

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932

Mirror-Spectator Annual
Summer Vacation

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* will close for its annual two-week vacation in early July.

The last issue for the *Mirror* will be that of July 3. Publication will resume with the July 24 issue.

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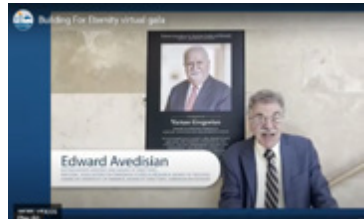
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NAASR Virtual Gala Honors Vartan Gregorian

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BELMONT, Mass. — For the first time, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) held its gala virtually due to the ongoing pandemic and restrictions on gatherings in the country and in Massachusetts in particular.

The venerable institution, which since the 1950s has helped found many of the Armenian studies professorial chairs at universities around the US — starting with Harvard — was slated to celebrate the legacies of legendary public intellectual Dr. Vartan Gregorian and philanthropist Edward Avedisian this year. The theme of this year was “Building for Eternity,” in reference to the construction of the organization’s new headquarters, plans for the future, and the symbol of Armenian culture, the “eternity sign,” a representation of which there is in front of the building in the form of a Michael Aram creation.



Edward Avedisian speaks at the NAASR building, before a plaque dedicated to the late

tan Gregorian and philanthropist Edward Avedisian this year. The theme of this year was “Building for Eternity,” in reference to the construction of the organization’s new headquarters, plans for the future, and the symbol of Armenian culture, the “eternity sign,” a representation of which there is in front of the building in the form of a Michael Aram creation.

Avedisian is the primary benefactor of the new NAASR headquarters. When it was suggested by NAASR Board Chair Yervant Chekijian that the building be named after him, Avedisian replied “Who am I? The building should be named for a scholar, like Vartan Gregorian.”

Gregorian had accepted the honor, as well as the invitation to speak at this year’s event, before his untimely passing.

The gala, like so many other events of the past year, was held “virtually” — that is, it was livestreamed as a Zoom meeting to a group of viewers who signed up beforehand. The program consisted of speeches, video footage of the new building, and montages of past NAASR events and of see NAASR, page 7

Pashinyan Holds on to Power after Bruising Election

By Raffi Elliott
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN—With 100 percent of ballots being counted as of the morning of Monday, June 21, incumbent Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is projected to retain a reduced parliamentary majority following a bitterly contested electoral campaign. The election, which took place on Sunday, June 20, was triggered in May when Pashinyan resigned as part of an agreement with opposition parties in a bid to end months of political tension rocking the country in the wake of last autumn’s Azerbaijani invasion of Artsakh.

According to preliminary results announced by the Central Election Committee, the prime minister’s Civil Contract party received 53.92 percent of the vote, enough to form a working majority government. His main rival, an electoral alliance led by former President Robert Kocharyan, which includes the Armenian Revolutionary Feder-



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is congratulated on his win.

ation, finished a distant second with 21 percent. The third force, “I Have Honor,” another electoral alliance which includes former President Serzh Sargsyan’s Republican Party and former National Security Service Chief

Artur Vanetsyan, received just over 5 percent. However, electoral rules require alliances to pass a 7-percent threshold to enter parliament, but also necessitates a minimum of three parties, so the final composition of the National

Assembly remains to be decided. None of the other 23 other parties and alliances contesting the vote crossed the threshold.

Declaring victory at his campaign headquarters late on Sunday see ELECTION, page 2

Most of the Ills Afflicting Armenia May Be Corrected by Changing the Constitution:’ President Armen Sarkissian

By Edmond Y. Azadian
Senior Mirror-Spectator Editorial Columnist

YEREVAN — On June 19, on the eve of the parliamentary elections, President Armen Sarkissian agreed to an interview with me, representing the *Mirror-Spectator*, on issues plaguing Armenia these days. This visit proved what was very obvious from outside — that there is a disconnect between the presidential office and the executive branch of the government. No matter how ceremonial the office of the president may be, it still has a function and a role in the workings of the entire country.

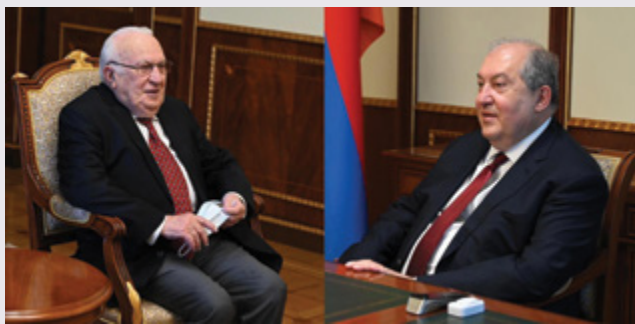
Beyond the strictly constitutional definition of the president’s role, the personality of the latter matters. Sarkissian was a prominent scientist before engaging in statesmanship and diplomacy. In addition to his knowledge of state-of-the-art science, over the years he has accumulated tremendous experience on a large scale in inter-

national trade and business. Along the way, he has been in contact with world leaders, relations with whom can lead to substantial benefits to the country.

One gets the impression that by confining the president to his constitutional role, and defining that role very narrowly, the Armenian government has been denying itself a powerhouse of resources which are so very needed by Armenia.

During the entire course of the conversation, the president seldom employed any diplomatic ambiguity or evasiveness. He was direct and as objective as possible.

President Sarkissian was one of the prominent leaders of the country who had called for the resignation of the prime minister after the debacle of the war, and recommended the formation of a government of technocrats. Referring to that matter, and to the notion that he might preside over such a government, Sarkissian see CHANGES, page 3



Edmond Azadian, left, and President Armen Sarkissian

Four-Time Grammy Nominee Constantine Orbelian Excited to Take Helm of NYC Opera

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

NEW YORK — Constantine Orbelian is a man with a plan; he is fully immersed in his plans as the new conductor and music director of [New York City Opera](#) (NYCO). He is also happy that he is finally back home in New York.

As with the rest of humanity, all the plans and programs for the past year have been affected by the worldwide COVID pandemic. see ORBELIAN, page 16



Conductor Constantine Orbelian in action

KARABAGH

The faithful in Karabakh visit Amaras, Gandzasar

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ARMENIA

Folk Singer Sevana Tchakerian’s New Direction with ‘Jinj’ Duo

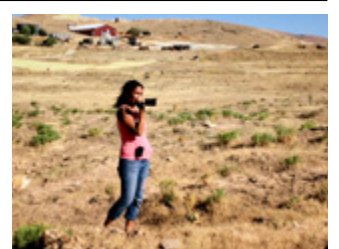
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CALIFORNIA

Ani Hovannissian’s ‘Hidden Map’ Up for Three Emmy Awards

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Mother See Welcomes Pashinyan's Dialogue Overture

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin issued a statement over the snap parliamentary elections held in Armenia on June 20.

“The parliamentary elections, despite the pre-election tension, contradictions and some violations recorded, have had a relatively peaceful course and were held without serious incidents.

“It’s highly important for the Church that the political force, which is taking office, will be able to ensure and guarantee pro-national solutions to such vital issues which relate to the security of Armenia, Artsakh and our believer people, the preservation of national identity and value system, education, culture, public solidarity and other pan-national issues. The Mother See and the clergymen of our Church have regularly expressed their positions and concerns over such important issues and will be consistent with the protection of state, national and spiritual interests in the aforementioned fields.

“The Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin assesses positively caretaker Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s remarks on solidarity, unity in establishing the homeland’s secure, prosperous and progressive life, as well as on the necessity to end hate speech. The caretaker PM’s proposal to dialogue directed to the spiritual leaders is also welcome. The Mother See has always acted from these positions and expects that the new leadership will take practical and consistent actions to implement their proposal on cooperation with the Church, as well as to form a public solidarity,” the statement says.

ARF's Saghatelyan Slams 'Fabricated' Charges Against Doctor Armen Charchyan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — ARF Supreme Council member Ishkhan Saghatelyan, one of the leaders of the Armenia bloc, on Tuesday, June 22, slammed charges against Armenia Bloc member Dr. Armen Charchyan as “fabricated,” aimed at pressuring the opposition.

The Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction on Tuesday was to hear a motion to arrest Charchyan, the head of the Izmirlyan Medical Center, for allegedly forcing his employees to take part in the snap parliamentary elections and to vote for the Armenia Bloc.

Speaking to reporters outside the court building, Saghatelyan said the doctor simply urged his employees to head to the polls as it was about the salvation of the homeland, denouncing the move to bring him to court.

He indicated the authorities thus attempt to intimidate the opposition figures. He dismissed Nikol Pashinyan’s “dictatorship of law” plan, stating he instead seeks to establish a one-man dictatorship in the country.

Pashinyan Holds on to Power

ELECTION, from page 1
 night, Pashinyan spoke of the need to “restore public and national unity” after what many critics have described as a deeply divisive campaign. “The people have given me the mandate to continue to lead this crisis,” the Prime Minister continued, promising to restore peace, secure sovereignty while continuing more aggressive reforms in business, culture and STEM research.

While not out-right rejecting the results, Kocharyan’s Armenia Alliance cast doubt on the preliminary figures, calling them “highly controversial.” In their official statement, the alliance insisted that the result did not reflect the “manifestations of public life” which the alliance’s leadership believes had been demonstrated in several polls and in particular, the large pre-election rally held in Yerevan on the eve of the election. They also called for an “in-depth and substantiated investigation into all registered and alleged violations.”

However, the legitimacy of polling results showing Kocharyan either tied or ahead of Pashinyan has been questioned by several analysts. One such polling company, MPG, which confusingly uses the brand name “Gallup International” — despite no affiliation with the American pollster of the same name — has been at the center of controversy for more than a decade. Owned by a former associate of Robert Kocharyan, the company has been described as a “polling mill,” pumping out results tailored to the tastes of clients.

Political consultant [Eric Hacopian](#) suggested that the polling conducted by MPG as well as another nebulous Ukrainian pollster were part of a coordinated campaign by the opposition to give the appearance of a race being too close to call, in order to then discredit the voting results.

One of the [more reliable polls](#), conducted by the Armenian Election Study, showed that voters who leaned towards Kocharyan resonated with his message of promoting security over democracy, while Pashinyan supporters, on the other hand, valued democratic governance more.

Dr. Anna Ohanyan, a nonresident senior scholar at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, argues that the choice between security and democracy is a false dichotomy. “Externally, democratic institutions, and meaningful elections in particular, elevate the role of the people and the people power as a geopolitical factor,” she told the *Mirror-Spectator*. “Most importantly, only by deepening democratic institutions and practices can state-building take place.” In her view, building transparent and democratic state institutions are a prerequisite for ensuring the security of citizens.

Kocharyan’s electoral campaign has also faced much public scrutiny, marred by questions about financing, political advertising and vote buying. Unlike his opponents, Kocharyan chose to mostly hold rallies in indoor spaces, often in undisclosed locations.

The Alliance’s campaign manager, Armen Gevorgyan, explained the decision as making them more accessible to voters. “Strangely enough, our supporters prefer indoor meetings which allow them to directly communicate with alliance representatives,” Gevorgyan told the press. However, critics have accused the campaign of deliberately choosing these settings to conceal the true number of attendees and only inviting media representatives from “friendly” outlets on the understanding that they would not be asking any awkward questions.

While both campaigns have accused each other of abusing administrative resources,

handing out bribes and threatening workers to attend rallies, virtually all of the criminal charges regarding vote buying were laid against representatives of the Armenia Alliance, as well as the “I have Honor” alliance and the Prosperous Armenia party.

The election itself seems to have gone through without major incidents according to various independent observers. Police reported receiving a total of 87 calls involving electoral violations while the polling stations were open, five of which were considered criminal offenses. The Early Election Working Group of Armenia’s Prosecutor General’s Office received 338 reports from across the country’s 2008 polling stations, including 26 which merit criminal investigations. The Human Rights Defender’s Office, for its part, received 145 calls. Most of these consisted of technical violations during the voting process. A total of 11 arrests were made on suspicion of vote buying by the Special Investigative Service. One candidate, the liberal Arman Babajanyan, was apparently the victim of a shooting. He remained unharmed.

Independent Observer, an observation mission charged with overseeing conduct of the election declared, on Monday, that [Sunday’s vote](#) had been free and fair despite some violations. These, in turn, were mostly blamed on opposition forces.

This sentiment was echoed by the representatives of a joint observation mission consisting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

which deployed more than 200 international observers across the country.

At a [press conference](#) held in Yerevan on Monday, Kari Henriksen, who heads the Parliamentary Assembly, hailed the vote as “competitive and generally well-managed,” despite a polarizing campaign atmosphere and inflammatory rhetoric. George Katrougalos, of the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly, also concluded that the elections “respected the democratic character and the constitutional order,” despite what he called “minor technical irregularities” such as lack of access for people with disabilities in certain polling stations.

Nikol Pashinyan had been under [pressure to resign](#) since signing the November 9 ceasefire agreement with Russia and Azerbaijan, which his critics consider an act of capitulation. Pashinyan has in turn defended his conduct of the war, insisting that continuing the forty four day conflict would put the lives of tens of thousands of soldiers in jeopardy. He instead blamed decades worth of entrenched corruption and graft in the Army under former Presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan for leaving the army unprepared, under equipped and doctrinally incapable of countering the high-tech Israeli and Turkish-manufactured weaponry which Azerbaijan deployed in the battle space last September.

Despite the prime minister’s landslide victory, Hacopian warned that this is not so much a new mandate for Pashinyan, but a rejection of the old regime. “The focus needs to be on governing, his mandate is to solve the issues that he failed to tackle over the previous two years,” the analyst says.

European Observers Praise Armenian Election Conduct

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — European observers gave on Monday, June 21, a largely positive assessment of the Armenian authorities’ handling of the weekend parliamentary elections won by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his Civil Contract party.

The heads of the largest international observation mission mostly deployed to Armenia by the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) presented its preliminary findings at a joint news conference in Yerevan. The mission consisted of over 330 monitors who visited polling stations

“Despite a very polarized political climate we had elections that were held very well and without any compromise to their democratic character,” said George Katrougalos, who led two dozen observers dispatched by the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly.

Katrougalos said they witnessed only “some minor technical irregularities in some polling stations” which could have seriously affected the outcome of the snap elections. All Armenian political factions should therefore accept the official vote results that gave a landslide victory Pashinyan’s party, he told reporters.

Pashinyan described the vote as free and fair when he claimed victory overnight.

The main opposition contender, the Hayastan alliance led by former President Robert Kocharyan, refused to concede defeat, saying that it suspects a “coordinated and pre-planned falsification of the election results.” It accused the authorities of abusing their administrative levers and harassing Hayastan activists to keep Pashinyan in power.

Eoghan Murphy, who led most members of the monitoring mission deployed by the OSCE’s Warsaw-based Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, urged the Armenian authorities to properly investigate all allegations of fraud and foul play. But he emphasized in that regard the mission’s “generally positive assessment of what happened in polling stations” on Sunday.

Murphy also said: “All candidates could campaign freely throughout the process and voters were provided with a broad range of options.”



The heads of an international election observation mission hold a news conference in Yerevan, June 21, 2021.

across the country during Sunday’s voting and ensuing ballot counting.

“Our overall conclusion is that the June 20 early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Armenia were competitive and generally very well-managed within a short time frame,” said Kari Henriksen of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. “However, they were characterized by intense polarization and marked by increasingly inflammatory rhetoric among key contestants.”

“Election day, including the vote count, was assessed positively overall,” stressed Henriksen.



ARMENIA



Visitors to Amaras Monastery, with Russian soldiers nearby

The Faithful in Karabakh Visit Amaras, Gandzasar

STEPANAKERT (PanARMENIAN.Net) — More than 150 pilgrims and residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, accompanied by Russian peacekeepers, have visited the Armenian monasteries of Amaras and Gandzasar, which is situated close to the new contact line with Azerbaijan, the Russian Defense Ministry reported on June 22.

Russian peacekeepers also used to accompany Armenian pilgrims to the medieval Armenian monastery of Dadivank, which came under Azerbaijan's control following the 44-day war in Karabakh in fall 2020.

"As part of the implementation of the trilateral statement of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia dated November 9, 2020, Russian peacekeepers continue to assist in the restoration of peaceful life in Nagorno-Karabakh," the Ministry said in a statement.

"As a result of the agreements reached, the Amaras monastery has found itself in close proximity to the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh."



Overview of Amaras

Kocharyan's Bloc to Take Parliament Seats Despite Fraud Claims

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Former President Robert Kocharyan indicated on Tuesday that his opposition Hayastan (Armenia) alliance will accept the parliament seats won by it in the weekend general elections despite challenging their official results in court.

Kocharyan said the bloc, which finished second in the snap elections, will use its presence in Armenia's new parliament to step up its struggle against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

"Our struggle will become much more intense. Parliamentary levers will allow us to work much more actively in other directions," he told a joint news conference with the leaders of the Dashnaksutyun (ARF) and Resurgent Armenia parties affiliated with the bloc.

"We will fight against this regime by all possible means, both in and outside the parliament," said Dashnaksutyun's Ishkhan Saghatlyan.

Some supporters of the two opposition forces have urged them to refuse to take up their parliament seats in protest.

Kocharyan argued against such a boycott, saying that presence in the parliament will give Hayastan "additional and substantial levers" to challenge Pashinyan's government and eventually cause its downfall.

"You will see in what corruption deals these authorities are mired, especially in state procurements and a number of other spheres," he said.

The 66-year-old ex-president, who topped his bloc's list of election candidates, said that he himself will likely cede his parliament seat to another Hayastan member.

"I'm a man of the executive branch. I don't quite imagine myself in a legislative body," he explained.

While claiming that the ruling party secured its landslide victory thanks to a widespread abuse of administrative resources and other "mass irregularities," Kocharyan described the official results as "unexpected."

He admitted that many Armenians voted for Pashinyan because they did not want their former rulers to return to power. In that regard, he complained that he and his polit-

ical allies did not have enough time to campaign in villages across the country where Civil Contract secured the highest percentage of votes.

Pashinyan Meets with Former Opponents

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Caretaker Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan is holding political consultations with the leaders of several political forces. Pashinyan received on June 22 the president of the Christian-Democratic party Levon Shirinyan, Pashinyan's Office told Armenpress.

"I am happy to see you and thank you for accepting my invitation. I have followed your campaign as much as I managed, and I have a very good impression. I regret that your alliance hasn't passed the required threshold in the elections, but the peculiarity of the elections is that they are always unpredictable, if they are real democratic and free elections. Today I would like to listen to your views on the further process of the domestic political life. I would like to know what you think about the possible platforms of the relations between the extra-parliamentary forces and the government," Pashinyan said.

Pashinyan also met with head of Bright Armenia Party Edmon Marukyan.

He thanked Marukyan for agreeing to meet and added his regrets that the party did not meet the threshold to enter the parliament. "Today I would also like to hear your opinions over the future of the political life and I also would like to hear what kind of solutions you see, so that the Government and extra-parliamentary opposition, including Bright Armenia Party have a high level of reciprocal contact."

Marukyan said the party will continue to have a role. "I hope that holding parliamentary elections and the formation of the new parliament can help to overcome the crisis in the country," he added.

'Ills Afflicting Armenia May Be Corrected by Changing the Constitution:' President Sarkissian

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offered the clarification that his recommendation was not directed at the prime minister's person, but a suggestion that the entire cabinet be replaced. As to whether he might himself become the head of such a technocratic cabinet, Sarkissian suggested that he was bound by his constitutional role not to assume any executive position.

The president's call for the resignation of the current government was based on his belief that the Third Republic has already run its course and we are at the threshold of a Fourth Republic.

Armenia's foreign policy establishment is in complete collapse, so how can a country manage its international relations in these trying times? When asked to what extent his contacts and experience with world leaders were being put to good use, the president did not attempt to hide his misgivings concerning Armenia's failures in world diplomacy. However, he did reveal that he had undertaken some efforts on his own initiative to maintain foreign relations. He referred to his recent trip to Georgia where he met with government officials and Armenian community leaders. He had also taken trips to Kazakhstan and Moscow, but he did not reveal further details about the official parties contacted

or particular topics discussed.

Western media sources have referred in the past to his rapport with former US president Donald Trump and the current president Joe Biden. Was he ever asked to utilize these contacts to raise some issues of great concern to Armenia? The president answered in the negative.

To the question of what he expects from the diaspora for Armenia, he spoke figuratively, questioning what would happen to an Emirati country on the Arabian peninsula if that country refused to use its oil resources. He then answered his own question, declaring that such a country would turn into a desert kingdom, and that is where we are now.

The president acknowledges that the diaspora has many talents and resources which cannot benefit Armenia because of constitutional constraints. Even a major country like France has a constitution which allows overseas French people to participate in the government and contribute to the country. This can be the answer to the rhetorical question of whether a diplomat like Sergei Lavrov can serve in Armenia in any governmental capacity.

There is an established protocol to exchange war prisoners. Most of the time, the warring parties transfer prisoners of war

into the custody of the International Red Cross, which in its turn returns those prisoners to the home country in compliance with the agreement sealed between the enemy countries. After the 44-day war, the declaration signed on November 9 called for an all-for-all exchange. All the Azerbaijani prisoners would have been released upon the release of all Armenian prisoners. Why did Armenia release all the Azerbaijani prisoners before the Armenian prisoners were freed? The president did not delve into the details of the issue nor did he hesitate to state that it was a bad deal.

To the question of how he would characterize relations between the Armenian state and church, the president replied that as far as the presidential office is concerned, they are excellent. However, he would not characterize those relations in the same terms as far as the executive branch of the Armenian government is concerned. At the same time, he averred the principal of the separation of church and state. He specifically emphasized that the state should not interfere in church affairs, nor vice-versa.

A new political order is being developed in the Caucasus. Major political forces are finding their accommodations in these developments and in this process they are

shaping Armenia's destiny. Yerevan is in no position to have its say in the process. The president acknowledged those dangerous trends and his recommendation was to develop a strong diplomacy as Armenia is no match to its neighbors in military power.

The president blames this untenable political situation on the political system which was adopted during Serzh Sargsyan's administration. Sargsyan had forced on the country a constitution tailor-made for himself. Upon his acceptance to run as a candidate for the presidential office, Armen Sarkissian had suggested to Serzh Sargsyan that the constitution be changed. However, before Sargsyan could make good on the pledge to do so, he abdicated his office in favor of Nikol Pashinyan. Eight days later, Sarkissian assumed the presidency.

Although the president refused to speculate on the outcome of the parliamentary elections, he confided that he already had an agreement with Pashinyan to hold a referendum in October on a new constitution, which will usher in a system of presidential rule and restore checks and balances on power.

We left the presidential office on that positive note.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Ruben Vardanyan Granted Armenian Citizenship

MOSCOW (Public Radio of Armenia) — Armenian businessman and philanthropist, Aurora Initiative co-founder Ruben Vardanyan has become a citizen of Armenia. “For me this was a very vital decision that I made after the Artsakh War, realizing that the current situation does not allow us all to be indifferent, to not think, to not worry, to not try to change the future of our Armenian world anymore,” Vardanyan said in a video message on June 19.

“Having been engaged in various initiatives in Armenia and the Armenian world for decades, I have left many questions to others. Today, standing on this land, which is an important place for me, I want to say that I am the owner. I am the owner of this land. I am the owner of Armenia. I am the owner of the Armenian world. We are the owner,” he said. “We should all understand that the situation in which we live in peace in Moscow, Paris, Glendale, or Buenos Aires will not work,” Vardanyan stated.

Return of Armenian Captives among Russia’s Priorities, Ambassador Says

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The return of Armenian captives from Azerbaijan is among Russia’s priorities, Moscow’s Ambassador to Yerevan Sergei Kopyrkin told reporters on June 22. “We welcomed the return of 15 captives. Right from the beginning, Russia has been doing everything possible to make this happen,” Kopyrkin said. He said there is progress on the matter, citing “the huge contribution” of the commander of the peacekeeping contingent in Karabakh, Lieutenant General Rustam Muradov, as well as of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Azerbaijan Ready to Allow UNESCO Mission In Karabakh

BAKU (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijan is ready to accept a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization mission in Karabakh, Foreign Ministry representative Leyla Abdullayeva told reporters on Tuesday, June 22, RIA Novosti reports.

UNESCO has said on several occasions that Azerbaijan is delaying its approval for a mission to Karabakh (Artsakh) to assess damage to cultural and religious sites. Stéphane Dujarric, a spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary-General, has said Azerbaijan is also hindering the organization’s humanitarian mission in the region.

Abdullayeva claimed, however, that after a telephone conversation between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay, the sides have been negotiating the matter in recent months.

Armenia Sees Russian Troop Deployment In Another Border Region

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Russia will likely deploy troops in another Armenian region bordering Azerbaijan, Armenia’s top army general said on Tuesday, June 22.

Lt. Gen. Artak Davtyan, the chief of the Armenian army’s General Staff, said Moscow and Yerevan are close to reaching a relevant agreement.

“As soon as there is a final agreement in terms of time frames and technical issues there will be a further announcement,” he told reporters.



General Artak Davtyan speaks with reporters.

Davtyan expressed confidence that Russian border guards will be deployed to Armenia’s Gegharkunik province. It borders the Kelbajar district west of Nagorno-Karabakh which was retaken by Azerbaijan following the autumn war.

Azerbaijani troops crossed several sections of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border

and advanced a few kilometers into Gegharkunik and another province, Syunik, on May 12-14. Yerevan has repeatedly demanded their withdrawal since then. Baku insists that its troops took positions on the Azerbaijani side of the frontier.

Gegharkunik’s governor, Gnel Sanyan, announced the impending deployment of Russian border guards there late on Monday. He said that it will be followed by the withdrawal of Armenian and Azerbaijani forces from contested border portions.

Davtyan did not confirm the planned troop disengagement mentioned by Sanyan.

“Negotiations are taking place with the Russian side because there are still issues,” he said. “Our goal is to have Azerbaijani forces withdraw from our territory without any clashes.”

It is not clear whether Russian military personnel could also be dispatched to the disputed border section in Syunik.

Russia already deployed army soldiers and border guards elsewhere in Syunik following the Armenian-Azerbaijani war stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire in November.

Russia’s and Armenia’s defense ministers discussed further Russian deployments in a January 16 phone call. They again spoke by phone on Monday.

“Sergei Shoigu and Vagharshak Harutyunyan discussed the situation at Armenian-Azerbaijani border sections in Gegharkunik and Syunik and ways of resolving it,” the Armenian Defense Ministry said in a statement. It gave no details.

Turkey: Erdogan Says Biden Meeting Opened ‘New Era’ Of Diplomatic Ties

ISTANBUL (Reuters) — The Turkish leader expressed optimism after the meeting, despite differences between the two countries on various geopolitical issues.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday, June 21, that his recent meeting with President Joe Biden opened a “new era” of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The two leaders met last week during a NATO summit in Brussels.

“We believe that we have opened the doors to a new era that is based on positive and constructive ties with the US,” Erdogan said after a cabinet meeting.

“We are determined to gain the greatest benefit possible for the country from the positive tone of our talks with Biden, strengthening our channels of communications with the US,” he added.

At the same time, Erdogan said he did have one request of the Biden administration: “Turkey’s only demand is that its economic and political sovereignty are respected in every field, and that it is supported in its struggle with terror organizations.”

Despite Erdogan’s positive comments, the two countries have multiple disagreements on various geopolitical issues.

Erdogan has pursued multiple military operations against Kurdish groups in Syria, claiming these groups have ties to the outlawed PKK terrorist organization. The US has supported some of these Kurdish groups in Syria in the fight against jihadist organizations such as the “Islamic State” (IS).

The US has also strongly opposed the sale of Russian S-400 missiles to Turkey. The missiles would bolster Turkey’s air defenses as it grapples with various security threats in the Middle East.

Erdogan at times has also criticized US support for Israel. The Turkish president has frequently shown overt support for the Palestinians.

Tensions were also icy earlier this year after Biden recognized the killings of Armenians during the Ottoman Empire as genocide.

The two countries have, however, cooperated in other areas, such as the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. Biden and Erdogan have agreed to allow Turkey to have a leading role in securing the airport of Afghanistan’s capital, Kabul, after the pullout of international troops later this year.

Amal Clooney Brings to Justice Daesh Woman Who Oversaw Rape, Enslavement of Yazidis

LONDON (Arab News) — Renowned human rights defender Amal Clooney has secured the prosecution of a Daesh member who abused, enslaved and assisted in the rape of captured Yazidi (also written Yezidi) women.

Clooney’s client was a Yazidi woman who was taken and enslaved at the age of 14 by the notorious terrorist group.

Her captors were an Algerian woman known as Sarah O. and her husband, a German-Turkish national known as Ismail S. According to the Daily Mail, he remains at large.

Sarah O. was arrested in Turkey in February 2018. After seven months in custody, she was deported to Germany and put on trial.

The verdict was heard on June 16, and saw Sarah O. sentenced to six and a half years behind bars in Germany.

She was convicted of membership in a foreign terrorist organization, assault, deprivation of liberty, aiding and abetting rape, enslavement, and religious and gender-based persecution as crimes against humanity.

From 2015 onward, the couple enslaved Yazidi women and girls who were captured by Daesh as it expanded its so-called caliphate throughout Iraq and Syria.

Yazidis, considered heretics by Daesh, were subjected to a catalogue of brutal abuse. Men were often instantly killed and women killed or enslaved.

The survivors were often subjected to

acts of extreme cruelty, including sexual enslavement, torture and summary execution.

Over two years, Sarah O. and Ismail S. enslaved seven Yazidi women, some of whom were sold on to others and one of whom — a 14-year-old girl — died while in their captivity.

Sarah O. beat the prisoners and assisted in her husband’s sexual abuse of them, helping to “prepare them” for rape. She also forced them into slave labor in her house.

The victim, whose identity remains hidden under German law, said: “No conviction can make up for our suffering, but I am immensely grateful to the German Federal Prosecutors and the German court for investigating and shedding light on the crimes committed against the Yazidis, and I hope that many more countries will follow this good example.”

Clooney, 43, has been active for years in pushing for justice for the countless Yazidi women subjected to horrors at the hands of Daesh.

One of Clooney’s colleagues representing the Yazidi women in the Dusseldorf court, Natalie von Wistinghausen, said: “For the first time ever, a court handed down a conviction for religious and gender-based persecution, and this recognition is of utmost importance for our client and for all Yazidi women, for their religious community as a whole, as well as for other victims of gender-based violence.”



INTERNATIONAL

A War of Words:

An Investigation of Patriotic Astroturfing During the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan War

By **Cristopher Patvakanian, Roupen Minassian, and Manana Hakobyan**

BOSTON/YEREVAN/SYDNEY ([DataPoint Armenia](#)) — A war between Armenia and Azerbaijan was reignited after Azerbaijani attacks on Artsakh in September 2020, but the fighting extended far beyond the mountains of the Caucasus. Twitter users engaging in social media narrative warfare during the war — also known as “astroturfing” — were very active during and after fighting on the ground. Though there has been some [scholarship](#) covering the activity of both pro-Armenian and pro-Azerbaijani Twitter users, including extensive Azerbaijani Armenophobic [hate speech](#), DataPoint Armenia (DPA) has conducted the most comprehensive analysis specifically on astroturfing to date. Its most [recent report](#) covers the themes, coordination, and primary tactics used by Armenian and Azerbaijani Twitter users.

Campaign Advocacy and Tweet Timing

Although pro-Armenian and pro-Azerbaijan groups coordinated large-scale campaigns in an effort to highlight atrocities of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, our investigation identified variations in how this information was disseminated on Twitter between these sub-groups. Initial investigations on the number of tweets/day noted differences in tweeting patterns. While pro-Armenian tweets demonstrated consistency between days, pro-Azerbaijan tweet activity correlated with significant events during the war.

Interestingly, DPA discovered that a large proportion of pro-Azerbaijan tweets during this period were replies or retweets of original content. DPA did not find said disparities in pro-Armenian tweets and observed more natural and variable tweeting behaviors.

Automation, Disinformation, and “Ephemeral Astroturfing”

Common themes that were utilized by both groups was the targeting of celebrities and the impersonation of government officials in attempts to manipulate both current and historical information about the geopolitical area. Although automation and bot activity was also a shared tactic, pro-Azerbaijan tweeters seemed to engage more in a process called ephemeral astroturfing, as we noticed a significant lack in the number of tweets when scraping (compared to pro-Armenian tweets) and the fact that highest volume accounts tweeting to pro-Azerbaijani hashtags were deleted or suspended.

Ultimately, what was demonstrated during the cyber war was a more coordinated approach to the dissemination of information by pro-Azerbaijan tweeters compared to pro-Armenian tweeters.

Hashtag Usage

During the war, hashtag usage became a popular tool for emphasizing and spreading opinions and news. Armenians had many of those hashtags such as #StopAzeriTerrorism, #RecognizeArtsakh, #ArtsakhIsArmenia, etc. The investigations on hashtag frequencies showed that pro-Armenian tweets employ numerous hashtags with little frequencies, while the pro-Azerbaijani tweets boost the hashtags by using only a few of them and increasing their frequency. This tactic allows their narrative to trend globally. The Twitter algorithm prioritizes content that uses trending hashtags. Additionally, the most popular hashtags can be tracked on Twitter’s “Trending” page which is a key to attracting the attention of the global community. There is a lesson to be learned about coordinated activism and the spreading of an organized unified narrative even when it comes to a

matter as simple as choosing the single representative hashtag from #StopAzeriTerrorism, #RecognizeArtsakh, #ArtsakhIsArmenia and other candidates.

Report Conclusion

Understanding not only the content but the mechanisms by which information spreads on social media is important because it in fact can have consequences in the “real” world. Pro-Azerbaijani users artificially spamming hashtags and harassing celebrities, most prominently with the hashtag “#DontBelieveArmenia” and targeting celebrities such as Cardi B and Elton John, damaged the image of Armenians in public discourse. This activity in turn even harms efforts to gather support and advocate for the Armenian cause internationally - not to mention violates the terms of service of Twitter.

For pro-Armenian users, much of the coordination, some of which was confirmed by Twitter to be [affiliated with the Armenian government](#) (and thus taken down), showcased how inexperienced the country is to Twitter campaigns. The primary activities of the accounts taken down by Twitter were impersonations of Azerbaijani government officials, such as Jeyhun Baramov, the Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs and the spokeswoman for the MFA Leyla Abullayeva. The goal of these accounts was essentially to give the appearance of Azerbaijani political disagreement and internal chaos, thus targeting the local Azerbaijani audiences. The identities of those accounts were eventually called out

have created an echo-chamber of pro-Armenian users retweeting the same content to one another rather than a larger outreach to international communities.

It is worth noting that unlike suspicious Armenian activity, there was no public investigation or takedown of suspicious Azerbaijani accounts by Twitter. DPA recommended in its report that Twitter conduct its own internal investigation into pro-Azerbaijani tweets during the duration of the war, and also improve its monitoring of the region during periods of conflict. Additionally, the report concluded there’s a need for improvement in Twitter’s platform monitoring given the particularly disturbing rhetoric highlighted in this report and publicly propagated on social media by official and non-official Azerbaijani users.

For access to the complete investigation, please see the report located on the [DataPoint Armenia website](#).

Social Media Best Practices

It is important to understand how to push your narrative on social media in an adversarial environment but it is also very important to know the ways to protect your mental health and digital security. Unfortunately, many Armenians came across some sort of hate speech during the war on social media and felt threatened. Some even experienced cyber-attacks such as messages or calls with harmful content, reported or stolen accounts. The hate speech and violence on social media puts extra psychological burden on the individual making them often



Figure 2: Left: a warning tweet from the spokesperson from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the fake account. Right: the profile of the real Jeyhun Baramov Twitter account, which uses the same photos and biography as the imposter.

Graphic taken from Stanford Cyber Policy Report, Cryst et al., 2021

by the actual Azerbaijani officials, and likely had little to no impact on Azerbaijani audiences. A Stanford Cyber Policy Center [report](#) specifically focuses on these “sock-puppet” accounts in detail, with a screenshot from their analysis provided below.

While Azerbaijan has a history of [social media manipulation](#) on Twitter, it came as a shock to many Armenians to see their government exposed by Twitter Safety for making fraudulent accounts on the platform. Knowing that the Armenian government has used these techniques, even to a small degree, should make Armenians be more careful when looking at information spread on Twitter on topics regarding both international and domestic issues. Though Twitter’s takedown did not find any Armenian government-affiliated accounts aimed at targeting the Armenian local audience, Armenians should be especially vigilant about the potential use of inauthentic social media for campaign/propaganda purposes during elections or other events where there is a coordinated flow of information. It is worth also noting that most Armenians are not using Twitter but rather, based on [website popularity](#), using Facebook, Youtube, VKontakte and Telegram as their primary social media platforms.

Moreover, much of the activity of Armenians, authentic and inauthentic, probably had a small effect on international audiences. The majority of new users from Armenia likely came through the “Social Media Army” groups on Facebook and only followed one another and government accounts. As a result, though the report does not focus on this, one can conclude Armenians may

behave irrationally. While it is hard to take control of emotions, always remember that the content on social media is not always authentic. Here are good practices to navigate through social media, especially, when you suspect that there is a chance of astroturfing.

Check the source and the author of the content. The authentic sources are more trustworthy than random blogs. In case of social media influencers or public figures, make sure that their pages are authentic and the accounts are not stolen.

Check the dates of the posts and metadata if available. Some pictures include metadata which can show where and when the picture was taken.

Report activities that violate the Terms of Service (TOS). These include any kinds of hate speech, misinformation and suspicious accounts.

When encountering hate speech do not engage with it, especially, with replying to the message or comment with a more hateful comment. It is a wiser decision to report this activity to the platform managers, so they can prevent more hate speech dissemination. Moreover, replying with hate speech puts at risk your account’s credibility in the eyes of platform managers, because usually it is really hard to track when and how the hate speech thread started and you become yet another person who exercises harmful practices.

Do not post personal information that can harm yourself or your loved ones such as farewell pictures with volunteers who join the army. Social media is a highly monitored place, where pictures and videos are being checked and geolocated.

Community News

ANI Director Rouben Adalian Speaks About Significance of Biden Affirmation of Armenian Genocide

WASHINGTON — Dr. Rouben Adalian, director of the Armenian National Institute, spoke about the significance of President Joe Biden's affirmation of the Armenian Genocide during the Armenian Assembly of America's Summer Speaker Series on Thursday evening, June 17.

Adalian noted that President Biden has a long and consistent record on this matter. While previous presidents provided a dictionary definition, it was President Biden that "connected recognition of the Armenian Genocide with a much broader interest of human rights" in this year's April 24th statement.

The affirmation journey has been long, according to Dr. Adalian, and a testament to the perseverance of the Armenian American community and our elected officials. He also highlighted key figures, including Senators Bob Dole (R-KS) and Bob Me-



Dr. Rouben Adalian

nendez (D-NJ) who helped reach this milestone by championing Armenian Genocide recognition in the United States Senate.

Adalian noted that when Senator Dole brought the Senate Armenian Genocide resolution to the floor in 1990 (S.J. Res. 212), it had first been approved by the Judiciary Committee, then chaired by Senator Biden (now president).

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Chairman Menendez played "vital leadership roles," according to Adalian, who emphasized that they steered the House and Senate Armenian Genocide resolutions by "bringing them to the floor and getting them adopted."

With full U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Dr. Adalian stated that there is no reason for the media to continue its "two-sided storytelling that has plagued the accounting of the Armenian Genocide."

"The Armenian-American community should feel equipped that they can tackle the media and can play a valuable role in that matter as well," he said.

Adalian concluded his presentation by stating: "What President Biden did in fully affirming the Armenian Genocide truly honors the memory of see RECOGNITION, page 7



Los Angeles City Councilmember Paul Krekorian, left, with Ambassador Armen Baibourtian

Armenian Consulate in LA Hosts Reception in Honor of City Councilmember Paul Krekorian

GLENDAL — On June 17, the Consulate General of Armenia in Los Angeles hosted a reception in honor of Los Angeles City Councilmember Paul Krekorian to express gratitude for the Councilmember's consistent support to Armenia and Artsakh. The reception was attended by public, religious, political and cultural leaders and community representatives. After the welcoming remarks by Consul General of Armenia in Los Angeles Ambassador Armen Baibourtian, speeches were delivered by Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, the Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of North America, Salpi Ghazarian, Director of the University of Southern California's (USC) Institute of Armenian Studies, prominent lawyer Rafi Ourfalian, and Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian of the California State Assembly. The speakers highly appreciated the work of Councilmember Krekorian for the sake of the Homeland. All the clergymen present at the event said a prayer for Paul Krekorian and his wife, Dr. Tamar Krekorian.

In his speech, Baibourtian noted the importance of Krekorian's activities and efforts for Los Angeles, the State of California, the US as well as Armenia and Artsakh in both capacities of an Assemblymember of the California State Assembly and a Councilmember of the Los Angeles City Council. "There are many examples that attest to Paul Krekorian's full and unwavering devotion towards the welfare and betterment of the Homeland of Armenia and Artsakh," said Ambassador Baibourtian in his speech. Back in 2012, the Los Angeles City Council adopted the Los Angeles-Shushi Friendship City agreement, and in 2013, the Los Angeles City Council recognized the independence of the Republic of Artsakh as a sovereign state by a special adopted resolution as a commitment to the right to self-determination of the people of Artsakh. Within the first days of the Artsakh War in the fall of 2020, Paul Krekorian began to see RECEPTION, page 7



Los Angeles City Councilmember Paul Krekorian, right, with Tekeyan Cultural Association West Coast Executive Secretary Mayda Kuredjian

Dr. Lorky Libaridian Speaks on Covid at CYSCA Meeting

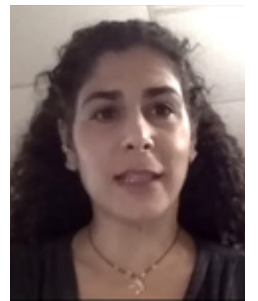
By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Dr. Lorky Libaridian spoke on "Cambridge and Yerevan through Covid-19" via Zoom at the annual Cambridge Yerevan Sister City Association (CYSCA) membership meeting on June 10.

This was the second annual meeting of the organization conducted virtually due to Covid-19, making the topic more than fitting.

Libaridian was introduced by Roxanne Etmekjian, CYSCA president. Libaridian graduated Yale School of Medicine, and completed a combined residency in internal medicine and pediatrics at the University of Rochester (NY). She works at the Cambridge Health Alliance and is medical director for Performance Improvement in Primary Care. Her work and research

include improving chronic disease management and pediatric well care and vaccination. She is an instructor in medicine at Harvard



Dr. Lorky Libaridian

Medical School and has been involved with Armenia for several decades. There, her focus is on education and training of family medicine residents and primary care physicians but this past year, it shifted to health care worker training related to Covid-19 and public health and mental health initiatives related to the events of the past year.

Libaridian began by noting that she grew up and still lives in Cambridge, while she considers Yerevan home as well, and declared that as part of her comparison of the two cities, she would be "highlighting the shared humanity that this pandemic has brought out and the reality of being human in this pandemic." Her talk was accompanied by illustrations and charts.

She provided basic statistical information, such as that Yerevan, with a 98 percent Armenian population of about one million and 26 percent living below the poverty line as defined there, has almost ten times the population of Cambridge, with a multicultural population almost 13 percent below the local poverty line. She compared the surges in Covid infections and concluded that with a total of 123 deaths in Cambridge and 4,463 in Armenia from Covid in total, there were significantly more deaths per capita in Armenia than in Cambridge.

Reactions to Covid in Cambridge and Armenia

Both Cambridge and Armenia were able to identify superspreader events, Libaridian pointed out, such as the Biogen conference at the end of February 2020 in the former, and a woman returning from Italy to an see CYSCA, page 9



COMMUNITY NEWS

NAASR Virtual Gala Honors Vartan Gregorian

NAASR, from page 1

the lives of Avedisian and Gregorian. A fundraising pitch was given throughout the hour-long program, giving it the feel of a telethon.

Moderna CEO Noubar Afeyan paid tribute to Gregorian. Afeyan, who had worked with Gregorian on numerous Armenian causes, including the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative which they cofounded with Ruben Vardanyan — spoke glowingly of his longtime friend. Gregorian's unique make-up was the product of the multiplication — not merely the addition — of wisdom, compassion, curiosity, and devotion, Afeyan opined.

“Vartan redefined the meaning of extraordinary,” he stated, and like a sports hero who redefines the game once in a generation, Gregorian redefined what it means to be a humanist, humanitarian, teacher, and leader. Afeyan also shared one of Gregorian's favorite quotes, from Bertolt Brecht: “Cursed is the land that needs heroes.” Certainly, this quote unfortunately applies to Armenia and the Armenians now and through most of history.

Chekijian spoke about Avedisian, a classically trained symphony clarinetist, who made his fortune in investments and gives back to the Armenian community through



Dr. Noubar Afeyan at the NAASR virtual gala

pushed him and the rest of the board to be more ambitious with the plans for NAASR's new center. Avedisian had a vision for a world-class institution as the headquarters of NAASR and he has a similar vision for Armenia — to invest in the education of the next generation. For this reason, he has founded a K-12 school named for his parents in the Malatia-Sebastia district of Yerevan, as well becoming a major donor to the American University of Armenia where one of the main buildings is named for his

Armenian causes and NAASR was evident.

Avedisian mentioned that he wanted NAASR to be a home and center for all Armenians, to study, do research, hold meetings, and even relax in the presence of the accumulated knowledge of history. He encouraged an open-door policy to welcome the Armenian community and for the center to truly be a part of the community.

Avedisian also discussed his memories of the late Vartan Gregorian and offered some insights onto what made the great man “tick.” One point he emphasized was Gregorian's motto of “my word is my bond,” pointing out that Gregorian turned down the presidency of Columbia University because he had promised Brown University — in word, not in a contract — that he would stay at the helm there until he raised \$1 billion for the school's endowment.

NAASR Executive Director Sarah Ignatius and Academic Director Marc Mamigonian had opened the program with a video tour of the new NAASR premises.

Ignatius spoke about how her grandfather, Hovsep Ignatius, a native of Kharpert, donated to the first NAASR campaign.

Mamigonian discussed the various ways in which NAASR helps the Armenian Studies community with grants and other programs. He pointed out that while there are an impressive 30,000 books (on Armenian topics) in NAASR's library, to put it in context, 60,000 books have been published on the American Civil War alone. By that reckoning there is still much work to do in the various fields of Armenian studies.

Various scholars also spoke, thanking NAASR for their support and funding of their work and that of other scholars in the

field. They included Dr. Lisa Gulesserian of Harvard, Dr. Hourri Berberian of the University of California-Irvine, Dr. Sebouh Aslanian of UCLA, PhD student Carla Kekejian of the University of Utah, and Tufts graduate Olivia Hintlian. Dr. Theo Maarten van Lint, Armenian Chair at Oxford University, gave a particularly touching message, describing NAASR as a “decisive force for good” in the academic community and in the world.

Dr. Nazareth Darakjian representing the Armenian Missionary Association of America, and AUA president Dr. Karin Markides, both spoke about Avedisian and thanked him for his many contributions to their respective organizations.

The gala was concluded by messages from Chekijian, Ignatius, and Mamigonian.

ANI Director Rouben Adalian Speaks About Significance of Biden Affirmation of Genocide

RECOGNITION, from page 6
the victims and is a landmark moment in the development and advancement of American political culture.”

Sen. Robert Menendez, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, carried the torch of affirmation from the 1990s and on a bipartisan basis secured passage of the Armenian Genocide in December of 2019. This landmark development followed the historic and overwhelming vote (405-11) in the House of Representatives in October of 2019, which resulted from the tenacious efforts of the Armenian Caucus in seeing that the 2019 resolution, spearheaded by Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA) and the Armenian Caucus leadership, reached the floor.

The Terjenian-Thomas Assembly Internship Program, which will take place virtually this summer, provides college students of Armenian descent an opportunity to gain exposure to the policy-making process in our nation's capital for eight weeks each summer.

Since 1977, the Armenian Assembly of America has assisted over 1,200 participants in securing placements in prominent congressional offices, government agencies, media outlets, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations in Washington, D.C.



Yervant Chekijian at the NAASR gala

his service on the boards of NAASR, the American University of Armenia, and the Armenian Missionary Association of America. Chekijian shared his own long history with NAASR starting when he first arrived in the United States from Jerusalem in the 1950s and attended the victory banquet celebrating the establishment of the Armenian Studies chair at Harvard.

As Chekijian described it, Avedisian

late brother.

A slide show of Avedisian's life was accompanied by a recording of him performing clarinet in a classical piece composed by Rouben Gregorian for clarinet and string orchestra. The affable Avedisian then appeared on the screen, sitting in a casual pose next to an image of Vartan Gregorian inside the new NAASR building. He spoke warmly from the heart and his enthusiasm for Ar-

Armenian Consulate in LA Hosts Reception in Honor of City Councilmember Paul Krekorian

RECEPTION, from page 6

unite and consolidate California American political and state leaders in pursuit of ending the Azerbaijani unleashed war against Artsakh. As a result, and thanks to his efforts, on October 5, 2020, U.S. Congressmen, California Assembly leaders and members, and Los Angeles City Council leaders and officials spoke at a joint press conference. During the 44-day war and in its aftermath, thanks to Krekorian, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously adopted a resolution confirming the support of the City of Los Angeles to the people of the Republic of Artsakh. Also, at his initiative, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously adopted yet another resolution, in which it demanded Azerbaijan to immediately release the Armenian prisoners of war (POWs) and captured civilians. Moreover, November 9th was declared as a Day of Remembrance and Commemoration of the victims of Azerbaijan's aggression against

Artsakh.

Baibourtian added that “the continued support for Armenia and Artsakh also have a consolidating effect and a unifying role for the Armenian community of California.”

Krekorian stated: “My response to the kind words of commendation and encouragement expressed today would be very brief — I was just doing my job. We should always be with our Homeland and cherish it.”

In the concluding part of the program, Anna Mouradian, Chief of Staff of LA County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, presented certificates of appreciation to Councilmember Paul Krekorian and his spouse Dr. Tamar on behalf of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

During the event, Armenian folk tunes were performed by duduk player Jivan Gasparyan jr., the grandson of the world-famous Jivan Gasparyan, as well as guitar player Andranik Kzirian.



City Councilmember Paul Krekorian with his wife, Dr. Tamar Krekorian



OBITUARY

Haritun Arto Shahrik

Lifelong Learner, Dedicated to Family

LEXINGTON, Mass. — Haritun Arto Shahrik died on Sunday, June 20, 2021 peacefully from complications that began with a compression fracture. He would have turned 98 within two days of his passing.

He was born on June 22, 1923 in Istanbul, Turkey to Parsegh Shahrikian of Shabinkarahisar, Turkey and Azniv (Fermanian) of Tokat, Turkey. He was the younger of two siblings; his late brother Hrnt was 11 years older, also born in Istanbul.

Haritun was a man who was larger than life, an enormous presence with a gentle demeanor, brilliant smile and twinkle in his eye. He immersed himself in science, and almost equally in philosophy, religion, spirituality, the arts and the psychology of the human condition.

A romantic at heart, he had an extraordinary mind. He was a deep thinker and seeker of knowledge from medical research to Armenian and world history and culture to the mysteries of the universe, and always encouraged and inspired his children and grandchildren to question everything and never stop learning.

"I'm 85 and am still learning, the lessons never stop," he once said. He was full of wisdom which he imparted to his family over the years. And whether he was sharing a life lesson, or posing a question or simply recalling a funny memory, he pulled you in with his cadence of perfectly timed words and pauses, that often had his listeners at the edge of their seats. His blue eyes smiling throughout, he would often end with an "ayo" or "ays kan."

Haritun attended St. Michel High School in Istanbul, and spent a year studying French at Istanbul's Faculty of French Language and Literature. Next he pursued dentistry at Istanbul's Faculty of Dentistry, graduating in 1952.

During his third year of dental studies, he conducted basic science research regarding the diseases of the oral cavity under the supervision of the University.

In 1956, he immigrated from to Boston, accepting a position at the Forsyth Pediatric Dental Clinic, where he continued to work as a dentist for two years. During his second year at Forsyth Dental, he expressed his desire to continue the research he had started in Istanbul characterizing the diseases of the human oral cavity. He received permission to start his own lab at the Forsyth Dental Clinic, initiating the rebuilding of what would become a famous research center in future years. He advanced his training in dentistry at the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, earning his second degree as a Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) following two years of study.

Despite his involvement in clinical practice, research continued to be an important part of his career. Initially inspired from reading Louis Pasteur's biography when he was in high school, he stayed committed to pursuing research on the human body throughout his career in dental medicine.

He opened a dental practice in Belmont and served his community until retiring in his 80s. He was universally loved by all his patients and was often called "the painless dentist."

In his early years, he lived on Curtis Street in Boston with his mother Azniv and met his wife Nina Oganian at an Armenian Student's Association dance in Boston. They married on July 29, 1962 and soon had two children, Anahid and Lilian. They eventually moved to Lexington, which be-



came the family home for decades until Nina passed away of non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 1998.

Haritun loved life; he had a joie de vivre that transcended the physical riches of life. It was the richness of heart and mind, his love and devotion to family and the simple things in life that brought him the most joy. Stop and smell

the roses was not a mere saying, he lived it, literally and figuratively. He was always amazed by the wonders of nature. He would often point to a flower blooming or leaves turning color and say, with the deepest of gratitude, "This is life, beautiful."

Unconditional love, kindness, empathy, generosity, endless gratitude and self-care were the values he embraced throughout his life and blessed his family with and those around him.

He loved to dance and had quite the moves, which was still very present in him, well into his 90s. He enjoyed dancing with his daughters and niece and later with his granddaughters to some of his favorite songs from greats including Glenn Miller and Frank Sinatra. His favorite style was Latin and every once in a while, he danced to the tunes of "Cabaret," as if he was performing on stage. He was young at heart and always ready to play a round of Tavloo, kick around a soccer ball, shoot a basket, or even play tennis with his daughters and eventually his grandchildren.

He was always present at school recitals, soccer and basketball games, and dance performances, cheering his grandchildren on with a gleam in his eye. And maybe even playing sideline coach.

He seemed happiest when sitting around a dining table with his family and/or close friends, enjoying good food and wine ... and lots of bread (and lemon) celebrating special occasions, sharing stories, laughing and relishing each bite. He was always seated at the head of the table and always orchestrated the perfect mix of joy and inspiration.

He was an active member of the Armenian community in Boston including the Knights of Vartan, "Bolsa Hye Miutune" (Istanbul Armenian Society) and often generously donated to many charitable causes, from the Armenian Hospital in Istanbul to the local Armenian churches and schools to many non-Armenian causes.

He was the husband of the late Nina (Oganian) Shahrik. He leaves daughters Anahid Shahrik and Dr. Lilian Mahrokhian (late husband Vahe Mahrokhian); grandchildren Diran Shahrik, Shant, Sanan and Sarine Mahrokhian; nieces and nephews Nadia Shahrik and Jacqueline Phillips, Barbara Seda Kaligian and her husband Dikran Kaligian and Armen Aghamianz, and grandnieces and grandnephews Andreas, Keri, Rosdom and Yeraz. He was predeceased by his brother, Hrnt.

Funeral service will be held at Saint Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church, 38 Elton Avenue, Watertown, on Thursday, June 24 at 11 a.m. Relatives and friends are kindly invited to attend.

Visiting hours will be at the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, 558 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown on Wednesday, June 23 from 6:00 - 8:00 pm.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to any of the following; Saint Stephen's Armenian Church or Armenian Relief Society, Inc - Artsakh Fund, 80 Bigelow Avenue, Watertown, MA 02472, or Cure Alzheimer's Fund at [curealz.org/giving/donate/](https://www.curealz.org/giving/donate/)



DONATIONS IN MEMORY OF MISSAK ALEXANIAN

Missak Alexanian, brother of ADL Arshag Tchobanian Chapter chairman Jack Alexanian (Captain Jack), passed away in Detroit, MI on March 20, 2021. The followings are donations made to Tekeyan Cultural Association "Sponsor A Teacher in Armenia and Artsakh" Program in memory of Missak.

- Sirop and Maro Bedrosian, Houston TX, \$500
- Adrine Alexanian, West Hills CA, \$200
- Mr. and Mrs. Shant Boyatzian, Woodland Hills, CA, \$200
- Dr. and Mrs. Hagop Colarian, Clovis CA, \$200
- Elizabeth Aprahamian, Nothville, MI, \$200
- Mr. and Mrs. Edward Korkoian, Farmington Hills, MI, \$100
- Kathrine Sparks Johnson, Lake Angelus, MI, \$100
- Steve Dakhlian, Bloomfield Hills, MI, \$100
- Susan Gopigian, Bloomfield Hills, MI, \$100
- Mr. and Mrs. Osep Sarafian, Northville MI, \$100
- Mr. and Mrs. Edmond Azadian, West Bloomfield, MI, \$100
- Dr. and Mrs. Harry Joboulian, Northville MI, \$100
- Dr. and Mrs. K. Dirani, Bloomfield Hills, MI, \$100
- Mr. and Mrs. R. Kalinowshi, Harbor Springs, MI, \$100
- Mr. and Mrs. J. Shekerjian, Birmingham MI, \$100
- Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Hulum, Alpharetta GA, \$75
- Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Fisher, Indian River, MI, \$50
- Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Newman, West Bloomfield, MI, \$50
- Serena and Ann Marie Egigian, Royal Oak MI, \$50
- Gregory Darakdjian, Birmingham MI, \$50
- Mr. and Mrs. G. Todd, Commerce Turnpike, MI, \$50
- Vahe Akaraz, Farmington Hills, MI, \$50
- David Terzibashian, Royal Oak, MI, \$30
- Mr. and Mrs. Hovsep Koundakjian, Southfield, MI, \$25
- Anita Saboonjian, Bloomfield Hills, MI, \$25
- Karen Heining, Clawson MI, \$20

Giragosian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Dr. Lorky Libaridian Speaks on Covid at CYSCA Meeting

CYSCA, from page 6
engagement party in Echmiadzin or a factory outbreak in Yerevan for the latter.

Libaridian gave a general narrative about what happened in the Covid period in both places, which to a degree experienced similar realities, such as early states of emergency. However, in Armenia, unlike the US, four main strategies were initially used: everybody with Covid was hospitalized even if not symptomatic; any people with contacts who had Covid were isolated and monitored much more rigorously than in the US; testing was a main strategy; and hospitals were ramped up.

Schools and businesses were shut down, and opened up again only temporarily because the numbers of sick went up once more. The borders with Iran and Georgia were closed and there were a lot of difficult political and economic discussions about what flights from which countries to stop, she said. While people in Cambridge eventually experienced fatigue in conforming to health restrictions, an important difference

was that masking, social distancing, and handwashing were much more difficult in Armenia due to social and cultural reasons. The limitations on gatherings, especially funerals, became impossible to impose, especially in November 2020 during the Artsakh war.

In Cambridge, Libaridian related, it was possible to repurpose health workers and building infrastructure for Covid-related use, and despite initial shortages of equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE), it was possible to keep on top of the situation.

In Yerevan it was a very different story. Hospital beds ran out so that patients in hospitals had to sleep on mattresses on the floor. Primary care in villages tried to send patients to Yerevan hospitals but there was not enough room, so patients with low oxygen saturation at home were told to open the window and stand by it to breathe, Libaridian said. Health care providers often would have to wait for one patient to die before giving the bed to another. Oxygen ran out, so that if you turned up one patient's oxygen on a ventilator, the other one's fell. The shortage of PPE supplies was an issue, especially in remote areas. Crowding took place in clinics, which led to further spreading, while testing rates were extremely low

and testing capacity never increased to the extent it did in the US.

At some point, it cost 15 or 20,000 dram to get a test in Armenia, which is about \$30-\$40, depending on where you did it.

Armenia was influenced in approaches to treatment by various countries throughout the world such as the US, France, China, Georgia, WHO, etc., so the variety of guidelines was overwhelming, while the Armenian Ministry of Health's resources were taxed. Many staff there too were falling sick.

Even today, Libaridian said, patients in Armenia get a laundry list of treatments, with too many antibiotics and steroids, and some might even be harmful. There is a lot of misinformation and it is difficult to communicate with providers who are overwhelmed and on the verge of collapsing. This was one similarity with the US, where health care workers also became overwhelmed emotionally and burnt out.

Effect of the Artsakh War in Armenia

As if the pandemic were not enough, Armenia was involved with a war with Azerbaijan in Artsakh. Libaridian gave a concise background for the non-Armenian listeners. She remarked that Covid numbers began to go up during the war, and though surround-

ing countries also had similar peaks at that time, she felt the war no doubt had an effect.

The most important one was noted by Dr. Armen Hagopjanian, a podiatrist who went from Los Angeles as a surgeon during the war. He pointed out that with patients with life or death threatening injuries, nobody cared about Covid when they came in. This, Libaridian stressed, was a main difference of what was experienced in Armenia vs. Cambridge.

Dr. Hagopjanian, like many other doctors and nurses, got Covid while there, but continued to practice because there were no other providers, so Covid spread like wildfire. Libaridian said that she was in Armenia when the war ended and there was significant political upheaval. Very few in the large mobs and protests wore masks, as Covid seemed not to matter at that point, Libaridian said.

Volunteers who went to Artsakh from Armenia and abroad to fight took the virus with them, as did healthcare personnel. Families sheltered for days and weeks in bunkers without ventilation and then were placed on buses to Armenia, bringing back Covid.

The losses of thousands of lives of soldiers had a massive psychological effect on the Armenians as a nation. No masks were generally worn in funerals, and there are at least two documented cases of funerals turning into superspreader events, but no one cared any more. Libaridian exclaimed that the psychological effects were and still are astounding. They changed how people thought about Covid.

Another difference between Cambridge and Armenia is that Armenia has a diaspora which mobilized on two fronts, the Artsakh war and the war on Covid.

The Future

Hopefully Covid-19 vaccination will be the light at the end of the tunnel. Libaridian said that questions of trust, misinformation, disinformation, and equity along socioeconomic and racial lines continue during vaccination in Cambridge, but now there is an excess of vaccines and we need to understand as a society and city why people still are hesitant toward vaccination.

Armenia, she said, has the same misinformation and disinformation, and with the upcoming June 20 parliamentary elections [editor's note: the meeting happened 10 days before the elections], vaccines are used as tools of criticism. Equity issues concern province vs. city in Armenia as opposed to multiethnic and multicultural roots in Cambridge. There are mobile units in Armenia as in the US to help increase vaccine uptake but it still remains very low in Armenia.

In Cambridge over 60 percent have gotten one or more doses of vaccine, though there are wide variations in populations ethnically and pockets not vaccinated. In Armenia, it is much lower, as the war had such a large impact on perceptions, Libaridian explained.

She pointed to a survey by the Republican Research Institute (IRI) about 1 1/2 months ago, which asked households what their most important problems were. Healthcare was only the fifth most important. When asked what is the most important problem facing Armenia, healthcare and covid did not even make the list.

In sum, though there are similarities because of the human condition, as Libaridian termed it, the situation in Yerevan is very unique and very different because of the types of concerns Armenians have, especially as a result of the Artsakh war. All eyes were, during the time of the lecture, on the forthcoming election.

After the formal presentation, questions were taken from the audience. CYSCA's president expressed a wish to continue a dialogue with Libaridian to see what CYSCA could do to help the Covid situation in Armenia.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Bishop Daniel Ordains Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian At Sourp Haroutiun Church, New Britain, CT

By Harry Mazadoorian and Chris Zakian

NEW BRITAIN, Conn. — On the weekend of June 4-5, the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection in New Britain, CT, and the entire Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, witnessed the holy sacrament of ordination, culminating in the consecration of a new priest to lead the faithful.

In two moving services — a Friday “Service of Calling,” and a Sacrament of Ordination *badarak* on Saturday — Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan ordained and anointed Deacon Michael Sabounjian into the holy priesthood, conferring on him the new name “Fr. Haroutiun.” Michael Sabounjian had been serving as deacon-in-charge since February at New Britain’s Holy Resurrection Church.

The sponsoring priest was Rev. Fr. Krikor Sabounjian, Fr. Haroutiun’s father, and the ordination godfather was Stepan Piligian, a longtime friend of the Sabounjian family. Fr. Krikor noted that his son’s priestly name — Armenian for “Resurrection” — was personally meaningful to him, not only for its beautiful intrinsic meaning, but also because it is a name he associates with a dear, now sadly departed, clergy colleague.

The calling service, of about 45 minutes duration on Friday, June 4, began in classic fashion, with a column of clergy and deacons processing to the front of the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection, with the ordination candidate traversing the distance on his knees.

All approached the presiding bishop, who was seated below the altar. The age-old ceremony proceeded as a series of questions and answers involving the bishop, candidate, and his sponsors, culminating in the declamation from the onlookers that “He is worthy” — in Armenian, “Arzhani eh.”

Addressing the congregation directly, Bishop Daniel Findikyan compared the calling service to a “rigorous final exam” in which “you are the jury: you are the ones to determine whether Dn. Michael is worthy to be promoted, tomorrow, to the holy priesthood of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church.”

“I’ve been his teacher,” the Primate said; “I’ve known him since he was a boy. The clergy are here to offer their testimony as well, along with his classmates. We’ve all done the best we can to be sure that we are presenting to God a man who is worthy — as worthy as a human being can be — to do God’s work, to lead God’s people, and to do the will of God. That’s why we are here tonight.”

Seeking New Life

More than 170 people attended the Holy Ordination *badarak* on June 5, while many others viewed the live-streamed Internet broadcast. As during the Calling Service, in attendance was a large delegation of clergy from the region and beyond. In one portion of the service, the elder clergy approached the newly anointed and consecrated Fr. Haroutiun to pay their respect to him by kissing his hand. The rest of the congregation followed suit at the end of the service, congratulating the new priest and his new Yerezgin Lucine. Clergy also assisted in other parts of the ceremony, including the vesting and anointing of the new priest.

In his sermon, Findikyan returned to themes he had touched on the night before, recalling the newly ordained priest had been his student, and is the son of a priest. “This young priest is very bright, and graced with talents — graced with a fiery love for God which goes back to his very junior years,” he said. “Many of you already in just a few months have caught a glimpse of that ... you’ve caught a glimpse of something living and holy.”

He noted the significant, more-than-coincidental circumstances underlying the ordination day: that it was taking place on the Feast of St. Gregory the Illuminator’s Deliverance from the Pit; that the day’s reading from Isaiah 61 proclaimed that “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me...”; and that the ceremony was happening in a church named for the Holy Resurrection, or Sourp Haroutiun in Armenian.

“The Church of the Holy Resurrection: the church of ‘New Life’ — that’s what you are,” the bishop said, gesturing towards the congregation, “on this day of new life for St. Gregory. On this day of new priestly life for a young man. A day of new life for his entire family.... A day of new life for the clergy here, who all feel enriched



Bishop Daniel stands before the altar, flanked by the newly-ordained Fr. Haroutiun and Yn. Lucine, and sponsoring clergyman Fr. Krikor Sabounjian and Yn. LuAnn — who are also the parents of the new priest.

by another bright priest to do God’s work.”

The Primate also touchingly remembered a beloved priest of the Diocese, the late Fr. Haroutiun Dagley, who died in 2002 at age 46, and said that the spirit of the late priest was present among them “as another Der Haroutiun steps forward, to bring Good News and New Life to the people who have been entrusted to him. He’ll do that in his own way, with the gifts given to him. And he’ll do that with an awareness of all the intersecting details surrounding his ordination day.”

Bishop Daniel challenged his listeners to be attentive to such intersecting details in daily life, and through them to ask: “How is God inviting me to get a glimpse of that New Life He wants every person to have?”

“God has anointed Der Haroutiun today; and through him, He has called all of you to be ministers of God’s will, God’s new life, God’s resurrection in the world.”

Work of the Entire Community

Growing up in Massachusetts, for most of his youth Fr. Haroutiun was a member of Holy Translators Church in Framingham, where his father has long served as pastor. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy, while minoring in Music and French, from Boston College. He then graduated from St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and St. Nerses Armenian Seminary in 2018 with a Masters of Divinity and a certificate in Armenian Studies, respectively. He completed a pastoral internship under the guidance of the Fr. Shnork Souin at the Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Church in Providence, RI.

Fr. Mardiros Chevian, St. Nersess Seminary’s dean, described Fr. Haroutiun’s seminary studies as “a three-year program studying a host of subjects, including theology, church history, and Scripture. It also involved spending time overseas in an Armenian monastery abroad.” Fr. Haroutiun has spent time in Jerusalem as well as Armenia.

Fr. Haroutiun is married to Lucine Sabounjian. His parents are Fr. Krikor Sabounjian and Yerezgin (and now also Diramayr) LuAnn Sabounjian.

The ordination represented the fifth priestly ordination performed by Findikyan since his elevation to the episcopal rank in 2019, and his third in as many months.

In a message made in the days prior to his ordination, then-Deacon Michael had said: “I ask everyone for their prayers, that Christ might embolden me in my faith, strengthen me in my perseverance, and guide me in my ministry. It is clear to me that no success in my pastorate

will come as a result of my own efforts, but rather from each member of our parish coming together in Christ’s self-sacrificial love. In that spirit, I pray that the Holy Spirit might direct all that I do in this new chapter of my service within the Body of Christ.”

Findikyan said that ordaining Fr. Haroutiun was a pleasure, having known his family for many years. “My role as the bishop is to make sure we have leadership, shepherding, and care within our church communities,” said the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Fr. Haroutiun’s transition to become the pastor of Holy Resurrection Church was greatly assisted by two parish committees. The first was a Transition Committee chaired by Dn. Matthew Cannata, and the second an Ordination Committee chaired by Elisa Griego and Robbin Haboian. The Transition Committee focused on welcoming Dn. Michael to the parish and introducing him to the faithful; the Ordination Committee attended to every detail of the sacred weekend, culminating in a well-attended banquet at Tunxis Country Club in Farmington, CT. Both committees received guidance and direction from seminary dean Fr. Chevian.

The banquet following the ordination provided an opportunity for fellowship and public reflections on Fr. Haroutiun, the Armenian Church, and its role in the lives of its faithful.

Gary Hovhanesian served as an able Master of Ceremonies for the banquet program, bringing a blend of solemnity and humor to the occasion. Guy Simonian, chair of the Holy Resurrection Parish Council, stated that the church had been impressed with what Fr. Haroutiun had accomplished as a deacon, and looked forward to working with him as their new priest.

Poignant observations were also offered by Fr. Krikor Sabounjian, godfather Stepan Piligian, and Fr. Haroutiun himself. Bishop Daniel inspired all in attendance with his stirring closing remarks and challenges.

As is customary following an ordination, the new priest has entered a 40-day period of seclusion, during which he will devote his time to prayer, reflection, and preparation. He will spend his time at St. Nersess Seminary, where he will reflect on his new ministry and the responsibilities of the priesthood of Jesus Christ in the Armenian Church.

On Sunday, July 18, Fr. Haroutiun will celebrate the Divine Liturgy for the first at the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection, his new parish.



COMMUNITY NEWS

SAS Awards Travel, Research Grants to Graduate Students for 2021

FRESNO — The Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) has selected its awardees for its Graduate Research and Conference Grants Program for MA and PhD Students. Established in 2019, the goal of the Grants Program is to provide resources for graduate students to conduct research and present papers at conferences. Grants of up to \$1000 are awarded semi-annually to eligible graduate students. The Spring 2021 group of applicants was chosen by a selection committee composed of members of the SAS Executive Council.

Victoria Abrahamyan is a PhD candidate at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Her dissertation entitled “Armenian Refugees: State Formation and Identity Construction in the French Mandatory Syria, 1920-1939” deals with Armenian refugees to analyze state formation processes in Syria. She argues that Armenian refugees played an important role in the state and nation-building processes that shaped modern-day Syria. Her work is part of a wider research project called BORDER - “Towards a Decentered History of the Middle East: Trans-border Spaces, Circulations, Frontier Effects and State Formation, 1920-1946.” BORDER aims at developing a theoretical reflection on borders and nascent nation-states in the post-Ottoman Middle East from a decentered perspective.

“I am honored to receive the Society for Armenian Studies Fellowship. This award will allow me to attend the upcoming Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Conference in Montreal, to conduct further research and obtain archival materials. Thanks to this valuable support, I shall be able to finalize my current doctoral research and make my modest contribution to the advancement of the field of Armenian studies.”

Emre Can Daglioglu is a PhD student in the Department of History at Stanford University. His research examines how capitalism was locally transformed and restructured in the Ottoman Empire after the Public Debt Administration (PDA) became the backbone of state finances in the late 19th century and to examine the role of silk in reshuffling and refiguring local and global financial, socio-political, and environmental networks in the East Mediterranean.

“The generous support of the Society for Armenian Studies will provide me with access to the rich collection housed in the AGBU Nubar Library in Paris. Since the re-

search in this library’s invaluable archives is essential for my dissertation project, this grant makes an invaluable contribution to my academic career. More importantly, I should note that while the pandemic increasingly and severely threatens the already limited availability of funding sources especially in the field of humanities, I cannot exaggerate how valuable the generous SAS support is for graduate students to travel and research.”

Armen Manuk-Khaloyan is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at Georgetown University. His current re-



Victoria Abrahamyan



Bedros Torosian

search is entitled “Druzhiy: Life and Death on the Russo-Ottoman Front, 1914-1917” which deals with the Armenian volunteer battalions that served in the Russian army

during World War I.

“I am very grateful to be a recipient of the Society for Armenian Studies Research Grant. With it, I will be able to carry out research at archives and institutions critical to a number of projects I am currently working on. The generosity of the Society continues to ensure the quality and breadth of the scholarship within the field.”

Bedros Torosian is a PhD student in the Department of History at the University of California, Irvine. His research, entitled “A Man at Home is Worth a Thousand Men at Sea: Territoriality, Nationalism, and



Emre Can Daglioglu



Dr. Armen Manuk-Khaloyan

the Making of Ottoman Armenian Masculinity,” deals with masculinization of two imaginary yet intertwined Ottoman and Armenian geobodies on the eve of increased

Armenian male emigration from the Ottoman Empire to the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Relying on previously unexplored Armenian-language newspaper articles and editorials printed on both sides of the Atlantic, the essay examines the symbiotic relationship between territoriality, masculinity, and patriarchal nationalism both before and after the momentous 1908 Young Turk Revolution and until the outbreak of World War I.

“It is a great honor to be a recipient of the SAS Grant that will allow me to attend the MESA Conference in Montreal, Canada in October 2021 and to present my recent paper titled “There is a House, but No Keeper, There is a Land but No Cultivator: Territoriality, Nationalism, and the Making of Ottoman Armenian Masculinity.” I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for this generous financial assistance that will help support my trip to the conference and therefore expand the reach of my research.”

The next application cycle will have a deadline of September 15, 2021.

The SAS Graduate and Research Grant was made possible through the generous institutional support of the Armenian Studies Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; the Meghrouni Family Presidential Chair in Armenian Studies, University of California, Irvine; the Hovannisian Chair of Modern Armenian History, University of California, Los Angeles; the Arthur H. Dadian and Ara Oztemel Chair of Armenian Art & Architecture, Tufts University; the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR); the Armenian Communities Department, Gulbenkian Foundation; the Armenian Studies Program, California State University, Fresno; the Institute of Armenian Studies, University of Southern California; and AGBU Nubar Library, Paris.

The Society of Armenian Studies is an international body, composed of scholars and students, whose aims are to promote the study of Armenian culture and society, including history, language, literature, and social, political, and economic questions; to facilitate the exchange of scholarly information pertaining to Armenian studies around the world; and to sponsor panels and conferences on Armenian studies.

For membership information or more information on the Society for Armenian Studies, visit the [SAS website](https://societyforarmenianstudies.com), at societyforarmenianstudies.com.

St. Nersess to Honor First 12 Alumni Priests Who were Ordained

ARMONK, N.Y. — St. Nersess Armenian Seminary will be celebrating its 60th Anniversary on November 13 at a banquet which will honor the vocations of the first 12 priests who graduated from St. Nersess and St. Vladimir’s Seminaries and were ordained.

The celebratory dinner will take place on November 13 at the Old Tappan Manor in Old Tappan, N.J. This event is the first in a series to recognize the alumni of St. Nersess, both ordained and lay, who are in service to the Armenian Church, in any capacity.

This year’s honorees, listed by ordination dates, are Rev. Fr. Kevork Arakelian (1973); Rev. Garabed Kochakian (1976); Rev. Yeprem Kelegian (1977); Rev. Mardiros Chevian (1985); Rev. Shnork Demirjian (1991); Rev. Diran Bohajian (1993); Rev. Sahak Kaishian (1993); Rev. Tavit Boyajian (1993); Rev. Arakel Aljalian (1993); Rev. Vasken Kouzouian (1994); Rev. Stepanos Doudoukjian (1996) and

Very Rev. Simeon Odabashian (1996). Two honorees are from the Western Diocese.

The tribute has ignited numerous memories amongst the honorees.

“When reflecting upon the first time I knew I wanted to become a priest, I recall how impactful the first St. Nersess Summer Conference was in 1963,” reveals Fr. Kevork Arakelian, the first American-born graduate of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary to be ordained a priest. Another recollection, by Fr. Yeprem Kelegian, includes the greatest influences on his path to the seminary. “I remember the ‘luminaries’ of my youth — Archbishop Torkom Manougian, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Der Arsen Barsamian, Der Dajad Davidian, and Der Karekin Kasparian.”

The evening will be filled with more nostalgic and celebratory reflections, as well as a special award. Invitations will be mailed in August, as well as commemorative keepsake booklet information to include your best wishes to the honorees. All donations

will benefit the seminary and its ongoing mission.

For more information, contact event co-chair Lynn Beylerian at lynnbeylerian@stnersess.org

MIRROR SEEKS SUMMER INTERN

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is seeking an intern for a six-week program this summer

(mid-July through August). The intern will receive a weekly \$150 stipend provided through the Armenian Students’ Association of America’s Internship Program.

The intern should be in college or graduate school. If interested, please contact Aram Arkun at tcadirector@aol.com or call 617 924-4420

Arts & Culture

Akhtamar Quartet Brings Healing Power of Music Armenia

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BRUSSELS — Four young musicians from Brussels have just concluded a concert tour of Armenia, bringing the healing power of music to layers of the population still suffering the impact of war and pandemic disease. The Akhtamar Quartet made its musical and solidarity journey through Armenia in the first three weeks of June, performing 20 concerts (all free of charge) in 15 days.

In addition to concerts in conservatories and music schools, they played for soldiers who had been wounded and/or traumatized by the war in Karabakh (Artsakh), and for children of refugees from the devastated region. Their repertoire featured the *Miniatures* of Komitas, arranged for string quartet by cellist Sergey Aslamazyan, as well as music by Claude Debussy, Johannes Brahms and Eugénie Alécian, a pianist and composer from Paris whose niece is a violinist with the quartet. At the Komitas Chamber Music Hall in Yerevan they joined with the Cadence Ensemble, which plays Armenian music as well as Argentine tango.

The quartet, which found its inspiration in the *Armenian Miniatures* of Komitas, was founded in 2014 in Brussels and features violinists Coline Alécian and Jennifer Pio, violist Ondine Stasyk, and cellist Cyril Sinon. The ensemble was one of six chosen for the Tremplin Jeunes Quatuor of the Paris Philharmonic in 2016, and in that same year, they received the second prize at the Festival Musiq3 of Belgium. They have performed widely throughout Europe, and in 2020 released their first CD, with Komitas *Miniatures* and a quartet composed for them by Eugénie Alécian.

To document their experience in Armenia and share it widely, videographer Baptiste Cogitore joined the tour, filming short clips that he made available on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. Cogitore is a journalist, author, documentary film maker and editor based in Strasbourg, France.

No matter where they went — Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Dilijan, Yeghegnadzor, Jermuk or Goris — they spread their message of solidarity with music. Their aim was to fill hospitals, schools and rural areas with music. At conservatories, for example in Yerevan, they offered a concert for students of string instruments, followed by a master class. The idea, Aram Talalyan explained, was to establish a connection between the students and their colleagues, no matter where they may be as international musicians. At the Boghossian Foundation, the students prepared a surprise concert for their European guests, all strings with a vocalist. In Echmiadzin, after their concert, 10 violinists came up on stage to play pieces by the beloved composer Komitas together with the quartet.

see HEALING, page 13



Sevana Tchakerian and Gor Tadevosyan

Folk Singer Sevana Tchakerian's New Direction With 'Jinj' Duo

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

YEREVAN — The voice of Sevana Tchakerian, folk singer, arranger, composer, and instrumentalist, has become quite familiar to the ears of music lovers in the Armenian Diaspora and Armenia in recent years. Best known for Collectif Medz Bazar, the avant-garde French-Armenian-Turkish folk group she co-founded in her hometown of Paris, Tchakerian moved to Armenia as the second Karabakh War broke out, stayed to assist in relief efforts (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2020/11/05/sevana-tchakerian-is-fighting-back-with-her-only-weapon-music/>), and has recently announced her parting of ways with the Medz Bazar group in an official sense. To the relief of her many fans, however, she is continuing to produce music, and the first fruits of her newest project, “Jinj” were released on the internet on Friday, June 11.

The band Jinj (meaning “clear” - “chinch” in Western Armenian) is composed of the duo Tchakerian and Gor Tadevosyan. Their Facebook page simply states that the group “fuses French hip-hop with Armenian folk music into an unconventional sound rooted in tradition.” The vocal on the group’s first single, *Khosa Khosa*, is primarily delivered in rap style in the French language by Tchakerian, with a hook sung in Armenian by Tchakerian and Tadevosyan together. The group writes their own material as well as performing folk songs.

Tchakerian, no stranger to experimentation and controversy, is sure to stir discussion with the song. The recording and especially the music video, which was released on the same day, are pushing the avant-garde side of Armenian music to new heights.

see DUO, page 13 Sevana Tchakerian



Ani Hovannisian's Documentary 'Hidden Map' Up For Three Emmy Awards

LOS ANGELES — On the heels of nine widely-acclaimed nationwide broadcasts of filmmaker Ani Hovannisian’s “The Hidden Map,” the documentary has qualified for three Primetime Emmy Awards — Outstanding Writing For A Nonfiction Program, Outstanding Narrator, and Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking.

“The Hidden Map” journeys into the concealed past of Turkey, as an Armenian-American granddaughter of exiled genocide survivors dares to uncover the buried truth in their lost ancestral homeland. A chance encounter with a Scottish explorer leads to a joint odyssey revealing sacred relics, silenced voices, fearless resilience and the hidden map.

A network television premiere with six broadcasts during the April 24, 2021 weekend inspired overwhelming audience reaction and requests, prompting NBCLX to schedule May 28 weekend encore presentations. Shortly thereafter, Hovannisian’s film was confirmed as one of the programs being considered for the coveted Emmys.

The Primetime Emmy Awards recognize excellence in American primetime television programming. Programs and individual achievements are first deemed eligible, and then generally voted on by members of the Television Academy, but a select few are juried awards. Among them is Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking, whose purpose



Ani Hovannisian in Bazmashen

is, according to the Television Academy, “to both honor and encourage exceptional achievement in one or more of the traditional components of the filmmakers’ art: 1. Profound social impact 2. Significant innovation of form 3. Remarkable mastery of filmmaking technique... (with) the capacity to inform, transport, impact, enlighten, and create a moving and indelible work that elevates the art of documentary filmmaking.”

About the film’s run for the 2021 see HIDDEN, page 13



ARTS & CULTURE

Folk Singer Sevana Tchakerian's New Direction with 'Jinj' Duo

DUO, from page 12

The music is basically hip-hop with some Armenian folk elements, like the blul (i.e. srink/kaval – shepherd's flute) played by Grigor Kartashyan. The Paradjanov-esque attire and filmography of the music video, directed by Persian-Armenian Armen Piri Masihi, brings to mind Lady Gaga's recent song, *911*, which had a music video directly referencing the famed surrealist Soviet Armenian filmmaker. Especially in the second part of the song, Tchakerian's outfit and makeup seems directly inspired by the mystery woman from "The Color of Pomegranates." The doll-like movements or stock-still poses of the figures in

sa, ourish jar chounes" (talk about us, there is no other solution) and further that focusing on oneself will get you nowhere, can be seen as a call to young Diasporans to come together in support of Armenia's future, moving there if necessary as Tchakerian and director Piri Masihi have done. Another interpretation that is definitely mentioned in the French lyrics at least, is related to the Coronavirus pandemic. Several references to sickness, viruses, plague, etc., make it obvious that the health emergency around the world was also on the songwriters' minds. The message here seems to be again "stop focusing on yourself, our only solution is to be directed toward other" to



Sevana Tchakerian in a scene from video for Khosa Khosa

the video are another direct reference to the well-known film. Though not for everyone, the idea works extremely well. Paradjanov made "the Color of Pomegranates" essentially as a feature-long music video for the songs of Sayat-Nova. The same techniques worked for Lady Gaga, and now, for Jinj. There is something to the idea of listening to hypnotic music while seeing a surreal tableau of human figures with penetrating eyes.

The song itself seems to be open to multiple interpretations. Being sung as a male-female duet, the lyrics "mer masin khosa" (talk about us) could be interpreted in reference to a relationship; the artists in another interview mentioned that the song is something for all people to relate to. But, it is hard not to see this song as social commentary about Armenia, in the tradition of songs by Collectif Medz Bazar such as *Notre Patrie* and *Vodka* (released earlier this year). Seen in that light, the song becomes a message of resilience, strength, and solidarity. The statement that "mer masin kho-

make sure the virus stops spreading.

Tchakerian's personal attitude is also strongly reflected in the song, as typical hip-hop braggadocio is used as a smart-aleck way to drive home a message of optimism (for the prosperity of Armenia, it would seem) and to state the artist's steadfast attitude ("no one can shut me up") and priorities ("I live for those I can count on my fingers").

Tchakerian and Tadevosyan are creating new music that expresses the new attitudes of the younger Armenian generation towards their homeland and their heritage, and especially their vigorous enthusiasm and hopes for the future. They might be changing things up, but everything comes from a good heart ("If kindness is out of style, I guess I'm old fashioned" Tchakerian raps) and they aren't going to let anyone stand in their way of changing the world and Armenia, for the better. Some won't like it, but as American hip-hop fans would say, "haters gonna hate."



A masterclass by Akhtamar members

Quartet Brings Healing Power of Music

HEALING, from page 12

The music of the great Komitas provided the common language through which the artists from Brussels could communicate their moral support for people struggling to recover from catastrophe — Armenians who, because of the war and the Covid pandemic, had not had access to music for months. As one quartet member remarked while at the Harichavank monastery, they felt a great fellowship through Komitas, whose music Armenians know by heart.

In Gyumri and in Yerevan, both at the Puppet Theater and the Lycée Anatole France, the quartet presented a special show for more than 200 children. The show designed especially for youngsters is "The Dream Makers," a musical journey without words, which "highlights the poetic and unifying power of music, the true universal language."



Children enjoyed the performance of the Akhtamar Quartet

Dressed in fanciful pastel colored costumes, the musicians accompanied their performance with dance-like swaying, to which artistic lighting lent an atmosphere of magic.

At the Arevamanuk Psycho-Social Support Foundation, the refugee children, moved by the lights and music, wanted to sing along and did, with gusto. "We would have lost hope without you," was the comment of one adult attending.

The most powerful demonstration of the healing power of music came during the performances for soldiers wounded or traumatized by the war. In the Rehabilitation Center for Wounded Soldiers in Dilijan, the concert drew a full house of soldiers between the ages of 18 and 20. Film clips show the concert stage, taken from the back of the hall. As the artists could report, the faces they saw in their audience were initially without expression, scarred by trauma. But in the course of the concert, muscles relaxed, smiles appeared, and one could see the joy of music. They "seemed to be in another world," and could share emotions.

Psychologist Patrick Alecian noted that music can help them find links with family members again, and experience a "life impulse." Haykuhi Horakimyan, a clinical psychologist, stressed the impact of the musicians from abroad, who, by their presence, express solidarity, and bring the beauty of music and art. As the cellist remarked after a concert for wounded soldiers in Yerevan, the experience was a unique moment of shared humanity, and highly emotional. "We brought them a ray of sunshine."

Many of the quartet's performances were recorded. You can see one of them at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7Ytjj050AU>.

Ani Hovannisian's Documentary 'Hidden Map' Up For Three Emmy Awards

HIDDEN, from page 12

Emmys, Hovannisian said, "I'm humbly honored that through this film, the Armenian story is being recognized as a valuable part of the greater human experience. I'm particularly gratified that it is among the handpicked films selected to advance in the Exceptional Merit category, which means

that esteemed judges watched it, read it, and agreed that there is something exceptional about this documentary that makes it worthy of belonging here. Even if it goes no further, I'm content, and look forward to sharing the film with more audiences in the United States and abroad. I'm thankful to many, our parents and grandparents first

and foremost, to the people I met there and those who helped me on the ground — Steven Sim, Sharon Chekijian and Peter Mursulian, and to others."

The winners of the Emmy Awards will be announced in September.

"The Hidden Map" has received several Best Documentary and Audience Choice

awards at international film festivals, and was selected as a finalist for the esteemed Humanitarian Award by the Accolade Global Film Competition. Most important to Hovannisian is the possibility that this film which documents and brings to life indisputable truths and immutable resilience will resonate for generations to come.



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

Quest for A Ravished Paradise in Chepni

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

After the Armenian Genocide, books trying to encapsulate and memorialize life as remembered in the home village or town of refugees forced forever to leave their native lands multiplied. The authors, themselves often eyewitnesses to many fateful events and customs, provided historical, cultural and ethnographic information as well as updates on surviving members of their community now scattered around the world. The following generations, descendants of these people living abroad, can only pass down what they learned from their ancestors and if conditions permit, visit their Western Armenian homelands. Mardig Madenjian is one such person who put to writing what he was able to find out over many years of research.

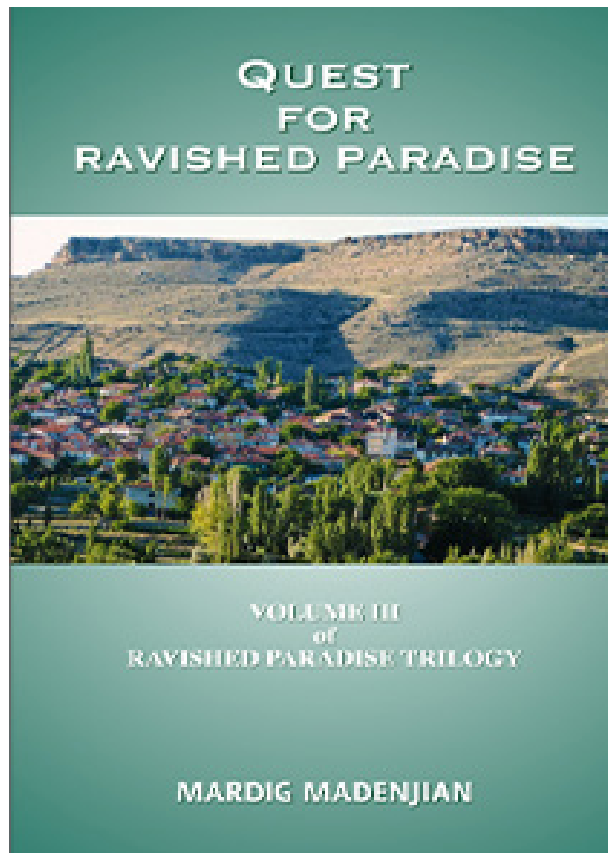
Madenjian wrote a trilogy dedicated to his ancestral village of Chepni, on the northern banks of the Alis River (Kızıl Irmak or Halys) in the southern part of Sepasdia (Sivas) province, and to the lives of his parents. This review covers the third volume, *Quest for Ravished Paradise: Volume III of Ravished Paradise Trilogy* (Pasadena, 2020, published by Armenian History Books). It was first published in Armenian in 2014 before being translated into English, and is a 304-page paperback.

The first volume, *Ravaged Paradise: Forced March to Nothingness*, encompasses the origins of Chepni and the events of modern Armenian history, including the Hamidian massacres and the Armenian Genocide. Madenjian possessed a 60-page handwritten memoir of his father and tape recordings of his mother, and interviewed a number of children of survivors of the genocide for source material in addition to extant printed sources.

The second volume, *Reclaiming Ravaged Paradise: Aftermath [of the] Armenian Genocide*, focuses on the survivors of Chepni in Syria and Lebanon and the at-



Author Mardig Madenjian



tempts of the Armenians to call for justice.

The third volume primarily describes Madenjian's 2007 trip back to Chepni, where he stays in the house of the local mayor, Hüseyin Erdal, and meets with many Turkish elders to find out what they know about the town and its previous Armenian residents. He intended to also travel the path of deportation of his parents.

He made a connection with the mayor of Chepni when he wrote to ask for a town map. In addition to a CD with fifty photos of the village and a flag of the municipality, Erdal wrote back with information about his family and children. He, his wife, and his children were all teachers. They began to correspond back and forth by email and eventually Madenjian told Erdal he planned to visit. Erdal's son Utku offered to drive Madenjian to different historical places such as Akhtamar just for the cost of gas.

Visit to Chepni

Madenjian, according to his own admission, was not an easy traveler in general, and was irritable and nervous. One can only imagine how motivated he was to see Chepni, because on top of the usual complications of travel, Madenjian would have to stay in the Erdal family home, the home of Turks whom he did not personally know. He himself notes that after he read that in Malatya three Turks and a German were killed with their necks cut like lambs in May prior to his 2007 trip, that this was a sign from God to postpone his trip — yet he still went. He went even though he considered the possibility that Utku and a friend who he said might accompany him and Madenjian on their driving trip might kill Madenjian as a *gavur* or infidel. He went even though he was elderly (69 years old) and needed a wheelchair at the Frankfurt airport and at arrival in Istanbul.

Madenjian does not shy from an emotional approach, as what he writes is personal for him. In the first volume, he states, "Many times, I wept, my pen unable to describe the atrocities. While I was writing, I lived their tortures and their agony." He is definitely prejudiced against Turks in general, as he proves time and again in his third volume. For example, at a hotel airport in Istanbul, when he was told that the crews were working on fixing the air conditioning, he commented, "It was a Turkish lie like millions of others." When he visits the city of Suruç, he recalls that charitable Muslims of the city provided bread and water to starving Armenian deportees during the genocide, and assumes therefore that the population must have been Arabs and not Turks.

Yet he became friends with the Chepni mayor, who came to pick him up from the Kayseri airport, roughly an hour distant from the village. Erdal surprised him when he offered raki, a Turkish alcoholic drink, with his meals. He explained to Madenjian that he was not a fanatic Muslim but rather a secularist social democrat and proponent of Mustafa Kemal, and he said that the villagers of Chepni were very liberal and democratic. He said he hoped

that when Madenjian returned home he would talk about Chepni to his friends, who will also want to come and visit. He was very interested in the memoirs of Madenjian's father Hovsep, which Madenjian brought with him.

Madenjian quotes liberally from these memoirs in this volume, providing many place names and descriptions of daily life before the Armenian Genocide. Relations according to the memoirs were good locally between Turks and Armenians, though the Ottoman Turkish authorities treated the Armenians badly, with discrimination.

The trip allowed Madenjian to physically connect the various parts of the village with his father's memories. He saw the newer Armenian church, built at the start of the 19th century. The mayor told him he would like to restore it and keep it as a model of Armenian architecture, and maybe use it as a library or lecture hall. However, the district governor (*kaymakam*) was religious as was his government and got upset with the word church.

Madenjian was introduced to various Turkish elders, some of whom remembered fragments of information about Armenians of the village, the names of various Armenian families which owned certain properties, and even about various family members of Madenjian. One or two were suspicious. It turned out that one was the son of someone called "Bloody Man," who had participated in the killings of Armenians. Some, even the mayor, wanted to know if he knew about where Armenians left their wealth and gold. Many mentioned that the Armenians were very hardworking.

Erdal said that he was told that the Armenians and Turks lived in harmony, and the Armenians even donated one of their churches to be used as a mosque (later Madenjian found out the church dated from 1526 or 1536). However, they eventually left to save their lives, and very few remained, he said, without saying why they had to leave. He and others noted that after the departure of the Armenians, the trees of the forests and vines all died and even the water of the rivulets dried up. The reason, he said, is that the people left there were lazy unlike the hardworking Armenians, and second, the "blessing/Bereket also passed" when the Armenians left. However, Erdal never mentioned why the Armenians left. Only once did Madenjian press the issue with Erdal and Utku but they remained silent.

Madenjian remained conflicted throughout his trip. On the one hand, he was proud of his ancestral village. He said, "It looked like a Swiss or Italian village with red roof tiles and green trees in some places," and he remembered his father describing the village as an earthly paradise. He saw things built by his ancestors, which even his parents had not mentioned to him, such as the spring of the Kalpaks. As he stood on the land his father, grandfather and grandmother worked and lived, he said, "It seemed to me that I could feel their breath on my skin." However, he also saw sites connected with tragic events, such as the slaughter of Armenians in the Keklijek Valley.

When he went to formerly Armenian towns whose names were changed, he became upset. At Saimbeyli, the former Hajin, he loudly yelled Hajin, "so that the mountains could once again hear an Armenian voice," he explained. At that moment, he said, "I felt much anger towards those barbarians, and one of them was next to me, although Utku was a nice young man. I liked him. He was kind and he respected me. He called me *Amca* (Amja), which means uncle." Yet, he continued, "I wondered, if he had the opportunity, would he try to kill me."

Retracing Deportation Routes

The second reason for Madenjian's trip to Turkey, aside from visiting Chepni, was to get a sense of the harshness of the deportation trip of his parents in July-September. However, he was able to do this from the comfort of an airconditioned modern car driven by Utku. The two stopped in infamous gathering places for the deportations such as Kangal, or Hasan Chelebi, where the local population was harsh and unscrupulous with the Armenian deportees. They saw the site of the infamous Kırk Göz bridge on the Tohma River, which had been submerged after the Kara Kaya dam was built in 1986. Here according to one eyewitness huge numbers of Armenians were killed. Both Madenjian's mother and another Chepni deportee talked about that place. Many children were left behind alone by their families, who were tricked by the



ARTS & CULTURE

Ode to Sorrow:

Micheline Aharonian Marcom's
a brief history of yes

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

MICHELINE AHARONIAN MARCOM'S *a brief history of yes* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2013) is the story of two lovers, the blond-haired, blue-eyed American man and the dark-eyed, dark-haired girl from Portugal, who say *yes* when they first meet at The Twin Bar in Lisbon, Portugal's capital city on the Tagus. The book starts, as it also ends, with the break-up of the one-year-long affair (August-to-August), by and by the lovers being exiled from *yes*. "Nothing" happens in between: The lover "arrives departs arrives again until all things eventually arrive at their end." Nonetheless, Marcom holds the reader through the 119 pages of her novel with the haunting repetitions of the blue-eyed American's, "You are not right for me," "I never loved you," "Why don't you laugh more," and Maria's, "I feel sad," "I am alone." The recurring echoes of the white clay city on the Tagus, and Maria's Pai's (Dad's), "Maria, estou com saudades tuas" ("Maria, I miss you"), give the book a mournful rhythm.

a brief history of yes is Maria's story. It is the story of the girl who brought the sad melancholy look across the Atlantic to America. Maria is torn between the certain knowledge of her lover's "You are not for me," "I never loved you," and the uncertain knowledge of, perhaps "her lover will love her more in time." To help the reader understand why Maria is always aggrieved and sad Marcom reaches into the deepest caverns of her interior, where "her grief has landed" but "where language does not arrive," not Portuguese or English.



Micheline Aharonian Marcom

This underground world is silent yet *known*, but not to the lover who asks his beloved, "You are quiet, what are you thinking?" In the maze of Maria's own thoughts and ideas, the abuse from her lover and the abuse she suffered as a little girl at the hands of her Pai, who would pull her pants to her knees and spank her to correct her bad behavior, become one, "with the one always saying you are not right, no good, correct your style, your language, your—." With the haunting beauty of her words, Marcom makes palpable this "feeling without a name, not a feeling even."

The blue-eyed American walks away from love. We share Maria's pain at being rejected ("He dumped me"), and berated ("Maria, how can you say such a thing") by the blue-eyed American who did not appreciate her gift to provide succor to her lover. "Maria is left making the song of her suffering the song of her life," writes Marcom. Aharonian uses the images of the Japanese maple pressed against Maria's windowpane, whose leaves "will fall off of the branches soon," and the hermit thrush singing alone its sad song in the grove by Maria's hilltop house, to evoke this suffering.

a brief history of yes is a sad book, certainly too sad for the blue-eyed American man who would like a "playful and happy girl to sleep with and to love . . ." But it is a beautiful book too. The "glorious song" of the "small brown not-beautiful bird," who returns to the grove every year on his way South, might be a sad song, but it is the song of "all of the world, its beauty, its growth and decay." Perhaps sorrow is the essence of joy, as the visionary poet Kahlil Gibran never ceases to remind us. "I have heard the sigh of those in yearning and longing and it is sweeter than the sweetest melody," writes Gibran. Maria too knows "that inside of yes is death also, always," "the meeting of the lovers inevitably the unmeeting."

There is not much of love's joy in *a brief history of yes*, only love's pain. "Isn't it possible to be happy?" wonders Maria. Yet, the novel is a validation of life.

false promise that they would be placed into orphanages and taken care of.

On the road trip, they also visited historic cities like Urfa, Aintab and Sis, and Madenjian unfailingly provides the historical background of all such significant places along with incidents connected with the genocide and earlier massacres. This portion of the book has less original material than the part about Chepni but still has some interesting anecdotes. Madenjian takes soil from various places to give to Armenians from those towns now living in the US.

Periodically, Madenjian gives excerpts from various oral histories of Armenians from the villages he visits, primarily in the Chepni area.

When Madenjian finally leaves Chepni, he declares to Erdal, "I came here like a tourist. I am leaving against my will. I found that this is where I belong, the country of

my parents. I hope to return some day." In return, Erdal says that if Madenjian returns, he would build a house for Madenjian and his wife in his garden, and added that anyone who came in his name is welcome in Chepni. Madenjian described his departure at the Kayseri airport, finally convinced in the sincerity of the Erdal family's affection for him despite his mistrust of Turks in general: "Even many years later, I will always remember how they stood with me until I boarded the airplane. It was an emotional separation between a Turk and an Armenian, both hugging each other. Was their desire to wait to the last minute for my security or just politeness? I am sure it was for my safety among Turkish passengers in Kayseri. . . They knew the Kayseri Turk was fanatic."

At the very end of the book, Madenjian relates a story told by Erdal about his great-grandfather, Ömer Kaa. It is unclear whether this was related during or after Maden-

MICHELINE AHARONIAN
MARCOM



A Brief
History of Yes

A NOVEL

Even if the lover doesn't see the sadness and the grief and says, "not-in-love to the love she had for him;" *even* with the memory of the old country and Pai's "you-are-not-rights . . . no-goods;" "*even* this, *even* all of it, you *must* love," writes Marcom. Maria "must return to *yes*." (italics mine)

Subtly woven into the fabric of the novel are Marcom's perennial concerns about urban life moving away from the old natural world to the new unnatural world, where "the night's sky [is] illuminated not by the cosmos above" but by the electric lights on the suspension bridge. It is most fitting that the blue-eyed lover is a civil engineer who builds stone and steel bridges. His is a world of "mean money'd critical thoughts" which take him away from his beloved. It is a world where there is no healing balm, no feelings, to ease the pain of life.

Marcom calls her novel a "literary fado," referring to a tradition of Portuguese music that is often melancholic. Indeed, to create Maria, Marcom brings together "the two melancholic, singing races." Maria's grandmother, who had "the look of mute sorrow" in her brown eyes, had lost her family in the massacres of Armenians in Turkey in 1915, a subtle evocation, for some readers at least, of Marcom's Armenian roots.

a brief history of yes is probably the most "inside" of Aharonian's novels. The little volume is an elegant assertion of the inside being part of "the *isness* of all of life." "Everything is inside," writes Marcom. In Aharonian's fictional world, knowledge of this inside is the guiding force that allows us "to live." Ignoring it leads to the rages and the cruelties that make Maria think, "But Pai I hated you. And Pai I took my revenge . . . I left our country I left you behind and not-speaking not-loved you unto death, until you died in the city on the Tagus . . ."

We return to *a brief history of yes*, over and over, to hear the songbird sing its mournful, but beautiful, song. Yes.

jian's trip, but it makes clearer the root of Erdal's affection towards Armenians. Ömer Kaa was hired to guard a caravan of Armenian deportees from Chepni in 1915 and opposed an attack by local thugs to kidnap young Armenian girls. The thugs, learning of this, beat up Ömer badly on the second day of the march. It took him a long time to recover, but when he did, he went to find his aggressors and beat them up one by one. When he finished, he said, "Thanks to Allah, I took my revenge and that of the Armenians."

While this book contains a fair number of typographical errors and linguistic infelicities, and is written in a colloquial tone, it holds the reader's interest and is a useful source of information on local Armenian and Turkish history. There are some interesting photographs but, at least in this reviewer's copy, the quality of their reproduction was not high.

ARTS & CULTURE

Four-Time Grammy Nominee Constantine Orbelian Excited to Take Helm of NYC Opera

ORBELIAN, from page 1

Orbelian will conduct his first NYCO production, a newly created version of “Rigoletto” on Sunday, August 29, at the Phoenicia International Festival of the Voice in Kingston, NY, followed by an encore performance on Friday, September 3 as part of Bryant Park’s annual Picnic Performance series.

Orbelian said that he hoped by the fall and winter, normal concerts would resume.

Orbelian, of course, has had a storied career, from a piano prodigy to conductor, taking his talents from his native San Francisco to Moscow, Yerevan, St. Petersburg, Kaunas (Lithuania) and back.

Orbelian recalled that as a student at Juilliard in the 1970s in New York, he would attend NYCO performances, where he heard some of the greats, including Beverly Sills, Jose Carreras and Placido Domingo.

“All the great artists made their debuts there,” he said.

And the price is right: “It is cheaper than the Met [Metropolitan Opera],” he noted.

The company was founded in 1943 and dubbed “The People’s Opera” by New

love Lithuania,” he said, and Kaunas City Symphony, he added, “is very, very, very comfortable and [of a] high-end caliber.”

Orbelian added, “It has become my family.”

With the orchestra, Orbelian has received four Grammy nominations in the last decade for opera and solo vocal recordings, including one of Verdi’s “Rigoletto” with his close friend and frequent collaborator, the late Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky, who tragically died of cancer in 2017.

Orbelian has a new record out with Kaunas City Symphony on Delos Music, “Poison D’Amour,” featuring Belarusian mezzo-soprano Oksana Volkova performing arias from, among others, Saint-Saens, Gounod, Bizet, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky.

New Beginning

Orbelian has bounced between the US and Russia for decades. He was born in San Francisco in 1956 to an Armenian father and a Ukrainian mother who were forced to leave the USSR after World War II.

In 1991, he made history as he became the first American to be appointed music director of an ensemble in Russia when he took the helm at the Moscow Chamber Orchestra. It was a position he held until 2010.

He received the title Honored Artist of Russia in 2004, a title never before bestowed on a non-Russian citizen. In May 2010, Orbelian led the opening Ceremonial Concert for the Cultural Olympics in Sochi Olympic Games in 2014.

Orbelian turns 65 in August and is excited for this latest chapter.

Another new chapter is that his son will get married later this summer in St. Petersburg, Russia, and in addition, he and his wife, violinist Maria Safariants, will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the St. Petersburg Palaces Festival, which the two cofounded.

“It’s a very exciting time,” he said. “There is a great renaissance of the arts and people are ready to get out.”

Orbelian praised the NYCO for being of its time, paying attention to the mood of the city, such as the production of the opera “The Central Park Five.”

“Hopefully we can get back on the arts scene. Everyone wants the New York City Opera to thrive. We need this great organization lifted up,” he said.

Already, he said, there are 18 opera productions with many sets and costumes that are ready to go.

There are also plans to move to the Rose Theater at Lincoln Center.

“It is a very convenient venue for the larger operas and acoustically it is fantastic,” he noted. In addition, the stage will make transformations and changes of settings easier.

“The first thing to do is to get our feet back on the ground. Let’s start slow. I am looking forward to doing recitals in the city in different venues,” he said.

Among those is the opera “Isabeau,” by Pietro Mascagni, with a libretto by Luigi Illica.

Another opera on deck for this winter

is the world premiere of “The Garden of the Finzi-Continis,” opening in January at the Edward J. Safra Hall at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, with the National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene.

He had high praise for “Finzi-Continis,” which is based on the 1970 film by Italian director Vittorio de Sica and co-written by Giorgio Bassani, who wrote the novel the film was based on. The story is about an aristocratic Italian-Jewish family in Italy when the Fascists come to power.

“It is really wonderful, and the company is very strong,” Orbelian added.

Orbelian noted that he is on the audition committee for the Premier Opera Foundation Awards, through which he can find and discover a lot of young, talented performers.

He wants to combine the strengths of the opera company and recitals with special projects involving Armenia. There is no reason, he said, a special program could not be performed featuring works by Romanos Melikian (the first artistic director of the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theater)

and Komitas.

“I want to forge relationships with opera houses around the world,” he said.

The pandemic has created a huge problem for performers who have lost their livelihoods.

“I feel so bad for the artists who have been unplugged” during the lockdown, Orbelian said. “There are so many musicians in New York City.”

He hopes to use his platform to give deserving Armenian soloists a stage in New York.

“My dream is to produce ‘Anoush’ here, utilizing technology so that it is very traditional in feel but not hard to take to Boston, LA or elsewhere in the US.”

He stressed, “That’s where my heart lies.”

He noted that there are plenty of excellent Armenian stars he would love to bring to the NYCO stage, including Asmik Grigorian, who he said, “is becoming a superstar” in the opera world.

continued on next page



With Canadian-Armenian soprano (and frequent collaborator) Isabel Bayrakdarian

York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. Orbelian noted that the mayor’s father, Achille La Guardia, an Italian immigrant, was an opera singer and therefore the mayor had a personal interest in the arts.

It was chance which led him to the new position.

Michael Capasso, the general director of NYCO, had been a friend for several years. He ran into Capasso in Moscow in 2019 where Orbelian was conducting a concert featuring Armenian-Lithuanian soprano Asmik Grigorian (daughter of the late Armenian tenor Gegham Grigorian) and another program featuring Maltese tenor Josef Calleja, who is a frequent performer at the Met.

There, Capasso told him about the open position and suggested he was right for the NYCO.

Orbelian has been the chief conductor of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra in Lithuania since 2014.

The position is one he loves, he said. “I

CALENDAR

ON-LINE EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

JULY 14–AUGUST 15 — The Armenian Heritage Park will hold a series of events during the spring and summer:

• **WEDNESDAY, JULY 14 at 4pm TEA & TRANQUILITY ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK ON THE GREENWAY, Boston Meet & Greet the Boston Mayoral candidates at the Park. Walk the Labyrinth. View the Abstract Sculpture. Tie Ribbon on the Wishing Tree. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org**

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

• **SUNDAY, AUGUST 15 at 2pm LABYRINTH WALKING WELLNESS program. 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**

NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 13 — **Save the Date: Saturday. 12 Vocations, Fulfilling the Promise of St. Nersess Seminary. Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary and the vocations of the first 12 priests who graduated from St. Nersess and St. Vladimir’s Seminaries and were ordained. This is the first in a series of events to recognize the alumni of St. Nersess, both ordained and lay, who are in service to the Armenian Church, in any capacity. The celebratory dinner will be held at the Old Tappan Manor in Old Tappan, N.J. For more info, go to www.stnersess.edu.**

RHODE ISLAND

JUNE 25-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/armenianchurchprovidence>

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 2 - Vahan Artsruni concert “Modern Fusion, Progressive and Song Gender”

JULY 9 - Hekimyan Band from Yerevan

JULY 16 - “Flutes & Sopranos”, featuring Soloists and Symphony Orchestra of the Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Harutyun Arzumanyan, Music Director & Conductor

JULY 23 - Favorite Armenian Songs, featuring Armen Hovhanessyan & Salbi Mailyan



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



Salpy's Tahini Shortbread Cookies with Walnuts

Tahini is a savory condiment often used in hummus, baba ghanoush, sauces, and salad dressings, but it's the perfect complement to sweet desserts, too. Tahini is made by grinding toasted, hulled sesame seeds to create a creamy, smooth spread. It's a similar process to making peanut butter. It is staple across the globe, originating in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine. It is also found in Asian dishes and Greek fare. So easy to make, and extremely irresistible, these Tahini Shortbread Cookies from Salpy's International Kitchen are buttery, perfectly sweet, and will have you coming back again and again. Flavored with tahini paste, these sophisticated cookies have a pleasing crumbly texture and an intense, almost nutty flavor.

These cookies are perfectly delicious plain or dusted with confectioners' sugar and served with coffee or tea as a midafternoon snack or fancy dessert. "They melt in your mouth and you'll be amazed with the nutty flavor coming from the tahini paste. Best of all, they are incredibly easy to make and extremely satisfying," says Salpy.

The popularity of tahini comes as no surprise to Sarit Packer, co-founder of Honey & Co in London, who has been making tahini desserts with great success for years. The restaurant usually has four tahini-based sweets on the menu at any one time, rotating specialties such as a white chocolate and tahini babka (a molten cake with tahini in the center), tahini sandwich cookies and occasionally, tahini ice-cream. She attributes its new success to three key components: sweetness, nuttiness and a high fat content. "This is by no means a superfood," she says, "but there is little dairy in Middle Eastern cooking, and if you mix tahini with water it becomes dairy-like."*

INGREDIENTS:

1 egg (white and yolk separated)
1 cup tahini
1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
1 3/4 cups granulated sugar
1 cup walnuts, finely chopped, divided
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

PREPARATION:

Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a mixing bowl, using a whisk or an electric mixer, mix together the egg yolk with the tahini until well incorporated. Add the butter to the bowl and continue mixing, gradually add the sugar and cinnamon, and stir until light and fluffy. Add 1/2 cup of the ground walnuts and the flour, gently stir until the dough starts to clump together. (You can tell if the dough is the right consistency when you squeeze a walnut sized piece into the palm of your hand and it stays together.) Form the cookies by using a cookie mold or roll into a walnut sized ball between the palms of your hands and flatten slightly as you arrange them on a parchment lined cookie sheet, and then make an impression with your thumb in the center. Brush surface of the cookies with the separated egg white and sprinkle some of the remaining ground walnuts on top.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until the cookies are lightly golden in color. Cookies will be soft to the touch when you take them out of the oven, but they will harden when they are completely cooled. Store cookies in an airtight container.

For this recipe, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/SalpyInternationalKitchen/photos/a.193156930836425/1702412833244153/?type=3&theater>

Also see Salpy's recipe for Armenian Nazook at: <https://www.facebook.com/SalpyInternationalKitchen/photos/a.193156930836425/1726509457501157/?type=3&theater>

*See: "Not just for hummus: why tahini is popping up in brownies, ice-cream and martinis," *The Guardian*, April 12, 2018 at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/12/not-just-for-hummus-why-tahini-is-popping-up-in-brownies-ice-cream-and-martinis>

Original recipe and photos are courtesy of Salpy's International Kitchen.

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Armenian Turbulence

He had been appointed the artistic director and director general of the Yerevan Opera Theatre in 2016 by the regime of Serzh Sargsyan, with the specific involvement of Sargsyan's wife, Rita, who was a musician.

"Once the revolution took place, they [the new regime] targeted me and attacked me," he said.

Orbelian does not like to dwell on the difficult times that he went through in Armenia though he sounds hurt and baffled by his illegal firing. He filed a lawsuit against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Acting Culture Minister Nazeni Gharibyan and was eventually reinstated as the head of the Yerevan Opera Theatre in January 2020. He returned to Armenia, where he stayed until March 18, 2020, at which time he left before all travel came to a halt.

Instead, he speaks wistfully of what had been accomplished there during his tenure and how stopping that momentum would affect so many artisans, musicians and others.

He had been asked to resign by then Culture Minister Lilit Makunts, since, as she said, Orbelian's appointment as both artistic director and direct of the theater, was "illegal." He still expresses shock since clearly he had not created his contract and position but the state had.

A shocked Orbelian continued to focus on his schedule, taking the troupe to the Bolshoi in 2018 with the Aram Khachaturian ballet "Gayane" marking the centennial of the First Armenian Republic.

In addition, Orbelian had already signed a contract to take the ensemble to Dubai and later Kuwait.

"They had not toured for 20 years," he said. That tour, he said, "was a huge success."

He was able to complete the tours and as funds were scarce, paid for the new productions himself.

Next, he helped stage Karen Khachaturian's ballet "Cipollino," which was "just fabulous" with "beautiful costumes and fantastic choreography."

The hard work paid off. "The theater never worked so intensely, and we were all sold out," he said.

"It gave so many people work, and we made everything in Armenia," he said. Aside from the staff, dancers and musicians at the theater, maybe another 100 were working on sets and costumes and now, again, they are unemployed.

During his time in Armenia, he was present for some of the major events there, including the Aurora Foundation concert, as well as the Francophonie Summit in 2018, which concluded with a gala concert attended by many world leaders.

There were many demonstrations for his



Orbelian with the late Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky and Russian soprano Anna Netrebko

reinstatement.

Now, all he wants is a safe Armenia. "I want things to get back to normal in Armenia, especially, and everywhere else, so that people in our profession can calmly work and do our best in pursuing opera and ballet without worrying about" war and COVID.

"It is such a disaster. What can I say? I want everything to come back to the way it was," he said. "We were really on a roll. My goal was to make Yerevan the greatest opera house in the region."

The opera house, he said, "is the gem of

our culture."

"I want to do whatever I can for these people [at the opera in Armenia] because they deserve it," he said. "It is just so sad — so, so, so tragic," what has happened with the war.

Many performances by Orbelian are on YouTube, including ones with [Asmik Grigorian](#), [Dmitri Hvorostovsky](#) and [Netrebko](#) as well as "Cipollino" in Armenia.

To learn more about the New York City Opera and its upcoming schedule, visit www.nycopera.com.

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
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Dangerously Omitted Information: Challenging Sassounian's Narrative of The Artak Tovmasyan Case

By Danny Donabedian

Harut Sassounian is an established, rather well-known political analyst and critic of Armenia's current leadership and administration. He has claimed, on numerous occasions, to offer fair and balanced accounts of noteworthy and relevant events that pertain to or impact Armenia's domestic, economic, and political spheres. While that meticulous judiciousness may occasionally be the case, in his recent article, "Armenia's Leaders Ignored Investor's Offer to Build Military Vehicles Before the War," that could not be farther from the truth.

In the article Sassounian attempts to prove two points: 1) Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his administration are incompetent and uncaring and 2) they inspire neither the investors nor investments needed to bolstering Armenia's economic prospects and future. To vindicate his politically-motivated opinion, Sassounian claims the current leaders completely and utterly botched a lucrative business opportunity with an Armenian that would greatly improve the economic lot of the country. Despite his excellent command of English diction, Sassounian's article is filled with numerous key omissions that would otherwise discredit, if not outright refute, the narrative he presents to his readers. More dangerous, however, are the falsehoods weaved throughout the piece, as the example of Artak Tovmasyan Harut introduces is grossly misrepresented. In fact, there is more to the story than what Sassounian lets on and Sassounian goes so far as to provide incorrect information to his readers. Prior to that, however, it would do readers well to briefly skim his article (*Mirror-Spectator*, June 12, p. 19) in order to do his words justice. His column has also been reproduced online elsewhere (here, here and here).

Firstly, let us speak of the STREIT Group and its history. Contrary to Mr. Sassounian's claims, it is not just technically a Canadian company that merely has minor branches or smaller offices in other countries. The company had its humble beginnings in Ontario, Canada, starting as a small business working out of the small garage of a Russian immigrant and former police officer named Guerman Goutorov. The primary development and growth of the company followed Goutorov's and STREIT's move to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where according to the US department of commerce and the STREIT's own website, its head office and central headquarters were established and it became based out of. STREIT does have a branch in Canada, but it is foremost Emirati corporation whose growth was dependent on the funding of its Emirati components. In addition to its headquarters being in the UAE, most of their armored vehicles are also produced at that location. Given Canada's positive reputation in the Armenian community, perhaps Mr. Sassounian felt that his readers would care more if Armenia wasted an opportunity to benefit from a Canadian corporation, rather than one stemming from the UAE. Giving the STREIT group the title of a Canadian corporation gives more credence to the magnitude of the alleged notion of a lost investment. While not exactly harmful, it is a slight manipulation of the facts that should have been corrected by stating it is an Emirati corporation with a branch in Canada whose CEO is a Canadian citizen.

The second folly is the overestimation and aggrandization of the military and economic value of the STREIT group. Harut Sassounian claims that the vehicles produced by STREIT carry critical national security implications, but this is left baseless as he fails to prove what precise military use, if any, and capacity STREIT's armored vehicles offer to the armed forces of Armenia. Without proof that these vehicles are superior to or as effective to the ones already present in the arsenal of the country's armed forces, one can instead conclude the STREIT vehicles offer no known actual military advantage compared to the armored vehicles Armenia already owns, purchases, and operates. Moreover, Mr. Sassounian ignores potential structural shortcomings and assumes the flawlessness of the STREIT vehicles when he states: "These armored military vehicles would have been very useful during last year's war with Azerbaijan, saving the lives of countless Armenian soldiers." Like many other armchair general pundits, Sassounian fails to conduct a sufficient analysis of the capacities of STREIT's military hardware to support that conclusion.

The STREIT vehicle line consists of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs), armored personnel carriers (APCs), sports utility trucks (SUTs), and light combat tactical all-terrain vehicles (LATVs). The MRAP STREIT offers is the STREIT Group Typhoon, which was initially designed to resist improvised explosive devices (IEDs) encountered during the Iraq war. It was later discontinued due to structural weaknesses and the tendency to lose control and induce casualties to passengers, especially in hilly or uneven terrain, to which Nagorno-Karabakh is no strang-

er. MRAP vehicles were initially constructed for the purpose of aiding troops in offensive operations whereby soldiers had to enter mined enemy territory, and thus would prove less handy to a war focused on territorial defense of Artsakh, where intention to expand and grab more land is absent.

Compared to the clunky MRAPs and poorly armored LATVs, in support of Sassounian's point, the APCs and possibly the SUTs produced by STREIT would be expected provide greater utility amidst battles. Before adopting Sassounian's conclusion prematurely, however, one would need to identify whether the STREIT APCs like the Cobra would be superior to the modern Russian-made GAZ Tigr APCs employed by the Armenian armed forces. Compared to the STREIT vehicles, the GAZ Tigr has the added benefit of being capable of incorporating other Russian military armaments already in Armenia's arsenal, including but not limited to specific radar systems and surface to air missile launchers.

In conclusion, if STREIT's vehicles are not superior to the current assets, at best, additional armored STREIT vehicles in Armenia's arsenal would solely be capable of serving as second-rate, emergency-use or auxiliary vehicles in war. In the best-case scenario, they could replace the vehicles destroyed or lost in battle, while at worst they would possess penetrable, inadequate armor incapable of resisting enemy projectiles, thus jeopardizing the lives of Armenian soldiers if they ultimately prove unreliable and penetrable in combat. Indeed, the weekend he authored the article, in order to assess whether the armor of the vehicles could hold up and save "the lives of countless Armenian soldiers," Mr. Sassounian did not check or assess whether the STREIT APCs could resist the blast of an armor-piercing smart micro munition high explosive (MAM-C) or thermobaric (MAM-L) missile. Rather than make premature statements on matters of defense, it would have been obligatory to carry out an investigation as to whether the STREIT vehicles possess or lack that capacity to resist the deadliest tools in Azerbaijan's arsenal: the subset of Bayraktar TB2 missiles capable of puncturing vehicles (like tanks) that are significantly more heavily armored than APCs or MRAPs, be it from STREIT or from another arms supplier. So whether they'd be able to save "countless" lives as Sassounian claims, particularly concerning deadly attacks from Bayraktars above, the overwhelming cause of Armenian human and equipment casualties during the recent NK war, the answer would clearly be: No.

The pedestrian idea that armored troop transport vehicles have complete utility in battle and would save countless lives ignores the fact that during the war, the larger size of the vehicles made for easier targets for laser-guided loitering munitions, as evidenced by the drone footage released by the Azerbaijani military. In the armored vehicles STREIT and other similar defense contractors produce, soldiers are not spread out meters apart but are bunched together. If using the drone footage as evidence, we can see the proximity of the soldiers inside these vehicles proved to be a wartime liability following the sundering and disruption of Armenia's air defense system. By blowing up an armored vehicle, a single Bayraktar missile could eliminate up to a dozen of Armenian soldiers rather than just a scattered few. This is precisely why on numerous occasions amidst the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, battle-wise Armenian soldiers often opted to reposition on foot, as the strongest odds of survival frequently consisted of traversing by foot when the airfield was a haven for drones. Later videos published by the Azerbaijani military confirm this to have been the case, recording large caches of tanks and troop transport vehicles being left behind. Some of these vehicles were paraded in Azerbaijan's despicable victory park. But all proper analyses are nuanced, rather than one sided. It may very well be that the armored vehicles STREIT produces could become useful, but only if hegemonic domination of the battlefield shifts from air to ground and a hard counter to the Bayraktars is acquired. The only other useful scenario would be STREIT vehicles serving a different purpose altogether — the bare minimum of being impromptu or improvised 'mobile-bunkers', i.e. barriers or covers for soldiers engaged in small arms fire in urban combat environments.

However, given the lack of expertise on military analysis, the omission of analysis on Sassounian's part is not as inexcusable as the failure to mention the easily pondered geopolitical consequences of a STREIT factory. STREIT military vehicles are Standardization Agreement (STANAG) 3 NATO certified. A NATO graded certification is not handed out like confetti. If the STREIT factories were built in Armenia, there would need to be repeat inspection and tests of their products by NATO investigators. The challenge therefore would be whether the creation of a STREIT factory is thereby legal and not in violation of Armenia's contractual agreements with the Collective Security Treaty Organization. And if it was in fact legal, given Armenia's membership in the military alliance, would there not be potential unwelcome political ramifications or consequences in allowing NATO personnel direct access to the hardware built in and employed by a CSTO member state? Sassounian fails to explore this possibility and the legal or geopolitical hurdles that could obstruct such a deal. That's not to say NATO-Armenia cooperation is impossible, as NATO delegations have visited the country with the intention of

continued on next page



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

People in Armenia Have Spoken Whether We Like It or Not!

The snap parliamentary elections have been tumultuous. A lot has been written and said about the candidates in these elections as to who should lead Armenia in light of the recent devastating war, dismal condition of the people, and threats against the territorial integrity of Armenia and Artsakh.

Nikol Pashinyan came to power three years ago. The overwhelming majority of the Armenian people, both in Armenia and the Diaspora, fervently welcomed him, reacting to their dislike of the former leaders. However, Pashinyan did not justify the people's enthusiastic support and their expectations. Many were disappointed with his inept performance both during and before the war. Even then, the antagonism for the former leaders was so intense and the prospect of their returning to power was so feared that most voters either stayed out of the election or voted for Pashinyan. What was really surprising is not so much Pashinyan's landslide victory, winning almost 54% of the votes cast, but the fact that the coalition led by former President Robert Kocharyan was able to receive as high as 21% of the votes.

Nevertheless, the people in Armenia have spoken. We should respect their choice whether we agree with them or not. Diaspora Armenians do not have a vote in Armenia's elections. Not even the citizens of Armenia who live outside the country can vote unless they go back home on Election Day. So, this is a choice made by those who live on the ground in Armenia. They will rightly bear the immediate impact of their choices, good or bad. In my opinion, Pashinyan does not possess the ability to lead a country with so many problems. Rather than finding solutions, he has regrettably made matters worse by his own incompetence and that of his advisors and ministers.

Regrettably, a lot of violent, vile, hateful and insulting words were said during the campaign, particularly by Prime Minister Pashinyan. It was unbelievable that he would wave a hammer during the campaign speeches and threaten to use it on his opponents after the election. He repeatedly threatened to lay them on the asphalt and plaster them to the wall! Those are words that no self-respecting leader should use in addressing his people, whether they support him or not. Pashinyan also told the people repeatedly that he will change his previously-described "Velvet Revolution" to a "steel revolution." It is amazing to me that a man who came to power preaching tolerance and advocating democratic principles has turned into a tyrant who is threatening violence towards his own political opponents. Such hostile language is more appropriate to be used against Armenia's foreign enemies.

I just hope that after suffering from the violence of our enemies, Armenians do not resort to commit violence on one another due to political disagreements. There should be a civilized discourse and polite expression of opinions.

The other strange phenomenon we encountered is the government's announcement prior to the election that there were 2,578,678 eligible voters. This is a very

strange figure given the fact that the country's population is around 2.9 million. If one subtracts the 700,000 youngsters under the age of 18 who cannot vote, the number of the eligible voters should be much less than the announced figure. The only valid explanation is that hundreds of thousands of Armenians who permanently left the country many years ago are still registered as voters. The inflated number of eligible voters is the reason that the election results wrongly show that a little less than 50 percent of them voted. It is high time that the government update its voting registers to eliminate the large number of people who have left the country for good. Since voters need to have a domestic address, those who have moved out of the country should no longer be eligible to vote. Furthermore, cleansing the voting registers would eliminate election fraud as locals would be unable to vote for those who have left the country, as it has happened in the past.

As expected, there were a lot of accusations of voter fraud resulting in the losing sides rejecting to accept the outcome of the election. We need to wait for the courts to make their determination before we jump to any conclusions.

Pashinyan's opponents had urged him to leave office and not let his government oversee the elections, fearing an undue influence over the electoral process. However, Pashinyan refused to do so and remained as a caretaker Prime Minister. As a result, he committed two serious violations even before the first vote was cast. He started campaigning several weeks before the legally authorized start of the campaign and used the resources of the government during his campaign trips, which is also illegal.

A sharply divided nation before the election became even more split after the election. Rather than advancing democracy in the country, successive elections have caused more instability in the country distancing Armenia further from any semblance of a democratic country. There is so much hatred among Armenians that one does not have to worry about Armenia's enemies. Regrettably, Armenians have become their own worst enemy. It is incumbent on all Armenians, regardless of their political preferences, to lower the degree of hostility, especially in social media, and learn to express their disagreements without being rude and hostile. The onus is on the leader of the country to set an example of tolerance and urge everyone to be more civilized towards one another, instead of inflaming the passions and using threatening language. After all, we are all the sons and daughters of the same nation and we should put our collective interests and the survival of the nation ahead of any other issue.

Now that two parliamentary opposition groups are about to occupy one third of the seats in the Armenian Parliament, the discussions and disputes, no matter how sharp, should be transferred from the street to the halls of the legislature.

Finally, regardless of whom we supported in the elections, we should not lose sight of the fact that the people of Armenia and Artsakh are in a destitute situation, particularly after the recent war, and we should do whatever we can to support them. We should also try to help our leaders, even if we disagree with them. I hope, in return, Armenia's leaders will welcome our extended hand and be willing to listen to the advice offered to them. We wish our people the best and pledge to do everything in our power to stand by them so they do not think they are abandoned to their tragic fate.

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bolstering cooperation with Armenia, maintaining friendly relations, and addressing areas of military edification on some other occasions. But no event is without some degree of geopolitical consequences, and one would be wise to note the infrequency of such visitations, none of which reach the level of cooperation whereby NATO investigators would visit and have direct access to armament factories in a CSTO member state. There is another matter altogether. Why would STREIT chose Armenia in particular? While I see no reason to doubt that Tovmasyan's stated intention of establishing an Armenian branch is intended to contribute to his homeland, motivations are often plural, multifarious, and intertwined. Geopolitics could be at play behind the scenes, and STREIT's utility to NATO's interest of curbing CSTO geopolitical influence is a line of thought to be explored. Let's consult a case study. STREIT works very closely with Kremenchuk Automobile Plant, a Ukrainian armored vehicle producer, in producing vehicles that have seen combat operations against Russia and Russian-backed separatists in Crimea and Donbas. The plant also sells armored vehicles to NATO superpowers like the United States. For these reasons, one can surmise the proposal for the construction of a STREIT factory in Armenia was submitted with the intention of partially drawing Armenia away from future Russian arms purchases and towards Western companies, at least in this subsection of military hardware consisting of armored personnel carriers.

But there is a fifth factor to consider. Does the STREIT Group occasionally circumvent the law for the sake of personal profit? The company has been mired in multiple controversies three years prior to reaching out to Armenia. Firstly, STREIT's US branch knowingly failed to acquire proper licenses for their exported military vehicles and carried out at least nine unlicensed exports leading to fines being levied onto the company by the United States government, with both the aforementioned CEO and president of the STREIT Group being charged for their role for providing false statements to the government and for being complacent in making illegal transfers and re-exports. This would not be the sole occurrence. According to the UN Security Council, the STREIT Group was also involved in violations of arms embargoes against Sudan and South Sudan. Coupled with poor glass door reviews which describe working for the company as a nightmare, reports written by those working for the company reveal STREIT refused to pay workers for months on end in 2014 and 2015, inspiring strikes and protests by employees. Sassounian claims the introduction of STREIT factories would create hundreds of jobs, but he should have checked whether those jobs would be properly compensated, without any stolen labor from the citizens of Armenia. Instances of misconduct by STREIT is a reason for concern, and it is not the immaculate company Sassounian paints it as. The government of Armenia is no stranger to this information, and the incompetence lays not with them but with Sassounian for not doing his due diligence in assessing the company's controversies.

While Armenian Minister of the Economy Kerobyan did author a Facebook post about the deal, Sassounian omits that there was also an Armenpress article about the case, with

Armenpress being a government-affiliated newspaper. Sassounian displays inexcusable pettiness when he insults Kerobyan as just a "mathematician" who supposedly lacks qualification where in fact, Kerobyan's career history includes numerous successful startups, various CEO positions, and formal work in Armenian banks and non-profits like the All-Armenia Fund that have contributed to Armenia's economic growth and development. If he is a man of integrity, he should offer an apology to Kerobyan.

A seventh factor is perhaps the most damning and the final nail in the coffin to Sassounian's "perfect example." Armenia was willing to accept the STREIT proposal, but the factory would have to be built on land other than that Yerevan plot occupied or owned by the Armenian ministry of defense. For whatever odd or unknown reason, STREIT refused. If STREIT was truly sincere about opening a factory in Armenia, they would have been inclined to accepting any suitable plot of land, including plots outside of Yerevan that would have been apt for STREIT's manufacturing supply chain. Their demand for a specific, very expensive plot of land in Yerevan indicates they had ulterior motives. So, it isn't Kerobyan who is misleading the public as Sassounian claims to his readers. Sassounian provides an outright mistruth to readers by writing the government didn't sit down with Tovmasyan and offer STREIT alternative deals when, in fact, Kerobyan indicates the government did, but it was not accepted by STREIT.

Perhaps it would have been important for Sassounian to touch upon these seven factors, as these controversies add to any justified, rational hesitancy the Armenian government may have exhibited surrounding the matter of Tovmasyan's proposal. There should be zero tolerance for omitted or false information that consequentially and untruthfully denigrate political opponents, for such confutative confusions set back the Armenian cause. Articles like Sassounian's recent piece only waste the time of factcheckers, all the while fooling members of our community. Reality is always more complex than what political pundits would like to make it seem, and it does the world no justice to simplify nuanced matters. While welcoming and encouraging constructive, effortful, evidence-based criticism towards all groups and actors in order to reach more effective policies to guide the development and preservation of the Armenian state, it is important to identify factual mistakes and poorly written criticisms for the common good of the community. Despite his article's flaws, perhaps it was harsh to imply it was deliberate disinformation on Sassounian's part. Rather than crafty spite, it could be a misinformed failure to properly investigate all the facts of the Tovmasyan incident and arrive at an evidence-based, fair conclusion.

Or to put in a way to coin homage to his favorite word, Sassounian's article was nothing but a show of incompetence.

Danny Donabedian is an Armenian-American and Watertown native. He graduated from Harvard College in 2019 and aspires to pursue a career in global health and health policy. He is passionate about identifying and evaluating cost-effective and high-impact health, economic, and educational interventions.



Academics Protest Thomas de Waal and Carnegie Europe for Piece Downplaying Genocide

A group of academics and human rights lawyers penned a public response to the think tank Carnegie Europe after the publication of an article by the British journalist and writer Thomas de Waal on April 30, 2021 entitled “What Next After the US Recognition of the Armenian Genocide?” The letter appears below, slightly for space.

Think tanks impact human lives by shaping public opinion and influencing policy. When think tanks publish work that distorts facts and neglects to name the beneficiaries of violence and dispossession, however, they abuse their power and undermine efforts that advocate for truth and human life. Think tanks should be held accountable for disseminating falsehoods.

It is in this spirit of accountability that we, a group of academics and practitioners, initially contacted the influential think tank Carnegie Europe after the publication of a problematic article by Thomas de Waal on April 30, 2021.

On May 18, 2021, some of the signatories of this letter sent a protest letter requesting a retraction or a published response from our group of signatories to de Waal’s article. While de Waal’s article had already been corrected by Carnegie Europe

three times for its inaccuracies, we pointed out that it still contained falsehoods and a minimization of the intentional, centrally planned, and organized genocide of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. We affirmed that these inaccuracies and minimizations have, in essence, contributed to denial of the Armenian Genocide.

This is not an abstract intellectual debate. Think tanks that cannot admit mistakes perpetuate the oppression of the very people who are the subjects of their articles. Currently, Azerbaijan is engaging in ethnic cleansing, the destruction of millennia-old monuments, a gradual invasion of Armenia, and the torture and execution of illegally held POWs.

Think-Tank Tribalism

Carnegie Europe’s Director, Dr. Rosa Balfour, responded to our cordial, well-reasoned, and research-backed letter by defending the institution though trivializing our criticisms as “emotional.” She opened her letter by thanking us for “deciding to write to [her] politely,” in effect ascribing incivility to our group before she even read our letter.

In discounting our legitimate criticisms as “emotional” because of who we are

— a group of largely Armenian scholars, lawyers, and journalists — Carnegie’s response to our protest letter is emblematic of Western Orientalist bias. What Balfour’s letter affirms is think-tank tribalism.

In her response, Balfour asserted that de Waal writes with empathy—empathy that is perhaps best illustrated by his claim that genocide is a “badge of honor” in a retracted section of the article. This cynical phrasing implies that the descendants of genocide are using the murder and violent dispossession of their ancestors for political aims. This is a common genocide denialist propaganda point.

Historical Revisionism and Denialism

Balfour’s reference to empathy in her response was a dodge to avoid the substance of our scholarly critiques regarding the inaccuracy of the claims de Waal presented and the methodology he followed. De Waal’s response to our letter similarly evades our legitimate objections.

De Waal confirms that he chooses chronologies and sources only when they suit him. According to him, the valid dates of the Armenian Genocide are not 1915-1923 as most scholars assert, but rather 1915-1916 (although in his response he

cites Ronald Suny to claim the dates of 1915-1917; where the missing year went, he does not say). The timeframe de Waal chose for overall losses in the Ottoman Empire — in which he seeks to contextualize, and therefore dilute, the annihilation of the Armenians — is 1914-1922. Thus, de Waal selected the narrowest possible window for the Armenian Genocide (1915-1916) and the widest possible one for Ottoman population losses (1914-1922). Unmentioned by de Waal was that his number for losses includes influenza, the Turkish civil war, the forced removal of Greeks, and the Armenian Genocide. Most disingenuously, de Waal falsely claimed that these losses were deaths, while his source, the Schuman Centre, is clear that the number includes migration. His entire premise is deceitful. Further, the Schuman Centre is not a specialized research center for genocide nor for history. The Centre’s focus is European policy issues — it is an inappropriate source for historical data. Not only does de Waal make errors of chronology and evidence, he also ignores the historiography of Armenian Genocide scholarship.

Scholarship on the Armenian Genocide has reached a level of proof rare for any historical event.

Elsewhere, de Waal ignores context. He cites the importance of “Armenian-Turkish dialogue” without acknowledging Turkey’s well-known instrumentalization of the term or the reality of the intense anti-Armenian sentiment and legal penalties that preclude honest dialogue today.

Most egregiously, de Waal asserts that Raphael Lemkin, the coiner of the term “genocide,” did not believe that recognition of and prosecution for genocide can be retroactive. To reveal the inaccuracy of his assertion, we need only to point to the fact that Lemkin built the Armenian Genocide into his very definition of the term genocide.

There is a great deal more at stake than the pride of a marginalized group. Overworked journalists, editors, policymakers, and members of the general public do not have time to study complex issues in depth. These groups often turn to recognized experts at think tanks for accurate and substantive coverage to inform their opinions and actions.

When otherwise credible entities such as Carnegie Europe use their authority to elevate inaccurate, harmful analyses and brush off valid critiques, these organizations become tools of oppression and violence and encourage public indifference and ignorance. Truth, clarity, and nuance are critical for those facing a resurgence of eliminationist mass violence and a global propaganda attack funded by oil money.

Signatories:

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