run, operate, founded the museum, but those who visit. Then there was the have-nots who had their eye on the museum for criminal profiteer-

theft, beyond the \$10-million reward, beyond the majesty of the paintings, if I could say why this story is at the core of who or what Boston is, I would have achieved my purpose. I kept trying to do that but the investigation kept dragging me in," Kurkjian said. "I tried to capture the higher issues of this theft and that is Boston or the people who run the museum and the FBI had held on to this case far too fiercely."

Netflix Calling

The story of the Gardner robbery features a colorful cast of characters, including the nightwatchman, Rick Abath, who stoned out of his mind, opens the door. Then there is the museum board chief who against all advice, refuses to install state-of-the-art security at the Gardner.

Kurkjian's book, *Master Thieves*, served as a starting point for the Netflix series and Kurkjian served as a production consultant.

"They [the Barnacle brothers] did a terrific job on it. They had aspirations and didn't have many numbers and connections. That's what their dad, Mike Barnacle, asked me to help them with," said Kurkjian, a multiple Pulitzer Prize winning retired reporter for the *Boston Globe*.

"My major advice to them was not to try to solve it, that if they tried to solve it, it

investigation and convince them that they, the people of Boston, the art lovers and those who have children and grandchildren to have them be committed to solve this case. That's why the paintings were placed in this museum. The owner of the museum, the woman who built it, wanted to inspire everyone, the haves and the have nots."

And that is why, he added, "Taking the paintings from this museum was so tragic."

Kurkjian added, "Boston has had this secret code that you don't talk, you don't bother anyone else's deal or conspiracy, because then you are snitching."

"That may have been the code in Boston back in the day when I grew up. But Boston has, right before our eyes, in the last 40 years, has changed and become a world class city. For whatever reason we are much more generous, much more open and much more accepting. I think that needs to be emphasized in the outreach," he noted.

Since the book has come out, Kurkjian has done hundreds of talks at venues big and small about *Master Thieves*.

The Usual Suspects

Throughout the 1970s-1990s, Boston and New England in general, were in the grips of a war between crime families, both Italian and Irish. Within the Italian mob,

continued on next page



COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

"This case rang the alarm for all the museums," he added.

The museum didn't even have a climate control system and only after the insistence of the security specialist, the first ever hired at the museum, put in an alarm system, for which he himself raised \$50,000, from corporate sponsors.

"With that alarm system came the motion detector system that was the one security system that they had in place which helped the investigation immensely," helping the cops find out "where the bad guys were moment by moment."

The museum did not have insurance, thinking "it was too costly."

Boston Police and the FBI

The Boston police and the FBI don't escape criticism in the series. Among the many mysteries shown is why a couple walking by the museum in shortly before the robbery, who saw uniformed officers sitting in a civilian car across from the museum, were not interviewed.

"The FBI Boston office, we learned later, had inside of it a conspiracy. They were doing business with James 'Whitey' Bulger, a criminal mastermind in Boston. Is that a facet in the investigation? I cannot answer that. It is wrong for me to imply the investigation was compromised in any way but that is the reality."

To this day, an FBI agent still runs down every lead. Yet, he added, "They need new eyes."

Robert Fischer, the former US Attorney, who is one of the officials interviewed on "This Is A Robbery," says they ought to release everything.

The Mob

Still, all roads point to the Mob.

Some really interesting characters with mob association are interviewed in the series, including Myles Connor, an inveterate art thief who had topped the list of suspects but been dismissed for one important reason: he was in jail during the robbery.

"I think that is the most likely scenario. The mob believe they could get a break

on some law enforcement issues if they had the masterpieces in their possession. And it's a score. If we don't have it, we can't make any money. Let's try it," he said.

But why haven't they used the paintings as leverage?

"My sense is that the bad guys who did it and had their own reason to do it to be a larger bad guy out of jail, that he said to the low-level associate, that I am not cooperating. I am here in jail on racketeering charges. They're not going to let me out because you've stolen a painting or two.' He thought he could still get these paintings either for profit but he was killed. That is Robert Donati."

He is the one who did

the investigating into the score and figured out how best to pull it off, Kurkjian said.

"Donati was a low-level crime figure. His mob boss, Vinny Ferrara, was just put in jail for racketeering three months before



Police on the scene of the robbery in 1990

the theft. In my book I have a back and forth conversation between Donati and Ferrara says do not involve me," Kurkjian noted.

"More and more we think that Bob Gentile, the old timer, once he dies, in his will there [will be] a provision that if anything shows up after his death, it will be administered by his attorney," Ryan McGuigan, Kurkjian noted.

"The interesting part of the scenario is that very good friends who knew about the vulnerability of the museum was Bobby Donati of the Vinny Ferrara gang and Bobby Guarente who was associate of the Frank Salemme gang.

"They knew the value of artwork and they represented each of the gangs that were at war with each other," he said.

And what of Whitey Bulger, the most famous of the Irish mob leaders?

"It is hard to imagine that a crime of this immensity would have taken place three miles away from Whitey's headquarters in South Boston without Whitey either pulling it off with his crew or having access to knowing about it," Kurkjian said.

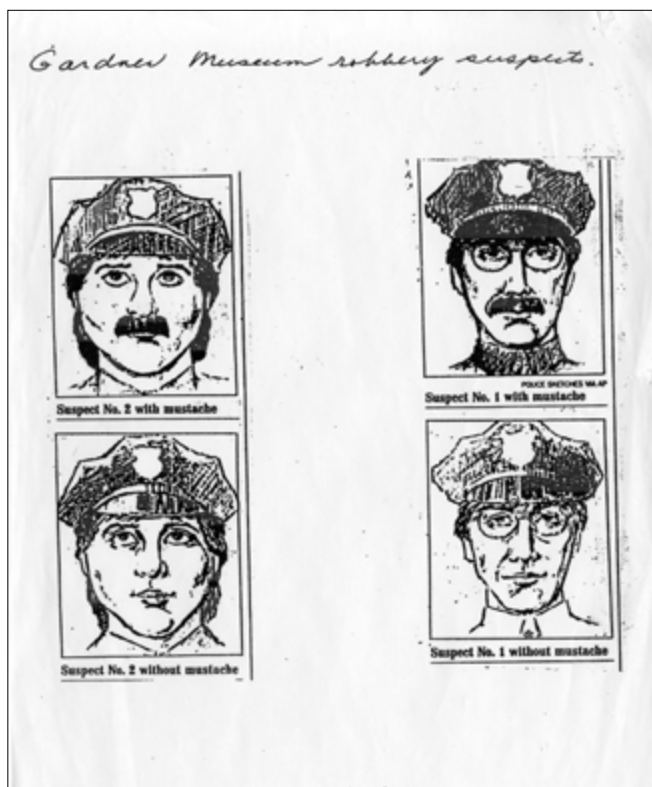
"At some point, I realized that there was something disturbing that needed to be explored more. I think the light went on in my mind when they said we won't prosecute you for the theft or the possession of the

stolen paintings. When that offer was made in 2005, it remains a public pledge by the police. There is something different about this case that I haven't been able to explain or understand yet. When you're in a plane that is coming to Logan and it's foggy, you look out and you ask where am I? Then all of a sudden you see where you are. I want to make sure when the Eureka happens and when we find out who did and why they did it and where they had held it that I was somewhere near the big reveal. They could show us in a criminal underworld's secret cave and I never would have known.

The one possible that turns to probable is the organized crime avenue, because the two gangs that were at war in the late 1980s in Boston, I know on the record, that both gangs knew of the museum's vulnerability for theft and both knew that stealing art could, they believed, get any of their bad guys out of jail," Kurkjian said.

"I hope somebody just gets the sense, buys into the charitable belief that the paintings belong to us. And I can bring my grandchildren," he said.

Kurkjian hoped that tips would come in with the program. As for the producers, he said, "They are hoping for season 2 because of the success of the program."



A police sketch of the two robbers

"The police report says that the men who came in had on their shirt lapel pins. And the police had pins back in the day noting professional points, marksman, Boston Policeman Patrolman's pin, and they would put it on their lapels," he recalled.

The close circuit TV system, and the tape were stolen. "The thieves knew about it. They hit the stop button and took the tape. I would love to see that tape because it would show them coming and going and would show them some places inside," Kurkjian recalled.

"The bad guys did not know it fed back into a computer. All they had to do was hit the print button" to indicate the moments of the criminals.

"The FBI took this investigation over from the first day. The Boston Police went through the museum, found the two night watchmen tied up, freed them, put them in separate rooms, but when the questioning began, it was done by the FBI. Boston Police and the Massachusetts State Police were far too accommodating to the FBI in letting them have control of the investigation. They should have said we need representation in this investigation," Kurkjian said.

"They assigned one agent to it full time. There have been 3 over the years. They've all been younger men who have one superior. There is an art crime unit within the FBI. It's been called in when needed but they are not in charge of the investigation," he said. It is the local Boston station that is in charge of this investigation.

SAVE *the* DATE

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Arts & Culture

Armenian Museum Of America Announces Concert Featuring VAN Jazz Quartet on June 13

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America recently announced the fifth in its online concert series featuring the VAN Quartet, an Armenian ethno-jazz fusion group. The concert will be shown online on Sunday, June 13 at 2 p.m. EST (11 a.m. PST and 10 p.m. in Armenia).

This concert series is supported by a grant from the Dadourian Foundation and is curated by Konstantin Petrossian, artistic director, composer and conductor. It is free, open to the public, and pre-registration is not required.

“In recent months we’ve hosted artists from Armenia, as well as from the diaspora,” says Executive Director Jason Sohigian. “This month, we’re pleased to present this concert with talented musicians from Armenia and from our diasporan community in Moscow.”

The VAN Quartet’s music is based on traditional Armenian folk songs and original compositions. The group is led by pianist and vocalist Vahagn Hayrapetyan and features duduk player Emmanuel Hovhannisyan, percussionist Vardan Babayan, and bassist Makar Novikov. Hayrapetyan is one of leading figures in the Armenia’s jazz scene, and this group gives a jazz feel and modern harmony to Armenian folk melodies.

“The VAN Quartet blends traditional folk songs with original compositions, and their talent and range as musicians allows for the free-form



Members of the VAN Jazz Quartet

improvisation and experimentation that makes jazz so exciting,” adds Sohigian. “This concert was recorded live this month exclusively for the Armenian Museum and is only available here online. We’re excited about this collaboration which brings all corners of the Armenian world together around music.”

The link to this free concert will be available on the Museum’s Facebook page, YouTube Channel, and website www.ArmenianMuseum.org.

The Armenian Museum of America is the largest Armenian museum in the diaspora. It is planning to re-open on Friday, June 18, and will be open Fridays through Sundays from noon to 6 p.m. Over the past year, the Museum has been updating its galleries and installed air filtration units on each floor. Reservations and social distancing are required, and visits can be scheduled by calling the museum.



Gariné Torossian (Donata Wenders photo)

Gariné Torossian, Genie Of Experimental Film

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Sergei Eisenstein. Maya Deren. Marguerite Duras. Agnès Varda. Sergei Paradjanov. Canadian-Armenian filmmaker Gariné Torossian belongs to a coterie of exceptional filmmakers, visionaries with a wholly original way of presenting their work to the world using the Seventh Art as their vehicle. In Torossian’s case, her handling of film’s physicality itself, her weaving film like fabric, of playing with repetition both visually and with soundtracks, her integrating of these techniques along with her own particular take on montage and the splice, finally her integration of photography and other media into her films form a truly arresting and organic body of work. In the twenty-two films that she has created to date Torossian almost always returns to themes of identity—as a woman, an Armenian, a creator, an inheritor of a millennial culture—while remaining an outsider questioning and integrating worlds within her. The diasporan and the native, the mainstream and the marginalized, the spoken and the unspoken. Starting in 1993 with the 5-minute-long “The Girl from Moush” when Torossian first came to the attention of American audiences with her subtle and questioning *sotto voce* that accompanied a montage of Armenian cultural figures and monuments, to the wonderfully creepy grandmother in “Hokees” (2000) who comes back to claim the child she lost during the Armenian Genocide from her own granddaughter, Torossian has marched to her own drummer. And after watching this aforementioned film no one will ever hear the word *hokees* (my soul/my love in Armenian) in quite the same way.

Stone, Time, Touch

The trio of diasporan women in the 2007 feature documentary “Stone, Time, Touch” (72 minutes), Canadian Armenians originally from Lebanon where the survivors of the Armenian Genocide regrouped after 1915, offer rich contrasting views of their homeland — as it was imagined and as it appears to them in person.

Torossian captures the many conflicting emotions of returning to their quasi-mythical homeland. Wonder and excitement, awe and reverence, but also disappointment



“Stone Time Touch”

Edoyan’s Film ‘The Sea Between Us’ Explores Aftermath Of Lebanese Civil War: Screening at Global Cinema Film Festival of Boston

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

MONTREAL — The Lebanese civil war’s aftereffects continue to traumatize people even today. Among other things, the war played an important role in the shaping of the Armenian diaspora. Marlene Edoyan’s documentary film, “The Sea between Us,” portrays aspects of the conflict through two strong-willed women of different backgrounds and poses the question of whether reconciliation is possible.

The Filmmaker

Edoyan served as both director and producer of this film. After a first degree in media studies in Lebanon, she earned bachelor’s degrees from both Notre Dame and Concordia University, in mass communications/media studies and art education respectively. After working on international animated films, Edoyan began making documentaries for film, television and festivals. She founded Fauve Film in 2012 in Montreal as a pro-



Film director and producer Marlene Edoyan

duction company for “author-driven social and political projects that have a unique vision,” and explore “stories of lesser-known communities.” Her first full-length documentary, “Figure of Armen” (2012), focused on the daily lives and struggles of Armenians after independence.

Edoyan has a deep personal connection to Lebanon. Her grandparents were survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Edoyan herself was born in the largely Armenian town of Bourdj Hammoud but grew up in a different neighborhood near Antilias, eventually attending the AGBU Tarouhi Hagopian School. She said, “Every generation seems to have some kind of calamity happen to them. For me, it was the Lebanese war.”

During the war, her parents moved their family to California, but eventually moved back, so Edoyan experienced the turmoil of the 1980s and 1990s in Lebanon. She said, “I was more aware of it toward the end, and I was older. It was atrocious and it scarred me for life.” Her family

see FILM, page 14

continued on next page



ARTS & CULTURE

from previous page

and confusion when presented with a real land full of real people negotiating often difficult lives almost two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Torossian's great strength as a director here is to let her subjects tell their highly personal stories as they unfold. What does it mean to be both part of yet outside of, one's own culture? How does one assert one's belonging to a people or a place while simultaneously trying to erase one's difference? Scarborough-born performance artist Kamée Abrahamian is only 17 on this particular visit to Armenia but already shoots video wherever she goes: she quietly takes in her surroundings, tentatively feeling her way. Actress Arsinée Khanjian has been to Armenia several times before, even shot "Calendar" with her husband Atom Egoyan in 1993, so Torossian lets her monologue unfold as she positions herself vis-à-vis a country independent for the first time in nearly a century. In this quietly haunting documentary Torossian periodically superimposes her own face over footage of Armenia to present a third view of the former Soviet republic — one as layered and complex as the filmmaker's technical approach to film. Among other awards that it garnered, the jury of the 23rd Warsaw Film Festival awarded *Stone, Time, Touch* with its prize for Best Creative Documentary.

Drowning in Flames

And then there is "Drowning in Flames" (1995), which may well be Torossian's masterpiece to date, a remarkable feat of technical skill and possibly one of the most visually powerful films that I have ever watched. This twenty-five



"Drowning in Flames" by Gariné Torssian

minute work, a quick spliced together succession of deep red, orange and blue hues presents a montage of stills taken from the photographs of American photographers Mike and Doug Starn, who are twins. There is little narration: the film begins with a chilling scream and a whispered sen-

tence "The blessed flames begin to speak." The voice then reappears at intervals to make pronouncements about "the eternal light" and comment on the nature of beauty—all with haunting background music by Timothy Sullivan. The film is almost sci-fi in nature and reminds one in parts of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Torossian shot the film on 16mm then cut the physical film into halves or multiple pieces. She then rearranged the images and frames and taped them together. After finishing the collage she optically printed it to make a negative and then a final print. To quote Torossian: "My main tools were a splicer, a viewer and tape." Anyone who has ever edited 16mm film on an old-fashioned splicer knows that this sounds simple but requires an amazing amount of concentration and technical skill—not to mention an eye for how things may or may not look once spliced together. *Drowning in Flames* is a remarkable film as well because the Starn brothers' photographs are themselves collages of existing images that multiply and manipulate original material. Torossian's film becomes a remarkable cinematic mise en abyme of re-manipulation and duplication—and in the process something wholly original to cinema: "My film introduces a temporal element into the art of the Starns, which deconstructs it in the same way they've reshaped the work of others," Torossian writes: "The Starns say that 'Art cannot be excused from time.' They allow their pictures to deteriorate and metamorphose into living entities that change like anything else." Like the Starns, Torossian takes the work of other filmmakers and photographers as a starting point, on the way to creating something wholly new. She notes that "Drowning is an homage to their practice, like *Visions* was to Michael Semak and *Girl From Moush* was to Paradjanov." *Drowning* moves at a rapid pace, displaying images of a virgin's visage and hands from a Dutch master, followed by a bleached rose, the face of Anne Frank, as well as the twinned Self-Portrait of the Starn brothers themselves. There are also images of machinery and globes that spin by, seemingly on fire as if we were witnessing a visually gorgeous apocalypse, with a shriek of pain or alienation sometimes piercing an otherwise quasi-silent soundtrack. And the whole looking as if it were indeed drowning in flames, a filmic Armageddon of sorts.

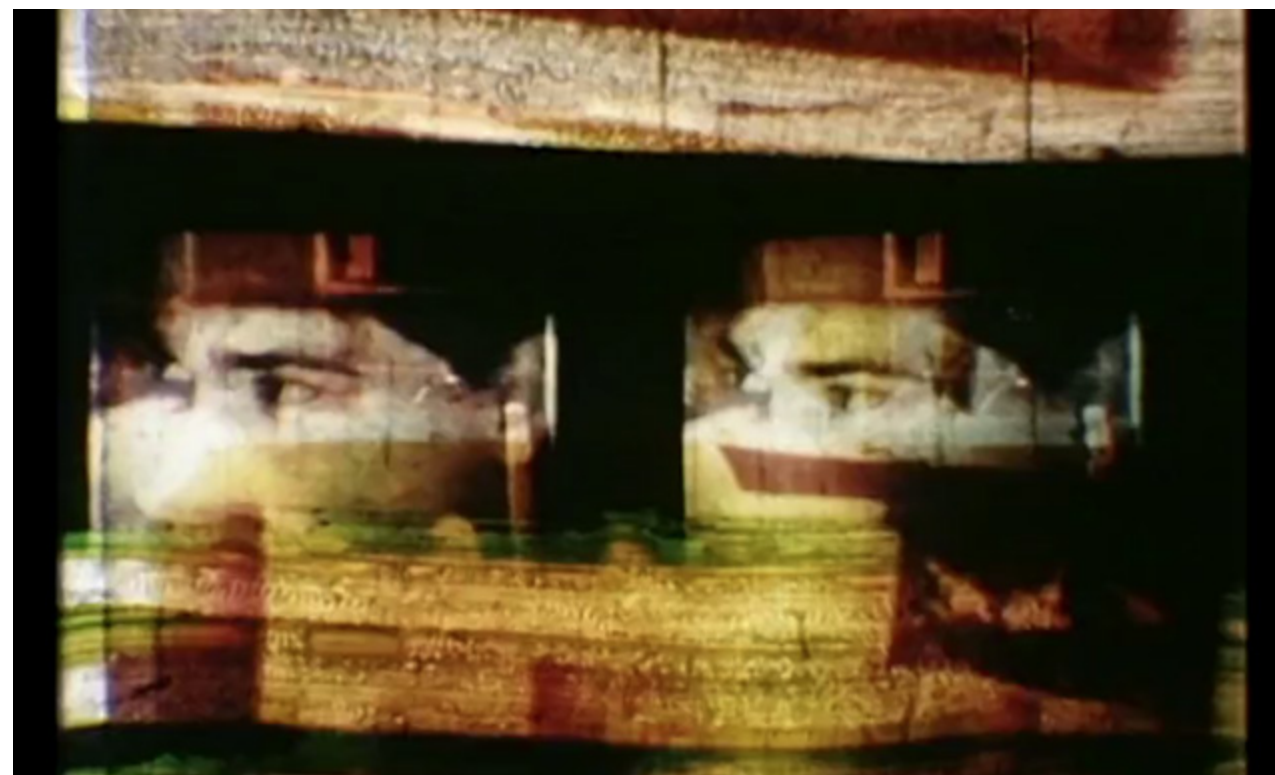
Watch any of Torossian's films — each one a beautiful, sparkling, intelligent gem. Together they make a unique contribution to world cinema, a vision that is universal in nature in its attempt to find meaning in the excavated past in order to understand the present, as the world hurtles ever more quickly into an unknown future. Torossian's films say the following: stay with me, listen to me, touch this stone, look at this painting, feel what this woman who lives in a tin container feels. See things through my eyes and hear them through my voice. And above all share in the beauty of the world and the beauty of film.

To watch, visit:

Girl from Moush: <https://www.amazon.com/Girl-Moush-Garin%C3%A9-Torossian/dp/B093FNPP9N>

The Structure is Rotten, Comrade: https://www.amazon.com/Structure-Rotten-Comrade-Garin%C3%A9-Torossian/dp/B093FQ3YXP/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=garine+torossian&qid=1621896794&s=instant-video&sr=1-1

An Inventory of Some Strictly Visible Things: https://www.amazon.com/Inventory-Some-Strictly-Visible-Things/dp/B093FPJC5K/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=garine+torossian&qid=1621896829&s=instant-video&sr=1-2



"Drowning in Flames" by Gariné Torssian

Gariné Torossian Filmography

- 1992 – "VISIONS" (4min, 16mm, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 1993 – "PLATFORM" (8min, 16mm, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 1994 – "GIRL FROM MOUSH" (5min, 16mm, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 1995 – "DROWNING IN FLAMES" (25min, 16mm, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 1996 – "MY OWN OBSESSION" (30min, 16mm, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 1997 – "PASSION CRUCIFIED" (22min, 16mm, Color) Director, Editor
- 1998 – "POMEGRANATE TREE" (3 min, 16 mm, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 1999 – "RED BRICK" (5 min, Video) Director, Cinematographer
- 1999 – "SPARKLEHORSE" (9 min, 16mm, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2000 – "DUST" (6 min, Video) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2000 – "DEATH TO EVERYONE" (6 min, 16 mm, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2000 – "HOKEES" (25 min, 16mm, Color) Director
- 2001 – "BABIES ON THE SUN" (5min, 16 mm) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2002 – "SHADOWY ENCOUNTERS" (15 min, 16 mm) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2003 – "GARDEN IN KHORKHOM" (14 min, Video) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2004 – "SANDIAS EUSTASY" (10min) Director, Producer, Editor
- 2005 – "HYPNOTIZE / MEZMERIZE" (11 min, Video, System of a Down rock band), Director
- 2007 – "ELECT THE DEAD" (3min, Color, Music Video) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2007 – "STONE, TIME, TOUCH" (74 min, Color) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2008 – "COME AROUND" (5 min, Video) Director, Editor, Cinematographer
- 2017 – "LA STRUCTURE EST POURRIE, CAMARADE" (9 min, Color, Video) Director, Editor
- 2017 – "AN INVENTORY OF SOME STRICTLY VISIBLE THINGS" (4 min, Color, Video) Director



ARTS & CULTURE

Edoyan's Film 'The Sea Between Us' Explores Aftermath of Lebanese Civil War

FILM, from page 13

moved afterwards to Canada when she was around 18 or 20 years old, and she has been living and working there ever since.

She always kept her ties with friends and family remaining in Lebanon, going back every few years. During this period, she said, "I was evolving as a person, and the way I saw Beirut and society there was changing." Slowly but surely the city was building up again and from the post war years to the early 2000s, it seemed as if it was going through a new renaissance.

The Origins of the Film

On the surface, she said, it seemed as if the Christians, the Muslims, and all the different sects were getting along. In 2014 she went there to show her film, "Figure of Armen," at the Lebanese Film Festival and met a more mixed group of young Lebanese who were different, she said, from the people she grew up with. These very open-minded cosmopolitan youth, Edoyan said, "found the language of art and cinema to come together and building a new ideology and thought for what the new Lebanon should look like."

However, this was in the heart of the capital, and she realized it was only being done in specific circles, such as through university people. For the young people stuck in the suburbs, there was no coming together. Edoyan said, "There was something interesting here. Whatever was happening was on a superficial level. There was no real effort by the government or by the people, except small groups or pockets of people and organizations like NGOs, to do any real work to find reconciliation and forgiveness. The animosities of the past were still there."

When the Syrian war started and refu-

understand. There are 18 different sects. The division was left-right, but it was more complicated than that."

Furthermore, she said, "The fact that I have chosen mothers to tell the story of

Fakhereldine, on the other hand, lived in a more multicultural environment and dealt with people as a social worker.

Initially, Edoyan said, she wanted to highlight Hayat's work with women for

led from October 2019 by young Lebanese against corruption. At showings of the film, she said she would say the film ends where the new revolution picks up.

On the other hand, at present, the same



Beirut panorama

war is not a coincidence. For me it is really important to see the perspective of women. Often women are ignored in times of war. Women usually are shown only as victims. They are not seen as solution makers or people who can create resolution in times of war."

The Main Characters

The two women she chose to show their motivations for what they did during the war and how they reacted were very charismatic. She said, "They had no problem sharing their personal lives in front of the camera." Their families too became part of the project and Edoyan spent much time to get to know them well.

The film is in the school of cinema vérité. Absolutely nothing, Edoyan insisted, was scripted and the participants were paid nothing. The film follows the characters in their lives, but Edoyan did admit that she provided a lot of direction. If people talked over one another or lost focus in conversations, she would intervene to get them to stick to one theme at a

their emancipation. She also worked with young men and was finding new ways of educating them. Edoyan said, "Hayat would tell me this is my way of making young men, future fighters, aware that they have choices in life. They don't need to go to war. They can learn a trade. They can work. They can provide for their families." Edoyan found this to be a powerful alternative to violence, exclaiming "This is not a fully bullet-proof solution, but it is a solution."

Hayat wanted to get people to live peacefully side-by-side in a more unified city. In her own family, there was intermarriage between Christians and Muslims. Hayat also worked to calm tensions in her primarily Shiite neighborhood of Nabaa (part of the municipality of Bourdj Hammoud) between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese.

However, what Edoyan did not know until filming was that Hayat's nephew Ali was a Hezbollah (a Lebanese Shiite Islamist party) fighter who was just killed. Edoyan said, "Ali's death really changed the narrative arc for Hayat. This is one concrete example of how none of this was scripted."

In contrast with Hayat, Wafaa appeared more traumatized from her childhood. Edoyan said, "I think the scars ran deeper. She is fearful of those who don't resemble her, of going into neighborhoods that are not Christian." She personally had participated as a fighter in the civil war and is shown in the film trying to persuade her son Anthony to carry on her legacy and point of view. She tried to train him to shoot a rifle but Anthony, only sixteen, was against political parties and fighting.

He was a prime example in the film of

the younger generation. The Internet connected him to a whole different world and he would pay no attention to the political talk of his parents. Interestingly, Edoyan felt it was harder to get the younger generation to speak candidly on film as they were media savvy and cautious, fearing perhaps future repercussions. She initially had a young girl as a third character but she pulled out as she was uneasy sharing everything with the public. Consequently, Edoyan focused on her two main characters, who are middle aged, along with their families.

As she finished the film, on the one hand, Edoyan was left inspired by the protests

people continue to stay in control of the Lebanese government. She concluded, "There is a bright new generation ready to take the reins, but no one is giving it to them. It is a very, very complicated situation. I don't know what the solution is."

What's Next

"The Sea Between Us" premiered at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam in 2019 and there was going to be a special premiere in Canada with the two main protagonists, but the spread of covid cancelled this. Covid also forced Edoyan to only participate virtually in four other festivals. The film is still playing in Canada, and this weekend will be screening online at the Global Cinema Film Festival of Arlington, Mass.

As the effects of covid become more controlled, Edoyan hopes to be able to have more physical events, including a showing in Beirut.

While Edoyan feels she will make more films on Lebanon in the future, her next feature-length project, "Spirits Rebellious," will be shot in the Armenian village of Gandza in Javakhk (in Georgia). She said she first visited there in 2010 and fell in love with the people. She declared: "They really live in a unique situation. You get to this village, and you think, you are in a Pissarro painting, in an Impressionistic painting. It looks like everything stopped in the 19th century."

Winters are very harsh and life is difficult in this region, where Armenian refugees fled Ottoman oppression starting in the 19th century. The poet Vahan Teryan was born in this village in 1885, and today it has a museum dedicated to him and takes great pride in literature, Edoyan said. A lot of children are born there so there are two schools. The children get higher education in Tbilisi and Yerevan, but many come back. Old and new, she said, are found side by side, and though geographically cut off, the Internet opened horizons to the outside world. Consequently, young people want to introduce modern ideas to village life.

Edoyan said she has been building relationships with the villagers over the last year and has already obtained financing for her film. She is also working on a medium-length documentary, "Malika," about a Sri Lankan migrant worker in Lebanon who bought land and a house in her home country only to find when she returned there that her family stole it from her by forging documents.

For more information about her films at the AFF, go to <https://www.worldwidecinemaframes.com/> and <https://festival.filmocracy.com/gcff/>, and for passes, see <https://>



Wafaa Khayrallah

gees came in to Lebanon, tensions began rising again. Like the Palestinian refugees in the prior period, the new refugees were seen as a potential threat. She said, "They brought the old sentiments to the surface again. There was a lot of xenophobia and 'othering.' Something was definitely happening in Beirut and I wanted to explore that. The physical barricades of the past had fallen but the psychological barricades were still there."

This motivated her to begin research on her new film in 2016. She was reading Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, which gave Edoyan insights, and so she returned to speak to all types of younger and older people. "I realized that in order to talk about the Beirut of today, I had to step back and understand what had really happened, why the older generation had done this war and where the tension stemmed from," she stated.

She included the Armenian community among the many groups of people she studied, but in the end settled on only two women from different backgrounds as her main characters. The reason, she said, was that "I couldn't tell the story from too many angles. It would be too chaotic and hard to



Hayat Fakhereldine

time, without telling them what to say.

During the development phase of the film, she worked with a Lebanese cameraman and began to understand what the characters and the neighborhoods could give to the film. She returned with a Canadian team to do the full production filming but kept a soundman from Beirut who understood Arabic. The team was only three or four people in order not to be too intrusive in people's homes.

The two main characters, Edoyan said, had their hearts broken from the war. Wafaa Khayrallah's father financed the Christian Phalanges Party (Kataeb) and she and her husband were still involved in it. Hayat



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe
Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



Chef Jon Koobation’s Cracked
Wheat and Kale Salad

This Cracked Wheat and Kale Salad recipe from award-winning chef Jon Koobation is a healthy twist on traditional Middle Eastern tabbouleh, using fresh kale instead of the parsley. “The addition of dried fruit and Feta cheese gives this salad a sweet, tart and salty element. The salad can be adjusted to the fresh ingredients available from your garden, such as tomatoes, peppers, squash or cucumbers,” Jon says. “Kale is far more milder than parsley so the taste is more palatable for many people. This is a different way to try your favorite tabbouleh recipe using kale instead of parsley, which can often be slightly bitter. When you chop kale finely, it looks just like parsley. And you won’t believe how unbelievably similar it is in taste and texture.”

The recipe is featured in *Cooking With Jon*, the engaging collection of many of Jon’s favorite signature recipes and highlights about his vast culinary and professional history. *Cooking With Jon* is more than just a cookbook – it is a walk down memory lane for Jon about his life growing up in the San Joaquin Valley – interspersed among the recipes are these interesting stories. Stories of how he came to be a chef, of his love for racing, what it was like going from just being the chef to owning his own restaurant, and his lifetime love of food and entertaining. “Cooking has been my passion in life. It has filled my life with joy,” shares Jon in the book.

Born in Dinuba, Jon was the owner and head chef at Jon’s Bear Club for several decades before retiring in 2013. He served as a prep cook and sous chef at several Lake Tahoe-area restaurants before returning home to the San Joaquin Valley. He worked at the famed Vallis’ Restaurant in Kingsburg, the Redwood Inn of Sultana, Dinuba Ranch and the Swedish Mill, and became the Bear Club’s executive chef in 1973.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 cup medium cracked wheat (bulgur)
- 1/2 cup slivered almonds
- 1 cup Feta cheese, crumbled
- 1 cup dried fruit: raisins, dates, cranberries, cherries, diced apricots, or combined
- 2 large green onions, thinly slice
- 3 or 4 cups rough cut baby kale or a blend of baby kale and arugula
- 3 or 4 lemons, zest and juice, to taste
- Kosher salt and cracked black pepper
- Olive oil

Serves 4.

PREPARATION:

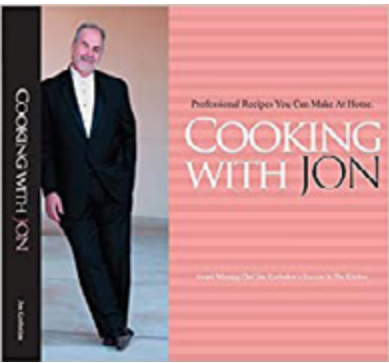
Place bulgur in a large bowl and cover with warm water, toss with a fork, and leave to absorb for 30-45 minutes. Squeeze water out of the bulgur in handfuls to eliminate all the liquid. Add the remaining ingredients to the bulgur, and mix with a fork to combine.

Cover and refrigerate for at least 3 hours, checking lemon flavor and seasoning to taste.

Hint: A drizzle of fine olive oil on the top of the salad at the time of service will enhance the flavor.

Note: While any type of kale will work for the recipe, curly green kale is best. That’s because it most resembles curly parsley, which is traditionally used in the recipe.

Cooking With Jon is a collection of some of his favorite recipes through the years, and the favorites of many of his patrons at Jon’s Bear Club before he retired. Also included are wonderful photos to go with the recipes -- photos that make you feel like you could just reach down and pick up the delicious food. Recipes include: Charred Asparagus Roll-Ups, New York Steak, Lobster Bisque, Tortilla Crusted Salmon, Shish Kebab, Meyer Lemon Homemade Ice Cream, and how to make your own kettle corn at home.



ORDER TODAY: Jon is the recipient of the 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award in the California Restaurant Association’s “Best of the Valley” awards. Contact Jon at chefjonkoobation@gmail.com to order his book and for a personally signed copy. Jon’s book is also available for sale at The Market Grocery Store and at Sam’s Deli & Cucina in Fresno. Or order his book directly at Amazon Books at <https://www.amazon.com/Cooking-JON-Jon-Koobation/dp/0692769315>

CALENDAR
ON-LINE EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

JUNE 2 — Wednesday, at 12 noon. Boston Pops Esplanade Brass Quintet at Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. The 20-minute musical performance at the Park is on the Boston Pops “Roiling Recital Tour. Rain Date: June 3.

JUNE 9–AUGUST 15 — The Armenian Heritage Park will hold a series of events during the spring and summer:

•Wednesday, June 9 at 4pm TEA & TRANQUILITY ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, Boston Meet & Greet at the Park. Walk the Labyrinth. View the Abstract Sculpture. Tie a Ribbon on the Wishing Tree. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

•Sunday, June 13 at 2pm LABYRINTH WALKING WELLNESS program ARME- NIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, Boston Meet & Greet at the Park. Introduction to the many benefits. Walk the labyrinth. A part of The Greenway Fitness program. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

•Sunday, July 11 at 2pm LABYRINTH WALKING WELLNESS program ARME- NIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, Boston Meet & Greet at the Park. Introduction to the many benefits. Walk the labyrinth. A part of The Greenway Fitness program. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

•Wednesday, July 14 at 4pm TEA & TRANQUILITY ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, Boston Meet & Greet the Boston Mayoral candidates at the Park. Walk the Labyrinth. View the Abstract Sculpture. Tie

Ribbon on the Wishing Tree. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

•Wednesday, August 11 at 4pm TEA & TRANQUILITY ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, Boston Meet & Greet at the Park. Walk the Labyrinth. View the Abstract Sculpture. Tie a Ribbon on the Wishing Tree. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

•Sunday, August 15 at 2pm LABYRINTH WALKING WELLNESS program. ARME- NIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, Boston Meet & Greet at the Park. Introduction to the many benefits. Walk the labyrinth. A part of The Greenway Fitness program. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

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 7:00m Eastern / 4:00pm Pacific. Edward Avedisian is the principal benefactor of NAASR’s 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 an extraordinary philanthropist and serves as a 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 will also join us in a unique conversation with Dr. Khatchig Mouradian, Armenian and Georgian Specialist at the Library of Congress.

JUNE 21 — Gregory Hintlian Memorial Golf Tournament at Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston. Monday. Hospitality/Registration is from 9-10:30 am. 10:30 AM “Shotgun” start. Lunch at the 9th hole. Dinner (casual dress) is at 4:30 pm. Location: Marlborough Country Club 200 Concord Rd, Marlborough, MA 01752. Register Online: The Gregory Hintlian Memorial Golf Tournament 2021 - Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Greater Boston (htaac.org) or call the church office 617.354.0632



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE
UNITED STATES

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

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

**Other than the Editorial, views
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publisher.**

Editorial

A Secret Document Which Was Not So Secret After All



By Edmond Y. Azadian

Armenia's media; although he lives in exile, he has been able to wreak havoc in Armenia's political scene with some sensational revelations and vitriolic criticism of the administration of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. He has proven time and again that he has close relations with political quarters in Armenia and in neighboring countries.

Pashinyan was caught by surprise when the secret document was released. One of the opposition leaders, Edmon Marukyan, took Pashinyan to task by requesting a special session of parliament, where he asked that any international agreement could become valid only after the vote by parliament or by public referendum.

Pashinyan, surprised, had to acquiesce to the fact that indeed, there was a document under consideration and that he is ready to sign it, because the agreement is 100 percent in Armenia's favor.

As the June 20 parliamentary elections approach, the parties have been digging up dirt on each other. But what Michael Minasyan recently divulged went beyond the limits of the election campaign and dealt directly with some existential issues regarding Armenia. Minasyan is Serzh Sargsyan's son-in-law and was Armenia's former ambassador to the Holy See in the Vatican. He holds sway in

Pashinyan is desperate to remain in power and that is why he has been signing such humiliating documents to prove his relevance to Russian interests.

One thing was made public about the document: that the document was to be an "addendum" to another one, perhaps part of the verbal agreements which Pashinyan has made with Azerbaijan or with Russia. Thus, after all, the agreement document turned out to be no secret, thanks to Minasyan. However, the back-and-forth shook the entire political establishment in Armenia.

Armenia has vowed to sign the document, he says, if Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev delivers on his promises. The public has yet to find out what Aliyev has promised to Pashinyan, but his public pronouncements do not inspire much confidence. He has been creating one problem after another to drive into the minds of the Armenians that their very existence is in danger and that they have to fight against that danger, rather than worry about the status of Karabakh.

He has repeated many times that the status issue is a non-issue as he has resolved that by force.

He has offered to Armenia to sign a peace treaty whereby Azerbaijan recognizes Armenia's territorial integrity, while Armenia must recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, with the addition of Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan.

This is a take-it-or-leave-it offer, which means that if Arme-



Neither Pashinyan nor Marukyan revealed the content of the document.

Pashinyan was asked why the document was kept secret from the Armenian people if it were so favorable. His answer was that the details of the agreement were still being negotiated and that it was not right to publicize them while they were still in the process of study and negotiations.

He also took the opportunity to take pot shots at his nemesis, Minasyan, whom he accused of dealing with the Azerbaijani government, which might be the culprit in releasing the document to unauthorized people to throw a monkey wrench in Armenia's election process.

It turns out that even Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan and Minister of Defense Vagharshak Harutyunyan were not aware of the existence of the document.

nia does not take the offer, it has to be ready for the next war.

In the meantime, Azerbaijan is creating new realities on the ground; since May 12, Azerbaijani forces have crossed the border into Armenia's sovereign territory and have advanced 3.5 kilometers into Syunik and Vardenis provinces.

In Syunik, they had taken over Sev Lij (Black Lake), which is the water resource for Armenians in the region and according to an authorized Soviet map it belongs to Armenia. The location where Azerbaijan had invaded was not chosen at random. It was calculated to be the shortest distance (40 kilometers) from Nakhichevan. Azerbaijan was itching for an armed conflict with Armenia to justify a new aggression, which would cut through Syunik and join it with Nakhichevan. That would make Aliyev's threat a reality, since he had threatened not long ago
see SECRET, page 17



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Azerbaijan and Turkey on Opposite Sides Of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

It is commonly stated that politics is similar to prostitution. There is no morality, just interests. However, there is also something called hypocrisy. While it is true that individuals or nations can get away with any kind of unscrupulous behavior for a while, but eventually it catches up with them and they become exposed.

There are plenty of examples of such dishonest behavior in the world, but let's focus on the current case of Azerbaijan and its hypocritical behavior.

Azerbaijan is an Islamic state and active member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, composed of 57 member states. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan's infatuation with Israel initially started by copying the behavior of its "elder brother" Turkey which had gone out of its way to curry favor with Israel and American Jewish organizations to be on the good side of the United States government and to counter the Armenian-American community's efforts in Congress to have the Armenian Genocide acknowledged.

Regrettably, the behavior of the Israeli government and that of Jewish American organizations were just as cynical and immoral intending to cuddle the Republic of Turkey which was pretending to be friendly and supportive at a time when Israel was surrounded by a sea of hostile Arab states.

Eventually, the leaders of Israel and Jewish-American organizations realized Turkey's fake friendship after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly insulted Israel and Jews by making hateful anti-Semitic remarks. Finally, Turkish hypocrisy was exposed and the relations were cut off!

Turning to Azerbaijan, it copied the Turkish example of hypocrisy vis-à-vis Israel and Jewish-American organizations. In this case, however, Azerbaijan pursued an interest much larger than their mere lobbying support. The relationship soon turned to mutual exploitation based on lies and deceit. Azerbaijan, flush with tons of petrodollars, bought billions of dollars of deadly drones and other advanced weapons from Israel in return for supplying the latter with oil. Never mind Israel's immoral and criminal action with descendants of Holocaust survivors supplying deadly weapons to kill survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

However, Israeli leaders ignored all obvious signs of hypocrisy, deceit and mutual exploitation, blinded by the Almighty dollar. As I reported in a previous column, an early sign of Azerbaijan's insincerity toward Israel was exposed on March 18, 2021, when Shahriar Hajiye, third secretary at the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations in Geneva, gave a speech at the Human Rights Council, harshly condemning Israel's "massive, flagrant and

systematic violations of human rights" of Palestinians. Except for a critical reaction by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in the United States, Israeli leaders ignored the Azeri attack, even after my column was reprinted by the Jerusalem Post on April 4, 2021.

A much more ominous development took place in May when Israel and Palestinians in Gaza engaged in mutual missile attacks, killing over 200 Palestinians and a dozen Israelis. The entire Arab and Islamic world condemned the Israeli attack on Gaza, except for Azerbaijan. Even when the Israeli police attacked Arab worshippers inside Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, one of the holiest Islamic mosques, Azerbaijan remained silent.

What will be the repercussions of Azerbaijan's abandonment of its fellow Muslims? Turkey and particularly President Erdogan certainly feel betrayed by its "junior brother" whom Turkey helped win the war against Armenia and captured large parts of Artsakh. While Erdogan was harshly critical of Israel and threatened military intervention, Azerbaijan remained quiet. This will not remain unnoticed either in Ankara or other Islamic capitals.

The next time President Aliyev of Azerbaijan submits another resolution to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to condemn Christian Armenia, OIC member states will remind Azerbaijan of its silence during the Israeli attack on Gaza. Ironically, just before the start of the recent Israeli-Palestinian attacks, Azerbaijan had proposed to mediate reconciliation between Israel and Turkey. Azerbaijan's silence during the Gaza attack also put an end to that prospect.

Azerbaijan's pro-Israeli stance will certainly create a friction with Turkey. The last time such ill will was expressed by Azerbaijan's leader against Turkey was when Armenia and Turkey signed a protocol in 2009 to open their mutual border which President Aliyev strongly opposed and stated that it would damage Azerbaijan-Turkey relations. During a meeting with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Bill Burns in Baku on February 25, 2010, "Aliyev made clear his distaste for the Erdogan government in Turkey, underscoring the 'naïveté' of their foreign policy and the failure of their initiatives, including the loss of support for Turkey among traditional international friends because of Ankara's hostility to Israel. He noted that in his view, there had never been any merit to the notion of a 'moderate Islamist' government in Turkey, and that Erdogan's insistence on promoting Hamas and Gaza (when other Arab countries were notably silent on these issues) had brought Turkey no benefits," WikiLeaks revealed.

In the long run, President Aliyev's lack of Islamic solidarity on Israel's bombing of Gaza could undermine his government's rule over 10 million Shia and Sunni Muslims in Azerbaijan, encouraged by Turkey which enjoys a tight grip over Aliyev after the Artsakh War. Aliyev's cuddling of Israel would also have a negative effect on Azerbaijan's relations with neighboring Iran and its large Azeri population.

A Secret Document Which Was Not So Secret After All

SECRET, from page 16

that if Armenia does not voluntarily accept it, he was ready to cut that corridor by force "through the historic Azerbaijan land of Zangezur."

There were two reasons Aliyev did not carry out his plan: Armenia did not resort to an armed response, be it for diplomatic reasons or lack of military resources, and second, there was an international outcry calling on Azerbaijan to move its forces out of Armenian territory. The warnings came from the US, European Union, Greece, Cyprus, Iran and India.

We are not convinced that Aliyev has changed his mind. He will certainly wait for another opportunity to make good on his threats. We have seen that in the past year he has become emboldened.

The secret document, which is no longer a secret, turns out to be a new ploy by Russia to give Armenia the run-around and at the end, expect an expression of gratitude toward Moscow that it saved Armenia from mortal danger. The September 27 war was encouraged by Moscow, and at the end of it, Moscow sought gratitude for President Vladimir Putin's efforts in achieving a ceasefire.

The document calls for another tripartite committee of representatives of Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan to finalize the borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan through demarcation and demilitarization. It is ironic that the proposal is coming from Moscow, which has treaty obligations to Armenia to defend the latter's territorial integrity.

Armenia was not allowed to bring the issue of Azerbaijan's incursion to the forum of the UN Security Council, as had been proposed by France. The only other option left was to appeal to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Russia-led security organization. Its latest session was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and four resolutions were adopted. Armenia's complaint was not even on the agenda. Instead, the secretary general of the CSTO, Stanislav Saz, made some remarks about the border tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Moscow is courting Baku to join CSTO, as revealed by Andrei Rudenko, deputy foreign minister of Russia, and

Armenia has to pay the price.

After signing the ceasefire agreements on November 9, President Putin warned the parties that if any of the nine points in the post-war declaration were not carried out by any party, that meant suicide for them. Well, Azerbaijan refuses to release the 200 Armenian prisoners of war and its leader is still alive.

Then, after all the international outcry, Azerbaijani soldiers are still on Armenian territory. If anything, their numbers have doubled, rising from 300 to 600. Does that suicide clause apply to Armenia only?

Tectonic political shifts are taking place in the Caucasus. That is why the parties have been trying to consolidate their gains and some others are jockeying for new positions.

Some fundamental understandings have been reached between the US and Iran in order to revive the nuclear deal which had been canceled by President Donald Trump. That may ease some sanctions and Tehran may recover from its political and economic depression and return to the international political forums to take a more assertive role in the region.

This latter development has many underlying reasons, one of which seems to be Washington's exasperation with Turkey.

It has dawned on political planners at Foggy Bottom that Turkey has irreversibly chosen its independent political course and will not return to the Western fold, all the while using the NATO umbrella as a shield or even a weapon.

Turkey's separate deals with Russia in such strategic areas including Syria, Libya and the Caucasus and its insistence on acquiring Russian S-400 missiles mean that the US can no longer rely on Turkey as a "trusted ally," particularly after the latter threatened to hijack 50 American nuclear bombs on its territory at the Incirlik Airbase. On the other hand, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's bombastic rhetoric against Israel and its leader, Benjamin Netanyahu was okay, as long as it intended to gain brownie points in the Muslim world, but to project that rhetoric all the way to Washington, accusing the US and President Biden of having "blood on its hands," was beyond the pale. This now

endangers the Biden-Erdogan summit on the next NATO meeting sidelines.

It turns out that even Russia is displeased with the rapprochement between Tehran and Washington, because if Iran returns as a player in the Caucasus, where Moscow and Ankara have had a free hand in shaping the power structure in the region, it can only hurt the two.

Conversely, with the return of Iran to the region, some balance will be restored and Armenia may find some space to maneuver.

Iran is already nervous that Turkey has attained a dominant role in the region. Iran's foreign policy establishment is working overtime to secure its border with Armenia and forestall further advancement by Turkish and Azerbaijani forces.

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami is in Yerevan to revive the prospects for a North-South corridor to connect the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea through Armenia. And next week, Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif will be in Armenia to discuss relations between the two countries. Russian sources have released the news that ten Iranian generals have visited Armenia secretly to discuss the border issues.

It looks like Armenia has been taking advantage of those new developments to shake away the Turkish-Russian chokehold. Foreign Minister Ara Aivazyan has invited three ambassadors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, that of the US, France and Russia, to reactivate the group on the issue of Karabakh, expanding on Pashinyan's intention to sign the not-so-secret deal.

The Foreign Ministry has issued a statement that it will not join negotiations for the demarcation of the borders before Azerbaijan withdraws its forces from Armenia, releases the prisoners of war and begins the negotiations on the issue of Karabakh within the principles and framework of the OSCE Minsk Group.

Although divulging the secret document created some noise, it looks as if it has also generated some common sense and political initiative in this most trying of times.



COMMENTARY

Now Is the Time For Statesmanship In Armenia



By Philippe Raffi Kalfayan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The spectacle we have been witnessing in Armenia is a collective suicide. It is shameful and something that insults our intelligence and dignity. The risk of losing an independent state is real, and everything continues as if nothing had happened: 5,000 dead, 10,000 injured. A generation sacrificed. Fear and fatalism are the order of the day.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's stubborn determination to cling to power is paralyzing the country. His sole argument for staying in power rests on the threat of former presidents returning to power, especially his archnemesis, Robert Kocharyan.

No words are spoken about the gross mistakes that have brought us to this point; all the current and former leaders have demonstrated the same difficulty for assuming responsibility for their mistakes.

I have been silent since my last interview with the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, in which I argued that every day that passes without a change in governance and diplomacy will cause irreversible damage to the Karabakh issue and to the territorial integrity of Armenia (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2020/12/03/need-for-diplomacy-greater-than-ever-in-post-war-armenia-karabakh/>). Yet nothing has changed, except Azerbaijan's nibbling at Armenian territories. There is no lack of analysts — “experts” — and irrelevant polemics, but opinions are fragmented, incomplete, partisan, often directed at the past by pointing to the mistakes of actors. They don't aim to solve the actual and dramatic political situation on domestic and foreign planes. Public exchanges on social networks between Armenians are appalling, rife with finger-pointing, bickering, slander, insults and conspiratorial accusations.

Meanwhile, we are on the eve of a national catastrophe. The moment of truth has come.

Will the Armenian Nation be collectively able to follow the right initiatives and do everything possible to prevent the repetition of mistakes made in the management of the crises it faced at the beginning of the 20th century? The immensity of the loss of a sovereign state would be irreversible for Armenians, because it can easily lose its population in an established and wealthy diaspora. The systematic emigration from Armenia since the early 1990s has accelerated and the refusal to send one's sons to fight for the homeland is a dominant attitude among the elites: adolescents of conscription age are sent abroad. At the same time, the new Armenian expatriates are doing everything to prevent their children from doing their national service in Armenia. Of course, one can hardly judge those parents' attitudes, especially for diaspora natives. But this reality shows how Armenian society is not confident in the future, and somehow is indifferent to what could well happen. It is this fatalism which must be reversed.

Support for Pashinyan Is a Political and Moral Aberration

A diminishing portion of the population blindly supports Pashinyan. That fact is likely to partly explain the irrationality of the situation. There is no ideology or platform offered. They throw their weight built behind a political leader as compared to another leader, but not in relation to specific political or ideological programs. The opposition has failed to convince voters in that respect, and it is running on a scatter-shot platform in the elections. In the upcoming June elections, the number of political parties (above 100) in a country that counts 2,500,000 inhabitants is also an aberration, particularly when one knows how divided the population is. The vote for the opposition will be divided among so many that those already in power can keep their offices but even worse, there will be no chance for a fundamental debate about national issues.

No leader in any democratic country would have survived politically and morally after the crushing military defeat and its disastrous human toll such as the one Armenia saw in November. The abandonment of sovereignty underpinned by the ceasefire agreement is being verified today. It should be remembered that the latter was signed without being referred either to Parliament or to the people, while the Prime Minister had made a promise to the “people” during his famous fiery speech of August 17, 2018 on Republic Square that he would never make a decision engaging the future of the country without consulting them.

The declaration made the day after the signing of the trilateral agreement “What would you have said, how you would have reacted if I had offered to give up part of the Karabakh territories without going to war?” should have disqualified the person uttering it.

I am still amazed to observe what little reaction this comment aroused in the diaspora. The bodies of the soldiers were still laying on the battlefield, the number of dead and missing was unknown (and still is to this day), and hundreds of families were living in anguish over whether their children were alive or held as POWs. This terrible confession leads us to believe that all human losses were suffered for that reason and for personal political survival.

Armenia's Present and Future: Statesmanship Must Prevail

A series of initiatives attest to the intellectual agility and dynamics of Armenians in rethinking the way the Armenian nation must operate (the idea of a “Network State”), and in promoting collective reflection and prioritising objectives for tomorrow (“The Future Armenian”). But as interesting as these initiatives are, they will only be useful if the Armenian state continues to exist. The “Network State” is even a disturbing

concept because it suggests that a virtual state could eventually substitute for the real state. I doubt that such a concept will exist before long in the practice of international relations. It cannot prosper without keeping the Republic of Armenia alive. Finally, if such a virtual state were to exist, it would be under the influence of new political superpowers, the GAFA (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon) and others, which are more powerful than the states and no less dangerous. Those new transnational trusts now impose their own power, particularly by regulating the freedom of opinion and expression with private rules.

The recent initiatives of former President Levon Ter-Petrosian have prompted me to break my silence because I consider him to be the only one to think and behave as a responsible statesman and to raise the right questions at this crucial time, however one may assess his term. He did make mistakes, like those who succeeded him, but he managed successfully to face the multiple challenges and no-less-dramatic circumstances at that time.

It is vain and useless to look for individual wrongs. There is a collective fault that has lasted for 30 years, and the diaspora is also liable for what happened. The only goal that prevails is to get out of this lethal swamp unscathed: the salvation of the Republic of Armenia.

To anticipate the inevitable comments of all those who, I am sure, will try to find some affiliation between me and Levon Ter-Petrosian, it should be said that I got to know him personally in 1989 in Paris. I was not necessarily a fan at that time, and I even openly confronted his government in the field of human rights from 1995 to 1998 because of the political persecutions taking place. But his statesmanship, discretion and pragmatism, the capability of having a strategic thinking devoid of romanticism are valuable.

He wrote many analyses about disturbing realities at the time. He was already raising the right questions (see his collection of articles *Armenia's Future, Relations with Turkey, and the Karabakh Conflict*, published in 2017). It seems to me that Ter-Petrosian is indispensable today for uniting the opposing political forces of the country in order to stop the current Armenia's ordeal and lead to a period of transition.

Unity cannot be decreed; it can only be the outcome of a compromise

In politics, nothing is ever transparent, but one cannot suspect Levon Ter-Petrosian of desiring power or intending to sacrifice national sovereignty as some outrageous journalists have claimed. He has his own realistic and pragmatic vision.

Neither Nikol Pashinyan's grip on power nor the return of Robert Kocharyan are ways to bring Armenia out of its current state of polarization. The election of one or the other may lead the country towards civil war, or at the very least to the perpetuation of the situation and thus political paralysis. A disunited and weakened country will be easy prey for the foreign aggressor and the flow of emigration will take care of the rest.

A domestic combustion has been avoided until now, which all Armenians should take notice of and welcome. This is good news for Armenian democracy. Nevertheless, unity cannot be decreed. You don't call it out trying to rally everyone behind you like most leaders of the opposition or the current parliamentary majority do.

It can only be achieved after exchanging views and reaching a compromise on fundamental points. The situation is more than opportune to engage in strategic debates and to create a national consensus around common objectives relative to national security and sovereignty. The refusals of Robert Kocharyan and Serge Sargsyan to make an alliance with Ter-Petrosian on the terms discussed between them are disappointing but they are not definitive. It is not excluded that an agreement be reached later in the aftermath of the June 20 elections, if those are held. However, it would have been wiser to start discussing these points today. It will be more difficult to doing it in an emergency mode under the pressure of constitutional calendar.

Political Stumbling Blocks

The points to be discussed are sensitive but fundamental. They cannot be the subject of bargaining. This is about the vision of what the Armenian state should and could be in the coming century. The question is: how do we imagine the existence and development of a viable state economically, diplomatically, and militarily when it is surrounded by almost 100 million Turks and Azeris, who practice hateful discrimination politics against Armenians and who aspire to appropriate a large part of Armenia, in addition to Karabakh? The strategic alliances, economic and demographic flows, prioritization of national causes, Armenian-Turkish relationship, and pan-Armenian model and affairs underpin this question.

Levon Ter-Petrosian has already pointed to the national objectives of candidate Robert Kocharyan and his ally ARF (Dashnak) but also to those of the Sasna Tsrer as obstacles. What is the pertinence of putting the Armenian question, in particular the international recognition of the genocide (invariable from Kocharyan through Pashinyan), and the territorial claims in the primary objectives? Are they essential to the resolution of immediate border disputes and national security issues? The pan-Armenian priority at the moment is to save Armenia's very existence. The territorial claims on Turkey arouse scepticism. There is no request for abandoning these utopias. A Nation needs those to move forward. But one should not make them immediate objectives. The diplomatic and moral victory of the Armenians remains the physical existence of a sovereign Armenian state because it represents the best proof of the failure of the Turkish intention, which was and still remains that of the annihilation of the Armenians in this region.

Clearly, Levon Ter-Petrosian and the Kocharyan/ARF alliance must intelligently debate these issues in order to reach an agreement for national interest.

All the while, the threat of another calamitous emergency is present. How can Armenia stop Azerbaijan's aggressive behaviour to avoid another war for which Armenia is not more ready than it was in September 2020? The best proof of this weakness is that neither Nikol Pashinyan, nor any other political leader offered strong rhetoric or go-to-war speech when Azerbaijani forces made their way to Syunik.

Changing the Negotiator Is Imperative

I insisted last December that it is unthinkable that Nikol Pashinyan should continue heading the negotiations with Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey. He can no longer be the negotiator since he is a defeated and powerless figure. On this point too, it seems to me that Levon Ter-Petrosian, teaming with the former presidents of Armenia and

continued on next page



COMMENTARY

from previous page

Karabakh, is best able to conduct these negotiations. This is the mission that he assigned himself in the justification of his attempt of rapprochement with the second and third presidents.

The risk of a resumption of war has existed since November 9. It must be remembered that Russian peacekeeping troops can withdraw at any time at the request of one of the parties (stipulation in the agreement). Meanwhile, the army leadership has been falsely accused of attempting a coup. Other institutions had expressed concern over the country’s security and demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister. As President Ter-Petrosian stated, the senior army officers who signed this declaration were expressing legitimate concern and he praised their restraint in not overstepping their constitutional boundaries.

The Foreign Ministry is weakened at a time when it is precisely what we need most. Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan is content to hold a salon and issue press releases. More fundamentally, Armenian diplomacy continues to make the same mistakes that led to the war: to stick to the Principles of the Minsk Group while the violation of the first of these Principles, namely the prohibition of the use of force, has shattered the negotiated terms of the process. That process was already a legal-diplomatic impasse (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2019/03/07/the-minsk-process-behind-the-words-and-principles/>). The Troika format could possibly survive. The Minsk Group is a useful screen for Russia to legitimize its role and action in Karabakh. But maintaining the content of the agreement is absurd.

Moreover, the trilateral ceasefire agreement of November 9 has itself been violated since that date, and the incumbent government failed to act accordingly to enforce it. Any negotiations on the aftermath of the ceasefire agreement should never have started since not all prisoners of war had returned to their homes. Last week, for about 24 hours the government even denied the advance of Azeri troops on the territory of Armenia, before retracting and then presenting itself as a victim to the “international community.”

Picking Alliances

Many columnists appeal to the “international community.” It should be remembered that is an empty concept. It does not exist. United Nations experts are currently studying the subject. The Security Council is the most important organ of the United Nations, although its functioning is dependent upon the geopolitical balance of power between its 5 permanent members (USA, China, Russia, France, and Great-Britain).

The countries to whom Armenia appeals for assistance in relation to the incursion of Azerbaijani troops into Armenian territory are the three members of the Minsk Group (France, United States, and Russia). Are they in a position to provide Armenia with assurances and guarantees of military protection?

How can we appeal to three countries which intentionally allowed Azerbaijan to take back by force the Karabakh territories occupied by Armenians in total violation of the Minsk Principles? Let’s take a closer look at this military incursion into Syunik and Gegharkunik.

This incursion could well be an Azerbaijani scenario with the possible endorsement of Russia aimed at putting pressure on the current negotiations, testing international resolve before staging a major ground invasion, and in the event of a withdrawal, which is likely to happen at this stage, serve the re-election of Nikol Pashinyan. In fact, the Prime Minister would thus appear as the winner of this diplomatic showdown.

Several disturbing elements support this hypothesis. First of all, no shots were fired. Second, the Azerbaijani troops advanced three kilometres in Armenian territory without encountering Russian or Armenian resistance. Third, no general mobilization order has been issued in Armenia. This scenario would prevent the return to power of the “Karabakhtsis” associated with the ARF.

This unsolicited political “aid” is poisoned because Armenia would emerge even more weakened from this scenario: Pashinyan would be indebted to Aliyev or labelled as traitor.

The American and Russian reactions are moderate. President Macron’s statements seem to exceed France’s ability to obtain what is announced. It is unthinkable that the United Nations Security Council will take a decision giving the green light to any military aid from France or from another country in the current circumstances. It may change if the situation worsens on the ground.

Besides, the Security Council would be embarrassed to pass such a resolution when it is blocked, due to the US veto, the passing of a resolution condemning Israel’s otherwise much more serious and disproportionate crimes against the Palestinian civilians.

Azerbaijan, thanks to the international tensions and the proven powerlessness of the United Nations system, is taking advantage of its military and psychological advantage and pushing its pawns. Everything can therefore be envisaged in the near future. It is unlikely that the West will intervene militarily. At best if the violation of territorial integrity continues, Armenia may hope for a UN Security Council resolution calling for the withdrawal of Azeri troops. On the ground that would not change anything. These resolutions are certainly important from a diplomatic and legal standpoint, but any informed observer knows how little international law and Security Council resolutions are respected (Israel being the first slayer of the UN system and of international law).

Will the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) multilateral treaty (an intergovernmental military alliance composed of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan) be more useful? It is highly doubtful that this treaty will be implemented in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan because all of the member countries wish to maintain bilateral relationship with Azerbaijan.

Will the bilateral military treaty between Russia and Armenia be the only option left? From a military perspective, this is probably the most realistic one. However, Russia cares for its own geopolitical reasons to continue its tactical alliance with Turkey, while also creating inroads over the territory of Armenia for regional economic reasons. It will then favor diplomacy until the end, especially if no shots are fired. The weaker side — Armenia — will be the one that should again make concessions. This is why Nikol Pashinyan, who embodies the surrender, must be replaced in the interest of the nation. The team and format proposed by Levon Ter-Petrosian are the best solution. Today the replacement of Pashinyan is even more urgent. It has been disclosed that a secret negotiation was going on and was about to be completed. Pashinyan did not want to disclose the content and claimed that if the adversary agrees to it he will sign it. Obviously he has no intention of consulting the Parliament or any other institution, creating another de facto blow to Armenia.

Extreme Options and Neglected Alliances

Armenia must stop portraying itself as a victim and take its destiny back into its own hands without begging or waiting for aid from third parties. It is easy to say but a long way to go.

The question of alliances is crucial and must be one of the subjects of closed-doors debates which should be held urgently between political forces. We can read and witness radical views. For an example, the new political movement launched by an alliance of the Sasna Tsrer with other small groups is actively promoting ties with the United States by taking advantage of the growing anti-Russian sentiment among a population that doubts the latter’s intentions in the region. I do believe that they are deeply mistaken about the intentions of the United States and Europe to supplant Russia in Armenia. Those militants forget too easily the setback of the Georgian experience.

Armenia is but a toy in the new cold war between Russia and the West. It does not have the means to question the strategic alliance with Russia: our border security, energy supply, transportation, telecommunication and banking industries for the most part rest with Russian firms. On the other hand, it is time to have a firmer discourse with Russia. The latter has often been mistaken throughout history in its tactical alliances.

At the other extreme, Kocharyan recently referred to Armenia’s increasing political integration into the Russian Federation. It is an unpleasant idea, because it means a greater loss of sovereignty. He must clarify that idea and it must be debated.

Beyond those alliances, the Armenian government never made reference to Iran, China, and India, while they all have an interest in maintaining the territorial integrity of Armenia. In fact, Iran and India have officially made a declaration about it within last days. The reasons for Iran’s interest are directly related to its own border with Azerbaijan and the fear for the rising up of its domestic Azerbaijani minority. And India has been brought into the equation indirectly by the Azerbaijani and Turkish appeal to fellow Islamic nations, especially Pakistan, for support in various international bodies.

One could elaborate even further. The point is that all those options must be debated by all components of the nation. No leader can decide alone at this critical time, where Armenia is at crossroads and the State endangered.

The most important thing is to act now, to mobilize and dedicate intelligence and resources to a few objectives, to have a real diplomatic and security strategy in the short and long term, and to put aside interpersonal conflicts. The negotiations and the transition must be prepared today. Strategic thinking and debate must begin now and not wait for the outcome of the elections. If Pashinyan signs a new agreement in the conditions he mentioned today, then those elections will most probably not happen.

[Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, based in Paris, is a Lawyer, Lecturer in International Law and a former Secretary General of FIDH (International Federation of Human Rights). He is a regular columnist for the *Mirror-Spectator*.]

LETTERS

Genocide Can Never Be Justified

To the Editor:

Michael Rubin’s article (5/8/21) that the post-Biden acknowledgment of genocide was followed by the US State Department’s enabling Azerbaijan to regain access to U.S. military “aid” is extremely alarming.

In that same article Rubin seems to position himself behind a different alarming attitude, that genocide might be “justified.” While he clearly does *not* justify the Armenian Genocide, he does suggest that certain circumstances might do so.

This is a dangerous road to go down. Let’s be clear that, according to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, there is no justification for genocide. Genocide is an absolute wrong and can never be justified under any circumstances.

Pamela Steiner, EdD
Senior Fellow, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights
Harvard School of Public Health

Pashinyan Has to Go

To the Editor:

I think in the diaspora we have the obligation to save our homeland from Pashinyan. I am sure you have seen the rally that was organized by former President Robert Kocharyan.

I believe we must use our electronic and print media power to support the election of Kocharyan.

I pray that we will have the opportunity to regain the lost territories and liberate Artsakh again.

Hirant Gulian
New York City

Medical Group to Present Program on Healing Power of Music

BOSTON — The Armenian American Medical Association of Boston (AAMA) will host the “Healing Power of Music” virtual event, bridging music and medicine. This virtual event will take place on Thursday June 3 from 7:30 to 9 p.m. and will be streamed live. Registrants will have access to the event venue for up to a month following the airing.

A key goal of this event is to help bring



Isabel Bayrakdarian



Little Singers of Armenia

inspiration and healing the communities after a challenging year for us as Americans, healthcare professionals and Armenians. Those tuning in will experience a program that is designed to stimulate both heart and mind.

The keynote speaker will be Dr. Lisa Wong, who is the associate co-director of the Arts and Humanities Initiative at Harvard Medical School. Based on her cele-

brated book, *Scales to Scalpels*, Dr. Wong, as the former president of the Longwood Symphony Orchestra, will explore the very intimate interplay between music, patient healing and the very way medicine might be practiced.

The program will host special musical appearances by Isabel Bayrakdarian (opera singer), Narek Hakhnazaryan (cellist), and the Little Singers of Armenia (children’s choir). Bayrakdarian will in fact premier a new collection of songs of healing and lullabies that she has recorded and shared exclusively with the AAMA.

During the program a special discussion




Dr. Lisa Wong

by music therapists will highlight the latest research on music’s effect on healing and medicine. Other special guests are expected too.

This event is free and open to the public; however, prior registration is required at: <https://www.engagez.net/node/872614/eventregistration>

Please see attached flyer for more details.



The Tekeyan Cultural Association Is Rolling Up Its Sleeves Again

Before the 44-day war, we supported the development of the strategic Berdzor corridor and made large investments in the region. Berdzor and its neighboring regions (Kashatagh) have now fallen into enemy hands. All of a sudden, its residents, students and teachers were forced to become refugees and are now helplessly scattered all around Artsakh and Armenia. They have lost everything and their living conditions are less than desirable.





The good news is that once more Tekeyan is engaged to make their lives better, so that they remain in Armenia and become part of the nation-building process.

This time though the help will be achieved through investments and not through donations. The creation of a **sustainable economy** is the aim of this appeal.

Through small contributions / mass funding we will create income-generating opportunities for the displaced families. Tekeyan of Armenia in association with a local reputable NGO (Shen or Syunik or Kashatagh) will make investments in agriculture and/or housing to create income or comforts for their beneficiaries. The recipients get these funds conditional that they give back on an annual basis the equivalent in produced goods of 5% of the amount of assistance they have received.

Contributors in this funding will be gratified to:

- a) Alleviate the hardship of these forcefully displaced families
- b) Receive a 5% annual return – goods which in turn will be redirected to schools or other needy institutions.



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For example: Collected funds will buy Bee Colony +/- \$US 150, Bee hive +/- \$US 50, Calf +/- \$US 200, Fruit treesapling +/- \$US 5 ... etc.



Members of Congress Urge US to Suspend Military Aid to Azerbaijan

AID, from page 1

“The U.S. has provided over \$100 million in aid from American taxpayer dollars to Azerbaijan, which is being used by the Aliyev regime to destabilize the South Caucasus region with its aggressive and unchecked actions,” said Assembly Congressional Relations Director Mariam Khaloyan. “We urge the Administration and Congress to uphold the letter and spirit of Section 907.”

Joining Armenian Caucus Leaders David Valadao (R-CA), Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), Jackie Speier (D-CA), and Adam Schiff (D-CA) on the letter were U.S. House of Representatives Members Jake Auchincloss (D-MA), Tony Cárdenas (D-CA), Judy Chu (D-CA), David Cicilline (D-RI), Katherine Clark (D-MA), Jim Costa (D-CA), Danny Davis (D-IL), Anna Eshoo (D-CA), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Jared Huffman (D-CA), Ro Khanna (D-CA), Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL), James Langevin (D-RI), Brenda Lawrence (D-MI), Andy Levin (D-MI), Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), James McGovern (D-MA), Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Devin Nunes (R-CA), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), Linda Sanchez (D-CA), Brad Sherman (D-CA), Abigail Spanberger (D-VA), Haley Stevens (D-MI), Thomas Suozzi (D-NY), and Dina Titus (D-NV).