



Nagorno-Karabakh Marks Independence Day without Prime Minister Pashinyan

By Ani Avetisyan

STEPANAKERT (Open Caucasus Media) — Almost a year after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Nagorno-Karabakh marks Independence Day. While officials from the Republic of Armenia were present at the ceremonies, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was a notable absence.

“The right to the determination of the people of Artsakh [Nagorno-Karabakh] is sacred. It cannot be stopped by the use of force,” read a statement written by Armenia’s Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on the occasion of the 30 anniversary of the Independence Declaration of Nagorno-Karabakh on September 2.

This was the first time in the history of independent Armenia that the country’s executive leadership, did not visit Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh on Independence Day.

In the statement, Pashinyan insisted that “the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is not settled” and cited statements made by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-Chairs France, Russia, and the United States.

“The conflict is awaiting its comprehensive settlement through a peace process based on the well-known principles proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs,” the Prime Minister’s statement read.

Nagorno-Karabakh President Arayik Harutyunyan lays flowers at the Stepanakert Military Cemetery. Official photo.

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Blinken Praises ‘Robust’ Ties With Armenia

WASHINGTON (RFE/RL) — US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed Washington’s desire to deepen US-Armenian relations in a congratulatory message sent to Armenia’s newly appointed Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan.

“The United States has a longstanding commitment to supporting the Armenian people’s democratic aspirations, and we look forward to cooperating with you to forge stronger bilateral ties based on our shared democratic values,” read the message released by the Armenian Foreign Ministry at the weekend.

“The United States is a partner in your efforts to strengthen the rule of law, combat corruption, and bolster democratic institutions, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. The US Embassy team in Yerevan is ready to assist you and your government maintain robust ties between our two countries,” added Blinken.

US President Joe Biden likewise said his administration wants to “deepen and expand” ties with Yerevan when he congratulated Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan last month on winning the June 20 snap parliamentary elections.

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Secretary of State Antony Blinken

Another Russian Military Delegation Visits Armenia

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Another Russian military delegation is visiting Armenia following Moscow’s pledges to provide more defense and security aid to its main regional ally.

The Armenian Defense Ministry said on Friday, September 3, that the team of Russian “military specialists” led by Major-General Valery Zhila had arrived in Yerevan for further negotiations with Armenian military officials.

A statement released by the ministry said Zhila briefed Armenian Defense Minister Arshak Karapetyan on the “directions and volume of upcoming work” at a meeting held on September 2. Karapetyan specified, for its part, “the scope of issues of utmost impor-

tance to the Armenian side,” the statement said without elaborating.

Armenia moved to deepen its already close military ties with Russia shortly after the six-week war in Nagorno-Karabakh stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire last November.

Moscow has since deployed troops

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Counting Every Armenian of Artsakh

By Cristopher Patvakanian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WESTBROOK, Maine — Long before the 2020 Artsakh war, Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte was a staunch advocate and leader for the rights of Artsakh Armenians. Having escaped Baku in 1989 and becoming a refugee at the age of 11, she is all too familiar with how traumatic it is to be a survivor of ethnic cleansing and a refugee without a home.

After publishing her book titled *Nowhere, a Story of Exile*, based on the diaries she kept as

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Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte, center, at an ArmenPress press conference, speaking about the census with representatives of the Armenian Association of Social Workers

YEREVAN
Ars MusicaWinds
Up Concert Tour
Of Armenia



YEREVAN
Summeet of
International
Contemporary Dance
In Armenia



GERMANY
A Soprano With
A Bottomless
Appetite for Risk





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Azerbaijanis Set Fire to Road Connecting Villages

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijani servicemen set fire to areas near the village of Azat in Armenia's Gegharkunik province on September 4, also targeting the road from the village of Norabak to Azat (in the immediate vicinity of an Azerbaijani position), Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan reveals.

As a result of the actions of the Azerbaijani military, pastures and other grasslands used by civilians were destroyed within a few days beginning August 29, people were deprived of their livelihoods, which, in turn, exacerbated social problems facing them.

"The fires pose a real threat to the life of the civilian population and their property. Weather conditions, in turn, contribute to the even faster spread [of fires]," Tatoyan said.

Armenia to Take Part In Russian-Belarusian Military Drills

MOSCOW (RFE/RL) — Armenian soldiers flew to Russia over the weekend to participate in large-scale Russian-Belarusian military exercises that have prompted concern from NATO.

The weeklong "Zapad-2021" ("West-2021") exercises are due to start on September 10 at training grounds in Russia and Belarus. They will involve thousands of troops as well as tanks, artillery and military aircraft.

The Belarusian Defense Ministry said last month that the cross-border drills will be based on a scenario where the two countries are under attack.

Tensions have run high in recent months on Belarus's borders with NATO members Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. Western officials say Minsk has been pushing illegal migrants into those countries to put pressure on the European Union in response to EU sanctions imposed on autocratic President Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged Russia late last week to be open about the upcoming drills and the troop numbers involved.

"What we have seen before is that the numbers of troops participating in the exercises significantly exceed the numbers announced," Stoltenberg told Reuters news agency.

US Ambassador to Belarus Julie Fisher said in June that the alliance would be paying "very close attention" to Zapad-2021.

Moscow says the war games will be transparent and defensive in nature.

The Armenian Defense Ministry said its troops will join the exercises in line with a Russian-Armenian plan of joint military activities in 2021. The statement did not specify how many Armenian soldiers will take part, only that an Armenian army unit is heading to the Russian military's Mulino training ground about 360 kilometers east of Moscow.

AUA Auction Featuring Paintings by Saroyan Hopes to Raise Funds for Scholarships

YEREVAN — William Saroyan has long been hailed as not only one of the most influential literary figures of his period, but also as a most revered member of the Armenian Diaspora. His influence runs deep in the hearts and minds of so many, with his

gust 31, the anniversary of William Saroyan's birthday, and ends on September 20. The scholarship will be named the "William Saroyan Scholarship" and will provide quality education to Armenian students at AUA, enabling them to become the next generation of thought leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs driving Armenia to prosperity.

Founded in 1991, the American University of Armenia is a private, independent university located in Yerevan, Armenia, affiliated with the University of California (UC), and accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission in the United States. AUA provides local and international students with Western-style education through top-quality undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs, promotes research and innovation, encourages civic engagement and community service, and fosters democratic values.

To participate in the online auction by bidding on a painting or contributing a donation to the William Saroyan Scholarship Fund at AUA, visit: <http://aua.cbo.io>.



William Saroyan January 24 1968 Fresno #6

most famous saying about Armenians quoted, or rather misquoted, endlessly by those who have never even read his works, a proving testament, year after year, to the lasting power of his name.

Saroyan wrote many successful stories and plays, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and an Academy Award for Best Story. But in addition to literature, Saroyan was also a talented painter, drawing prolifically and producing hundreds of paintings throughout his lifetime.

Recently, the American University of Armenia (AUA) received a generous contribution of two of William Saroyan's original paintings from the William Saroyan Foundation. The beautiful works of art are exhibited online and are being auctioned off to raise funds to support scholarships for AUA students. The auction began on Au-



William Saroyan February 6 1968 Fresno #3

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Yerevan-based political analyst Eric Hacobian told OC Media that Pashinyan not visiting Nagorno-Karabakh does not "signify anything" in the relationship between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

According to Hacobian, the move was like "an attempt" not to give the Azerbaijani government "an excuse to ramp up tensions on the Armenian borders."

"As we know, Armenian government officials are in and out of Artsakh all the time," he said.

Pashinyan has not visited Nagorno-Karabakh since the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in November. The January visit of then-Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Ayvazyan to Stepanakert

elicited loud condemnation in Baku, with Azerbaijani authorities [describing](#) the visit as a "provocation" that contradicted the Trilateral Peace Declaration that ended the war.

The Russia-brokered agreement brought an end to the war over Nagorno-Karabakh and led to the deployment of 2,000 Russian troops to the region.

"I bow my head in memory of the martyrs who fell for the sake of the homeland. Human losses are irreversible and binding at the same time," the President of Nagorno-Karabakh, Arayik Harutyunyan, wrote in a statement on September 2.

Harutyunyan, along with lower-level officials from Armenia, as well as the former Presidents of Nagorno-Karabakh also [vis-](#)

[ited](#) Stepanakert's military cemetery to pay tribute to Armenian soldiers who died during both the second and first wars over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The parliamentary [delegation](#) sent from the Republic of Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh on September 1 was led by the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Ruben Rubinyan.

The ethnic Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast proclaimed independence and the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (Republic of Artsakh) on September 2, 1991. At present, no country, including the Republic of Armenia, officially recognizes the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia's Former Chief Prosecutor Arrested

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Aghvan Hovsepyan, Armenia's former prosecutor-general, was arrested on Tuesday, September 7, on a string of corruption charges he denies.

Hovsepyan, 68, served as prosecutor-general from 1998-1999 and 2004-2013. He went on to become the first head of a newly created law-enforcement agency, the Investigative Committee, in 2014. He ran the committee until the 2018 Velvet Revolution.

The Special Investigation Service (SIS)

said Hovsepyan has been charged with bribery, money laundering and illegal entrepreneurial activity. It claimed that he also misappropriated properties worth 800 million drams (\$1.6 million) while in office.

A statement by the SIS did not specify the source of a 190 million-dram bribe allegedly paid to Hovsepyan or name "a number of companies" which it said were illegally managed by him during his tenure.

"In the interests of the criminal case, we cannot give other details at this point," a spokeswoman for the law enforcement agency, Marina Ohanjanyan, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Hovsepyan's lawyer, Gagik Khachikyan, said his client strongly denies the accusations carrying up to 12 years in prison and will challenge his arrest in court.

"Aghvan Hovsepyan is in a combative mood," Khachikyan wrote on Facebook. "Naturally he does not accept the accusations. I'm convinced that all the bubbles will burst quickly."

Hovsepyan used to be one of Armenia's most powerful state officials. As chief prosecutor, he played a major role in a government crackdown on the opposition launched after the 2008 post-election unrest in Yerevan. Dozens of opposition members, including Nikol Pashinyan, were jailed on controversial charges at the time.

Hovsepyan resigned in June 2018 one month after Pashinyan swept to power as a result of mass protests that toppled the country's former leader, Serzh Sargsyan.



ARMENIA

Armenian State Symphony Orchestra and Violinist Sergey Khachatryan Dazzle at Dubai Opera

By Hasmik Hakobyan

DUBAI (Panorama.am) — The air was filled with high-quality Armenian music sounds at the Dubai Opera on September 5. The Armenian State Symphony Orchestra (ASSO), led by its Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Sergey Smbatyan, and world-renowned violinist Sergey Khachatryan brilliantly performed prominent Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian's Violin Concerto at the luxurious Dubai Opera hall.

The performance drew shouts of "Bravo!" from the audience. For a long time, the foreign audience did not allow the soloist and the conductor to leave the stage. In response to the applause, Sergey Khachatryan performed "Havun, Havun" by Gregory of Narek, filling the Dubai Opera with medieval Armenian melodies.

Aram Khachaturian wrote the concerto in 1940. It has been performed on different stages of the world, being greatly loved by audiences.

Speaking to [Panorama.am](https://www.panorama.am), Sergey

Khachatryan confessed that he loves Khachaturian's *Violin Concerto* and has performed the composition in different countries of the world.

"I am glad that we can participate in such an international festival with the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra today as well and present the masterpieces of Armenian composers to foreign audiences," he said.

Asked whether the nationality of a musician performing Khachaturian's Violin Concerto makes any difference, the violinist said there is probably a difference, adding maybe the Armenians, being familiar with the Armenian music and carrying it in their genes, perform it differently.

"If you grew up listening to Armenian classical music, you are familiar with national music, you have those elements of folk music in your mind, you understand it better, but of course, foreigners can also perform the concerto brilliantly," Khachatryan said.

Referring to further programs, the vio-

linist said that there are no specific concerts planned yet, but he plans to come to Armenia by the end of the year to perform for art lovers. Sergey Khachatryan did not unveil other plans, saying that they are still in his mind and are yet to be brought to life.

Sergey Smbatyan said in turn that the orchestra has performed at the Dubai Opera numerous times. "A long-awaited concert with Sergey Khachatryan was held in Dubai. We have performed here a lot, every concert is unique and this concert is no exception," he said.

Speaking about the InClassica Festival, Sergey Smbatyan said that it is one of the biggest music events, adding participation in such a festival is a great achievement for the orchestra.

"I think that participating in such an international festival is a success. The orchestras performing at the festival are among the top 20 symphony orchestras of the world and, I think, it is a great achievement for the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra to perform here

with them," Smbatyan said.

In addition to participating in the festival, the participants of the final rounds of the "Classic Piano" International Piano Competition held within the framework of the InClassica Festival shared the stage with the ASSO, which, according to its head, was a responsible task.

It's worth noting that Sergey Smbatyan will conduct 10 concerts with other orchestras and soloists within the framework of the InClassica Festival.

To note, the concert of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra and Sergey Khachatryan took place within the framework of the 10th InClassica International Music Festival in Dubai. The special 10th-anniversary edition of the festival is organized by the European Foundation for Support of Culture (EUFSC) in partnership with the SAMIT Event Group.

The event's Composer-In-Residence is Alexey Shor. The festival has brought together 37 musicians, 7 orchestras and 12 conductors. The InClassica International Music Festival runs until September 26.

HRD: Azerbaijani President's Armenophobic Speeches Are Fascist

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Armenian Human Rights Defender's office has analyzed speeches delivered by the Azerbaijani President on August 26 and on August 31, singling out the excerpts that generate hatred and enmity towards Armenians. Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan believes that President Ilham Aliyev's speeches resemble fascism.

The Armenian and English versions of the report were sent to the Armenian National Assembly, the government and law enforcement agencies, as well as various NGOs.

The analyses of the Human Rights Defender's staff and the monitoring of materials in Azerbaijani show that the President of Azerbaijan continues to generate hatred towards the entire Armenian nation, the population of Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in his public speeches, threatens Armenians, insults them and uses inflammatory expressions.

"Torture and killings committed by the Azerbaijani armed forces against the Armenian servicemen and civilians are a consequence of such policies, as are the violations of the rights of the border residents of the Republic of Armenia," Tatoyan said in a statement on Monday, September 6.

Blinken Praises 'Robust' Ties With Armenia

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The US State Department earlier urged the Armenian opposition to accept the official vote results that gave victory to Pashinyan's Civil Contract party.

The two main Armenian opposition groups continued to reject the results as fraudulent.

Both Biden and Blinken reiterated Washington's calls for "comprehensive" settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict:

"We encourage reengagement in substantive negotiations under the auspices of the [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] Minsk Group Co-Chairs as soon as possible," Blinken said.

The group is co-headed by the United States, Russia and France.

Counting Every Armenian of Artsakh

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a refugee from Baku, Anna began her advocacy on various pro-Armenia and Artsakh policies. Simultaneously, she completed humanitarian projects to support the communities of both Artsakh and Armenia, eventually formalizing her efforts by establishing the Anna Astvatsaturian Foundation. Created in the spring of 2020, the foundation is a 501c3 non-profit dedicated to humanitarian cultural and educational efforts in Armenia, Artsakh and the diaspora. When the war began, it concentrated on providing first aid to Artsakh but has since shifted its focus towards conducting a full population survey to document the needs and property losses for the entire Artsakh Republic.

Astvatsaturian Turcotte's reason for starting the census project was prompted by her personal experience as a refugee. She explained that as a Baku Armenian "none of our losses, whether physical or psychological trauma, and property loss, was ever recorded by anyone... the government of Armenia should know that. Now all that information is lost."

The foundation launched the project with the assistance of Armenia's Association of Social Workers, and the work has been underway since the end of the war. The final results of the 50-page survey will provide critically needed data for the government, NGOs, human rights organizations, and international institutions to develop post-war programming for Artsakh based on data.

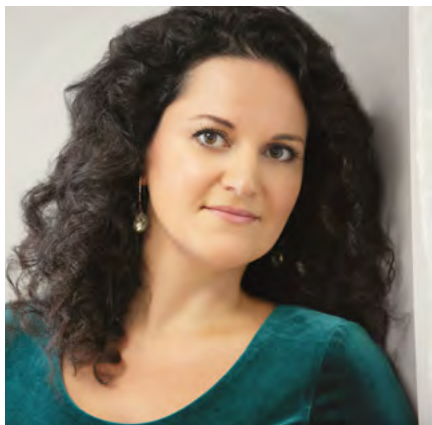
Astvatsaturian Turcotte elaborated that when the 2020 war began and the Artsakh refugees were fleeing into Armenia, she asked the government of Armenia and Artsakh if their losses were being recorded. In her own words, "it was mind boggling that it wasn't being done, with the history of mass atrocities we have survived – data is our power, and it wasn't being collected." Once the war ended, however, the government was still not collecting that information.

That's when Astvatsaturian Turcotte stepped in. Rather than waiting for the

already overwhelmed ministries to prioritize the issue, she found it so important that her Foundation took on the daunting task of doing a census to record the many losses Armenians from Artsakh faced.

Conducting the Census

Conducting a survey in the post-war conditions was not an easy endeavor. The biggest obstacle was getting the people of Artsakh to be open for inter-



Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte

views. After the war, many interviewees were not only distrustful of the government, but also traumatized to the point of not wanting to share their stories.

Of course, this was happening in tandem with the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite that setback, the Association of Social Workers still conducted all interviews in person according to professional norms, undertaking numerous precautions not to spread the coronavirus.

Another critical issue was and remains the funding. "We are about \$15,000 away from the total fundraising goal to wrap up this project and the diaspora is very exhausted by fundraisers after the war, and understandably not trusting of the efforts," Astvatsaturian Turcotte disclosed. However, "once they find out what the Foundation is doing, they are eager to help. We are still fundraising and depend on our donors to finish the initiative."

The foundation aims to survey the

entire population of Artsakh, even accounting for those who refused to do the complete survey interview. According to Astvatsaturian Turcotte, beyond the last Soviet census (1989) and a few sample surveys done by NGOs, her foundation's survey is the newest and most complete – covering medical, psychological, financial and property impact of the war, as well as family information, ages, education etc. The survey includes those living in Armenia and Artsakh, but not Artsakh's refugees in other countries.

Ultimately, Astvatsaturian Turcotte believes there are three areas for which the census data will be crucial. The first is immediate, short-term assistance, as Artsakh is currently being rebuilt. The second is to allow the victims of war crimes and international organizations to use the information during legal proceedings and final assessments of the crimes' impact. Finally, for the long term, this data will serve as a historic record.

"Comprehensive data is one thing the victims of the 1915 Armenian Genocide, the Baku and Sumgait pogroms didn't have. We still wonder to this day how much was truly lost," Astvatsaturian Turcotte elaborated. "We're very good at keeping our losses alive in creative ways through telling our personal stories or advocacy, but not in an empirical way, and with this census we can capture those data points for future research."

The Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte Foundation encourages all types of organizations interested in using the data to apply for access, both Armenian and non-Armenian. Given that their collection of data followed a strict protocol of processes, vetting, recruiting, and training of interviewers, it can be considered reliable for many purposes. All applicants will be vetted and provided with information at a statistical level to prevent exposing confidential data and protect the sensitive information of families in Artsakh. For details on the application and how to support the foundation's efforts, see its website, www.astvatsaturian.org/projects/

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Serbia Detains North Macedonian Diplomat at Armenia's Request

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The law enforcement bodies of Serbia have detained North Macedonian diplomat Mile Milenkovski on the basis of an international arrest warrant issued by Armenia, North Macedonian *Alsat TV* reports.

The detention took place on August 27 as Milenkovski was crossing the border point "Presevo" to enter the territory of North Macedonia. However, the news was confirmed by the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Friday, September 3.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia confirms that an employee of the Ministry, who is currently assigned to our OSCE Mission to Vienna, was detained in the Republic of Serbia on 27.08.2021. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia has officially has reported this to the Embassy of North Macedonia in Belgrade. According to the report, the competent court in Serbia has ordered extradition detention on the basis of an international arrest warrant for a crime he is accused of having committed during his private trip abroad," the Foreign Ministry stated.

According to the TV channel, the Serbian authorities acted in accordance with the request of the Armenian side, which is investigating the case, in which Milenkovsky is one of the defendants.

At the same time, the diplomat is a relative of the former head of the country's national counterintelligence Sasho Mijalkov, who is currently serving a prison term for abuse of office.

According to Armenian law enforcement agencies, in 2018, three diplomats from North Macedonia, led by Milenkovski, helped a former Armenian government official flee the country on a private jet.

Aliyev Aide: Baku, Moscow Still Determining Russian Peacekeepers' Mandate

BAKU (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijan and Russia are discussing additional legal mechanisms on the mandate of the Russian peacekeepers deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh, Hikmet Hajiyev, an aide to the President of Azerbaijan, has said.

"As for additional agreements and legal mechanisms on the mandate of the peacekeepers, there have been preliminary contacts between the parties in this regard, and certain discussions are still ongoing," Hajiyev said in an interview with the BBC.

He stressed that the activity of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Karabakh is based on the trilateral statement of November 9, signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia.

Hajiyev said the trilateral statement set a "political and, to a certain extent, legal framework" for the peacekeeping forces.

Armenia's First Defeat in the Qatar 2022 World Cup Qualifying Games

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

STUTTGART, Germany — After three consecutive victories and a draw, Armenia's national soccer team suffered its first loss, which was a pretty heavy one. Its squad was defeated 6:0 on September 5 by four-time world champion Germany

horizontal of the J group with ten scores, yielding leadership to the Germans. The next game will be played in Yerevan on September 8, where the Armenian national team will host Lichtenstein. In October, the squad from Yerevan will compete against Iceland (October 8, Reykjavik) and Romanians (October 11, Bucharest). After that, the two home games against N. Macedonia

Barsegian his 40th match for the national team. Mkhitarian has scored 30 and Barsegian 8 goals.

Armenians from Stuttgart and different European cities were present cheering for their national squad. Before this game, Armenia and Germany played on June 6, 2014. In a friendly international match, Germans again overwhelmed the Armenians 6:1.

A video segment may be viewed at www.mirrorspectator.com which displays Armenian fans present at the Mercedes-Benz Arena in Stuttgart and Armenia's only attempt at goals by Sarkis Adamyan.



Armenia's fans in the stands

in Stuttgart. Midfielder Serge Gnabry, native of Stuttgart, hit the first goal six minutes after the game started and doubled the score nine minutes later. The first half finished with 4:0 on the scoreboard. Die Mannschaft, as Germany's squad is called, or "The Team" in English, added two more goals during the second half.

The four-time champions prevailed for almost the entire duration of the game. The Armenians had only one real attempt at the German goal but Sarkis Adamian's strike was unsuccessful.

Armenia now occupies the second hor-

(November 11) and Germany (November 14) will conclude the qualifying tour. The group leader will advance to the world championship, which will happen in Qatar next year. Whoever occupies the 2nd horizontal will have to play extra games, which will determine the participation.

Sunday's match marked several significant caps that the players accomplished: Germany's goalkeeper Manuel Neuer and midfielder/forward Thomas Mueller were honored for playing 100 games for Die Mannschaft. Armenia's captain, Henrikh Mkhitarian, played his 90th and Tigran

Russia Calls On Armenia, Turkey to Normalize Ties

MOSCOW (RFE/RL) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed hope on Friday, September 3, that Armenia and Turkey will normalize their relations after last year's war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

"Now that the groundwork has been laid for a political process and the unblocking of all [Armenian-Azerbaijani] transport and economic links after the end of the war there I think that it would be totally logical if our Turkish and Armenian colleagues resumed their efforts to normalize relations," Lavrov said during a youth forum in Moscow.

"We are ready to assist in that in the most active way," he said, echoing a statement made by a Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman on Thursday.

Turkey has for decades made the establishment of diplomatic relations and opening of the border between the two countries conditional on a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict acceptable to Azerbaijan. Baku claims that its victory in the six-week war stopped by a Russian-brokered ceasefire last November put an end to the conflict.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan spoke on August 27 of "some positive signals" sent by the Turkish government of late and said his administration is ready to reciprocate them.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan responded by saying that Ankara is open to normalizing ties with Yerevan. But he appeared to echo Baku's demands for a formal Armenian recognition of Azerbaijani sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh.

A senior Armenian pro-government lawmaker said earlier this week that Pashinyan's administration will not accept any Turkish preconditions.

Armenia and Turkey came close to normalizing bilateral relations in 2009 when their foreign ministers signed two relevant protocols in Zurich, Switzerland in the presence of Lavrov and the top US and European Union diplomats.

Ankara subsequently linked their ratification by the Turkish parliament to a Karabakh settlement. As a result, Armenia's former government formally annulled the protocols in 2018.

Lavrov revealed on Friday that during the 2008-2009 Turkish-Armenian rapprochement he "warned" then Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian that the Turks will not drop their preconditions.



LONDON — New Armenian Ambassador to the UK Varuzhan Nersisyan posted the photo above of himself with champion of Armenia and Karabakh Baroness Cox taken at the Armenian Festival in London on September 5. "So delighted to meet Baroness Cox at the Armenian Festival in London," he wrote. He previously served as the ambassador of Armenia to the US.



INTERNATIONAL

Ars Musica Winds Up Concert Tour Of Armenia

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

ECHMIADZIN — The members of Ars Musica agreed that the musical and cultural highpoint of their extensive visit was the final event. The renowned men's chorus from Thuringia, Germany, was concluding a two-week concert tour that renewed and enriched their relationship to Armenia. The friendship had begun more than thirty years earlier, when many of today's singers were members of a boys' choir. In 1988, they had performed a concert in the city of Suhl, in solidarity with the victims of the Armenian earthquake. And in 2018 the Ars Musica singers commemorated the anniversary again with a major choral performance. In July of this year, they kicked off their current initiative with a concert in Halle, the twin city of Gyumri, and then in August flew to Yerevan to embark on an ambitious musical itinerary.

The venue for the final concert on August 28 was the modern auditorium in the Echmiadzin monastery, seat of the Catholicos of all Armenians. Following a visit through the treasure chamber and the spacious grounds of the site, they performed for a large audience, which included dignitaries of the monastery and the Apostolic church. Just days earlier was the 70th birthday of the Catholicos Karekin II. The concert featured works from the classical and spiritual repertoire as well as Armenian pieces.

In the course of their packed visit, the men's chorus visited several landmark sites in Armenia's religious history, beginning with the Khor Virap monastery, which offered the view of Mount Ararat, and Noravank, where they visited the chapel and enjoyed lunch. Next was the Tatev monastery, which they reached via the "Wings of Tatev" cableway. Here they gained initial insights into the historical



Members of Ars Musica in performance in Echmiadzin



significance of Armenia's religious tradition and architecture. And here they had their first opportunity to express their gratitude through music. Although, as they noted in their reports on the trip for their website (<https://arsmusica.de>), it is not common for churches in Armenia to host formal concerts, they were permitted to perform a 40-minute program of sacred works to an appreciative audience, which included the regional Primate of the church. They also sang Armenian works in the original language in what would become a regular feature of their events.

The next historic sites they encountered were the classical temple at Garni, and the Geghard monastery. In a chapel at Geghard, they presented a small concert, their music enhanced by the unique atmosphere and marvelous acoustics of the venue. They later visited the Sevanavank monastery, where they sang a short program following evening prayers.

Cultural Encounters

Not only churches and monasteries, but also schools, museums and social centers welcomed the visiting musicians. In the capital, the Ars Musica singers had a chance to see the art collections at the Cascade and to encounter the Mother Armenia monument, before reaching the Armenian Genocide memorial at Tsitsernakaberd. There, after taking a tour through the museum, they honored the memory of the victims by laying flowers at the monument.

In Yerevan they visited the Matenadaran and toured the Komitas museum, as well as the nearby Pantheon where many famous composers are buried, including Komitas. Here, in the concert hall of the museum they gave a concert, as part of the Komitas festival, and included several works by the Vardapet. In addition to music, they were introduced to other facets of Armenian culture, in visits to the House of Armenian Writers, the Byurakan Observatory and Radio Yerevan where they even sang two songs. This means, they reported, that the headline, "Ars Musica sings at Radio Yerevan," is no joke.

Music and Other Gifts

As reported in the Mirror-Spectator, the musical gift that Ars Musica officially presented during this tour was a Venera Grand Concert Harp for the conservatory in Gyumri. (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/08/26/ars-musica-brings-grand-concert-harp-to-gyumri/>) Music has been and remains at the center of the Ars Musica experience. But the group has raised funds through concerts also to provide material support for those in need. That was the spirit behind the initial solidarity concerts for earthquake victims in the beginning, and that continues to characterize the chorus's engagement for Armenia. A few years ago they had organized benefit concerts to finance the renovation of the auditorium in the Hovhannes Tumanyan Middle School in Litschk. During this trip, they were able not only to visit that new auditorium but to perform there as a chorus — and even to sing together with some of the pupils, in German as well as Armenian. During their stay, a new projector they had financed for the school arrived in Yerevan, and will soon be delivered with assistance of the German embassy, so that pupils and teachers can present film material in school.

While in Yerevan, the men from Ars Musica participated in a cultural program at the House of Hope, a social project which provides support for disadvantaged Armenians. The number of people in need has increased, as people have been fleeing to safety in the wake of the war in Nagorno Karabakh. The singers presented their music, and also funds and material donations, for example, clothing. Fifty traditional Thuringian caps donated by a local garment manufacturer were part of the package, as well as single items given

as personal gifts by each of the singers. Most appropriately, the gathering concluded with a shared meal, and a shared cuisine. Armenian helpers followed the expert instructions provided by the singers to prepare a typical Thuringian dinner: bratwurst, roast sausages, onion tarts and potato salad. It was perhaps the Germans' way of reciprocating for an Armenian lunch they had enjoyed after visiting Syunik--grilled trout, fresh vegetables and a wine-tasting.

At their concluding concert in Echmiadzin, both hosts and guests emphasized the value of music as a means of bringing peoples together. All hope that the German singers may return for another tour.

Russian Military Delegation Visits Armenia

MILITARY, from page 1

in Armenia's Syunik province bordering districts southwest of Karabakh retaken by Azerbaijan during and after the hostilities. Yerevan requested additional Russian troop deployments along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in May.

The Russian and Armenian militaries held at least two rounds of "staff negotiations" in the first half of this year. Karapetyan's predecessor Vagharshak Harutiunyan said in January that they are aimed at "assisting us in the reform and modernization of Armenia's armed forces."

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reportedly assured Karapetyan on August 11 that Moscow will continue to provide such assistance. Shoigu also signaled the start of more Russian arms supplies to the Armenian army.

Karapetyan again visited Moscow two weeks later to attend the opening ceremony of an international arms exhibition and meet with top Russian defense industry executives. He said Armenia plans to buy modern Russian weapons but did not go into details.

"I can say that I have not heard a single word 'no' here," the Armenian defense minister told reporters in the Russian capital.

Dmitry Shugayev, director of the Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, listed Armenia among several countries with which Russia signed defense contracts on the sidelines of the Army-2021 Expo.

Earlier this week the TASS news agency quoted a senior military official in Moscow as saying that Russia and Armenia are now discussing a new agreement on a joint air-defense system.

The two states already have such a system that includes elements of a Russian military base stationed in Armenia. It was set up in the late 1990s and upgraded by a Russian-Armenian treaty signed in 2015.



Community News

Shekherdimian Appointed Associate Director for Healthcare Outreach for Promise Armenian Institute

LOS ANGELES — Dr. Shant Shekherdimian, a pediatric surgeon at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine (DGSOM), has been appointed the inaugural associate director for healthcare outreach at the Promise Armenian Institute (PAI) at UCLA.

In this role, Shekherdimian will conduct public health research, develop health-related education and research opportunities for UCLA faculty and students, facilitate healthcare initiatives that involve UCLA and explore alternative models for UCLA Global Health engagement for healthcare improvement in Armenia. In pursuing these activities, Dr. Shekherdimian will serve as a senior advisor to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia.

“Part of the Promise Armenian Institute’s mission is to coordinate interdisciplinary research and public impact programs between UCLA and the Republic of Armenia, and this new position will accomplish just that in the medical and healthcare arena,” said professor Ann Karagozian, inaugural director of the Promise Armenian Institute. “We are grateful to Dr. Shekherdimian for his extraordinary



Dr. Shant Shekherdimian

dedication to PAI’s mission and the improvement of healthcare in Armenia.”

“I am honored to serve as the associate director for healthcare outreach for the Promise Armenian Institute, and very much look forward to supporting and expanding the scope of healthcare-related activities with which UCLA is involved in Armenia. I am excited for this opportunity to collaborate with UCLA faculty and students, as well as our colleagues in Armenia, to work on developing solutions to some of the challenges Armenia’s healthcare system faces,” noted Shekherdimian.

Shekherdimian is an associate professor of pediatric surgery at UCLA DGSOM. For many years he has been actively involved in various initiatives in Armenia’s healthcare sector, including efforts to improve post-graduate medical education, see PROMISE, page 6



Harry S. Cherken, Jr. Appointed Honorary Consul Of Republic of Armenia for Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA — Harry Sarkis Cherken Jr., senior counsel in the international law firm of Faegre Drinker, has been appointed honorary consul of Armenia for the Greater Philadelphia area.

As honorary consul, Cherken will facilitate economic, education and cultural exchanges between Armenia and Philadelphia; will endeavor to protect the interests of Armenian citizens while in Philadelphia; will support the Armenian diaspora community and organizations at large; and, will act as a liaison for official government and business delegations. As such, he has become a member of the Consular Corps Association of Philadelphia, the oldest association of foreign Consuls in the United States.

In his practice as an attorney, Cherken focuses on the representation of publicly-traded and closely held corporations, partnerships, investors, and developers, particularly in the acquisition, construction, development, financing, leasing, management, consolidation, and disposition of commercial real estate. At the legacy law firm of Drinker Biddle & Reath, he previously served as a managing partner and, for many years, chair of its real estate practice group.

Cherken is a fellow of the American College of Real Estate Lawyers, and served for a decade as a member of the Advisory Board of the Advanced Commercial Leasing Institute of the Georgetown University Law Center. For a number of years, he was the principal editor of Ladner on Conveyancing, the premier text on Pennsylvania real estate.

In recognition of his professional accomplishments, Cherken is listed in the Best Lawyers in America, Chambers USA: America’s Leading Lawyers for Business (Senior Statesman, Pennsylvania, Real Estate), Who’s Who in the World, Who’s Who in America, Who’s Who in American Law, Who’s Who Legal: USA Real Estate, the International Who’s Who of Real Estate Lawyers, the International Who’s Who of Business Lawyers, the Guide to the World’s Leading Real Estate Lawyers, and the Expert Guide, The World’s Finest Lawyers, Construction and Real Estate.

After earning a B.A. in economics and business from Lafayette College, he received a J.D. from Villanova University School of Law, where he was a member of the Law Review. He also earned an M.A. in liberal arts from the University of Pennsylvania in 2010.

He now serves or previously served as a board member of a number of corporations and charitable groups, including Urban Outfitters, Inc., Perpay, Inc., Lafayette College, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Reading Terminal Market Preservation Fund, the Woodmere Art Museum, the Kulicke Fund, and the Balch Institute. He also currently is the President of the Board of Direction of The Philadelphia Club.

Cherken has been active in the Armenian-American community for many years. He was both a founding Member of the Board of Governors of the Armenian Bar Association, and one of its Past Chairs. He served the Armenian Assembly of America in various capacities over the years, and presently is a Fellow Trustee. Furthermore, he is a long time member of the Board of Directors of the Howard Karagheusian Commemorative Corporation headquartered in New York City.

LA Couple Indicted on Massive Fraud Flee Before Sentencing

LOS ANGELES (Fox 11 News) — A Tarzana couple awaiting sentencing after their conviction in an \$18 million COVID-19 relief fraud case allegedly cut their ankle monitoring bracelets and fled, according to the FBI’s Los Angeles office.

Richard Ayvazyan, 43, and Marietta Terabelian, 37, were found guilty in June of scheming to submit fraudulent loan applications under which they and others obtained more than \$18 million in Paycheck Protection and Economic Injury Disaster Loan program funds they used to put down payments on luxury homes in Tarzana, Glendale and Palm Desert and purchase jewelry and other high-end items.

They were scheduled to be sentenced on October 4 in Los Angeles federal court.

In a tweet late Tuesday, August 31, the FBI said the couple are considered fugitives and asked the public for any information on their whereabouts.

Federal authorities said the couple have been missing since Sunday.

Attorneys for the pair did not immediately respond to requests for comment from City News Service.

Ayvazyan, Terabelian, and two relatives were found guilty at trial of conspiracy to commit bank fraud and wire fraud, bank fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Ayvazyan was also found guilty of aggravated identity theft.

The jury determined the defendants must forfeit bank accounts, jewelry, watches, gold coins, three homes and about \$450,000 in cash, according to the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

“Seeking quick riches, the defendants stole federal funds intended to help Americans harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic carnage left in its wake,” Acting U.S. Attorney Tracy Wilkison said following the trial. “The verdicts in this case are the first in this district resulting from a pandemic-related fraud scheme, and we are prepared to bring additional defendants to justice as we continue our efforts to safeguard our nation’s disaster-relief programs.”

Evidence showed the defendants used bogus or stolen identities to submit fraudulent applications for the loans. In support of the applications, the defendants also submitted sham documents to lenders and the Small Business Administration, including fake identity documents, tax documents and payroll records.

The couple used the fraudulently obtained funds as down payments on luxury homes and to buy gold coins, diamonds, jewelry, luxury watches, imported furnishings, designer handbags, clothing and a Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

Prior to the verdict, four accomplices pleaded guilty to criminal charges in the case.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Brigham And Women's Virtual Prostate Cancer Clinic Offers Patients Convenience, Efficiency

By Lisa Hughes

BOSTON (CBS) — While most of the world has adapted to “virtual” medicine during the pandemic, it is nothing new for some patients at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

Rich Boyajian, a nurse practitioner in Radiation Oncology at Brigham & Women's Hospital, is the founder of the Virtual Prostate Cancer Clinic.

Nearly a decade ago, when he realized how far patients were traveling for routine tests and how busy the doctors were going over the test results.

“There has to be a better way,” he thought.

With a grant from Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boyajian created the program and the software.

When the virtual clinic opened in 2016, David Fraley was among the first patients to enroll. He realized the convenience and efficiency immediately.

Fraley, who was treated for prostate cancer in 2011, no longer had to drive all the

way into Boston for lab work. He could do it in Foxboro.

“You don't have to waste three or four hours out of the day coming into Boston. And if there is a situation, you deal with it,” Fraley said.

Boyajian and his colleague, Physician Assistant Ashley Kowtoniuk, use a zip code search to identify affiliated labs that a patient can easily visit.

Once the patient's blood work (for PSA tests) and the patient's questionnaire are in, the software automatically extracts the information and “knows” if the patient has relapsed.

It can also tell if the patient has significant symptoms.

Boyajian and Kowtoniuk can access the information from their computer, wherever they are, contact the patient, and set up the follow-up visit with a doctor.

The clinic's ability to keep patients on their follow-up schedules without interruption was particularly helpful during the pandemic.

“It's software doing the job of helping

us triage patients. We're sitting at a computer. We can do our work from home. My daughters would tell you that they have video of me taking care of patients from Disneyworld. It allows you the flexibility to practice wherever you are,” Boyajian said.

Patients enjoy the same flexibility. The clinic serves patients in Kazakhstan, the UAE and Bermuda, in addition to all the New England states and Florida.

“Patients don't want to leave the Dana Farber-Brigham and Women's Center,” Boyajian said. “They feel like the doctors have saved their lives and they want to stay attached to them as long as they can.”

Boyajian understands that feeling well.

Twenty five years ago, he was a leukemia patient at DFCI who received a life-saving bone marrow transplant. His connection to the patients and doctors in the virtual clinic is personal.

He's now hoping that virtual clinics can become a fixture in patient care for other diseases, including other cancers.

Boyajian, a six-year Pan Mass Challenge



Rich Boyajian, RN, NP

rider expects to be back on the bike (and in the ride) in 2022.

“I've skipped a few years,” he explains smiling, “Next year, I'll be back pedaling again.”

Shekherdimian Appointed For Healthcare Outreach

PROMISE, from page 6

introducing quality improvement programs and developing multidisciplinary care teams.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent war in Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh in late 2020, Dr. Shekherdimian has been one of the leads in UCLA's Operation Armenia, an initiative that provides immediate medical disaster relief and long-term humanitarian aid and infrastructure support to Armenia and Artsakh. While continuing to expand these efforts, the research he will conduct as associate director for healthcare outreach will provide additional insights for the Ministry of Health to help further strengthen the overall healthcare system in Armenia.

“Dr. Shekherdimian has a proven track record of service in Armenia, and we are very pleased to welcome him in this new capacity as senior advisor,” said Armenia's Minister of Health, Anahit Avanesyan. “Dr. Shekherdimian's expertise and support are especially welcome now, in view of the strain placed on the healthcare sector of Armenia by the recent war on Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to continuing our work with Dr. Shekherdimian and expanding UCLA's engagement in the improvement of Armenia's healthcare sector.”

“We are continuously working to engage and attract highly qualified diaspora specialists to work in Armenian state institutions. The appointment of Dr. Shekherdimian as a senior advisor to the Minister of Health is an important step in an ongoing partnership with the Ministry of Health, and what we hope will be a fruitful initiative to attract more qualified specialists to high-ranking positions in various ministries and state institutions. We are grateful to the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA for its partnership and commitment to the improvement and development of the Armenian public sector,” stated High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Zareh Sinanyan.

The Promise Armenian Institute (PAI) was established at UCLA in late 2019 as a hub for world-class research and teaching on Armenian Studies and for coordinating Interdisciplinary Research and Public Impact Programs across UCLA, and with the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

OBITUARY

Savey “Shoushig” Tufenkian

Immigrant, Philanthropist, Daughter of Genocide Survivors

GLENDAL — Savey “Shoushig” Shirvastian Tufenkian, wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother passed away on August 25 at home in Glendale. She was 83.

She was born in Garadagh, Iran, to Vagharshak and Verjin Shirvastian, survivors of the Armenian Genocide. She received her high school education in Beit Mery, Lebanon and received a scholarship to attend American International College in Mass. where she graduated in 1954.

Savey and her younger brother Kosti moved to California in 1955. Together they founded Western Disposal Company — later known as Western Waste Industries.

She married Ralph Tufenkian of Los Angeles in 1956. Savey was a kind and generous person who was eager to help her community, local and abroad.

After the tragic loss of her son Richard in 1990, Savey and Ralph established the Richard Tufenkian Pre-School which has remained closest to her heart to the end. In addition to the Pre-School she has played a major role in the founding and continuation of many Armenian organizations such as Armenian Interna-



tional Women’s Association the Armenian Missionary Association of America Orphan and Child Care, USC Institute of Armenian Study, and many more.

Savey is survived by her husband of 63 years Ralph Tufenkian, son Greg and Caroline Tufenkian and daughter Sandra and Paul Kalemkarian; grandchildren Sara, Lisa and Lena and their spouses, and Sam, Michael and Max and three great-grandchildren Micah, Ani and Ambrose.

Adele Flora (Koundakjian) Manuelian

Dedicated Armenian Museum Volunteer

BELMONT, Mass. — Adele Flora (Koundakjian) Manuelian, of Belmont and Watertown, September 3, 2021. Beloved wife of the late Haig Der Manuelian.

She was the daughter of the late Gabriel and Flora (Der Boghossian) Koundakjian, survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

She was the mother of Mark Manuelian and his wife Deborah, Matthew Manuelian and his wife Anahit Atayan, Michael Manuelian and his husband Gregory Welch, and Martin Manuelian. Also survived by 9 grandchildren: Ara, Ami, Ana, Asa, Haik, Romen, Kolbey, Kinley and Konley. Sister of Anne Gregoire, Elizabeth Koundakjian, Marion Osterberg and the late Margaret Boyajian. Sister-in-law of Dr. Lucy Der Manuelian. Also survived by many loving nieces and nephews.

The funeral service took on Wednesday, September 8, at Armenian Memorial Church, Watertown. Interment followed the service at Mt. Auburn Cemetery.

Adele was a consummate local girl — she was born on Tremont Street in Jamaica Plain, grew up in Newton and Waltham, graduated with the Waltham High School Class of 1945 (where she was an excellent student and athlete), and raised her four sons in Belmont and her adopted daughter, ALMA (the Armenian Library and Museum of America, now the Armenian Museum of America) in Watertown. She was a huge Patriots, Red Sox and other Boston sports fan.

Adele had a zest for life and found joy in family, friends, and community. She loved socializing and was an avid tennis player (and professional tennis fan)



and passionate bridge player. She was a dedicated volunteer and supporter of the Armenian Museum of America, where, since its founding, she devoted many hours each week to everything from accounting to mailings to gardening and for decades, with her husband, Haig, was one of its pillars. Growing up she sang in a church choir, and afterwards continued to enjoy playing piano and singing. She loved music, especially opera and hymns. She also loved gardening and flower arrangements. She was a committed member of the Belmont Woman’s Club and the Belmont Garden Club. She was the base of support for her husband, Haig, and together they made tremendous contributions to the Armenian and non-Armenian communities.

Adele was a deeply compassionate human being. Like her father, she thought often of her distant relatives in Armenia (most of whom she had never met), followed their news and helped if there was a need. Not ever having experienced the joy of having grandparents in her own life, Adele had a special place in her heart for the elderly. In her years as a young mother, she volunteered at the Armenian Nursing Home in Jamaica Plain. She appreciated the elderly and maintained strong opinions about respecting their values and wishes, ideas that she carried forward in helping to care for her mother-in-law and later her own mother. Although not a political person, in her later years, she followed the news and current events closely and was often deeply impacted by the plight of others.

Arrangements were made by the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home.

ABMDR New England’s Celebrates 10th Annual Walk of Life

WATERTOWN — On September 25, the Armenian community of New England will come together in support of the 10th annual Walk of Life of the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR). Every year the pan-Armenian event in Watertown draws youth participation, with large numbers of students from area schools and colleges. It also attracts the support of numerous community organizations and many public figures.

Established in 1999, ABMDR, a non-profit organization, helps save lives by recruiting and providing matched unrelated donors for bone marrow or stem cell transplantation to all Armenian and non-Armenian patients worldwide who are suffering from leukemia and other life-threatening blood related illnesses. Due to the unique genetic make-up of Armenians, it is nearly impossible to find suitable matches among the existing international registries. Hence the importance of establishing a registry that would help facilitate recruiting and identifying matched unrelated bone marrow donors.



Over the past 10 years, the Walk of Life in New England has received support and sponsorship from several large and small businesses, including: PRO-METRIKA LLC of Cambridge, the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, the Armenian-American Pharmacists’ Association (AAPA), Watertown Savings Bank, ThermOil, Inc., several other local businesses, the Armenia Tree Project, the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (ACEC) and the AGBU New England District.

The walkathon’s opening ceremony will be held on the grounds of ACEC, on September 25 at 11am and will conclude at Faire on the Square, in Watertown Square, where participants will gather to celebrate the day’s achievements and enjoy great music, dancing, and food.

The funds raised at the walk and all other donations go a long way to ensure ABMDR stays loyal to its mission, by educating the public, recruiting donors and thus building a robust donor registry, and facilitating bone marrow stem cell transplants for patients worldwide.

ABMDR New England is encouraging community members to join the Walk of Life by clicking [here](#). Interested readers can reach out to: abmdrne-wengland@gmail.com.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Princeton PhD Candidate Erin Piñon Nabs AGBU Helen Evans Scholarship

NEW YORK — Erin Piñon, a PhD candidate at Princeton University in the Department of Art & Archaeology, has been awarded the first AGBU Helen C. Evans Scholarship, which was launched in early 2020 by Ani and Mark Gabrellian to honor the curator and driving force behind the Armenia! exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Their significant gift established an endowment that is being supported by other generous community members who also recognize the importance of encouraging exceptional graduate students from around the world pursuing studies in Armenian art, art history, architecture, or early Christianity. The scholarship, which is open to students of all backgrounds, is awarded by AGBU, with Dr. Evans assisting in the review process.

As described in her application, Piñon developed a passion for Armenian art as an undergraduate student at Tufts University, where she studied under Dr. Christina Maranci. By her senior year, Maranci wrote, she was “enchanted” by Armenian and Byzantine art, and all things related to Armenia and Armenians.

After graduating from Tufts, Piñon completed her master’s in art history at Southern Methodist University. The recipient of a number of awards, including a Fulbright

US Research Grant to Armenia, Piñon, who is not Armenian herself, has learned Western and Eastern Armenian to communicate both in Armenia and across the diaspora, skills critical to her studies. She has also served as a visiting lecturer in Armenian art and architecture at the American University of Armenia in Yerevan.

Piñon is currently completing her dissertation titled “The Illuminated Haysmawurk’: Ottoman-Armenian Painting and Confessionalism in the Age of Print.” Examples of the manuscripts required to complete her work are currently safeguarded within two main repositories: the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul, and the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) in Yerevan. This scholarship will allow her to conduct fieldwork essential to completing her dissertation.

In describing Evans’ profound impact on the fields of Armenian and Byzantine art history, Piñon, who first met Dr. Evans in Yerevan, said, “Her pioneering work on Cilician scriptoria and manuscript illustration defined new areas of Armenian art history, revealing that the art of medieval Armenia did not develop in isolation. I am deeply honored and incredibly grateful to be able to continue my research with a

grant named after such a towering figure in this field whose scholarship and mentorship have shaped me profoundly.”

“I am excited by the selection of Erin Piñon as the first Helen C. Evans scholar. She is well along on her PhD on modern Armenian manuscript illuminations that should help link the past and present in Armenian studies. Erin not only intensely identifies with past Armenian art and culture but also is actively involved with contemporary Armenian issues across the globe, said Dr. Evans. “I am also so appreciative for this scholarship, which not only encourages study in the field that’s been so central to my career but also ensures recognition of the importance of Armenian art and culture over the next generations.”

Both Dr. Evans and Ms. Piñon noted her involvement with the Armenia! exhibition, with Dr. Evans pointing to “...an impressive article by Erin to be included in the exhibition’s symposium volume.” Ms. Piñon likewise reflected on Armenia! in her application, writing that Dr. Evans “...welcomed me to the diverse team of historians and art historians who worked on the Armenia! exhibition, which framed my doctoral coursework and heralded a new moment in Armenian art history.”

The Gabrellians joined in congratulating Ms. Piñon as the inaugural scholarship recipient, stating, “We were inspired to launch the AGBU Helen C. Evans Scholarship both to honor and recognize Dr. Ev-

ans’ outstanding achievements, and to also encourage others to continue exploring this culturally and historically valuable field. Erin clearly represents the next generation of scholars that we’re so pleased this scholarship recognizes.” They added, “Supporting top tier research, teaching, publication and curation on these topics is even more critical now as so many monuments, historical sites and relics are at risk for destruction.”

As the AGBU Helen C. Evans Scholarship endowment grows, more than one grant each year can be awarded, serving as a meaningful recognition of Dr. Evans’ profound impact to this field. Contributions are invited and may be made by contacting Karen Papazian at kpapazian@agbu.org or calling 212-319-6383. Please make checks payable to AGBU (Memo: Evans Scholarship) and mail to AGBU Development Department, 55 East 59th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is the world’s largest non-profit organization devoted to upholding the Armenian heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs. Each year, AGBU is committed to making a difference in the lives of 500,000 people across Armenia, Artsakh and the Armenian diaspora. Since 1906, AGBU has remained true to one overarching goal: to create a foundation for the prosperity of all Armenians. To learn more visit www.agbu.org.



Erin Piñon
Photo credit: Izaac Costiniano

Ariana Maral Nigoghosian Receives Daughters of Vartan 2021 Zabelle Chapter Undergraduate Merit Scholarship

DETROIT — The Daughters of Vartan value the importance of recognizing the academic accomplishments of Armenian college students. This year the Zabelle Chapter awarded the Merit Scholarship for an undergraduate student to Ariana Maral Nigoghosian.

The Daughters of Vartan were unable to honor her at their annual June dinner, because it was cancelled due to Covid-19. They will honor her at a special dinner and introduce her to the membership when they can once again assemble safely.

Ariana is the daughter of Gregory and

Laura Nigoghosian of Northville, MI, the great-granddaughter of the late KV Past Commander Edward and late DV Past Chairwoman Frances Korkoian, the granddaughter of the late George and Susie Mardiros and George and Karen Nigoshian, the great-niece of DV National Chairwoman Gloria Korkoian, KV PGC Edward and DV PNC Yvonne Korkoian and cousin of KV Past Commander Christopher Korkoian.

Ariana is in her third year at the University of Michigan majoring in neuroscience, where she continues her academic excellence.



Ariana Nigoghosian

weekly workouts with athletes to promote emotional and physical well-being. At the University of Michigan, she is an Executive Board Member of the Armenian Student’s Cultural Association. Since 2018, she had been an active member of the Armenian Youth Federation as the Corresponding Secretary & Central Membership Council.

Ariana was instrumental in raising funds and awareness for displaced Armenians affected by the recent Artsakh War.

Ariana said, “My experience with individuals with special needs, my interest in neuroscience, and my Armenian heritage may seem to be completely separate topics. However, in my eyes, they are completely connected. It is my Armenian family that has taught me altruism. It is my Armenian community that has taught me activism and advocacy for the voices of others. It is my Armenian ancestors that have taught me that perseverance is the gateway to any hope, dream, goal, or desire. I hold the stories of my great-grandparents close to my heart. Their courage allowed them to survive the worst act of hate ever inflicted upon a people. I will channel their perseverance in all that do, to show that Armenians will forever have a place in this world.”



At a family dinner on July 18, 2021, Ariana was presented with the Undergraduate Merit Scholarship by her great aunt, Gloria Korkoian, then MWGDR and Scholarship Chairwoman, KV Past Grand Commander Edward and DV Past National Chairwoman Yvonne Korkoian. Her parents Greg and Laura are on either side of her.

AMAA Awards Scholarships to Needy And Deserving Students

PARAMUS, N.J. — “The Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) awarded \$212,450.00 in direct scholarship grants to 84 worthy students for the academic year 2021-2022 attending colleges and universities in the United States and Canada,” announced John Cherkezian, chair of the AMAA’s Scholarship Committee. In addition, \$32,000 more was assigned for qualified university students in Armenia.

For more than 50 years, the AMAA has helped thousands of college students with scholarships, thus helping them prepare for the future and relieving the financial burden that makes it harder to focus on their work. Moreover, since its founding, AMAA has supported the education of tens of thousands of Armenian students at all levels, in the Near East, Europe, Continental US and Armenia. The AMAA also provides generous and abundant financial aid to schools and institutions of higher education in the Near East, including Haigazian University and the Near East School of Theology in Beirut.

“These scholarships also represent an investment in our youth and in building the future leadership of our communities here in North America and around the world. We congratulate all the recipients for all their accomplishments and look forward to what they will achieve in the years ahead,” said Cherkezian.

The scholarships granted this year were provided from several AMAA scholarship funds established over the years to help students in need. Students may request applications from AMAA Headquarters in Paramus, NJ beginning in January of each year. The deadline to submit applications for the 2022-2023 academic year is May 1, 2022.

Founded in 1918, the Armenian Missionary Association of America serves the religious, educational and social needs of Armenian communities in 24 countries around the world including Armenia and Artsakh. For additional information, visit www.amaa.org.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Summeet of International Contemporary Dance in Armenia

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special for the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — On August 23-29, an unprecedented and very important event in the history of Armenian culture took place in Yerevan — the International Summer Festival of Contemporary Dance. The title of it is “Summeet” - short for “summer meetings.” Since it is a play on the word “summit,” as well as the Armenian word “samit” (dill), the symbol of the festival became the image of that plant.

The festival was organized by the Cannon Dance House in St. Petersburg (headed by Vadim Kasparov), the “Sar-er” (Mountains) Cultural Association of Yerevan (headed by Erna Revazova), the Opera Studio of the Yerevan Conservatory (artistic director Hasmik Papyan, director Hayk Vardanyan) and the Balmanukyan Dance Project (headed by Arman Balmanukyan). The festival was supported by the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports.

For seven days the Armenian dance community had a unique opportunity to watch modern dance shows, performances and dance-themed films, attend lectures, participate in master classes of dance teachers from different countries, watch... Yerevan Conservatory Opera Studio, the Small Theater of the Yerevan National Center of Aesthetics and the Theater of Young Spectators hosted big and small performances of Armenian and Russian choreographers. Contemporary dance, indeed, has never been so comprehensively presented in the Armenian world.

The Opening

The festival opened with a full-length performance of “Black Garden” by the Cannon Dance House of St. Petersburg. The choreographer, Valeria Kasparova (aka



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seen as a choreographic opposition to the common evil. The day before the performance, Valeria took the dancers to Yerablur — the cemetery of war victims; the performers entered the emotional realm of their stage characters, and these young Russian girls were in an extremely emotional state even after the performance. By the way, last June “Black Garden” was presented at the “Nord Dance” festival of modern choreography held in Petrozavodsk (Russia), equally shedding tears from both Armenian and Azeri spectators present in the hall.

The Speakers

Three representatives of modern Russian choreology took part in the festival. Svetlana Ulanovskaya coordinated the meetings and questions and answers between the artists and the audience after each performance, providing professional discussions and proficient analysis of what was just has been watched. The other two experts, Ekaterina Vasenina and Irina Sirotkina, gave public speeches:

both had already been to Armenia and were somewhat familiar with the local field. Vasenina presented the current state of contemporary dance in Russia, emphasizing that in Moscow and St. Petersburg the low-cost performance is more active and interesting (although ten groups of modern dance are state-funded), while stage dance is most popular in the regions. The speaker singled out three points. a. today anyone can stage a modern dance performance, regardless of the availability of a diploma, b. anything can become a modern dance performance, c. economic segregation defines the genre segregation of modern dance.

Irina Sirotkina, a historian of modern dance in Russia, in her lecture “Modern Dance. Interrupted Flight” introduced Inna Chernetskaya, a representative of Russian contemporary dance, and her Armenian student, Srubhi Lisitsyan, who later became an eminent figure in Armenian dance and choreology. In her turn, Chernetskaya was a student of Mary Wigman, German modern dancer, thus, according to Sirotkina, there is a direct link between German expressionism and Armenian modern dance, thus attributed Lisitsyan’s practice of modern dance to the influence of her teacher. Choreologist Nazenik Sargsyan, a long-time researcher of Lisitsyan’s life and work, made additions and run discussion with the speaker, objected to the mentioned opinion and substantiated her objection. As we see, such festivals also contribute to instructive professional dialogues.

Footfwa of Mobility

Outstanding guests give life and color to every art festival, creating a festive atmosphere or intensifies it only by their presence. Such a character for the “Summeet” was the Swiss dancer and choreographer Footfwa de Imobilitéé. His pseudonym translates as Footfwa of Immobility, however, this 52-year-old young man was the exact opposite of his name. Even when he was motionless, he was like moving and dancing. Footfwa, this always smiling, super-positive artiste with unusual drive, has been traveling the world for several years with his unprecedented initiative, “Peace Dancewalk.” He walks dancing or dances walking in different countries of Europe, Asia and Africa, with or without his supporters, with or without music, with or without clothes, thus covering more than two thousand kilometers, to which were added the last few kilometers in Yerevan, accompanied by Armenian musical instruments, *zurna* and *dhol*. Planet Earth is a great dance hall for Footfwa, all humans are his dance partners, and the mankind dancing together is the guarantor of peace, mutual respect and tolerance. A documentary about Footfwa’s footsteps was shown at the Small Theater, during which the elegant and charming Alizée Sourbé repeated the dance moves on the screen or improvising, meanwhile telling about her experience of dancing.

Old-Fashioned Modern

Let me note that I also use the commonly used definition of “modern” or “contemporary dance” with some reservations: perhaps it would be more correct to use the words “innovative,” “experimental,” as it is not correct to describe a phenomenon with more than a century of history as “modern” (“Modern dance is so old-fashioned!” once Samuel Goldwyn exclaimed).

English dancer Deborah Bull once said that she enjoys the freedom of modern dance as well as the constraints of classical dance. Watching the works of different choreographers, one can be convinced that modern dance also has limitations and constraints in its seeming freedom; repetitions of dance movements are inevitable, especially in long performances. As a result, some performances seemed unnecessarily long and had several endings. This is a universal phenomenon in the modern dance world. But what is important here, is the stylistic diversity, which was happily present at the Summeet. It was wonderful to



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Vaneh Kasyants), who rediscovered her Armenian roots also through national dances, one more time expressed her heritage through modern choreography language. The show has been presented during the war in Artsakh (no matter which one), aka “black garden” (*kara bagh* in Persian) from the perspective of women and children. The ominous sounds of planes and bombs, the loud music that intentionally rushes from the stage to the audience, the sometimes considered reverberation of some songs, the opposite effects of the stage lighting created a very emotional atmosphere, especially for our war-torn society. The choreographer did not use Armenian dance movements: in fact, if we take out Armenian music, it can be

erina Vasenina and Irina Sirotkina, gave public speeches: both had already been to Armenia and were somewhat familiar with the local field. Vasenina presented the current state of contemporary dance in Russia, emphasizing that in Moscow and St. Petersburg the low-cost performance is more active and interesting (although ten groups of modern dance are state-funded), while stage dance is most popular in the regions. The speaker singled out three points. a. today anyone can stage a modern dance performance, regardless of the availability of a diploma, b. anything can become a modern dance performance, c. economic segregation defines the genre segregation of modern dance.



COMMUNITY NEWS

be convinced again that there is a huge potential of modern dance among Armenian dancers, that next to the already established names of choreographers (Arsen Mehrabyan, Ara Asaturyan, Arman Balmanukyan, Lilit Hakobyan) new, young talents stand out (Anush Sargsyan, Lusine Davtyan, Nina Hayrapetyan, Arshavir Muradyan). This potential was also significant in the works of dramatic theater directors who performed modern dance performances and did not lag behind their choreographer counterparts. Their inclusion in Summeet gave additional colors to the festival: I mean Arsen Khachatryan's "Offline" and Vahan Badalyan's "La vie en rose" ("Life in Pink") performances with the eminent participation of both experienced and new young artists.

As for the performances presented by the Russian guests, we must once again mention and single out the creative style of Valeria Kasparova (see my interview with her in the *Mirror-Spectator* here: <https://mirror-spectator.com/2020/09/24/valeria-kasparova-vaneh-kasyants-modernity-is-love-and-respect-for-the-past/>). She gave moments of excitement to the Yerevan audience also with her performance of "Voices," sensibly adapting the movements of modern dance to the Armenian traditional music.

By the way, let us mention that the brilliant performance of Russian dancers might arouse good envy, however, for the sake of justice, let us also note that Armenian dancers are not inferior to their northern counterparts in



The dancers assembled

too. The youth of the twenty-first century are taking on the challenges of mankind in a globalizing world, the first of which is the problem of human communication. "Babylon" by Valeria Kasparova and Arman Balmanukyan, a unique choreographic "cacophony" "Communication Disruption" by Anush Sargsyan or the characters of aforementioned "Offline," a boy and a girl highly dependent on the latest technologies, depict choreographically the complexities and contradictions of today's human communication. And for the Armenian artistes, unfortunately, the war topic is still relevant today ("Black Garden" by Valeria Kasparova, "# 44" by Ara Asaturyan and Arman Julhakyan): all that remains is to wish that our artistes (and not only) never touch upon that topic again.

For years, people have rightly mentioned the lack of a proper choreographic stage in Yerevan. The Summeet showed that such a platform could be the Opera Studio under the auspices of the Yerevan Conservatory. Its directors Hasmik Papyan and Hayk Vardanyan, being representatives of vocal art, were always present at all the performances, ensuring not only the responsible attitude and positive aura of the hosts, but also emphasizing the need for the presence of representatives from different

spheres at the important cultural event. Moreover, one of the organizers of the festival, Arman Balmanukyan, did not hesitate to clean and polish the stage with a stick after the performances. This is a change of mind, from which all the positive changes in the world begin.

Of course, there were also organizational flaws that are unavoidable, especially for the first one. For instance, in a significant part of the plays, there was an oral speech, which, without being translated, often caused difficulties to understand. Let's hope that the organizers will learn a lesson from them, whose efforts, in the end, gave the desired result, giving at least a small part of the post-war Armenian society a fest of high art.

The festival ended with another pleasant newness. A new Armenian brand, Tateon apple drink, was introduced to the public at the closing reception. This strong alcohol beverage was started to be produced in Vardenis, during the wartime, by singer and businessman Armen Karapetyan, who lived in France for many years and now established in Armenia. A new festival, new names, new drink... new hopes.

The Breath of Dance Fest

At the festival, dancers from Voronezh, Igor Prudsky and Nikolay Gavrilin presented the "ARRRR" show, choreographed by Pavel Glukhov, during which they take water from bottles and splash each other.

This trick, typical of the comic film, seems nothing to do with choreography, but the boys did it so diversely, refreshingly, provocatively, humorously, that, it seemed to be pleasant to watch if they empty two more bottles.

As Vadim Kasparov, one of the organizers of this dance fest, says: "My dream is that the whole world says: we want us to be 'like Armenia.' And I am sure that everything will work out!"



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their openness and understanding of this type of art. Some may be only technically.

New Trends On- and Off-Stage

Bringing together the performances of Armenian and Russian choreographers, one can notice other similarities

representatives of vocal art, were always present at all the performances, ensuring not only the responsible attitude and positive aura of the hosts, but also emphasizing the need for the presence of representatives from different



The call 2 - Tigran Arakelyan for Summeet Dance Festival

Arts & Culture

‘Cliffs of Freedom’ Now Available on Apple TV, Amazon & Google Play

To celebrate the bicentennial of Greece’s Revolutionary War, the National Hellenic Society (NHS) announced recently that the film “Cliffs of Freedom” is now available to watch on major platforms including Amazon Prime, Apple, and Google Play. The film is also available to audiences with Greek subtitles.

The epic nature of “Cliffs of Freedom” will make audiences reflect, feel, think, and be inspired.

It is a historical drama romance movie based and inspired on a novel written by Marianne Metropoulos, *Daughter of Destiny*. The novel served as the springboard to the film produced by Marianne and Dean Metropoulos with Marianne serving as co-writer of the screenplay.

Marianne’s story is an amalgam of accounts and events that transpired during Greece’s Revolutionary War. The lives, struggles, sacrifices and saga of the Greeks is brilliantly on full display, symbolic of the resiliency, resolve and grit of the Greek people determined to be free. Their deep faith, values and love of family, culture and heritage marks the first time their story is shown on the silver screen in epic form. The film’s production values, acting, score and the caliber of cast and crew have created a motion picture that has riveted audiences.

“Cliffs of Freedom” story centers on an ill-fated romance between a beautiful young Greek village girl set in the beginning days of Greece’s Revolutionary war. The girl, played by veteran actress, Tania Raymonde, falls in love with and a handsome and conflicted Ottoman Colonel, portrayed by actor Jan Uddin. The Colonel is mentored by a Greek elder and advisor to the Empire, brilliantly portrayed by the late Academy-Award winning actor, Christopher Plummer. The brutality of the war comes to a head when the Greek village girl’s family is massacred, she swears revenge directly implicating the man she loves which ultimately leads to a battle that changes the course of history for Greece and her people.

The story is set in Valtetsi, a small village in Arcadia in Greece’s Peloponnese. As the Greek Revolutionary War looms large in smaller Ottoman strongholds including Valtetsi, the hero of Greece’s War of Independence, General Theodoros Kolokotronis calculates that following successful campaigns in Levdi, Doliana and Grana a win in the stronghold of Tripolitsa would serve as a bellwether symbol of Greece’s resolve to win the fight for freedom. After an incessant and steady campaign, Tripolitsa falls on September 23, 1821. A day marking the beginning of the end of Ottoman’s rule and four centuries of subjugation over Greece.

Net proceeds from the film benefits the NHS’ Heritage Greece Program which has reconnected and sponsored 500+ college aged students of Greek descent on a life-changing shared experience with a complement of students from the American College of Greece in Athens.



Asmik Grigorian

A Soprano With a Bottomless Appetite For Risk

By Joshua Barone

BAYREUTH, Germany (*New York Times*) — Asmik Grigorian was hungry after all. The soprano, whose debut at the Bayreuth Festival the evening before had been met with a roaring ovation, initially ordered an espresso to help her wake up. But then she wanted more.

“Do you have ice cream?” she asked a waiter.

“Chocolate?” he responded. “Strawberry, vanilla —”

“All,” she said, cutting him off. “All of it.”

He returned with a coupe glass nearly overflowing with five scoops of different flavors. And she ate it all.

Grigorian, 40, approached dessert the way she does opera: with daring, total commitment and a bottomless appetite. She has a voice by turns steely and lyrical, immense and delicate, and one of the fiercest dramatic talents in the field.

Her Bayreuth debut, as Senta in Wagner’s “Der Fliegende Holländer,” is one of many high-profile engagements that have followed in the years since she stunned the opera world as the title antiheroine of Strauss’s “Salome” at the Salzburg Festival in 2018. Record labels came calling. So did major companies like the Royal Opera in London, where she will star in Janacek’s “Jenufa” next month, as well as Salzburg, where she is becoming a fixture and will return on Wednesday to join a run of Strauss’s “Elektra.”

“She’s the complete package,” said Franz Welser-Möst, who conducted “Salome” and will lead Grigorian again in “Elektra.” “She has a great voice, she’s a fantastic actress, she’s extremely beautiful, she’s humble, she’s 100-percent discipline, she never comes late to a rehearsal. You don’t meet someone like that very often.”

Like any great performer, the director Barrie Kosky said, “she carries her own lighting equipment within herself.”

“She’s not quite of this world,” he added. “I always think she’ll go back to Planet Grigorian when she’s had enough of us here.”

Growing up in Vilnius, Lithuania, Grigorian’s home life was intensely musical. Her father was the tenor Gegham Grigorian; her mother, the soprano Irena Milkeviciute. Opera was omnipresent, and by 5 she was studying piano.

“I was never going to be an opera singer,” she recalled, “but step by step that is exactly what happened.”

Her first teachers were her parents; even now, Grigorian turns to her mother for advice when taking on a new role. Rigorous training followed at a specialized arts school, then the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater, before Grigorian dived headlong into professional life.

She debuted as Donna Anna in Mozart’s “Don Giovanni” and immediately followed it with Violetta in Verdi’s “La Traviata.” If anything was guiding her career, it was motherhood. She had given birth to a son while still a student, and she was interested in whatever work would keep her busy — and paid.

“I was doing everything,” Grigorian said. “And for many years I could not get out of this circle of doing too-hard roles, too much. It was never perfect, because it just can’t see RISK, page 16

Books

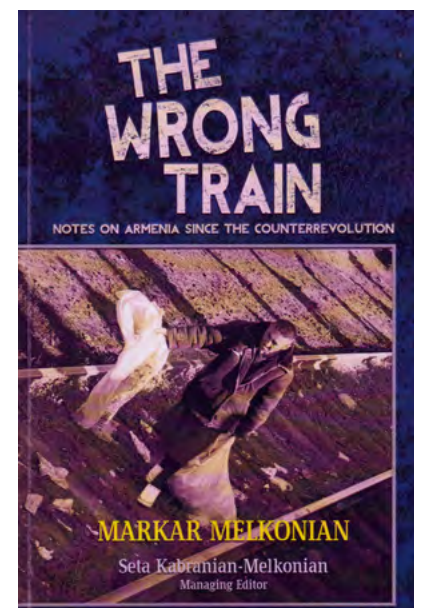
Woes of Capitalism In Armenia Exposed in Markar Melkonian’s Book *The Wrong Train*

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

The attention of Armenians worldwide is focused understandably on Armenia and Artsakh’s tense relations with Azerbaijan at present. Markar Melkonian, with a book published in 2020 prior to the war, treats longstanding fundamental questions of economics and politics affecting Armenian society that also deserve attention. In *The Wrong Train: Notes on Armenia since the Counterrevolution* (Los Angeles: Sardarabad Press), he consistently argues that the post-independence choice of a capitalistic economy and neoliberal ideology continues to harm Armenia and Armenians.

The Wrong Train is a slim 186-page paperback volume bringing together articles published by Melkonian on Hetq Online, the internet site of the



Investigative Journalists of Armenia, between 2010 and 2018, together with a new introduction. Seta Kabranian-Melkonian is the managing editor of the book.

The author received a doctorate from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1997, and is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at California State University, Northridge. He has authored a number of books, including *Richard Rorty’s Politics: Liberalism at the End of the American Century* (Humanities Books, 1999), *My Brother’s Road: An American’s Fateful Journey to Armenia*, a riveting book about his younger brother Monte Melkonian (2005, 2007), and several college textbooks published in recent years.

Decline of Living Standards Post-Independence under Capitalism

Melkonian peppers his articles with a seemingly unlimited number of depressing statistics indicating the

continued on next page



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decline in the living standards of the citizens of the Republic of Armenia. In 2010, some fifty percent of the population lived in poverty, and poverty continues to be widespread today. Privatization of land depopulated the countryside while real estate speculation pushed housing costs in Yerevan beyond what many can afford. Women and children have suffered the most, points out Markarian, due to the dismantlement of public schools, clinics, childcare programs and in general a social safety net.

A UNICEF report on the 25th anniversary of the end of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic reported that 1/3 of children in Armenia were “poor and deprived.” More specifically, 1/3 of children five years old and under are nutritionally deprived. Oxfam’s Armenian office the same year reported that 60 percent of the Armenian population overall is malnourished.

In the Soviet period an average of \$500-\$600 was spent per student, but according to a 1997 United Nations report, this dropped to \$30. School dropout rates grew 250 percent a year from 2002 to 2005 according to another source. Children in the poorest families are forced to work in the fields, beg, sell trinkets in the streets or collect recyclables from garbage, instead of going to school or playing.

Women’s role in politics declined in independent Armenia. In 1985, 35 percent of the deputies elected to the Supreme Soviet in Armenia were women. In 1999, only 4 women were members of the Armenian National Assembly, composing some 3.6 percent of its membership. While it is correct that women still remain grossly unrepresented in the cabinet and most parts of government, it should also be noted, though it is not mentioned in the book, that representation in parliament increased again over time. It reached over 23 percent by the beginning of 2021, and returned to the levels of Soviet times in the June 2021 election, through which 37 women were elected out of 107 deputies, or roughly 35 percent once again.

The population of Armenia nearly quadrupled under Soviet rule to a peak of 3.3 million, while it has declined by at least one million under the current republic. Families in independent Armenia have been pulled apart due to dislocation and unemployment, with many males seeking jobs abroad and leaving women and children behind. The Republican Party when Serzh Sargsyan was president only paid verbal respect to the conditions necessary for families to thrive. It included in its platform, Melkonian notes, that “the basis of Armenian society is a traditional family,” which is simply a way, he explains, “not to convey meaning but to numb brains” about what was happening.

Causes of the Decline

The primary cause of the aforementioned decline is the capitalist economic system, Melkonian argues. Corruption existed in Soviet Armenia, but capitalist privatization and “reforms” led to an explosion of thuggery, extortion and exploitation far beyond what Armenians had seen before, Melkonian wrote, which is not simply due to the inheritance of a “mysteriously inherited” Soviet mentality. Several decades of foreign-directed reform only led to more sacrifices and burdens on the poor, he stated, yet Western agencies and free market proponents consider this approach successful. Melkonian quoted *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, who considered Armenia and Azerbaijan among only five countries that had successful capitalist economies from the entire post-Soviet region in 2014, and then speculated what Armenian capitalists might be thinking: “If this is what a successful capitalist economy looks like, then the question naturally arises: *What was the point of letting capitalists take over the country in the first place?*”

Melkonian places the socioeconomic situation in Armenia in world context, and in more than one chapter/article points to the increasing gap between the superrich and the rest of the world. He notes that in 2014, the wealth of the 80 richest individuals in the world equaled that of one-half of the rest of the world’s population. The same increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few is taking place in Armenia.

Under the first three presidents, various ways to make the free market economy more “efficient” were proposed. During this period, there has been no true political opposition in the Republic of Armenia, Melkonian states, which could deal with the deeper problems of the economy. The opposition parties were similarly supporters of neoliberalism, implying privatization of public property, cutbacks in state provision of healthcare, education, public transportation, and removal of environmental and other regulations. “The overall effect,” Melkonian said, “in Armenia as elsewhere, has been an enormous transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top.”

The reason, he concludes, “is that successive administrations have been dominated by cliques that have in com-

mon the fact that they own and control a large part of the country’s productive wealth.” In other words, he said, “a class that comprises a tiny minority of the population has come to wield a near-monopoly on economic and political power.” In turn, these plutocrats use public institutions to advance their own interests and power.

Shrill nationalist rhetoric of groups like Sasna Tsrer, he stresses, is not an alternative to neoliberalism but too often camouflage for the same ideas.

‘Velvet Revolution’ Merely a Change in Administration

Melkonian does not find the “Velvet Revolution” to be a true revolution, as it did not bring a new economic class to power. He exclaimed in 2018: “What has taken place in Armenia since [Serzh] Sargsyan’s resignation was neither a revolution nor a counterrevolution; *it was just a change of administration,*” and predicted that primarily stylistic changes would be made.

In his book’s introduction, written a year or two later, Melkonian quotes Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in January 2019 assuring businessmen in Zurich that “Armenian citizens do not want more redistribution of income. They have seen enough of that.” He observed, “But Pashinyan has turned reality upside down,” since “in Armenia, as elsewhere, redistribution has not taken place from the rich to the poor; on the contrary, in the past decades the wealthiest minority has massively expropriated the poor and working-class majority.” Armenia has become one of the most unequal countries on earth during its period of independence. Consequently, he sarcastically points out, Armenians have indeed seen enough of such redistribution.

Pashinyan, he concludes, is prescribing the same neoliberal policies of his predecessors, the results of which are plain to see.

How to Improve Economic and Political Conditions

The only broad solution to these woes that Melkonian offers is to organize resistance to free market reforms which hurt the majority of the population. He cites the resistance in the US to the attempts of politicians such as Governor Scott Walker in Wisconsin as an encouraging example. Traditional constituencies with independent organizational presence, like labor unions, played an important role in this, he adds, just as in the past popular resistance led to the abolition of child labor, the eight-hour work week, universal suffrage, consumer safety legislation, and many other achievements.

In a chapter written prior to the Velvet Revolution, he said, “the best counterforce against the ongoing abuses by Armenia’s plutocrats is resistance from the bottom – from the streets, social media, offices, factories, and public squares.” The next step would be “to build a common vision and a common organization to fight against plutocracy altogether – and to fight for workers’ power.” Melkonian finds that militant unions and a party of labor is necessary to force the ruling class to give up state power. A “mass-based democratic opposition that has built a sustainable institutional presence on the ground and that presents a realistic way forward” is necessary.

Instead of the market model of democracy that ratifies the existing control of Armenia by wealthy oligarchs, Melkonian proposes deliberative democracy, through which “open discussion and debate *transform personal preferences*, creating new conceptions of the greater good.”

He hoped for “a generation of working-class Armenians who will break with the delusions of their parents and grandparents as thoroughly as the counterrevolutionary generation twenty-five years ago blotted the lives and hopes of their Soviet Armenian predecessors.” His ultimate goal is the replacement of capitalist rule by socialism, or workers’ power.

Socialism

Melkonian sketches out how he sees a possible non-capitalist state with workers in power as a class controlling the state. Economic planning exists in any state today, but if workers are in control it will benefit the poor, and those in the middle instead of just a small minority of the rich. The means of production do not have to be owned by the state, he explains, to have a socialist system. Private ownership by self-employed workers is possible, but some large sectors like energy, transportation, mining, banking, finance and insurance should be socialized. Eventually production for the market will decrease and be replaced by production for use value. Land also should be removed gradually from private ownership. He wants a multiparty representative democracy within the workers’ state. Cuba is one of the states which Melkonian holds up to Armenians as a socialist example despite decades of US obstruction and embargo.

Rare for an American-born Armenian, Melkonian re-



Markar Melkonian holding a copy of his book at Abril Bookstore in Glendale, California

mains a staunch defender of the early period of Soviet communism, though a critic of its many flaws in its later decades. On the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917, Melkonian penned an article of praise on its spurring of workers’ rebellions, ending Russian participation in World War I. Its heirs, he observes, hastened the end of colonial regimes, liberated women, defeated fascism, fed the hungry, extended lifespans, pioneered scientific and technological research, and so forth. He defends Lenin against blame for Stalin’s brutalities. Melkonian looks to the revolution as a source of inspiration for the future, stating: “Perhaps the best and brightest of a rising generation will reclaim the vibrant spirit of the October Revolution.”

Foreign Policy Issues

While primarily focusing on domestic Armenian politics and economics, Melkonian occasionally touches on foreign policy issues. He notes that “Foreign aid is an instrument of foreign policy,” and gives the examples of the large roles played by USAID and Western-funded NGOs in Armenia. Furthermore, he finds the promotion of civil society “a distraction from the struggle for freedom.”

He warns of US intervention with financial aid to strengthen trust in the Armenian electoral process through new technical processes, pointing out that “many American voters themselves do not trust the American electoral system.” He wrote about the US embassy’s announcement about its program, stating that it “is not really about improving Armenia’s electoral system. We know that it is just another propaganda stunt, a tit-for-tat against Moscow, another lesson in obedience for the instruction of the natives.” Melkonian also in a separate chapter wrote about US intervention in the elections of other countries, including in the run-up to the 1996 presidential election in Russia in support of Boris Yeltsin.

Melkonian presents the destruction wreaked in Iraq and Syria since 1990 by the US, which also largely destroyed the local Armenian communities, turning most Armenians there into refugees. In fact, he notes that among the 30,000 Iraqi Armenians uprooted, some had fled to Syria, where they were made refugees a second time. He then criticizes Armenia for sending its own soldiers as part of the Coalition of the Willing, thus giving some additional legitimacy to the plans of American neoconservatives to destroy the armies of Syria and Iraq, despite their harmful results for Armenians. Ominously for Armenia, Melkonian wrote, Iran was the next country in the sights of the US neocons.

For the Republic of Armenia too, Melkonian finds that the growing Russophobia in the Armenian opposition prior to the Velvet Revolution, was contrary to Armenia’s vital security interests, while the US agrees in general with Turkey that Armenia and the rest of the South Caucasus should be integrated into the “dominant imperialist system” as Melkonian calls it, within Ankara’s sphere of interest. He warns readers of “the old dangerous fantasy of Uncle Sam as Armenia’s savior.”

While many readers may not agree with Melkonian’s admiration of the early Soviet Union and Cuba, or his ultimate goal of socialism, they still can benefit from his revealing analysis of the effects of the practice of neoliberalism in Armenia. Understandably, there is a bit of repetition in the book’s chapters, which after all were initially written as independent articles, and the language could use additional minor editing.

The English edition is available from Abril Bookstore in Glendale and various online vendors, while an Armenian-language edition, ՄԻԱԼ ԳՆԱՅՔԸ. Գրառումներ հեռահաղորդակցության համակարգում (2021) is available from Zangak Publishing House (www.zangak.am) in Yerevan.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Mary Perch's tabouleh

Fresno's Mary Perch, Beloved Matriarch and Dedicated Community Volunteer

FRESNO — “My gifted mother, Mary Elizabeth Bedrosian, was born in Fresno, California to Beatrice Onan Bedrosian and Hovsep (Harry Avedis) Bedrosian on May 7, 1920. She was the oldest of five siblings — Mary, Nevart, Peter, George, and Johnny. She grew up on the family farm in West Fresno located on Jensen and Fig Avenues. Their home was filled with laughter, lots of Armenian food, music, family, and good friends,” says Melene. “My mother’s family lived

on that small farm with a mother, father, five children (all talented cooks), grandmother, grandfather, and two aunts living and working together. Their perpetual garden would produce a bounty of fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs for the entire family for many years,” she adds.

“In the 1940s, Saturday nights were Kheyman and Lamb Chop Nights, and featured lots of music, dancing, talking, and singing,” she says. “Sunday afternoons were reserved for weekly gatherings of the neighbors and family members who enjoyed Grandpa Hovsep playing his zourna, with the family joining in ethnic music and dancing.” (See: “Hovsep Joseph Bedrosian: Master Zourna Player,” at: <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/sound-archive>.)

“My mother attended Fresno Colony Elementary School and Washington Union High School, and was involved in high school

clubs and activities, including playing the piano, bass, and the tuba in the school’s marching band.” Mary graduated from Washington Union High School, and was later introduced to her future husband, Jivon John Perch, who was born in Turkey in 1912. They were married on August 24, 1940 at the Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church in Fresno, and were blessed with two children, Basil and Melene.

“My father’s father, Harry Perch, immigrated to the United States in his twenties

from Turkey, leaving his wife and three children in his homeland for seven years until he could bring them to America. Upon arrival, Harry founded California Sun Dry Company on Fulton Street in downtown Fresno, in the back of Illbeg’s Market. He later built a new plant under the same name on Cedar and Ventura Avenue, where his two brothers-in-law, Simon and Manuel Barsam, joined him. Eventually, Harry and his sons, George and Jivon, started what would become Sunnyland Bulghur Company in 1935 in a metal building on a large commercial lot located at 1435 Gearhart Avenue in Fresno.”

“Grandpa Harry was a creative artist, designing and fabricating cloth. He could pick up any piece of fabric and tell you exactly how it was made. His life began in America working as a farm hand on the Koligian Ranch. From there he ended up milling grain. He would process the product (bulghur wheat) by hand, sacked it, and carried two hundred pound sacks on his back and delivered them to his many customers. The old Hanoian’s Market, located on Railroad Avenue at the time, was one of his first customers.”

“World War II was a time of significant growth for the plant because of a defense contract that required the use of cracked wheat to feed American soldiers, and to sandblast aluminum airplane parts,” says Melene. “The family’s original bulghur process used the traditional Middle Eastern method. Almost immediately, Sunnyland Bulghur Company became known as the premium bulghur wheat manufacturer and, with a growing demand for their high quality product, the Perch family perfected a continuous method of processing that was unique in the industry. My father and uncle sold the company to the Orlando family in 1977, who continue to run the company today.”**

As a young wife and mother, Mary led an active and busy life with her two young children. She served as a den mother for the Boy Scouts and a Brownie troop leader. She was involved with the Winchell Elementary School PTA. She made lifelong friends and continued friendships while lunching with the Winchell ladies well into her 90’s. Mary served as PTA president at Sequoia Junior High



Mary Perch received many awards for her dedication, service and culinary contributions at the Fresno Masonic Lodge in the 1980s.

and continued with the PTA at Roosevelt High School. Through the years, Mary and her husband Jivon enjoyed weekly card games playing Tripoly with their friends. Mary also found time to participate and guide her children in DeMolay and Jobs Daughters activities. She was active in The Daughters of the Nile and held many leadership positions, Melene adds.

Mary believed in community participation, volunteering, and service to others. She became an active member of the Eastern Star in Fresno, following her husband Jivon in the Masonic life. “After that, my mother was asked to create and cook the meals for the ‘stated’ monthly meetings to generate more attendance and support. She planned, shopped for, and prepared the meals (where sometimes up to 200 guests would attend), and decorated the dining room and the tables, while my dad would be in charge of the desserts at the end of each meeting,” says Melene. “My mother worked with dedication for over 45 years, and adored the hard-working kitchen crew and volunteers who worked by her side to make the Masonic dinners such a huge success in Fresno.”

Mary also served as president of the Las Palmas Dates, a Masonic women’s service organization, and was in her late 80’s when she gave up her cooking and kitchen duties for the Masonic dinners. “The Las Palmas Dates met while the male members were in their meeting. Throughout her blessed life, my mother touched many peoples’ lives with her warm, loving personality, and generosity of spirit — and with the many unforgettable dinners she served at the Las Palmas Masonic Lodge that members still talk about to this day,” says Melene.

“My mother was a self-taught cook with an excellent sense of style and taste. Her dishes had to be made with the freshest ingredients and seasoned correctly. Our family recipes have been down from generation to generation. The measurement for the older recipes was from mouth to ear, of the eyes, or atch-koo-chop, as my grandmother said. My children and grandchildren make the same Armenian foods our family has made for years,” says Melene. “My mother took pride in designing eye-catching menus and decorations for each holiday event, luncheon, dinner, picnic, and family celebration. On many occasions, memorable meals, appetizers (mezze), salads, snacks and home-made desserts came from her kitchen to the dining room table to be enjoyed by family and close friends.”

continued on next page



Home Again

Mari Firkatian’s Winning Recipe: Add One Part History, One Part Cookbook

By Christopher Atamian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

On one end of the culinary spectrum, traditional cookbooks are often a hodgepodge of recipes arranged by ingredient (a particular meat or spice), meal type (breakfast or dinner, appetizer or dessert) or geographical provenance (Chinese, French). They may be cross-referenced or listed alphabetically, but you pretty much know what you’re getting ahead of time. Alice Bezjian’s *Complete Armenian Cookbook* is one such trusted classic. At the other end of the spectrum, are learned disquisitions on



Cooking with the family

culinary history, that link history proper or some aspect of it to the recipes being presented. The recent *Lavash* (Leahy, lee and Zaga) falls into a relatively new category: the sleek cookbook that we’ve come to expect at the



local Barnes and Noble. There are also restaurant-specific books such as Aline Kamakian’s recipes from *Mayrig* restaurant in Beirut. And now from historian Mari Firkatian, we have something wonderfully new, a history book and family biography that is also a fine cookbook. *Home again: Armenian Recipes from the Ottoman Empire* first traces the history of Firkatian’s family in historic Armenia followed by its post-Genocide existence in Bulgaria and then America.

Curiously, the recipes also come at the end, although she does include some of the foods eaten by her family in the text preceding the recipes proper. On the food side of things, as Firkatian herself notes, Bulgaria presents an interesting example, since some of the food eaten in this Balkan country like *dolmas*, *sarmas* and *paklavas*, overlaps with Armenian cooking.. So delightfully enough in the present volume we learn the history of not one but two remarkable countries: Armenia and Bulgaria. Firkatian tells us for example, that the Byzantines often sent Armenians — accused of the Paulician heresy or simply considered too powerful or numerous — to the outskirts of the empire in Bulgaria, so that large populations of Armenians existed in Bulgaria since well before the Middle Ages. They eventually intermarried with the local populations. Similarly, in later centuries, the Ottomans often

sent Bulgarians into exile to Anatolia, particularly to the Armenian city of Diyarbakir. There the only other Christians were Armenian, so that Armenian clergy were often called to provide succor the newly-arrived Bulgarians. A wonderful expression even arose in Bulgarian: *Otid se oplatchina armanskiat pap!* Or “Go complain to the Armenian priest!”

In the first one hundred and twenty pages or so of Firkatian’s text, we also become knowledgeable in the positive and negative aspects of life in Communist Bulgaria. There are remarkable passages — such as a grandfather who fishes by throwing dynamite into the Black Sea, and warm anecdotes as well, such as hunting for mussels along the Black seashore. Firkatian returns to Bulgaria as an adult to find a quickly modern country, so that the text reads a bit like a primer in 20th century Bulgarian history. But it’s specifically the traditions of Bulgarian Armenians that Firkatian spends the most time on — the churches, clubs and women’s groups, many of whose ranks were swollen with refugees after the Armenian Geocide of 1915. These are all things that she will find again when the family emigrates one last time to Connecticut — a local Armenian family that puts them up until they can find a place to live, another that helps her mother find a first job. In an age in America when hummus and yogurt were considered exotic, so too were most of the foods that her family prepared. Meanwhile, Firkatian is an avid reader and straight-A student who eventually earns a PhD. And through this all, it’s the stories and food of her grandmother *Medzmama Mariam* — a remarkable cook, rug maker and woman of seemingly endless talents and love — that shine through. Paeans to a lost relative or friend are sometimes overdone, but here it is all to the author’s credit, as she lays her book out from the beginning as a love story to food, Armenia — and her grandmother!

The cookbook section of *Home Again* is equally compelling, with easy-to-follow recipes and elegant pictures to accompany them. Some of the recipes are easily recognizable: *manti*, *tanabour* and *vospov yalanchi dolma*, for example. But others were discoveries as well, such as *Tut-mach about* (Malgara chicken soup) or *silivri khavurma*, a well-spiced version of potted meat. There are salads, soups, kebabs, pilafs and desserts galore but also delicious preserves (sour cherry, a favorite!) and pickled meat recipes as well. But most of all, *Home Again* provides an elegant mix of biography and food—read the history like you would any other well-written family memoir. Then when you are hungry one night, turn to the back and *Egoor djan, gera, hamov eh, votch?*

Buy *Home Again: Armenian Recipes from the Ottoman Empire*: <https://www.amazon.com/Home-Again-Armenian-Recipes-Ottoman/dp/172264429X>

from previous page

In later years, Mary enjoyed keeping fit and taking special care of her skin. She enjoyed playing cards with her sister and sisters-in-law and a dear aunt for many years. She became a regular at Fresno’s Peppermill Restaurant, and Table 20 was always reserved for the many cheerful luncheons she shared with her dear girlfriends. Mary and Jivon found time for dancing lessons, and continued cooking and entertaining for their family and friends. “My mother liked to jump rope and loved shopping at the Estée Lauder counter at Macy’s in Fresno.”

Though she was the oldest of five children, Mary was the last remaining member of her family when she passed away on March 14, 2020. She is survived by her two devoted children, seven grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren. Here are two of her favorite bulgur recipes collected by Melene, who has just written her own family cookbook. “Bulghur, one of the world’s original fast foods, is our family’s favorite ingredient because of our family business,” adds Melene.***

Mary’s Tabbouleh

- INGREDIENTS:
- 2 medium bunches parsley, finely chopped
 - 1 medium bunch green onions, chopped
 - 3 medium tomatoes, seeded and chopped
 - 1/2 cup fine (#1) bulghur
 - 1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
 - 1/2 cup olive oil, to taste
 - 1 tablespoon fresh mint, chopped
 - Aleppo pepper to taste
 - Salt and pepper to taste
 - 1 teaspoon sugar (optional)

Mix all ingredients in a medium bowl and chill for several hours or overnight. Check seasonings. Serve cold. Serves 4-6.

Summer Bulghur Salad

- INGREDIENTS:
- 2 medium cucumbers, chopped
 - 2 large tomatoes, chopped
 - 2 medium bell peppers, 1 green and 1 red, seeded and chopped
 - 1 medium red onion, chopped
 - 1 cup fine (#1) bulghur
 - 1 cup your favorite vinegar and oil salad dressing
 - Salt and pepper to taste
 - Garnish with fresh chopped parsley, if desired
- Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl and chill for several hours or overnight.
- Serves 4.

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Sunnyland Mills is the leading modern bulghur wheat manufacturing facility in the world and continues the legacy of a family business committed to delivering superior quality, whole grains, and natural products.

**For information on the Perch Family’s ownership history of Sunnyland Bulghur Company, go to: <https://sunnylandmills.com/our-company/>
For the Sunnyland Mills product catalog, go to: <https://sunnylandmills.com/our-products/>
For bulghur recipes, go to: https://sunnylandmills.com/recipes/#sm-recipe-search-urp_1+p:1

Tradition...My Favorite Family Recipes by Fresno’s Melene Ouzounian

***Melene Ouzounian has written a commemorative family cookbook featuring nearly 800 recipes in memory of her mother and family. It is available for purchase at \$25.00 each, plus \$5.00 postage. To order, e-mail Melene at: meleneouz@aol.com.

A Soprano With a Bottomless Appetite for Risk

RISK, from page 12

be if you do so much. But I couldn't do less because my fee was too small and I needed to support my son."

She felt trapped. Then, when she was about 30, the strain took its toll on her voice, and required surgery to repair. She was forced to take a two-month hiatus, which she viewed as a turning point: She could return to her hamster-wheel schedule or retreat to focus on training.

"If I continued with the dramatic repertoire, I would not exist today," Grigorian said. "I decided: OK, I'll start to learn. I invested a lot in learning, and my singing became much better. Then, step by step, my fee started to get bigger."

Kosky joked that Salzburg, given its global profile, made her sensational turn as Salome seem like a sudden arrival, when indeed she had been working non-stop and building a reputation for years before. She sang at his company, the Komische Oper in Berlin, multiple times, including a shattering portrayal of Tatjana in Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin" in 2016. During those rehearsals, she was also commuting to Vilnius for a run of "Sweeney Todd," in which she was improbably starring as the dumpy meat-pie baker Mrs. Lovett.



Asmik Grigorian (<https://www.giornaledellamusica.it/>)

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

- SEPTEMBER 12** — Holy Trinity Armenian Church's Annual Picnic with traditional Armenian food and music, 12 to 5 p.m., with the blessing of the Madagh at 3 p.m. Sunday. Holy Trinity Armenian Church 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge
- SEPTEMBER 19** — SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT THE PARK. 2 p.m. Cindy Fitzgibbon, WCVB TV5, emcee Enjoy Hye Guys Ensemble – Ron Sahatjian, clarinet. Jack Giragosian, oud; Kevin Magarian, guitar and Arthur Chingris, dumbeg RSVP hello@ArmenianHeirtagePark.org
- SEPTEMBER 25** — Amaras will hold its annual Walkathon in support of the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry. Registration and Check In: 10:30 am – 11:00 am. Walk: Starts at 11:00 am. Start Location: Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (ACEC) 47 Nichols Avenue, Watertown. End Location: Saltonstall Park at Watertown Square. Registration Fee: \$25 for Adults; \$10 for Students and Children (Children need to register to participate in the Walk). Online Registration is highly recommended. For more information: call 617-331-0426 or email ne@abmdr.com
- OCTOBER 3** — International Food Festival: Sample authentic cuisine from nine different countries. Sunday, 12 pm to 3 pm, Holy Trinity Armenian Church 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge.
- OCTOBER 6** — LET'S MEET AT THE PARK! Wednesday, 10.30 a.m. In collaboration with Age Friendly Boston Meet & Greet. Walk the Labyrinth. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeirtagePark.org
- November 14** — GIVING THANKS: TOGETHER IN CELEBRATION, Sunday, 2 p.m. In collaboration with Boston Children's Choir & The Greenway Conservancy Meet & Greet. Enjoy the Boston Children's Chorus Walk the Labyrinth. Tie a Ribbon on the Wishing Tree RSVP hello@ArmenianHeirtagePark.org
- December 19** — CANDLELIT VIRTUAL LABYRINTH WALK: IN PEACE & HARMONY, 4.30 p.m. Meet & Greet. Walk the Candlelit Labyrinth. Wish on The Wishing Tree. Hot Chocolate. Individually-wrapped cookies. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeirtagePark.org

NEW JERSEY

- SEPTEMBER 25** — The TCA Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group Presents an open air concert with Huyser Music Ensemble. Saturday. Save the date. Details to follow.
- 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.

"What soprano in the history of opera has rehearsed a new production of 'Onegin' and zipped back to do Mrs. Lovett in Lithuania?" Kosky said. "I asked her, 'Aren't you a bit young?' and she said, 'I just love the character.'" (Grigorian said she wasn't sure whether she'd ever reprise her "Sweeney" role, but added, "I just need a few weeks to get back the Cockney accent.")

The soprano Karita Mattila, who rehearsed the Royal Opera's "Jenufa" with Grigorian last spring, before the pandemic lockdown, said that "they just had a ball together." Grigorian gave Mattila a ring from Lithuania that, Mattila said, "came from the heart, like everything else she does."

In rehearsals, said Dmitri Tcherniakov, who directed the Bayreuth "Holländer," Grigorian "tries to understand everything." And it was her focused demeanor that convinced Markus Hinterhäuser, the Salzburg Festival's artistic director, that she would be right for "Salome." She had been cast there earlier as Marie in Berg's "Wozzeck," and he noticed that she operates with "absolute respect for a production."

"She is not a solo performer," Hinterhäuser said. "She is always thinking of the group. It was also interesting to see what kind of possibilities she has, acting wise. I mean, singing, there's no discussion. But acting. ..." He trailed off, widening his eyes and holding up his hands to mime his shock at her dramatic talent.

Grigorian, center, as Senta in Wagner's "Der Fliegende Holländer" at the Bayreuth Festival. Credit... Enrico Nawrath/Bayreuther Festspiele

Grigorian, who never studied acting, doesn't know where her stage prowess comes from; her directors said it seemed like pure instinct. Welser-Möst said that whenever she goes onstage, "she burns herself in front of the audience." Kosky grouped her with what he called "a very special group of singing actors that you just pray for."

It will be a long time before New York audiences get to hear her live. She had been scheduled for a new production of "Salome" at the Metropolitan Opera that was postponed because of the pandemic, and now won't appear there until a revival of that opera in about five years. She may appear in the United States earlier in concert programs, which she is hoping to do more of as her 5-year-old enters school and their

lives become less nomadic.

Until then, her home is whatever city she is working in, a lifestyle that barely slowed during the pandemic: "Dutchman" was her fifth new production since spring last year. And she opened all of them despite suffering from long-term effects of Covid-19.

She became sick in March 2020, while in London for "Jenufa." She lost her senses of smell and taste, and her weakness and dizziness made rehearsals such a struggle that she cried. The disease, she said, affected her stomach, her skin and her nervous system — and still surfaces in the form of palpitations and panic attacks.

But, as with her vocal crisis a decade ago, Grigorian seized on her illness as motivation. "I realized there are so many beautiful things which I can do," she said. "Now is my best age, and I must do it."

Her recording of Rachmaninoff songs with the pianist Lukas Geniusas will come out next March, and she hopes to release a cycle of albums that span opera arias and contemporary music by the likes of Amy



Asmik Grigorian (Pinterest)

Winehouse. Next summer, she will be back at Salzburg to star in all three of the one-acts that make up Puccini's "Il Trittico."

Kosky said that she "could sing the phone book and it would be fabulous." He did express one wish for her which Welser-Möst shared: Tosca.

"I would die to hear that," Welser-Möst said. "I don't think you would have experienced such an intense Tosca — and I know this is daring to say — since the Callas days."

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COMMENTARY

Editorial

The Dangers of Armenian-Turkish Rapprochement



By Edmond Y.
Azadian

Suddenly, a new dynamic has been set into motion in the Caucasus region. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has announced that it is time for Armenia and Turkey to work towards a rapprochement. Simultaneously Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has opened the prospects of beginning negotiations with Armenia while Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has detected some positive signs in Turkey's attitude towards Armenia, expressing his readiness to begin negotiations without preconditions.

These parties have prioritized unblocking communications and roads with the prospects of economic gain and prosperity for all the countries concerned.

As a goodwill gesture, Armenia has opened its airspace unilaterally for Turkish overflights between Turkey and Azerbaijan, while Turkish airspace remains closed to flights of Armenian aircraft.

However, highlighting short-term economic gains must not come at the expense of political risks and historical consequences which may cost the Armenian side dearly.

All these developments must be viewed within the prospects of President Erdogan's imperial plans. The year 2023 will be a watershed for Turkey as it marks the centennial of the creation of the Republic of Turkey through the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. It is planned to bring the Ataturk era to its conclusion and begin the Erdogan epoch. In conjunction with this, a new constitution is being drafted to replace the one adopted in 1982 whereby federative states are under consideration.

With the recent Sushi Declaration, Turkey and Azerbaijan technically have laid the foundations of a future federal state, anticipating the incorporation of the Turkic states of Central Asia. President Erdogan believes there will be room for other conquests in that federative state, including Armenia. Former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, known for his ambitious designs of reviving the Ottoman Empire, has been discussing relations with the Kurds, perhaps with the hope of absorbing that minority into a modernized version of the empire.

To breathe life into these designs, President Erdogan has cited the historic march of Turkish conquests through history, stating: "Ours is the victory in Manzikert. Ours is the conquest of Istanbul, as well as the peace operation in Cyprus, operations in Syria, Libya and Karabakh."

The Byzantines weakened the Bagratid (Bagratuni) Kingdom of Armenia and took over its capital, Ani, in 1045. However, the Seljuk forces, led by Alp Aslan defeated the Byzantine army in 1071 at the Battle of Manzikert, opening the floodgates of Seljuk conquests in Asia Minor, culminating with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottoman forces of Fetih Sultan Muhammed.

As a logical component of the above "achievements," we need to add Erdogan's statement during the victory parade in Baku last year that he had come to "achieve the unfulfilled dreams of our ancestors," citing Enver Pasha.

When talk comes to normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia, one must look beyond the immediate impact of those relations as the economic incentives of these relations may entail future traps of historic consequences. This should not be considered as a mere scare tactic, since Erdogan's ambitions are real and have already been partially achieved by the conquests he has cited above.

We should also try to analyze Russia's interest in promoting normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations to find out if it is only self-serving.

"Now that the groundwork has been laid for a political process and unblocking of all [Armenian-Azerbaijani] transport and economic links after the end of the war, there I think that

it would be logical if our Turkish and Armenian colleagues resumed their efforts to normalize relations," Lavrov said during a youth forum in Moscow.

"We are ready to assist in that in the most active way," echoed Foreign Minister Spokesperson Maria Zakharova.

This sudden rush toward negotiations is in the interest of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Russia, in order to consolidate their political and territorial gains they made as a result of the tripartite declaration of November 9.

Russia has been conveniently overlooking the outstanding problems that have been plaguing Armenia: the return of POWs and the determination of the final status of Karabakh. All this is to forestall the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs, meaning France and the US, beginning the process of negotiations under the OSCE, which ultimately will raise the issue of status and question the legality of Russian peacekeeping forces on Azerbaijani soil.

As a delaying tactic, Russia deliberately changed, mid-stream, its representative to the Minsk Group from veteran Igor Popov to Igor Khovayev, who is taking private trips to Armenia and Azerbaijan to familiarize himself with the situation. Interestingly, during his contacts in both countries, he has not even mentioned the resumption of the Minsk Group negotiations.

In his turn, Mr. Lavrov has reiterated Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's arguments about the release of Armenian POWs, stating that they were captured after the November 9 ceasefire, during a joint press conference with Armenia's new foreign minister, Ararat Mirzoyan, who, in his inexperience, has failed to remind Mr. Lavrov about Russia's obligations under the declaration and international humanitarian laws about people held captive against their will.

Armenia has taken the first step by opening up its skies to Turkish flights but it was too early to state that Yerevan is ready for negotiations without preconditions because Azerbaijan and Turkey have made clear they will not come to the negotiation table before their prerequisites are met. Azerbaijan is asking Armenia to sign a peace treaty ceding all claims on Karabakh and Russia has already stated that this is no time to discuss the status issue.

While Turkey comes with a host of loaded historical demands, all along, Ankara was seeking the settlement of the Karabakh issue in Azerbaijan's favor. Now that that hurdle has been overcome, in Moscow's view, there should not remain any preconditions. But Ankara has first subscribed to Baku's position and has added its own precondition for Armenia to refrain from the pursuit of the recognition of the Genocide, drop any claims for compensation and recognize Turkey's territorial integrity and borders drawn by the Treaty of Kars of 1921.

Therefore Armenia is heading to the negotiation table emptyhanded. Yerevan must have its own preconditions which it can counter against Turkish demands. At least it has to place on the table the recognition of the Genocide, if not a package of compensations, to have a bargaining chip and begin the talks from ground zero, ticking off, as they go, claim against claim.

For the last 106 years. Turkey was comfortable because only a sovereign state can pursue legal compensation. Ankara could put up with the nuisance that the diaspora has been raising and could continue to enjoy the fruits of the Genocide with impunity. But as Armenia became a sovereign state, it has become a thorn in the side of Turkey.

Therefore, the ultimate goal must be to eliminate that sovereign state from the map, to be able to digest the spoils of its crime.

Russia's prodding Armenia has one simple goal: to keep the West away from the Caucasus and finalize its deal with Ankara.

Armenia must not become a pawn in this dangerous game.





COMMENTARY

Hail to the Third Republic of Armenia on Its 30th Anniversary

By Rev. Dr. Vahan H. Tootikian

SEPTEMBER 21, 2021 is the 30th Anniversary of the Third Republic of Armenia. The present state of Armenia is the resumption of the preceding two republics. In the years 1918-1920, statehood was regained with the creation of the first independent Armenian state since 1375. A small, land-locked, poor remnant of historical Armenia, devoid of natural resources, a land of refugees and epidemics, this First Republic became the nucleus of the present-day Armenia.

The close alliance of Turkey and Bolshevik Russia in the early 1920s led to the collapse of the First Republic. Turkey with its invading force, and the Red Army, aided by local communist sympathizers, advanced into Armenia on November 29, 1920 and set up a Soviet regime which lasted from 1920 to 1991. This period is known as the era of the Second Armenian Republic.

Present-day Armenia, the Third Republic, is just a tiny part of historic Armenia. Its size is 29,800 square kilometers, or 11, 506 square miles, and is situated in the south Caucasus, or Transcaucasia. It is bounded on the north by Georgia, on the east by Azerbaijan, on the south by Iran, and on the west by Turkey and the Azerbaijan enclave of Nakhichevan.

Historic Armenia, at its height of power (1st century B.C.) stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. It had an area about 240,000 square miles. The Third Republic represents only 4.8 percent of historic Armenia and is only one-sixth of the Armenian territories delineated by the Treaty of Sevres by President Woodrow Wilson. Only 30 percent of the Armenian people live in Armenia, while the rest live in the Diaspora.

Looking back retrospectively, Armenia has been one of the cradles of human civilization. Historic Armenia is where the Garden of Eden was. The Bible informs us that Noah’s Ark landed on the summit of Mount Ararat (Genesis 8:4).

Mount Ararat, which Armenians also call Massis, with its twin-peaks as the Greater and Lesser, stands sentinel over the heartland of Armenia. It has been a symbol of Armenian identity, and a source of aspiration for the Armenian poets and artists throughout ages.

Yerevan is one of the oldest cities in the world. It was founded in 782 B.C. The Armenians were there when mankind’s earliest thinkers were formulating their thoughts in that cradle of civilization.

Located on one of the strategic crossroads of the ancient and medieval worlds, Armenia has been a bone of contention for many nations. It was occupied by the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Mongolians, the Turks and the Russians. Thus, throughout their history, the Armenians have lived in perpetual conflict between national survival and national subordination and have suffered cruelty at the hands of mightier powers. But despite their sufferings, not only have they managed to survive and thrive, but also have developed a rich and distinctive culture.

Speaking of the Third Republic, it must be stated that the past thirty years of independence have been a “mixed score.” On the positive side, the Republic of Armenia has made every effort to consolidate its independence. Full membership was attained in international forums. Economic reforms were made to ensure smooth transition from the old system to a free market economy. Land reforms were made. Reforms in industry, trade, banking, services and other spheres have been introduced.

On the negative side, there are some concerns on the free and democratic process in elections. There has been widespread corruption in the government. There is an increase in disparity on the economic and social levels. But the exodus of Armenians from Armenia presents an even more serious problem. Since 1991, approximately 2.5 million Armenians are reported to have emigrated abroad. With its population dwindling steadily, the question is whether the Armenian army will be large enough to defend its borders.

The most devastating problem presently, however, is the outcome of the Artsakh war, which was initiated on September 27, 2020 by Azerbaijan and Turkey against Artsakh and Armenia. Tragically, the 44-day war resulted in the deaths of thousands of soldiers, civilians, and young Armenian conscripts, the destruction of numerous homes, schools, hospitals and institutions, and the transfer of seven districts of Artsakh to Azerbaija-

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ni control. These tragic events have disrupted many Armenian lives. Needless to say, many are confused, angry, depressed and frustrated. Some feel it is a hopeless situation.

Undoubtedly, the situation is serious, but not hopeless. Anyone who studies Armenian history will notice that hope has been one of the striking phenomena in the collective experience of the Armenian people. Throughout Armenian history, hope has manifested itself in political and national movements, exploding in a way that cannot be contained. Much of what we are taught by Armenian history supports this idea even in the face of unspeakable evil like the Armenian Genocide. Central to inextinguishable hope of this kind is the concept that the greatest traumas can be overcome. The story of the survival of the Armenian people is its chief testament. Just by being here, then, the Armenian people are evidence of hope.

After the catastrophic defeat in Artsakh, the Armenians must get up and look straight to the future with hope and confidence. At the same time, this event should give them wisdom to take a hard look at missed opportunities and plan for a better outcome in the future. All Armenians must stay vigilant. They must stay united to plan for the future. In the past, when they stood together they were able to achieve great things through unity.

Despite all of these difficulties, however, the Republic of Armenia has been growing and prospering the past 30 years and had become the actualization of the dream that a people without a land — and a land without a people — would be reunited.

We pray that God will protect the Republic of Armenia and keep our people filled with grace and reinforce them with faith to live and work for the love and wellbeing of our homeland.

LETTERS

Calling Attention to Disaster Engulfing Lebanon

To the Editor:

Twenty years ago, on a warm summer day, we witnessed one of the greatest celebrations of the Armenian Apostolic Church, within the courtyard of St. Gregory’s Cathedral in Antelias. Pilgrims from all over the world gathered to see H.H. Aram I celebrate the Holy Badarak and Blessing of the Holy Muron. Our Prelacy arranged a pilgrimage to the Holy See of Cilicia for this unique celebration that only occurs once every seven years or on very special occasions; and to Der Zor to pray at the Genocide Memorial which no longer exists.

We are all linked together by the Holy Muron that was placed on our foreheads when we were baptized and confirmed; the same Holy Muron that was used to confirm King Dertad when he converted to Christianity, the same Holy Muron used to consecrate our churches and every *Vehapar* from the time of St. Gregory until to the reign of H.H. Aram I. With each new successive batch of Holy Muron a container of the old Muron dating back to St.

Gregory is co-mingled with the new in a vessel, linking the past to the present and to the future and stirred and blessed with the relic of the right hand of St. Gregory.

Twenty years ago we received spiritual nutrition by praying, see the Holy services remembering the victims of the Genocide. We briefly walked in the same desert in Syria that our great-grandparents, grandparents did, imaged how difficult it was to survive the intense heat, with no food, no water and no shelter. The survivors of the genocide, those who were “fortunate” to survive and arrive in Lebanon were welcomed by the people of Lebanon. The Lebanese people did what our Lord had instructed: they gave them clothes when they were naked, they gave them food when they were hungry, and they gave them shelter when they were homeless.

A year has passed since the massive explosion in the port of Beirut, the pandemic still lingers on and the economy of the country is in turmoil. Now our *Vehpar* is asking for our help, it our time to do our part and help our sisters and

brothers in Lebanon. History will remember those generous Lebanese and Armenians who 100 years ago helped our survivors without hesitation, how will history remember us?

Will future generations say that the Armenians in America in 2021 helped their fellow Armenians and the Lebanese people? We owe them a debt of gratitude for their generosity they provided, they opened their homes, their wallets and their hearts...now it’s our turn to be the Good Samaritan and to give generously.

I ask all my fellow Armenian sisters and brothers to be mindful, generous and contribute our part to help our sister and brothers who are in a dire situation.

With brotherly love and hope,

John Daghlilian,
Sub deacon of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

New Controversy Looms in Jerusalem Over Land Leased By the Patriarchate

Editor's Note: We reached out to the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and spoke with Fr. Baret Yeretsian, director of the Real Estate Department of the Patriarchate, who disputes the facts presented in Harut Sassounian's article below. It should be pointed out that the Jerusalem Patriarchate and its properties ultimately belong to the Armenian people. Consequently, it has an obligation to inform the public of its actions. An official statement by the Patriarchate explaining what has transpired could have prevented the spread of unauthorized information.

As if Armenians did not have enough problems these days with the disastrous developments in Artsakh, we are now faced with a new controversy in the Diaspora. I have received dozens of phone calls and emails from Armenians in various countries, informing me about a new issue brewing at the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem. The details are sketchy and Armenians I contacted in Jerusalem asked that I do not disclose their names fearing either expulsion from the housing provided to them by the Patriarchate or some other retribution.

The issue is about a plot of land that was recently leased by the Patriarchate to a Jewish businessman from Australia. I contacted all three clergymen who were mentioned as approving this deal on behalf of the Patriarchate.

I first sent an email to Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, asking for a copy of the contract. Regrettably, he did not respond. I then called Archbishop Sevan Gharibian, the Grand Sacristan of the Patriarchate. He was reluctant to discuss the issue. I was told by an anonymous source that Arch. Gharibian was pressured into approving the contract. I then called Father Baret Yeretsian, Director of the Real Estate Department of the Patriarchate, who confirmed the deal and provided some of the details. These three clergymen, a minority of the eight-member Holy Synod of the Patriarchate (Dnoren Joghov), were the ones who had approved the lease. An anonymous source suggested that the entire St. James Brotherhood of the Patriarchate should have met to review the contract.

Fr. Yeretsian stated that there have been several offers from citizens of various Arab countries to lease that particular property owned by the Patriarchate. However, he stated that the most advantageous offer was made by Danny Rubenstein, a Jewish businessman from Australia.

Without disclosing the amount, Fr. Yeretsian confirmed that the Patriarchate received an advance payment from the businessman. An anonymous source informed me that the down payment was one million dollars. Fr. Yeretsian also told me that the Australian businessman plans to build a seven-star luxurious hotel on the property and a percentage of the annual revenue of the hotel will be transferred to the Patriarchate. Even though the anonymously circulated in-

formation fixed the length of the lease at 99-years, Fr. Yeretsian told me that the lease was in fact for 98 years. Such a lengthy lease leads many to believe that the Patriarchate will never recover that property. When asked, Fr. Yeretsian disagreed, asserting that the Australian businessman will have to return the property to the Patriarchate at the end of the lease, along with the pricey hotel built on it. This is an issue that remains to be seen a century later. Similar lengthy leases for other properties have been signed by the Patriarchate in the past resulting in the same arguments.

The property in question is called "Goveroun Bardez" (Cows' Garden), located on the historic Mt. Zion, at the southwest corner of the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem. Several months ago, the Patriarchate had signed an agreement with the Municipality of Jerusalem to use the same property as a parking lot to be renovated at the expense of the Municipality and part of it used to park the cars of Jewish residents of the area. At the time, the Patriarchate issued a statement declaring that the value of this land is over \$2 million. Fr. Yeretsian told me that the new lease with the Australian businessman will supersede the earlier agreement with the Municipality. Other sources told me that the new agreement was also signed without the approval of the Armenian Patriarchate's full Holy Synod or the Brotherhood of St. James.

There have been past controversies when members of the Patriarchate leased other properties or attempted to sell precious manuscripts stolen from the archives at Sotheby's auction in London. To make matters worse, the sale or lease of any Armenian property to Israeli individuals, companies or the government is frowned upon by Palestinians who view such transactions as expanding Israel's presence in the occupied territories. I was told that the Palestinian Authority had sent a formal letter of complaint to the Armenian Patriarchate regarding the lease of this property. However, Fr. Yeretsian denied receiving any such communication.

In the absence of concrete facts and copies of actual documents it is hard to reach any firm conclusions. In the name of transparency, the Patriarchate should make public a copy of the contract for the lease of the "Goveroun Bardez" property disclosing its terms. Without such disclosure, it is hard to judge the advantages or disadvantages of this contract.

If the Patriarchate is engaging in such transactions in order to cover the administrative expenses of its operations, it may be useful to release a report of the Patriarchate's annual revenues and expenses so everyone can see if the Patriarchate is in a dire need of income. If the Patriarchate is indeed in a desperate financial situation, such a report may encourage benefactors from around the world to make contributions to the Patriarchate and eliminate the need for the sale or lease of additional valuable plots of land.

Finally, in the past, an independent temporary committee was formed to oversee the administrative affairs of the Patriarchate. This may be the right time to reestablish such a committee on a permanent basis. The reports of a credible oversight committee would put an end to divisive and persistent rumors in the Armenian communities about the affairs of the Patriarchate.

Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America Makes Appeal for Relief Aid to Haiti and Lebanon

By Bishop Daniel Findikyan

Last week I sent an urgent directive to leaders throughout the Eastern Diocese, asking all of our people to pray to our merciful Lord for the relief of suffering brought on by the recent disasters plaguing our world—whether of human or natural origin.

That message also advised that I would follow up this week with additional direction on how the faithful of our Diocese could help in these dire circumstances. The present message is my appeal to focus on two such causes, in the nations of Haiti and Lebanon.

Anyone watching the news is all too familiar with the heartbreaking images from Haiti, which experienced a mammoth earthquake two weeks ago. Of course, as Armenians, news of this kind of natural disaster summons up the compassionate feelings we had in the aftermath of the earthquake that rocked our homeland in 1988. Though more 30 years have since elapsed, the losses caused by that catastrophe are still felt in palpable ways in our homeland—and the people of Haiti will likely endure years of hardship after their recent disaster.

One news item that struck a chord with me told how the earthquake had destroyed hundreds of churches throughout the island, yet the Haitian people continued to congregate amid the ruins of their sanctuaries, to worship and pray as communities of faith, and to draw closer to our Lord in the midst of their suffering. It vividly reminded me of nearly identical scenes we saw among our people in Spitak, Gyumri, and Vanadzor, in the aftermath of the 1988 earthquake.

Less visible in the general public sphere—but profoundly urgent to us as Armenians—is the ongoing crisis in Lebanon. More than a year after the catastrophic explosion in Beirut's harbor, the country is still burdened by the destruction and loss of life that occurred. To make matters worse, that burden is magnified by the political, economic, and medical upheaval that the people of Lebanon were already enduring at the time, the effects of which have not abated.

This summer, His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, appealed to the Armenian diaspora to send relief aid to help Armenians and others in the country who are still afflicted by these multiple disasters.

Of course, by virtue of our ancient embrace of the humane ethic embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, we Armenians cannot turn a blind eye to these terrible developments. Sadly, there is no dearth of pain and misery in our world today, as our people in Armenia and Artsakh know all too well. Our Diocese remains deeply committed to ameliorating the troubles in our homeland on a long-term, ongoing basis, through our own Fund for Armenian Relief, and our support of Holy Echiadzin's Artsakh Outreach project.

But these two tragedies, in Haiti and Lebanon, seem to me to demand urgent attention in the present moment.

With that in mind, I am directing that our parishes take up special collections for the next two Sundays—September 5 and 12—culminating in the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

The collections will benefit the earthquake relief effort in Haiti, and the ongoing humanitarian out-

reach effort in Lebanon. All collected funds will be divided evenly between the two causes. Half of the proceeds will go to support the work of the Little Sisters of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus: a Catholic relief group working "on the ground" in Haiti, with a sterling reputation for providing prompt, direct assistance to those most in need.

The other half of the collected proceeds will go to support the crucial outreach efforts being undertaken by the Armenian Church's Catholicosate of Cilicia, under the direct supervision of His Holiness Aram I.

Checks should be made out to the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, memo: "Haiti/Lebanon Relief Collection." Individual donations can also be made on the Diocese's secure server (<https://armenianchurch.us/donate/>).

I implore all of our faithful people to be generous in these extremely difficult times. Parishes should send their collected funds to the Eastern Diocese by Friday, September 17.

Most of all, throughout these weeks, and in the days to follow, please continue to offer prayers for afflicted people everywhere. Just within the last day, we have begun to hear about the victims of hurricane flooding in Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. Remember them, too, as we pray for the peace of God and the relief of suffering among the people of Haiti and Lebanon, Armenia and Artsakh, Afghanistan and America, and the entire world.

To donate visit <https://armenianchurch.us/donate/>



Annual Divine Liturgy Held at Armenian Surb Khach Church On Akhtamar Island

ISTANBUL (Public Radio of Armenia) — The annual Divine Liturgy at Surb Khach (Holy Cross) was held at the Armenian Church on Akhtamar Island in Lake Van on Sunday, September 5.

Participation in this year's service was limited due to the coronavirus pandemic. Only a small number of invited guests attended the mass.

Religious services were resumed in the church in 2010 after a 95-year hiatus.

The church was built between 915 and 921 A.D. by architect Bishop Manuel under the sponsorship of Gagik I Artsruni of the Kingdom of Vaspurakan.

The church was abandoned after the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The building's restoration began in 2005 and opened as a museum two years later.



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Turkish Technical Team Begins Work At Kabul Airport

By Ragip Soylu, Levent Kemal

ISTANBUL (Middle East Eye) — A Turkish technical team arrived in Kabul last week to help efforts to reopen its airport, a Taliban spokesman and two people familiar with the issue said.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told a Turkish newspaper on September 5 that Turkey and Qatar have been working together at the airport. “[Turkey] is now working at the general terminal and around it,” Mujahid told *Yeni Safak* newspaper.

Two people familiar with the issue told Middle East Eye that the Turkish technical team began to work at the airport on September 1. There is a small Turkish security team present at the airport to protect that technical group, the people added.

Turkey has also taken additional security measures in neighboring Pakistan, deploying special forces and other equipment to use in case of emergencies in Kabul.

On Monday, Al Jazeera reported that the Taliban invited Turkey, China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Qatar to attend a ceremony announcing a new Afghan government.

The draft deal revealed by MEE last month included provisions that would see Ankara recognising the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan and providing security at the Kabul airport through a private firm.

Additional members of the Turkish special forces, operating in plainclothes to secure Turkish technical staff, would also not leave the airport perimeter, according to the deal.

Turkey temporarily shut its Kabul embassy amid the chaotic US withdrawal and Taliban takeover, instead continuing operations from the airport, but has now reopened the building and its diplomatic staff are operating from the mission as normal.

Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* last week reported that a special phone line between Turkey and the Taliban had been established to conduct negotiations on the airport and other matters.