

# Sununu Family Continues to Support Azerbaijan through Mining in Karabakh

By Aram Arkun  
*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

CONCORD, N.H. — As the *Mirror-Spectator* reported [last November](#), the Anglo Asian Mining company, in which Republican politician John Henry Sununu, father of current New Hampshire governor Chris Sununu, is the second largest shareholder, plans to resume mining gold in Zangelan province and possibly two other areas that were previously under Armenian control.

John Sununu, a former governor of New Hampshire and former chief of staff to President George H. W. Bush, owns a 9.38 percent stake in the company. After the end of the 2020 Artsakh War, the Sununu family increased its direct involvement in the company, when in December of last year, Anglo Asian Mining [welcomed Mi-](#)



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev with former Governor John H. Sununu pictured at a meeting in Washington, DC in March 2016 (Photo: trend.az)

[chael Sununu](#) to its board as a non-executive director. Michael is the son of former governor John Sununu and is a founder and manager of Sununu Enterprises and Sununu Holdings.

Anglo Asian Mining’s predecessor company, controlled by the same CEO, see [SUNUNU](#), page 7



A family receiving their hives and bee colonies, flanked by Anahit Kosakyan (in red at left) and Gayané Muratyan, TCA representative in Armenia at right

# Sustainable Assistance

## Tekeyan Cultural Association Helps Berdzor Refugees Earn Incomes and Live in Armenia

WATERTOWN — The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the USA and Canada (TCA) supported the development of the strategic Kashatagh (Lachin) corridor and made significant investments in the region. The TCA supported the Berdzor Tekeyan school in the principal town of the corridor and during the past six years undertook the responsibility of considerable renovations, while the TCA Sponsor a Teacher program supported its teachers and staff financially.

Classroom after classroom, the school’s dilapidated facilities were renovated and the school of 20 students grew to become the attraction of the region.

Around it assembled an active community of new settlers. The renovations included 17 classrooms, the reception hall, the roof, drinking water connection, and, most recently, new bathrooms on each of the four floors. The Tekeyan school became the talk of the town and its enrollment grew to be over 220 students.

The 44-day Artsakh war arrived at the end of last year. The unforeseen scenario of vacating the school became a reality. The town of Berdzor and its neighboring regions (Kashatagh) fell into enemy hands. All of a sudden, its residents, students and teachers were forced to

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# Armenian Authorities Accused of Disrespecting War Dead

YEREVCAN (RFE/RL) — The director and two other employees of a morgue were fired on Wednesday as the Armenian authorities faced accusations of showing disrespect to the bodies of Armenian soldiers killed during last year’s war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

At least 3,800 of them died during six weeks of heavy fighting with Azerbaijani forces stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire in November. Hundreds of others remain unaccounted for.

Their relatives have regularly staged protests in recent months to demand that the Armenian government do more to recover the bodies of their loved ones or shed more light on their whereabouts. Many of them distrust official data on still unidentified bodies of dead soldiers kept at Armenian morgues.

On Monday, some angry relatives forced their way into the mortuaries to count the number of corpses and body parts stored there. They took pictures inside a morgue in Abovian, a town 15 kilometers north of Yerevan.

The photographs circulated on social media showed plastic bags filled with human remains lying on the ground in its basement, which was not refrigerated to prevent their decomposition. They caused uproar in the country, with many accusing the authorities of dishonoring the Armenian soldiers killed in action.

The Armenian Ministry of Health initially denied that their remains are kept in degrading conditions. But Health Minister

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# CSTO Announces War Games in Armenia as Border Standoff Continues

By Raffi Elliott  
*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN — The Collective Security Treaty Organization, (CSTO), a post-Soviet defensive alliance of six member-states including Armenia, has confirmed that it will hold large-scale military drills in Armenia this year. The war games, dubbed “[Thunder 2021](#),” were announced as a tense standoff on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border enters its

fourth week after several hundred Azerbaijani soldiers illegally entered Armenian territory on foot on May 12.

Armenia officially triggered Article 2 of the CSTO’s mutual security treaty just under two days after the incursion was recorded. However, aside from statements of concern, the organization has until now refrained from openly backing its South Caucasian ally in the matter. In the

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Armenian and CSTO soldiers drilling during War Games

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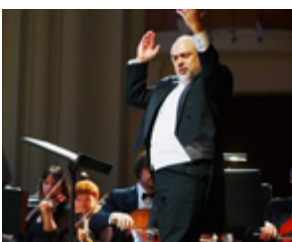
**GLENDALE**

45-Year-Old Massis Kabob Outgrows Mall Food Court



**NEW YORK**

Orbelian Named Music Director of New York City Opera







ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Lebanese-Armenian POW Put on Trial in Baku

BAKU (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The preliminary court hearing in the case of Viken Euljekjian, a Lebanese citizen of Armenian descent captured by the Azerbaijani military after the end of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in fall 2020, is being held on June 8. He was charged with “mercenary activity, “terrorism, “illegal crossing of the state border,” Sputnik Azerbaijan reports. Euljekjian is now under custody in Azerbaijan, in gross violation of the international humanitarian law. He was earlier transferred to a hospital reportedly after suffering back pains.

### UN General Assembly Elects Margaryan As Budgetary and Administrative Committee Chair

NEW YORK (Panorama.am) — During the Plenary of the United Nations General Assembly on June 7, the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations Mher Margaryan was unanimously elected as a Chair of the Administrative and Budgetary Committee, one of the six main committees of the UN General Assembly, for the 76th session of the UNGA, the Permanent Mission of Armenia to the UN reported. In his remarks Margaryan expressed his gratitude to the representatives of the UN member states for the expression of confidence. He stressed his commitment to lead the works of the Committee in an objective and inclusive manner aimed at the enhancing the efficiency of the administration of the United Nations. The UNGA Fifth Committee is responsible for administrative and budgetary matters and adopts the UN regular and peacekeeping budgets. The Committee’s activities also include the questions related of human resources and management of the organization.

### Gallup: Pashinyan Tops Kocharyan By 1.8 percent In New Survey

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The approval rating of Armenia’s Civil Contract party, led by Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, leads the Hayastan (Armenia) bloc headed by ex-President Robert Kocharyan by 1.8 percent, a fresh survey conducted by Gallup International reveals. In late May, 22.4 percent of respondents said-down from 27.2 percent a month earlier — that they would vote for Pashinyan’s party if elections were held next Sunday, Gallup said. Support for Kocharyan and his bloc, meanwhile, grew over the one-month period from 8.1 to 20.6 percent. All the other relatively major political forces gained a little ground, according to the survey. Prosperous Armenia’s rating grew from 3.7 percent to 4.2 percent, as did those of Bright Armenia (from 1.8 percent to 2.9 percent). “I Have the Honor” bloc was supported by 3.9 percent of respondents.

# Consumer Spending, Financial Literacy Facing Stress in Post-Covid, Post-War Armenia

By Cristopher Patvakanian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — The financial system and spending patterns of many Armenians were not isolated from the shocks to Armenian society following the pandemic and 2020 war.

Financial literacy — knowledge of one’s earnings, spending, savings, and financial planning capacity, plays an important role in consumer spending behavior. By some metrics, Armenia’s level of such knowledge is among the lowest in the region. According to the S&P’s Global Financial Literacy Survey, per its 2014 survey, only 18% of adults were overall financially literate in the country, compared to 36% in Azerbaijan and 30% in Georgia. That survey asked 4 basic questions on numeracy, interest compounding, inflation, and risk diversification, and the result showed only 18% of Armenians were able to answer at least 3 of those questions correctly. In times of crisis, it is more important than ever to have a good understanding of the financial system and a society with high financial literacy.

Incidentally, the situation is not much better in the United States, as only around 30% of Americans would be considered financially “literate” based on a similar survey.

A recent study on Armenia is the Financial Capability Barometer, conducted by the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) from 2014-2019. The Barometer looked at more thematic groups and categories beyond simple questions of financial knowledge, capturing also the skills, attitude, behavior metrics of financial literacy of Armenians across the country. The study found that the overall “behavior” of individuals — the number of people taking concrete actions in their financial best interest — for most all measures in the survey experienced an overall increase from 2014 to 2019. This progress, though very promising, still leaves areas for improvement in Armenian society, namely in long-term planning and saving behaviors.

#### Impact of Covid-19

Looking at the effect of the pandemic on financial spending patterns, there are several metrics which provide insights into the behavior of Armenians. The first obvious impact of COVID-19 was the reduction in cash transactions, most likely due to fears of contracting the disease from fiat money. For the first time in Armenian history, the percent of card transactions surpassed those of cash ones, with only 43% of transactions being conducted with cash vs. 57% with cards in the first quarter of 2020. Armenia saw a change not only in the volume but also in the number of transactions.

Compared to 2019, the overall number of credit card transactions in Armenia experienced a 39% increase in the 2020 financial period, a notable difference again due to the impact of Covid on Armenians’ financial spending. The increase in card transactions resulted in the need for better financial literacy. As a result, banks and institutions began implementing campaigns and on card best practices and protection from scams.

Similarly, many bank transactions which previously were primarily conducted in person became available through online websites and mobile applications. In fact, in June of 2020, the Central Bank itself promoted the use of online services for transactions to reduce the spread of COVID19.

However, despite the emphasis on reducing traffic towards in person banking services, there was still a 7.5% growth in the accounts created in 2020, compared to 5.6% account growth in 2019.

#### Impact of 2020 War

Quantifying the impact of war on financial literacy and behavior is challenging, as many key statistics, indicators, and survey results have not yet been released. However, during periods of crisis and uncertainty, if there is low trust in the government and financial system, there are several measurable changes that can be observed, such as

waived from late fees and penalties from the bank, while having their fines or credit classifications being considered on an individual basis. For those families in Artsakh, a policy was proposed by the Artsakh Republic in February to allow individuals and legal entities that have mortgage, business, consumer loans and loans received before September 27, 2020 to use state support in the near future. Similarly, from October 2020 to March 31, 2021, individual borrowers were provided with a grace period for principal amounts of up to 30 million drams or equivalent foreign currency loan liabilities (except for mortgage and gold



A shopping mall in Armenia

dollarization and levels of savings kept in the bank.

Looking specifically at dollarization, or the conversion of local currency to dollars out of fear of a devaluation, one can see this happening to an extent in Armenia after the war. According to the Central Bank of Armenia, households and businesses lost an estimated 5-7 billion AMD or 9.5 - 13.4 million dollars (per the current exchange rate) thanks to unearned interest. On the tremendous loss in savings due to irresponsible savings and dollarization, CBA Chairman Martin Galsytan stated, “I do not know how many crises we have to go through to understand that such things should not be done.”

One change we did not see were masses of people taking out their deposits out of the bank, also known as a “bank run.” Though historically they do not primarily occur during periods of war, many bank runs do happen when the general public feels safer to hold their currency in cash and loses confidence in the bank’s ability to protect their money during periods of catastrophes. One important reason likely behind this is the Deposit Guarantee Fund of Armenia (DGFA). Similar to the American FDIC guarantee of one’s savings in the US, the DGFA protects the savings of up to 16 million AMD and up to 7 million AMD worth of foreign deposits per person. The deposit guarantee was increased after the war from the initial 10 million for AMD and 5 million AMD worth of foreign currency.

Two concerns many Armenians had were regarding what would be the fate of the financial commitments of those who were living in Artsakh and of soldiers participating in the war. Initially, those who could provide documentation that they were in fact conscripted or volunteered were

loans), and the loan repayment period was extended accordingly.

Many commercial banks were considering fully or partially forgiving credit liabilities of customers who died, went missing or became disabled as a result of hostilities, but at the discretion of the bank and each customer’s unique situation. However, on May 18, it was announced by CBA Chairman Galystyan in a National Assembly meeting that banks and credit organizations had forgiven 2.5 billion AMD in loans to the victims, relatives of the missing or missing soldiers, all without any government assistance.

In terms of financial spending post-war, a major concern in consumer spending could be a rise in prices, namely for bread and grain products. Former Minister of Agriculture, Arthur Khachatryan, estimated in November of 2020 that in the future Armenia would need to import 20-25% more grain from other countries after losing that land during the war. Similarly, the Chairman of the Board of Banks of Armenia, Artak Ananyan, believes that the majority of the financial effects of Armenia’s crises are to be felt and seen in 2021, per his March interview earlier this year. In his words, “Much [of the impact on the banking system] will depend on the development of the epidemic situation, the actions of the authorities, the general domestic and foreign policy situation of the country.”

As Armenians anticipate elections this summer, periods of crisis are bound to test the financial system again, and consumer behavior will respond accordingly. Many bankers and institutions are hoping consumers will make decisions in their best interest, decisions which ultimately stem from, among many factors, one’s level of financial literacy.





ARMENIA

# CSTO Announces War Games in Armenia as Border Standoff Continues

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ensuing weeks, Azerbaijani forces fired on Armenian positions, killing one service-member and later abducted six military engineers from Armenian territory in the middle of the night. Most recently, a shootout ensued when Armenian forces prevented Azerbaijani soldiers from stealing a shepherd's flock near Gegharkunik's Kut village.

CSTO Deputy Secretary General Valery Semerikov insisted last week that urgent measures, "primarily of a political and diplomatic nature" were necessary to address the crisis. This position seemingly aligns with the Russian Federations, which has also repeatedly offered to act as a mediator to resolve the border demarcation dispute, without explicitly calling out Azerbaijan for breaching Armenian sovereignty.

Armenian Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan previously criticized the alliance's reluctance to intervene or even explicitly formulate its stance on the issue. He did reveal that CSTO leaders had privately pledged to support Armenia, but have yet to do so publicly. "We want clarity on this issue," Pashinyan insisted during a parliamentary question period last month.

Armenian Acting Minister of Defense Vagharshak Harutiunyan said after a visit with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Shoigu, in Moscow last week "our partners looked into possible ways of resolving the situation and reached agreement on necessary steps." However the Russian Ministry of Defense's statement did not elaborate on any agreed solution.

More vocal support for Armenia's position did come from the West, however. As part of a two-day visit to the French capital Pashinyan was warmly received by French President Emmanuel Macron, French Senate President Gérard Larcherm, and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo on June 1. Macron repeated earlier calls on Azerbaijan to immediately retreat from Armenian sovereign territory and formally accepted Pashinyan's earlier offer that France join an international mediation effort to resolve the border demarcation issue. The French President even called his Azerbaijani counterpart with that same message. "We stand in solidarity with Armenia and we will continue to do so," Macron said during the meeting between the two heads of state.

Echoing the French president, Senate leader Gérard Larcher also called on Azerbaijani troops to withdraw and release all Armenian POWs, including those most recently abducted. "We raised the issue of Armenian prisoners of war with the President of the European Parliament, which resulted in the European Parliament passing a resolution that we assess as quite a positive step. We are not satisfied with this, our efforts will be continued," Larcher said.

Pashinyan also met with European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels the following day. Michel welcomed the pace of Armenia's reforms since the 2018 revolution as well as the ongoing implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Michel praised Armenia's restrained stance regarding the Azerbaijani encroachment and

called for Azerbaijan to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

The United States too commended Armenia for seeking a diplomatic solution. In an unusually strong statement, the US State Department specifically called on Azerbaijan to retreat to its May 11 positions and to release all prisoners. A similar memo was also shared to the Permanent Council in Vienna, the US Chargé d'Affaires Courtney Austrian pledged US support for a resolution to both the Karabakh conflict and the border demarcation issue through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Pashinyan had publicly asked the OSCE to take an active role in the demarcation issue, including the possible deployment of peacekeepers, during a security council meeting on May 27, attended by representatives of parliamentary opposition parties. Acting Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan caused some controversy when resigning his post hours after the announcement, followed by one of his deputy ministers as well as the Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman Anna Naghdalyan who had held the post since 2018. The prime minister's Press Secretary Mane Gevorgyan called on Ayvazyan to clarify a later comment that Foreign Ministry would "never allow policies that would hurt Armenia". The OSCE Minsk group responded to Armenia's request the next day calling on all sides to resume peaceful negotiations under its auspices.

The border crisis, which was apparently timed to coincide with the official launch of election season in Armenia — with the first Azerbaijanis crossing the border within 36 hours of parliament dissolving itself — has already affected the election campaign. The prime minister's Civil Contract party has seen a steady drop in support over

the month of May, as voters remain anxious over border security though he remains in the lead. These concerns have been amplified by leaked documents from exiled media tycoon Mikael Minasyan that Pashinyan intended to cede parts of Tavush province to Azerbaijan — a rumor which has been repeatedly denied. His challenger, former President Robert Kocharyan, has put defense and security matters at the top of his campaign, with slogans reading "Towards a Stronger Armenia." He has criticized both Pashinyan's leadership during last fall's 44-day war, and the ongoing border crisis.

However critics accuse the one-time president of having failed to secure a dignified peace and resolution to the Karabakh conflict during his decade-long tenure in office at a time when Armenia was still fresh off its victory in the previous war, and before Azerbaijan's Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline became operational, revenue from which would fund Azerbaijan's decade-long weapons buildup which Armenia could not match. Kocharyan, and his hand-picked successor, Serzh Sargsyan were also known to have presided over decades of entrenched corruption and nepotism in the Armenian military.

Pashinyan hit back at Kocharyan's criticisms as well, saying that three years were not enough to reverse three decades of stagnation in the military. His earlier claim that he had made the biggest arms purchases in Armenian history has been seemingly backed up by figures recently released by the SIPRI database.

With parliamentary elections scheduled for June 20, the campaign season has officially kicked off on Monday June 7. 28 parties and alliances have been registered to take part in the vote.

## Armenian Foreign Ministry Confirms More Resignations

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — All four deputy foreign ministers of Armenia tendered their resignations after Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan stepped down on May 27, it was officially confirmed on Monday, June 7.

Ayvazyan announced his decision hours after an emergency session of the Armenian government's Security Council which discussed mounting tensions on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

Speaking at a May 31 farewell meeting with the Foreign Ministry staff, Ayvazyan hinted that he is quitting because of disagreeing with government decisions which he believes could put the country's sovereignty and national security at risk. He did not go into details.

It emerged afterwards that one of Ayvazyan's deputies, Gagik Ghalachyan, also handed in his resignation on May 27. Some Armenian media outlets reported last week that the three other deputy ministers — Artak Apitonyan, Avet Adonts and Armen Ghevondyan — followed suit.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry confirmed those reports on Monday, adding that the resignations of Apitonyan, Adonts and Ghevondian were submitted to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's office for approval last week.

None of the vice-ministers has been formally relieved of his duties so far.

The Foreign Ministry's Spokesperson

Anna Naghdalyan had announced her intention to resign shortly after the foreign minister's decision to quit.

Speaking at the May 27 meeting of the Security Council, Pashinyan called for the deployment of international observers along contested portions of the frontier where Armenian and Azerbaijani troops



From left, Deputy FM Gagik Ghalachyan, Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan and Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Anna Naghdalyan

have been facing off against each other for the last four weeks.

Some opposition figures and other critics of Pashinyan denounced the proposal, accusing him of failing to defend Armenia against foreign aggression and plotting to cede Armenian territory to Baku. The prime minister and his allies deny that.

Ayvazyan's remarks gave Pashinyan's detractors more ammunition. An Armenian government spokeswoman challenged the outgoing minister to publicly clarify "who, where and how was going to take some steps or to make decisions contradicting our country's national and state interests."

## Armenian Authorities Accused Of Disrespecting War Dead

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Anahit Avanesyan publicly apologized to soldiers' families on Tuesday, saying that she was wrong not to have personally inspected the Abovian morgue.

The scandal continued unabated, however. One of the relatives publicized on Tuesday night a short video of the morgue basement.

Avanesyan formally reprimanded Mher Bisharyan, the head of a state center of forensic medicine overseeing the Armenian mortuaries, the following morning. Bisharyan in turned sacked the director and two other workers of the Abovian morgue.

"We fired them because they didn't perform their duties properly," Bisharyan said. He said they should have placed the remains on stretchers and stored them in a more orderly way.

Bisharyan said that the remains were taken to the Abovian facility because a refrigerated morgue truck where they were kept until May 28 broke down. He said they were "temporarily" stored in the basement due to a lack of space in the morgue's refrigerated rooms.

The official added that the remains were transported on Tuesday to a refrigerated facility in Martuni, a town 130 kilometers north of Yerevan.

Sofia Hovsepyan, an independent member of Armenia's outgoing parliament critical of the government, dismissed the authorities' response to the scandal which she said highlights their "impunity" and lack of empathy for the families of the war dead.

"Instead of firing the three individuals they should have sacked and prosecuted the health minister and the former health minister [Arsen Torosyan, the current chief of the Armenian government's staff,]" she told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Hovsepyan claimed that many bodies of the deceased soldiers were for months kept at another morgue not equipped with refrigerators and that the authorities transported them to more suitable facilities only after her persistent complaints.

According to the authorities, 200 corpses and 400 body parts of dead soldiers are currently kept there. Officials say that DNA samples taken from them match those of nearly 100 families of the missing soldiers. They say those families refuse to take and bury the corresponding remains because they do not trust the results of the forensic tests.

About 70 other families are said to have refused to give their DNA samples to the authorities for the same reason.



## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## EU Calls on Armenia, Azerbaijan to Solve Humanitarian Issues

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The lead spokesperson for the external affairs of the EU Peter Stano called on Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve the humanitarian issues, including the release of captives. Commenting on the June 4 landmine explosion in Karvachar as a result of which Azerbaijani reporters were killed, Stano tweeted: “Civilian casualties of landmines must be prevented. All information necessary for demining must be exchanged. The EU supports ban on land mines and urges Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve pending humanitarian issues, including release of detainees.”

## Baku Blocks Football Commentator's Accreditation for Euro 2020

MOSCOW (Public Radio of Armenia) — Nobel Arustamyan, a football commentator for the Russian Match TV channel, has been denied accreditation for Euro 2020, his colleague Vasily Utkin informs. “If there is injustice in the world, then here it is. Nobel Arustamyan actually does not work for the Euro. He is not accredited. Nobel is NOT ACCREDITED!!!” Utkin said in a Telegram post. The accreditation must be approved by the organizing committees in all countries. “It is clear that Nobel would not have gone to work in Azerbaijan. Now he will not go to London or Amsterdam,” Utkin said. Nobel Arustamyan is of Armenian descent.

## Russian, French, German FM's Discuss Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh

MOSCOW (Panorama.am) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on June 7 held a phone call with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. The ministers conducted a detailed exchange of opinions on prospects for resolving the domestic Ukrainian conflict in Donbass following the May 26 videoconference with political advisors of the Normandy format countries' leaders. They noted that there was no alternative to the Minsk agreements, and that all sides had to fulfil their obligations, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a [statement](#). They discussed the situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the implementation of the statements by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia of November 9, 2020 and January 11, 2021. They noted the importance of unflinchingly complying with the ceasefire regime and the need to resolve any disagreements by political and diplomatic means. The ministers reaffirmed the role of the OSCE's Minsk Group during the negotiating process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Lavrov noted that any involvement of international organizations is only possible with the consent of Baku and Yerevan.

## Armed Low-Cost Drones, Made by Turkey, Reshape Battlefields and Geopolitics

By James Marson and Brett Forrest  
ISTANBUL (*Wall Street Journal*) — A soldier idles by a Russian-made T-72 tank. A moment later, a missile fired from a drone slams into the vehicle, exploding in an orange flash, blowing the man off his feet and leaving the tank a smoldering wreck. The scene is one of dozens of aerial videos that were posted online in Azerbaijan last year showing off a new weapon. Over six weeks, it helped the nation regain territory in the Nagorno-Karabakh region that had been held by Armenian forces for more than two decades. The videos show attacks on tanks, trucks, command posts, mortar positions and radar installations.

Smaller militaries around the world are deploying inexpensive missile-equipped drones against armored enemies, a new battlefield tactic that proved successful last year in regional conflicts, shifting the strategic balance around Turkey and Russia. Drones built in Turkey with affordable digital technology wrecked tanks and other armored vehicles, as well as air-defense systems, of Russian protégés in battles waged in Syria, Libya and Azerbaijan.

“The implications are game changing,” UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said in a speech last year, citing Syria's heavy losses to Turkish drones.

Flying alone or in a group, these drones can surprise troops and disable poorly concealed or lightly defended armored vehicles, a job often assigned to expensive warplanes. The drones can stay quietly aloft for 24 hours, finding gaps in air-defense systems and helping target strikes by warplanes and artillery, as well as firing their own missiles.

Militaries, including the US, are upgrading air-defense systems to catch up with the advances, seeking methods to eliminate low-budget drones without firing missiles that cost more than their targets.

The US Air Force Research Laboratory is also developing Skyborg and Valkyrie, lower-cost autonomous aircraft that are part of an innovation program. “Our adversaries are already fielding technologies that will hold our legacy platforms at risk,” an Air Force official said in a statement.

Israel and the US have long used high-end drones in counterterrorism operations to target prominent enemies. But the countries have hesitated to sell their top models, even to allies, for fear of proliferation.

Responding to drone deals that China and other producers have struck with coun-

tries shunned by the US, the Trump administration last July relaxed its export policy somewhat, potentially boosting sales of more capable models than previously allowed. The United Arab Emirates said in January it had agreed to buy 18 US-made MQ-9 drones for nearly \$3 billion.

Technological advances and global competitors have produced inexpensive alternatives. The standard-bearer of the latest armed-drone revolution emerged last year on the battlefields around Turkey, the Bayraktar TB2.

Compared with the American MQ-9, the TB2 is lightly armed, with four laser-guided missiles. Its radio-controlled apparatus limits its basic range to around 200 miles, roughly a fifth of the ground the MQ-9 can cover.

Yet it is utilitarian, and reliable. The drone's Turkish producer, Baykar, which started in 1984 making auto parts, boasts of more bang for the buck. Qatar and Ukraine are customers. Poland, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization member, said last month it would buy 24 TB2 drones. Several other NATO allies are interested, as well as countries in Africa and Asia, Turkish government and company officials said.

The TB2 drone gained international notice in the skies over Syria in early 2020. Toward the end of February, the Syrian regime, backed by Russia, was advancing on Idlib, which was held by rebels supported by Turkey. After an air raid killed more than 30 Turkish soldiers, Turkey embarked on Spring Shield, an operation that integrated drones with electronic warfare systems, ground troops, artillery and warplanes.

The drones, quiet and hard to spot on radar, flew for hours seeking gaps in air-defense systems, which fell “like domino tiles” once breached, said Haluk Bayraktar, chief executive of Baykar.

Last spring, the TB2s helped turn the tide in the Libyan civil war for the Tripoli-based government, which is backed by the United Nations.

Turkey had sent arms in 2019 to stem an assault on the capital by militia leader Khalifa Haftar, who is supported by Russia and others. In 2020, Turkey increased military support. Improved drone tactics honed in Syria provided the upper hand against Russian-made surface-to-air missile systems known as Pantsir, handing the Tripoli government aerial supremacy. By June, Mr. Haftar's forces retreated from Tripoli.

The success of the drones has helped

Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to expand his regional influence.

While Turkey's enhanced capabilities may benefit NATO, fellow members worry that the ability of Mr. Erdogan to deploy and sell drones could embolden his assertive pursuit of a more independent foreign and security policy.

“The US, like a lot of European partners, is leery of Turkey's drone exports and the aggressive way Turkey has been using drones in these conflicts,” said Dan Gettner, a researcher at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, a nonpartisan policy research group in Arlington, Va.

Ukraine signed a deal in January 2019 to buy TB2 drones from Turkey, receiving at least six so far, and Kyiv is in talks for joint production.

Turkish officials say they aren't seeking conflict with Russia by taking on its allies. Turkey has close energy ties with Moscow, and it [purchased an advanced Russian air-defense system](#), leading to sanctions from the US.

The TB2 was born of Turkey's dissatisfaction with available models from the US and Israel, and the country's desire for systems under its control to fight the PKK, a Kurdish militant group.

Baykar emerged as a leader among several Turkish drone producers after spotting a niche in the early 2000s, said Mr. Bayraktar, the company's chief executive. His brother Selcuk Bayraktar, who took advanced studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, came up with flight-control software and guidance systems while using off-the-shelf components.

The TB2s, as well as Israeli-made drones, helped Azerbaijan overwhelm Armenian forces. Attacks were recorded for videos and posted online by Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry.

Oryx, a blog that verifies destroyed equipment, cited the destruction by the drones of 106 Armenian tanks, 146 artillery pieces, 62 multiple rocket-launch systems, 18 surface-to-air missile systems, seven radar units and 161 other vehicles. Azerbaijan had 30 tanks destroyed.

After six weeks of fighting, the Kremlin brokered a cease-fire in November.

At a victory parade in Baku in December, Azerbaijani leader Aliyev sat with Erdogha on a dais lined with Turkish and Azerbaijani flags. Triumphant music blared. When a phalanx of trucks carrying TB2 drones passed, Mr. Aliyev nodded and smiled.

## Grey Wolves Operate in Georgia Under Guise of Humanitarian Organizations – Expert

TBILISI (Public Radio of Armenia) — Representatives of the Turkish ultranationalist Grey Wolves group visit Georgia under the guise of organizations human rights and advocacy organizations, says journalist and expert Iosif Zaalishvili.

“For example, the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) NGO presents itself as a human rights organization, but in reality it is a terrorist organization. In Georgia and Azerbaijan it is engaged in recruiting Muslims with a view to listing them in the ranks of the Grey Wolves in the future. The organization operates in Georgia, their webpage openly states that they transport humanitarian cargo to Adjara, Pankisi during Islamic hol-

idays,” Zaalishvili told Gita Elibekyan, Public Radio's Tbilisi correspondent.

According to him, the Turkish business, and almost interest-free mortgages are gradually changing Georgia. And this is a way for Pan-Turkish to expand to the country, the expert says.

“The Grey Wolves come here as investors, businessmen and benefactors and launch activity under the guise of humanitarian organizations,” Zaalishvili says.

He emphasizes that the Georgian authorities should be wary of threats coming from Turkey and notes that “democratic Georgia should not have such relations with a country that supports

terrorism and is not worthy of NATO membership.”

Furthermore, he says, Georgia should cancel the visa-free travel with Turkey to keep the country away from terrorist activity.

Alexander Kvakhadze, an expert at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) says the Grey Wolves are first of all trying to expand their influence in Turkic-speaking environment, and have become especially active in Azerbaijan. While Kvakhadze sees no Grey Wolves activity in Georgian business, he says “Turkey is actively working on the religious component in Georgia.”





## INTERNATIONAL

# Meeting with Biden Looms as Critical Test for Erdogan

By Metin Gurcan

ISTANBUL (Al-Monitor) — Bracing for a make-or-break meeting with his US counterpart Joe Biden, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan remains squeezed between an imposing need for a thaw in his fraught ties with Washington and the task of selling it to his fold at home, where anti-American sentiment is running high, not least because he has often fueled it himself. (See related editorial on page 18.)

The two leaders are scheduled to meet on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Brussels on June 14 in what would be their first face-to-face encounter since Biden became president, stripping Erdogan of a cozy rapport with the White House under Donald Trump.

Hectic preparations are under way in Ankara for the meeting, sources close to the government say, as a slew of thorny dossiers await the two NATO allies. Chief among them is the lingering row over Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 air defense systems and its ensuing ouster from the F-35 joint strike fighter program by Washington. Bilateral tensions have simmered also over US support for Kurdish forces in Syria, the US trial of a Turkish public bank for helping Iran evade sanctions, Washington's refusal to extradite Fethullah Gulen, the Pennsylvania-based preacher accused of orchestrating the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and Ankara's territorial rows with Greece in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas. Other issues of mutual concern include relations with Russia and tensions in the Black Sea region, the future of Syria and the situation in Iraq, particularly in the Kurdish-run north, where the Turkish army has been pursuing armed Kurdish militants from Turkey taking refuge in the region.

In a TV interview June 1, Erdogan conceded that his dialogue with Biden "has

not been easy" thus far, unlike his "very peaceful and easy-going" phone diplomacy with Trump. Referring also to the terms of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, he said he "had never experienced such tension" with the White House, putting the blame on Biden for recognizing the Ottoman-era killings of Armenians as genocide.

Nevertheless, the row over the S-400s remains the most pressing, with Ankara still scrambling to find a solution that would satisfy Washington. It has floated several options, including the so-called Crete model — a reference to the Greek Cypriots' controversial purchase of S-300 missiles from Russia in the 1990s, which ended up in storage on Greece's island of Crete.

There are signs that Erdogan might propose a new formula to Biden — to deploy the S-400s under US control at the Incirlik air base in southern Turkey, without any Russian involvement in their operation and maintenance. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stressed this week that Ankara would have "100% control" over the systems and no Russian military experts would be present in Turkey.

Ankara's approach to the issue continues to strike many as superficial. With all that chatter on how Turkey would be the only one pressing the on-and-off button, Ankara has sounded as if it is a vacuum cleaner at stake and not a sophisticated missile system and, no wonder, failed to convince Washington.

To break the ice with Biden, the strongest card Erdogan could play is to promote Turkey as the best regional partner in US efforts to contain Russia and Iran. Though this card has somewhat weakened amid Turkey's diplomatic, security and economic rapprochement with Russia in the past several years, Ankara has recently stepped up moves to show it is not giving Moscow a free pass in the region.

The leaders of Georgia, Poland and Ukraine — all at odds with Russia — have visited Turkey in short succession since April. During those visits, Erdogan pledged full support for Georgia's bid to join NATO, sealed a drone contract with Poland and threw his weight behind Ukraine in its standoff with Russia. Also, Turkey took active part in NATO's Steadfast Defender exercises in Romania last week.

Turkey's growing military ties with Ukraine, in particular, are increasingly irking Russia, as evidenced by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's latest warning to Ankara to "stop fueling Kyiv's militaristic sentiment." Ankara has also sent signals of possible further steps to counterbalance Russia in the Black Sea.

On the domestic front, anti-American bluster has been Erdogan's main political fuel to rally his conservative and nationalist base. Yet realpolitik dictates a thaw in bilateral ties. Along with its tougher attitude on the diplomatic front, the Biden administration has refused to ignore Turkey's violations of democratic norms, unlike Trump.

All those dilemmas have led to a rift in Ankara between those who favor normalization, even if at a transactional level, and those who believe that Washington is keen on toppling Erdogan.

Mehmet Kocak, a columnist for the pro-government Islamist daily *Yeni Akit*, for instance, argues that bilateral ties are doomed to deteriorate further, recalling that Biden, in an interview before his election, advocated support for Turkey's opposition to defeat Erdogan. Despite those remarks, "President Erdogan congratulated Joe Biden on his election and offered to open a new chapter in bilateral ties, but that, too, has remained unreciprocated," he writes. According to such isolationist

Islamists, any dialogue with Washington would be futile.

Similar arguments have been raised by Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu, backed by the Nationalist Movement Party, Erdogan's de facto coalition partner. Soylu, who insists that the United States was behind the 2016 coup attempt, said last week that the rattling corruption allegations leveled against him by a fugitive mobster were part of a US-led conspiracy to topple Erdogan's government.

Then there is a small but vocal clique of secular Eurasianists, which is a diehard adversary of the United States and claims to have swayed Erdogan's foreign policies in the past several years. They, too, are irked by Ankara's efforts to mend fences with Washington. Patriotic Party leader Dogu Perincek, the foremost voice of the Eurasianists, has recently lashed out at SETA — a government-linked think-tank, from where many presidential aides hail — for trying to "besiege Erdogan" and talk him into changing course toward reconciliation with the United States and Israel.

This motley crew of US adversaries is likely to do its best to undermine Erdogan's efforts at rapprochement with Washington, drawing especially on the claim that Biden is bent on toppling Erdogan; this claim is an appeal to the Turkish president's conservative and nationalist base.

As for Biden, it would hardly come as a surprise if he puts a rigid condition on Erdogan to choose his side. That would be in line with NATO's evolving vision, which is no longer limited to military partnership and common values, but highlights also greater economic cooperation along with political cohesion.

Similar pressure from Russian President Vladimir Putin would only deepen Erdogan's predicaments as he becomes increasingly squeezed, both at home and abroad.

## Genocide Conviction Upheld against Former Bosnian Serb Military Chief Mladic

By Antohyn Deutsch and Stephannie Van Den Berg

THE HAGUE (Reuters) — United Nations war crimes judges on Tuesday, June 8 upheld a genocide conviction and life sentence against former Bosnian Serb military commander Ratko Mladic, confirming his central role in Europe's worst atrocities since World War II.

Mladic, 78, led Bosnian Serb forces during Bosnia's 1992-95 war. He was convicted in 2017 on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes including terrorizing the civilian population of the Bosnian capital Sarajevo during a 43-month siege, and the killing of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys taken prisoner in the eastern town of Srebrenica in 1995.

"His name should be consigned to the list of history's most depraved and barbarous figures," chief tribunal prosecutor Serge Brammertz said after the verdict. He urged all officials in the ethnically divided region of former Yugoslavia to condemn the ex-general.

Mladic, who had contested both the guilty verdict and life sentence at his trial, wore a dress shirt and black suit and stood looking at the floor as the appeals judgment was read out in court in The Hague.

The appeals chamber "dismisses Mladic appeal in its entirety..., dismisses the prosecution's appeal in its entirety..., affirms the sentence of life imprisonment imposed on Mladic by the trial chamber," presiding judge Prisca Nyambe said.

The outcome caps 25 years of trials at the ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which convicted 90 people. The ICTY is one of the predecessors of the International Criminal Court, the world's first permanent war crimes court, also seated in The Hague.

"I hope that with this Mladic judgment children in (Bosnia's Serb-run entity) Republika Srpska and children in Serbia who are living in lies will read this, " Munira Subasic, whose son and husband were killed by Serb forces that overran Srebrenica, said after the ruling, highlighting Serb genocide denial.

Many Serbs still regard Mladic as a hero, not a criminal.

Post-war Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, now chairing Bosnia's tripartite inter-ethnic presidency, denounced the verdict. "It's clear to us there is an attempt here to create a myth about genocide that never occurred," Dodik said.

In Washington, the White House praised the work of the U.N. tribunals in bringing perpetrators of war crimes to justice.

"This historic judgment shows that those who commit horrific crimes will be held accountable. It also reinforces our shared resolve to prevent future atrocities from occurring anywhere in the world," it said in a statement.

The appeals judges said Mladic, who after his ICTY indictment was a fugitive for 16 years until his 2011 capture, would

remain in custody in The Hague while arrangements were made for his transfer to a state where he will serve his sentence. It is not yet known which country will take him.

Lawyers for Mladic had argued that the former general could not be held responsible for possible crimes committed by his subordinates. They sought an acquittal or a retrial.

Prosecutors had asked the appeals panel to uphold Mladic's conviction and life sentence in full.

They also wanted him to be found guilty of an additional charge of genocide over a campaign of ethnic cleansing - a drive to expel Bosnian Muslims, Croats and other non-Serbs in order to carve out a Greater Serbia - in the early years of the war that included brutal detention camps that shocked the world.

That prosecution appeal was also dismissed. The 2017 verdict found that the ethnic cleansing campaign amounted to persecution - a crime against humanity - but not genocide.

United Nations human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said on Tuesday the final Mladic ruling meant the international justice system had held him to account.

"Mladic's crimes were the abhorrent culmination of hatred stoked for political gain," Bachelet said in a statement.



Ratko Mladic

The lower ICTY court ruled Mladic was part of "a criminal conspiracy" with Bosnian Serb political leaders. It also found he was in "direct contact" with then-Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, who died in 2006 shortly before the verdict in his own ICTY trial for genocide and crimes against humanity.

Mladic was judged to have played a decisive role in some of the most gruesome crimes committed on European soil since the Nazi Holocaust of World War II.

The tribunal determined that Mladic was pivotal in the Srebrenica slaughter - which occurred in a U.N.-designated "safe area" for civilians - since he controlled both the military and police units involved.



# Community News

## Aurora Honors The life of Aurora Co-Founder Vartan Gregorian

NEW YORK — On June 5, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative held an Aurora Dialogues Online event titled “Vartan Gregorian. The Aurora Co-Founder,” focused on Vartan Gregorian’s extraordinary life as humanitarian, educator and mentor. The tribute was moderated by David Ignatius, associate editor and columnist for the *Washington Post*, with speakers including Aurora Co-Founders, Aurora Prize Selection Committee members and Aurora Prize Laureates. The viewers also had a chance to watch several videos featuring Vartan Gregorian over the years and hear him speak about the issues closest to his heart.

To kick-off the event, David Ignatius greeted all participants and the audience. “[We are here] to pay tribute to the late Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Co-Founder and my dear friend, the incomparable Vartan Gregorian, who was an inspiration to us all and a man whose intellectual and moral legacy will live on and influence generations of thinkers and scholars,” said Ignatius, turning the floor over to Aurora Co-Founder Noubar Afeyan.

Afeyan, co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and Founder and CEO of Flagship Pioneering, set the tone for the tribute: “Over many years that I knew Vartan, I always felt he was looking over my shoulder and over the shoulder of all those he knew. What’s even more impressive though is that through his life’s work Vartan also looked over the shoulders of many thousands, if not millions more, most of whom he didn’t know.”

It was hard for Lord Ara Darzi, Chair of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee and Director of the Institute of Global Health Innovation at Imperial College London, to remain composed and not overwhelmed with emotion as he spoke about Gregorian. “He was authentic, he was selfless, he was generous to many, including me. He was poetic, he was a romantic, he was a legend. Also, his wit, his infectious smile and the twinkle in his eyes made him a superb member [of the Selection Committee]. I’ve learned a lot, watching him in action for a number of years,” said Darzi.

One of the people who have experienced Vartan’s life-changing touch was Dr. Tom Catena, Chair of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, 2017 Aurora Prize Laureate and Medical Director of Mother of Mercy Hospital, Nuba Mountains: “He was the guy who grew up in different cultures, around people of different religions and different beliefs. And I think this really made him the man he was. He was a guy who could really get along with anybody and I think everybody felt that he was their friend.”

This sentiment was echoed by Marguerite Barankitse, 2016 Aurora Prize Laureate and Founder of Maison Shalom, who said: “He was a symbol of hope, a symbol of love, of humility, of

see TRIBUTE, page 9



Fr. Nigoghos Aznavourian with Fr. Shnork Souin and Bishop Daniel Findikyan

## Father Nigoghos Ordained To Priesthood at St. Mark Armenian Church

By Talene Jermakian

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — Over Memorial Day weekend, St. Mark Armenian Church held the historic ordination of its pastor, Father Nigoghos Aznavourian (formerly Timothy), by the hand of Primate of the Eastern Diocese, Bishop Daniel Findikyan.

The ordination took place over two days — May 28 with the Service of Calling to the Priesthood, and May 29 with the Ordination and Divine Liturgy.

More than 130 clergy, parishioners, and family and friends of Father Nigoghos (Nicholas in English) were in attendance for Saturday’s ordination, the first to ever be held in Springfield. This also marked the first time an American-born deacon has been ordained to the priesthood by an American-born bishop.

Father Nigoghos is pastor of the Springfield parish, where he has served since February. Father Shnork Souin, Pastor of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church in Providence, Rhode Island, was Father Nigoghos’ Sponsoring Priest, who has supported his spiritual journey to the priesthood. Father Shnork’s anniversary of his ordination happens to be May 29 — the same as Father Nigoghos’.

In his remarks during the banquet, Father Shnork explained how he got to know [then Tim] when he was in his early twenties. [Tim] would travel by bus to lenten services from Pawtucket, where he lived at that time, and then return to work the overnight shift at a local Stop & Shop when he would use free time to study for his college classes. Father Shnork expressed how impressed he was with his dedication and supported his interest in Theology, sending him to take a class at Holy Cross Orthodox Seminary in Brookline, Mass.

Father Shnork continued, “A question was asked of me when I became ordained, ‘What is your goal in life?’ My answer was, if I could somehow impact some young man to somehow decipher, discern and respond to a call to serve, to be able to pass a baton to, that would be a fulfillment of my ministry. I feel like I have achieved my goal.”

Ralph Rafaelian of Rhode Island, who has been a good friend of Father Nigoghos since his baptism as a young adult at Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church in Providence, served as Father Nigoghos’ ordination Godfather.

Findikyan chose the name Nigoghos, which was revealed for the first time during the ordination service, as is tradition. During his benediction, he explained, “St. Nicholas had the gift of godliness. He was able to grow so close to God, that he had the virtues of God himself. Goodness, humility, holiness...leaving his ego behind, throwing it away for the sake of offering everything he had to others. Looking out for others before looking out for himself. That’s where his reputation as a giver of gifts comes from. That’s where his connection with Christmas comes from...today we have been given a gift for the Church. The gift of a young deacon, now a young priest.”

Later in the day, Bishop Findikyan remarked, “This is the best part of being Primate. The greatest gift is that I get to be a small part of the promotion of a wonderful young man to become a priest, a servant, a shepherd of our church, and of one of our precious parishes.”

Aznavourian was born in Boston to David and Patricia Aznavourian, and grew up in Malden, later moving to Rhode Island as a young adult. He is a 2020 graduate of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary and St. Vladimir Orthodox Theological Seminary. He also received a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from Rhode Island College.

see ORDINATION, page 7

## Diocese Announces The First Postdoctoral Fellow and Director Of the Zohrab Center

NEW YORK — The Eastern Diocese is pleased to announce that scholar Jesse Arlen has been named as the first “Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Armenian Christian Studies, and Director at the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center.”

Arlen was selected for the fellowship by a committee representing the Diocese and Fordham University, following a public call for applications. Earlier this year, the Eastern Diocese, under the auspices of Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel, entered into an agreement with Fordham University, which reconfigured the director’s position of the Diocese’s Zohrab Information Center.

Under this arrangement, the Zohrab Center directorship is now a rotating position of two to three years’ duration, where each successive director will simultaneously hold a post-doctoral research fellowship at Fordham’s Orthodox Christian Studies Center.

“I am honored to have been selected as the first recipient of the newly formulated postdoctoral position of Zohrab Center director and Fordham University research fellow,” said Arlen. “I am grateful for those who gave me this opportunity, which will allow me to engage in research, teaching, and programming around the areas I have pursued in my graduate studies: Armenian Christian culture, theology, and history as well as language and literature.”

He added: “I look forward to continuing to deepen connections and work collaboratively with colleagues at the Diocese and for future opportunities at Fordham and St. Nersess.”

Since February, Arlen has been serving as the Zohrab Center’s interim director, while he completes his Ph.D. at UCLA in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures with a focus in Armenian studies. He is the author of numerous publications and papers, and has been a speaker at many academic workshops, panel discussions, and interviews.

“Jesse is a very promising scholar in the field of Armenian theology and early Christian studies,” said Bishop Daniel. “He brings to the Zohrab Center not only strong scholarly and teaching credentials, but also sincere dedication to the Armenian Church and its vital Christian witness and ministry.”



Jesse Arlen has been named as the first Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Armenian Christian Studies, and Director at the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center.





## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Sununu Family Supports Azerbaijan through Mining in Karabakh

SUNUNU, from page 1

Reza Vaziri, signed an agreement with the Azerbaijani government for rights in 1997 to six mines, including three which were then under Armenian control. As a result of the recent Artsakh war, two of these areas are under full Azerbaijani control. A third area, Sotk/Soyudlu, is on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijani controlled Kelbajar.

In the company's quarterly report of April 13, 2021, CEO Vaziri states: "A recent visit to the Vejnaly [Kovsakan] contract area in Zangilan has identified some high grade ore stockpiles and the feasibility of transporting this ore to Gedabek for processing is being evaluated." A May 20, 2021 Anglo Asian Mining report further elaborates: "However, due to safety and security concerns, access to Vejnaly and the other restored areas by company personnel remains somewhat restricted. The determination of their final status continues to be reviewed by the government of Azerbaijan."

Anglo Asian Mining also has an eye on the Kashen deposit with molybdenum and

copper in northern Martakert (Kyzlbulag), part of the territory of the Artsakh Republic, which at present is under the control of Russian peacekeepers. As the company website states, "our access to Kyzlbulag will depend on the final resolution of the status of Nagorno Karabakh."

Non-executive chairman Khosrov Zamani in the May 20 report concludes, "The restoration of the three contract areas in the formerly occupied territories and Karabakh opens up further opportunities for the Company. The contract areas cover a total of 900 square kilometers and contain existing mines and have exceptional exploration potential. Our production sharing agreement is in good standing and will be reset to 'year zero' for each of these contract areas once access has been granted. The political situation is still developing and the Company is closely monitoring events. The Government of Azerbaijan has also commenced building infrastructure in the areas such as roads, railways and airports." The same report also notes, "Development will commence when the Company receives notice in accordance

with its PSA [Production Sharing Agreement] that the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe ('OSCE') (or comparable international organization) has acknowledged a liberation of the previously occupied territories and the Company is satisfied the districts are secure."

Significantly, the government of Azerbaijan takes a hefty cut of Anglo Asian Mining's profits due to the existing PSA, while the economic ties of the Sununu family with Azerbaijan naturally lead to political consequences. John Sununu serves as a member of the Honorary Council of Advisors of the United States-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce and in 2017 received an award of appreciation from this organization for his "contribution to US-Azerbaijani diplomatic relations."

Anglo-Asian's own website attempts to present Azerbaijan in a good light. For example, it glosses over the many problems of Azerbaijan's undemocratic and authoritarian government with statements like "Azerbaijan is a multiparty democracy and presidential republic with a separation of the executive and legislative bodies. It is

among the region's most stable countries."

The Azerbaijani connection with the Sununu's is apparently not one way. BGR Government Affairs, which lobbied for the Republic of Azerbaijan, donated \$1000 to Chris Sununu's campaign for governor in



Governor Chris Sununu, 2017 (US Department of Agriculture photo by Lance Cheung)

2017 and hosted a fundraising reception.

A campaign by the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) calling on Governor Chris Sununu to divest his family's shares in this company, calling this investment "blood money," has not received any response so far, according to the ANCA's Washington D.C. office. Attempts this May by the *Mirror-Spectator* to contact Michael and Chris Sununu also received no response and it does not appear that in general Governor Sununu has made any public comments on the Artsakh war.

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## Father Nigoghos Ordained To Priesthood at St. Mark Armenian Church

ORDINATION, from page 6

He met his wife Julianne (née Tavitian) of Haverhill, Mass., on an annual Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 2015. The couple also spent 10 months studying at Gevorkian Theological Seminary in the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin in Armenia. During the banquet, Yeretzgin Julianne showed a video, a surprise for Father Nigoghos, showing their journey and many life events leading up to the ordination.

Armen Asik, Jr., a talented musician and parishioner of St. Mark, performed a beautiful piece on classical guitar during the banquet, a skill and passion he shares with Father Nigoghos, who studied classical guitar in college.

Addressing guests for the first time as a priest, Aznavourian reflected on his newly given name. "The importance of Saint Nicholas, he had an emphasis on visitation...visitation to the poor, to the odar, to the stranger among our midst. To the people who are "down and out." He had not only the intellectual faith of the holy council of Nicea, but he had the works that went along with that. And my prayer is that we together will be able to emphasize that in our ministry as well."

Aznavourian is now in 40 days of seclusion and prayer at St. Nersess Seminary, and after completing he will be returning to St. Mark to serve as the parish's full-time pastor.



## COMMUNITY NEWS / OBITUARY

## Iris Arousiag Papazian

### Activist, Daughter of Genocide Survivors

RIDGEFIELD, N.J. — Iris Arousiag Papazian died on May 29, 2021.

Born on July 4, 1936, in New York City to Krikor and Veronica (Sahagian) Pilbosian, survivors of the Armenian Genocide from Malatya in Western Armenia, Iris was the second of three daughters. In 1945 the family moved to Philadelphia, where she attended Temple University and earned a bachelor's degree in journalism and communications. She was a dedicated member of St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, where she taught Sunday school for many years. After graduating, she moved to New York to continue her studies at Columbia University and met Pierre Papazian. Their marriage in 1959 was the first one to be celebrated in the new Sts. Vartanantz Church in Ridgefield. They settled in suburban New Jersey, and in 1965 they had a son, Michael.

Iris Papazian's life was marked by a profound love of service and devotion to the Armenian nation and Church. She



was associated with the Prelacy of the Armenian Church in New York from its very inception in the late 1950s, working with all of the prelates who have served the Prelacy beginning with Archbishop Hrant Khatchadourian and continuing with Archbishop Karekin Sarkissian (later Catholicos Karekin II of the Great House of Cilicia and Catholicos Karekin I of all Armenians), Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, Archbishop Oshagan Cholyan, and Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian.

Her multiple talents as a writer and journalist turned her into the writing and editing force, both seen and unseen, behind so many public relations and publishing efforts. Her devotion to the Church and the Prelacy culminated in her working full-time as director of communications and publications, editing the periodical Outreach and producing the weekly e-newsletter, Crossroads. Her commitment extended so far that she continued to work long hours at the Prelacy into her 80s even

though she had by then become officially "semi-retired."

Even in her weakened condition after she became ill in 2019, she contributed as much as she could to various projects. Her contributions to the Church and Armenian people were recognized by Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia, who bestowed the Mesrob Mashtots medal and the Knight of Cilicia award upon her, and the Eastern Prelacy, which presented the Queen Zabel award to her.

She started a successful business first in the basement of the house and later as the business expanded to an office building. The business, H. Prim, Co., provided services in typesetting and graphic design. It was so successful that she was joined later by her husband, who worked with her for many years until his passing in 1995, and it also employed other family members and friends.

She was a member of the Executive Board of the Hovnanian School and its Educational Committee for many years and was the administrator of the school for some time. She was also a long-time member of the editorial board of the AGBU Ararat Quarterly, and in the 1970s she and her husband Pierre published *The Literary Tabloid*. Later, she supported her husband in the publication of the periodical *Phoenix*.

But her career was only one facet of her life: she was devoted to all of her family and her friends. Iris adored all of her family and they in turn were very closely devoted and attached to her. She is survived by her son, Prof. Michael B. Papazian and her daughter-in-law Andrea, her sister-in-law Margaret Papazian, her nieces Alexis and Sara Kazarian, her older sister Elizabeth Pilbosian and her younger sister Rosely Nevart Stronski and husband Wally Stronski.

A gifted cook, she loved to prepare food and entertained all her loved ones even while working outside the home full time.

An avid and prolific reader of poetry, fiction, and virtually every topic, Papazian appreciated and understood the power of the written word, of which she was a masterful practitioner. Even as she succumbed to illness, she kept her mind fully active and engaged. Her hope was that she would complete a history of the Prelacy, for she was the Prelacy's memory.

The viewing and funeral took place at St. Vartanantz Armenian Apostolic Church (Ridgefield, New Jersey), on Wednesday, June 2, followed by interment at George Washington Memorial Park in Paramus (New Jersey), presided by the Prelate, with the participation of Very Rev. Fr. Sahag Yemishian, Vicar and Pastor of Sts. Vartanantz Church; Archpriest Fr. Nerses Manoogian, Pastor of St. Gregory the Illuminator Church (Philadelphia); Rev. Fr. Mesrob Lakissian, Pastor of St. Illuminator's Cathedral (New York City); Rev. Fr. Nareg Terterian, Pastor of St. Sarkis Church (Douglaston, New York); and Rev. Fr. Vahan Kouyoumdjian, Outreach Pastor.

## George N. Moorachian

### Korean War Veteran

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — George N. Moorachian of North Providence, RI, passed away peacefully on Tuesday, June 1, 2021 at the age of 89. He was born in Providence, RI to Armenian Genocide survivors, Nishan and Zartar (Derderian) Moorachian. He is predeceased by his parents and sister, Sarah Moroukian of Latham, NY.

He is survived by his wife of 53 years, Margaret (Topalian), son, George Moorachian and his wife Rose of Natick, MA, daughter, Nancy Moorachian and her husband, Seth Brown of Springfield, VA, and grandchildren, Luke, Faye and Avedis. His grandchildren brought light to his eyes especially when they were all together. He was a loving uncle to his niece and nephews.

George was a graduate of Central High School in Providence. He served honorably on the USS Tringa in the United States Navy during the Korean War. After his service he attended Bryant College. George began his career with the Federal Department of Housing and Development and created an Administrative Accounting System that was selected for use by various agencies. Later, he furthered his career as Assistant Budget Officer with Boston Redevelopment Authority. He spent the majority of his career with the Providence School system first as Budget Officer developing a new budget system and retiring in 1992 as Business Manager.

George was a dedicated member of the Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church. He was elected to the church Parish Council serving for many years and chairing numerous committees. He was honored with the award of Parishioner of the Year in 2016. George was also a member of the Knights of Vartan where he held executive positions and was honored as Knight of the Year. He was a Mason for over fifty years.

George was an avid gardener, jazz enthusiast and loyal Yankees fan.

The funeral service was held at Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Church. A private burial with military honors followed at North Burial Ground.

Arrangements were made by the Nardolillo Funeral Home.



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 the prior three weeks' issues of the Mirror-Spectator.

Sami and Annie Totah Family Foundation, Potomac, MD, \$500  
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## COMMUNITY NEWS / OBITUARY

# Aurora Honors the life of Vartan Gregorian

TRIBUTE, from page 6

compassion. He was a holy man. He's a saint. He has achieved what is written in the Holy Bible. He changed the world into a paradise."

Other speakers were also eager to list Vartan Gregorian's achievements while simultaneously highlighting his unwavering modesty. Samantha Power, USAID Administrator, former US Ambassador to the United Nations and former Aurora Prize Selection Committee member, referred to Vartan Gregorian as her "hero friend."

"The loss is immeasurable, but the fact that he had Aurora and the energy that it gave him was incredible. <...> His own courage, his own fortitude, his own resilience are so self-evident. He is the embodiment of a self-made American man, but for any of us who've had the privilege of Vartan telling his own story, you would think that he had almost nothing to do with it," said Power.

Vartan Gregorian truly lived by the principles he was striving to instill in others, noted Ernesto Zedillo, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member, Director at Yale

Center for the Study of Globalization and former President of Mexico: "When I tried to distinguish one element of Vartan's interaction with the world, with humanity, with the people he had contact with throughout his life, the common element was generosity. And I think it was that generosity that led him to such incredible achievements. And generosity means love, love with which he did everything, and I think that is what made it possible."

It was his unique personality that had Mary Robinson, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member, chair of the Elders, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights captivated the moment she met Vartan Gregorian when he was still President of the Brown University – and not only captivated her, but also her husband, as she warmly remembered. "From the beginning, we were absolutely enchanted with this incredible President of the University – his humor, his knowledge. When I worked from New York for 8 years, we had a lot of long discussions about human rights and other issues," she reminisced.

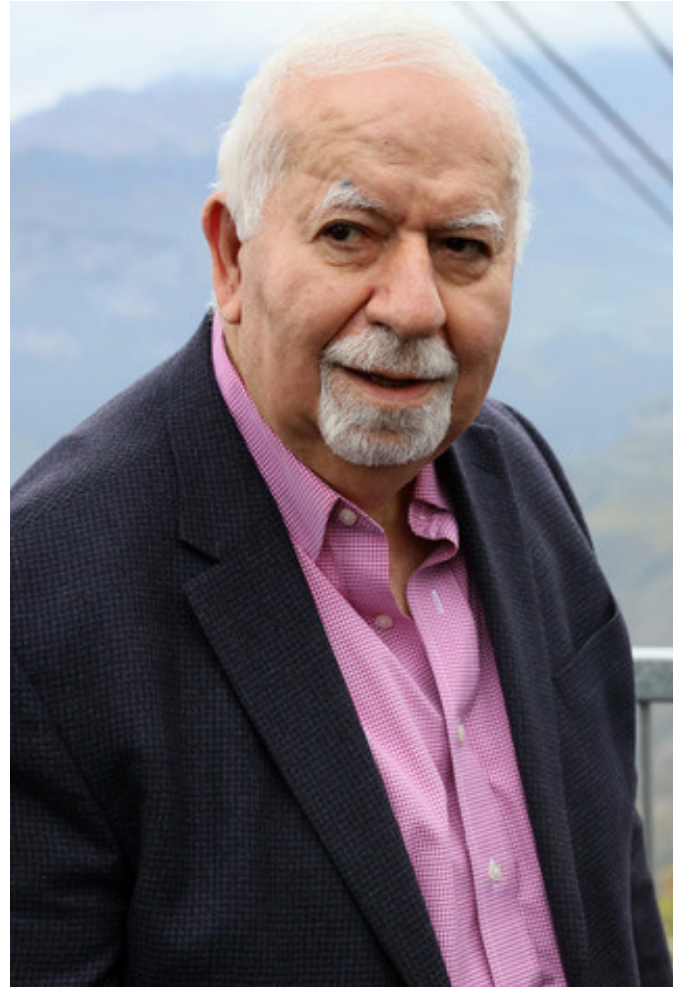
Shirin Ebadi, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member, Nobel Laureate, Iranian lawyer and a human rights activist and Founder of Defenders of Human Rights Center in Iran, talked about Vartan's unrelenting quest for tolerance, understanding and peaceful coexistence, quoting an ancient Persian tale about the common source of all religions – humanity. "If a group spreads hatred in the name of religion or ideology and considers violence permissible, be certain that they have made a mistake and have gone astray. <...> I would like to pay tribute to Vartan Gregorian, my mentor, and to remember his efforts to spread knowledge, thanks to which he paved the way for peaceful coexistence," said Shirin Ebadi.

This was a cause the next speaker, Mirza Dinnayi, 2019 Aurora Prize Laureate and Co-Founder and Director of Luftbrücke Irak (Air Bridge Iraq), could certainly get behind as someone who has seen his people persecuted for years and continues to fight for their lives today: "When I remember Vartan, I see an Armenian single mother who brought this great man and hero to the world, as a gift to the humanitarian family of the world. So we should also spread this ideology of humanism, of peace, of coexistence."

Vartan's high spirits were a guiding light for many, as were his compassion and commitment, noted Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member and Founder and President of Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa: "An eternal optimist, I never ever think that there's no hope in the world I live in, because not having hope is not having life. <...> Vartan was someone who showed me, in those very short six years, that in-

deed, remaining indifferent to the suffering of others was not something that he did. He treated you like you mattered. He treated everyone like they mattered."

There was a certain light in Vartan that shone not only through his words, but



most importantly, his actions, added John Prendergast, Aurora Prize Selection Committee Member, human rights activist and Co-Founder of The Sentry: "He believed in the things most of us could not yet see and he worked to make them happen. The concept of 'bari luys,' good light, was very important to him. He saw it as hope for a better future. <...> He was transcendent in his ability to live in hope for a better future and in working to see that better future come to pass."

As Vice President of International Program and Program Director for Russia and Eurasia at Carnegie Corporation of New York and Aurora Creative Council Member, Deana Arsenian has probably spent more time at Vartan's side than, perhaps, all of the other speakers combined. She expressed her gratitude for the event and a little sadness due to the inability to "compress my 30-year relationship with a person who can only be described as a force of nature into one moment," so she could share it with others. She did try, however, telling the audience a touching story of Vartan finding time in his busy schedule to talk to two 5-year-olds he met on the street during his trip to Yerevan in 2016, adding that it showed his "warm and fuzzy inner personality."

In conclusion of the event, Ruben Vardanyan, co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative as well as co-founder of Noôdome, thanked everyone and revealed his certainty that the cause that was so crucial for Vartan Gregorian will still go on, honoring his legacy. "Vartan had an important role in doing many projects in his life, but this was a unique project for him because he was one of the co-founders of Aurora, together with us. For him, it was critical that we continue, because Aurora for him was important not only as a humanitarian issue. He liked that we found a way to keep this global agenda connected to the Armenian world," said Vardanyan.

## OBITUARY

### Mitchell Merzoian

*WWII Veteran, Family Man*

FRESNO — Mitch Merzoian was born to Dickran and Helen Merzoian on July 30, 1920. He was their only son, the sixth of seven children.

He grew up in Fresno and graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1938.

When World War II broke out, he enlisted in the Army and served in the Ad-



miralties, New Guinea and the Philippines. Mitch enjoyed his service, the people he met, and the opportunity to serve his country.

As he put it, "I never regretted a minute of it."

Following his discharge from the ser-

vice, Mitch worked for Rosenberg Brothers and eventually, the Bonner Packing Company.

He married Eleanor Torosian on June 4, 1949 and they had two children, Rick and Carol.

He and Eleanor were active golfers and enjoyed many fun golf trips together, including three trips to Scotland with friends. They also enjoyed their friendships at the Fort Washington Golf and Country Club. Most of all, Mitch enjoyed his family, as he was a loving and devoted husband, father and grandfather.

Mitch is survived by his wife Eleanor, son and daughter in law Rick and Rita Merzoian, his daughter Carol Giovacchini, his grandchildren Andrea and Billy Ramos, Anthony Giovacchini, and Leslie and Art Cervantes, his two great-grandsons, Mack and Brady Cervantes, his sister Margaret Thatcher and many nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his sisters Gladys Whittaker, Grace Durham, Sandra Merzoian, Vi Rustigan and Nell Hagopian, Eleanor's brother Al Torosian, and his son-in-law Jim Giovacchini.

A memorial service will be held on Wednesday, June 16 at 11 a.m. in the Stephens and Bean Funeral Chapel. Following services, a luncheon will be held at the Fort Washington Golf and Country Club. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the donor's favorite charity.

### Toros Toranian

*Aintab-Born Writer, Doctor*

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Writer, publicist, public figure and doctor Toros Toranian died at the age of 93 on June 3. Eduard Militonian, president of the Union of Writers of Armenia, told Armenpress, recalling that Toranian was a member of the union and was living in Armenia.

Torianan was born in Aleppo in 1928. His parents, Khachar and Varduhi, were born in the village of Zipin in Aintab.

Torianan's father studied for six years at the Cilician school in his hometown and had command of the Armenian language, while his mother grew up in a Kurdish family and did not know Armenian.

His father died when Toranian was 2 years old, and that is why the family's home language was Turkish.

Torianan spoke Turkish only until the age of 5, and learned Armenian in kindergarten.

He attended the Gulbenkian Armenian School in Aleppo and received a medical



education. He wrote in many genres and is known for his works *The Road to the Stars* and *Green Letters*.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Tekeyan Cultural Association Helps Berdzor Refugees Earn Incomes and Live in Armenia

ASSISTANCE, from page 1

become refugees scattered all around Artsakh and Armenia. They lost everything and their living conditions became less than desirable.

The Tekeyan Berdzor school itself was turned into barracks for Armenian soldiers during the war, and afterwards it had to be evacuated. Not only have its alumni and staff been turned forcibly into refugees, but of those alumni who served as soldiers, five were killed and five became disabled, three of whom are seriously handicapped.

## A Way to Help

The good news is that once more Tekeyan is engaged in making their lives better, so that the Berdzor refugees remain in Armenia and become part of the nation-building process. This time, help will be provided through investments and not through donations. The creation of a sustainable economy is the aim of this TCA undertaking.

Through small contributions / mass funding we started by creating income-generating opportunities for the displaced families. Tekeyan of Armenia in association with a local reputable Syunik NGO will make investments in agriculture or beekeeping to create income or comforts for their beneficiaries. The recipients get assistance on the condition that, after a waiting period of two years, they pay back on an annual basis the equivalent in produced goods of 10% of the amount of assistance they have received.

After some seed money from the TCA was provided, a fundraising drive was initiated. The response is positive and we



During a training session

have started receiving funds to be allocated to the designated investment scheme. As noted, these funds will serve the following objectives: 1) To alleviate the hardship of these forcefully displaced families and give them the opportunity to earn a living; 2) In two years, to receive a 10-percent annual return from the beneficiaries in the form of goods which in turn will be redirected to

schools or other needy institutions.

The project was coordinated and implemented by Arto Manoukian of Montreal, a TCA board member, monitored by the TCA's Armenia representative, Gayané Muratyan, with the assistance of Anahit Kosakyan, the last principal of the Berdzor Tekeyan school. This group was introduced to the Syunik NGO by another dedicated

Armenian, Tony Halepli of Montreal.

As the Syunik NGO is based in Vayots Dzor province, TCA decided to begin its project in that same province and benefit from the proven experience of this NGO. Honey production was the first form of assistance.

While donations were coming, we did not sit idle. We have recruited multi-chil-



Moving a beehive





COMMUNITY NEWS

dren refugee families from Berdzor (Artsakh) who were installed in Vayots Dzor. Another initial requirement from these families were their experience in beekeeping. We have found twelve such families. Syunik NGO interviewed each one of them to see if they qualify. That evaluation process was important, because of the fact that without experience the bees die and our assistance becomes wasted. Syunik NGO qualified eight out of the available twelve families.

We then signed a contractual agreement between Tekeyan and Syunik, a bank transfer was concluded, and the initial eight families received five new hives and five bee colonies each. With the portable wooden hives come services offered by Syunik for them to succeed. These include tools, training, monitoring, follow-ups, extraction equipment, and even marketing the honey. This follow-up is for the long run, to make these families economically sustainable. Once proven successful, they will get more hives, until till they fly on their own.

As these families are obliged to give us back 10% of their production, this will allow us to help new families, multiplying the effect of the largess of our initial donors.

The First Beneficiaries

One of the most difficult tasks of the



The beehives

program was the choice of beneficiaries. One of the most important preconditions is that the beneficiary will not emigrate from Armenia, but will adopt beekeeping as his business.

Vahe Sayadyan is one of the first bene-

ficiaries of the program. He was wounded in Mekhakavan (Jabrayil) during the 2020 Artsakh war, and now is handicapped. In his family which was in economically distress, there were children, but the Tekeyan program gave him a way to earn his liveli-

hood again in Malishka village.

The other initial beneficiaries include Narek Aleksanyan in Bardzruni village, Tatevik Hovhannisyan in Herher village, Hayk Ghambaryan in Yeghegnadzor city, Garik Aloyan in Vayk city, Anush Kocharyan in Malishka village, Levon Karapetyan in Taratumb village, and Murad Palanjyan in Malishka village.

The Next Steps

We have more funds available, but we are going one step at a time. We simply do not have the luxury to waste money. We will try to make the most out of what our donors give. The bee season has ended, so our next assistance will go through other




Anahit Kosakyan (in red at left), Vahé Sayatyan, a handicapped refugee veteran, and Gayané Muratyan, TCA representative in Armenia

such initiatives, alleviating the livelihood of the Berdzor refugees. TCA is once more extending a helping hand one family at a time.

We thank all participants and encourage others to open their hearts and make tax-deductible donations. Any amount serves the purpose. Extend your helping hand to these multi-children war-torn families. In the United States, please send your checks made out to the Tekeyan Cultural Association with the memo "Berdzor Project" to 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472, or use our online link <https://givebutter.com/NLWnPU>.

For more information, contact Arto Manoukian at [manoukb@yahoo.com](mailto:manoukb@yahoo.com) and tel. (514) 824-5300, or the North American Tekeyan headquarters via [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com) or (617) 924-4455.






### 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 Syunik NGO will make investments in agriculture to create income for their beneficiaries. The recipient gets assistance conditional that within 2 years they give back on an annual basis the equivalent of 10% of their produced goods to other needy families.



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# Arts & Culture

## Constantine Orbelian Named Music Director, Principal Conductor of New York City Opera

NEW YORK — New York City Opera (Michael Capasso, General Director) has announced the appointment of internationally acclaimed conductor and pianist Constantine Orbelian as the company's music director and principal conductor. Orbelian will conduct his first NYCO production this summer when the company performs a newly created version of *Rigoletto* on Sunday, August 29 at the Phoenicia International Festival of the Voice in Kingston, New York, followed by an encore performance of the Verdi favorite on Friday, September 3 as part of Bryant Park's annual Picnic Performance series.

"We are indeed very fortunate to welcome the world-renowned maestro, Constantine Orbelian to the New York City Opera Family," commented Capasso. "Maestro Orbelian brings decades of international experience conducting opera's greatest stars both in performance and on award-winning recordings and will offer the company and its audiences many world-class performances in the future. I have no doubt his skill and experience will be central to restoring City Opera to its place in the American and international Opera scenes."

"I am thrilled to accept the position of music director and principal conductor of the venerable New York City Opera," said Orbelian. "It is a great opportunity to help bring this historic, culturally significant musical institution back to life after a challenging time of Covid closures. We will give opera lovers the thrill of hearing extraordinary singers from across America and beyond. Staying true to the NYCO tradition, we will provide contemporary composers a great platform in which to premiere their works. We look forward to welcoming you, our opera-loving public, to our performances at Bryant Park and the Phoenicia International Festival of the Voice this summer and to announcing our next season of events and performances."

New York City Opera will return to the Bryant Park Picnic Performance series this summer with four concerts beginning this month on Friday, June 18 with its annual "Pride in the Park" concert and culminating on Friday, September 3 with a fully staged, costumed and Orbelian-conducted production of *Rigoletto*, a newly created 90-minute version with narration written and performed by actor and playwright Bill Van Horn.

This winter, New York City Opera will produce, with National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, the world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie's "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis," opening in January at the Edward J. Safra Hall at the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in downtown Manhattan, guest-conducted by James Lowe. Other upcoming 2022 productions include the New York premiere of Anthony Davis and

see ORBELIAN, page 17



Inguna Kurcens with her Latvian students (Aluksne, 2009).

## Inguna Kurcens

*'Armenia Is an Inexhaustible Storehouse of  
Beauty and Wisdom'*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / ALUKSNE, Latvia — Art critic Inguna Kurcens was born in 1951 in Riga. Her entire family was oppressed during the time of Stalin.

Inguna graduated from the Music College in Abakan (Khakassia, Krasnoyarsk Krai), then the Academy of Arts (1975-1981) in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). She graduated from her postgraduate studies at the Moscow Research Institute of Art History, where in 1993 she defended her PhD thesis on the work of Minas Avetisyan.

From 1981 to 2000 Inguna lived in Yerevan, worked at the National Art Gallery and Yervand Kochar Museum, taught art history at the Yerevan Art Institute and at the art history faculty of Yerevan State University. Her articles on the Armenian fine arts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were published in the Russian and Armenian press of Yerevan, as well as in the Haigazian Armenological Review of Beirut. Inguna Kurcens represented Armenia at international conferences in St. Petersburg and Warsaw. She is the author of the catalogue of artist Eduard Isabekyan's Moscow exhibition (Moscow, 1988) and a booklet on Minas Avetisyan (Yerevan, 1989, both in Russian).

Since 2000 Inguna has been living in the city of Aluksne (Latvia), where she teaches at the School of Arts and the School of Music.

In 2014, the monograph by Inguna Kurcens "Minas Avetisyan. Painting and Drawing. (On the Question of the Forms of Associative and Symbolic Imagery in Armenian Painting of the 1960s - 1970s)" was published in Yerevan (in Russian).

**Inguna, is it true that your love of Minas Avetisyan's art brought you to Armenia? How did it come about?**

It was my love for an Armenian brought me to Armenia! And the love for Minas's art arose already in Armenia after getting acquainted with the artist's works at the Museum of Contemporary Art. I was struck by the suggestive power of his pictorial language, existential fundamentality with the ascetic simplicity of plots. The task of creating an analytical toolkit for obtaining and reading the content of Minas's works fascinated me, especially since even from the first year of the Academy of Arts an art critic was obliged to distinguish verbal essays based on a picture from a professional analysis of the form of a work.

**It is known that at that time the indirect monopoly on the study and popularization of Minas's work belonged to late art critic Henrik Igityan. Was it easy for you as an art critic to find a place in the Armenian professional environment?**

I did not have any problem in finding a place in a professional environment only because I had been washing windows full time for 11 years at the Zvartnots airport and simply did not "shine" among my colleagues. Therefore, by the way, I never mastered the Armenian language, although it is dear to me.

I have great respect to Henrik Igityan, for the very fact that he opened the Yerevan Museum of Contemporary Art. Popularization of the works of Armenian artists was necessary, and in this Henrik Igityan excelled. But at the same time, there remained a wide field for art criticism analysis of specific works of art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period of interest to me of the 1960s-1970s. I settled on this field and no one bothered me — on the contrary, there was the joy of communicating with colleagues like Ellen Gayfedzhyan, Martin Mikaelyan, Poghos Haytayan — everyone could learn something from them which was a valuable experience. But the most valuable thing was live communication with the artists themselves - God, how grateful I am to all of them and how I love them all!

continued on next page

## LA's 45-Year-Old Massis Kabob Outgrows Mall Food Court

By Farley Elliott

LOS ANGELES (LA Eater) — There was a window of time last year, as Los Angeles County faced another round of lockdowns during what would become the region's deadly winter coronavirus surge, when the massive, three-story Glendale Galleria stood Echo Canyon empty. The 45-year-old mall, home to more than 250 storefronts, was a retail behemoth in search of a customer base that, because of stay-at-home orders, legally couldn't exist.

Across the entire 1.6-million-square-foot property, which encompasses multiple buildings, only three businesses were open to customers. There was Target at the southern end, with its own entrance, and Dick's Sporting Goods in an adjacent building a full city block to the northeast. And then there was Massis Kabob.

"We had runners," says Gevik Baghdassarian, whose family has operated Massis Kabob inside the Glendale Galleria since 1976. "People weren't allowed to come inside the mall, so my son and a couple of my nephews would take orders outside to the curb." As managers turned kebab skewers and filled takeout



containers with hummus and shirazi salad, the kids thanked drivers for supporting where they could. Otherwise, Massis was alone in the world, floating inside an empty food court. Eventually, well-intentioned mall management put out some dining tables in the shade of the parking garage, but the cordoned-off placement mostly just drew funny looks and internet hot takes about the dystopian setup.

"We had to look ourselves in the eye and say, 'Are we going to make it?'" says Baghdassarian. "Everything my dad did for 45 years, are we going to lose it all in six months?"

Gevik's father, Hacop Baghdassarian, wasn't like other businessmen. The Armenian family man had run a paint supply company in Iran but fled to the United States at the outset of the country's long and brutal revolution. The Baghdassarians landed in Glendale, home today to the largest concentration of Armenians outside Armenia itself, just in time to catch wind of the emergence of the mega-mall Galleria development. With no restaurant experience, Hacop Baghdassarian found a way in on the ground floor: a small Armenian food

see KABOB, page 15





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Inguna Kurcens Armenia Is an Inexhaustible Storehouse of Beauty and Wisdom'

from previous page

**I have repeatedly heard the opinion that the greatness of Avetisyan is somewhat exaggerated by his contemporaries. Do you agree?**

Here it would be good to know who is speaking, then much will disappear as meaningless. The dogs bark, but the caravan goes on. And then, at what time such an opinion was expressed about the exaggeration of greatness — during his life, in subsequent decades, or today?

I think that if we were talking about exaggerating the greatness of Minas's work, I would not be talking about greatness (these are all games of vanity), but about the significance of his art, which is difficult to exaggerate due to its deep meditative content.

I would not use the word "great" in relation to Minas. He was neither a tribune nor an orator, he does not address large masses of people, he conducts a quiet one-on-one conversation with the audience. In the way of pictorial expression, Minas is rather a chamber artist, unlike, say, Michelangelo.

I told the students that if you so thoughtlessly distribute the epithets "genius," "great," then what should we call Homer, Aeschylus, Grigor Narekatsi, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Goya, Bruegel, Durer, Picasso?

Minas Avetisyan was an outstanding Armenian artist, original and inimitable. Some of his portraits are comparable to those of Rembrandt in their realistic penetration into the image.

Another thing is that in interpersonal communication we sometimes say to each other: "Well, you're a genius." However, in the face of history, there is still a gradation of such epithets.

**Many people say that during the Soviet years Armenia was quite liberal, and that modern art, which you studied, flourished here. What is your personal experience in this regard? If you stayed in Russia, would you have the same opportunity to study the art of modernism?**

I will not use the concept of modernism in our conversation at all. The term "modernism" was coined by the Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario in 1890 to contrast national modernism with the European Hispanic tradition. In our Academy, even when we analyzed the work of Salvador Dali, this term was not used.

Another matter is "underground;" we had access to it by visiting "apartment" exhibitions. In Yerevan, the "underground" was well represented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, which, undoubtedly, facilitated access to it, and the officials from art did not bother you. My love for Soviet art of the 1960s-70s originated in Leningrad, and Minas fully fit into this period, which I presented in my book, for the publication of which I thank you, Artsvi jan, in my prayers.

I am more impressed by the altruistic origins of shaping in art. Therefore, in relation to the work of Minas, I can repeat after Van Gogh "What can be more artistic than loving a person!" For me, this is a motto for all time.

**You have studied intensely and took a fresh look at the works of not only Minas Avetisyan, but also such famous Armenian artists as Yervand Kochar, Vruyr Galstyan, Hovhannes Ter-Tatevosyan and others. How would you rank the works of Armenian artists living and working in Soviet Armenia, in a visible world context?**

This raises the question of the criteria and the objects of comparison. I think it is unproductive to compare painting with other types of visual and often non-visual activity. For example, Moscow conceptualists are beginning to write texts, and what has to do with fine art? It is better to read Viktor Pelevin. Or these installations, well, so boring or performances - theater students make them much better and more interesting.

For example, in Armenia there were no conditions for the emergence of pop art, it was imported, which means it is very imitative, so judge and decide for yourself — to import or not to import. And so with other phenomena such as the corpse of a shark in formaldehyde by Damian Hirst. But it was sold for \$ 12 million! The price of a work, according to the author, is one of its meanings, but the Apostle Paul warned that the love of money is the root of all evil.

I understand, young people need to hang out and try something. But in any kind of fine art, and indeed any art, I do not remove the criterion of giftedness, talent and the criterion of mastery.

There are many epigones of any of the trends in the world of art all over the planet, but such painting, which,

according to Vrubel, brings a special pleasure to a person, is what attracts me to Armenian painting, which generously endows any sophisticated viewer.

**Your student, art critic Lilit Sargsyan, asked me to share the following: "You are remembered in Armenia and your services are highly appreciated not only in the artistic environment, in the museums where you worked, but also in the university environment; you were a favorite lecturer of many young art critics. What did your teaching work give you, what do you think about the Armenian art school?"**

First, I bow deeply and thank all my students for those hours and days spent together in the art world. As for the Armenian art school, it is bright, original, immensely interesting, and it is not lost in the history of world fine art as a kind of forgotten island.

It was important for me to develop the taste of younger colleagues for high art. It was no coincidence that I introduced them to the masterpieces of the world of fine art in



Inguna Kurcens with her Armenian students (Yerevan, 1999).

the hope that they themselves would build a scale of values between significant phenomena and those phenomena that are not art, but are imposed on society with the help of PR. I absolutely agree with Vazgen Bazhbeuk-Melikyan's idea that you need art like a crust of bread — in that case it is something real!

The artist is not "crucified on an easel." An easel is a tool of labor, maybe even a creator's refuge. But here's the self-portrait "Crucifixion" by Minas — a painting where the artist is really crucified, here it contains a human and creative concept of life — this completely sweeps away the spectacular phrase "Crucified on an Easel." I wanted students not to be afraid to sacrifice an effective word in the name of meaning and to be able to defend their point of view, to justify it. Here I ask you to convey my respect to Lilit Sargsyan and Knarik Vardanyan.

**And what did Armenia give you in general?**

The best years of my life, both creative and personal, have passed in Armenia. In Latvia, for 20 years now, I have not had the opportunity to communicate not only with Armenian, but also with Latvian artists. It is a fact. I don't regret it, because love is sacrificial.

And then, such phrases as Great Latvia or Great Poland are perceived (by me in any case) as absurdity, while Great Armenia is still Great for me today. As an art critic, let me remind you that achievements in science tend to become obsolete, while in art nothing becomes obsolete and is always open to aesthetic pleasure and modern interpretation. Armenia in this sense is an inexhaustible storehouse of beauty and wisdom.

In Armenia, I learned the joy of lively communication with young people, my students with their inquisitive mind and thirst for knowledge of the world of art.

Armenia is my second homeland.

**Yes, I do not forget your words when you returned from a trip from Poland: "Here I am again in my native land."**

Armenia has truly become dear to you, Armenia sheltered me, I am still a citizen of Armenia. Armenia gave me the opportunity to get acquainted personally with one of the world's most ancient cultures, to really broaden my horizons and fully realize the modest scale of my own knowledge.

**Some great Armenian artists live in Riga. Living in Latvia, do you keep in touch with local Armenians?**

The answer is no, and here's why. Arriving in Latvia in 2000 at the request of my mother, all the years until her death in 2018, I helped her was with her. This was my mission. I am infinitely sorry for my mom. I was born in Riga Central Prison. Then my mother was sent with me to the Mordovian camp, where two years later it was supposed to take me away from her and send me to an orphanage. Then my grandmother, who was in exile in

the city of Chernogorsk (Khakassia), took me to her. I called her mom until I was seven. It was my grandmother who introduced me to the world of music (she was a student of Rimsky-Korsakov, but did not graduate from the St. Petersburg Conservatory). But I am not talking about that now. I will tell you about one episode in my mother's life, when after the Mordovian camp she was redirected to Siberia. During logging work, her leg was injured and showed signs of gangrene. The doctor told us about the need to amputate the leg. And then my mother said how a dog began to come to her every day, licking her wound, and she did this until the need for amputation disappeared. I cried bitterly for this. But I also cried when, getting acquainted with the work of Vostanik Adoyan (Arshile Gorky), I learned that his mother had died of hunger in Yerevan in 1919.

In Aluksne, I still teach piano at the Children's Music School. But, I repeat, a lively contact with artists remained in Armenia, not in Latvia. You know, I still cannot even visit the Armenian Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator in Riga, although there are only 203 kilometers from Aluksne to Riga. I live in the provincial Latvian town of Aluksne, notable, however, for the fact that it was from here that Peter the Great took Marta Skavronskaia, the future Empress Catherine the First, as his wife. Of course, while teaching at the School of Arts, I got acquainted with the history of Latvian art, including contemporary art, but not through personal communication, as in Armenia.

**You follow the events in Armenia. Now the country is again in crisis. The words and wishes of such a connoisseur and Friend of our country as you sound like a balm for our hearts.**

Artsakh, Nagorno-Karabakh, historically belongs to Armenia. I am with you, brothers Armenians! I am a citizen of Armenia!





ARTS & CULTURE

# Books

## A Sexy, Fun, Beautiful Trio of Books From Denis Donikian

Translated by Christopher Atamian  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

For close to 50 years, Denis Donikian has been a voice for the voiceless, a great littérateur and artist, an outspoken critic of corruption and dictatorship wherever he has found them—briefly said, a rare voice among Armenian writers. Born outside of Paris in the city of Vienne to parents who were both survivors of the Genocide, Donikian is the author of more than 40 volumes of poetry, non-fiction and prose. He most recently published *La Petite Encyclopédie du Genocide Arménien*, a four hundred page book which breaks down the *Aghet* by topic and theme. The author writes mainly in French and sometimes in Armenian, having attended the Collège de Sèvres as a child and later at Yerevan State University. He studied in Armenia then travelled to and fro, between Armenia, the Ukraine, and Georgia where he met luminaries such as filmmaker Sergei Paradjanov. Everywhere he has gone he has written, taught, created, shared generously of himself. In typically profuse fashion, Donikian has released three more books this year, beginning with the bilingual *L'Esprit du Corps Féminin*/"The Spirit of the Feminine Body", followed by his book of aphorisms *Idiots and Idiocy* and finally the Eastern Armenian bilingual edition of his stunning poem "Paradjanov's Horses."

### Donikian, Lover of Women: Celebrating the Female Erotic

Donikian--the poet and the man--has always been an unabashed lover of all things feminine. In a way that comes off as perhaps typically French to some, he simply loves women: their charm, their wit, their style and perhaps especially their bodies. His current ode to all things feminine *L'Esprit du Corps Féminin*/*The Spirit of the Female Body* continues in this unique, inimitable vein. In an age of Me Too political correctness and where everyone now seems afraid to write what they really think about the opposite sex, Donikian instead throws caution to the wind. The poems included in this tantalizing book of poems each sparkle with their own grace and should be read as a corrective to the current hesitancy to celebrate what is feminine and what is masculine in our

world — never forgetting those that are both and neither and everything in between! His introductory poem in turn serves as a perfect introduction to readers:

*Tes seins sont du raisin dans mes paumes  
Ta peau est un velours vibrant de confusion  
Ton front un tabernacle de grâce*

*Ton rire une délivrance  
Et tes silences le manteau immaculé des choses  
J'ouvre tes cuisses comme un livre du cantique  
Où vit sous son Buisson ardent  
L'eau qui a soif d'être bue  
Ma langue y quête  
Le suc qui doit ressusciter  
L'homme en son agonie*

Your breasts are grapes within my palms  
Your skin velvet vibrating with confusion  
Your forehead a graceful tabernacle  
Your laughter a deliverance  
And your silences the immaculate coat of all things  
I part your legs like a canticle  
Where beneath its burning bush lies  
The water that thirsts to be quaffed  
My tongue searches out  
The sap that will resuscitate  
Man in his agony  
(English translation, Christopher Atamian)

### Aphorisms to Deconstructs Stupidity: Donikian's Idiots and Idiocy

(n.b.: Originally derived from the French word for the female reproductive organ, the words "con" and "connerie" have long since entered mainstream gallic vocabulary as mild insults—the equivalent of both "jerk" or "p---k" in English, depending on the exact context. As in: "He is such a p---," and "Her boss often does and says jerky things. A class bully, for example, or a politician who turns his back on his campaign promise are a "con" and "Quelqu'un qui fait des conneries."

Pretty much anyone who takes pleasure in annoying or belittling others simply for the sake of it can be termed a "con" without fear.)

Donikian has always been a lover of aphorisms — along with Ara Baliozian he is one of two important contemporary diasporan writers to have published entire books of them. Many are justifiably self-critical towards Armenian culture and politics, as well as human society as a whole. The two hundred and one mostly clever, sometimes ironic, and at others truly critical aphorisms presented here should bring a more than a few smiles to readers' faces. Some of Donikian's main themes include Armenian history and culture in general; the lack of foresight or honesty of some governmental institutions and leaders and, sigh, the continuing rule of idiots and idiocy, far and wide. A few of my favorites follow (translations mine):

4 – *De nos jours, les cons accèdent aux plus hautes marches du pouvoir : Trump, Putin, Erdogan, Bolsonaro, Bachar el-Assad, Kim Jong Un... Il y a même des royale-ment cons qui exhibent leur connerie d'apparat au balcon de leur palais.*

These days, jerks accede even the top echelons of business, law and medicine: Trump, Putin, Erdogan, Bolsonaro, Bashar-el Assad, Kim Jong Un. There are even some royal assholes who exhibit their ceremonial b.s. on the balcony of their palaces.

5– *Le plus grand con de l'histoire reste quand même Hitler; porté aux nues par un peuple qui s'enconnaît de ses conneries idéologiques.*

The biggest jerk in history remains Hitler, who was lifted to the heavens by a nation of people increasingly encumbered by his ideological imbecilities.

14 – *La connerie est mimétique. Plus je te ressembles, plus je suis con.*

Stupidity is mimetic. The more I resemble you, the stupider I become.

26 – *Ces spectateurs d'un match de football, que font-ils sinon qu'ils sont pris dans le délire d'une connerie collective chaque fois que le pauvre ballon se fait frapper par un con dans une direction ou dans une autre ?*

And what of spectators at a soccer match? What are they all doing, caught up in collective stupidity every time

a poor old soccer ball gets kicked by some idiot in one direction or another?

59 – *Il n'y a pas plus con qu'un con heureux.*  
Nothing is more idiotic than a happy idiot.

65 – *Quand un con rentre à l'hôpital, il n'en sort pas guéri.*

When a jerk goes to the hospital, he still comes out a jerk.

81 – *Ma grande peur: aller au paradis avec les cons.*

My biggest fear in life: to go to heaven and find it populated with more jerks.

90 – *Le con sait tout sauf qu'il ne sait rien.*

The idiot knows everything except the fact that he actually knows nothing.

148 – *Un peuple monoethnique est forcément fertile en conneries tellement les cons cherchent à se ressembler en se rassemblant.*

Any monoethnic nation is obviously rife with stupidity, given how much idiots all try to look and act the same by sticking together.

### Paradjanov Horses, Horses of Fire

Written over forty years ago in 1979, *Paradjanov's Horses* — a title that plays with Soviet Armenian Sergei Paradjanov's film title "Horses of Fire" - has just received a masterful translation into Eastern Armenian by Lilit Mnatsakanian. Some background. From 1975 to 1977 Paradjanov was jailed by the Soviets for being homosexual. His real crime? Being a poet, a free spirit, someone who refused to bow down to authorities, who was so remarkably creative that his wholly original interpretations



and stylistics went against meaningless communist dictates such as "socialist in content, nationalist in form." In what became known as "L'Affaire Paradjanov" thanks to a series of articles and pressure brought about by both famous and mainstream writers — among them Donikian, but especially people like Louis Aragon, Fellini and Goddard — Paradjanov was finally released from Siberian labor camp. But authorities continued to track him for the rest of his life, until his death in 1990 at 66 years old. Donikian, in typical fashion, visited Paradjanov in his native Tbilisi where he shot some footage of the director, ambled down the roads of that fabled city and eventually wrote the searing and indescribable book of poetry in question. Donikian claims to have been influenced by Saint-John Perse and Solzhenitsyn, but some remarkable creative fury must also have been at work when he composed it. It may seem odd to begin with a conclusion but Donikian's powerful love poem to all things equine and Paradjanov ends thus:

"Horses! Feverish and glowing. Give your eyes back their initial purpose: to dream. And their dancing spear carves and breaks through your blindness. Everything was heavy before. And mimed the saddening metrics. Then came the opening of the eyelids, and the bolt of lightning surged in your jaws. And your lips! — here they are — sing the naked horses — he swarms the sands — the message.

...because the poet is the danger inherent in angles, in measures, and the quiet masters. Because the steppe and the men said to be "wild," mime this mixture of sexes, when the wind burrows into the eye of the sands and fleece."

*Donikian is a writer yet to be discovered in English. All three books above, all three as different in tone and content as if three different writers had penned them. All three available through the author at: donikian.d@gmail.com*

Learn more about Denis Donikian : [www.denisdonikian.com](http://www.denisdonikian.com)

Denis Donikian's Must-Read blogs: ECRITTERATURES (Scribblings) (<http://denisdonikian.wordpress.com>) Marcher en Arménie (Hiking in Armenia) (<http://ddonikian.wordpress.com>) Petite Encyclopédie du génocide arménien (Small Encyclopedia of the Armenian Genocide) (<http://denisdonikian.blog.lemonde.fr>)







## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Long Island Student Wins New York State Art Award

GARDEN CITY, NY — Last October, Isabelle Sirounian, a sophomore at Garden City High School, submitted a sketched drawing of her great-grandmother to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Reflections Contest. The theme of the contest was “I Matter Because...” Feeling the emotions from the war at that time in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), she connected the 1915 Armenian Genocide to the war with Azerbaijan and submitted the following statement with her artwork: “I matter because I am the great-granddaughter of Zabelle, the woman in my drawing. 105 years ago, she escaped the Armenian Genocide after witnessing her entire family get killed. Today, in 2020, history is repeating itself in Armenia. The world remains silent, once again, as innocent Armenians are dying. As a descendent, I will not remain silent. I will speak out for my people. I want peace for Armenia and that is why I matter.”

Isabelle’s submission won first place at her high school and in Nassau County, and this week was awarded the New York State Award of Merit in Visual Arts.



## LA’s 45-Year-Old Massis Kabob Outgrows Mall Food Court

KABOB, from page 12

stall measuring 300 square feet. Massis, a colloquial Armenian name for Mount Ararat, was born, with Baghdassarian turning skewers, making falafel, and greeting customers.

“He was truly old world,” says Gevik Baghdassarian of his father. “When my dad was around, you knew it was a family operation.”

Massis grew from that first location in October 1976, expanding its existing footprint and then opening five other mall-only locations, from the Westfield Fashion Square in Sherman Oaks out to Arcadia. Openings were measured across decades, always entirely owned by the Baghdassarian family, and always tied to the belief that the malls’ foot traffic would sustain them.

“Because we’re in a mall, people assume that we’re part of some larger conglomerate,” says Gevik. “The uniforms, the logo... people just assume you’re no longer some small operation.”

Hacop Baghdassarian died from a rare blood cancer in 2017, leaving the fate of Massis in the hands of his sons and widow. In 2020, the pandemic began in earnest, dramatically changing both the retail and restaurant landscape forever.

“We’ve always been at the will of the malls,” says Gevik. “The only other thing I can remember that’s close to this past year is when the Northridge earthquake happened in 1994 and they shut us down for three days. I can’t imagine what my father would be like if we had to tell him the malls were closed for three months.”

Now Gevik has been tasked with creating a new vision for Massis, and that starts with moving beyond the old ways — and moving away from the stigma of being a food court restaurant.

The next iteration of Massis begins with a standalone, non-mall location in Glendale. The project, currently under construction at the corner of Colorado Boulevard

and Glendale Avenue, had been a lifelong dream of Hacop’s, a place for the family to truly grow its roots even more deeply into the Armenian community.

“We’re a historic ethnic population that’s been here for so long,” says Gevik, “and we’ve contributed so much to LA — not only in food, but in culture.”

The younger Baghdassarian is determined to see his father’s passion project cross the finish line, even if the pandemic has delayed construction by nearly a year. With a little luck, the building will host its grand opening this fall, on the 45th anniversary of the first Massis Kabob, as part of a larger Armenian celebration with support from city officials and a nearby Armenian American museum project.

“We really want this to be a flagship store, something we can roll out to other cities,” says Gevik, pointing to renderings that show a dining area, patio, and the company’s largest kitchen. The Baghdassarians are taking inspiration from fellow Glendale Galleria tenant Panda Express, which opened its first-ever location at the mall, on how to grow without ceding control.

“Panda opened up right next to Massis in 1983,” says Gevik. “I used to joke with my dad that we had a head start on [founder Andrew Cherng], and now he has over 2,000 locations. We’re still stuck at six. What’s going on?”

Growth is the goal, but family and community are the priorities. “Everybody knows the food at Panda Express,” says Gevik. “We want to do the same thing for Armenian food. My dad’s happiest moment was when non-Armenian customers would come in and order koobideh, and they would pronounce it correctly because they knew what it was.”

It won’t be easy making koobideh a household menu item, Gevik admits, but it’s worth a shot. Step one is moving beyond the food court, without leaving the lessons of the mall behind.







## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



## Mediterranean Couscous Pilaf

This versatile couscous recipe is courtesy of Lisa Prince Newman, author of the bestselling cookbook/memoir *For the Love of Apricots: Recipes & Memories of the Santa Clara Valley*, now in its second printing.

Lisa's cookbook features recipes that use apricots in every form: fresh, dried, preserved, and liqueurs so you can enjoy the wonderful taste, brilliant color, and health benefits of apricots all year long. "This recipe comes from Chef Heidi Krahling, owner of Insalata's Restaurant," says Lisa, a favorite Mediterranean fine-dining establishment in Marin County California. "I have gently adapted Heidi's Couscous Pilaf recipe to present dried apricots in a tasty, colorful medley of nuts, fruits, and herbs."

Apricots have very little sugar and are a great source of many antioxidants, including beta carotene and vitamins A, C, and E. Plus apricots add brilliant color and a bright, tangy flavor to every dish. Couscous, which is grain-based, has fewer calories than rice or quinoa. Lisa points out, "This couscous comes together quickly. The dried apricots and nuts provide hints of sweetness and crunch, while spices like cinnamon and turmeric supply a depth of flavor that will keep you coming back for more. This recipe is a wonderful addition to weeknight dinners or casual get-togethers."

### INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup pistachios or almonds  
3 cups water  
1 teaspoon fine sea salt (for salt water)  
2 cups couscous  
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1/4 teaspoon turmeric  
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1/2 cup diced scallions  
1/2 cup chopped dried apricots  
1/3 cup dried currants (or golden raisins)  
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro  
1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley  
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt (for general seasoning)  
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

Serves 8.

### PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Spread the nuts on a baking pan and toast, stirring once, until lightly browned and fragrant, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool.

Combine the water and salt in a large saucepan over medium-high heat and bring to a boil.

In a medium saucepan, combine the couscous, cinnamon, and turmeric, and mix well. Add the oil and stir well to coat the grains. Add the boiled water gradually, mixing well.

Cover with a lid and let sit for 15 minutes until the grains are tender. If needed, add a little more boiling water, and let the couscous sit for an additional 5 minutes. Fluff the couscous with a fork.

In a large bowl, combine the warm couscous, nuts, scallions, apricots, currants, cilantro, parsley, salt, and pepper. Toss to mix well. Taste and adjust the seasonings as needed. Serve warm or at room temperature. This pilaf can be made up to 4 hours in advance and kept covered at room temperature.

With beautiful pictures and sumptuous recipes, the *For the Love of Apricots Cookbook* will take you on a nostalgic journey with Lisa Prince Newman, an accomplished home cook and city planner. Short essays sprinkled throughout the cookbook evoke the region's 100-year orchard era and the rapid transformation of the Santa Clara Valley, affectionately known as the "Valley of Heart's Delight," into Silicon Valley.

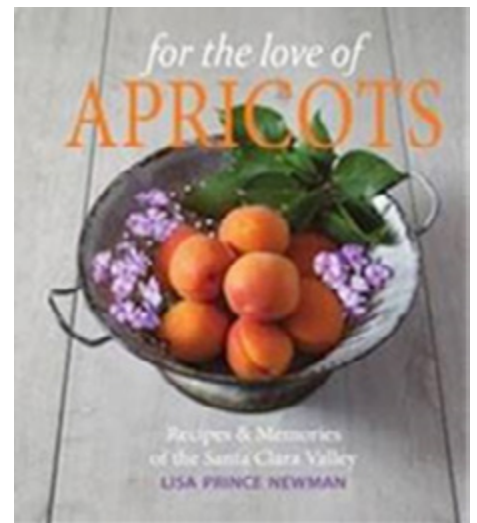
**ORDER TODAY:** *For the Love of Apricots Cookbook* makes a perfect gift for friends and family. Lisa will personally sign and include a special Apricot Bookmark in every cookbook she ships. A *For the Love of Apricots* Tote Bag is available for sale on her website.

To order, go to: <http://fortheLoveofApricots.com/>

*For the Love of Apricots: Recipes & Memories of the Santa Clara Valley* by Lisa Prince Newman, published by Prince of the Orchards Publications, 2020, 178 pages, Food Photography Copyright © 2018, 2020 by Jessica Yager Photography; Orchard Photography Copyright © 2018, 2020 by Eric Larson.

*For the Love of Apricots: Recipes & Memories of the Santa Clara Valley* is also available at local California apricot growers. Check out Lisa's Apricot Shop to source apricots year-round at California orchards through mail order and at: <http://fortheLoveofApricots.com/shop-for-apricots/>

For the latest news, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/FortheLoveofApricots/>



## Hybridity: Armenian Pavilion to Open at La Biennale di Venezia on August 28

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Following an open call announced by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia, and the deliberation of a twelve-member jury, the proposal HYBRIDITY (previously Hybrid Identities) was selected to represent the Republic of Armenia at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

The project is presented collaboratively between the architecture and design firm INVIVIA, founded in 1999 and based in Boston, MA, USA, and Storaket architec-

tural studio, founded in 2007 and based in Yerevan, Armenia.

The Armenian Pavilion will allow the international community to step into the Armenian experience, for a time. HYBRIDITY is an experimental installation on the grounds of Ca' Zenobio degli Armeni as well as a digital platform that encourage visitors to explore the fundamentals of human interaction through a physical and virtual expression of the living process among a hybridity of identities.

As a representation of the Armenian experience of exile and survival, dissem-

ination and coming together, HYBRIDITY tries to translate this human capacity to interact with each other and influence cultures both as individuals and as a community, in familiar as well as in unusual spaces.

HYBRIDITY will connect more than 80 countries of the Armenian Diaspora through a global virtual machine that digitally expands the architectural structures in Venice. Using Augmented Reality (AR), Armenians from around the world will be invited to share visual stories, videos and images of spaces they inhabit. Visitors

of the exhibition will be able to experience the collective contributions interwoven into the physical environment in and around the grounds of Ca' Zenobio degli Armeni.

The Armenian pavilion celebrates the resilience of a people, while remaining conscious of the universality of the issues at hand. At a time where humans face a number of planetary crises, HYBRIDITY highlights the human capacity to interact with each other in the realms of the local and the global, the national and the diaspora, the digital and the physical.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Constantine Orbelian Named Music Director, Principal Conductor of New York City Opera

ORBELIAN, from page 12

Richard Wesley's Pulitzer Prize-winning opera "The Central Park Five."

Four-time Grammy-nominated conductor Constantine Orbelian has been called "the singer's dream collaborator" by *Opera News*, which hailed him for conducting vocal repertoire "with the sensitivity of a lieder pianist." He has toured and recorded with some of the world's greatest singers, such as American stars Renée Fleming, Sondra Radvanovsky and Lawrence Brownlee, and with the great Dmitri Hvorostovsky and other renowned Russian singers in European, North American, Russian and Asian music centers.

Orbelian's accomplishments include being Music Director of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra and the Philharmonia of Russia, founder of the annual Palaces of St. Petersburg International Music Festival, Chief Conductor of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra in Lithuania, and Artistic Director of the State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater in Yerevan, Armenia. Among his concert and televised appearances are collaborations with Hvorostovsky, Renée Fleming, Anna Netrebko, Elīna Garanča and Van Cliburn, including the legendary pianist's farewell performance.

Born in San Francisco to Russian and Armenian émigrés parents, Maestro Orbelian made his performing debut as a piano prodigy with the San Francisco Symphony at the age of 11. After graduating from Juilliard in New York, he embarked on a career as a piano virtuoso that included appearances with major symphony orchestras throughout the U.S., U.K., Europe and Russia.

The first American to become music director of an ensemble in Russia, he was awarded the coveted title "Honored Artist of Russia" in 2004 in recognition of his efforts championing Russian-American cultural exchange. In 2012 the Russian Consulate in San Francisco awarded the maestro the Russian Order of Friendship Medal, joining such luminaries as Cliburn

and Riccardo Muti in being so honored. In 2001 Maestro Orbelian was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, given to immigrants, or children of immigrants, who have made outstanding contributions to the United States.

Maestro Orbelian has recorded over 60 CDs for the DELOS Label and has additional DVDs and CDs which have been released on Decca, Deutsche Gramophone, Chandos, Philips and Warner labels.

Since its founding in 1943 by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia as "The People's Opera," New York City Opera (NYCO) has been a critical part of the city's cultural life. During its history, New York City Opera launched the careers of dozens of major artists and presented engaging productions of both mainstream and unusual operas alongside commissions and regional premieres. The result was a uniquely American opera company of international stature.

For more than seven decades, New York City Opera has maintained a distinct identity, adhering to its unique mission: affordable ticket prices, a devotion to American works, English-language performances, the promotion of up-and-coming American singers, and seasons of accessible, vibrant and compelling productions intended to introduce new audiences to the art form. Stars who launched their careers at New York City Opera include Plácido Domingo, Catherine Malfitano, Sherrill Milnes, Samuel Ramey, Beverly Sills, Tatiana Troyanos, Carol Vaness, and Shirley Verrett, among dozens of other great artists. New York City Opera has a long history of inclusion and diversity. It was the first major opera company to feature African-American singers in leading roles (Todd Duncan as Tonio in *Pagliacci*, 1945; Camilla Williams in the title role in *Madama Butterfly*, 1946); the first to produce a new work by an African-American composer (William Grant Still, *Troubled Island*, 1949); and the first to have an African-American conductor lead its orchestra (Everett Lee, 1955).

A revitalized City Opera re-opened in

January 2016 with *Tosca*, the opera that originally launched the company in 1944. Outstanding productions during the four years since then include: the world premieres of Iain Bell and Mark Campbell's *Stonewall*, which NYCO commissioned and developed, and legendary director Harold Prince's new production of Bernstein's

Month, include the New York premiere of Péter Eötvös's *Angels in America* and the American premiere of Charles Wuorinen's *Brokeback Mountain*. New York City Opera has presented such talents as Anna Caterina Antonacci and Aprile Millo in concert, as well as its own 75th Anniversary Concert in Bryant Park, one in a series of the many



*Candide*; Puccini's beloved *La Fanciulla del West*; and the New York premiere of Daniel Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas* — the first in its *Ópera en Español* series. Subsequent *Ópera en Español* productions include the New York premiere of the world's first mariachi opera, José "Pepe" Martinez's *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*, Literes's *Los Elementos*, and Piazzolla's *Maria de Buenos Aires*. In addition to the world premiere of *Stonewall*, the productions in NYCO's Pride Initiative, which produces an LGBTQ-themed work each June during Pride

concerts and staged productions that it presents each year as part of the Park's summer performance series.

New York City Opera continues its legacy with main stage performances at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Theater and with revitalized outreach and education programs at venues throughout the city, designed to welcome and inspire a new generation of opera audiences. City Opera's acclaimed summer series in Bryant Park brings free performances to thousands of New Yorkers and visitors every year.

## CALENDAR

### ON-LINE EVENTS & PROGRAMS

#### MASSACHUSETTS

**JUNE 14–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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

•Sunday, August 15 at 2pm LABYRINTH WALKING WELLNESS program. ARMENIAN 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](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)

**JUNE 16** — NAASR Building for Eternity Virtual Gala. Wednesday, 7pm-EDT (4pm-PDT). Distinguished Honoree EDWARD AVEDISIAN. Extraordinary philanthropist, musician, educator, NAASR Board member, and principal benefactor of NAASR's new Vartan Gregorian Building, recognized for his outstanding dedication and distinguished service in advancing education in the U.S. and Armenia. Special In Memoriam, VARTAN GREGORIAN (1934-2021), President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, President of the,

New York Public Library, President of Brown University, Professor of Armenian and Caucasian History and Professor of South Asian History, University of Pennsylvania, and Co-Founder, Aurora Humanitarian Initiative. Tribute by Noubar Afeyan. Attendance is free but registration is required at [https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/WN\\_-oxRIUeKQ2WPgFVoDFXIGQ](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/WN_-oxRIUeKQ2WPgFVoDFXIGQ). To sponsor or donate, <https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/weblink.aspx?name=E332049&id=39>

**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](http://htaac.org)) or call the church office 617.354.0632

#### RHODE ISLAND

**JUNE 11-JULY 25** — The Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church of Providence hosts the Armenian Cultural Hour every Friday at 7:30 p.m. online. Whether or not you have a Facebook account, you can find the LIVESTREAM of the event through the parish's Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/armenian-churchprovidence>

June 11 - Vahan Artsruni "Chamber and Spiritual Music"

June 18 - "Our Youth Talents", featuring Haig Hovsepian, violin, Vartan Arakelian, piano, Shant Arakelian, bassoon, Ruben Karapetyan, Vocal

June 25 - "To the Light" concert, featuring Soloists and Symphony Orchestra of the Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Harutyun Arzumanyan, Music Director & Conductor

July 4 - Vahan Artsruni concert "Modern Fusion, Progressive and Song Gender"

July 11 - Hekimyan Band from Yerevan

July 18 - "Flutes & Sopranos", featuring Soloists and Symphony Orchestra of the Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Harutyun Arzumanyan, Music Director & Conductor

July 25 - Favorite Armenian Songs, featuring Armen Hovhanessyan & Salbi Mailyan





## COMMENTARY

# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE  
UNITED STATES

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## Editorial

# Armenian Genocide on Agenda of Biden-Erdogan Summit



**By Edmond Y.  
Azadian**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia declared its independence along with the other Soviet republics.

At the dawn of the new independence, journalists in Armenia held a panel discussion to which I was invited. Perhaps that was one of the first forums where journalists from Armenia and the diaspora held a free exchange of ideas.

My fellow panelists were peppering me with questions and at one point, I stopped and told them I was turning the table on them and had one question for all of them. I asked how important they considered the issues of the Armenian Genocide and the claims on the historic Western Armenian homeland. I asked them to raise their hands. I got the shock of my life when I saw that only 50 percent of the journalists present even considered those issues as important for Armenians in the homeland.

My response was that if this represented an accurate sampling of public opinion, it did not auger well for our future.

If our commitment to our heritage is only 50 percent, then the chances for the survival of the newly-independent republic cannot surpass the 50-percent mark.

All along, the blame was laid on the Soviet system that did not allow Armenian historians to concentrate on the issue of the Genocide. Some brave scholars like Jon Kirakosyan and Lentrush Khurshudyan had dealt with the topic, but they had to operate within the straitjacket of Marxist ideology.

But it turns out that even under an independent system, the interest is simply not there.

During the last 30 years, Armenia could not develop its own genocide scholarship, and even the Tsitsernakaberd Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex has become a

bone of contention among scholars to the embarrassment of the entire academic community of Armenia. Ironically, most credible Armenian Genocide studies have been achieved in the diaspora and a good portion of it by non-Armenians, such as Taner Akcam, Halil Berkay, Israel Charny and Yair Auron.

Most probably, the underlying reason was the belief that the issue is a sentimental cause for diasporan Armenians.

In contrast, the Jews have generated a tremendous volume of Holocaust studies, along with founding many museums around the world. They have held the entire world accountable for its silence and have received compensation not only from Germany, but also from countries emerging from under Soviet rule.

Unfortunately, Armenians have failed to capitalize on their past misfortune to help them in the present. The Armenian government only realized very late that it had a case of universal magnitude which could be tapped as a political resource; during Robert Kocharyan's administration, the recognition of Genocide was placed on Armenia's foreign policy agenda, only to be criticized by his predecessor, Levon Ter-Petrosian, as an undue provocation to Turkey. We have seen the video clip of then Vice-President Biden being told in confidence by President Serzh Sargsyan during a phone call that the issue is not a priority for Armenia. And still, Armenia has not learned its lesson.

We have witnessed that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's current administration is no different; the prime minister and his entire team, collectively refused to categorize Turkey as an enemy, when questioned publicly.

Armenia is not a rich country with mineral resources, nor does it have military might nor political clout. Yet, it has lost the moral, legal and historical power of its genocide, which could have been used as a cudgel against Turkey. President Erdogan realizes much better than the Armenian politicians the political weight of the issue. We have witnessed how much

his administration is invested in pseudo-scholarship, media campaigns and political actions to deter President Biden's recognition of the Armenian Genocide on April 24, 2021, which came to crown the legislative actions that the US Congress had taken earlier.

Now, in view of the Biden-Erdogan planned meeting, which will take place on June 14 on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Brussels, the Genocide issue has emerged in a more spectacular way and most probably will feature as an agenda item during the meeting.

Erdogan realizes better than anyone the legal and political consequences of the recognition of the Genocide by major powers.

Metin Gurcan recently published an article on the website Al-Monitor regarding that forthcoming meeting, highlighting the issues which have strained US-Turkish relations.

The article in particular refers to the Armenian Genocide: "In a TV interview on June 1, Erdogan conceded that his dialogue with Biden 'has not been easy' thus far, unlike his 'very peaceful and easy-going' phone diplomacy with Trump. Referring also to the terms of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, he said, 'he never experienced such tension' with the White House, putting the blame on Biden for recognizing the Ottoman era killings of Armenians as Genocide."

Turkey has many problems with the US administration, yet

Erdogan singles out the recognition of the Genocide, signifying the potential threat to Turkey that it poses.

There has been a row between the two sides over the purchase of S-400 Russian defense systems, with the ensuing ouster of Turkey from the F-35 joint strike fighter program. Other problems include the US trial of Turkish Halkbank, which had helped Iran evade sanctions, the ignored request for the extradition of Fethullah Gulen to

Turkey, and US support for Syrian Kurds and Ankara's tensions with another NATO ally, Greece. All these issues will be on the negotiation table.

All along, Erdogan has been intransigent on the issue of the Russian arms purchases, maintaining that Turkey is an independent country and cannot be treated as a secondary power. However, Erdogan's administration is in the midst of a political chess game; while highlighting the Genocide issue publicly, his foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu is soft-peddling the S-400 issue, insinuating that Turkey may send home the Russian experts manning the defense system and place the arms on Incirlik Airbase under US control, hoping to barter with the Genocide issue.

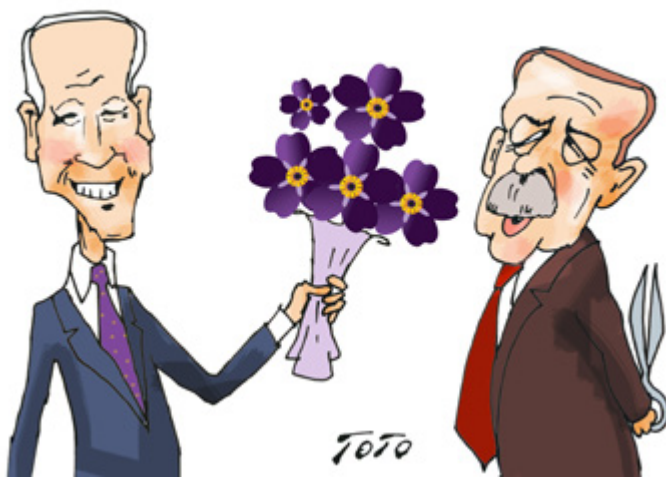
Armenia's foreign policy planners may need to learn a lesson from Erdogan, who uses the Genocide issue so skillfully to reach his political ends.

Armenians have to be realistic and acknowledge that it was not only their lobbying efforts that achieved the recognition nor President Biden's honesty to deliver on his promise, because many politicians and presidential candidates made easy promises only to forget them after winning an election. This time around, a confluence of factors has contributed to the successful end of this political saga.

The cumulative impact of Erdogan's mischievous activities finally proved that Turkey was using the cover of NATO and power to pursue its own narrow objectives, most of the times against the interests of the alliance. This rude awakening had come not only to President Biden, but also the leaders in Europe. This could not have been formulated any better than what the president of the European Union stated.

President Charles Michel said, "We are not naïve. Turkey is a neighbor, it is a NATO ally, but the European Union has come to the conclusion that Ankara has to be convinced that it has to adopt a positive policy regarding European interests...."

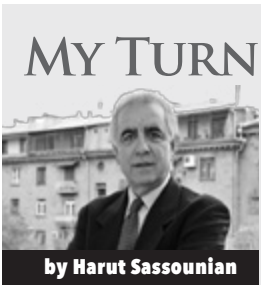
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COMMENTARY



# MY TURN

## Armenia’s Leaders Ignored Investor’s Offer To Build Military Vehicles Before the War

Armenia’s current leaders blame previous leaders whenever something goes wrong in the country. After they lost the war, they blamed it on the previous presidents. They do not take any responsibility for their own shortcomings, even though they have been in power now for three years. While the previous rulers can be blamed for many wrongdoings, the current leaders have their own share of shortcomings.

Here is the perfect example of how the current leaders completely mishandled a critical national security project that they are fully to blame. There are many more such examples.

An Armenian businessman by the name of Artak Tovmasyan had the proper connections and the brilliant idea of building state-of-the-art armored military vehicles in Armenia and donating a portion of them to the Armenian government. One would think that Armenian officials would have welcomed such a valuable proposal and would have done everything possible to facilitate this important investment opportunity which has critical national security implications. This is the incredible story of incompetent and uncaring high-ranking Armenian government officials failing to capitalize on this unique offer.

Shortly after Nikole Pashinyan came to power as Prime Minister of Armenia in 2018, Mr. Tovmasyan met with him and proposed to invest in Armenia millions of dollars along with the Canadian Streit Group, a well-known manufacturer of armored military vehicles with 30 years of experience and factories in five countries, including Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, India and Pakistan. The sixth such facility would have been in Armenia. The total amount of the investment may have reached \$20 million which would have included other military-related investors. The project would have also created hundreds of jobs.

Prime Minister Pashinyan expressed interest in the project in 2018 and told his aides to follow up. Regrettably, due to the incompetence and carelessness of Pashinyan’s cadre of officials, three years later, no progress has been made on this vital project, despite Mr. Tovmasyan’s several follow up meetings with the Prime Minister. These armored military vehicles would have been very useful during last year’s war with Azerbaijan, saving the lives of countless Armenian soldiers. Unfortunately, Armenian officials have remained unresponsive to this project, both before, during, and after the war.

Mr. Tovmasyan’s proposal consisted of offering to build gradually around 1,300 armored military vehicles over the next 10 years and donating 130 of them to the Armenian armed forces at no charge. With each vehicle worth \$450,000 or more, the total value of the donated vehicles would have been over \$60 million.

In return, Mr. Tovmasyan asked that the government of Armenia contribute the necessary land to set up this manufacturing venture on a free industrial zone. Coincidentally, he was made aware of a vacant piece of unused land on the outskirts of Yerevan belonging to the Ministry of Defense. If the project did not materialize, the investor would have been obligated to return the donated land

back to the Armenian government.

I am in possession of over a dozen letters sent by Mr. Tovmasyan’s company, First Industrial Zone, to Armenian officials during the past three years, seeking approval for his proposed project. However, despite repeated requests for an answer, the Armenian government did not respond to Mr. Tovmasyan.

The Armenian government referred Mr. Tovmasyan’s proposal to the Inter-agency Committee which was tasked to review the project. The Interagency Committee included representatives from the Ministries of Economy, Finance, High Tech Industry, Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Justice, State Revenue Committee, Urban Development Committee, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Union of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs of Armenia. Surprisingly, the Interagency Committee did not include anyone from the Ministry of Defense to properly evaluate a military project. The Interagency Committee’s guidelines require that it review and refer to the government within 20 working days any submitted proposal. However, this deadline passed long ago, despite several reminders.

The most astounding part of this story is the unexpected Facebook post on March 6, 2021, by the recently-appointed Minister of Economy, Vahan Kerobyan, who had studied mathematics, but is clueless about economics.

Minister Kerobyan arrogantly wrote: “In reality, I am the one who stopped this industrial zone project because it ridiculously despises the interests of the citizens of the Republic of Armenia.” Minister Kerobyan was in no position to stop this project for two reasons: 1) As a recently-appointed Minister, he was not even around when this project was presented to the Prime Minister and subsequently referred to the Interagency Committee. 2) The decision to approve or reject this project rested with the Interagency Committee and the Prime Minister.

Minister Kerobyan went on to make more outlandish claims. He wrote: Let Mr. Tovmasyan “submit his proposal to the government’s approval in the next two weeks, but if he wants to pick up the nine hectares of land in Yerevan by promising a negligible amount of investment, then I remain of the opinion that this is not an investment project but a robbery. We have also proposed to implement this business with their conditions and tax permits in a city other than Yerevan, but incomprehensibly, exactly the precious piece of land in Yerevan is necessary to them for this production zone.”

Minister Kerobyan is misleading the public. Even though the Armenian government has not responded to the proposal in several years, he is claiming that he will respond in two weeks. Why hasn’t he then reacted to the existing proposal since his appointment last November? The fact is that he has never made a counter-proposal and has never sat down with the investor to discuss the proposal. Incidentally, the Defense Ministry was the one that suggested the land located on the outskirts of Yerevan to Mr. Tovmasyan, not for free, but for purchase.

Finally, it is very unprofessional of Mr. Kerobyan to respond through a Facebook post to a serious proposal involving a multi-million dollar military production. Regrettably, that reflects the Minister’s lack of qualification for the job he holds.

In conclusion, Armenia lost the war for many reasons, but this type of behavior by an unqualified Minister and an incompetent government does not inspire any confidence that it will be able to attract investors and improve the country’s dismal economic situation anytime soon.

from previous page

In the past Turkey’s behavior did not contribute to European interests. We are ready to use all the tools at our disposal to control Turkey’s behavior.”

It is significant that the statement was made on June 1, on the eve of Nikol Pashinyan’s meeting with Mr. Michel.

Upon his election, President Biden announced that “America is back.” His policies are having their reverberations on international relations. He will be meeting with President Vladimir Putin of Russia, who he accused of being a “killer.” He will meet with his Russian counterpart on that premise.

He was not less complimentary toward Erdogan. Just before his election, President Biden pledged to work with Erdogan’s opposition to unseat him. It was no wonder that he gave a cold shoulder to the Turkish leader, refusing to talk to him after the election. He picked up the phone on April 23 to break the news to Erdogan that he was about to release a statement recognizing the Armenian Genocide. Erdogan’s reaction was uncharacteristically subdued, given the complex nature of his relations with Washington.

Human rights issues have no bearing on Turkey’s president, but when President Biden speaks of human rights, he means business. Perhaps Erdogan will learn that even before his meeting with his American counterpart.

It is obvious that during the Biden-Erdogan meeting, the Genocide issue will be on the table. The US, as a co-chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, was not pleased either with the haphazard arrangements that Russia and Turkey have made in the Caucasus, with the contention that they had solved the Karabakh issue by force.

Let’s hope President Biden will be bold enough to tell his two counterparts that America is back and the unfinished business of Karabakh has to be taken back in hand by the Minsk Group and resolved based on the principles adhered to by the group all along.

# Will Samantha Power Be the First US Official to Preside Over Four Genocides?

By Michael Rubin

Samantha Power rose to prominence as the author of *Problem from Hell*, a study of the US response to genocide. She wrote the book against the backdrop not only of the slaughter in Bosnia but also Rwanda. It not only won her a Pulitzer but also brought her to the attention of a freshman senator, Barack Obama, whose coattails she rode to become US ambassador to the United Nations.

Once in office, however, Power engaged in the same moral compromises she once publicly condemned. She created the Atrocity Prevention Board but stood largely quiet as Obama chose to ignore the acceleration of a small political uprising into the Middle East’s worst sectarian slaughter of the 21st century. Rather than resign when Obama chose to stand down in the face of genocide, Power let her ambitions get the better of her, sacrificed her moral authority, and remained. Now, as USAID administrator, history repeats.

President Donald Trump began the abandonment of Syrian Kurds, but President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and national security adviser Jake Sullivan appear determined to complete the job. They recently undercut the autonomous zone’s

ability to finance its own operations. That they’re doing this in the face of Turkey’s own ethnic and sectarian cleansing campaign in northern Syria is unconscionable. Given the option and ability, Turkey would eradicate the Syrian Kurds in their entirety, driving them into the desert near Deir ez-Zor to die, as the Ottomans did to Armenians more than a century ago.

For the Armenians, the threat of genocide remains real. On September 27, 2020, the centenary of the Ottoman Turkish invasion of newly independent Armenia, the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh faced a surprise attack from a combination of Azerbaijani forces, Turkish Special Forces, and Syrian mercenaries, many of whom were veterans of al Qaeda or the Islamic State. While the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency have yet to say whether the invasion caught them by surprise or whether they simply chose not to forewarn the Armenians, Azerbaijan’s subsequent behavior suggests that genocide remains the goal. Azerbaijani dictator Ilham Aliyev, for example, now suggests that the Armenian capital Yerevan is actually Azerbaijani territory. His wife, a UNESCO ambassador, celebrates “renovations” in which Azeris erase the Armenian past from pre-modern churches. Rather than dissuade Azerbaijan from such behavior, Blinken sidestepped US law to keep military aid to Azerbaijan flowing. While Power apologized while out of office for Obama’s failure to recognize the Armenian genocide, when faced with forces determined to continue it, she remains silent.

Then, there are the Tutis about whom Power wrote in her book. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda was anti-Tutsi. While in the Obama administration, see POWER, page 20





Some members of the Boston Pops brass performed at Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway on June 2 as part of the Boston Pops “Rolling Recital” series. (All photos by Nancy Kalajian)



Arto Kurkjian and his family enjoy the fine outdoor performance on a weather-perfect day.

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**Will Power Preside Over Four Genocides?**

POWER, from page 19

however, Power sought to withhold explicit recognition of the anti-Tutsi character of the genocide in order to extract concessions from Rwandan President Paul Kagame. The problem with the transactional approach, however, is that it legitimizes genocide revisionists and deniers. Today, many Hutu genocidaires remain ensconced just across the Rwanda [border](#) in Burundi, Congo, and Uganda, staging occasional [terrorist attacks](#) across the frontier, believing that Power’s moral confusion gives them a second chance to finish the job.

Power [recognizes](#) the Uyghur genocide. The question then becomes whether her behavior will be, as with Syria a decade ago, moral compromise or whether she will stand up to a Biden team increasingly willing to appease [China](#). This, more than any introspective autobiography, will be the mark of Power’s true character.

Power made combating genocide her brand. Rather than be the woman who changed policy-makers’ immoral compromises, she increasingly appears to be Exhibit A as to how power corrupts. This is a tragedy not only for Power, but also for the many whom she might have saved.

*Michael Rubin (@Mrubin1971) is a contributor to the Washington Examiner’s Beltway Confidential blog. He is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.*