

## Armenia Reports Third Fatality in Border Clashes With Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (AFP) — Armenia said on January 12 that the number of its soldiers killed in border clashes with Azerbaijan had risen to three, in the most serious outbreak of fighting between the ex-Soviet adversaries in months. Azerbaijan previously said one of its sol-



An Armenian soldier (PanArmenian.net photo)

diers died in the fighting on January 11 along the disputed and volatile border region, where tensions are still high in the wake of a war between the Caucasus nations in 2020.

Armenia's defense ministry said in a statement Wednesday that the body of an Armenian serviceman was discovered with fatal gunshot wounds in the vicinity where "intense skirmishes" had erupted on the previous day.

Two soldiers wounded in the fighting were in a stable condition, the defence ministry added.

Both sides have accused the other of initiating "provocations" that sparked the exchange of fire that left one Azerbaijani soldiers and the three Armenian troops dead.

Armenia said earlier that its military had been targeted by artillery and drones in its eastern border area, a claim Azerbaijan denied.

The deaths represent a serious threat to a ceasefire implemented with Russia's help in November 2020 that brought an end to six weeks of brutal warfare that claimed the lives of 6,000 people on both sides.

## CSTO Troops Begin Withdrawal From Kazakhstan

MOSCOW (RFE/RL) — More than 2,000 troops from the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) reportedly began withdrawing from Kazakhstan on Thursday one week after being called in to help stabilize the Central Asian nation following deadly unrest sparked by a fuel price hike.

The "collective peacekeeping forces ... are starting to prepare equipment and material for loading into the planes of the military transport aviation of the Russian aerospace forces

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## Armenian, Turkish Envoys Meet for First Talks on Normalizing Relations

By Joshua Kucera

MOSCOW (Eurasianet.org) — Envoys from Armenia and Turkey have met in Moscow to launch negotiations over normalizing relations.

The envoys — Serdar Kilic, a senior Turkish diplomat; and Ruben Rubinyan, the deputy speaker of Armenia's parliament — met in Moscow on January

14. Following the meeting the two sides issued identical, optimistically worded statements. (See related editorial.)

"During their first meeting, conducted in a positive and constructive atmosphere, the Special Representatives exchanged their preliminary views regarding the normalization process through dialogue between Armenia and Turkey," the two foreign ministries said. "Parties agreed to continue negotiations without preconditions aiming at full normalization." The meeting was not filmed and afterwards the envoys did not speak to the press.

The two envoys were appointed in December as part of their countries' moves toward restoring ties in the wake of the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. That war resulted in the return to Azerbaijan of the territories sur-



Member of Parliament Ruben Rubinyan (left) and Ambassador Serdar Kilic



rounding Nagorno-Karabakh, which Armenia had occupied since the first war between the two sides in the 1990s.

The seizure of those territories in 1993 was what prompted Turkey to close the border. While Armenia has long been in favor of normalizing relations, Turkey — under pressure from its Azerbaijani allies — refused as long as the occupation continued. "With that issue off the table, Turkey began to signal its readiness for new talks with Armenia soon after the war," the International Crisis Group wrote in an analysis previewing the January 14 talks.

The Moscow meeting was the most concrete step yet that the two sides have taken to normalizing relations. They will have to overcome a number of obstacles and potential spoilers: Turkish and Azer-

baijani commentators have been putting forward public demands conditioning restoring Ankara-Yerevan relations on other issues, like Armenia renouncing control over Nagorno-Karabakh or giving up the cause of international recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide.

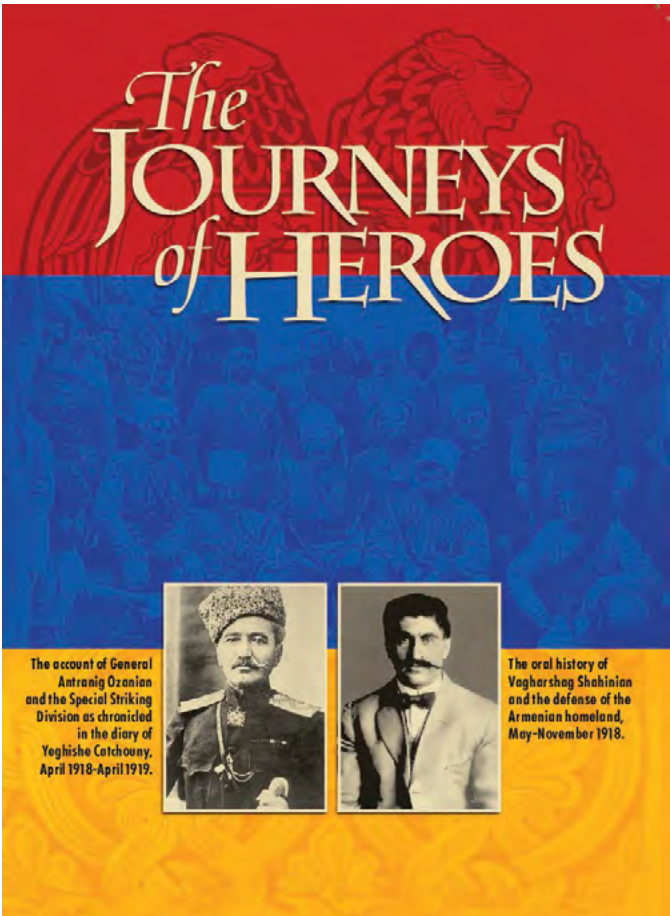
That, in turn, has given fuel to Armenia's political opposition and nationalists in the Armenian global diaspora, who have been trying to portray the talks as a unilateral

concession by a weak Armenian government to their enemies. And many ordinary Armenians, who might have been in favor of restoring ties with Turkey before the war, have become more wary in the light of Turkey's open, strong support of Azerbaijan's 2020 offensive and a re-awakening of anti-Armenian discourse in Turkey.

But no preconditions have been officially put forward, a fact that the January 14 statement emphasized. And in the days ahead of the talks the signals were mostly positive.

In late December, Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov said that Baku "fully supports" Armenia and Turkey's normalization efforts. It was Azerbaijan which scuttled the last attempt at

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## The Journeys of Heroes Sheds Light on Armenian History And Current Conflict

By Harry Kezelian  
Mirror-Spectator Staff

FAIR LAWN, N.J. — It is not often that the translation and publication of a family heirloom diary ends up being highly relevant to current events.

In the case of Ken Sarajian and Paul Shahinian, their grandfathers' stories involved heroic exploits from modern Armenian history which certainly warranted publication, but which were not nearly as topical as they suddenly became once war broke out again with Azerbaijan.

The book, the *Journeys of Heroes*, was published by the ANI Armenian Research Center in Yerevan, and edited by Tatul Hakobyan, director of the Institute and a journalist and independent political analyst in Armenia. It presents translations of the memoirs of Vagharshag Shahinian, a volunteer fighter from Van, and Yeghishe Catchouny, one of the primary personal aides of General Antranik Ozanian. Both men served in the Caucasus front of WWI during the creation of the First Republic of Armenia in 1918.

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ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### New French Institute to Open in Armenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Former Ambassador of France to Armenia Jonathan Lacôte announced in a statement on social media this week that a French institute will open in Yerevan as the French government has officially approved the initiative. During his mission in Armenia Lacôte worked with the Aznavour Foundation for the implementation of this project. The institute will be located near the Aznavour Center on Yerevan's Cascade.

"This institute will unite the projects of all those who contribute to cultural ties of the two countries. The creation of this institute 30 years after the establishment of diplomatic relations will justify the sincere expectations of the Armenian society," Lacôte said on Facebook. The institute will be engaged in implementing educational, cultural and humanitarian programs.

### Karabakh to Be Home to Anania Shirakatsi Int'l Educational Complex

STEPANAKERT (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Anania Shirakatsi International Educational Complex will be established in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in September 2022 to improve the quality of education in the country, State Minister Artak Beglaryan said on January 18.

"It will be an extension of the educational complex in Yerevan. We are bringing their entire educational program, which is part of the international baccalaureate, to Artsakh," Beglaryan said. The State Minister also revealed that the budget for Artsakh's education sector has increased by 17.6% in 2022 against the previous year, reaching more than 17.3 billion drams (more than \$36 million). "The growing budget envisages an increase in the salaries of employees in the field of education, including science, culture and sports, by an average of 20 percent," he said.

### Court Rejects Request to Allow Opposition MP to Attend PACE Session

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction this week denied a motion to allow Armenia's former Deputy Prime Minister and current MP Armen Gevorgyan from opposition Armenia bloc to leave the country and attend the regular PACE session on January 23-29.

Gevorgyan has been charged with assisting in an "overthrow of the constitutional order" as part of the March 1 criminal probe, as well as corruption and money laundering. His lawyer Lusine Sahakyan had petitioned the court in December to either remove the restrictions on her client's free movement or allow him to leave the country from January 24 to 28 to attend the regular session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) as part of the Armenian delegation to the PACE.

# Armenian, Turkish Envoys Meet for First Talks on Normalizing Relations

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normalization, the 2009 process that became known as the "protocols."

"Having long posed the greatest impediment to a Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, Baku's public and private tone has changed dramatically in the wake of its victory," the Crisis Group analysts wrote. "Some senior bureaucrats in Baku privately suggest that Turkish-Armenian normalization might even help smooth their own post-war relations with Armenia by showing the benefits of shifting from a war footing to an everyone-wins focus on trade."

A foreign policy commentator in the Turkish pro-government newspaper Daily Sabah portrayed the talks with Armenia as part of a broader push by Ankara to improve many of its strained relations around the region, including with the United Arab

Emirates, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. "These recent efforts of normalization and pro-active diplomatic initiatives will constitute Turkey's priority foreign policy agenda for 2022," wrote the analyst, Tahla Kose, in a January 14 piece.

And the fact that Russia is brokering the talks suggests that one early concern — that Moscow would try to scuttle them for fear of Turkey gaining more influence in the region — has been evaded. Russia's involvement also is likely to blunt the objections from Armenia's internal opposition, which has warm relations with Russia.

While a recent flareup on the border resulted in four soldiers killed — three Armenian, and one Azerbaijani — there has nevertheless been diplomatic progress between Baku and Yerevan, as well.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lav-

rov, at a press conference the morning before the Kilic-Rubinyan meeting, said that Armenia and Azerbaijan were close to reaching an agreement on one of the key issues in their bilateral agenda: agreeing on a demarcation of the two countries' border. "Literally yesterday I was speaking with an Armenian colleague, who had a new proposal, we will send it along to Azerbaijan. We will see how to make [an Armenia-Azerbaijan-Russia commission working on border issues] work it out as quickly as possible."

Also that day, Farid Shafiyev, the head of an Azerbaijani government-run foreign policy think tank, said in an interview with Interfax-Azerbaijan that Baku and Yerevan had reached a spoken agreement to create a border demarcation commission.

## Armenian Shepherd from Syunik Kidnapped

By Gevorg Gyulumyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — On January 13, Azerbaijani forces abducted Surik Matevosyan, a 53-year-old shepherd of the Tegh community in the Goris region (Syunik Province), along with his 500 sheep. The head of the neighboring village of Aravus, Argam Hovsepyan, said that the shepherd had gotten lost and the Azerbaijanis took advantage of this opportunity.

"Probably while grazing the sheep, he slowly went along and reached the border. On one side of the border are our people, on the other side are theirs. He crossed the border and they immediately went down and took him. The shepherd has 1,000 sheep, divided into two parts. Maybe he had 500 sheep with him," Hovsepyan said.

Fortunately, on the same day, the shepherd was returned through the mediation of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, but the Azerbaijani forces refused to return the sheep belonging to him.

"The Azerbaijanis deny that there were about 500 sheep with the shepherd of Tegh village Surik Matevosyan when he was captured on January 13. They say there is no such thing," the head of the village of Tegh, Davit Ghulunts, told us.

"But there are photos taken on a phone of the Azerbaijanis taking the sheep. We presented it to the Russian peacekeepers,



The Armenian shepherd returned from captivity among Armenian and Russian troops (photo Sputnik Armenia)

and they presented it to the Azerbaijanis. Negotiations are continuing. There is no answer yet," he added.

Deputy of the National Assembly Tigran Abrahamyan also commented on the case, observing: "The incident of a shepherd in

the village of Tegh who was kidnapped due to the actions of the Azerbaijanis and then returned to his homeland through the efforts of Russian servicemen clearly shows the level of protection of the border settlements, or rather their vulnerability."

## Many Karabakh Armenians Still Lack Adequate Housing after 2020 War

By Robert Zargarian

STEPANAKERT (RFE/RL) — Nearly 16,000 residents of Nagorno-Karabakh displaced by the 2020 war with Azerbaijan continue to live in temporary shelters or homes, a senior official in Stepanakert said on January 18.

Artak Beglaryan, the Karabakh state minister, said that more than 20,000 others remain in Armenia 14 months after a Russian-brokered ceasefire stopped the six-week war that left at least 6,500 people dead.

Most of the displaced Karabakh Armenians are former residents of Karabakh's southern Hadrut district and the town of Shushi (Shusha) captured by Azerbaijani forces. Others used to live in districts

around the Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast handed back to Baku after the ceasefire.

In Beglaryan's words, the Karabakh authorities provided 467 apartments for displaced people in 2021.

"At the end of last year we provided 108 apartments built by the All-Armenian Fund Hayastan," the official told a news conference. "We will provide more than 200 apartments in the coming weeks."

"Right now 2,862 apartments are being constructed," Beglaryan said, adding that the authorities are on track to provide virtually all displaced families living in Karabakh with adequate housing by 2024.

The authorities also offer between 10 million and 15 million drams (\$ 21,000- \$ 31,000) to families buying existing apart-

ments or houses. The subsidy is well below home prices in Stepanakert and nearby settlements which went up after the war.

The prices are too high for the family of Lusine Hayrian. She, her husband and five children fled their village in Hadrut during the war and now huddle in a single room in a Stepanakert hostel.

"Nobody has visited us so far," Hayrian told RFE / RL's Armenian Service. "Nor have we heard any promises of a [new] home."

Karabakh had an estimated 150,000 residents before the war that broke out in September 2020. According to Karabakh officials, at least 90,000 local refugees fled their homes and took refuge in Armenia during the fierce fighting. Most of them returned to Karabakh after the ceasefire.



# Armenia's Temple of Garni Listed among Most Beautiful Roman Monuments

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The Belgian Le Vif Weekend magazine recently listed Armenia's Garni temple among the 51 of the most beautiful Roman monuments in the world.

"The year 476 marked the end of the Western Roman Empire, but fortunately much of what the Romans built can still be seen today," author Maaïke Schwering says.

The Colosseum in Rome, the largest amphitheater in the world and one of the seven modern wonders of the world, tops the list of most beautiful monuments.

The list also includes the Pantheon of Rome, the Verona Amphitheater, the oasis city of Palmyra and others.

The Temple of Garni is the only standing Greco-Roman colonnaded building in Armenia and the former Soviet Union. Built in the Ionic order in the village of Garni, in central Armenia, it is the best-known structure and symbol of pre-Christian Armenia.

The structure was probably built by king Tiridates I in the first century AD as a temple to the sun god Mihr. After Armenia's conversion to Christianity in the early fourth century, it was converted into a royal summer house of Khosrovidukht, the sister of Tiridates III.

It collapsed in a 1679 earthquake. Renewed interest in the 19th century led to excavations at the site in early and mid-20th century, and its eventual reconstruction between 1969 and 1975, using the anastylosis method. It is one of the main tourist attractions in Armenia and the central shrine of Armenian neopaganism.



## Armenian Judges Decry 'Government Pressure'

By Naira Nalbandian

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — A group of judges have accused the Armenian authorities of seeking to curb judicial independence through disciplinary proceedings against their colleagues and arbitrary assignment of court cases.

Some of them spoke up on January 13 during a special meeting of the Armenian parliament committee on human rights which was organized by its opposition chairwoman, Taguhi Tovmasyan, and boycotted by its pro-government members.

"My fellow judges have the impression that these disciplinary proceedings are launched in an attempt to intervene in the work of judges," Arman Hovannisyan, a judge of a Yerevan court of first instance, told the committee.

"That can be regarded as pressure because if we look at what kind of disciplinary proceedings have been launched and against which judges, we will see malevolence, rather than coincidence," he said.

The number of such proceedings increased significantly last year after a controversial government bill empowered the Armenian Ministry of Justice to demand disciplinary action against judges by the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), a state body overseeing Armenian courts.

In a joint statement issued earlier this week, a dozen judges, among them members of the Court of Appeals, accused Justice Minister Karen Andreasyan of abusing that authority to try to bully judges known for their independence.

Aram Vartevanyan, a lawyer and parliament deputy from the main opposition

Hayastan alliance, said on Thursday that the opposition minority in the National Assembly will ask the Constitutional Court to declare Andreasyan's controversial prerogative unconstitutional.

Vartevanyan and other opposition lawmakers attending the parliament committee



Taguhi Tovmasyan

meeting were even more concerned about the effective suspension of a computerized system of random assignment of all cases to judges. The system using special software was designed to minimize government and law-enforcement officials' influence on judicial acts.

Last summer, Armenia's National Security Service (NSS) confiscated the computer carrying the software in what it called a criminal investigation into the integrity of the automated selection of judges. The NSS has not yet returned the software, allowing court chairpersons to continue to assign cases at will.

Opposition figures and lawyers say the

NSS action was ordered by the Armenian government for the purpose of excluding independent-minded judges from politically sensitive criminal cases. They claim that the authorities are particularly keen to assign them to other judges who rarely reject arrest warrants sought by prosecutors.



Gagik Jhangiryan

Arshak Vartanyan, another Yerevan court judge, said the computerized case assignment is essential for judicial independence and criticized its de facto scrapping.

"Is a single criminal case much more important than the functioning of that computer software?" Vartanyan told lawmakers. "The SJC could have asked for time to replace the software or temporarily used other software. There are many tools to ensure the principle of randomness. Why has this not been done?"

The acting head of the SJC, Gagik Jhangiryan, refused to attend the parliamentary committee hearing and sent another judicial official instead. The official, Khachik

Ghazaryan, defended the judicial watchdog empowered to nominate, sanction and fire judges.

"The Supreme Judicial Council has no other way of influencing that [NSS] investigation and preventing the confiscation," Ghazaryan said. "We have no other computer program to carry out [case assignment.]"

Jhangiryan was installed as a member of the SJC by the government-controlled parliament in January 2020. He became its acting chairman three months later.

Opposition politicians, lawyers and some media outlets have since regularly accused the controversial former prosecutor of helping Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan increase government influence on courts. He has denied the allegations.

Jhangiryan stated in August that Armenian courts must be purged of "people who have committed crimes against justice." He himself had been at odds with human rights activists when serving Armenia's chief military prosecutor from 1997-2006.

Pashinyan demanded a mandatory "vetting" of all Armenian judges in 2019, saying that many of them are linked to the country former rulers. But his government subsequently agreed to refrain from such a purge at the urging of legal experts from the Council of Europe.

A government bill on judicial reforms enacted in 2020 calls instead for a "verification of the integrity" of judges which is carried out by a state anti-corruption body.

Andreasyan sought to revive the idea of judicial "vetting" after being appointed as justice minister in August. He stated later in 2021 that the vetting process has already begun thanks to the Jhangiryan-led SJC.



## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## Ambassador Meets Japan Foreign Minster

TOKYO (Armenpress) — Armenia's Ambassador to Japan met on January 18 with Japanese State Minister for Foreign Affairs Taka-ko Suzuki, the Embassy of Armenia announced.

A number of issues relating to the bilateral and multilateral cooperation were discussed.

The sides discussed holding joint events on the 30th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Japan. They attached importance to raising mutual recognition through culture, intensifying human contacts and engaging Japanese companies into Armenia's infrastructure programs (road, water reservoir construction, etc.), as well as renewable energy sector.

The necessity of expanding the bilateral legal contractual field was also emphasized at the meeting.

## Moscow Requested Clarifications from Ankara, Lavrov Says

MOSCOW (Mediamax) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated on January 14 that Moscow requested clarification from Ankara regarding the statement of the Turkish presidential aide about the use of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) forces in Kazakhstan earlier this month.

"There was, to put it mildly, an incomprehensible statement in Ankara by one of President Erdogan's advisers, who condemned Kazakhstan's actions on inviting the CSTO. We asked our Turkish colleagues to explain what this means," Lavrov said, speaking at a press conference on the results of 2021.

At the same time, the Russian minister stressed that he did not observe a "nervous reaction" from the officials of Azerbaijan and Turkey regarding the dispatch of CSTO peacekeepers to Kazakhstan.

## Putin and Aliyev Discuss Ukraine Situation

MOSCOW (News.am) — Russian and Azerbaijani presidents Vladimir Putin and Ilham Aliyev discussed by telephone the internal Ukrainian settlement on January 18, the Kremlin press service reported.

Considering Ilham Aliyev's recent visit to Ukraine, they discussed the problems of the internal Ukrainian settlement.

Vladimir Putin spoke about his contacts with the U.S. and its allies regarding the provision of guarantees ensuring Russia's security.

During the exchange of views on the recent events in Kazakhstan, they expressed satisfaction that the situation was quickly stabilized, in particular thanks to the presence of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) peacekeeping forces.

The two confirmed further strengthening of the Russian-Azerbaijani strategic partnership.

## First Screening of Dink Film Held in Istanbul

ISTANBUL (Agos) — Writer and director Ümit Kıvanç's film "Memory is Insufficient - A Film for Hrant Dink" was screened for the first time on January 13.

The film was released ahead of the 15th anniversary of his assassination, which took place on January 19, 2007.

After the one-hour movie screening, a short panel discussion was held with Fethiye Çetin, Kıvanç and Arat Dink, moderated by Zeynep Sungur, the Hrant Dink Foundation Communications Coordinator.

Çetin, who said that we have experienced for years how insurmountable pain and mourning imprison us in spirals of fear, anger and violence, finished her speech with the answer given by Hrant Dink, who asked the question "How can we overcome this deadlock?": "Memory exchange, conversation, dialogue, and their indispensable condition is freedom of expression... Because we are each other's doctors."

Kıvanç explained why he wanted to make this documentary:



how we can pass it on. Ümit Kıvanç gave the most correct answer to the question of what is the method for this. My father had the ability to combine everyday words with deep meanings, and Ümit Kıvanç's everyday images in the documentary provide a parallel with this."

The film is available on the foundation's website, [www.hrant-dink.org](http://www.hrant-dink.org).

## OSCE, Artsakh Respond to Aliyev Verbal Attack on Minsk Group

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on January 12, in an interview, said Baku will suppress the attempts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group to deal with the Karabakh issue.

Aliyev said he has an idea of "what the group should do and what it should not," adding that their work is done. "They should not deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, because it is resolved," he said in an interview with Azerbaijani TV channels.

In a joint statement dated December 7, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov, and French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian encouraged the sides to welcome the co-chairs to the region as soon as possible to allow them to assess the situation on the ground first-hand and to reach agreement on an agenda for future engagements.

They also reiterated their strong support

for the continuing work of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair in Office (PRCiO) in the region and encourage the sides to cooperate fully with his efforts.

The co-chair countries of the OSCE Minsk Group reaffirmed their commitment to working with the sides to find comprehensive solutions to all remaining issues related to or resulting from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in accordance with their mandate in order to promote a secure, stable, prosperous and peaceful future for the South Caucasus region.

The Polish OSCE Chair Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk reiterated the organization's full support for the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

"The Polish Chairmanship is not in the position to comment on the public statements of the President of Azerbaijan. We reiterate our full support and appreciation for the work of the OSCE Minsk Group, its Co-Chairs and the Personal Representative of the Polish OSCE Chair-in-Office Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk," the OSCE announced.

Alexander Lukashevich, Russia's Permanent Representative to the OSCE, said at an online briefing, "We are concerned that the Co-Chairs have not yet been able to visit the region, to get acquainted with the situation, to outline concrete measures to assist the parties in establishing contacts between citizens, to resolve humanitarian issues," Lukashevich said.

He hoped that the visit will take place in the near future.

Referring to the situation in Nagorno Karabakh, Lukashevich noted that despite some incidents, due to Russia's efforts, it was possible to maintain stability in the region in general. According to him, the stabilization of the situation allowed to address other issues, such as the unblocking of roads, discussions on the "3 + 3" platform, etc.

The Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Artsakh issued a statement, again decrying Aliyev's "anti-Armenian, destructive, expansionary vocabulary and ideas, dwelling upon relevant programs and goals."

The statement continued, "Such a policy is a gross violation of international law, international humanitarian law, and the agreements reached. It aims to torpedo peace and stability initiatives and dismantle the existing formats."

And it continued, "The OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairmanship is the only format for the settlement of the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict agreed by all sides. We highly appreciate the mission of the Russian peacekeeping forces in Artsakh and consider unacceptable any attempt to cast a shadow on their activities."

A French Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Nathalie Loiseau, chairwoman of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defense, reacted sharply when Azerbaijani Ambassador Rahman Mustafayev, tweeted Aliyev's statement that Baku "will not allow" the OSCE Minsk Group to engage in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

"Mr. Ambassador, diplomacy is first and foremost about respecting the country where you have the honor to serve. France is the co-chair of the Minsk Group, and you are pretending to reject it. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not settled, the ceasefire regime is not observed. Three Armenians died yesterday," Loiseau wrote on Thursday, January 13.

(Armenpress, news.am, Panorama.am, Public Radio of Armenia contributed to this report.)

## CSTO Troops Begin Withdrawal From Kazakhstan

WITHDRAWAL, from page 1 and returning to the points of permanent deployment," said a Russian Defense Ministry statement carried by Russian news agencies.

The CSTO, an alliance composed of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Tajikistan, said in a statement on Wednesday, January 12, that the pullout should take about 10 days to complete.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan discussed the troop withdrawal with Kazakhstan's President Qasym-Zhomart Toqaev in a phone call. Pashinyan's press office said Toqaev also briefed him on ongoing efforts to "normalize the situation in the country."

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced, meanwhile, that all Armenian, Belarusian and Tajik troops deployed to Kazakhstan will be flown out of the country by Russian planes on Friday. The other CSTO forces will complete the pullout by January 19, Shoigu told Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The 100 Armenian soldiers joined the CSTO contingent late last week. Russian news agencies reported on Wednesday that they are guarding a bread factory and a water distribution facility in Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city and the epicenter of the unrest.

The commander of the Armenian army unit, Major Hayrapet Mkrtchyan, was quoted as saying that one of its main missions is to prevent "terrorists" from poisoning drinking water supplied to the city residents.

The CSTO troops arrived in Kazakhstan after Toqaev declared a state of emergency on January 5 and asked the bloc for military assistance when the protests turned deadly, with security personnel and mobs clashing on city streets nationwide.

The exact number of people killed in the violence remains unclear. Although the official death toll was announced as 164, Toqaev has said hundreds of civilians and security forces were killed and injured.

Toqaev claimed that "foreign-trained terrorists" were behind the protests in an attempt to overthrow the government. But analysts say there appears to be an internal power struggle between the president and followers of his predecessor Nursultan Nazarbaev, who has remained a powerful figure in the country since handpicking Toqaev as his successor in 2019.

After dismissing the cabinet, Toqaev removed the 81-year-old Nazarbaev as head of the National Security Council, a powerful position from which the longtime leader continued to exert considerable influence over the oil-rich Central Asian nation.



# Community News

## TCA Congratulates Western Diocese And Its Primate Archbishop Derderian on 95<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

WATERTOWN — The Central Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA) congratulates Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, and the entire diocese, on its 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In a special message sent to the archbishop this January, the TCA Central Board points out how important this diocese is for the Armenian people, as it is home to one of the largest communities of Armenians outside of Armenia, and praises its



efforts at preserving the faith of the Armenians and their survival as a people, while connecting them to the Armenian heritage and the surviving motherland.

The TCA Central Board leaders note that the expansion of the diocese and the active nature of its parishes indicate that the spiritual leadership of the diocese is fulfilling its role in an exemplary fashion. They observe that the foundations of the diocese are firmly rooted in the blessings and prayers of the renowned Catholicos Khrimian Hayrig and Kevork V.

The TCA Central Board concludes with wishes for an even brighter future for this diocese and all those it serves.

## Nina Nazarian Named Medford Mayor's Permanent Chief of Staff

By Alex Newman

MEDFORD, Mass. (Patch.com) — Nina Nazarian was named the permanent chief of staff for Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn in January. Nazarian had been serving on an interim basis since September 13, when she took over for departing Chief of Staff David Rodrigues.

The city posted the job opening for chief of staff on December 2, according to a statement from the mayor's office. Nazarian was officially given the role December 27.

"Nina has proven herself to be an exceptional member of our team, helping guide key policy directives, helping to modernize our workforce

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Home Is Calling backstage

## COAF Raises Over \$8.4M To Build 2nd SMART Center in Armenia

NEW YORK — The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) raised a record-breaking \$8.4M on December 11, during its second virtual Gala, "Home Is Calling." Donations will be invested in the construction of a second SMART Center in rural Armenia.

The second SMART Center will be built in Armenia's Armavir region, where COAF began its mission to rebuild the country's rural communities 18 years ago. By introducing innovative, non-formal educational hubs to rural communities, COAF is accelerating the pace of progress in Armenia's most disadvantaged regions. The COAF SMART Center currently operating in Lori has already provided crucial education, healthcare, psychological, and social support services to 2,500+ children and their families, across 27 communities. Armavir's SMART Center will replicate this investment in the education and holistic development of Armenia's rural families and children, creating economic and social stability, alongside educational opportunities and career resources, in isolated rural communities.

This year's benefit was met with enormous generosity, including an astounding \$5 million in anonymous donations and stunning commitments from long-time supporters, including the Vahe Fattal Foundation, whose contribution will establish a Digital Design Studio in the Armavir SMART Center. Another \$1 million was gifted by COAF Founder and Chairman Garo Armen.

"Home Is Calling" brought together a community of people dedicated to uplifting Armenia's youth and investing in the future of the country. Outstanding donations included: Armen and Janette Avanesians and Family, \$150K; JHM Foundation, \$150K; Jack and Zarig Youredjian, \$150K; Peter and Marilyn Sarkesian / Ajemian Foundation, \$105K; Victor Zarougian and Judith Saryan, \$100K (\$50K supporting COAF's expansion into Artsakh); Anonymous, \$100K; Haig and Hilda Manjikian, \$100K; and Michael Panosian / ToughBuilt Industries, \$100K. Further contributions were made by Tacori and Levon Travel, who donated two extraordinary pieces of jewelry and a \$1,000 travel voucher for COAF's raffle. Pledges also came in from students in COAF's beneficiary communities and children as young as seven.

This year's benefit was co-hosted by Araksya Karapetyan of Good Day L.A. on FOX 11 Los Angeles, COAF Head of Development Haig Boyadjian, world-renowned auctioneer Gabriel Butu, USArmenia television anchor Armine Amiryan, and Tony Award winner Andrea Martin. Entertainment included musical performances by opera singer Guren Baveyan, the piano duet Aida Avanesyan and Svetlana Hakobyan, the talented Aghvan Papoyan and Arthur Mnatsakanyan, local artist Gor Sujyan, and the Carpet Jam family of musicians. A string of celebrities made guest appearances, including award-winning actor Ed Harris, New York Times bestselling author Chris Bohjalian, California State Assembly Member Adrin Nazarian, famous poet and writer Peter Balakian, Nobel laureate Ardem Patapoutian, comedic actress and playwright Lory Tatouljian, actor Garik Papoyan, comedian and writer Vahe Berberian, and California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara.

If you missed the show, stream a recording of the show at [givebutter.com/homeiscalling](https://givebutter.com/homeiscalling), or watch Araksya Karapetyan of Good Day L.A. recap the event below, and consider supporting COAF's mission to advance the children of Armenia.



Home Is Calling live event

## Christmas Celebrated At St. Vartan Cathedral

NEW YORK — For the second consecutive year, the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity and Theophany of Jesus Christ (Asdvadzahaydnoutian) at New York's St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral required navigating the protocols of the ongoing pandemic.

But the joyous service on Thursday, January 6, 2022, commemorating God's gift of salvation to the world, overcame the tribulations of these uncertain times, and showed that God's love and grace can prevail, and illuminate the way before us. Indeed, that is the message of Christmas embodied in the announcement of the angels, spoken to shepherds more than 2,000 years ago: "For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Rev. Davit Karamyan, Vicar of St. Vartan Cathedral, marked the feast day as celebrant during the Divine Liturgy and Blessing of Water ceremony (Churorhnek). Fr. Karamyan, joined by members of the Diocesan clergy



Rev. Davit Karamyan

and deacons, celebrated the badarak in place of Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan, who took ill a few days prior to "Armenian Christmas," but is now, following the prescribed quarantine period, once again in good health.

In the Armenian Church, the Feast of Theophany occupies an eight-day period (called the "octave" of Theophany), observed from January 6 to 13. Armenian Christmas itself is unique in the Christian world, in that it commemorates both the birth and baptism of Jesus: two events in Christ's life separated by 30 years, according to the Gospel accounts.

The rich colors and golden hues of the processional banners and vestments at the start of the service, punctuated by the percussive ringing of the kshots (liturgical fans) and sacred sharagans of the choir reverberating throughout the sanctuary, set the tone for the ancient and beautiful liturgical rituals. Like the previous year's celebration, the number of worshippers permitted in the sanctuary was kept to a minimum, to ensure safety and comply with local regulations on public gatherings during the pandemic. However, the presence of God's love was unmistakably clear in the worshippers' expressions.

And for the thousands of faithful participating from home, watching the broadcast on the Eastern Diocese's

see CHRISTMAS, page 7



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Fugitive Nicholas Alahverdian Who Faked His Death and Fled U.S. Is Caught in Scotland

By Neil Vigdor and Amanda Holpuch

GLASGOW, Scotland (*New York Times*) — The remembrances poured in for Nicholas Alahverdian, saying that he had succumbed at 32 to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2020. "His last words were 'fear not and run toward the bliss of the sun,'" an online tribute to Alahverdian read.

There was an in memoriam citation with the signature of a congressman on official letterhead, even a death notice purportedly quoting the mayor of Providence, R.I.

But his demise was greatly exaggerated, the authorities in two states said this week. Alahverdian, a convicted sex offender wanted on a rape charge in Utah, was alive and not so well, prosecutors in Utah and the Rhode Island State Police said.

He was recently arrested in Scotland, according to the authorities in the United States, who said that Alahverdian, 34, had been hospitalized with Covid-19 in Glasgow and had at one point been placed on a ventilator.

He had been using the name Arthur Knight while living in that country and eluding investigators, who said on Thursday that they were now seeking to extradite him to the United States on a rape charge that has been pending since September 2020. The Providence Journal earlier reported Alahverdian's arrest.

The case, which prosecutors said involved a sexual assault on a woman — whom Alahverdian had reportedly met on Myspace — in 2008 in Orem, Utah, had been sealed until recently. The charge was filed seven months after he faked his death, said David O. Leavitt, the chief prosecutor in Utah County, which includes Provo.

"We don't make a practice of charging dead people," Mr. Leavitt said on Thursday, January 13, adding that Alahverdian could very well have known that "we were onto him."

Leavitt said that DNA from Alahverdian matched genetic evidence that had been taken from the victim. But that rape kit,

like a multitude of others sitting on shelves in the county, had long gone unanalyzed, he said.

After being elected as county attorney in 2018, Leavitt said, he ordered that DNA evidence from scores of languishing rape kits be entered into a national database of registered sex offenders.

"We got a hit," he said. "Suddenly, we had a suspect."

Investigators said that the suspect, Alahverdian, had used a slew of aliases, including Nicholas Rossi. He was convicted in 2008 of sexual imposition and public indecency under that name.

Those charges stemmed from an encounter between Alahverdian and another Sinclair Community College student in Dayton, Ohio, who told a campus police officer that Alahverdian had groped her and masturbated in front of her in a stairwell.

The conviction, which Alahverdian unsuccessfully appealed, required him to register as a sex offender. That victim had also met him on Myspace, which Leavitt said had been a pattern.

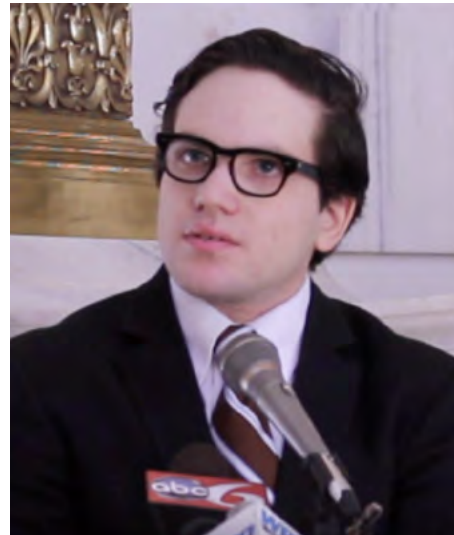
"What we found was a trail of victims," Leavitt said. "We knew that if we charged him and if that were public, that we'd never find him."

In Glasgow, hospital employees were able to identify Mr. Alahverdian from photographs, according to investigators, who said that his fingerprints and DNA had been provided to Interpol.

Laura Hamilton, a spokeswoman for the Crown Office, which prosecutes criminal cases in Scotland, said "Arthur Knight" had appeared in a virtual court hearing from Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow on Dec. 23 in connection with the extradition proceedings. Ms. Hamilton said the Crown Office had not scheduled future court dates.

A spokeswoman for Police Scotland said the force had arrested a 34-year-old man on December 13 in Glasgow "in connection with an international arrest warrant."

The Rhode Island State Police and the



Nicholas Alahverdian (GoLocalProv photo)

F.B.I. referred questions on Alahverdian's current status to Leavitt's office, which said that it was not immediately clear whether Mr. Alahverdian was still hospitalized.

The online tribute to Alahverdian, which gave February 29, 2020, as the date of his death and clocked in at nearly 1,000 words, said that his "earthly remains were cremated with his ashes scattered at sea."

"At the time of his passing, the room was filled with the sounds of the end credits for the 1997 film 'Contact' by composer Alan Silvestri, a film and score which held special meaning for Mr. Alahverdian," the tribute read. The movie, adapted from a novel by Carl Sagan, involves a possible message coming from a distant star system.

The tribute said that Alahverdian had earned acclaim as a child welfare reform advocate, drawing from his own experience of being raped and assaulted in Rhode Island's child welfare system.

It quoted Jorge O. Elorza, the mayor of Providence, remembering Alahverdian as a

"a beloved community leader whose selflessness and lifelong contributions to the residents of the State of Rhode Island have earned him the unwavering admiration and respect of many."

A spokeswoman for Elorza did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Thursday.

On a Facebook tribute page for Alahverdian, an in memoriam citation signed by Rep. Jim Langevin, Democrat of Rhode Island, is still prominently displayed.

According to Langevin's office, the citation, which includes the House seal, was requested by someone claiming to be a member of Alahverdian's family. An aide to Langevin described it as a common courtesy for the office to accommodate such requests, though he said that had it known about Alahverdian's background, it would not have granted it.

The person requesting the tribute asked for Langevin to read the citation on the floor of the House, a request that the office said had been denied.

"Every year, my office issues many condolence cards to Rhode Islanders during their times of mourning," Langevin said in a statement on Thursday. "If police reports are accurate, it is disturbing that this one was abused to further this apparent deceptive plot to escape justice. I hope he is brought to justice and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Leavitt said that Alahverdian's victims ranged far and wide because of his deception and weren't limited to those in the sexual assault cases. The exhaustive search for him, he said, sent a powerful message, to people including the woman Alahverdian is accused of raping in Utah.

"She certainly hasn't rested from her suffering," he said, "and from our perspective, we shouldn't be resting, either."

## Nina Nazarian Named Medford Mayor's Chief Of Staff

NAZARIAN, from page 5

and ensuring City operations remain smooth and functional during this latest surge," Lungo-Koehn said. "She has been a reliable ally, offers thoughtful advice based on her years of government experience, and she will continue to serve the people of Medford with professionalism and humility."

Nazarian joined the mayor's Office of Procurement in September 2020, acting as special project manager for complex projects and procurement. Prior to joining Lungo-Koehn's administration, Nazarian served as town administrator in Littleton and Princeton.

She has been instrumental in managing and securing grants and projects in Medford, including the renovation and restoration of the fire department facilities and the development of new procurement policies for city staff, the mayor's office said.

"I am honored and humbled that the mayor has entrusted me to lead her staff and help craft and implement her policy goals for her second term," Nazarian said. "I have seen first-hand the dedication and commitment the Mayor has for this community, and I can't wait to continue on the work we have been doing to make her vision for Medford a reality."

## Scholarships Available

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Scholarship Committee  
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Tel. 401 461-6114 • Fax 401 461-6112  
e-mail: headasa@aol.com

Deadline for returning completed Applications: March 15, 2022

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Christmas Celebrated at St. Vartan Cathedral

CHRISTMAS, from page 5

YouTube and Facebook channels, the use of a four-camera configuration to transmit the program provided a three-dimensional, “virtual” experience of the service.

With the closing of the altar curtain and dimming of the lights, the sanctuary took on a mysteriously beautiful and sacred aura as the choir soloist sang the hymn Der Voghormya with heartfelt inflection and reverence. It is moments such as this that have embodied the devotion and unwavering faith of Armenian Christians since the earliest days of our church.

Following the sacrament of Holy Communion, Fr. Karamyan came forward from the altar to deliver his sermon.

“Today is one of the greatest, most joyful days in the life of the Armenian Church,” he said in his homily. “We celebrate the birth of our Lord and accept it as the greatest

‘Good News,’ and we long for salvation.” Fr. Karamyan went on to describe how God became like us—a human being—in order to bring salvation and peace on earth among people who have goodwill and accept Him.

But what is expected from us today? “If we want peace in our lives, we must open our hearts to Him, for once He is with us, peace reigns and prevails within us,” he emphasized. “The Armenian Church opened its heart to fully accept the birth of Jesus many years ago, and we today need to revive that spirit, through our own goodwill towards each other.”

As is its tradition, the Armenian Church designates a Godfather of the Cross for the Christmas Water Blessing ceremony. This year the honor was bestowed upon brothers Nicholas and William Nazarian, who stood as witnesses of the ceremonial remembrance of Christ’s baptism.



The Divine Liturgy celebration



George and Lorraine Marootian

St. Vartan Cathedral’s Christmas celebration began on the evening of January 5, with the solemn Jrakalouyts (“Lamp-lighting”) service traditionally celebrated on Christmas Eve. The Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day was the work of many hands. Assisting the celebrant Fr. Davit Karamyan were a half dozen deacons and altar servers, led by Dn. Manuel Rakoubian. Hasmik Rakoubian directed the soulful St. Vartan Cathedral

Choir, accompanied by organist Florence Avakian.

George and Lorraine Marootian and the St. Vartan Cathedral Council extended hospitality to worshippers during an outdoor reception following the service. The online broadcast was directed by Yervant Keshishian, with Chris Zakian providing the narration. Diran Jebejian photographed the service inside the sanctuary.



Rev. Davit Karamyan performing the Divine Liturgy





COMMUNITY NEWS

# Service Armenia 2021 Young Professionals Connect with Armenia

SAN FRANCISCO — Following the successful restart of the Service Armenia program this summer, the Paros Foundation hosted their first Service Armenia trip for young working professionals this October. For seven years Paros has taken young people ages 17 to 22 to Armenia for a month-long service and tour program. While Paros had to sadly cancel their 2020 trip, they couldn’t keep their young and eager future participants away for long. Following the difficult year due to the war, Paros had an influx of interest from young professionals who also wanted to visit Armenia, tour and participate in service work and give back professionally.

“We decided to expand our Service Armenia program to those ages 24 and older, who are interested in making a difference in Armenia. Our goal with the Young Professionals trip was not only to be able to make a difference in their lives by connecting them with Armenia, but to also facilitate this group giving back to their homeland with their various professional experiences,” said Peter Abajian, executive director of the Paros Foundation. “I am so happy this trip was so successful.”

During an unforgettable two-week period, the Service Armenia Young Professionals group accomplished several service projects. The group worked on hard



SERVICE Armenia Young Professionals tour sites in Armenia as part of their trip while developing life-long friendships.



SERVICE Armenia Participants, brothers Aram and Sevan Nahabedian help distribute grocery packs to families in need in Gyumri.

work flooring and painting the Ghoghany Children’s Center, an organization The Paros Foundation supports in the Nor Nork neighborhood of Yerevan. The group implemented an orphan excursion for children from the Yerevan Children’s Home. They assembled food packets and distributed them to impoverished families, as a part of our Groceries for Gyumri project. The group also spent the day in Gyumri where they visited the Debi Arach Children’s Center and attended the opening of the much-anticipated Hianali Beauty Center, a Project of the Assarian Vocational Training Program. Among the highlights of the visit to Gyumri included a visit and tour of Digital Pomegranate, a high-tech company based in Gyumri, and the site of another vocational training program sponsored through Paros.

The Service Armenia Young Profession-

als group also toured historic, religious, and cultural sites in Armenia alongside their service. The program had English speaking staff and guides, safe and well-located accommodations and transportation

combined with interesting cultural and educational activities. Dates for the 2022 Service Armenia Young Professional’s trip are set for October 14 to 30, 2022. The program is open to participants ages 24 to 45.

## Los Angeles Family Donates \$70,000 For Initiatives in Rural Armenia

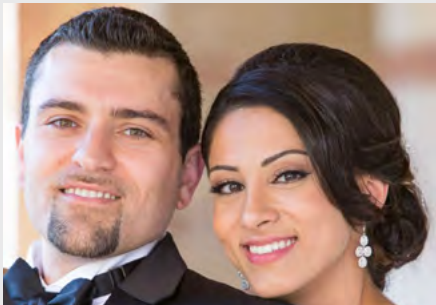
LOS ANGELES — Dr. Neshan Tabibian, and his son and daughter-in-law, Drs. Hagop and Anilga Tabibian, have donated \$70,000 to start new initiatives in the village of Dzovinar, Armenia.

With the coordination of Ter Gevork Barseghyan, parish priest of St. Astvadzadzin Church in Dzovinar, and Yn. Astgthik, the Tabibian Family Fund has embarked on a program to start new small businesses and a computer training program in the village.



Dr. Neshan Tabibian

The recently renovated Christian Education Community Center received 10 new laptops. A qualified instructor will teach adults from the village how to use a computer for communication and business. The children who come to the Community Center will be taught proper computer usage. In addition, ten laptops, and a portable projector have been bought, and are already in use, for the Dzovinar Elementary School.



Drs. Hagop and Anilga Tabibian

One project consists of receiving four industrial grade sewing machines and having a community member receive formal training in how to operate the machines. In turn she will train local women to produce numerous types of clothing and sewn goods to be sold to larger markets in Martuni, Yerevan and beyond.

Once these two projects are successfully implemented, they will receive two industrial grade fruit dehydrators with which residents of Dzovinar and surrounding villages will be able to dry the fruits that grow in their region to be sold at large city markets.

As diasporans, the Tabibian Family Fund will continue with initiatives that will bring additional income to the residents of the villages as well as improving the quality of lives as part of strengthening rural Armenia.



SERVICE Armenia Participants helped renovate the Ghoghany Children’s Center including painting and installing new laminate flooring.





# Arts & Culture

## ‘It’s Not about Just Hitting, It’s About Playing’

*The Vision and Mission of Young Drummer Arman Mnatsakanyan*

By Sona Mirzoyan

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN — If you like jazz and live in Yerevan then you have probably been present at Arman Mnatsakanyan’s gigs or simply know his name. Chances are that his energetic beats wake you up every morning on Armenian Public TV.

Arman is a 24-year-old drummer from Yerevan. Due to his consistency, hard work and dedication he managed to build a successful career in his hometown. Currently, Arman participates in more than 10 ensembles (State Jazz Orchestra of Armenia, Vahagn Hayrapetyan Trio, Dialog Project, New Quintet, Karen Grigoryan Quartet, Armenian Navy Band, Kind of Trio, etc.), without sticking to a particular genre and playing almost every known jazz style. He plans to further promote his career and reach new heights. We talked to Arman about his perception of music, obstacles on his way, sources of inspiration, and future endeavors.

### What comes to your mind when you hear the word “drums”?

If we talk about a band concept, drums are definitely the pulse and the foundation on which the music is built. Apart from this, there is an interesting connection between the bass and the drums, as they are pretty close musically. In general, good relationships between the bassist and the drummer are always beneficial for the music.

I never wanted or tried to associate the instrument with hitting. Many people ask me questions like “How long have you been hitting the drums?” or “Can you hit this rhythm?” It’s not about just hitting; it’s about playing. The stereotype about the minor role of drums is upsetting, and one of my missions is to break it. If we regard this prejudice from a theoretical point of view, when you tune the drums, you do it with notes, and a melody can be easily played with the instrument.

As a young musician you might have encountered problems and obstacles from the very beginning of your career path. What are the issues you wish the next generation wouldn’t face?

The most urgent issue relates to practice rooms. If you live in an apartment, the neighbor factor makes it almost impossible to arrange practice sessions at home. I have faced this problem a lot, even dealt with the police (laughs). I didn’t manage to reach a compromise with my neighbors. Nevertheless, their point of view is reasonable. This problem exists all over the world, but the prevailing culture of apartments in Yerevan makes it more relevant.

see DRUMMER, page 14



Carolyn Rapkiewicz in traditional dance attire

## Experts Team Up to Preserve Armenian Folk Dance

Harry Kezelian

*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

BERLIN — If a folklorist said they had found a hidden remnant of pre-Genocide Armenian culture, one might think they had been doing research in a remote valley in Armenia, a rural community in the Middle East, or among the forgotten Islamized “Hamshen” Armenians of the Pontic Mountains in Turkey.

What about Springfield, Mass.? Talk about hidden in plain sight.

For reasons that are still not entirely clear, researchers have increasingly begun to recognize that the established communities traced from the early Armenian immigrants to the US, while successful, Westernized, and assimilated in many ways, have preserved a wealth of folk dance and music that has been forgotten in other Diasporan communities and is little known in contemporary Armenia.

In other words, if one wants to speak fluent Western Armenian, they might need an immersion experience in a place like Beirut; but if one wants to learn how to dance the “Tamzara” the way it was done in the villages of Western Armenia, the best bet might be to live in Boston for a while or better yet, Fresno.

And the practitioners and champions of those dances are uniting from all over the world, eventually attending a summit this summer (more on that further down).

Generations raised on the style that has come to be known as kef music enjoy dancing to the strains of oud, clarinet, and dumbeg. The genre has often been accused by critics as merely replicating the Turkish-language hit parade of turn-of-the-century Istanbul. That’s partially true, as any glance at a classic unrestricted set list will tell you. But alongside the Turkish popular/folk music, which is increasingly being kept to a minimum, the folk dances of Western Armenia like “Tamzara,” “Haleh/Kochari,” “Papouri,” “Lorke” and many others have consistently been played (in their authentic form) and consistently been danced by the adoring fans of artists like Onnik Dinkjian, John Berberian, Hachig Kazarian and Richard Hagopian. This music and dance has retained its popularity in old-established US diaspora communities like Detroit, Philadelphia, New England, and Fresno.

But even in these storied communities, traditional folk dance is not in its pristine condition. Traditional dances have given way in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to Diasporan folk dances invented by Armenian-American teenagers, and there is a general lack of understanding of the history of the dance. These treasures are hidden in plain sight, often with an emphasis on the word “hidden,” since current generations no longer remember their origins. Depending on who you are talking to, if you ask about “Tamzara” you might be a shown one of several traditional village steps (by someone who is a great dancer, but doesn’t know what village the steps came from), a Diaspora version based on those steps, or a completely made-up dance that emerged in New England in the 1960s and shares little with the true “Tamzara” aside from its music. The latter (readers may know it from its famous hand clapping) is actually the most well-known among younger generations. Yet, practically every town in historic Western Armenia had its own variation of that dance with different steps and even a different melody — and at one time, many of those were still being danced at picnics across New England, the Midwest and Central California.

Meanwhile, folk dance was heavily promoted in Armenia during the Soviet Era, but predominantly in a “choreographed” form. Influenced by Russian and European ballet, elaborately choreographed stage productions based on Armenian folk dance steps were developed to wow theatrical audiences across the Soviet Union as well as in the West. While artistically pleasing, folklore and dance as a social phenomenon was somewhat

see DANCE, page 10

## Khoren Stalbe Stays True to His Humanist, Armenian Roots

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

*Special to the Mirror-Spectator*

YEREVAN / DAHAB, Egypt — Latvian singer and DJ Khoren (Horan) Stalbe was born on March 8, 1971, in Riga. In 1990 he founded the musical group “F&k Art.” In the 1990s he worked for SWH radio as a DJ. The clip for his song *For Black Man Christmas No Weekend* was the first Latvian video to be shown on MTV. In 1995, the group won the Liepaja Amber competition. In 2002, he participated in the Eurosong 2002 competition and in a duo with Linda Leen tried to gain the right to represent Latvia in the Eurovision Song Contest. Latvia won Eurovision this year and won the right to host Eurovision next year. Since 2014, Khoren Stalbe has been the soloist and leader of the Riga Reggae band. In 2003 he published the book *Halfway* in Latvian on his Himalayan expedition and Nepal, which became a bestseller. From 2009 to 2013, he ran the Baltika diving club in the Egyptian resort of Dahab. In May 2011, he was named the world’s best underwater photographer by Underwater Photography in the Wide Lens category. At the end of last year he returned to Dahab with his family to continue underwater photographing.

**Khoren, it was Ashot Grigoryan who wrote about you for the first time, which was a very pleasant surprise! How would you characterize your work?**

Everything in my work, from painting as a child to music and cinema, the most important message is the protection of the environment and the idea that we are all brothers and sisters, regardless of race or religion. Each of my concerts begins with a long recitative, which ends with the words: “One sun and one earth! Two worlds are tearing me apart. The only thing I am absolutely sure of is that all the people around are siblings.” Since childhood, I have loved nature and this world very much. It seems to me that this world is the creation of the Lord, and we should treat it with care. I see this in terms of environmental protection. As for “STOP THE WAR” and other slogans that I use in my concerts, they are probably close in spirit to the Armenians, because Serj Tankian, the greatest musician from System of a Down, whom I hope to meet someday: in principle, he does very similar things and his message is the same as ours. For me, as an artist, the most important thing is to feel the message. Therefore, it makes no difference to me whether it is painting, music, dance or something else. The important thing is what meaning we put in it and no matter how it is, I always try to show the world the good, the positive side and the beautiful side. The ability to see beauty is a gift to look at the world with love. This is how I would describe my message to the world.

see ROOTS, page 12





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Experts Team Up to Preserve Armenian Folk Dance

DANCE, from page 9

pushed to the side in order to prove that the “proletariat” could produce “high art” as a confirmation of Communist ideology and as a way to compete with European culture. When the state dance troupes of Soviet Armenia toured the Diaspora, many copied their dramatic style, erroneously believing that it was more “authentic” merely because it came from the homeland. Knowledge of traditional dance suffered as a result.

“The other point is that most of the Armenians performing all over, in Armenia, in the Diaspora, do the dances that were created for the stage,” says Carolyn Rapkiewicz, one of the dance researchers involved in a new project to document traditional Armenian dance. “There’s a lot of copying of that style. I’m a dancer, I really love all kinds of dance, but let’s find out the real origins of the dance. Was it made up in this country, was it made up in the Soviet Union for the stage?”

While practitioners recognize that folk dance is a living art form, and there is nothing wrong with later evolutions of the dance, at the same time, they wish to document and understand the history of the original dances, while learning and passing on the steps and the style to future generations. Not only that, but under threat of assimilation in the United States, much of this traditional Western Armenian dance culture could be lost if it is not documented. For this reason, a team of dance experts from across the United States have teamed up with the Berlin-based Houshmadyan Project to document the accumulated knowledge of traditional dance that was brought to the US by Armenian Genocide survivors.

## The Dance Master

Tom Bozigian was born in Los Angeles and raised in Fresno. His father, one of the early eastern Armenian immigrants to settle in the LA area, came from the Catholic Armenian villages of Shirak (the region around Gyumri in modern Armenia) while his mother, a native of Fresno, hailed from a family of immigrants from Western



Tom Bozigian leading a dance class

Armenia’s Kharpert region, in present Eastern Turkey. Bozigian was brought up with traditions of both Western and Eastern Armenia from relatives that had grown up in those places before the Genocide and before the Soviet Era. Traditional folk dance of all Armenian regions was to become his specialty.

Perhaps even more influential than this dual background was being raised in the burgeoning and culturally traditional Armenian community of Fresno, where, as immortalized by William Saroyan, Armenian grape growers tried to preserve an Anatolian village lifestyle to some degree on American soil.

“In 1944 I began Saturday Day School at St. Paul Armenian Apostolic Church,” Bozigian states. “I was 6 years old. We studied Armenian language, traditional song/dance and Armenian plays. I grew up in Fresno finishing graduate school and lived there 25 years. I learned songs and dances of Armenian immigrants from Sepastia, Kayseri, Kharpert, Cheungeush, Sev Dzov (Hemshen), Erzenga, Erzeroum, Artveen, Ardahan, Alashgert (my Paternal side), Moosh, Bitlis, Sasoon, Seghert. Then playing music rebounded off my experiences.”

Moving to LA in the late 1960s where he worked as an educator, Bozigian studied ballet, as well as Armenian folk dance with choreographer Jora Markaryan, leading to an invitation to study at the Sayat Nova State Choreographic School of Soviet Armenia in the early 1970s. He graduated from the academy and returned to Los Angeles in 1975, where he has taught Armenian folk dance ever since. He not only teaches dance classes worldwide but performs as a percussionist and vocalist with his own ensemble. He has made it his life’s mission to preserve the Armenian folk dances brought to the United States by the original Armenian immigrants, in some cases, preserved



Tom Bozigian posing with davoul drum

nowhere else in the world.

In recent years, Bozigian has won recognition from ethnographic authorities in Armenia thanks to his work. One of Bozigian’s frequent collaborators is Gagik Ginosyan of Armenia. Ginosyan, recognized as the leading ethnographic dance expert in Armenia today, is promoting the teaching of Armenian folk dances in their original “unchoreographed” form. Coming up under the influence of Hayrik Mouradian, who brought traditional folklore and dance to Soviet Armenia from the Van-Vaspouragan region, Ginosyan has formed his own group, “Karin” to perpetuate the original dances. With the help of Bozigian, Ginosyan has added many regional dances to his repertoire, which survived in the US but not in Armenia. In some cases, he has been able to revive dances which have travelled quite a circuitous route; Ginosyan learned the dance “Kham-khama” from Bozigian, who learned it more than 50 years ago from a musician named Jimmy Haboian in California, who had learned it from the Kurdish immigrant community in his native Detroit. Ginosyan and Bozigian reintroduced the dance in Yerevan, and the results are all over YouTube.

## Dance Team, Assemble

Bozigian has become a one-man institution, but at age of 83, he felt it was time to make sure his legacy gets passed on. So, just before the pandemic, he approached Gary and Susan Lind-Sinanian of the Armenian Museum of America in Watertown. The couple has been engaged in the preservation of all things Armenian (like history, folklore, and folk dance) in the New England area for decades, and Gary, though not of Armenian birth, has become one of the top authorities in the US on the dances of the early immigrants.

Gary Lind-Sinanian contacted Carolyn Rapkiewicz, who has been active in promoting traditional dance for years in the DC area, to organize a Zoom meeting, and Robert Haroutunian, the leading expert in the New York

metro area was added to the group.

Rapkiewicz, born in Massachusetts, has worked in museum curator for many years including with the Smithsonian and was instrumental in the featuring of Armenia at the 2018 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, as well as Onnik



Carolyn Rapkiewicz

Dinkjian’s awarding of the National Heritage Fellowship honor from the National Endowment for the Arts. She grew up attending Armenian picnics at Camp Ararat in Maynard, Mass. in the 1960s, where she learned the folk dances and culture of her Kharpert, Gesaria and Sepastia ancestry. She was the leader of the Arax Dance Ensemble in Washington, DC from 2004-2015 and the Arev Dance Ensemble, also in DC, from 2015-2020, before she and her husband retired to Bar Harbor, Maine.

Robert Haroutunian is the leader of the Aradzani Dance Ensemble affiliated with Holy Martyrs Armenian Church in Bayside, Queens, which aims to perpetuate traditional





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Armenian Communities of Persia/Iran

History, Trade, Culture



Edited by  
**Richard G. Hovannisian**

# New Book Released on Armenian Communities of Iran

LOS ANGELES — Mazda Publishers has announced the release of *Armenian Communities of Persia/Iran: History, Trade, Culture* (670 pages, retail \$45). This is the 15<sup>th</sup> and final volume in the series “Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces,” edited by Professor Richard G. Hovannisian of the University of California and Chapman University.

The volume, covering the Armenian presence in Iran from antiquity to the contemporary times, includes Armenian-Iranian relations from the pre-Christian era to the Middle Ages, the Maku and Tabriz districts, with the monasteries of St. Thaddeus, St. Stepanos, and Tsortsor, the importance of Persian Azarbayjan/Atrpatakan in the Armenian and Iranian revolutionary movements, and the displacements and massacres of the Christian inhabitants of the Urmia, Salmast and Khoy districts during the Turkish offensives in World War I, as well as the leadership in relief efforts of Archbishop Nerses Melik-Tangian of Atrpatakan (Tabriz).

Another section assesses the impressive place of the all-Armenian municipality of New Julfa in Iranian-Armenian history, with its painters and artisans, unique churches, and monastic complex (the Vank), its merchants who were prominent in the international commercial networks from East Asia to Russia and Western Europe, and its distinguished Armenian theater. The volume concludes with a pictorial essay featuring the paintings of New Julfa and outlying districts by the noted Julfan artist Sumbat. Other chapters assess the interactions between the current Armenian leadership in Tehran with the Iranian authorities, and the socio-economic integration of Armenian Iranians in Southern California. The volume is enhanced by numerous color illustrations.

This 15<sup>th</sup> volume is the only one in the series that concentrates on Armenian communities outside the Ottoman Empire and is dedicated to Dr. Vartiter K. Hovannisian, a constant companion and professional collaborator since the very beginning of the series and long before.

Copies may be ordered from Mazda Publishers, Abril and Sardarabad bookstores in Glendale, NAASR bookstore in Belmont MA, or (at an introductory promotional price of \$32 in the U.S.) from Daron Kevorkian at [daronkev7@gmail.com](mailto:daronkev7@gmail.com).

unchoreographed dance. Much of his repertoire is based on the research of the late Arsen Anoushian, a dance expert who led the Armenian Folk Dance Society of New York in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, which had collected dances from the original immigrants particularly from the Van, Erzurum (Garin) and Sepastia regions.

Bozigian, the Lind-Sinanians, Rapkievian and Haroutunian had not worked together before as a group, but they had a mission to accomplish for posterity. According to Rapkievian, the group wanted to “make sure that the dances people don’t do anymore get passed on and even perhaps revived.”

“We started talking once a month about what we wanted to do together,” says Rapkievian, “And we brainstormed a lot of different ideas. And I said, ‘why don’t we try to do a virtual archive.’ We could collect video that’s out there and record new if we wanted to. And the group thought that was a good idea and I started looking for organizations or institutions to partner with or host us.”

Due to the need for a reliable, dedicated website to host the dance videos for public dissemination, Rapkievian began exploring dance archives and Armenian organizations. She knew of Houshamadyan, the Berlin-based web archive whose mission is “to reconstruct and preserve the memory of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire through research.” Led by history professor Dr. Vahe Tachjian, the Houshamadyan Project has been making the history and

an to get together and dance together,” says Rapkievian. “To convene a kind of summit of ourselves to make sure we were doing the steps the same way and in the same style.”

### The Dance Summit

The planned meeting ended up being joined and cosponsored by Houshamadyan. Ani Boghikian Kasparian of Michigan was the liaison between the overall Houshamadyan group and the dance project. Kasparian is part of the board of Houshamadyan USA, a 501(c)(3) group that was founded in order to make it easier for US residents to donate to the initiatives of the Berlin-based organization.

And so, the dance leaders converged on Boston in August in order to film the first 20 dances. The videography was provided by Houshamadyan and took place in the hall of the Armenian Cultural Foundation. Live music was provided by the ensemble of oud master John Berberian with Mal Barsamian

(clarinet), Bruce Gigarjian (guitar) and Ron Tutunjian (dumbeg). There were also a couple of dances that were performed simply to vocal singing by the dancers, which was traditional in Historic Armenia.

Bozigian’s wife, Sheree King, is also part of the team.

Rapkievian states that “primarily Tom [Bozigian] and Gary [Lind-Sinanian] have been writing the written dance directions to do

these steps. But you can’t really learn to do a dance from written instructions,” thus the need for the videos. The written notes are best used as an aid to memory for someone who already knows the dance, Rapkievian added. Of course, video isn’t ideal either, but it’s extremely valuable from a preservation standpoint. “We are trying very hard to find community recordings of dances that may be on film in people’s attics or garages. The first dance we chose to publish, was one which I found years ago, a video at a picnic of some older men doing the ‘Govdun’ dance.”

The picnic took place in Indian Orchard, Mass., a suburb of Springfield. Still home to a vibrant Armenian com-



Robert Haroutunian, far left, with Aradzani Dance Group in New York

munity, most early settlers hailed from Sepastia (now Sivas, Turkey). The signature dance of the men of Sepastia’s village of Govdun has been passed down in this community while little-known elsewhere. In fact, New England musicians colloquially refer to the melody as “Springfield Sepo.” (“Sepo” is slang for a person from Sepastia.)

The Govduntsi dance was chosen as one of the 20 documented at the August summit. The video as well as information on the dance and its history can be found at <https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-sivas/govdoun/local-characteristics/dance.html>

Houshamadyan is issuing a call for donations to aid the dance project. The dance researchers are also looking for photographs and video which are dance related from the early Armenian immigrants in the US. The group hopes to document all the dances that have been passed down and are known by experts and teachers in the US Diaspora. They further plan to have a second “dance summit” in the Detroit area this summer.

“In my parents’ and grandparents’ generation, the original village line dances were passed down,” says Rapkievian, “because this was an expression of our identity, and it’s important to maintain our identity,” noting that the picnics hosted by compatriotic unions, or clubs for Armenians who originated in the same city, village, or region, were the venue for passing down these traditions.

She says the group is currently looking for more photographs and videos, and deciding on the next 20 dances to be recorded, hopefully this summer in Detroit.

Rapkievian notes that the dances which were created by Armenian-American teenagers in the 50s and 60s are a valid form of culture too. They were created based on traditional movements, she says.

“Maybe after we try to record all the village dance, we’ll try to do the American born dances too.”



Gary (right) and Susan Lind-Sinanian, at the Armenian Museum of America

culture of historic Western Armenia available to the masses through the online medium since 2010. They publish articles and videos in English, Armenian, and Turkish on information that was once only available in out-of-print thick Armenian-language tomes printed in the US or the Middle East in the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century. These books, often dedicated to the memory of everything about the Armenian life in a single village, town, or region, were known as houshamadyanner (memory-books).

“Vahe was very excited,” says Rapkievian, “and we agreed to collaborate.”

“We had already agreed before contacting Houshamady-





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# The Journeys of Heroes Sheds Light on Armenian History and Current Conflict

HEROES, from page 1

Hakobyan is the author of *Green and Black: Karabakh Diary* (2008), *View From Ararat: Armenians and Turks* (2012) and most recently *Valley of Death: A 44-day Catastrophe* (2021). He joined Ken Sarajian (grandson of Yeghishe Catchouny) and Paul Shahinian (grandson of Vagharshag Shahinian) for a book presentation at St. Leon's Armenian Church on December 9, which was simultaneously broadcast on Zoom and moderated by Ara Araz. The event was cosponsored by the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL), the Knights of Vartan – Bakradouny Lodge, the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), the Ararat-Eskijian Museum, the Armenian Network of America – Greater NY, and the families of Vagharshag Shahinian and Yeghishe Catchouny, as well as St. Leon's.

After an introduction by Araz, there was a discussion by Paul Shahinian, followed by Ken Sarajian, on the contents of the book.

## Two Heroes

Vagharshag Shahinian was a young man from Van who had immigrated to America and was working in a foundry in Syracuse, NY. At the outbreak of the First World War, he made his way back to Van, fled with his family to Yerevan, and joined a volunteer military unit. Settling in the US after the Sovietization of Armenia, his adventures were known to grandson Paul Shahinian and other family members but details were murky until a cassette tape was discovered marked simply "1915." The tape was an interview with Vagharshag which revealed the story of his military service in Armenia.

Shahinian also discussed the story of Yeghishe Catchouny, who was a family friend of the Shahinians. While Catchouny had written down his story and had it published as *Zoravar Antranig – Hayagan Arantz'in Harvadzogh Zoramasuh* [General Antranig – The Armenian Special Striking Division], it has not been translated into English. The two families' search for a translator for these two stories was answered when Hakobyan, who had taken an interest in Catchouny's original book (published in Western Armenian), approached the Catchouny

descendants for a project.

Catchouny was born in Arabkir and studied law in Constantinople. During the war he ended up in the Caucasus, where he acted as "aide-de-camp" to General Antranik,



Vagharshak Shahinian and Shoushanik Shahinian (Photo courtesy of Housamadyan)

in the words of Shahinian. In his memoir, Catchouny described the events that transpired in his service under Antranik and with the Special Striking Division, a fighting force which defended the First Republic of Armenia but did not always obey orders from the government. When the Armenian leadership made huge concessions to Turkey in the Treaty of Batum, Antranik refused to recognize the Treaty and went rogue, travelling to Zangezur (today's Syunik) with his men. The Turks would have been given permission to traverse from Nakhichevan to Baku with their military. Antranik put a stop to this by holding the Syunik region with his Special Striking Division.

Much of the historical context of the Karabakh Conflict is brought to light by Catchouny's story, including the territorial disputes revolving around Karabakh, Nakhichevan, and Syunik, as well as the issue of Pan-Turkism. Great power politics, which at the time prominently featured the British, are also part of this story.

The interesting coincidence in the two stories came from the fact that Vagharshag Shahinian's "Vanetsi Regiment" was sent to take over the location in Dilijan that Antranik's group had left. Shahinian, a commander of 200

men, and his friends quickly realized that their mission was fruitless and informed their commander that they too were leaving to join Antranig. Shahinian ended up leading 1,100 men southward to join Antranig, although by the time they arrived in Nakhichevan, Antranig had gone on to Syunik and Karabakh.

## Stories Give Context to Today's Issues

Ken Sarajian, a grandson of Yeghishe Catchouny, was next to speak. Speaking as a high school history teacher, Sarajian does not like the phrase "history repeats itself." Rather, we should look to history to gain insight on what is going on today, he says. He believes his grandfather's story has an important resonance for what is happening in Artsakh (Karabakh) today, as it describes the territorial conflicts that surrounded Karabakh in the World War I period, which involved much of the same players. To understand why there is a conflict today or what is going on, we need to look at the roots of the issue, he said. Hakobyan reiterated the importance of the Shahinian and Catchouny stories and their relevance to today's Artsakh conflict. During the question and answer session, he claimed that the three figures responsible for keeping Syunik part of Armenia are Antranig, Garegin Nzhdeh, and Alexander Miasnikyan (one of the first heads of the Soviet Armenian government). Hakobyan also pointed out how relevant Catchouny's testimony is, as he did not refrain from criticizing his leader, General Antranig, at times. Hakobyan's point was that memoirs of everyday people are sometimes considered too biased to be used as an historical source, but Catchouny's criticism of Antranig showed him to be an extremely honest and trustworthy source as to the events that took place. Hakobyan also noted that much of the account is corroborated by British officials who were present.

*The Journeys of Heroes* is available on the NAASR website here: [https://naasr.org/products/journeys-of-heroes-the?\\_pos=1&\\_sid=2aaedf67e&\\_ss=r](https://naasr.org/products/journeys-of-heroes-the?_pos=1&_sid=2aaedf67e&_ss=r)

A translation into Eastern Armenian, as both accounts were originally in Western Armenian, is planned by Hakobyan in the immediate future for publication in Armenia.

## Khoren Stalbe Stays True To His Roots

ROOTS, from page 9

### How did you get involved in underwater filming?

My mother is a hydrogeologist, and since I grew up with my mother in "splendid isolation," we were traveling a lot. I spent all my childhood on expeditions with my mother and her colleagues on the lakes. At the age of four I knew how to do a chemical analysis of water. Along the equator, I traveled the whole world, or rather, not the world, but the underwater world, most of the most beautiful places in the world.

Well, I am such a traveler, traveling to the underwater world is my mission and the most important journey of my life. I love documentaries, I filmed and participated in projects of underwater documentaries, about the lives of fish and so on, participated in the filming of several world records, worked with Alexei Molchanov, a world champion in freediving. I participated in several films as an actor and cameraman, two projects were in 2021, but my biggest adventure was 10 years or more ago, with a Russian film company for more than a month filming 3D underwater in Papua New Guinea, which was very difficult and painstaking. At that time, there were only five cameramen in the world who performed such work. Much has been done and much more needs to be done. I also, being half Armenian, would like to cooperate with Armenians with great pleasure, be it anywhere in the world or in Armenia.

**Your name must have been difficult and unusual in Latvia?**

Yes, questions about my strange name bothered me all my life. But on the other hand, from childhood, the unusual name put me in a situation where I was somehow special, not like the others: at least visually, I was different from other Latvian children, and my name, of course, played a role. Then, when I took up art, the name helped me a lot, because if others have pseudonyms, stage names, then I did not need anything like that. Thanks to my popularity, there are now a total of 60 Khorens or

Horens in Latvia!

**And how do you define "Armenian" and "Latvian" in you?**

Interesting question! I grew up in a purely Latvian environment and at first I was embarrassed to talk about my roots. Then, at the age of 18, when I entered the conservatory, the acting department, and my favorite teacher and director Mara Kimele (by the way, she once staged a play with my father in Armenia) asked: "Where did you get such a name?" "Well, I have an Armenian name." She asked: "Is your dad Armenian?" She smiled, looked at me, because she already understood everything. I nodded. She was the first person who told me: "You should be proud of this, not ashamed." So I thank her!

Well, speaking both jokingly and in all seriousness, I think that I inherited emotions and irascibility from the Armenians, and probably envy or something like that from the Latvians. But I wanted it to be different: from the Armenians to inherit, for example, intelligence and knowledge, and from the Latvians being hard working and having the

ability to endure. This is also a joke. I think that these two worlds from the peculiarity of my soul, perception of the world and values. These worlds combined in me, tearing me in half. When I was born, a good friend of our family said: "I wish he was as talented as his father and as hardworking as his mother." And thanks to my unusual Armenian-Latvian fate, I adore, love and admire the mountains and the sea, therefore, when they ask me what I do, I jokingly say that "I climb and dive."

**Everyone in Latvia and Armenia who knows you knows also you bear the name of your father, a well-known actor and director in Armenia, but his name is never spoken. Are you doing this on purpose, or should I mention it already?**

I think that now it is already possible to pronounce this name loudly, because for obvious reasons I have never really been able to tell anyone in my life who my father is and how talented and famous he is. I only heard good things about my father from my mother, how talented, wonderful, interesting he is. Yes, my father is Khoren



Abrahamyan, and for many Soviet years I had to hide this from the public so as not to harm either my father or the public, because we all thought what would they say about us. I hope that a small speck from his huge talent, from this bright soul fell on me (laughs). By the way, those who saw me on stage, say that we even have the same posture, how we stand, how we talk, how we communicate. Once, as a child, I was traveling with my mother in public transport, the Armenians talked to us, asked my name. Mom answered: "Khoren," they were very surprised and said: "Do you know that our famous Armenian artist also bears the name Khoren?" My mother smiled sadly and said: "I know."

**At the age of 48, you visited Armenia for the first time. Can we say that since that year you have turned a new page in your life?**

Undoubtedly, that was a new page in my life! My Armenian wife persuaded me that I should definitely visit Armenia, because I will understand why I am like this. And I am glad that I did it: thanks to television, the program "Traveling with a Star," which invited me to travel to Armenia, and still it seems to me that God sent me there. When people asked me: "Why don't you go to Armenia, why don't you meet with your relatives?" I answered them: "It will happen in a very special way and it should happen like a pilgrimage." And so it happened.

My wife is Lusine Tsaturyan. She inspires me a lot and helps me in my perception of the world. Somehow I met a beautiful girl and then, when we talked, it turned out that she is Armenian, I thought: this is destiny!

**What was your most vivid memory from Armenia?**

First impression: we arrive in Armenia at dawn. I looked at all this beauty of Armenia, kissed the ground, cried a little and thanked the Creator that I have such an opportunity in 48 years to look at the country of my father. This, of course, was indelible. There have been central journeys in my life, and among them Armenia, of course, comes first. On any trip, and even more so during my pilgrimage to Armenia, the most important thing is the people! So the most touching was the meeting with my relatives and how they met me. Well, of course, when I visited my father's grave, at least that's how I met him in this life. Since childhood, I was very much influenced by religion, the study of various scriptures, etc., so

*continued on next page*





ARTS & CULTURE

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



## Armenian Mother’s Choreg From Steve Sharafian

These two recipes are contributed by writer, recipe developer, and baking instructor Steve Sharafian contributed this family recipe from his amazing food blog, A Serious Bunburyist. Choreg (no matter how it is spelled) is a family favorite in most Armenian households. It is the classic Easter bread that our mothers, grandmothers and aunts lovingly made for us each year. (<http://ibunbury.blogspot.com/2011/04/choreg.html>).

Many cultures have their own variations of this sweet bread. This aromatic, plush Armenian bread is meant to be an indulgence after winter and Lent, but many Armenians eat it year-round as well. It’s perfect for breakfast, lunch or as a snack any day of the week with a hot beverage. It can be formed into individual round or knotted rolls, and — more commonly — into long braided loaves, and the braids are often made with three strands of dough, to represent the Holy Trinity.

From Dining in Diaspora, “For the descendants of survivors who settled in cities like Boston, Detroit, Racine, Chicago, Fresno and Philadelphia and so many other pockets in the U.S., choreg is the cornerstone of their identity, made generation after generation during Easter in the houses they grew up in, intertwined with the most significant childhood memories they had.” (<https://www.diningindiaspora.com/food/2018/3/30/choreg-for-armenian-americans-identity-is-braided-into-this-bread>)

### This is Steve’s story

In Proust’s *Du côté de chez Swann*, a spoonful of tea with a few crumbs from a “little shell of cake” awakens a powerful joy and a childhood memory. In my family’s narrative, it is a sip of tea with a snail shell of bread that is the gateway to remembrances. Choreg is the Armenian version of a yeast bread made across Europe and parts of the Near East to celebrate special occasions, especially Easter.

During my childhood, choreg was the harbinger of Easter Sunday—my mother only made the small, shiny rolls once a year, usually near the end of Lent. When I was young my parents allowed a lenient Lenten regime: my brothers and I gave up a particular flavor of ice cream or a certain type of candy. I came to learn this painless practice of Lenten abstinence was not church sanctioned. Throughout Christianity’s history, churches and their faithful took their Lenten observances seriously. Fasting was common. Those that “merely” abstained from eating certain foods often gave up eating all animal products and fruit; some only ate bread and water. After this type of (or any type of) deprivation, one can easily imagine why a bread rich with butter and eggs was served to celebrate Easter; the church’s greatest feast day deserved a very special bread.

The Ladies Society cookbook from my childhood church introduces its choreg

recipe as follows: “There are as many choreg recipes as there are Armenian cooks. Each recipe adds a little something different, making it as unique as the bakers that prepare them.” The constant ingredients are eggs, flour, milk, salt, sugar, yeast and fat. Some recipes exclusively use butter, while others use a mixture of butter and shortening or vegetable oil. The variable ingredients typically include the addition of mahleb (or mahlab), a nutty, sweet/sour spice made from ground sour cherry seeds; toppings may include sesame or black caraway seeds. Some braid the dough before baking; others create spirals resembling a snail shell. Some choreg is noticeably sweet; other versions taste like brioche.

My mother’s choreg is, of course, the best. It is a small, unadorned, snail shell roll that is more sweet than not. Here is the recipe that she follows. It is originally from an English-language Armenian newspaper called the California Courier. (The parenthetical ingredients are my mother’s preferences.)

### INGREDIENTS:

- 4 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 1/4 cups sugar
- 1 stick unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 1/2 cup shortening (Crisco brand), melted and cooled
- 1 cup whole milk, lukewarm (90F - 95F)
- 2 fresh yeast cakes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 5 cups all-purpose flour (Gold Medal brand)
- 1 large egg, beaten for wash

### PREPARATION:

Pre-heat oven to 150F and turn off oven.

Beat eggs in upright mixer using a whisk attachment for 2 minutes. Add sugar and mix for two to three minutes until thick and light yellow in color. Add melted butter and shortening to beaten eggs and mix until incorporated.

Add fresh yeast cakes to lukewarm milk and crumble the cakes with hands to dissolve yeast. Add milk and yeast into egg mixture and mix until incorporated.

In a large bowl, mix salt into flour. Change the mixer’s whisk to a paddle. With mixer on low, slowly add flour to egg mixture. Mix until incorporated. Dough is very soft and sticky. Turn dough into a lightly oiled large bowl and gently cover with wax paper. Wrap bowl with a heavy towel and put into the pre-warmed oven — make sure the oven is turned off—to allow the dough to double in size (approximately 3 to 4 hours). Remove bowl from oven.

Pre-heat oven to 375F. Pinch off a piece of dough the size of a large egg. Roll the dough between your hands to make a 6-inch long rope as thick as your index finger. (If dough is too sticky, slightly oil your hands when shaping choreg.) Wrap dough to form a snail shell. Place shaped dough on parchment-lined baking sheets. Let rise for 1 hour.

Brush choreg with beaten egg. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes until golden. Makes approximately 40 rolls.

Regrettably, sourcing fresh yeast has become quite difficult in my neck of the woods. If you cannot find fresh yeast, don’t worry: you can make the recipe with active dry yeast. In place of the 2 fresh yeast cakes, which weigh 34 grams, use 11.3 grams of the active dry yeast. If you make this substitution, remember to heat the milk to the temperature recommended on the yeast package.

My mother serves her fragrant choreg with slices of cheese, typically a mild cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese. In a nod to my wife’s Wisconsin roots, we sometimes serve choreg with slices of Widmer Cheese Cellars’ Brick Cheese. (<https://www.widmerscheese.com/>).

I usually skip any cheese and enjoy my choreg with a cup of sweet Darjeeling tea.

My mother still bakes over a hundred choreg for her friends and family to enjoy during the Easter season. She calls when the rolls are baked and each family goes to my parents’ house to pick up its share. Although my family gets an ample allotment, the bread is usually gone—eaten for breakfast or with afternoon tea—within a couple of days. When my daughters were young, they snacked on choreg riding home from elementary school in the family station wagon. It is one of their earliest food memories.

To this day, the taste of choreg with a sip of sweet tea is a great comfort, like a fond childhood memory. Proust writes that smell and taste “remain for a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, upon the ruins of all the rest, bearing without giving way, on their almost impalpable droplet, the immense edifice of memory.” By sharing this recipe I hope that this unique and memorable Armenian Easter bread will not fade from memory.

For more recipes from Steve Sharafian, go to: <http://ibunbury.blogspot.com/>

Also see:

<<https://www.diningindiaspora.com/food/2018/3/30/choreg-for-armenian-americans-identity-is-braided-into-this-bread>>

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visiting monasteries, holy places in Armenia, and the fact that Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity, this, of course, was also a very important moment for me. God bless Armenia!

**The pandemic has greatly affected the lives of the stage people especially. What did you do during this period and what are you doing now?**

Covid showed very well - who knows how to intelligent-

ly express his opinion, and who puts pressure on others. And generally showed - who is who. Let’s say, having put on masks on people, the Lord tore off the masks from us and showed what Our faces and souls are in reality. Such situations should bring people closer, and we, on the contrary, spoil everything as always and split into two camps - for or against the mask and vaccinations. Somehow we must learn in this world, if not to love like Jesus, then at least to have tolerance for one another. Of course, for people on the stage and in general for people who work with the public, this is a huge blow and a revolution in general,

all life upside down, but thanks to the pandemic, I began to do a series of interviews with famous people who could inspire others to be kind and great too. And this happened thanks to the pandemic. Also, due to the pandemic, I again ended up in Egypt, on the Holy Land of Sinai in Dahab, it is not far from Mount Moses from the monastery of St. Catherine, where I once lived for five years. I dive again, shoot, photograph, show the beauty of this world and love the underwater world and those around me. I am sending you all greetings from the Holy Land of Sinai!



# The Vision and Mission of Young Drummer Arman Mnatsakanyan

DRUMMER, from page 9

My generation is lucky enough to have access to online platforms. There is no lack of information like it had been twenty years ago. However, in Armenia, it is a bit difficult to get that information “physically,” from a specific person, as there is not as much emphasis on the percussion instruments as there should be.

One of the problems I have personally encountered is getting a response to a specific musical question in real-time. It took months to find the answer to that question. But if I were in the United States, for example, in Berklee [College of Music in Boston], I could find four people on every square meter who would have been able to give a clear and comprehensive answer. In my opinion, the information deficit is the biggest problem in our city today.

There are people in our lives to whom we owe our success and the very state of becoming who we are. Who do you consider a mentor or a teacher?

First and foremost, I would like to mention my father, who himself is a musician, a drummer. Musical taste, mentality and the formation of musical individualism are the qualities I utterly owe to him. To this day he is present at my gigs or listens online to give his opinion, which is the most important assessment to me. My father is always very impartial and fair: bad is bad, good is good. He rarely praises me. He always kept me from so-called “musical racism” [i.e. when musicians limit themselves to a specific genre and avoid experiments]. He has always encouraged me to listen to whatever I like, not to follow stereotypes, not to create idols, and not to be afraid of experiments and new ideas.

Another very significant person in my life is Vahagn Hayrapetyan, a fantastic musician, whom I met at the age of 15 or 16. The love towards jazz initially inculcated by my father started to expand through communication with Vahagn. The experience and the vision I received from Vahagn are irreplaceable. The acquaintance and further cooperation with him have become a springboard in my career, which is now still relevant. Even though Vahagn is a pianist, I have learned a lot from him as a drummer. This comes to prove that one should not be merely a pianist, a drummer,



Arman Mnatsakanyan (photo E. Frolova-Trufanyan)

a singer, etc. One should be a musician first. I should also mention my teachers of percussion instruments, especially my personal teacher, drummer Alexander Grigoryan, a representative of my father’s generation. The foundation that he has laid in achieving and honing the mastery of playing percussion instruments is irreplaceable. Till now I keep that practicing routine every day.

When it comes to the music industry, we often face a dilemma: does demand gen-

erate supply or does supply generate demand? In your opinion, what is the reason why we have so much subpar music today in Armenia?

I think we have a problem with delivering and distributing quality content. Sometimes the music we create with inexhaustible devotion is not showcased properly to reach the listener. First of all, we shouldn’t underestimate the marketing steps. Being a virtuoso and just performing well is not enough to shape a market. You should take into account the listener’s prejudice and type before starting any gig. In many cases, the musicians just come, greet the audience and start playing. It seems to me that before playing each piece one can give background information, the prehistory, or any other subtle details.

For example, in the case of the hard bop genre, no matter how well you play, an average listener may not understand it right away, as this particular style is known for its complexity. Therefore, it is necessary to approach the question a little differently, try to give some insights to the listener, and have an educated audience at the end of the day.

Furthermore, you need to have quality content on social networks. The low-quality music we are talking about now often has a better “package” (video- and sound production), and it has a direct influence on the final “product.” In the case of quality music content, these factors are sometimes ignored.

When you just come and play what you love, you do not want to make it accessible to the listener and you do not care who will judge it: this approach is a bit wrong. The musician is a messenger and you cannot ignore the opinion and predispositions of your listener. The musician has a mission and should try as much as possible to convey that message to the listener.

Answering your question, I would paraphrase and say that the means and packaging of supply generates demand. Quality content should be encouraged at the state level via special platforms that may help musicians provide the same packaging to create a fair and healthy competition.

Currently, you participate in more than 10 ensembles□ Given that workload, is there any hobby or pastime that helps you

recharge and relax?

I have been playing tennis for five years. Later, when music began to dominate my life, it became a hobby. Daily communication with my friends, appearing in the role of a listener, are the activities that bring a lot of energy. Listening to good concerts and good artists helps me a lot. On the days when I do not play, I listen to performances or do my practice, because the way to my happiness lies in this. When a musician

Throughout five years I used to be there most of the day. Recently I started to practice in another space. In any case, that area remains irreplaceable in terms of self-development, self-knowledge, and maturity. It is one of the most important places in my life and in our city.

We’ve touched upon your past experience, present activities. What are your long-term and short-term plans?

Back in 2018 I won a scholarship to the



Arman Mnatsakanyan near the Ulikhanyan Jazz Club (photo Sona Mirzoyan)

does not practice, it is a catastrophe. Apart from hobbies, in my free time, I practice or engage in activities of ordinary human beings (laughs) — meeting with friends, outings, etc.

I know that you love Yerevan very much. Are there places in Yerevan that are of special importance to you?

First, there are streets that have a special significance. One of them is Abovyan Street□ It stores so many things — romantic stories, life stages that I particularly value. I would like to specify the Ulikhanyan Jazz Club. For musicians, it’s like a second home, a meeting point where everyone gathers. And for those who are at the beginning of their career, Ulikhanyan is like a forge. What happens there is pretty close to the concept of New York jazz clubs.

Sakharov Square is another sacred place for me. My first studio and practicing space were right there. I discovered that place myself — the old building that used to be a fire station turned into a working space for various artists and sculptors□ I was probably the first musician to appear there.

Berklee College of Music while I was doing a summer program. I haven’t used this opportunity yet, but soon I am planning to leave for the US — to Boston, and to continue my studies at Berklee, one of the world’s top educational institutions for musicians.

I am looking forward to exchanging experience, communicating with various musicians, and most importantly spreading that experience here and reducing the information deficit that I have mentioned before.

The most ideal music career and future I can imagine is to travel a lot, perform with different artists, and create an opportunity for myself to live where I want to — in Yerevan. To achieve the aforementioned goal, to build ties, I should live abroad for a while. Working on a fifteen-second video for social networks is one thing, holding jam sessions in a club is another thing. It requires an extraordinary level of experience and professional growth. This is what makes me leave my comfort zone and career here and go to the US.

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CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

NEW YORK

OCTOBER 15 — Save the date! The Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York Chapter is celebrating the diamond anniversary of the Tekeyan Cultural Association with a gala. Details to follow.

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# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

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ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE  
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## COMMENTARY

# EDITORIAL

## The Hazardous Road of Negotiations with Turkey's 'No Preconditions' Approach



By Edmond Y. Azadian

Representatives of Armenia and Turkey met in Moscow on January 14 for a session aimed at starting official negotiations soon.

The meeting was hailed in many quarters. Even during a period of increased tensions between the US and Russia, the reactions from those two opposing capitals converged.

The US, Russia, the European Union, NATO and other corners welcomed the initiative, particularly when Armenia and Turkey issued identical statements indicating that the meeting had taken place in a positive atmosphere with constructive approaches on both sides.

Of course, these declarative statements do not mean much, because there is no roadmap yet nor an agenda on the table to start substantive negotiations.

This rapprochement was mediated by Russia and had Washington's blessing for different reasons. Armenia is treading cautiously so as not to give any cause for concerns to Moscow, but many believe that face-to-face negotiations may prove to be more productive than those mediated by third parties, because the latter may interject their own interests in the deal.

The situation is not without some ironies. In Russia's case, we have to ask why is it important for Moscow to restore Armenia's normal relations with Turkey when Russia has invested so much in the fear factor that Armenia harbors against Turkey. For many years, Armenia's unconditional cooperation with the Russian side has been fueled by that fear and Russia has used that as a political asset in dealing with Armenia. Russian military base number 102 in Gyumri is proof of that, where Armenia, despite its weak economy, has assumed to host it and cater to it.

The other issue, at the start of these negotiations, is the timing; indeed, how will these talks be impacted in the shadow of the current Washington-Moscow standoff over Ukraine?

The factor driving Moscow and Washington to encourage these negotiations is that both parties are currently weak and they may give in to international pressure. Of course, this weakness is relative; Armenia is on its knees after its defeat in the recent war, and Turkey has become the victim of its own expansionist ambitions, which has led the country to the brink of economic collapse.

It is public knowledge that President Joe Biden has personally advised President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to lift the blockade on Armenia and initiate diplomatic relations.

In order to make headway, Armenia has to study Ankara's negotiation tactics and the possible pitfalls awaiting it.

In order to satisfy President Biden's request, Mr. Erdogan surprised the world and announced that Turkey is negotiating with Armenia without preconditions but during the negotiations, it will certainly corner Armenia in an impasse and come up with clean hands before Washington.

Turkologist Ruben Safrastyan of the Academy of Sciences in Armenia states that this is the fourth attempt for the two countries to negotiate, following the 2009 Zurich protocols, "football diplomacy" and the "track-two" diplomacy of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC).

Two of those efforts were encouraged by the United States. He believes that this round has a better chance because it is advocated by both the US and Russia. But he has a caveat: Safrastyan underscores that the new Armenian-Turkish process can succeed only "If Turkey, under pressure from the US, Russia and France, recognizes the Armenian Genocide."

And his cautious optimism at this time is based on the fact that the three co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group — Russia, the US and France — tasked with settling the Karabakh issue, now officially recognize the Armenian Genocide, which was not the case in the previous instances.

All that President Biden has asked of Turkey is to lift the blockade and establish diplomatic relations. If Turkey has just achieved that goal, it must not be rewarded for good behavior. After all, Ankara had breached international law by closing its borders and blockading a country deprived of a marine out-

let in the first place. On the contrary, Turkey must be held accountable for its conduct as an international outlaw.

Instead of viewing the situation from that perspective, Ankara is sitting at the negotiating table to resolve century-old problems and Yerevan is giving in to this diplomatic ruse.

No one can predict how long these negotiations may last and what outcome they may yield, but Armenia has to be prepared for the economic impact which may result from the opening of the borders, and accordingly must set tariffs and put in place regulatory systems to protect Armenia's flagging economy.

One component of Turkey's expansionist policy has been economic penetration. A case in point is Turkey's presence in Africa. This past fall, Mr. Erdogan was in Africa, from where he returned with hefty economic deals from the oil-rich country of Angola. Similarly, Russia is beholden to the Turkish economy as well as the Turkic nations in Central Asia.

Armenia must not pin its hopes on economic relations with Turkey; the latter can offer Armenia one deal which is an intangible factor in itself yet very tangible for Armenia: peace and security on Armenia's borders.

Turkey and Azerbaijan are stifling Armenia militarily and economically to depopulate it. Erdogan and Aliyev have pub-



licly stated that Armenia is being swiftly depopulated which will lead the country to implode, making it an easy prey for Turkish takeover.

Today in Armenia, even those with secure jobs leave the country, worrying that there is no security and no hope for their children.

Turkey's contention that it will be negotiating without preconditions can fool very few people as it has its barely-hidden agenda with many preconditions; its perennial demand from Armenia to give up the pursuit of genocide recognition, ratify the Kars Treaty of 1921 which has set the current boundaries between Armenia and Turkey, and make peace with Azerbaijan so that Turkey can open the border.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has stated time and again that in every step of the negotiations, Turkey will consult Azerbaijan. President Erdogan himself has instructed Armenia to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan.

Down the road, if Ankara conditions its deal in tandem with Baku, the Armenian side must make a counter condition of consulting with the diaspora. Armenia is the only entity which see NEGOTIATIONS, page 17





## COMMENTARY

# Covid, Genocide and Orthodox Believers: A Commentary

By Tessa Hofmann

I just read Harut Sassounian's article Patriarch of Istanbul Spreads Falsehoods About Covid, Under the Guise of Religion (Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 27 December 2021). The article refers to a sermon by the Armenian Apostolic Patriarch of Istanbul, Sahak Mashalian, in October last year. At that time, (if he was accurately quoted) the patriarch warned his congregants against covid vaccinations, which he related to the apocalyptic visions of the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation. In it, there is talk of a beast that forces people to wear a "mark" on their forehead or right arm. With this mark or chip, the patriarch hinted, complete control would be exercised over those vaccinated.

The words of the church leader shocked me, but I was not surprised. In Germany, about one-fifth of the population belongs to the vaccination skeptics or even opponents. This anti-vaccination segment of the population is made up of very heterogeneous segments: middle-class esotericists including anthroposophists, followers of alternative medicine, die-hard conspiracy theorists, but also neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists. Among Germany's immigrant communities, including a large proportion of those of Turkish and Arab descent, vaccination skepticism is equally widespread; among other things, there are fears of infertility as a result of vaccination.

There are also vaccination opponents and vaccination skeptics among Armenians. Since valid empirical studies on the number and motives of Armenian vaccination opponents are lacking, I can only draw on personal experience. For around the same time, in October 2021, I had my very personal and no less drastic experience with Armenian vaccination opponents. At that time, the Working Group Recognition - Against Genocide, for International Understanding, which I co-founded and chair, organized a three-part series of events on the theme Berlin Writes Legal History: From Assassination to the United Nations Genocide Convention (see Armenian Mirror-Spectator, November 27, 2021, pp. 6, 20). Public health regulations prescribed that, if these events were held indoors, participants had to be vaccinated or recovered from a covid infection within the past six months.

Because of this restriction, we were criticized by an Istanbul-born Armenian who, in his Facebook comment, compared the exclusion of the unvaccinated with the extermination of Jews in the "Third Reich" and, as a descendant of Armenian Genocide victims,

now saw himself victimized again — by a human rights organization based in Germany. The comparison is also extremely popular among non-Armenian vaccination opponents in Germany. It represents an unacceptable trivialization of the Shoah: The victims of the industrial-scale extermination of Jews by Nazi Germany were never asked if they wanted to be Jews. The Nazi regime declared them Jews based on its arbitrary racist definitions. A "non-Aryan" grandparent was enough for discrimination. Today's vaccination opponents in European constitutional states, on the other hand, define themselves as vaccination opponents and certainly run no risk of being murdered for their decision.

Is it relevant that our Armenian critic was from Istanbul? A fellow human rights activist committed to recognizing the Ottoman genocide, who became an unvaccinated covid victim, was also from Turkey: He had no pre-existing conditions, followed a healthy diet, exercised, and believed that he could therefore forgo vaccination. He contracted the disease from his infected wife. After a tracheotomy in the hospital, he became further infected with multidrug-resistant germs and died at the end of October.

However, I know Armenian vaccination opponents also among the "hayastantsiner," as well as among young Pontos Greeks of the fourth post-genocidal generation. Is anti-vaccination more widespread among Orthodox Christians than in secular or Western Church societies? The empirical picture is mixed: In Romania, there seems to be a correlation between the low nationwide vaccination rate of 41.74 percent (first-time vaccinations) and the anti-vaccination attitude of the Orthodox clergy. In Armenia, the rate of initial vaccinations is even lower, at only 32.27%. However, the Catholicos of All Armenians, Garegin II, has clearly distanced himself from the statements of the Istanbul Patriarch and has professed his own vaccination. But in the orthodox EU state of Greece, the rate of first-time vaccinations is 72.42%, almost as high as in largely secular Germany (73 percent).

Epidemics or pandemics have accompanied mankind since the beginning of its history. But for the first time ever, the state has intervened globally and massively in the individual and collective liberties of its citizens. In societies where citizens' trust in the state has already been shaken for historical or current reasons, this has intensified the public's fatigue and irritability. In other societies, these reactions appeared for the first time. After two years of Covid regulation, nerves are on edge, especially since governments' ep-

idemic policies were often inconsistent due to lack of experience. Political decision-makers have also neglected to openly communicate to citizens that they are often in the dark because of the limited knowledge about Covid; and to err is human.

What we do know, however, and were already well aware of, at least in the scientific community, before the Covid outbreak at the end of 2019, was the connection between epidemics, zoonoses and our treatment of nature or our fellow creatures (to put it in terms familiar to Christians).

Rapidly encroaching wildlife habitat, their consumption by humans, and mass farming of so-called livestock — especially cattle, pigs, and poultry — for the "meat industry" have caused Ebola (through the consumption of monkeys in Africa), avian influenza, and most recently SARS CoV-2. U.S. researchers warned years ago that widespread consumption of wildlife in the South of China, including bats and pangolins, could cause a new SARS virus. In 2019, their suspicions became reality. More epidemics or viruses will inevitably follow if we do not draw conclusions and drastically change our lifestyles. Preserving wildlife habitats and at least reducing the billions of livestock are elementary prerequisites for this. And since not everyone is ready for voluntary vegetarianism, a state regulation or increase of meat prices would be a very first step in this direction. In religious terms one might see it as a matter of respecting, instead of violating, the divine order of Creation.

And this is what it is all about: taking responsibility. I expect spiritual leaders, even more than political leaders, to make us aware of the ethical connections between lifestyles and pandemics. Patriarch Mashalian, on the other hand, draws on a widespread, anti-capitalist-tinged conspiracy theory to explain the pandemic, according to which the apocalyptic beast stands for either Bill Gates, George Soros, or similar suspects. One can take one's pick. By thus shifting the blame, he regrettably deflects attention from the responsibility we all bear for our environment and our fellow creatures. And what falls back on us is not Divine punishment, but the consequence of our own ineptitude.

(Dr. Tessa Hofmann is a scholar of genocide and Armenian studies with numerous publications on Armenian history, culture and current affairs. She has been a human rights activist for ethno-religious minorities in the Middle East, including Turkey, and the South Caucasus for nearly 50 years.)

## LETTERS

### It's Time for Diaspora To Take Action

To the Editor:

We've spent the past 14 months watching prominent members of our Diaspora talking about what Armenian government must do in order to solve this and achieve that. And for 14 months, we watch the Armenian government do exactly the opposite. As it has for the past 30 years.

Time has no mercy. And we're running out of time.

Our indolence of these past 14 months could be more damaging than the catastrophe of November 9, 2020.

Inaction doesn't just spawn fear: it encourages assimilation. For in the absence of clear and present successes and achievements, assimilation is the only means that saves the next generation from inheriting the pain, the misery, the helplessness, the depression.

The idleness our Diaspora demonstrates while clinging to the false hope that Patria will adhere to reason is gradually petrifying into its tombstone of own making. Time and again we observe the arrogance and ignorance the imbeciles known as the ruling elites in Armenia practice towards our national goals, the Diaspora, common sense itself. Yet, time and again, in denial of this self-evident

fact, we opt for inaction.

We read and watch opinionmakers among us debate what Armenian government ought to do to weather the current mess and the coming storm. And we choose not to notice best of their advice fall on deaf ears. We continue clinging to the "Patria will adhere to reason" self-lie we so generously infuse into our bloodstream.

Well, here's the reality: Patria will not adhere, brothers and sisters. Those ruling in our ancestral Homeland always have been and still are concerned with only one thing: holding on to power. The purpose of the Velvet Revolution, which brought Nikol Pashinyan to power, was to use power as means and a method of introducing fundamental changes and improvements. Instead, keeping Pashinyan in power has become its sole purpose and goal.

National aspirations, priorities and prerogatives, strategic development, reversing the ongoing Exodus and encouraging repatriation, encompassing and involving the Diaspora in the nation-building processes neither were nor are part of the agenda of the ruling elites. And no matter how much we talk about it, talking will not help.

We need to act. We, the people. The majority of the Armenians: the Diaspora.

We need our own, new and radical National Agenda, one for all Armenians regardless of our geography. An agenda built with the account of own means, assets, resources. One which views Armenia as the ultimate purpose, and not as

the source, partner, contributor. One, which accounts for all relevant circumstances instead of depending on them. one, where guaranteed success of each step depends only on us, our dedication, our resoluteness and resilience, and nothing or no one else.

For time is running out. For time has no mercy. And neither talk nor prayer will suffice.

Cilicia 2.0, an online initiative, may not be a panacea. But it offers a course of action that will allow us to capture the initiative, turn the tables, and convert our losses into strategic advantages. It offers an alternative path to a clear and present success — a set of physical, material, and spiritual goals — achieving which will rule out the otherwise inevitable assimilation of the majority of our people and guarantee not only the preservation and continuation of Armenism in each of us, but that of the Armenian Civilization itself. It offers us our very own Reconquista - territorial, material, spiritual, civilizational.

If not Cilicia 2.0 - let us discuss and draft another actionable plan.

Anything's better than inaction. Anything's better than wishful talk, whining, complaining, hoping for better.

We need great Hope. Hope is spawned by defiance. Defiance is materialized by actions. And they still speak louder than words.

Ara Gavur





## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Pitfalls of Armenia's Unnecessary Negotiations with Turkey

The *Los Angeles Times* published on January 11, 2022, an opinion column by Jonah Goldberg, titled: "Just meeting with Putin is a concession — the U.S. should be wary of giving more."

Goldberg expressed his unhappiness that Russia and other members of its military coalition, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which includes Armenia, sent troops to Kazakhstan on a 'peacekeeping' mission earlier this month. In his article, Goldberg made a critical reference to Armenia: "None of CSTO's members — Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — are democracies. Armenia comes closest; Freedom House designates it a 'semi-consolidated authoritarian regime' with a 'Democracy Score' of 33 out of 100. The rest are 'consolidated authoritarian regimes.'"

Goldberg's derogatory description of Armenia, which has been praised as a bastion of democracy since Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan came to power in 2018, must have made Armenians feel uncomfortable.

Freedom House, a Washington-based research institute funded mostly by the U.S. government, regrettably proves that Goldberg was not wrong in his criticism of Armenia. Freedom House publishes an annual "Freedom in the World" report which assesses each country's degree of democracy, including political freedom and civil liberties. Countries are classified as "free," "partly free," or "not free."

When Pashinyan became Prime Minister, he was applauded by the international community and Armenians worldwide for establishing democratic rule through his "Velvet Revolution." However, Freedom House continued to classify Armenia as "partly free" throughout 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. Armenia is also designated as "not an electoral democracy," based on its low ratings on "political rights" and "civil liberties." Just in case Azerbaijanis and Turks wish to celebrate Armenia's low ratings, both Azerbaijan and Turkey are ranked far worse as "not free."

Here are highlights from Freedom House's detailed 30-page report on Armenia for the year 2020:

In the category of "National Democratic Governance," with 1 as best and 7 as worst, Armenia was rated 2.25. This category "considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches."

In the category of "Electoral Process," Armenia was rated 3.25. It "examines national executive and legislative elections, the electoral framework, the functioning of multiparty systems, and popular participation in the political process."

In the category of "Civil Society," Armenia was rated 4.5. It "assesses the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of the civic sector; the legal and political environment in which it operates; the functioning of trade unions; interest group participation in the policy process; and the threat posed by anti-democratic extremist groups."

In the category of "Independent Media," Armenia was rated 3. It "examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media."

In the category of "Local Democratic Governance," Armenia was rated 2.25. It "considers the decentralization of power; the responsibilities, election, and capacity of local governmental bodies; and the transparency and accountability of local authorities."

In the category of "Judicial Framework and Independence," Armenia was rated 2.5. It "assesses constitutional and human rights protections, judicial independence, the status of ethnic minority rights, guarantees of equality before the law, treatment of suspects and prisoners, and compliance with judicial decisions."

In the category of "Corruption," Armenia was rated 3. It "looks at public perceptions of corruption, the business interests of top policymakers, laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest, and the efficacy of anticorruption initiatives."

A second report on Armenia was published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on January 14, 2022. HRW is an international non-governmental organization, headquartered in New York City that conducts research and advocacy on human rights.

HRW reported that even though "the political crisis" after the Artsakh war "was largely defused in the June 2021 snap elections ... domestic violence, discrimination against people with disabilities, barriers to effective pain treatment and palliative care, and violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity persisted. Striving to fight rising incidents of hate speech, authorities introduced regulations which may undermine freedom of speech."

Regarding "accountability for law enforcement abuse and torture in custody," HRW reported that "torture and ill-treatment in custody remains a problem and it is often perpetrated with impunity. Even when criminal investigations are launched in response to allegations of torture, they are rarely effective."

In the first six months of 2021, there were "documented 15 cases, with 17 victims, of physical violence against journalists perpetrated by both public officials and private individuals." There were also "heated public debates, which often included inflammatory speech by members of parliament and other public officials that was at times directed against human rights defenders and activists."

The HRW also reported that "many children with disabilities remain segregated in orphanages, special schools, or at home with little or no education." In May 2021, "parliament adopted the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which includes guarantees of accessibility, independent living, and access to justice, and bans disability-based discrimination."

According to HRW, "violence against women and children ... remains a persistent problem." In addition, "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in Armenia continue to face harassment, discrimination, and violence."

An indication that Armenia is losing its image of a democratic country is the fact that last March, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a call with Prime Minister Pashinyan, counseled him about "the importance of the rule of law and democratic institutions."

Prime Minister Pashinyan came to power in 2018 promoting democracy, thereby gaining much support and praise from international circles. Regrettably, Pashinyan's monopoly on power and increasing tendency to make all governmental decisions single-handedly are turning Armenia into a one-man rule which will result in the country losing its democratic credentials and international support.

## The Hazardous Road of Negotiations with Turkey's 'No Preconditions' Approach

NEGOTIATIONS, from page 15

can plead the case of genocide and the compensation emanating from it, but it cannot sideline the diaspora when it comes to the genocide issue without coordinating with the diasporan Armenians who are the descendants of the survivors of that genocide.

At a conference in Chicago, Ibrahim Kalin, Erdogan's spokesperson, stated that when Turkey and Armenia strike a deal, the case of the diaspora Armenians will collapse.

In his turn, Foreign Minister Çavusoglu has warned diaspora Armenians not to destroy the negotiations by their independent actions.

Therefore, it is clear that diasporan activism is a real thorn in the side of Ankara.

There is precedent for the inclusion of diasporan considerations. In 1920, at the Paris Peace Conference, the Armenian government's delegation was headed by Avedis Aharonian, who signed the Sevres Treaty. But alongside Aharonian's signature was that of Boghos Nubar, the head of the Armenian National Delegation, representing the displaced Armenians of the diaspora, and Turkey recognized both signatories.

If Azerbaijan weighs in at the negotia-

tions, these talks may come to a grinding halt, because the leader of that country has been seeking an outrageous price for his consent.

Mr. Aliyev has been insisting on wresting the Zangezur Corridor from the sovereign territory of Armenia. That corridor is crucial for Turkey as well, to pursue its own pan-Turkic agenda, although with the recent development in Kazakhstan, that plan has suffered a setback. Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was an ardent supporter of pan-Turanism, and was still the power behind the throne of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, was removed from the scene and Russia tightened its economic control of the region. However, the Turks do not design their politics on incidents; they plan for centuries down the road and therefore a come-back is still on their agenda.

The reason Turkey is so interested in pursuing that bypass in Armenia is that during the recent war, Iran and Georgia blocked the movement of its military. Otherwise, both Baku and Ankara have corridors and roads for civilian use through those countries.

The current border incidents are the result of Aliyev's frustrations. He had banked his policies on Turkey's flourishing glob-

al role. But Turkey's current state and the meltdown in Kazakhstan have turned out to be game-changing developments and also indicate that the writing is on the wall for post-Soviet despots.

Perhaps as a result of this new upheaval, Aliyev has been acting rashly. He held a press conference recently to insult and ridicule the OSCE Minsk Group. He stated that the Minsk Group has no business anymore as Azerbaijan has already solved the Karabakh impasse. "By the way, this year is the 30th anniversary of that group. They can celebrate the occasion and go home," he said.

On the other hand, he said that he will disrupt the OSCE activities in the region, a challenge thrown down at the international community.

As far as the corridor is concerned, "we will build railways and motorways there. In the future, we are considering powerlines to supply energy to Nakhichevan. We will also build gas pipelines. One may pass through Meghri. The other one through Kapan and another one through Sisian. Therefore, that corridor will encompass the entire region of Syunik," Aliyev added.

Aliyev's litany of insults also included a

military threat; he indicated that Azerbaijan will continue rearming itself, but "we will watch carefully the revanchist activities of the Armenian side and we will destroy any threat, no matter how profound, that may be deployed."

Of course, Aliyev's peace plan imposed on Armenia seeks the latter to recognize Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, Karabakh included.

Continuing with his rash moves, Aliyev made a move that might actually play into Armenia's hand; this past week he made a surprise trip to Ukraine, when the war trumpets are sounding between Russia and Ukraine, and signed a military treaty of mutual defense.

Thus far, Russia had let Aliyev off the hook when it made rash moves, but this time around, Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, reacted by announcing that demarcation and delimitation of the border are not related to the Karabakh issue, the latter being Aliyev's demand.

Therefore, there are many roadblocks in the course of these negotiations.

Armenia has to sue for peace to buy time and develop its armed forces for the next round, which may not be too far in the future.





## COMMENTARY

# New Volume on Armenian Strategic Thought after Karabakh War

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

The shock of the grave Armenian defeat in the 2020 Artsakh war has naturally led to various efforts to figure out what went wrong and perhaps more importantly, what Armenians need to do to avoid further catastrophes. The collection of articles published as the French-language volume *La Pensée stratégique Arménienne*, edited by Varoujan Sirapian and published by Éditions Sigest in Paris in 2021 with the assistance of the Tchobanian Institute, is a step in this direction. It is an attempt to promote strategic thinking concerning the military, economy, law, sociology, communications and propaganda, demography and international relations. The 164-page book includes chapters by Sirapian, Nikos Lygeros, Charalambos Petinos, Benyamin Poghosyan, Mher Sahakyan and Yéghia Tashjian.

Each chapter can be read as a self-contained article, with few direct references to the other sections of the book even though there is some overlapping coverage. The authors all seem to be partisans of the creation of a stronger Armenian state in the future to better defend the interests of Armenia and Artsakh and accept the importance of Russia's role in the region, though some find it less reliable than others.

## Sirapian on Defense

The longest contribution is by Sirapian at the start of the book. Sirapian is a frequent writer in the Armenian press in France, North America, Lebanon and Armenia, the author of a number of books, and founding president of the *Institut Tchobanian* (Alfortville, France). He proposes instead of lamentation an analysis of the causes of the defeat be conducted in order to find means to rectify the situation. The most important Armenian objective should be to move from being an Armenian people to an Armenian nation embracing both diaspora and homeland, according to Sirapian.

Among the most important realms requiring strategizing, he says, are the reformation of the army to assure the security of the country, the establishment of a state of law with a reliable independent justice system, improvement of the demographic situation, and inculcation of the notion of obligations and rights for Armenian citizens.

Sirapian stakes out the problems in the approach to such issues in Armenia. He points out that the lack of an independent Armenian state over a period of nearly 600 years, aside from a little over two years at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seriously handicapped the creation of strategic political thinking and a political elite to carry it out. The current independent Armenian republic has dozens of political parties but has not succeeded “during these three decades to put into place a sane and democratic political life where ideas (and not persons) can oppose one another without violence in order to arrive at a well-defined objective, even with different methods” (p. 20).

Even after Nikol Pashinyan's Velvet Revolution, the level of political discussion primarily has remained on the local level, Sirapian remarks, often full of invectives, with a division between the “old” and the “new.”

Militarily, Sirapian qualifies Armenia's army as lacking both sufficient training and up-to-date weaponry. Sirapian quotes Dr. Nerses Kopalyan, an assistant professor of political science in Nevada, as pointing out that the doctrine of mutually assured devastation that Armenia relied on to prevent Azerbaijan from attacking was shown to be bankrupt and useless in the April 2016 four-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Sirapian writes that the 2016 war should have been a wake-up call for the former, both indicating Armenia's military weakness and Azerbaijan's increased willingness to wage war. The use of new military technology such as Israeli drones and the unwillingness of Armenia's ally Russia to intervene should have also been a warning to revise Armenia's strategy.

He proposes that before reconstruction concerning the war losses, Armenia must make its territory secure by reinforcing its army through new weaponry, technology and cadres. He points to Israel as a good example to follow, with its choice to be feared rather than loved, as per fourth Israeli prime minister Golda Meir well-known statement. Armenia must develop its own military-industrial complex, investing in military research and development, and create a professional modern army, Sirapian states. As part of the reform process, he agrees with Kopalyan that an independent and apolitical truth commission is necessary to investigate the errors and failures of the 2020 war.

In the realm of international relations and diplomacy, on the one hand, Sirapian repeats the adage that states do not have friends — they only have interests (p. 8). While interests may change over time, somewhat contradictorily, he also qualifies certain states or peoples as “hereditary enemies” of Armenia. He is referring to Turkey and Azerbaijan as states nursing an “immutable” pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic strategic plan for over a century no matter the regime in power (p. 15), with the goal of annihilating Armenia (p.23).

Sirapian criticizes the diplomacy of the government of Nikol Pashinyan. He ventures that, for example, a recognition of the Artsakh Republic by Armenia, could have been more useful than merely provocative statements by Pashinyan such as “Artsakh is Armenia. And that's it” (August 2019).

Dealing with Russia is one of the difficult issues requiring careful thought. Russia is indispensable for Armenia's defense and survival, Sirapian states, but it also cannot permit democratic societies near its borders in the zone under its influence. Sirapian quotes historian Armen Ayvazyan as summing up Russia's approach as neo-Byzantine: it weakens its allies in order to oblige them to remain dependent in the Russian orbit.

For Armenia to eliminate its domestic oligarchic political and social structure, which has pillaged the country since independence and led to heavy demographic losses through

emigration, Sirapian posits that in the medium term, other allies must be found without breaking ties with Russia. Yet, Sirapian points out, again quoting Ayvazyan, the West, meaning the US, NATO and the European Union, work to weaken Russia by using Turkey as a tool, strengthening the latter as a regional power despite the concomitant menace for Armenia. Furthermore, Russia would not allow Armenia to fully ally itself with a West hostile to it. Instead, Sirapian offers the possibility of complementary military-industrial alliances with India and China.

Many of his suggestions for the Armenian state are commonsense brief notes on topics such as reducing corruption, improving education, rethinking the health and pension systems, creating a tourism ministry, and using “soft power” like the largely unexploited sympathy towards the bloodless Velvet Revolution while neighboring Azerbaijan remains an autocracy.

What are the means to accomplish all this? He offers some proposals that seem sensible, such as to fight corruption in the state budget, give the diaspora a greater voice in the use of the money raised by the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund and add a component of geopolitics to its work, state guarantees for the security of investments from outside the country, invest more in the youth of Armenia, encourage the active participation of the Armenian diaspora in the political and economic life of the republic, proactively support immigration to Armenia and improve conditions so emigration stops.

His chapter raises important questions, but how to accomplish these goals, or at least develop successful strategies to do so, remains for others to detail.

Sirapian in his chapter draws on an unusually eclectic range of sources, not only academicians and politicians but also editorialists and even cartoonists in the diasporan Armenian press and generalist websites (e.g. a website primarily on art providing economic information without sources: <https://www.hisour.com/fr/economy-of-armenia-36427/>).

## Poghosyan on Armenian Foreign Policy

Poghosyan is the founder and president of the Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies since 2017, and was vice president of research and head of the Institute for National Strategic Studies in Armenia from 2016 to 2019. In his chapter, Poghosyan examines independent Armenia's foreign policy from 1991 to 2021, dividing it into the periods of President Levon Ter-Petrosian (1991-1998), Presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan (1998-2018), and finally the period of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Among the errors of the past he points out is the inability of Armenia and Artsakh to populate the latter's territories on a large scale, which left a geostrategic void which Russia was able to exploit for its own national interests and ultimately establish its troops on Azerbaijani soil as a lever of influence on the latter. Pashinyan's rejection of Karabakh negotiation plans discussed prior to his coming to power in 2018 and forceful statements had a negative effect on negotiations concerning Artsakh, while his government did not make any new proposals concerning the modified stage-by-stage plan offered by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in 2019 and 2020.

Poghosyan indicates that aside from its military failure in 2020, Armenia remained diplomatically isolated. Its sole ally, Russia, only provided it enough arms during the war to prevent Karabakh from being totally overrun, but benefited from its defeat, which forced Armenia to finally accept Russian peacekeeping forces. Artsakh thus was turned into a Russian protectorate though it was allowed formally to keep its army and government.

Poghosyan makes some recommendations for Armenian strategy under the current circumstances. He first observes that Armenia will not be able to change the new arrangement in its favor at least during the medium term, which means that any changes that would be produced in this period would be in favor of Azerbaijan. Consequently, Armenia must maintain the current status quo to prevent the expulsion of Armenians from the remaining territories at present under Russian control.

In the longer term, up to 15 years, the status quo is unacceptable for Armenia because it means the slow death of Karabakh, whether through massacre or the forced displacement of the Armenians of the region. In this period, Armenia must modify the status quo in Karabakh in its favor. At the minimum, Poghosyan writes that this would mean pushing Azerbaijan outside the borders of the former autonomous region of Nagorno Karabakh and enlarging the corridor connecting it to Armenia.

Azerbaijan clearly will not withdraw from the territories it has taken in 2020 without a new war, Poghosyan says, and Armenia does not have the means now or in the medium term to wage such a war. However, as the current borders are unacceptable, Poghosyan finds that Armenia must at least declare that Azerbaijan is occupying parts of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh. He suggests it must clarify its position on what the borders of Karabakh include for the sake of negotiations because potential ambiguity can both increase the uncertainty as to the future of Karabakh and lead to further emigration of the Armenian population there.

Armenia must also avoid allowing Azerbaijan to use the process of the delineation and demarcation of Armenia's borders with Azerbaijan as a tool to force Armenian acquiescence in its control over Karabakh, Poghosyan states. It must announce that the process of border setting does not cover the frontiers adjacent to Artsakh territories occupied by Azerbaijan and must militarily prevent all Azerbaijani attempts to penetrate Armenian territory with its soldiers.

Thirdly, Poghosyan recommends that Armenia must proceed in opening transportation routes between it and Azerbaijan as per the November 10, 2020 trilateral declaration while clearly stating that if Azerbaijan does not renounce its menaces to open a “Zangezur corridor” by force, Armenia will refuse to furnish Azerbaijan any routes towards Nakhichevan via Armenian Syunik. It can instead propose other itineraries to allow as per the November 10 agreement, communication between Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan proper.

Poghosyan concludes by suggesting that better mechanisms must be developed to allow greater participation of the the diaspora in domestic Armenian politics.

## Tashjian on Relations with India

Tashjian, a graduate of the American University of Beirut with a degree in public policy and international affairs, received his bachelor's degree in political science at Haigazian University. He is currently the regional officer of Women in War, a think tank, and an analyst on regional security issues. Tashjian writes on Armenia's relations with India, which were primarily in the realm cultural and scientific cooperation until recently. He suggests India can help balance the Azerbaijani-Turkish-Pakistani axis of cooperation internationally. India faced this trio in its Kashmir conflict and Turkey and Pakistan helped Azerbaijan in the 2020 war against Armenia, thus there is a natural alignment of interests.





## COMMENTARY

Indian media expressed strong support for Armenia during its war and even prior to the war, in March 2020, Armenia signed a contract worth \$40 million for the purchases of Swathi Weapon Locating Radars from India.

Most significantly, Armenia is included in the Indian vision of an International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which can strengthen Armenia's economy, security and geopolitical position. The corridor will link the Iranian port of Chabahar and the Indian Ocean to Eurasia and Helsinki, passing through Armenia. India, Iran and Russia are the prime participants in this project, which leaves out Pakistan and also is seen as a counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Armenia previously has been deliberately left out of all regional transportation projects. Tashjian recommends the Armenian government play a more active role in developing its domestic routes, such as the North-South road, which would facilitate communication between Iran and Georgia and a railway linking Armenia and Iran.

Azerbaijan, in theory, is in a more advantageous position than Armenia as a transportation partner in INSTC, with more active modernization of its infrastructure and construction of new roads and railway routes. Armenia, however, has an advantage as a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, allowing access to that market, unlike Azerbaijan. Recent shifts in political alliances, Tashjian notes, can also help Armenia. He cites some experts who find the Azerbaijani encroachments on Armenian soil in Syunik in 2021 were an attempt to destabilize Armenia as a potential transportation partner in the Indian initiative. They point to the strong Iranian and Indian governmental statements against these attempts (and in Tavush).

Finally, Tashjian recommends a greater Armenian diplomatic presence in India, and more cooperation with India against the Turkish-Azerbaijani-Pakistani axis, such as a joint center on security issues to share information and combat terroristic activities, along with joint anti-terrorist military exercises. Armenia can buy more modern weaponry from India. He also suggests the creation of an Indian-Armenian forum to encourage Indian investments in the information technology, tourism and industrial sectors of Armenia's economy. Armenia must also, he writes, speed the construction of the North-South corridor by engaging with India more and finding new commercial partners to make investments in it. Armenia can thus through collaboration with India break out of its commercial isolation imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan and play a greater role in international commerce and politics.

#### Sahakyan on China and Russia

Mher Sahakyan's paper provides a similar analysis of Armenian-Chinese relations, taking into consideration the Russian role in the region. Dr. Sahakyan is the founder and director of the China-Eurasia Council for Political and Strategic Research, in Armenia. He is the 2020/2021 Asia Global Fellow of the Asia Global Institute of Hong Kong and founder of the annual international conference Eurasian Research on Modern China and Eurasia. He holds a PhD in international relations from China's Nanjing University and is now a lecturer at the Russian-Armenian University and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) of Armenia. He is author of the book *China's Belt and Road Initiative and Armenia*.

Sahakyan lays out the means of Russian political and economic influence in Armenia, including various treaties, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, military aid, trade, the soft power of media, Armenian immigrants working in Russia, educational institutions, and various other types of aid. Despite this close relationship, Sahakyan points to the various types of Russian military and economic relations with Azerbaijan, and its failure to militarily intervene during the 2020 Artsakh war as undermining Armenian confidence in its relationship with Russia, just as the Velvet Revolution and subsequent changes in Armenian actions concerning Russia internationally led to some Russian mistrust of its ally. Nonetheless, Russia and the CSTO prevented a full invasion of the territory of the Republic of Armenia during the war.

Sahakyan concludes that the Russian relationship remains important for Armenia as a source for below-market-price weaponry, for defense against any potential Turkish attack on its territories, especially as some ten years are required for Armenia to recover from its military losses of 2020, and for access to the Russian economic market. Thus he recommends Armenia normalizing its relations with Russia as its principal ally despite the aforementioned issues.

He also observes that Russia is working with China to create a political and economic eastern axis, in which Armenia has the possibility to participate. Unlike its four neighbors, Armenia has failed to obtain similarly vast Chinese investments in its economy. Furthermore, China began to send trains full of merchandise using the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway route and the Bosphorus underwater tunnel to Europe from 2019. Sahakyan suggests Armenia taking concrete measures to attract such investments and to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative in particular so as not to be excluded from potential opportunities for economic growth.

To this end, he proposes the creation of a research group including representatives of various Armenian ministries, businessmen and universities, as well as the president of the Armenian community in China, to investigate both the Belt and Road Initiative and Chinese Go Global investment strategy. In particular, since Armenia has fallen behind technologically as much as 40-50 years, Sahakyan feels that joining Russia in participating in the Chinese digital Silk Road, which attempts to connect with various countries to produce Chinese technologies, will help Armenia catch up. China is ready to share its experience in the realms of 5G, big data, artificial intelligence, digitization of the economy and cybersecurity.

Such cooperation, Sahakyan continues, can also help Armenia advance in the military realm. He therefore recommends creating a joint Sino-Armenian technological university in Armenia, where initially Chinese professors can be invited to teach. After 15-20 years, Armenia gradually will be in this fashion catching up technologically and creating its own specialists and innovations.

In the health realm, China already has sent 100,000 doses of its Sinovac vaccine against covid. Sahakyan recommends Armenia ask Beijing to set up production of this vaccine on Armenian soil and then export it to the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union and Middle East. Aside from economic gain, this will guarantee Armenians access to vaccines and the opportunity to learn from Chinese health specialists.

If Armenia's transportation routes are unblocked as a result of the November 2020 trilateral agreement, China could use Armenian railways as part of its Belt and Road Initiative and China will feel more secure in investing in Armenia without fear of losses through a new war. Sahakyan recommends Armenia first becoming a regional member

of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and after obtaining some loans, investing in its North-South route, which will increase Armenia's abilities to participate in the China-Central Asia-West Asia-Economic Corridor (CCAWEAC).

Currently Armenia has a negative trade balance with China, exporting minerals and importing various manufactured items and food. Sahakyan recommends negotiating with China so the latter augments its purchases of a variety of goods.

On a broader scale, Sahakyan recommends changing the focus of Armenian state diplomacy from obtaining recognition of the Artsakh Republic and of the Armenian Genocide, in both of which he feels it failed, to developing the economy and science in Armenia by obtaining new investments, technologies and infrastructure projects. In this way, he concludes, Armenia can quietly build a strong state capable of defending its interests and that of Artsakh. He states that Armenia must be realistic, as it has no way to defeat Turkey and Azerbaijan together, and retake Western Armenia and Cilicia, or further territory for a Kura-Arax republic. Instead, he writes that it must establish normal relations with all of its four neighboring states by finding peaceful solutions to its problems, and focus on improving its educational system.

Instead of turning more to the West, Sahakyan suggests Armenia strengthen its relations with Russia (and the CSTO and EEU) and China. The US has shown that it considers Turkey as the principal country to have influence in the region. There is also only so far Armenia can get close to the US without upsetting its relations with Russia. The EU is interested in Azerbaijan's oil and gas so the latter country will have more influence in Brussels in the future, while Turkey has a special relationship with Germany, the principal country of the EU. French gestures of sympathy are morally helpful but Sahakyan stresses that today it is only Russian soldiers guaranteeing the security of the Armenian population in Artsakh and the sovereign borders of Armenia. Armenia must take its place in the bloc of the East while developing its relations with the West as much as possible. Armenia must also resolve its problems with Azerbaijan so it will not be used as during this past war as a tool in Russian-Turkish geopolitics.

#### Petinos: On an Expansionist Turkey

Charalambos Petinos is a historian specializing in Byzantium and the geopolitics of the Mediterranean. His contribution to the present volume concerns Turkey's relations with its neighbors and international institutions. He depicts an expansionist Turkey under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attempting to return to the role and the territories of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish foreign policy, Petinos claims, follows a long-term approach, setting goals and waiting patiently to realize them, sometimes for decades, as in the case of Cyprus.

It takes advantage of general perturbations in international affairs to act while other powers are distracted, he says. In the case of the 2020 Artsakh war, the covid-19 pandemic and a complicated US presidential election provided its opportunity. Furthermore, he concludes that Russia allowed Erdogan to attack Armenia in the hope of turning Turkey against NATO, yet in the end NATO implanted itself in Azerbaijan by means of Turkey. Thus an unfinished pax Russica of several decades was replaced by a pax Turcica.

He warns Armenians that Turkey, having succeeded through that war to insert its military into the South Caucasus, will await the right moment, notwithstanding the current presence of Russian forces, to take control of the strategic corridor between Nakhichevan and the rest of Azerbaijan, in order to connect Turkey to the latter, and ultimately to Central Asia. He suspects a third step in the future will be to seize part of southern Armenia, probably using Azerbaijan as its intermediary.

Petinos uses Turkish actions in Cyprus as an example and warning for Armenians. He states that Azerbaijanis and Turks will populate the regions of Artsakh they have seized and attempt to efface the Armenian identity of these areas, just as they have done in the part of Cyprus they have occupied. The ultimate goal in both cases is to control the entire territories of the two regions.

Petinos also cites the precedent of northern Syria, where Turkey brought in Syrian Arabs and other Sunnis, to settle in place of the expelled Kurds. In Artsakh, Syria and Libya, Turkey also brought mercenaries to fight its battles.

He concludes that the Artsakh situation is not part of a territorial conflict but a war of extermination of Armenians which had begun under the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Azerbaijani museum celebrating the victory exhibits the racism from which this war sprang. His view of Turkey is not that different than that of Sirapian.

Petinos makes his own policy recommendations. First, he thinks Pashinyan, whom he characterizes as incompetent, must resign in order to calm the domestic political Armenian scene, and to strengthen relations with Russia. Armenia has no other choice but to work closely with Russia in order to create a strong Armenian state, as no other states have shown a willingness to intervene concretely. In fact, in the current situation, Armenia has become so dependent on Russia that Petinos even wonders whether Armenia is truly an independent country.

Armenia must develop education and research, he recommends, and create jobs to attract the youth to stay and not emigrate. It must also fight corruption and reinforce the state of law. Its diaspora must strengthen Armenia, including through immigration and economically. Think tanks must be used to develop Armenian soft power alongside hard power of the state. These recommendations are made without specifying how they can be achieved in practice.

#### Conclusion

The volume concludes with a brief contribution of under two pages by Nikos Lygeros, professor of mathematics, linguistics, epistemology, geostrategy and strategic management at the Universities of Athens, Thrace and Kavala and the Polytechnic School of Xanthi. He is a professor of strategy, geostrategy and topostrategy at the Police Academy of Greece, School of National Security of Greece, the Hellenic Air Force Academy, and several other institutions. He encourages Armenians to develop its strategic thought for the future, based on studies of geography, relationships and networks, and taking into account chronology ("chronostrategy").

The volume presents many interesting ideas and some concrete recommendations for action. However, it serves primarily as an introduction to Armenia's international issues, which require more extensive analysis, perhaps through monographic works. The lack of coordination between chapters leaves readers with questions. For example, neither Tashjian nor Sahakyan discuss potential problems if Armenia collaborates with both India and China on their respective major projects, as the global ambitions and plans of both great powers are rivals in many areas.



# 'Shots on Goal' to 'Deterministic' Drug Development: Flagship CEO, Moderna Chair Noubar Afeyan Pens First Annual Letter

**By Kyle LaHucik**

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (*Fierce Biotech*) — The founder of Moderna's incubator, Flagship Pioneering, penned his first annual letter charting the four driving forces behind the biotech industry's future with an emphasis on digital biology and platform technologies.

Noubar Afeyan, Ph.D., who founded Flagship in 2000 and is its CEO as well as chairman of Moderna, also called on governments and private sector companies to embrace preemptive measures to treating disease and preparing for future pandemics. He wrote the letter through the lens of a “never-ending year now in its 758th day.”

Afeyan wanted to document lessons learned from the pandemic. But, given omicron, it ended up being an analysis of the depths of the largest wave to date, which has infected millions of people, including Afeyan.

For a letter addressing the driving forces

behind biotech, some key areas were notably missing: how the clinical trial landscape is evolving to include virtual models, calls for more diverse patient populations and drug pricing.

Should the biotech industry rebrand to the world of biodigital? Now shaping the drug development world is digital biology and an “era of programmable medicines” in which drugs are seen as instructions and programs that contain predictable outcomes. Flip the switch, and companies can design therapeutic programs based on the desired outcome using this method.

Afeyan sees digital biology as the translation of physical matter into information to spearhead a revolution in medicine. No longer should the R&D motto be “shots on goal.” The industry should shift from a “probabilistic drug discovery” engine to a “deterministic approach enabled by digital biology.”

Drug development is notorious for failures. Failure to even get a compound into

the clinic. Failure to pass muster in a clinical trial. Failure to get approved. But digital biology and programmable medicine aims to quash the “game of chance,” Afeyan wrote. Take for example the quick succession of developing mRNA vaccines for SARS-CoV-2, getting them emergency authorized and then delivered into the arms of hundreds of millions to ward off the worst of the pandemic.

Artificial intelligence allows time travel,  
in a sense

Flagship is known for generating scientific hypotheses, exploring them, turning the findings into biotech and diagnostic startups and then testing them in human trials. To fuel that engine even faster and broader, Flagship sees artificial intelligence and machine learning combining with biology to foster a whole new understanding of human genetics and disease. And, of course, the expectation is that AI will enable a ramp-up of the hypothesis-to-exploration-to-testing pipeline.

Picture this as the “disease time travel,” as Afeyan likes to say. The melding of AI and biology allows scientists to dig into the origins of diseases, which leads to clues for treatment paths. And, on the flip side, researchers can use biological data to peer into the future and detect genetic patterns that could cause devastating impacts like a tumor in a specific tissue.

And, not to be the messenger of bad news, but the future also likely contains more pandemics. AI and biology, married, can maybe “safeguard against multiple future scenarios.” COVID-19 could have been a scenario, but instead it was a reality.

The public markets did not favor biotech stocks last year, but private investors poured endless heaps into startups at record-breaking numbers. Part of the reason, in Afeyan's mind, is that stock investors "nonetheless remain biased toward single-asset biotechs." When those biotechs go silent or disclose hurdles in drug development, their stock prices tank. A biotech with "all chips on one bet" will falter if they have nothing else in the pipeline following a drug failure.

In steps biotech startups that operate their R&D model on a platform approach, in which an initial program's success derisks the outcomes of future "highly correlated follow-on" ones. These biotechs have nabbed funding rounds at astronomical sizes, relative to five or 10 years ago, but when they hit the public market, investors tend to box them into their "brick wall of bias" that governs the single-asset line of thinking.

Afeyan argues the “resource-intensive” path to a regulatory greenlight has been a “grating factor” be ridden by high costs and time. The pandemic called for a reshaping of the regulatory process, in doing so in some ways, it led to dozens of vaccine and therapeutic approvals for COVID-19 in record time. He didn’t directly highlight Moderna, but Afeyan did toot the horn of mRNA vaccines in this section.

Going forward, the Flagship CEO urges the pandemic's learnings continue to be applied, with regulatory operations balancing "societal risk with societal benefit." Sometimes, though, molds and shifts in the regulatory framework, as evidenced by the FDA's controversial approval of Biogen's Alzheimer's med, Aduhelm, show how much backlash and upheaval comes in the wake of adjustments to long-held regulatory standards.

Afeyan's outlook on drivers of biotech innovation was coupled with his calls for more healthy security and preemptive health measures globally, at the government and private-sector levels. COVID-19 is a fast-moving pandemic set against what now seems like a backdrop of more slow-moving chronic disease pandemics, he wrote. That reality makes Afeyan ask for more preventative actions to delay the onset of diseases and stop future viral outbreaks from cascading into pandemics.

Aside from pandemic prevention, Afeyan wants a refreshed approach to tackling common illnesses by addressing the underlying disease, rather than the symptoms that are seen and measured easily. This laundry list of diseases includes heart failure, dementia, diabetes, kidney failure and, brought to the forefront by the pandemic, depression.

Afeyan wraps up his letter on a sobering note: human health can't be separated from the planet's health. Sustainable agriculture, carbon capture and farming innovations must be factored into the health conversation, he wrote.

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TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF  
IN ARMENIA AND ARTSAKH.

☐ Yes, I want to sponsor teachers in Armenia and Karabagh to continue helping them educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the teacher's name and address.

☐ \$200    ☐ \$400    ☐ \$600    ☐ other\_\_\_\_\_

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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*Make check payable to:*

Tekeyan Cultural Association—Memo: Sponsor a Teacher

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