

# Armenian President Resigns

YEREVAN (DP, Azatutyun) — Armen Sarkissian announced Sunday, January 23, that he was stepping down as president of Armenia, citing his inability to influence policy during times of crisis.

Armenia has been embroiled in a political crisis that erupted in the wake of a war with Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory.

Sarkissian disagreed with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan over his decision to remove the chief of general staff in the wake of the war with Azerbaijan and amid protests.

**“WE LIVE IN A UNIQUE REALITY, A REALITY WHERE THE PRESIDENT CANNOT INFLUENCE MATTERS OF WAR OR PEACE,”**

—ARMEN SARKISSIAN

Pashinyan removed Armenia’s chief of general staff in March 2021, claiming that the military was planning a coup.

Pashinyan has been under pressure since the peace deal that ended

the war with Azerbaijan, with regular street protests demanding he step down over the terms of the agreement.

At the time the peace deal was being negotiated, Sarkissian criticized the fact that he had not been included in the deliberations.

“This is not an emotionally-driven decision and it comes from a specific logic,” Sarkissian said in a statement on the website of the president of Armenia.

“The president does not have the necessary tools to influence the important processes of foreign and domestic policy in difficult times for the people and the country.”

see RESIGNATION, page 3



## FBI Raids Home of Texas Rep with Deep Ties to Azerbaijan

By Mike Levine

WASHINGTON (ABC News) — The federal grand jury probe that led to the raid of Democratic Congressman Henry Cuellar’s home and office in Texas this week has begun issuing subpoenas, seeking records about a wide array of U.S. companies and advocacy organizations, many of them with ties to Azerbaijan.

Among the information being sought, according to one subpoena reviewed by ABC News, are records related to the congressman, his wife Imelda, and at least one of his campaign staffers.

An attorney representing Cuellar, Joshua Berman, told ABC News that “the congressman and his family are fully cooperating” with the investigation. On Wednesday, January 19, after the FBI raids in Laredo, Texas, an aide to Cuellar said the congressman is “committed to ensuring that justice and the law are upheld.”



Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-TX), right, meets with former Azerbaijan Ambassador to the U.S., Elin Suleymanov, in 2013.

The subpoenas issued in recent days came from a federal grand jury in Washington, D.C.

The FBI and Justice Department have declined to discuss the investigation or describe its scope.

It is unclear if Cuellar or his wife are targets of the probe. But, in addition to other information, the subpoena reviewed by ABC News seeks records “relating to anything of value” that the congressman, his wife, and others close to them may have been offered by certain business leaders or foreign officials.

The subpoena also asks for records relating to any “work, act, favor, or service” that Cuellar or his wife may have provided at the behest of certain foreign companies, government officials, American business leaders, or others.

The subpoena reviewed by ABC News specifically seeks records related to at least three Texas-based companies for which online databases identify Imelda Cuellar as an officer or director. It also seeks records relating to an array of logistics-related firms

see RAID, page 10

## President Armen Sarkissian Releases Resignation Statement



YEREVAN (president.am) — President Armenia Sarkissian of Armenia announced his resignation on January 23 in a statement on the official presidential website, which is reproduced as follows.

In the early 1990s, due to major geopolitical changes, our people had the greatest opportunity to establish their own indepen-

dent state. Our mission was not to replace one flag with another, but to build a country that would ensure the security, progress, and prosperity of Armenians once again, centuries later.

I emphasize that the main meaning of the existence of an independent state is the ability to assume and bear responsibility when

see STATEMENT, page 3

## Baseball Analyst Tim Kurkjian Named to Baseball Hall of Fame

By Stephen Kurkjian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WASHINGTON — Longtime baseball writer and ESPN’s TV analyst Tim Kurkjian said his first thoughts were of his father when he learned in December that he was headed to Major League Baseball’s Hall of Fame as this year’s winner of the Baseball Writers’ Association of America’s Career Excellence Award.

“Baseball was the only language we spoke in the house, and it was because of our Dad [Badrig “Jeff” Kurkjian],”

Tim said in a telephone interview. “He was a terrific player at Watertown High School, and he passed on his love of the game to me and my two brothers, Andy and Matt.”

While chosen by a different system than the one that decides which major league players are elected to the Hall of Fame, Tim’s ascension to baseball’s highest honor makes him the first Armenian to gain the recognition.

see KURKJIAN, page 11



**STEPANAKERT**

**Stepanakert’s Bardak: Where Everybody Knows Your Name**



Page 4

**WASHINGTON**

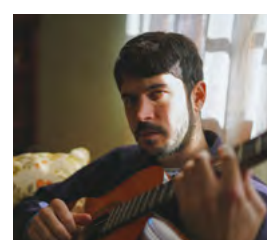
**Armenia Parliament Speaker Simonyan Meets Speaker Pelosi in Washington**



Page 8

**WATERTOWN**

**‘Ghedtair Composite’ Album Reimagines Armenian Folk Music**



Page 12



## ARMENIA

## NEWS from ARMENIA

### Mass Media Watchdog: Intolerance Towards Journalists on the Rise

YEREVAN (Arka) — The Chairman of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression this week Ashot Melikyan reviewed the year 2021 at a press conference on January 25, saying attitudes towards the mass media has deteriorated.

“Journalists and cameramen are often targeted by politicians, officials and citizens. Notably, during mass rallies, supporters of political forces identify mass media outlets with this or that political force. All of this result in intolerance towards mass media,” Melikyan noted.

He said a total of 18 cases of physical abuse against mass media representatives were recorded, as a result of which 20 journalists were hurt.

Also 107 cases of calls for violence, threats, lawsuits and other methods of exerting pressure on media by political and state figures were recorded.

Melikyan also expressed concern that cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information have increased with 99 such cases recorded in 2021.

### Covid-19 Infections Grew By 1,332 on Jan. 25

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The number of confirmed coronavirus infections in Armenia grew by 1332 to reach 353,731 on January 25 morning, according to information provided by the Health Ministry.

Fresh figures also revealed that 155 more people recovered, four patients died from Covid-19, while two others carrying the virus died from other causes in the past 24 hours.

### Karabakh: Azerbaijan Committed 69 Crimes Since 2020 Ceasefire

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Azerbaijani military has committed 69 crimes against the civilian population of Artsakh since a ceasefire statement was signed on November 9, 2020, the Prosecutor General’s office of Artsakh reported on January 22.

In total, 54 criminal cases have been launched to investigate the crimes committed by Azeri servicemen stationed near the border settlements, the statement adds.

There have been 5 murders, 28 attempted murders, 1 terrorist act, 12 instances of destruction of property, 16 cases of attempted destruction and damage to property, 3 cases of theft, 2 cases of robbery, 3 cases of destruction of graves, 4 cases of torture, 1 case of threats, 1 kidnapping, the statement reveals.

Three civilians and 10 servicemen were killed in the reporting period, 37 people received gunshot wounds, while six others were physically abused.

“This information proves that Azerbaijan has been regularly violating the condition of “complete cessation of fire and hostilities,” the Prosecutor’s office reported.

# Sarkissian’s Resignation Sparks Speculation, Raises More Questions

By Raffi Elliott

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Armenian President Armen Sarkissian may have reignited political intrigue in Armenia when he announced his resignation late on Sunday, January 23. In the announcement posted to the presidential website, Sarkissian bemoaned the lack of executive power that the Constitution affords the office of the president, which he claims, denies him access to “the appropriate tools” to influence matters of war and peace, or solve systemic domestic and foreign policy problems.

“We have a paradoxical situation when the president has to be the guarantor of statehood without actually having any real tools,” Sarkissian was quoted as saying, adding that the Constitution contains certain flaws which, among other things, prevents well-known experts from the Diaspora to participate in the management of state institutions in their historical homeland.

He also grumbled over what he described as his family and himself being targeted by “various political groups.” The president and his family have indeed been at the center of much public cogitation since he was first tapped as former President Serzh Sargsyan’s replacement in early 2018. Questions have lingered over his ties to several prominent figures, including the British royal family, his citizenship status, and the source (and location) of his massive wealth.

Prior to his political life, the 69-year-old Sarkissian had a flourishing career as a mathematician, physicist and computer scientist. He is famously credited as one of the creators of the early Nintendo puzzle game Tetris, and its offshoot, Wordtris. Upon Independence, he briefly served as Armenia’s fifth prime minister in the 1990s before taking up office in London as Armenia’s longest-serving ambassador to the United Kingdom — a role he kept until 2018 when he accepted the position of President of the Republic of Armenia.

Under this new arrangement, Armen Sarkissian would be elected by the National Assembly to the purely ceremonial role of President of the Republic on April 9, 2018, under the newly amended constitution which simultaneously went into force, freeing his predecessor, Serzh Sargsyan (no relation) to then assume the newly-bolstered role of prime minister, which would hold most executive functions, including direct control over the military, police and security establishment.

What was likely intended as a typical post-soviet transition of elites quickly triggered a series of events culminating in the May 2018 Velvet Revolution, where the regime was brought down by months of large-scale peaceful demonstrations. The newly-appointed President Sarkissian was credited with playing a critical role in brokering productive dialogue between the government and the opposition, thus securing a peaceful transition.

“We and others called it a velvet revolution,” Sarkissian reminisced to reporters from RFE/RL in an interview on the one-year anniversary of the event. “I often call it a revolution in the Armenian way ... We are Armenians and we are different from many others in that we manage to carry out dramatic changes, including revolutions, in a very humane manner, without clashes, without tragedies, which of course hugely impressed the world.”

The president’s actions during and immediately following the 44-day Second

Karabakh War have been both praised and criticized by observers. Despite making several international trips, including to NATO headquarters and Brussels at the height of the fighting, Sarkissian came under fire for not utilizing this vast network of influential world figures more effectively to pressure Azerbaijan into a ceasefire. He was also criticized by both pro-government and opposition commentators for his ambiguous stance during the political unrest following the ceasefire. Sarkissian was praised for using the apolitical nature of his office to call for unity in the face of instability, but also spoke out in favor of replacing the current government with a technocratic one, sparking calls for his resignation by government figures and some civil liberties watchdogs.

Among the president’s most difficult calls was the controversy over the dismissal of then-Chief of the Army General Staff, General Onnik Gasparyan in February 2021 for involving the military in civilian political matters. Sarkissian’s ultimate decision to neither sign the dismissal nor reject it — choosing instead to submit a separate question to the Constitutional Court — almost led the country towards a constitutional crisis, with pro-opposition lawyers even challenging the legitimacy of his Presidency in court, but ultimately led to his brokering of a deal between the Government and opposition forces to organize fresh snap elections. These elections, held on June 20, 2021, saw Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s government retain a comfortable parliamentary majority in what international observers deemed “competitive and generally well-managed [elections] within a short timeframe.”

Sarkissian remained neutral during the pre-election campaign, calling on voters to “Vote fairly and freely, and reckon with only and nothing but your conscience.” Post-election, the president and prime minister seemed to have publicly reconciled their differences, exchanging encouraging remarks with each other.

Throughout this presidency, Sarkissian has tried to position himself as a head-diplomat for the country, while also promoting scientific advancement and education, pushing his signature policy: “Quantum Politics.” In the aftermath of the war, Sarkissian went on a frenzy of diplomatic trips, mostly to the European Union and to the Gulf States, which sought to help Armenia position itself as a credible partner in the midst of increasing regional rivalry between The Gulf Countries and Turkey. These trips contributed to the announcement of several large-scale strategic investments from the United Arab Emirates, and a symbolically significant meeting with Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman.

However, at times, the President’s diplomatic overtures seem to have coincided with business interests as well. Sarkissian has been accused by environmentalist groups such as Ecolor of having intimate links to the gold mining giant Lydian International which had won a controversial concession to exploit the Amulsar mountain in Armenia’s Vayots Dzor region. In fact, Sarkissian served both as a director of the company and board member in-between stints as Armenian ambassador to the UK. Sarkissian repeatedly defended his role in the mining project as a use of his network to attract investment and job creation to the Armenian nation. The mine did indeed hire up to 1700, mostly local, employees and injected almost \$1billion

into Armenia in the form of state taxes, local CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) projects and other investments. However, the company’s future remains unclear following a restructuring in the wake of environmentalist protests.

But a line from the president’s statement in particular, that “The purpose of my proposal was not to move from one form of government to another (parliamentary to semi-presidential or presidential), but to create a state system based on checks and balances” suggests that Sarkissian may not be so much pushing for a constitutional change of powers, rather than setting himself up for a potential run for the prime minister’s office in 2026, where he might find the constitutional powers he was looking for.

Indeed, the president has been dropping hints about resigning for a while now, with several opinion polls showing him to be among the more popular public figures, rivaling the prime minister’s numbers. Several political commentators have pegged him as a potential candidate for last year’s election. Prof. Nerses Kopalyan, a political scientist at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, tweeted on Monday: “President Armen Sarkissian had been hinting for some time of possibly resigning. As the domestic political landscape has relatively stabilized, he’s taken the step. Expect him to enter politics as a democratic alternative to Pashinyan. The voter base is there!” According to him, the president won a lot of political capital in the eyes of many Velvet Revolution participants who were more concerned with removing the previous regime than supporting Nikol Pashinyan. In last year’s election, Pashinyan did manage to win over 35 percent of the undecided vote, which Kopalyan describes as more of an “anti-Kocharyan vote” rather than support for him. According to him, Sarkissian could fill a void in the political spectrum which breaks the lesser-of-two-evils dichotomy by giving more urban and educated voters a more mature and experienced candidate who still respects the values of the Velvet Revolution.

While no official statement on the rumor has been made yet, the president has been dropping a lot of not-so-subtle hints that he might see himself as that person as well. In a clearly-self-promotional interview with SpectatorWorld.com appropriately titled “Will Armen Sarkissian save Armenia?”, Sarkissian was asked how one could build a nation devastated by foreign aggression and demoralized by infighting. Sarkissian was quoted as responding: “You begin by looking inwards. You ask yourself difficult questions and make necessary changes.”

Still, both the reason provided, and the circumstances of the president’s resignation have raised lingering questions. Civil rights activist Daniel Ioannisyan, who also sits on the Constitutional Amendment Committee, was perplexed by the president’s claimed dissatisfaction with the lack of powers of his office. In a media interview following the President’s resignation, Ioannisyan countered that Sarkissian seldom, if ever, used the constitutional leverages at his disposal anyway. “The only time [Sarkissian] truly attempted to use his powers to affect the political process, during the crisis of General Gasparyan’s resignation last February, his actions ended up hindering efforts to keep the Army outside of politics” Ioannisyan said, “how he would have chosen to wield his powers if he had been afforded more is anyone’s guess.”

see QUESTIONS, page 3



## ARMENIA

# Armenian President Resigns

RESIGNATION, from page 1

The post of president is largely ceremonial in Armenia, and executive power is held primarily by the prime minister. Armenia became a parliamentary republic after a 2015 referendum that significantly limited presidential powers.

“We live in a unique reality, a reality where the President cannot influence matters of war or peace,” Sarkissian said in his statement, adding that the president did not have the power to veto laws.

## Resignation Sparks Speculation, Raises More Questions

QUESTIONS, from page 2

But the most explosive theory explaining the president’s resignation — which strangely was made on a Sunday evening, while he was outside the country on leave — came in the form of a damning report by the investigative journalism platform Hetq. According to Hetq editor-in-chief Edik Baghdasaryan, Sarkissian had admitted to holding citizenship of the small Caribbean island of St. Kitts and Nevis at the time he was sworn into the Presidency, thus violating the Armenian constitution which requires the President to be solely a citizen of Armenia. If the president’s appointment was indeed unconstitutional, it would raise questions about the validity of all presidential decrees signed since 2018, including the appointing of the prime minister’s government. According to Hetq, “President Armen Sarkissian is unlikely to return to Armenia since he could be prosecuted for forging official documents.”

“I hope that eventually the constitutional changes will be implemented and the next president and presidential administration will be able to operate in a more balanced environment.”

The outgoing president was elected in 2018, having previously served as Armenia’s ambassador to the United Kingdom. Sarkissian also held the post of prime minister in 1996-1997.

### What’s Next

In a rare convergence of views, pro-government and opposition members of Armenia’s parliament on Monday dismissed the main stated reason for President Armen Sarkissian’s resignation and criticized his track record.

Lawmakers representing the ruling Civil Contract party and the opposition minority in the National Assembly countered that Sarkissian was well aware of the largely ceremonial powers vested in the presidency when he agreed to become president in early 2018.

“Didn’t he know the limits of his prerogatives when he was elected president?” said Civil Contract’s Khachatur Sukiasyan. “He must have familiarized himself with the constitution before taking office.”

Sukiasyan, who is also a wealthy businessman, went on to question Sarkissian’s patriotism and attachment to Armenia.

“If an Armenian keeps 90 percent of their capital in a foreign country I cannot help but wonder to what extent he trusts and loves the Republic of Armenia,” he said, referring to a fortune made by Sarkissian in Britain.

Sarkissian, 68, had lived and worked in London for nearly three decades. Former President Serzh Sargsyan offered him to become the head of state as Armenia completed its transition to a parliamentary sys-

tem of government. The country’s former parliament controlled by Serzh Sargsyan’s Republican Party (HHK) elected the new president for a seven-year term in March 2018.

Hayk Mamijanyan, an opposition lawmaker affiliated with the HHK, charged that Sarkissian has not performed his duties properly since then.

“He has sung the same song for four years,” Mamijanyan told reporters. “Taking about the same things — powers, powers, powers — for four years is not comprehensible for me.”

Sargsyan’s political allies have been particularly critical of the current president. They have claimed that he is afraid of pushing back against what they see as Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s authoritarian tendencies.

Under Armenian constitution, parliament speaker Alen Simonyan will take over as interim president if Sarkissian does not withdraw his resignation within a week. In that case, the National Assembly will have to elect a new head of state within the next 35 days.

To become president in the first round of voting a candidate has to be backed by at least 81 members of the 107-seat parliament. The legal threshold is set at 65 votes for the second round.

Pashinyan’s Civil Contract controls 71 parliament seats, putting it in a position to install the new president. The ruling party has not yet indicated who could be its presidential candidate.

The two opposition factions in the National Assembly similarly did not say on Monday whether they will field a candidate.

Pashinyan said on Monday that Armenia’s parliament should elect a new pres-



ident of the republic who will be in sync with his administration.

Pashinyan said that Sarkissian phoned him and informed him about the surprise decision just a few hours before announcing it. He said he “took note” of it and will not comment on the reason for the resignation given by the head of state.

Civil Contract controls 71 of the 107 seats in the National Assembly, putting it in a position to install the next president.

Pashinyan said that he and his political team have not yet discussed potential candidates for the job. He indicated that they will pick a figure loyal to them.

“I think that we must go for a solution that will ensure political harmony between the president, the government and the parliament majority, especially now that we are faced with very serious challenges,” he said during a virtual news conference aired by Armenian Public Television.

## President Armen Sarkissian Releases Resignation Statement

STATEMENT, from page 1

we realize that only we, as a single body, are the builders of our victories and culprits of our defeats.

Enthused by such a historic opportunity, like many of my compatriots, I dedicated myself to that mission. For various reasons, the activity of my participation at various stages changed, but I did not stop believing in our ultimate national success. And that was my chief motivation to accept the proposal to become the President of Armenia.

Making this important decision, I proceeded from the proposal made to me, according to which the new presidential institution would have tools and opportunities to influence foreign political, economic, and investment policy, and relations with the Diaspora, as well as to promote national interests in the international arena, and shape a new scientific-educational and high-tech environment.

Sometime later, the April-May events of 2018 took place...

A question may arise why I did not resign at that time. The answer is obvious, because of the responsibility I took on as President of the Republic. I was obliged to do everything in my power to avoid the further deepening of internal division and possible clashes, which could have extremely negative consequences. I also sought to use the prestige and connections gained through my work of many years, and my international political-economic potential, to build a strong and stable state.

Again, a question may arise as to why the President failed to influence the political events that led us to the current national crisis. The reason is obvious again: the lack of appropriate tools that any state official has with only one document - the Constitution. The roots of some of our significant problems are hidden in the current Basic Law.

We have a paradoxical situation when the President has to be the guarantor of statehood without actually having any real tools. The Constitution also presupposes the supremacy of one institution over another, creates obstacles for well-known Diaspora specialists to participate in the management of state institutions in their historical Homeland, etc.

We are a parliamentary republic in form, but not in content. The purpose of my proposal was not to move from one form of government to another (parliamentary to semi-presidential or presidential), but to create a state system based on checks and balances. Without it, it is difficult to talk about significant achievements because progress and success can be achieved only in the conditions of a predictable and harmonious system.

I am glad that a commission for constitutional amendments has been set up, for which I thank the government. I hope that eventually the constitutional changes will take place, the next president and the presidential institution will be able to work in a

more balanced, coordinated environment.

We live in a unique reality, a reality where the President cannot influence matters of war or peace.

A reality, when he cannot veto the laws he considers inexpedient for the state and the people.

A reality, when the President’s opportunities are perceived not as an advantage for the state, but as a threat by various political groups.

A reality where the President is unable to use most of his potential to solve systemic domestic and foreign policy problems.

A reality where the world is in a constant turbulence zone, but the President does not have a constitutional tool to help his country.

A reality where the head of the state and sometimes his family are targeted by various political groups. They are not so much interested in the achievements of the presidential institution for the benefit of the country, as in my past, various conspiracy theories, and myths. This “concern” for me goes beyond morality, ultimately directly affecting my health.

I have been thinking for a long time and I have decided to resign from the post of the President of the Republic after working actively for about four years.

That decision is not emotional at all, and it follows a certain logic.

The President does not have the necessary tools to influence the radical processes of domestic and foreign policy in these difficult times for the country and the nation.

At this difficult time for our state, when national unity is needed, the presidential institution should not be the target of gossip and conspiracy theories, thus diverting public attention from the most important issues.

Today, more than ever, we need meaningful, deeply thought out, and carefully considered actions. Otherwise, we, the Armenians of the whole world, will not achieve the goal of our mission, we will find ourselves in the margins of history.

We have no right to make mistakes anymore!

In the end, I would like to express my special gratitude to our citizens, our compatriots in the Diaspora, for their perseverance, endurance, patience, and courage in these difficult times for the country.

Special thanks to the soldiers and officers of our brave army, my homage to the families of the heroes who sacrificed their lives for our Motherland.

I also thank all the employees of the Office of the President of the Republic and my colleagues in the state structures for efficient joint work.



## ARMENIA



Bardak pub in Stepanakert, Artsakh (photo Lilit Shahverdyan)

# Stepanakert's Bardak

## Where Everybody Knows Your Name

By Lilit Shahverdyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

STEPANAKERT — “I was named after my grandfather, and my name says a lot about me,” says Azat Adamyan, the owner of the popular pub Bardak, located on the outskirts of Stepanakert, near the highway to Shushi. The pub outgrew a humble business initiative to become an inalienable part of social life in Stepanakert. For Azat, who made an old garage into a center for local youth, Bardak is a lifestyle, rather than merely a business.

Bardak is a small compact building painted dark blue inside, in which numerous musical instruments nestle, including acoustic guitars, and colorful sign boards, foreign flags and banknotes adorn the walls, accompanied by writings in the most varied languages. These are usually in the form of sticky notes that visitors leave to immortalize their visit to Bardak and add a final touch to the decorations. A statue of the formidable Lenin, an old dusty xerox sign and a decommissioned Smerch rocket stand near the entrance, all brought from different places in Artsakh that are now taken over by Azerbaijan.

Bardak translates from Russian as “mess,” and that is how its owner interprets his brainchild. Its aim is to gather together the youth and adults, locals and tourists, musicians and dancers, in an affable ambience suited perfectly for friendly talks, chants and fiery dances.

“After the war of 2016, I decided to initiate a start-up in Stepanakert to prove that life still can keep going on,” says Azat. “Even though 2016 was pretty light compared to the events of 2020, incredibly many people were affected, hurt or heartbroken, and I wished to invigorate them somehow.” However, this was not the Azat’s first business idea; he had managed to found an extreme tourism club previously. Instead of a new office for that enterprise, he invested into the creation of Bardak which played an important role in shaping his personality.

Azat didn’t intend to run a pub, as his initial idea was to create a cozy space to hang out with friends. In its early stages, Bardak was familiar only to Azat’s friends, who would often drop by for a cup of coffee. But as time passed, the place became more popular and beloved by the youth, and it gradually evolved into a go-to recreation area where one can have cocktails, sing accompanied by guitar and make new acquaintances.

“When I entered the old garage with a friend of mine, I resolved that I will name it after the very first thing that comes to the tip of my tongue,” says Azat, and his first impression of the incomplete building was a mess, or “bardak” in Russian. Today, an exquisite black motorcycle is standing near the pub which always draws guests’ attention. It is one of the very first props to become one

of the many symbols of Bardak, including Azat with his helmet.

One of the regular visitors to the pub is Rudolf Hayriyan, 28, who associates the mess at Bardak with freedom and escapism. “At Bardak, everyone is familiar with each other, and that’s what I like the most,” says Rudolf. Slowly but surely, Rudolf became a part of Bardak, and subsequently practically family with Azat.

What makes the place even more unique is that it manages to link generations, the young and the elders.

“In these few years, Bardak has united the locals, and the younger generation is now getting involved in our family,” says Rudolf. As a frequenter of the pub, he claims that the bar’s role and purpose haven’t changed that much throughout the years. However, he ruefully remembers with sorrow the nights they would spend there



Azat playing his guitar at Bardak (photo Lilit Shahverdyan)

before the war. “There was always a massive influx of tourists,” he recalls, “and the pub was especially lively and engaging before the war ignited.”

Previously, the space was a popular spot for concerts by various Armenian performers and local musicians, such as the Shushva Band (The Band of Shushi) that is deemed popular and well-respected within Artsakh. However, the war has left its indelible footprints on the pub, which still maintains the same atmosphere as before, but fails to invoke genuine joy in people.

The bar is not only the best recreation center for Rudolf and his friends. It is also a means of escaping from reality for them. “When I’m feeling too low,” says Rudolf, “I go to the pub simply to refocus myself, to relax and concentrate on more positive things, such as singing with my guitar.”

The melodies of Viktor Tsoi’s music are often heard here thanks to Rudolf, an amateur musician who considers music an essential part of his character. Through music, he manifests his emotions and conveys his message.

“I love the feeling of entering an alternate reality when I’m strumming the strings of my instrument,” he says.

Bardak has a mission — to connect people and create the friendliest environment for making new friends, and Azat’s and Rudolf’s tight friendship is one of its accomplishments. “I believe every person relates to their name to some extent,” states Rudolf, “and Azat’s name is all about his personality — he is free in everything, in his actions and thoughts, and that is why we all respect him.”

### Azat’s Innovations

Besides the pub, Azat runs his extreme sports club, until recently a family workshop called Adamyan’s Manufactory printing expressions in Artsakh dialect on clothing (it closed for reasons unrelated to the war), and the ForRest Hub.

Not far from Stepanakert, Azat renovated a Soviet-era camping space and turned it into ForRest Hub, where guests can organize concerts, camps, or just gather around the fire and get away from the city life. It is particularly popular among the youth.

The income from Bardak will allow Azat to complete the construction of ForRest and start a new enterprise — Maran, which will be a public food court at ForRest. “I often think of expanding Bardak, refreshing the interior, but I am afraid that any change will undermine the authenticity of the pub because the walls carry all the memories,” he says.

The first ornaments of Azat’s pub came from his home; later he received numerous offers to buy unusual items that would complement the indoor and outdoor design. Sometimes visitors themselves would leave souvenirs that eventually got embedded into the interior, such as car plates and stickers. After the recent war, the items that were fortuitously brought from Shushi and other affected regions increased both in value and historical significance.

Long before September 2020, Azat fetched the signboard of the first photocopying center in Shushi which now embellishes Bardak’s entrance door. The door itself turned into an essential relic — Azat saved it from the Tigranakert fortress a few hours before the territory was handed over to Azerbaijan. “I promised myself to return it to its original place,” he confesses.

The signboard of Talish is hanging inside the bar along with Tigranakert’s, mixed in with numerous hats, vinyls, clothing and instruments. Azat received it as a gift in 2018 from the film crew of “The Gate to Heaven,” Jivan Avetisyan’s movie about Artsakh.

However, what catches the visitors’ attention the most is the Smerch rocket near the entrance, covered with the stylized and recognizable minimalist paintings of Areg Balayan’s Blojiks. Azat got the missile from the road to Khnatsakh in order to always have it before his eyes as a stark reminder that life has not reached its end, but a new beginning.

Azat and his household were not exempt from the dire aftermath of the war. During the 2020 fighting, Azat received shrapnel wounds and was taken to the hospital, which he left early in order to continue helping at home. He received appropriate medical treatment afterwards, but some shards of shrapnel sank too deep into Azat’s body to be retrieved. In the last days of the war, when Stepanakert was being actively shelled, Azat’s house got partly damaged along with the pub, yet he succeeded in repairing the buildings in the very same manner he healed the injuries he received.

Azat’s will and desire to create new things for the people motivates everyone around him. “He doesn’t allow the pessimistic spirit around him,” says Rudolf. “He’s always the first to cheer everyone up and put them on the right path.”

Rudolf believes that it’s the faith in a bright future that keeps everyone going and holds back from negative thoughts that prove to be counterproductive. “Had he had any doubts about our fate, he wouldn’t have persisted on restoring Bardak and starting other businesses,” adds Rudolf.

“We can never avoid war,” assures Azat, “but to stand a chance we have to take care of each other.” Whenever starting a new enterprise, his biggest concern is not the business with its revenues, but the people, the customers he’s so eager to serve.

Azat got married in the summer of 2021 and is now awaiting the birth of his first child. Despite the heavy burden the war laid upon Azat and his family, he is willing to confront these difficulties again if necessary to save what he and his ancestors have been building for years. “The most precious thing I have now,” he says, “is my father’s house. If I lose it, everything will disappear in vain.”



## ARMENIA

# Karmir Shuka Villagers Stop Azerbaijani Military Convoy

By Gevorg Gyulumyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — On January 25, an Azerbaijani military convoy tried to pass through the village of Karmir Shuka in the Martuni region of Artsakh without informing the Armenian side, so the villagers did not allow them to cross for some time. As a result, the Azerbaijani military column remained in the village during this period.

“They came and tried to cross without informing the leadership of the community. That’s why they stopped them. They called from the municipality and said that they came without giving notice,” said our local source. According to the latter, when the Azerbaijani military crosses the main road of Karmir Shuka, both the community authorities and the Artsakh defense army must be informed.

He added with emphasis: “Neither the community leadership nor the army knew. They came unexpectedly. That’s why we stopped them. What right do they have to ignore us? But there was no clash. The road remained closed for about 15 minutes. The government then said, ‘Open it’ and we opened it.”



Russian peacekeepers near Karmir Shuka

Metakse Hakobyan, a member of the Artsakh Parliament, told us that the residents demanded that the Azerbaijanis not use the road as if they possessed the right of ownership, but must warn in advance in order to come to an agreement before crossing that road. They conveyed their demands to the Azerbaijanis through Russian peace-

keepers, and only then, after negotiations, did they open the way.

A second issue raised is that occasionally the villagers’ animals wander over to the neutral zone or into Azerbaijani controlled land, and the Azerbaijanis do not return them.

The Artsakh deputy said that the Azerbaijanis have not responded to the demand of the Artsakh people yet and declared: “We will see from the next passage whether they will keep us informed in advance. It will become clear in this fashion whether the demands of the Armenian side have been accepted.”

According to Hakobyan, the residents’ patience has already run out. They are trying to organize themselves and, in this way, ensure their own security.

“If they live in Artsakh, it means they are not afraid of the provocations of the enemy. The enemy must understand too that he must not resort to provocations. Otherwise there will be more such incidents. I hope this will be a signal for the Azerbaijanis,” said Hakobyan, continuing: “Everyone living in Artsakh is a hero, because he lives realizing that a few meters away is the bloodthirsty enemy. Only a great love for the homeland can make a person live like that. Especially after the war we tremble for our homeland and we look at everything differently. Until now, we thought that the Artsakh issue would be resolved in favor of Armenia as a result of negotiations, but we are witnessing the opposite. The authorities of Armenia want to close and end this issue of 25 percent [the remaining lands of Artsakh under Armenian control]. It remains for us to live resolutely in Artsakh and not act in such a way that Artsakh does not suddenly become emptied of Armenians,” said Hakobyan.



Metakse Hakobyan, with view of Karmir Shuka

## Azerbaijanis Prevent Armenian Pilgrims from Visiting Dadivank

By Gevorg Gyulumyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Armenian pilgrims are still not able to visit Dadivank monastery and it not clear when they will be able to attend liturgical services.

The Primate of the Artsakh Diocese, Bishop Vrtanes Abrahamyan, said that five Armenian clergymen continue to remain, isolated, in Dadivank: “Our five clergymen are always there. Only the pilgrims have not been able to enter since May. The clergy are there. They serve in a worthy way, in accordance with what is proper.”

The Primate is in touch with the five men, in spirit and by phone. There are also several dozen Russian peacekeepers with them in the area of Dadivank. Bishop Abrahamyan exclaimed: “They are our servants. The monks are in their monastic life. When it is necessary to visit Yerevan or Stepanakert, we permit it. They come,

do their work and return, but they are always at their place of service. They do not have any contact with the Azerbaijanis. The clergy carry out all their activities with the peacekeepers.”

He stated that the purpose of the clergy is to pray, conduct services and celebrate liturgies. He remembers that at one time pilgrims used to visit the monastery, and baptisms and blessings were conducted.

Father Vrtanes does not know the reasons for banning the entry of pilgrims. Armenian pilgrims, for example, are able to visit Amaras Monastery accompanied by peacekeepers. He noted that Amaras is not a forbidden zone. It is possible to enter with the peacekeepers and there is a liturgy every Sunday, unlike Dadivank, which is not considered part of the territory of Artsakh at the moment.

He said, “They do not permit it and that is it, without a reason. They do not say anything. The peacekeepers are on the grounds

of the monastery. They live together. Of course the rooms are different. They are separated: they are military, while the clergymen perform spiritual service. What the Azerbaijani side thinks is a secondary question. We are doing what we have to do.”

Tension is periodically observed at the borders of Armenia and Artsakh, and unfortunately, peaceful inhabitants are also killed. The Azerbaijanis have not changed their aggressive behavior. The Armenian clergymen, however, do not lose their optimism.

“Every clergyman is optimistic. There is no clergyman who is not optimistic, because a person who has a connection with God is unable not to be optimistic. A person who is discouraged is a person who has fallen into sin. We are not discouraged because we are always with God. We feel his presence in us and we convey the same to our people, whether through words, individual conversations, general prayers, or through sermons, worship services, and

visits to military units.”

After the war, Azerbaijan declared that Artsakh does not exist. Moreover, it continues its aggressive policies but received this answer from the Primate, who declared: “Azerbaijanis can say such a thing, but the truth remains the truth. Artsakh is Armenian and must remain Armenian. We must continue to live here, to become stronger, be by the side of our state, by our value system, by our children, and raise worthy children who will love our country even more and become devoted leaders for the future of our homeland and people. This is our mission and I think we will not fail, because we are with God.”

Earlier, we reported that the Azerbaijanis had closed the monastery, first claiming the reason was Covid, and later saying that the Tartar River had overflowed, the road had collapsed and the monastery could not be reached. Now, however, there is no clear reason for the ban.



## INTERNATIONAL

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## Turkey Looks to Establish Air Routes with Armenia

ISTANBUL (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The possible launch of flights from Armenia to the cities of Van and Kars in Turkey is under discussion, according to Hurriyet daily news, which has obtained details from a recent briefing held at the country's Presidency.

Turkey and Armenia held their first meeting at the level of special envoys in Moscow in mid-January and agreed to continue talks for reconciling and establishing diplomatic and economic bonds after three decades. As part of confidence-building measures, they have also agreed to start reciprocal charter flights between Istanbul and Yerevan.

According to the information obtained from the briefing, it has been agreed that further studies should be made to launch flights between different cities, including Kars and Van, the cities hosting important religious and historical sites for Armenians.

## Canadian-Armenian Appointed to Tourism Committee

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — Canadian-Armenian specialist Sisian Boghossian has been appointed the head of Armenia's Tourism Committee. A relevant order has been signed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Sisian Boghossian is a participant of the iGorts program of the Diaspora High Commissioner's Office, which allows Diaspora specialists to work for Armenian Government.

For the last few months, Sisian has been working at the Tourism Committee of the RA Ministry of Economy, and her professionalism led to being appointed to this official position, Diaspora High Commissioner's Office says.

## Composer Tcheknavorian Dedicates Works to Victims Of Artsakh War

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Iranian-Armenian composer, conductor Loris Tcheknavorian had composed more than 40 works in the past two years, including two major pieces which he has dedicated to the victims of the 2020 Artsakh war. The latest work is a requiem in memory of the pandemic victims. Tcheknavorian is visiting Armenia and his remarks came on January 24 at the meeting with Armenia's Minister of Education, Culture, Science and Sport Vahram Dumanyan.

The meeting discussed joint initiatives, development and implementation of new projects, the possibilities to present the latest works of the maestro in the motherland.

Minister Dumanyan also invited the maestro to the concert titled To the Heroes:44 on January 25 at Aram Khachaturian concert hall which will feature the Armenian State Philharmonic Orchestra and is dedicated to the victims of the 44-day Artsakh war.

# Will There Be an Armenian Diaspora in 100 Years' Time?

By Avo Piroyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The Armenian diaspora today is a modern phenomenon dating back not much more than 100 years. The first wave of emigration goes back to the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the second wave followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

At times, it can feel as though the diaspora will be a constant feature of Armenian society abroad. However, should the current status quo continue, the vast majority in the Armenian diaspora will assimilate and disappear within a few generations, according to sociologist Prof. Georgi Derluguian.

Derluguian is a professor of Social Research and Public Policy at New York University (Abu Dhabi affiliate). He has authored multiple books and dozens of scholarly articles and contributions on social history. His first-hand study of the Soviet Union's collapse culminated in the award-winning monograph, Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus (University of Chicago Press, 2005). He previously taught at Northwestern University, Sciences Po and Université de Bordeaux in France, as well as Tallinn Technological University in Estonia and Kiev State University in Ukraine.

The current status quo is, of course, not an unchangeable factor and the future of the diaspora is not a foregone conclusion.

### Ghettos and Peasants

To project the future of the diaspora, one needs to look at the past. Namely, how have Armenians survived for the several thousand years that they have been around.

Armenians had an independent or semi-independent homeland in one form or another until the sack of Ani by the Seljuk Turks in 1064 and the fall of Armenian Cilicia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. After that point Armenians have lived under foreign rule.

"The vast majority of the Armenians that continued to live in the Armenian heartlands throughout the centuries, up until the Armenian Genocide, were peasants. They married within their tight-knit communities and spoke the Armenian language by default.

"Those that found themselves living in the bigger cities under foreign rulers largely lived in ghettos where they did business with each other and were held together by the Armenian Church and Armenian schools," said Derluguian.

Those Armenians that did not fall into one of the above two groups assimilated over time with the dominant ethnic group.

### Victims of Their Own Success

Interestingly the diasporas that assimilate and disappear are the ones that have the greatest success and face the least amount of persecution (excluding pogroms and genocide), such as the Armenian diaspora in India.

"They are the victims of their own success," said Derluguian.

Today the USA, Russia and France constitute the main parts of the diaspora. In all three, Armenians are not persecuted nor live in ghettos.

"Ask yourself, what are the chances of your kids marrying an Armenian? And then their kids? And if someone is only one quarter Armenian [ethnically] or less even, then what keeps them attached to their Armenian part?" asked Derluguian.

### Multi-Ethnic Armenians

However, the prospects are not all negative. Preserving one's ethnic roots in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become decidedly easier with civilized nations now accepting of and open to multiculturalism.

"Over the last 20 or so years it has even become 'cool' to have a second identity [ethnicity]," said Derluguian.

Those with only partial Armenian heritage are often just as, if not more, enthused about their heritage as full blown Armenians living abroad or in Armenia. Indeed, those that marry into an Armenian household tend to adopt themselves into the new culture.

"One of the things that surprised me most when I first visited the Armenian community in the US, was how active American, Mexican etc. women that married Armenian men were in the Armenian

community including the Armenian Church," said Derluguian.

Indeed, these diaspora institutions (the church, schools etc.) have been and continue to be the backbone of the Armenian communities abroad and their ongoing existence is crucial to preserving the diaspora.

### The Pleasure Principle

"Being an Armenian in the diaspora can't be too difficult," said Derluguian.

This alludes to the pleasure principle which dictates that people seek maximum pleasure and minimum pain. In the case of the Armenian diaspora, this includes emotional pain attached to the negative situations associated with Armenia.

"Armenia and being an Armenian has to be an attractive prospect [either economically or culturally]. Armenia needs to generate 'cultural products,'" said Derluguian, adding, "everyone



Prof. Georgi Derluguian

knows/knew the Sabre Dance [by Aram Khachaturian]. This made Armenians feel proud to be associated with that."

As such much depends on the success of the Armenian state which in turn heavily depends on the level of involvement from the diaspora. The latter is arguably the Armenian state's greatest economic asset and potential and is so far heavily underutilised for a variety of reasons.

"It must be a mutually reinforcing ascendant relationship. Without a successful national state diaspora could dissipate as soon as in another generation or two, yet the Republic of Armenia is unlikely to succeed without the diaspora either," said Derluguian.

### Connection Is Vital

Of the three fundamentals — peasantry, segregation (ghettos) and an independent homeland — that kept the Armenian identity alive over several thousand years, only one truly exists today.

In order for the Armenian diaspora to have longevity, its members need to have strong links with the Armenian diasporan organizations and institutions.

Beyond, and indeed perhaps instead of that, even a small level of attachment to the Republic of Armenia will strongly foster the Armenian identity into the next generation/s regardless of how multi-ethnic an individual might be. Things such as an Armenian passport or a home in Armenia will almost certainly solidify a person and their family's connection to their Armenian roots.

The realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with its technological and social advances make preserving the Armenian diaspora easy and hard in equal measure.

Unlike in times gone by, Armenians are no longer forced together to form a diaspora. It is now a choice. Equally unlike in times gone by, Armenians are no longer facing persecution and active pressures to assimilate. Therefore, it is a free choice and one that is the diaspora's to make.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Turkish Writer Ahmet Altan: 'I Prefer Prison to Exile'

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Freed after nearly five years in jail for alleged involvement in a failed coup, Turkish journalist and author Ahmet Altan, 71, now counts his time by the number of books he has left to write.

Celebrated in the West — particularly Germany and France, where he won literary prizes while still behind bars — Altan remains in a tricky situation back home, where he faces the threat of further prosecution.

But speaking to AFP in his Istanbul flat, Altan said he would rather spend his last days in a Turkish prison “where I spoke my native language” than be a free man in exile, where “you are nearly no one (and) have no roots.”

“Writers are very anxious because every minute is a minute that you can write, you can do your job, so every minute that you don’t write, you feel regret,” he said in fluent English.

“I feel it now much more than before prison,” he confided, ensconced in a black leather chair flanked by stacks of books.

Altan, who has sold nearly seven million books worldwide, was one of tens of thousands of Turks jailed or fired from their jobs in purges that followed a 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The soft-spoken intellectual was locked up in Silivri, an Istanbul prison complex fitted out with Turkey’s largest courtroom — the main venue for mass trials that saw more than 2,500 suspects jailed for life.

Altan was partially singled out for his work with *Taraf*, a newspaper he founded. The government closed the paper on allegations it had obtained financial backing from a US-based Muslim cleric Erdogan blames for the coup plot.

Released less than half way through his 10.5-year sentence last April by order of the European Court of Human Rights, which found “no evidence” of wrongdoing, Altan returned to his family having written two more books in jail and nearly completed a third.

The first, a prison memoir called *I Will Never See the World Again*, was translated into 28 languages but never published in Turkey.

He describes the second, a novel called *Lady Life*, as an ode to freedom and his personal “revenge.”

It became a best-seller in Turkey after his release, scooping up France’s Prix Femina foreign book prize in 2021.

“It’s kind of saying, ‘you couldn’t steal those five years from me,’” the silver-bearded writer said of the novel, between cigarette puffs.

He recalled writing “eight or nine hours a day”, while his two cellmates nagged him about the endless cigarette smoke.

## ‘Exile Would Be Harder’

One day in prison he stumbled across FlashTV, a “low-end” channel that showed voluptuous women singing and dancing in skimpy dresses.

“They were the only ladies I could see while in prison... I really liked to watch it but my cellmates were very religious,” laughed Altan, who describes himself as an atheist who is passionate about religion.

*Lady Life*, a story of a literature student who falls in love with two sensuous women, “came in this atmosphere,” he said.

“I lived in some other world,” he said. “If you can write, there is nothing to complain about.”

Altan’s jailing sparked international outrage, turning him into a symbol of oppression in Turkey after the coup attempt.

Thirty-eight Nobel laureates — including JM Coetzee and Kazuo Ishiguro — published a letter in Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper in 2018 calling on Erdogan to secure the writer’s release.

Aware of his high profile and the new court proceedings he faces, Altan shies away from answering overtly political questions today.

But while he vows to publish his future books abroad before trying his luck at home, Altan sounds resolute about staying in Turkey, no matter what.

“It’s not because of courage. But being in exile is something I believe is harder than being a prisoner,” he said.

In exile, “you may be safe and secure ... but you cannot feel like you are (sleeping) in your own bed, in your own home. I’d rather be in prison.”



## European Top Court Rules Turkey Violated Rights of Journalist Deniz Yücel

STRASBOURG (Ahval) — The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ruled that Turkey violated Turkish-German journalist Deniz Yücel’s rights by keeping him in pre-trial detention for a year, after he was detained on terrorism and propaganda charges in 2017.

Yücel’s pre-trial detention violated his right to liberty and security, right to compensation for unlawful detention and freedom of expression, the court said on Tuesday, January 25.

Three years after his release, the court also ruled that Turkey should pay 13,300 euros (\$14,600) in non-pecuniary damages to Yücel, including 1,000 euros (\$ 1,120) for the court expenses.

Yücel, then Turkey correspondent for German newspaper *Die Welt*, spent nearly one year behind bars in Turkey after being detained on terrorism and propaganda charges in February 2017 for an interview with a top leader of the outlawed Kurdistan



Deniz Yücel

Workers’ Party, an armed group that has been fighting for autonomous rights in Turkey for over three decades.

Yücel returned to Germany following his release from jail in February 2018 under German and EU diplomatic pressure pending trial.

In June 2019, Turkey’s Constitutional ruled that Yücel’s detention was illegal and robbed him of his personal freedom and security, in addition to his freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Yücel was awarded 25,000 lira (\$1,852) in damages.

In its Tuesday decision, the ECHR considered that the applicant had not been awarded appropriate and sufficient compensation. The sums awarded to the journalist by Turkey’s Constitutional Court had been manifestly inadequate, according to the court.

In July 2020, a Turkish court in Istanbul sentenced Yücel to two years and nine months in prison on charges of “inciting hatred” and producing “terror propaganda.” Yücel, who lives in Germany, was tried in absentia in a more than two-year-long trial, after prosecutors said articles he wrote for *Die Welt* spread propaganda for the PKK, which is designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Regarding a fourth accusation that the applicant had brought to the ECHR for not being benefited from a right of unlimited access to the evidence against him, the court ruled on no violation on the matter.

Turkey also accused Yücel of having contact with U.S.-based Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, who Ankara blames for masterminding a failed military coup in 2016. Gülen denies the accusations.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publicly called Yücel a “terrorist” and “agent,” during his detention.

## Istanbul’s Hrant Dink School Continues To Educate Students from Armenia

By Talar Hisarlı Horozoğlu  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

ISTANBUL — The Hrant Dink School in the Gedikpasa neighborhood of Istanbul currently has about 80 students (26 in kindergarten, 29 in primary school and 25 in middle school) and 16 teachers, including the principal of the school, a cook and a cleaner. As the spring semester has started, we are committed to make the most out of our educational as well as social programs and activities.

As such we have launched math classes taught in the English and Russian languages for the 3rd and 4th grades. This interdisciplinary initiative aims at improvement of foreign language skills among young students in a more practical and comprehensive method. The earliest feedback is promising.

It is safe to say that our students — their parents to be exact — come from all over Armenia. Most of them are from Yerevan, Gyumri or Vanadzor. Yet we have students who were born in Istanbul as well. Turning to their parents, they generally work as babysitters, cleaner, maids and caregivers (mothers). Fathers are normally involved in the leather manufacturing as well as the jewelry sector.

All of our teachers hold university diplomas from Armenia and the European Union. They also are coming from various parts of Armenia. We do our best to hire creative and energetic professionals of their respective fields.

Covid cases among students are fairly rare. We had eight cases among the staff during the last two years. Due to some bureaucratic problems not everyone holding

foreign passports in Turkey can get vaccinated. Thus, only a few teachers are fully vaccinated, although according to a recent regulations all foreigners can get the vaccines, which certainly is good news for us.

Following the 2020 Karabakh war, Armenian families are still coming to Turkey in search of work and a slightly better (more bearable) life, which is unfortunate. Many families had left for Armenia when the war erupted but some of them have already returned to Istanbul. The overall diagram of these movements is rather complex. People react to every major economic and political turmoil by packing up and hitting the road.

Our energetic team is devoted to its mission. We are in a constant pursuit of more creative and efficient improvements that may help our students be happier and more complete and confident in their abilities.

# Community News

## Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission Secures \$5 Million In Funding

BILLERICA, Mass. — The Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission has been awarded \$5 million in funding from the state's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation, officials announced this week.

The commission was established under the Act Relative to Criminal Justice Reform in 2018 with the charge from the Legislature to study and make recommendations for the creation of a crisis diversion facility in Middlesex County. The new center would provide an alternative to arrest and unnecessary transport to the emergency rooms for individuals in need of behavioral health services.

Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian and President and CEO of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health Dr. Danna Mauch — who serve as co-chairs of the commission — thanked State Senator Cindy



Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian

Friedman (D-Arlington) and State Representative Ken Gordon (D-Bedford) for their efforts in securing the funding in a package approved by the Legislature in December.

“Over the last four years, the Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission has worked tirelessly to engage stakeholders; study available resources and gaps in services; and understand how we can most effectively support local law enforcement diversion programs,” said Sheriff Koutoujian and Dr. Mauch. “The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the issues the commission is charged with tackling. This ARPA funding moves us a major step closer to being able to deliver the critical services that will benefit those most in need in communities across Middlesex County.”

“A Middlesex County Restoration Center will provide much-needed clinical support for some of our most vulnerable community members,” said Senator Friedman. “This significant investment will help make the center a reality, and it will ensure that this evidence-based model of care is effectively used to divert residents

see FUNDING, page 9



Speaker Nancy Pelosi greets Alen Simonyan

## Armenia Parliament Speaker Simonyan Meets Speaker Pelosi in Washington

WASHINGTON — On January 19, President of the National Assembly (NA) of the Republic of Armenia Alen Simonyan met with the Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi.

At the meeting Simonyan said that from 2018 to 2021, Armenia has improved its Transparency International Corruption Perception Index from 35 to 49 and by the Freedom House assessment, the Global Freedom Score has registered positive growth - from 45 to 53. The sides have reiterated that democracy is one of the major pillars for Armenia-U.S. cooperation.

Simonyan presented a series of legislative reforms of Armenia.

He spoke to Pelosi about the current phase of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and the situation in the region after the 44-day war. He reaffirmed the readiness of Armenia to work for establishing long-lasting peace and stability in the region. He has stressed that the Azerbaijani authorities keep openly threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia and continue the encroachments against its territory. The sides have agreed that the final settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict can be reached only through peaceful negotiations — under the auspice of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairmanship. Issues on urgent release of Armenian prisoners of war by Azerbaijan, as well as the opening of all communication lines in the region were also discussed.

The two referred to the strengthening of Armenia-US inter-parliamentary relations and outlined expanding the cooperation in that direction. In this regard, the President of the National Assembly has highly valued the activity of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, which has bipartisan support and plays a key role in cementing these relations. Alen Simonyan expressed his gratitude to the Speaker Pelosi and her all colleagues for their valuable contribution in the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the adoption of the relevant resolution.

At the meeting the Order of Honor was handed to Pelosi on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United States of America for the significant contribution in strengthening and developing Armenian-American friendly relations.

Minority Leader of the US House of Representatives Republican Kevin McCarthy, Republicans David Valadao and Gus Bilirakis, Democrats Frank Pallone, Jackie Speier, Adam Schiff and Anna Eshoo took part in the meeting.

On January 18, the delegation met with the heads of the international structures. During the meetings issues on regional security, the peculiarities of democracy in Armenia, the elections of the national local self-government bodies and the post-election processes were discussed.

At the meeting with President of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) Damon Wilson the work of the National Assembly of the eighth convocation was discussed, as well as the priority legislative reforms to be designed in a number of spheres. In response to the question by Simonyan, Wilson presented the programmatic main directions of cooperation being envisaged with Armenia and especially with the National Assembly. In this regard, issues on the NA-international structures-civil society cooperation format were discussed. The American partners highlighted the initiatives intended for free press and values of democracy in

see SIMONYAN, page 10

## UCLA Promise Institute Presents Conference on Ownership of History, Ethnic Conflict in South Caucasus

LOS ANGELES — The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA — The Armenian Studies Center of the UCLA Promise Armenian Institute presents *Is the Pen Mightier than the Sword? Historians, Disputed Ownership of History, and Ethnic Conflict in the South Caucasus*. This two-day international conference will take place on Friday, January 28 and Saturday, January 29, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Pacific Time) via the Zoom Webinar platform.

The profession of history and its practitioners have often been at the forefront or in the trenches of ethnic conflicts and cleansings from the Balkans to the Former Soviet Union. In Hobsbawm's memorable phrase, “historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts: [they] supply the essential raw material for the market. Nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation is the past; what justifies one nation against others is the past, and historians are the people who produce it.”

Spurred by the violence and monument-destruction in the mountainous region of Karabakh, this symposium brings together some of the world's leading authorities to examine the role of historians in fanning the flames of ethnic/territorial conflicts across the troubled landscape of the South Caucasus. Examining case studies from Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia to Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh and its surrounding regions and Nakhijevan in Azerbaijan, scholars will present comparative and connective histories of how the historian's craft and its proponents have been implicated in the incitement of conflict and the destruction of cultural heritage.

Topics to be explored include Soviet nationality policy, the production of national histories for the South Caucasian nationalities, the standardization of curricula of national histories under Soviet and post-Soviet rule, and the destruction of historical monuments. A concluding plenary panel will assess the question of historical memory in the South Caucasus and how historians in the region can help facilitate peace and conflict resolution.

Registration for this conference is required and free. To register [bit.ly/PAIJan2829](https://bit.ly/PAIJan2829); upon registration, you will receive a unique link to the Zoom webinar. The conference will also live stream on Promise Armenian Institute's YouTube channel.

This conference is organized with the support of the UCLA Richard Hovannisian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History, the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies, the UCLA Center for European and Russian Studies, the Society for Armenian Studies, and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR).

The complete program of the conference — containing the list of the panelists, abstracts of their presentations, and biographical sketches of all speakers — is available on the event webpage.





## OBITUARY

## Sirarpi (Stella) Baronian Aftandilian

*Daughter of Genocide Survivors, Stylish Hostess and Fundraiser*

WAYLAND, Mass. — Sirarpi (Stella) Aftandilian of Wayland and earlier a long-time resident of Weston, died peacefully on January 15, 2022. She was 95.

Born in Worcester to Hovannes and Margaret (née Kharagavorian) Baronian, both of whom were survivors of the Armenian Genocide, she grew up in the tight-knight “Laurel Street” neighborhood of the city, which was home to many Armenian immigrants and their offspring. She and her family then moved to Medford, where she graduated from Medford High School. Later, she attended classes at Boston University and worked for several years for an accounting firm in Boston.

In 1955, she married Victor Aftandilian,

a chemist who was a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard University at the time. The couple soon moved to Wilmington, Del., where Victor was employed as a research chemist at DuPont. There they had three sons before moving back to the Boston area in 1960, first residing in Watertown and later in Weston.

She was very proud of her Armenian heritage and was active in the community. In her youth, she was a member of the Medford chapter of the Armenian Youth Federation. Wishing to pass on her devotion to her ancestry, she and her husband made sure that their sons attended Sunday School and Armenian School at St. Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church in Watertown.

## Meliné Agavnie Markarian

*Dedicated to Music, Family*

COCONUT CREEK, Fla. — Meliné A. Markarian of Banner Elk, NC and Coconut Creek, FL, peacefully passed away in Florida. She was 92.

She was the daughter of John and Mary Kulhanjian, the owners of the Hye Hotel in Asbury Park, NJ, which was noted for its fun, Armenian food, music and hospitality for thousands of Armenian vacationers in the summer months.

Taking time from her music studies, Meliné was the dining room manager of the hotel during the season. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the Univer-

where Meliné was his office manager.

With her strong belief in education, she became the President PTA of the school her sons attended. Due to her advanced knowledge of music, she was elected President of the Band Parents Association.

Meanwhile, following Dr. Berge’s success in his medical field, he became a founding member of the Hialeah General Hospital in 1971.

With her beautiful voice, Meliné became a featured soloist in the Greater Miami area. At the same time, deeply involved with higher learning and music studies, Meliné became Province President of the Sigma Alpha Iota Music Fraternity, where she helped to develop chapters with the schools of music at Florida Atlantic University and the Florida International University, while working closely with the SAI headquarters in Asheville, NC.

After retirement in 1990, they bought a summer home in Beech Mountain, NC, where Meliné contributed her talents in the High-Country area. She became a founding member of the Appalachian State University Summer Music Festival and served on the Advisory Board of the University Library and School of Music in Boone, NC.

Deeply devoted to the Center for Judaic Holocaust and Peace Studies at Appalachian State University, she also contributed her extensive talents to the Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, NC.

Meliné Markarian was inducted into the University of Miami Iron Arrows Honors Society for her lifetime achievements.

Meliné was the wife of Dr. Berge H. Markarian, mother of David (Solimar) Markarian and Daniel (Andrea) Markarian. She is also survived by seven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and many relatives and friends. Under the care of Simon Javizian Funeral Directors, a private funeral service was held in Boca Raton, FL with Fr. Vartan D. Joulfayan officiating. Arrangements were made by the Simon Javizian Funeral Home of Michigan.



sity of Miami Foster School of Music and then continued her studies in France at the Fontainebleau School of Music, before advancing her lyric soprano specialized studies in Vienna, Austria.

In 1954, she met Berge H. Markarian, an obstetrics and gynecology resident who was visiting the Hye Hotel, and they got married in St. John Armenian Church in Miami. The happy couple was blessed with the birth of two sons, David and Daniel.

Dr. Berge started his practice in Hialeah,



She was an active volunteer for Friends of Armenian Culture Society (FACS) and helped put on the annual Armenian Night at POPS with the Boston Symphony. She was also active in the Armenian Assembly of America, and especially the Armenia Tree Project, which promotes the socio-economic development of Armenia through

reforestation. Using her considerable social skills, she was a prolific fundraiser for the latter and mentored many of the organization’s staffers.

She was a great hostess and frequently put on dinner parties for relatives, friends and her husband’s business associates, including many overseas visitors, often times at very short notice. Everyone came to admire her for her warmth and hospitality, as well as her sense of humor, even though she had tendency to ask people personal questions which she said, in tongue and cheek, was part of her “charm.” She loved the company of young people, and was known affectionately as “Auntie Stella” to the children of her many cousins and friends as well as her husband’s relatives.

Known as a fashion icon, she loved to dress stylishly and wear hats. She was a ubiquitous presence with her outfits and hats at parties and other social events.

She was a devoted sister to her late siblings John, Betty, and Helen Baronian, and was the devoted mother to her son John and his wife Krista, her son Gregory and his wife Nazeni, and her late son Ara and his wife Terri Lee. She was also the grandmother of seven precious grandchildren: Lia, Melanie, Victoria, Alexander, Danielle, Alec, and Luca.

Funeral services were held at St. Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church, Watertown, MA, on Saturday, January 22, followed by interment at Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, MA.

### Restoration Center Commission Secures Funding

FUNDING, from page 8?

in crisis from overburdened jails and emergency departments.”

“This investment in a Middlesex County Restoration Center represents a crucial step forward in the Commonwealth’s effort to improve access to much-needed services in our communities,” said Representative Gordon. “It will benefit individuals in need of behavioral health services, our law enforcement agencies, and our entire community. I am grateful for the efforts of Senator Friedman, Sheriff Koutoujian, Dr. Mauch and the entire commission for their unwavering

support of this important initiative.”

In addition to the \$5 million from ARPA, the Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission previously secured \$1 million in the state’s Fiscal Year 2022 budget signed by Governor Baker last summer.

“We want to thank Senator Friedman, Representative Gordon and the Baker Administration for their continued support of the commission,” said Koutoujian and Mauch in a statement. “At each step of this process, they have been deeply involved in all we are seeking to accomplish with this crucial initiative.”

## ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR

# Giragosian

F UNERAL H OME

**James “Jack” Giragosian, CPC**  
**Mark J. Giragosian**  
Funeral Counselors

576 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472, TEL: 617-924-0606  
[www.giragosianfuneralhome.com](http://www.giragosianfuneralhome.com)

**DENNIS M. DEVENY & SONS**  
Cemetery Monuments

Specializing in  
Armenian Designs and Lettering

701 Moody St. Waltham, MA 02543  
(781) 891-9876 [www.NEMonuments.com](http://www.NEMonuments.com)

Telephone (617) 924-7400

**Aram Bedrosian**  
**Funeral Home, Inc.**

Continuous Service By The Bedrosian Family Since 1945

558 MOUNT AUBURN STREET  
WATERTOWN, MA 02472

MARION BEDROSIAN  
PAUL BEDROSIAN  
LARRY BEDROSIAN



## COMMUNITY NEWS



Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan and Speaker Nancy Pelosi, center, with Ambassador Lilit Makunts and Rep. Adam Schiff at left and Rep Anna Eshoo, at

## Armenia Parliament Speaker Simonyan Meets Nancy Pelosi in Washington

SIMONYAN, from page 8

Armenia, noting that they would continue to show program and methodological and other supports.

At the meeting with Derek Mitchell, the president of the National Democracy Institute (NDI), the main theme of the talk related to the engagement of the women and young politicians in parliament. The NA President Alen

Simonyan highlighted the work being done within the framework of the NDI parliamentary program in the establishment of communication between the citizens and the deputies and the rise of the citizens' involvement. According to him, as a result of that program the Parliament-voter relation is coordinated. The interlocutors also touched upon the continuous assistance to the RA

NA factions, deputies, Standing Committees and the NA employees in the support of the legislative researches, the citizens' involvement and communication.

The delegation discussed issues on the protection of human rights in Armenia with Sarah Holewinski, the Washington director of the organization Human Rights Watch.

## FBI Raids Home of Texas Rep. with Deep Ties to Azerbaijan

RAID, from page 1

and cultural advocacy organizations from around the United States, many of them with ties to Azerbaijan, which sits on the Caspian Sea near Iran, Russia and Georgia.

Touting Azerbaijan as “a secular, modern, Muslim country,” Cuellar has been an outspoken advocate for the nation over the past decade, even serving as a co-chair of the Congressional Azerbaijan Caucus.

He publicly called Azerbaijan “a strong ally of the United States” and a key partner in “the global war on terrorism,” noting that in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, it provided an important route for sending reinforcements and supplies to American forces in Afghanistan.

On the House floor last year, Cuellar offered remarks to “honor the diplomatic tour” of Azerbaijan’s long-serving ambassador to the United States, Elin Suleymanov, describing Suleymanov as “a force of peace and diplomacy.”

In recent years, Cuellar and Suleymanov attended many of the same events, including the 2015 announcement of what Cuellar called an “historic agreement” between Laredo’s Texas A&M International University and the government of Azerbaijan.

That agreement established an annual two-week program for Laredo-area college students to visit Azerbaijan and learn about international energy issues, including the worldwide oil and gas industry, according to press releases from Cuellar’s office.

The “Baku Summer Energy School” program was backed by a partnership between ExxonMobil, the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy in Baku, Azerbaijan’s capital, and the nation’s state-owned gas company, known as SOCAR, according to the press releases.

In 2015, when the first iteration of the

program was announced, the Turkish-born head of a local nonprofit that also helped arrange the program, Kemal Oksuz, issued a statement thanking Cuellar “for his playing a very instrumental role” in making it all happen.

Three years later, in 2018, federal authorities arrested Oksuz for his role in a scheme to conceal that a 2013 congressional delegation to Baku -- which did not include Cuellar, according to press reports -- was paid for by SOCAR, the state-owned gas company, “in order to gain access to these public officials,” the Justice Department said.

Oksuz admitted to lying on U.S. disclosure forms, pleading guilty to one scheme-based count, and was sentenced to time served. But his lawyers insisted that he “never attempted to corrupt any action by a government official, and never would have agreed to participate in such an effort.”

The subpoena reviewed by ABC News is seeking, among other information, records related to Oksuz, SOCAR, the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, and other entities that the Justice Department mentioned in its case against Oksuz.

Cuellar, who represents Texas’ 28th Congressional District along the U.S.-Mexico border, has been in Congress since 2005.

Cuellar is in the final weeks of a tough reelection campaign. He faces a challenge for his seat from a fellow Democrat, and the primary election is being held on March 1.

“The Assembly thanks the FBI for its investigation into Azerbaijan’s ongoing and surreptitious efforts to unduly influence U.S. policy,” stated Armenian Assembly of America Co-Chairs Van Krikorian and Anthony Barsamian. “This kind of corruption enables genocidal policies like the atrocities that occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh during the 2020 44-day war,” they continued. “We

urge Members to disassociate from the Congressional Azerbaijan and Turkish caucuses,” the Co-Chairs added.

Highlighting its deep concerns regarding the efforts of the Azerbaijan and Turkish authoritarian regimes and their paid agents to whitewash their abysmal human rights record, coupled with their ongoing and undue attempts to influence U.S. policy, the Assembly has consistently called on Members of Congress to withdraw from the Turkish and Azerbaijan caucuses. The Assembly has repeatedly called for public congressional hearings on Turkey’s attempted influence in U.S. democracy, including a probe into former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn’s payments by Turkey that were uncovered by the Department of Justice in 2017.

In addition, the Assembly, in a 2017 letter from Assembly Co-Chairs Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian to the House Oversight and Government Reform and House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, highlighted Azerbaijan’s continuous attempts to “undermine western democratic values and institutions,” and referenced a BBC article that unveiled a “secret \$3 billion slush fund,” resulting in the Azerbaijani Laundromat scheme, published by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP).

Azerbaijan’s dynastic dictatorship, led by the ruling Aliyev clan, has a long history of bribing foreign officials and diplomats to promote its self-serving foreign policy goals. Based on reports by the Office of Congressional Ethics, Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev gave lavish gifts to Members of Congress who traveled to Baku in 2013, on a junket funded by the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR). The Assembly has consistently urged the Department of Justice to inves-

tigate these foreign trips illegally funded by Azerbaijan. The corrupt tactics used by Azerbaijan to whitewash its criminal and genocidal actions are so well-known that it has been labeled as “caviar diplomacy.” The Assembly has called on the Senate Judiciary Committee to end this unscrupulous practice.

Last Fall, a trove of financial records called the Pandora Papers were released to the public by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). They revealed the wide extent of the Aliyev regime’s corruption and the depth of involvement by his family and close associates.

Referred to as the biggest leak of offshore data highlighting the financial secrets of political leaders, the Pandora Papers, through 12 million documents of evidence, uncovered the hidden wealth, tax avoidance, and money laundering schemes used by ruling authorities to conceal funds in offshore accounts.

Particularly, the documents reveal that the Aliyev family has been systematically robbing its own country’s wealth since Ilham Aliyev’s first term in office in 2003, and that they have, spanning several years, acquired approximately \$700 million worth of real estate in the United Kingdom alone, in addition to registering scores of offshore entities and running a \$2.9 billion money laundering scheme, known as the Azerbaijani Laundromat. It was also specified that the Crown Estate, which owns and manages property on behalf of the Queen of England, bought a £66.5 million (\$91 million) property from the Aliyev family in 2018, in which they made a £31 million (\$42 million) profit.

(Material from an Armenian Assembly of America release was added to the article above)



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Baseball Analyst Tim Kurkjian Named to Baseball Hall of Fame

KURKJIAN, from page 1

Although he says he regrets he doesn't know more about his heritage, he said he delights in bringing special pride to Armenians as he so often is approached by total strangers while he is our covering baseball and told that they too are Armenian.

"I am proud I am Armenian, proud of how loyal and sturdy we are as a people," Tim said. "Wherever I go, someone will come up to me and say, hello, I am Armenian like you."

For sure, there have been Armenians who have played in the major leagues and a few who have had standout performances or careers. For example, there is Chuck Essegian, one of only two players to play in the Rose Bowl and World Series, hit two pinch hit home runs as a member of the LA Dodgers in 1959 World Series; and Steve Bedrosian, who won 76 games during his 14 years as a pitcher and won the National League's Cy Young Award in 1987. His son, Cam Bedrosian, although currently unsigned, has pitched in the major leagues since 2014; and James Sarkis Essian, who after his career as a catcher for several teams in the 1970s and 1980s, became the first Armenian to manage a major league team when he took over the Chicago Cubs for one year in 1991.

Only 333 of the nearly 20,000 players who have played in baseball's major leagues have had such standout careers to be elected to the Hall of Fame, and none of them appear to have an Armenian parent; nor have any of the 119 who precede Tim because of their outstanding reporting in newspapers or as broadcasters.

The Baseball Writers Association Award which elevated Tim to the Hall of Fame referenced his excellence in covering baseball in various media forms — newspaper, magazine, broadcast and on-line — saying he had "hit for the cycle," a baseball term that means getting a single, double, triple and homerun in a single game, during his career.

Anyone who has read his articles or listened to him knows the depth of knowledge and heart that his work contains. His coverage captures the game through rich statistical analysis as well as the human element, the up-close observation of the world's greatest players competing at their peak, all the while conveying the personal joy that comes with playing a game that our fathers played and taught their sons and daughters to play.

For a sport that calls itself "America's pastime," you can imagine that this year's Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Cooperstown, N.Y. will be rich in history. Tim says he has covered the induction ceremonies many times and is hopeful that this year he will be surrounded by his family at the event. That includes including his wife, Kathy, a lawyer; children, Jeffrey, a radio broadcaster in Las Vegas; and daughter, Kelly, a creative director for a marketing firm, with her husband and baby son Carson, who, Tim notes, is showing all signs of being right-handed.

Tim is also hopeful that his cousin, Robert Shvodian, who lives in Bethesda near Tim's home, will also be there. Now 90, Shvodian grew up in the shadow of Yankee Stadium but had a fierce loyalty to the Red Sox and slugger Ted Williams. His depth of knowledge of baseball history and trivia is so complete that Tim will often call him to check a fact or a statistic before printing it.

But Tim says he knows he will be mostly thinking of his father, who passed away at in 2003 at age 84, and his mother, Joyce "Joy," born in England, who passed away in 2020. His mother may never have shared the passion that Tim and the other men in the family showed towards baseball but she was a gifted writer and Tim remembers helped him improve his writing skills after a gym teacher told him the article that Tim had written for his high school newspaper was "the worst" he'd ever read.

## Early Passion for Baseball

From his earliest days, Tim recalls having a passion towards baseball. He was an inveterate collector of baseball cards, played a tabletop baseball game whenever he was inside his house and lulled himself to sleep during baseball seasons listening to Washington Senators game on his transistor radio.

When his older brother expressed concern to their father that Tim, then a junior at the University of Maryland, might have trouble finding a career since he seemed to know and care only about baseball, the elder Kurkjian responded: "Don't worry, Tim will figure it out."

Now, decades later, Tim believes that it was a matter of destiny that he would become a baseball writer. How else

to explain that he graduated from Walter Johnson High School, named after perhaps the greatest pitcher in major league history, and that he was born on December 10, 1956, a decade after the day that Johnson died.

Or that he counts among his fondest memories the Sunday breakfasts that his father would take him and his two brothers at the Washington hotel so all could prowl for autographs from the major league players who were there during the baseball season to play against the hometown Senators. (But typical of Tim's delightful way of telling a story, the autograph he remembers most was the one he didn't get. Although he and his brothers were convinced that the young, good-looking man they had approached at the hotel was Oakland Athletics' star Bert Campaneris, they realized they were wrong when they looked at the signature he gave all of them — Harry Belafonte.)

Sixty years later, Tim has become a familiar face at major league ballparks all over America, on the field and in clubhouses. He said if he had to choose, he would select as his favorite assignment covering the final two weeks of Cal Ripken's drive in 1995 to break Lou Gehrig's record of playing in 2,131 consecutive ballgames.

"He (Ripken) let me into places that no one else had access to," Tim recalled. "I had covered him when he broke in and he just trusted that I would cover this achievement the right way." Tim's article on the event, which fans later voted as the most memorable moment in the history of the game, ran 12 pages in *Sports Illustrated*.

While he may have become a familiar figure around major league ballparks, Tim remembers best the few times that his Armenian heritage has been recognized. Toronto Blue Jays manager Jimmy Williams, noting that Tim was Armenian, said he had learned while managing in Fresno and having an Armenian as a roommate, that you can't use the same pot to make a second helping of pilaf; and Ed Pinckney, a standout basketball player for the Boston Celtics and others, introduced himself to Tim at ESPN by saying "eench besus," explaining that his wife was Armenian, and both loved to make pilaf.

## Roots in Watertown

The little Armenian that Tim understands he learned too through his father. Every summer, the family vacation consisted of driving from their home in suburban DC to his grandmother's home in east Watertown where the neighborhood was as dense with Armenian families as anywhere in the country.

The elders in the families all seemed to have had the same life experience as his grandmother, Perousz Vosgerchian, who, because of increased hostility against Armenians from the Ottoman rulers, had emigrated to America in the early 1900s from her village in eastern Turkey. Within a few years, she married a neighbor from the village, Balthazar Kurkjian, who wrote poetry while operating a neighborhood grocery store.

Together, the couple raised four children, including Badrig, the oldest, who excelled in mathematics and baseball at Watertown High School. While Badrig was a standout at the plate and at second base, his teammate Oscar Khederian, regarded as one of the best hitters to have graduated from the high school, earned most of the headlines and even gained him a minor league contract.

His math skills earned Badrig acceptance at MIT where he majored in the subject both as an undergraduate and its doctoral program. Badrig spent his career as a statistician and became the chief mathematician for the US Army's Material Command and was a fellow with the American Statistical Association. Born in 1956, Tim inherited his father's love of baseball and his ability to pore over statistics to find answers — or at least predictability — to the vagaries of the game.

Throughout his career, he has pored through newspaper box scores that capture the previous day's games and determine how a team that he may be covering is performing. "If I am flying to San Diego to cover the Padres, the notebook I bring with me is full of the Padres' box scores from the week or month before, plus the notes I've made about the performance of individual players," Tim said.

"Reporting is a very competitive business, and even though I may see a team one or two times a year, I need to be up-to-date on how they're doing," Kurkjian said. "That's where my curiosity comes from, I had it as a little kid, and I still have it today."

He is also looking for some very oblique tallies as he pores over the box scores — like what he calls the "reverse triple double," when a player makes two errors, strikes out twice and hits into two double plays. "It's only



From left, the late Joy Kurkjian, with Tim Kurkjian, her son, and Barbara Tellalian, at the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator's* 78<sup>th</sup> anniversary program in 2011

happened once from what I can find in baseball history, when Kurt Bevacqua was playing for the Rangers in 1978," he recalled.

Kurkjian began his professional journalism career, as the backup reporter covering the Baltimore Orioles for the *Washington Star*. The lead Orioles reporter at the time was Dan Shaughnessy, who was named as a baseball writer to MLB's Hall of Fame in 2016. After the *Star* closed, Tim moved to the Dallas Morning News where he covered the Texas Rangers.

Four years later, Kurkjian returned to Maryland and worked for four years for the *Baltimore Sun*, covering the Orioles. He then spent seven years as a senior baseball writer for *Sports Illustrated*. In 1998, he joined ESPN where he has worked as a columnist for its website and a reporter/analyst/host for "Baseball Tonight," the latter assignment earning him an Emmy Award in 2002. He won a second Emmy for contributions to "SportsCenter" in 2003-2004.

While baseball fans have come to appreciate Tim's articles for their command of statistics and baseball history, the three books he has written — *America's Game* (2000); *Is This a Great Game, or What* (2007) and *I'm Fascinated by Sacrifice Flies* (2007) — are rich with personal anecdotes gained from 40 years of covering sports.

In our interview, the stories flow out of him like boyhood memories, capturing the poignancy that all boys have of being good enough to play professional baseball, no less make it to the major leagues.

"I remember, Opening Day for the Rangers in 1982, and the centerfielder George Wright was a rookie, and he got three hits at four times at the plate that day. I asked him in the clubhouse if he had had a good time, and he said 'Yeah, I've never been to a major league game before.' So here's the first time he's been to a major league game, and he gets three hits. That why this game is so beautiful, so special."

(Stephen Kurkjian, who is Tim Kurkjian's second cousin, is a retired reporter for *The Boston Globe*. Along with the three Pulitzer Prizes he won as a member of *The Globe's* Spotlight team, Kurkjian prides himself in being the first 10-year-old to make the Dorchester Little League's All-Star team.)



# Arts & Culture

## Is Fiction Indeed Fictitious? Ara Iskanderian's *Godless Hour*— A Yerevan Tale

By Arpi Sarafian

The world of Ara Iskanderian's first published novella, *Godless Hour — A Yerevan Tale* (Gomidas Institute, 2021) is a fantasy world. In the author's own words, it is a world in which "the magical, the mythical, and the unreal . . . still reside." On the "blackest of nights," when God looks the other way for a single hour, the Reckless demon Ajami brings to life the stone statues in the Rose City of Yerevan and, to entertain himself, engages them in a contest to decide "Who is the greatest?"

*Godless Hour* is a narrative offered through the dialogues of a "cast of characters." The book does in fact have a Dramatic Personae and the story has the immediacy of a theatrical experience. In response to Ajami's "playful questions," each revived statue gives an account of its part in Armenian history and culture.



Iskanderian lures us with the great names we all grew up with. The debates between Mesrop Mashtots and Tigran the Great, and between the other major players of our nation's past, engage us fully. The book's 122 pages build to a crescendo of excitement and intensity.

*Godless Hour* is "a story of total fiction," writes Iskanderian in his Preface to the book. Yet, it is fiction that is not detached from our own reality. The novella is full of the facts of our history. Haik Nahapet, Mesrop Mashdotz, Sayat Nova, Aram Khachaturian and the remaining of the 20 statues of the Rose City perform at the bidding of master Ajami. Their discourses create a credible world. The contemporary resonance of The High Father's, "They squabble whilst around them the enemy gathers forth for their slaughter," see *GODLESS*, page 15



## Armen Agop's Minimalist Approach to Sculpture and Painting in Italy and Egypt

By Maydaa Nadar

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

CAIRO — His latest exhibition of sculptures and paintings is called *Taking Time*, which took place at the Flora Bigai Arte Contemporanea gallery in Pietrasanta, Italy, last summer to much acclaim. His Armenian role models in arts are Gomidas (Komitas) and Arshile Gorky (Vostanik Adoian).

Armen opines that the former dared to dig deeper into the Armenian culture and heritage and tried to intensify something that was at risk to be completely forgotten and lost. The latter, in contrast, had the ability to go beyond the limits of his surroundings, opening new doors and exploring the unknown without following what society was asking for at the time.

When he talks about sculpture, he not only makes you fall in love with art but with your entire surroundings, even with your inner self. Meet Egyptian-Armenian sculptor Armen Guerboyan, known by the pseudonym Armen Agop. "My name is Armen Guerboyan. I just use Agop, which was my father's name, as an artistic name," Armen explains.

Armen's grandfather was part of the famous resistance at Musa Dagh. He was the younger brother of Movses Der Kalousdian, one of the leaders of the revolt during the

see *SCULPTURE*, page 13



"The neutral aspect of black granite allows me to pursue my interest to articulate silence," says Armen Agop (photo: Armen Agop's official Facebook page)

## 'Ghedtair Composite' Album Reimagines Armenian Folk Music

By Aram Arkun

*Mirror-Spectator Staff*

WATERTOWN — The classics of Armenian folk music may seem eternal, passed down from one generation to another. Yet variations and new interpretations always arise, whether regionally or over time. Today it is no different. If that music is going to remain something vital, it will be open to reinterpretation by new artists, and guitarist and audio engineer Justin Mayfield of Brooklyn, New York is doing his best to keep that music alive, starting with his inaugural digital album, "Ghedtair Composite."

Justin described the journey which led him to this project, declaring: "I think my story is pretty common with a lot of diasporan Armenians who were not exposed to the culture growing up but find the interest later in life and start to try to educate themselves. It has all been my own self-education after graduating college and going to Armenia for the first time in 2014. It has been like filling in holes." He waggishly observed in his online notes to his album on bandcamp.com that "my childhood was more bacon thanujuk; more soccer practice than Armenian language lessons."

### Becoming a Musician

The 33-year-old grew up outside of Boston in Upton, close to Worcester, in a musical environment. Mayfield said he always wanted to play an instrument. He learned violin as a young child through the Suzuki method with his mother, and in middle school learned to play saxophone, but his father always had guitars around the house. As he explains it, "My dad was a guitar player and an audio engineer himself, so it came from him putting a guitar in my hands at a young age."

His father, who used to record in studios on tape and do all the manual, physical tape work for editing, also somehow passed that interest on to Justin, who recalled, "I remember recording on a tape machine, teaching my sister how to play and sing some simple parts, so I could record two people at the same time."

His mother is Armenian, and Mayfield was fortunate to have gotten to know his maternal grandparents, and even his great-grandmother. He said, "I grew up with my grandmother and great-grandmother. I had this feeling of guilt for not knowing where she [great-grandmother] came from. I knew her basic story of coming to America during the Genocide. My dad in 1982, before my sisters and I were born, sat my great-grandmother

see *MUSIC*, page 14



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Agop's Minimalist Approach to Sculpture and Painting in Italy and Egypt

SCULPTURE, from page 12

Armenian Genocide in 1915. French ships brought the Armenians from Musa Dagh to safety in Port Said on the Egyptian coast. Later, the family moved to Lebanon, but Armen's grandfather chose to stay in Egypt, where Armen was born in Cairo in 1969.

After turning 13, Armen began to study drawing and painting in the studio of the Armenian painter Simon Shahrigian. He then graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in the Department of Sculpture at Helwan University in Cairo. Following his graduation, he was awarded a research scholarship from the same university.

Winning the Prix du Rome - The State Prize of Artistic Creativity, from the Egyptian government, led to a sponsored stay in Italy for a year to focus on his artistic investigations. The Bel Paese - Italy's poetical nickname meaning "beautiful country" - is described in Armen's words as "a great place for a sculptor to live." He elaborates: "Just as Egypt was a great place for a sculptor to be born, with all its heritage Italy is a great place for a sculptor to live. What is significant about Italian culture is its ability to extend the influence of its ancient culture into our contemporary world. Egypt and Armenia underwent several historical interruptions. Italy's continuation of its past heritage, which was not radically interrupted, allows the presence of the past in the future."

During his year in Italy, Armen participated in several group exhibitions and won another prize. There was enough interest in his work to encourage him to remain in Europe on a permanent basis.

## Armenian and Egyptian Cultural Influence

Despite this move, when he was asked about his connection with his motherlands Armenia and Egypt, his answer was: "The nature of things is to be connected with our origins willingly and unwillingly, visibly and invisibly. Origins are rooted in us even

if we are not aware of it. I think it is a part of a way of being, it's built-in. I believe we are what we all have been; this doesn't mean that we can't be all what we want to be."

He grew up in a generation of Armenian diaspora with the Armenian word *koyadevel* echoing around him. This word has a complex meaning, to exist and to endure - merely existing is not enough, and Armen relates a personal significance of timelessness to this it. This played an important role in enhancing his personal artistic investigations, with exploration beyond current trends and fashion. Armen perceives the Armenian culture as a one of belief, more than conviction and he believes that only with belief, can one manage to transmit sacredness, whether by the music of the *duduk* or by carving on a rocky mountain and transforming it into a holy space. No wonder his sculptures have been described as meditative and spiritual. He declared: "I guess I owe a big part of it to the heritage of belief. It took me a long time to realize that I believe in believing [but] it's a built-in system."

## Expression through Art

What many of us normally perceive as ordinary for him is an inspirational starting point. He stated: "If I want to talk about strength, I might talk about tears. Actually, with the paintings, there is no demonstration of abilities or skills. Anybody can do it. It is like intensifying the soberness of the smallest element and giving more importance to the least valuable element which we usually ignore. The point, which is the beginning of any line, is where I begin and where I choose to stop, repeating it over and over and being content with that, accepting the least and believing in its power to magnify something unknown inside us through time."

Through his words, you sense his passion for art. As any child, he drew and never found a good reason to stop, he said, "until reaching a certain age, when we



"At the core of the things I do in the studio is to follow my instincts and interests," says Armen Agop about his passion for sculpture (photo: Armen Agop's official Facebook page)

discover that society calls that instinctive drive art and the one who practices it an artist. I believe artists are the ones who can't ignore their instinctive drive. Then the main mission is to carry on protecting the purity of that instinct from the continued perseverance of society to influence it and canalize it."

His connection to sculpture was not merely reflective. He further elucidates: "I guess that it is not that I was attracted to the art of sculpture itself, as much as I was and am attracted to the act of sculpting, to practicing the verb of sculpting. I believe it is an instinctive drive. As a kid I was attracted to drawing or modeling clay. Connecting with another part of nature, such as a stone or color, is a way to connect with the whole world, even if someone is not aware of it at his young age."

Black granite is his main medium of expression, as it has many interesting characteristics. He says that the reason above all others for this is his instinctive connection with the stone. According to his description, its neutral aspect allows him to pursue his interest to articulate silence; the compactness and hardness require a slow rhythm and long process which permits him to discover what he really desires to share with the stone. For him, it's about sharing time with this substance and coming to a point of agreement. "Granite resists time and change, yet is optimistic to the future," he proclaims.

His artistic style is described as minimalist. He comments: "I know my work many times has been described as minimal, which is a term that changed its meaning in the public understanding and now is being used for simplicity." In this regard, Armen gives us a brief about minimalist art born in the US in the 1960-70's with different motivations and perspectives, relating it to his work that is driven by an ascetic approach (through a meditative process) which deals with soberness and simplicity, and trying to focus on the core values.

He said: "I guess, in a way, it is a prolongation of a belief system (the belief system I mentioned earlier). It's more important for me to do the work than having it made better by others. By choosing the most basic elements, like a point or a line, and believing in their potential, through a meditative practice, I face these elements again and again, each time discovering a new way of being and a different dimension of existence."

Through his artwork, Armen attempts to explore all the things that he does not talk about with others. More than just as a theme, he gives priority to meditative practice and the spiritual aspect. At the core of what he does in the studio is to follow his instincts and interests. He first explores and

tries to understand them and then maybe puts them in context. He elaborates: "I just play. It all starts with playing. When I come to a point where I feel I need to pursue and develop something, I carry on blindly and obsessively, digging deeper, with an unexplainable belief - an irrational conviction that it might lead to something (without having any proof). It becomes a matter of faith. I don't work, I either play or pray."

The main struggle he has faced during his career is to stay faithful to the instinctive drive without letting the others/surroundings/societies impose their needs and temptations with their offers of superficial success and career-oriented banalities. "The main struggle is to just be who we are in our own nature, to resist the pressure of a society who wants to push us in such a way that they can understand, conceptualize or be entertained," he concluded.

He described his exhibition "Taking Time" as a meeting of painting and sculpture, a body of work that is focused on a meditative practice which resulted in spiritual contemporary art. The works exhibited for the first time in Italy are quite distant from the Italian lifestyle or Western values of understanding time. He said, "Many Western cultures value more speed and outward strength. On the other hand, the exhibition was concerned with spirituality and inwardness and not speed or external power."

## Other Forms of Art

When it comes to music, he is mostly drawn to pure music without words or lyrics, especially folk music. In spite of geographical distances separating various creators of the latter, he exclaims that this musical genre can be very close in spirit everywhere. It usually depends on very basic instruments and so the music of different regions can have a lot of common links.

Armen even connects this kind of music with his artistic approach to sculpture, asserting that the non-representative aspect of pure music without lyrics, especially folk music, is very close to him. He encourages us to adopt his approach, saying that when we listen to lyrics they may be heroic or emotional or any other type; but when we listen only to instrumental music, this can open us to something we didn't know about or touch a hidden part of us.

He added, "Words have meanings which activate our thinking. Although they can be very meaningful, they can also be limiting. I believe art is beyond meaning. The same happens in visual arts. I believe the most confusing aspect of visual art is its appearance. Whenever we see something, we try to associate it with something we already know. So the appearance of an artwork is a big obstacle to perceiving the core of the work."

**FRESNO STATE**  
Armenian Studies Program

**THE ARMENIAN STUDIES PROGRAM, FRESNO STATE  
AND TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION METRO LOS ANGELES CHAPTER  
PRESENT**

**"VAHAN TEKEYAN: SELECTED POEMS"**  
**ԳԻՆԵՁՈՆ-BOOK LAUNCH**

**DEDICATED TO THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF THE TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION**  
**ԱՅՍ ԶԱՏԱԳԻՐԸ ՆՈՒՒՐՈՒՄԸ Է  
ԹԷԿԵԱՆ ՄԵԿՎՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ՄԻՈՒԹԵԱՆ ՀԻՄՆԱԴՐՈՒԹԵԱՆ 75 ԱՄԵԱԿԻՆ**

**WITH PROF. BARLOW DER MUGRDECHIAN**  
ARMENIAN STUDIES PROGRAM, FRESNO STATE

**Friday, March 11, 2022 • 7:30PM**  
**Tekeyan Center-1901 N. Allen Ave., Altadena, CA**

**Յայտագիրը Անգլերենով եւ Հայերենով**

For more information: Armenian Studies Program  
<http://fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies> or  
[info@TekeyanLA.org](mailto:info@TekeyanLA.org) • [facebook.com/TekeyanLA](https://www.facebook.com/TekeyanLA) • [@TekeyanLA](https://www.instagram.com/TekeyanLA)



## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# 'Ghedtair Composite' Album Reimagines Armenian Folk Music

MUSIC, from page 12

down and recorded her telling her story on a tape machine [together with Justin's great-grandfather]...She was born in Marash and my great-grandfather was too. They came through France [to the US]. It is funny — my fiancée's family came from there as well."

Despite this personal contact, Mayfield said that he had little exposure to Armenian music as a child. His mother and grandparents used to say that they had all this Armenian music on vinyl, but they got rid of them.

He exclaimed, "Now that we all have turntables it kills me to hear that!"

His grandmother is 93 years old. Every once in a while, Justin said, he would catch her singing something and ask, "what is that? Why have I not heard you singing that before?" She will answer, "I don't know. Some Turkish music." He explained that they spoke mostly Turkish at that time and a lot of Turkish is still in her memory along with some Armenian mixed in.

He may not have been very familiar with Armenian music as a teenager, yet he never was interested in mainstream music. He said, "I was always searching for odd and experimental music. Even through the world music lens, Armenian music is different from other cultures in a lot of ways."

It took some other famous Armenian-American musicians to make him realize what he was missing. "Honestly, it started with System of a Down for me. A lot of people my age would probably say that. That is where I saw that these are cool musicians who are Armenian and maybe I should figure out what they are influenced by. And that was what implanted it into my mind that I should dig into it a bit more," he related.

## Connecting with Armenia Is Life-changing

Justin graduated from Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Penn. in 2010, with a bachelor's degree in music theory and composition. He said he was always curious to learn more about Armenia and a few years later, "that curiosity lined up with graduating college and trying to figure out what I was going to do professionally and artistically. I found out about the Birthright Armenia program, I applied, and immediately went over there in the fall of 2014."

He remarked: "I needed something to reinvigorate myself, and again, there was that feeling of guilt growing up and not having Armenian culture as part of my identity that I wanted."

He stayed three months in Armenia, volunteering 20 hours a week at the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies in Yerevan, where he ran a music composition workshop with about 12 children and recorded their work. He helped build the music department there as much as he could, made some databases of music, and prepared some online courses on music theory. He went to some small club shows and remembers seeing the amazing jazz pianist and composer Tigran Hamasyan at the Opera House. Justin performed a few songs for the other participants of the Birthright Armenia program but said that he was not able to spend as much time studying Armenian music for himself as he would have liked.

The rest of his time in Armenia he took two Armenian language classes a week. Though the stay was a short one, it had a great impact on the young musician. Mayfield said, "It felt like a year's worth of experiences because every weekend we were traveling to different areas around Armenia. We also went to Artsakh. And I met my fiancée on the trip as well." His fiancée was from northern California, and now the couple are living together in Brooklyn, where they participate in Armenian Creatives (as the name indicates, a local group of creative Armenians).

After returning from Armenia to New York, Mayfield went straight to audio engineering school in 2015 and obtained a certificate in audio recording. He said, "I was then pretty much floating around the kind of jobs that get you through the day and give you a paycheck and doing my music projects at night."

While he continues to



At the Brooklyn home studio, 2021 (photo Kohar Minassian)

play guitar and perform in Brooklyn with numerous rock bands (including Sheena Marina, Brim, Miracle Sweepstakes and Edna, aside from being the sole member of Tag Cloud), his formal work is now in the audio book podcast world. He has been working as an audio post-production coordinator from June 2021 for Audible, doing audio book editing and some podcast editing and production, as well as sound design and music composition — basically, as he said, "anything audio that anyone will let me work on."

Looking at his musical development with hindsight, Justin realized, "There is actually a piece of my musical interest that has always come from Armenian music, the way that it removes time signatures or removes structures from the melody. A lot of the melodies are free form, with no time signatures, or odd times and odd rhythms, and that has been something that I have always gravitated towards."

## The Album

Justin's new album is called "Ghedtair Composite." Ghedtair is his way of transliterating the Armenian word for "rivers" [keder/geter], which happens to be his middle name in English, while composite, he said, refers to different things coming together in this album.

"It is something I have been thinking about doing for a long time, probably since 2014, when I went to Armenia and felt I needed to learn more about the music. I was feeling I wanted my own project to help myself digest Armenian music, because it had not been in my life until that point. The time came with the pandemic last year, and I was in Los Angeles walking around Abril Bookstore [in Glendale]," Justin said.

There he found a book of Armenian folk music transcribed for guitar and this became his entry point for learning songs. He arranged them after entering them onto his computer note by note. He said he would add his own bass line or drum beat, and then move some sections around, doing a little restructuring of the music. The arrangements were generally for guitar, piano, drums, bass and vocals.

"I kept the melodies completely intact. I added some of my own countermelodies and sections to the music so it makes more sense. I would say I was pretty free with my interpretations of the music but kept the melodies intact generally," Justin said.

Then he found some 9 or 10 musicians, many of them of Armenians, to record parts remotely and send them to him. He gave them the sheet music for their parts and the recording that he made without their parts, so they could record along with this demo track. Justin explained that he encouraged them to be liberal in how they played. For example, Armenian-American artist Sima Cunningham, based in Chicago, gave him the vocals for Gomidas' Karoun A and, though he did not request it, recorded all of the vocal arrangements, including for background. He said that these arrangements were perfect, so he centered the song around them and mixed everything according to what she provided.

Justin added that the 2020 war lit a fire under him to complete this project, and he decided to donate all proceeds from the album to the Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund.

The two drummers on the album, Alex Ruiz and Pete Moffett, are both non-Armenian but they are close friends of Mayfield with whom he plays in a lot of bands, while there are a few Armenian musicians based in Brooklyn who also participated, including bass player and composer Noah Garabedian (whom Justin had not met before), trumpeter and composer Michael Sarian, and musician and songwriter Craig Heed.

Some musician participants hail from more distant locations. Justin found French-Armenian songwriter and musician Sevana Tchakerian, known for her work in Collectif Medz Bazar, who lives in Armenia and has a new band called Jinj. He wrote to ask whether she would be willing to sing on a song for which he had her voice in mind. Once she sent him her part, Justin arranged the recording around it to make it fit more.

Two other Armenians included on the album are his old friend Daniel Ehranjian, a bass player, and Shauna Topian, Justin's cousin, who studied musical theater and performed on and off Broadway before the covid-19 pandemic.

Justin said, "I am not great at meeting people at shows or networking, so this was a great excuse to communicate with these people and form a connection or relationship with them. It was my ideal way of doing it, my ideal path to forming a friendship. I was pretty nervous to contact these people. I wasn't sure if I would get shut down, rejected, or no replies at all, but a lot of people were super-enthusiastic to be a part of it — which is awesome. It worked out amazingly."

Even Justin's fiancée, Kohar Minassian, a videographer and photographer skilled also in graphic arts, played a role in the preparation of the album. She helped design the artwork and as an Armenian speaker familiar with many of the songs, Justin said she provided him with various types of guidance.

There is one other family connection in the album, but this time to the past. Justin was able to insert the voices of his great-grandparents Hagop and Grace Sunukjian from the 1982 recording by his father into four of the tracks.

The kind of music Justin usually plays in his American bands, he said, is mostly guitar-based rock. You could call it psychedelic rock, indie rock or alternative rock, with some bands more straightforward rock and others more

*continued on next page*



Teaching a music composition workshop at TUMO (photo TUMO)



from previous page

“spacey.” In “Ghedtair Composite,” Justin said, “The main goal is to transform Armenian sheet music to the kind of music that I would play with people regularly, in a band in Brooklyn. It was just to put it through my own lens and make it feel natural to me. This is my way of wearing the Armenian identity, like it is a T-shirt.” We could call it in general psychedelic Armenian rock, he conceded, if that were a genre.

Justin said that he did listen to several versions of each of the songs before coming up with his own take but did not want to listen to too much in order to avoid being influenced. Each song, he said, he cast into a specific genre, so that one might sound like a jazz song, with another electronic opera, or surf rock.

The main source of the original material was the work of Gomidas Vartabed, along with Grigor Suni and Alexander Spendiarian (though there is even also a piece based on a part of the Makar Yekmalian version of the divine liturgy). Justin said, “I wanted to learn what these songs were written about and the context for them being written or transposed.” He is trying to post images for each song and give liner notes, with production and composer information, one song at a time, while trying to build up a bit of publicity for the project (see <https://www.instagram.com/ghedtaircomposite/>).

The album itself is already finished – recorded, mixed and mastered. The songs include *Kotchary*, *Gakavy Yerke*



Album cover illustration of “Ghedtair Composite”

*Le Le Yaman*, *Karoun A*, *Alagyas/Ah Maral Jan*, *Kele Kele*, *Es Kez Tesa*, *Khorhourt Khorin*, *O Rose (Ay Vart)*, *Havadarim*, and *Saren Guka*. Justin said that the album will be released in full on February 18, and can be purchased online at <https://ghedtaircomposite.bandcamp.com/releases>. After he can collect enough to make a donation for the

Armenian Wounded Heroes Fund, he will make the songs streamable on sites like Spotify and Apple, where they will be free. Technically, he would also receive 1/1000 of a cent each time someone listens to a song, but that will not build up to anything significant.

Justin revealed that he would like to do a physical release eventually of the album, whether as a CD, vinyl record, or cassette tape, but this would be expensive, so that he wants to first be sure that there are enough interested people. With covid, it is too complicated for the time being to have an inaugural live concert, he regretfully remarked.

To his potential audience, Justin declared, “I know this is an album of Armenian music that doesn’t sound like Armenian music. A lot of people say it sounds weird, avant-garde, or experimental. I hope some people enjoy it and think about other ways to transform and evolve our cultural identity in the world public sphere.”

He is already planning his next Armenian-themed album. Justin said, “The next one I definitely already want to make more of a surf rock version of songs, where everything is played straight ahead and not as much production. I want to find a group to actually play them with as opposed to remotely recording. Hopefully the times will allow that to happen. I just want to continue to put this old music into a new format and get more of it out there. I think it is important to continually bring these pieces of culture to the surface and keep them relevant, even if it is just for our circles of people.”

# Ara Iskanderian’s Godless Hour — A Yerevan Tale

GODLESS, from page 12

cannot be missed. Besides evoking our humiliating defeat in the recent Artsakh war, it highlights the urgency of our current situation.

Iskanderian is careful, however, not to reduce a very complex reality to a simplistic “solution.” As a “trained historian,” to borrow his words, he carefully lays out “the great dichotomy of the Armenian nation,” the tension between a dispersed diaspora and a center that has to hold this important people together. The ever-present fact of exile being a fertile soil for Armenians—the sarcastic, What need of land?—is brought together with the lure of a homeland where the “lost souls” can return and live in peace under the protective gaze of Mayr Hayastan. The book does hint at the possibility of a harmonious existence between the two, yet the questions remain: Will High Father and High Mother return to each other? How does one reconcile the reality of “two parents forever apart?” Ironically, these unanswered questions make the desired connection more credible, as it embraces the facts, albeit the ambiguities, of the current state of our nation.

One wonders why Iskanderian characterizes his approach as “didactic.” Even if offered as a series of monologues by the individual statues, the diverse perspectives subvert the very one-sidedness of didacticism. Against the dissuasions of Vartanantz being “A children’s delight, but a meaningless fable,” for example, we have Vartan Mamikonian’s defiant, “death embraced is immortality.” Similarly, “True . . . much was lost forever,” is juxtaposed with the ever-victorious “Vahagn — a god of war,” and with Sasuntsi Davit’s,

“When the hour doth come

When so terrible is the fate that we are nearly done

Then will I return from whence I did depart

.....

And know that though all seems it cannot be worse

Your Son of Sassun has not yet returned home.”

Iskanderian’s rhyme has its charm. His prose also has a pleasing poetic rhythm to it: “Here rides the Daredevil of Sassun — with spark flecking horse’s hooves beneath

him and lightning-like sword above him, he brings not war, but a light . . .” Of the great *Fedayi*, Zoravor Antranik, he writes, “Only songs and toasts will tell of him, though he asked in life for less words . . .” In fact, the attraction begins with the twist in the wording of the title, “A Yerevan Tale.”

Integrating the rational, or the real, and the irrational, or the imaginary, also allows Iskanderian to explore issues that are too complex to be reduced to the precision of the world of facts. The irrational gives him, to borrow his words, “respice from scientific rationale, and . . . intellectualism.” Iskanderian’s is a conscious departure from the Western tradition of privileging the rational over the irrational. Indeed, the “fictitious” helps Iskanderian explore the “facts” of our complicated existence from varied angles, bringing him closer to conveying the “truth,” and making us wonder, with the celebrated novelist Virginia Woolf, if fiction is indeed fictitious. We surely appreciate the “truth” of myths and legends which interweave the “magical” and the “real.”

The question “who would be the greatest overall” is left answered, but the book does give the reader the comfort of knowing that the foundations of our little homeland are unshakable. The Godless Hour of the play comes to an end. The stone statues return to their corners. Ajami the master Trickster is chased away, and the Rose City is reclaimed. Even if, before going off, the Soulless demon bellows, “Then be damned all of you! . . . truly you deserve these rock pedestals you sit upon; they are truly your gravestones,” one leaves the novella with the assurance that this “small tribe of unimportant people,” will not die. It will go on existing. Godless Hour is a “Good morning to a new dawn.” “This land needs only the loving maternal embrace, the womb’s warmth to return to, and perhaps be reborn again,” says the All Mother to the All father, as they part.

Lamentation over “a much larger but lost Armenia . . . is a common theme that could be found through the dialogue of my resurrected statues,” notes Iskanderian. Wittingly, or unwittingly, he adds his own lamentation when he mourns the disappearance of the “little tea shop on Abovian street” in Yerevan, where “over the course of several weeks,” he wrote down his story. The little shop “is now, like so much, alas, no more,” he writes. One can, of course, always choose

not to lament and, instead, take heed of the High Mother’s words to The High Father: “Sing praises in place of lament . . . dream not of past glories . . . and be grateful for the nightmares not seen.”

The novella is a labor of love and may have the imperfections of things that come from the heart. Iskanderian writes of “the joys of this journey of discovery . . . I hope

you will enjoy reading my story as much as I enjoyed writing it.” The fledgling author can rest assured that imagining him writing his little book seated in the little tea shop on Abovian street touches that soft spot we all have, I like to believe, for the land of Ararat, the land of Mesrop Mashtots, Sasuntsi Davit, Sayat Nova, and of the ever mighty and glorious Titan, Tigran the Great.

## 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.**

### MASSACHUSETTS

**10th Anniversary Celebration Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Join us for events during the year at the Park. Watch this space for details.**

**APRIL 3 — ANNUAL RECONFIGURATION OF THE ABSTRACT SCULPTURE (Rain Date: April 10) A crane lifts and pulls apart the two halves of Abstract Sculpture, rhomboid dodecahedron made of steel and aluminum, to create a new sculptural shape. 7.30 a.m. The Park’s Endowed Fund for the Annual Reconfiguration, the generous gift of Charles and Doreen Bilezikian, supports the annual reconfiguration. A&A Industries, Anahid and Aurelian Mardiros, manufacturer of the Abstract Sculpture, their generous gift in kind, oversees the annual reconfiguration. Coffee, hosted by Starbucks & Conversation is from 8:00am—9:00am. RSVP appreciated, [hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)**

**SEPTEMBER 21 — GALA BENEFIT CELEBRATING CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR NATION’S IMMIGRANTS! InterContinental Hotel, Boston. 6 p.m. Honoring STEPHEN KURKJIAN, Distinguished Citizen, Leader, Pulitzer Prize Journalist and Author, and Recognizing Organizations Serving Immigrants and Refugees. Funds raised support the Legacy Fund, endowed fund to care for and maintain the Park year-round. Advance Reservations only. To receive the invitation, please send name and address to [hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org](mailto:hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org)**

### MICHIGAN

**FEBRUARY 24 — The four Armenian Churches of Greater Detroit (St. John Armenian Apostolic Church, St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church, St. Vartan Armenian Catholic Church and Armenian Congregational Church) along with the Knights and Daughters of Vartan will commemorate the Feast of Sts. Vartanank, 6 p.m., St. Vartan Armenian Catholic Church, 256000 Drake Road, Farmington Hills. Celebrant will be Monsignor Andon Atamian. No reception will be held due to COVID**



## COMMENTARY

# Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian

## Something About Carrie



Carrie Nahabedian  
Brindille/Paul Strabbing

Food and wine writer, blogger and cookbook author Barbara Hansen's interview with acclaimed Armenian-American chef Carrie Nahabedian first appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on December 8, 1999, and is reprinted in an abridged format with the permission of the *Los Angeles Times*. Nahabedian, best known for her work at the one-Michelin star restaurant NAHA in Chicago, was a recipient of a James Beard Foundation Award in 2008. As of the 2012 edition of the Michelin Guide, Nahabedian is one of only ten female chefs in the United States to hold a Michelin star. Nahabedian and her restaurateur cousin, Michael Nahabedian, opened NAHA in November 2000 in Chicago. The Mediterranean-inspired American cuisine earned a Michelin

Star for eight consecutive years, a James Beard Award for "Best Chef, Great Lakes," and four stars by Phil Vettel—the highest rating given by the legendary Chicago Tribune critic. For 18 years, Nahabedian's NAHA was a mainstay among the city's top restaurants. In April of 2013, Carrie and Michael opened Brindille-French for "twig," offering refined Parisian cuisine, a celebration of their love of French culinary traditions, techniques and flavors. Hailed as the "Best Restaurant to Open in 2013" by the Chicago Tribune, Brindille was awarded the James Beard Foundation Award for "Outstanding Restaurant Design, 2015" for the work of Tom Nahabedian and Bureau of Architecture and Design.

A James Beard Award winner herself, Barbara Hansen wrote food and restaurant articles for the *Los Angeles Times*, where she was on staff for many years. She has two blogs, [www.tableconversation.com](http://www.tableconversation.com) and [www.eatmx.com](http://www.eatmx.com), and has written for *Bon Appetit*, *Saveur* and other publications. Her six books include a best seller, *Mexican Cookery*, two Southeast Asian cookbooks, a book on bread and a guide to Korean restaurants in Los Angeles.

(For the original story, see: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-dec-08-fo-41602-story.html>).

LOS ANGELES — In Carrie Nahabedian's mid-Wilshire townhouse, a broad coffee table is covered with *mezze*. One plate holds yalanchi, rice-stuffed grape leaves sprinkled with fresh mint leaves. Another contains the garbanzo bean dip hummus, streaked with rivulets of golden olive oil. Crackers and grilled triangles of pita bread go with the dip. String cheese, Greek olives and thin slices of *basturma* (seasoned dried beef) share a platter, and a shallow bowl contains huge, glistening red prunes, pistachios, cashews, raisins and large Medjool dates.

Crowding the dining room table are platters of lamb kebabs, grilled peppers and onions, a bowl of pilaf that combines rice and fine noodles, a giant bowl of tabbouleh salad and a plate of cucumber sticks. There is also choereg and the final platter holds baklava so thick with nuts that it makes other renditions of this Middle Eastern dessert look paltry.

"It's a very simple meal," says Nahabedian.

She can turn out a spread like this with no struggle for two reasons. First, Nahabedian is Armenian, from a family of gifted cooks and generous hosts. Abundance is second nature in that milieu.

"A big thing in an Armenian household is always to have more food than you could possibly eat," she says.

Second, she is executive chef of the Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles, a post that demands such a high level of expertise that a meal like this could seem easy.

On the job, Nahabedian concentrates on Mediterranean-Californian food. But this day, she is at home, cooking the foods she grew up with. This is because her parents, Helen and Mark Nahabedian, are visiting from Florida.

"I don't think you have enough food," warns Helen Nahabedian, who is helping with the pilaf and contributed the choereg.

Carrie Nahabedian is out on the patio of her sunny townhouse, grilling the lamb. But there is only meat on the skewers. Where are the usual squares of bell pepper and onion? "I don't like that," she says firmly. "That's a real American version." Nahabedian marinates the lamb with red wine, oregano, onion and olive oil. "You keep it as simple as possible," she says.

Lamb is often the main dish when Nahabedian entertains. "I think I've cooked lamb just about every possible way you could cook lamb. I love lamb. I make a joke: Being Armenian, you're part lamb and part bread." She likes chicken too, and fish, but borrows from Greek cuisine for fish recipes. "Armenians don't cook

it that much," she explains.

Nahabedian's father walks over to the grill and says, "We all boast about our children, but this one's something special." He talks about how she's self-taught, never went to culinary school, never needed to.

Born in Chicago, Nahabedian did not cook until she was 15, when her mother was sidelined from the kitchen by surgery.

Weary of eating in restaurants, Nahabedian told her father, "Cooking can't be that difficult. Mom cooks every day." And so she plunged in, not at the beginning but with a cheese soufflé. The recipe came from the Time-Life book *The Cooking of Provincial France*.

"I cooked the entire book in two months," she says. "I was like this big sponge. I was soaking up everything you could possibly think of."

At 17, Nahabedian went to work part-time at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Chicago. From room service, she progressed almost immediately to the kitchen and within six months was cooking for the fine dining restaurant, working all stations. "It really comes naturally for me," she says.

You could say it's in her genes. "My mother cooks so tremendously," she says. "And my grandmother, Rose Nahabedian, was known in Chicago as the queen of Armenian cooking." Carrie learned pilaf, yalanchi and other dishes from Rose, and she has clipped recipes from both women to the back of her favorite Armenian cookbook (*Armenian Cooking Today* by Alice Antreassian [St. Vartan's Press, 1989]).

Nahabedian went on to cook at such illustrious Chicago-area restaurants as Le Perroquet, and Le Francais in suburban Wheeling, Ill. She transferred to Los Angeles after three years as executive chef of the Four Seasons Hotel in Santa Barbara.

Her townhouse is filled with colorful items she has found on her travels. She is especially fond of the framed cream-colored silk scarf printed with the letters of the Armenian alphabet that hangs above the mantel. It belonged to her grandmother Rose. Nahabedian's parents were born in the United States, but both sets of grandparents came from Sivas. And she carefully observes such old traditions as placing an Armenian communion wafer in a container of bulgur wheat. "It's a blessed wafer. It blesses your food," she says.



Rose Nahabedian, Carrie's beloved grandmother and mentor from Chicago.

### Stuffed Grape Leaves With Oil (Yalanchi)

Active Work Time: 1 hour 30 minutes

Total Preparation Time: 3 hours 30 minutes plus 8 hours chilling

"This is my grandmother Rose Nahabedian's recipe, which she taught me how to make," says Nahabedian. She prefers to use Riceland brand medium-grain rice.

2 cups medium-grain rice, rinsed in hot water

1 tablespoon salt plus 1 teaspoon

8 cups water

5 onions, chopped

1/4 to 1/2 cup oil

1/2 tablespoon dried dill

1 teaspoon dried mint

2 pounds canned grape leaves

1 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

1/2 cup olive oil

Torn fresh mint leaves

Lemon wedges, optional

Place rice in medium saucepan and add 1 tablespoon salt and 4 cups water. Cover and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low and simmer until tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

Sauté onions in oil in large skillet over medium heat until transparent, 12 to 15 minutes. Mix in with rice, add dill and dried mint, and cool to room temperature, 30 minutes.

Place grape leaves on work surface shiny side down and stems pointing to bottom. Place tablespoonful of cooked rice mixture in center. Fold leaf over at both sides and roll from bottom to top, forming cigar shape. Continue until all rice mixture is used; you'll have used about 1 1/2 pounds grape leaves.

Blanch remaining grape leaves in boiling water 1 minute, then strain. Line heavy pot with blanched grape leaves. This prevents stuffed leaves from sticking to pot. Arrange layer of stuffed leaves seam-side down in circle in pot. Top with additional circular layers of stuffed leaves until all are in pot. Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt and cover with 4 cups water. Place layer of grape leaves on top to form seal, then place heavy plate on top of everything to hold stuffed leaves in place while they cook. Pour lemon juice on top. Cover and bring to boil over medium high heat. Reduce heat to low and cook 1 hour. Cool in pot 1 hour, then remove plate.

Refrigerate stuffed leaves at least 8 hours or preferably overnight. To serve, remove from pot and place on platter. Drizzle with olive oil and garnish with mint leaves. Serve cold or at room temperature with lemon wedges on side, if desired. Makes about 60.

(For the full story and recipes from Nahabedian, visit [www.mirrormirror.com](http://www.mirrormirror.com).)





# THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



An ADL Publication

THE FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
ARMENIAN WEEKLY IN THE  
UNITED STATES

**EDITOR**

Alin K. Gregorian

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Aram Arkun

**ART DIRECTOR**

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

**SENIOR EDITORIAL COLUMNIST**

Edmond Y. Azadian

**STAFF WRITER**

Harry Kezelian III

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Christopher Atamian, Florence Avakian,  
Taleen Babayan, Artsvi Bakhchinyan,  
Raffi Bedrosyan, Christine Vartanian  
Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe  
Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald  
Papasian, Harut Sassounian, Hagop  
Vartivarian

**REGIONAL  
CORRESPONDENTS**

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-  
Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian,  
Michelle Mkhlian

YEREVAN: Raffi Elliott

BERLIN: Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

PARIS: Jean Eckian

SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian

CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

**PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

**VIDEO CORRESPONDENT**

Haykaram Nahapetyan

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

Baikar Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA  
02472-1509

Telephone: 617-924-4420

FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

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

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

ISSN 0004-234X

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

Other than the Editorial, views  
and opinions expressed in this  
newspaper do not necessarily  
reflect the policies of the  
publisher.

## COMMENTARY

## EDITORIAL

## President Sarkissian's Resignation Triggers a Crisis within a Crisis



By Edmond Y.  
Azadian

President Armen Sarkissian's resignation dominates almost all headlines in the Armenian news media. One question raised is whether now is the proper time to trigger another crisis. After all, Armenia has been experiencing an extended period of unrest since the recent war and faces the most challenging problems in dealing with a stubborn enemy.

In addition, Armenia is facing another challenge — an own-goal of sorts — with the prospect of negotiating with Turkey to tackle century-old issues.

President Sarkissian must have considered the above problems, but they still did not deter him from submitting his resignation.

The president has cited several reasons for his decision, which may not reveal the entire truth. It would be redundant to quote all those reasons cited in his resignation statement, as they have been fully covered by the media.

One of the major complaints was the constitutional limitation of the presidential office, allowing the president only a limited role in carrying out protocol. Even those functions were sometimes taken over by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan — for example, the prime minister's eulogy at Charles Aznavour's funeral in Paris in 2018, where French President Emmanuel Macron was the other speaker.

Sarkissian has complained about the "lack of tools to perform a significant role in the state."

When I met the president last June, he laid out all his objections about the current constitution, his complaints almost repeated verbatim in the statement released this week, but he gave no indication that he thought about quitting his job. In fact, he assured me that he had cut a deal with Pashinyan to have the current constitution revised in October 2021.

It seems that the exasperated president realized that Mr. Pashinyan had no inclination to change the constitution. And indeed, following the president's resignation, Mr. Pashinyan gave an extensive press conference, covering a plethora of issues, among them the issue of constitutional changes. He stated that he had appointed a committee to study constitutional changes, but, at this time, he saw no need for any changes.

The current parliamentary constitution was drafted by former President Serzh Sargsyan, and it was tailor-made for him. The current constitution calls for a super prime minister, a position which was inherited by Pashinyan and he has been guarding it jealously since assuming office in 2018 by overthrowing Sargsyan.

President Sarkissian's resignation was greeted gleefully by the pro-government press. Many of the members of the government interviewed were unanimously critical of the president's performance. Even Pashinyan, during his press conference, expressed relief and further explained that his party will certainly elect a replacement by the second round of a parliamentary vote if they fail in the first round. The deck is stacked in his favor; the ruling Civil Contract party has 79 members in parliament and 81 are needed to elect the president in the first round.

Pashinyan stopped short of naming his candidate but he assured the public that the candidate will be from the ruling party's ranks. To justify his choice, Pashinyan stated that the president has to work harmoniously with his government.

All along, Pashinyan has been advocating this idea, holding obedience over competence, while the president was com-

plaining of the need for a system of checks and balances in a democratic country.

Armenian society is extremely polarized and that situation affects the entire political spectrum. However, surprisingly, there seem to be unanimity of views about the president's resignation. Indeed, many of the opposition leaders, interviewed by the media, expressed critical views about the president's performance, though for different reasons.

The news media is extremely biased and polarized. One thing the diaspora can provide to Armenia is objective coverage of news and fact-based and independent commentary. So often in Armenia the stories seem to be devoid of concrete facts and are instead rife with rumors.

There are few unbiased analysts and objective commentators but their fare has few takers in a desperately divided society. Each camp savors the diatribe spewed by his side and this situation characterizes the political culture of the country. Unfortunately, in this climate, the government is taking advantage and starting to silence the free press.

Kapil Komireddi, an independent writer, in an article in the Spectator World, provides the following comparison between the president and the prime minister: "Pashinyan is an excep-



tional figure in world politics for what he has achieved in this part of the world. He is sincere and idealistic but he can be incredibly persistent and stubborn. Sarkissian is in a different league. He is a scientist. He's a capitalist but he did not have his finger in the pie here. He made his fortune by working hard in the West, a Soviet Thatcherite who wants Armenia to turn into the Israel of the Caucasus. He cultivated really strong relationships as a diplomat. With the exception of [Recep Tayyip] Erdogan and [Ilham] Aliyev and maybe Imran Khan, he can get a meeting with almost any world leader. For a tiny country, that is a huge asset. He was just not utilized during the war. He

see CRISIS, page 19



## COMMENTARY

# Erdogan's 'New Türkiye' and Its Confrontation With the West

By Carlos Antaramián

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Since the entry of Turkey into NATO in 1952, no Turkish government has maintained as anti-Western and anti-US an attitude as that of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, first as prime minister in 2003 and later as president in 2012. This attitude began to reach its peak during the Gezi Park protests in 2013, followed by the failed “coup d’État” in July 2016, while most recently, in the past three months, we can see an angry Erdogan expressing vehemently anti-Western rhetoric in many of his discourses concerning the West.

Gone is the Cold War and Turkey’s position as a bastion of democracy against Soviet Union. With the end of the rivalry of the bipolar world, Turkey was freed from the restrictions inherent in being a strategic ally of NATO. Free from this impediment, Turkey was able to abandon its isolation and transform itself into a regional power that opened up new spaces and broadened its foreign policy agenda, looking to establish itself as a serious actor with an extensive sphere of influence.

Since the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2002, as Alper Kaliber and Esra Kaliber, point out in their 2019 article in the International Spectator (“From De-Europeanisation to Anti-Western Populism: Turkish Foreign Policy in Flux,” Vol. 54, No 4, 1-16), Turkey’s foreign policy has had two very clear periods: the first had an anti-hegemonic and anti-Western discourse that could be observed as an occasional and marginal element; in the second period this discourse became the core or even the defining component. Turkish foreign policy of the first ten years of the AKP defined Turkey as a promoter of peace, seeking to be “instituting order” in the region, particularly in the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus. This period was characterized by de-Europeanization (understood “as the loss or weakening of the impact of the European Union/Europe, as a normative/political context for Turkish foreign policy,” according to Kaliber and Kaliber, and also by a problematization of conventional policymaking marked by the secular and pro-western leadership structure inherited from 70 years of Kemalism. Fundamentally, the AKP pursued a policy of “zero problems with neighbors” and maintained the discourse of wanting to be part of the European Union and an ally of the West, and at the same time sought to stop being a peripheral country as was imposed by the bipolar order during the Cold War.

The transition from low-intensity anti-Western discourse to today’s intense discourse was slow and the result of a process that began with the Gezi Park protests in 2013; it was further accentuated in a very marked way after the failed “coup d’État” of July 15, 2016. As of 2013, Erdogan considers the West as an hostile power that seeks to destabilize Turkey, especially the United States, which supports groups antagonistic to the government, whether they are Kurdish militias in northern Syria, human rights activists such as Osman Kavala, or even the religious leader Fetullah Gülen and his followers. Gülen, in the eyes of the government and much of Turkish public opinion, is considered guilty of masterminding the 2016 “coup d’État” attempt.

This attempted overthrow has become, in the narrative of Erdogan and his followers, the founding myth of the “New Turkey,” similar in a certain sense to the War of Independence (1919-1923) that gave birth to the secular Turkish Republic after the Treaty of Lausanne and with Atatürk as its leader. Now, under Erdogan’s neo-Ottomanism, Turkey has ceased to be a secular Kemalist state to become, as it was during the sultanate, the defender of Islam and seeks to expand its influence to the last corners of the former Ottoman Empire and even farther, a new imperialism alla turca. This is regardless of whether the putsch was the work of the US-backed Gülen movement, as the official narrative states, or whether it was orchestrated by the regime itself to suppress opposition and dissidents and consolidate Erdogan’s authoritarianism, as Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) claims. A third possibility, as veteran British researcher Gareth Jenkins suggests, is that the event was a combination of both elements. That is, there was a seed of insurrection that was discovered by the government and activated by the government itself to get rid of the military disloyal to the regime. The result of the coup was a huge purge of Gülenist elements, but curiously also of many hardliner Kemalists. The Turkish armed forces are less and less Kemalist and secular and more pro-Erdogan Islamists. To guarantee secularism, during the Cold War, it was necessary for the military power to be independent of the civil power but that has changed since 2016.

The founding myth of the “New Turkey” has allowed Erdogan to follow a new nationalist and Islamist foreign policy that reflects his authoritarian interests and has allowed him to make constitutional changes to remain in power until 2033. His rhetoric empha-

sizes sovereignty and is vehemently anti-Western, going hand-in-hand with an anti-imperialism and anti-Americanism that doubts and criticizes the policies of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the statements of the Council of UN Security in Syria, and the verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights. Such an approach allows for a government which requests that the ambassadors of the United States, France, Denmark or Canada leave the country and declares them *persona non grata* if they critique the decision of the Turkish Court on the imprisonment of Osman Kavala. Many other insults appear in Erdogan’s rhetoric reflecting that the West is the “other,” contrary to the essence of an Islamic Turkey. The Kemalist tradition that had marginalized and degraded Turkey’s Islamic and conservative values is over. Now, Erdogan’s Islamism is central in domestic and foreign politics.

In addition, Erdogan has created a government that, according to various international organizations and watchdogs, “has become a mafia state and the evidence suggests that more than at any other time” (Global Organized Crime Index 2021, Stockholm Center For Freedom). It has been noted that the government launders money or finances terrorist activities (Financial Action Task Force) and maintains strong links with paramilitary companies such as SADAT International Defense Consultancy, whose CEO, Ali Kamil Melih Tantiverdi, has stated that “the company does not have the purpose of making money, but has a mission” and that it, in addition to turning Turkey into a global power, is paving the way for the long-awaited Mahdi (Islam’s prophetic redeemer).

Considering Erdogan as the Mahdi may appear to be an exaggerated and isolated comment issued by some fanatic. In part it is, but both Tantiverdis, father and son, have been very close allies of Erdogan since they formed their paramilitary company in 2012. The company corporate manifesto says that they seek to help the Islamic world to occupy its rightful place among the “Super Global Powers.” SADAT has had very close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and is suspected of training al-Qaeda fighters and ISIS. Turkish deputies, members of the opposition Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), suspect that it is this company that has transferred Islamist mercenaries, recruited in Iraq and Syria, to fight both in Libya and on the side of Azerbaijan in the 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Islamist radicals who do not hesitate to commit genocide as they did against the Christian population in Iraq could do so again, against the Armenians of Karabakh.

The suspicions of the anti-government deputies must lead to an international investigation to verify whether President Erdogan has used SADAT to hire mercenaries who have committed heinous crimes in Karabakh, Syria and Libya, as well as the sale and transfer of weapons to many of the war fronts in which Turkey is actively participating. Similarly, the reports from various watchdogs and international organizations indicating that the Turkish government finances terrorists and launders money from organized crime should be investigated and, if true, those responsible should be prosecuted.

Turkey’s foreign policy went from maintaining “zero problems with neighbors” in 2016 to “generating problems with all neighbors.” Its active participation on the side of Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, by providing weapons, military advice, training to Azerbaijani armed force officers and, as noted earlier, sending Islamist mercenaries, changed the balance of power in favor of Azerbaijan, causing deep instability in the South Caucasus. Ankara confirmed its claims in the region and has shown that its relationship with Azerbaijan is based on the idea that the two countries are “one nation – two states.” In addition, its participation has also been growing in the conflicts in both Syria and Libya, as well as in the Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, where it has sold unmanned aerial vehicles known as Bayraktar TB-2. Turkey has caused greater instability in the Eastern Mediterranean by claiming sovereignty over islands and seeking a new determination of territorial waters to seize hydrocarbon reserves. This aggressive foreign policy has irritated both the European Union and the United States. This confrontational attitude towards the West is also seen in the Atlantic Alliance.

Pan-Turkism, that ideology created at the end of the 19th century by Ziya Gökalp and which sought the creation of a Great Turan that would encompass all the Turkic peoples of the world, has been updated and used by Erdogan as part of his neo-Ottomanist policy in Azerbaijan, as well as in Central Asia and among the Uyghurs of China. Azerbaijan’s massive victory over Armenia and Karabakh in the 44-day war produced enormous popularity for Turkey not only in Azerbaijan but also throughout the Turkish-speaking world, especially among the Central Asian Turkish republics. Turkey’s influence in that region began with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, first reflected in the influence of the soft-power of movies, soap operas and especially pro-Turkey schools, primarily Gülenist.

But since October 2020, the strategy of Turkey has been to generate an organization with principles and objectives similar to those of NATO, but whose membership is exclusively for countries of Turkish origin – the so-called “Army of Turan.” The danger of this organization, similar to that of pan-Turkism at the end of the 19th century, is its exclusive nationalism that could turn into genocidal chauvinism against all non-Turkish peoples in the area. The existence of this new military alliance led by Turkey, if we consider the lessons of the war in Karabakh, could indicate that the use of Islamist mercenaries or the financing of terrorist groups could be transferred to other regions and generate greater instability and a palpable increase in tensions.

The United States and the European Union have a wide range of mechanisms and sanctions that could effectively curb the ideas of radical Islamism, ultra-nationalism and expansionism that Erdogan expresses more frequently every day. The introduction of economic sanctions by the West may be a more effective response to mitigate the tensions caused by the aggressive Turkish foreign policy of recent years. If there is no pressure from world powers, the Turkish government could cause a dangerous imbalance in the entire new and growing sphere of influence to which the “New Türkiye” aspires.

Carlos Antaramián is an anthropologist and the Technical Secretary of SUCUMO (Seminar for the Study of Middle Eastern Cultures at Mexico’s National University). He has published a book on Armenians in Mexico and prepared the documentary “Armenios en La Merced.” Curator of the exhibition “Armenia. An Open Wound,” he is author of several chapters and articles on Armenian communities in Latin America.

THE FOUNDING MYTH OF THE “NEW TURKEY” HAS ALLOWED ERDOGAN TO FOLLOW A NEW NATIONALIST AND ISLAMIST FOREIGN POLICY THAT REFLECTS HIS AUTHORITARIAN INTERESTS AND HAS ALLOWED HIM TO MAKE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES TO REMAIN IN POWER UNTIL 2033.



## COMMENTARY

## MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

## Armenian President Resigns: Another Setback for Armenia

I woke up Sunday morning to the shocking, yet not unexpected, news that the president of Armenia, Armen Sarkissian, announced his resignation while abroad, most probably London, after nearly four years in office.

The president is someone I have known for 30 years. He is a highly-educated man with multiple accomplishments: physicist, computer scientist, successful businessman, diplomat and politician (former prime minister and president of Armenia).

Sarkissian, a native of Armenia, graduated from Yerevan State University with advanced degrees in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics. He then became Associate Professor of physics at his alma mater. In 1982, he moved to the UK and became a professor at the University of Cambridge. He subsequently served as the head of the Department of Computer Modeling of Complex Physical Phenomenon at that university.

In 1991, shortly after Armenia's independence, Sarkissian became the country's first ambassador to London. He served as Armenia's prime minister from November 1996 to March 1997. After recovering from a bout with cancer, he was appointed as Special Advisor to the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and as a Governor of EBRD from 1998 to 2000. He served on the Dean's Board and Advisory Board of Harvard and Chicago universities and several prestigious international organizations.

In 2018, President Serzh Sargsyan recommended Armen Sarkissian to the parliament to be his successor, shortly before current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan came to power, who had been critical of his nomination.

Sarkissian became the president of Armenia under the amended constitution which gave him a ceremonial role with no political decision-making power. He had the choice of either approving appointments proposed by Pashinyan and laws passed by the Parliament or submitting them to the Constitutional Court for its determination.

As president, Sarkissian was entrusted with ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Constitution. He had to navigate delicately through Armenia's highly-charged political atmosphere and severely divided society. Despite the limitations of his office, he used his extensive international political and business contacts to promote relations with Armenia and encourage investments from overseas. He visited over a dozen countries, holding high-level meetings during his tenure.

Meanwhile, Sarkissian was subjected to relentless criticism by Pashinyan's partisans who never missed an opportunity to undermine his reputation and actions. He was also attacked by opposition groups. Much less understandable was the constant drumbeat by conspiracy-minded Armenians who accused him of being a British spy, without any basis of fact. These individuals must have forgotten that Great Britain is no longer a great power. It lost its vast Empire where the sun never set. Nowadays, Great Britain is a country with its multiple political and economic problems, and not in a position to meddle in Armenia's internal affairs.

During a private meeting I had with President Sarkissian in his office in 2019, he confided to me the constant criticisms and continued attempts to undermine his activities by his detractors.

We all recall that President Sarkissian found out from the following day's newspapers about Pashinyan signing the statement of capitulation at the end of the Artsakh War on November 9, 2019. Pashinyan did not have the minimum

courtesy of letting the president of Armenia know about his grave decision neither before nor after signing that statement.

President Sarkissian tried to overcome the obstacles created by three separate groups: Pashinyan's partisans in power, the opposition, and the conspiracy-minded crowd. He was severely criticized for objecting to certain orders submitted for his signature by Pashinyan or laws passed by the Parliament's ruling majority. The biggest outcry was raised in the fall of 2020, shortly after the devastating Artsakh War, when he publicly urged Pashinyan to resign.

In his resignation statement, President Sarkissian complained that he and "sometimes his family are targeted by various political groups. They are not so much interested in the achievements of the presidential institution for the benefit of the country as in my past, various conspiracy theories, and myths. This 'concern' for me goes beyond morality, ultimately directly affecting my health."

Furthermore, in his resignation statement, President Sarkissian pointed out the "paradoxical situation when the president has to be a guarantor of statehood without actually having any real tools. The Constitution also presupposes the supremacy of one institution over another, creates obstacles for well-known Diaspora specialists to participate in the management of state institutions of the historical homeland, etc.... We are a parliamentary republic in form, but not in content. The purpose of my proposal was not to move from one form of government to another (parliamentary to semi-presidential or presidential), but to create a state system based on checks and balances."

Explaining his inability to deal with "the current national crisis" in Armenia due to his limited powers, President Sarkissian concluded his statement with a warning that Armenia will find itself "in the margins of history. We have no right to make mistakes anymore!"

According to the Constitution, Alen Simonyan, the Speaker of the Parliament, is now the Acting President until elections are held for a new president, no earlier than 25 days and no later than 35 days from Sarkissian's resignation.

The Constitution also outlines the process of electing a new president by the Parliament: At least 25% of the Parliament members has the right to nominate a presidential candidate. Whoever receives at least 75% of the votes of the members of Parliament is elected President. If no candidate receives 75% of the votes, a second round of elections is held, during which all the candidates who participated in the first round can run. In the second round, the candidate who receives at least 60% of the total number of the Parliament's votes is elected president. If not, a third round is held, in which the two candidates with the most votes in the second round can run. The candidate who receives the simple majority of the votes of the Parliament is elected president.

The presidential candidate must: Be at least 40 years old, solely an Armenian citizen for the last six years, permanently resided in Armenia for the last six years, has the right to vote, and speaks Armenian. The term of the President is seven years. He or she cannot be reelected.

The new president will be chosen by the prime minister's party members in Parliament as they hold the majority of the seats. My fear is that an unqualified person will be chosen to be the next President just like the other appointments made by Pashinyan, thus confirming once again his preference for partisan politics over national interests. Rather than establishing much needed governmental checks and balances, the choice of a pro-Pashinyan president will further consolidate the absolute power enjoyed by one man, the prime minister. He confirmed our worst fears when during his press conference on January 24, 2022, he said: "the president, government, and majority in Parliament must have a political harmony." In other words, rather than checks and balances, Pashinyan prefers single-handed rule.

## President's Resignation Triggers a Crisis within a Crisis

CRISIS, from page 17

tried to do his best — he reached out to everybody — but he was sidelined and constrained within Armenia. The prime minister ran the show. And it was, I am sorry to say, a disaster from start to finish."

Unfortunately, very few citizens in Armenia share this view. From the first day of Sarkissian's appointment, he was characterized as a "British spy" or a "Russian agent," depending on one's tastes and political agenda.

Incredibly, the president learned about the war in 2020 from the news media. The disconnect was that deep within the government.

The president, through his broad contacts, brought in significant investments into the country. But it looks like nobody needed or appreciated that kind of help.

One thing was obvious from the onset: he was a hold-over from the old regime. Pashinyan's team has never been interested in experience; all it needs is obeisance.

In addition, provincialism is rife in the country's political culture as evidenced by loutish debates in the parliament.

I will hazard to extrapolate from the same situation which applies to Armenia's musical life. Over the years, Armenia has lost many world-class musicians and conductors from the diaspora who left the country in dis-

gust. Among them are stars such as Valery Gergiev, Ohan Dorian, Aram Gharabekian, Loris Tjeknavorian and Constantine Orbelian.

Provincialism is the standard and society cannot connect with the extraordinary. We can see that trend spill over into politics. This may be symptomatic of small countries that have little tolerance for global celebrities.

One of the president's complaints was that prominent talents from diaspora could not get involved in Armenia because of constitutional constraints. He cited the example of Noubar Afeyan, the man behind the Moderna COVID vaccine.

During the Velvet Revolution, President Sarkissian played a moderating role; although Serzh Sargsyan had installed him in the president's office, he had the audacity to call on him to resign. "That was a wise move," Sarkissian said. But on the other hand, he made a fatal mistake of calling on Pashinyan to resign during the turmoil resulting from the 2020 war. It was not his place to join the masses calling for the premier's resignation, just as it was not the place of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II to do so. It was a moment where these leaders could play a crucial role by extolling unity. Those calls were never forgotten by Pashinyan's team, and therefore today, no tears are shed for the president.

In accordance with the constitution, the new president will be elected in February.

Pashinyan was looking for such an occasion to get someone from his own team to the post to further consolidate his grip over the government, after pushing the old guard out of the constitutional court and placing his own supporters in the Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry ranks.

Pashinyan's decision not to change the constitution means a brief reprieve from giving in to Turkish demands to delete the reference to Historic Armenia or Western Armenia, although he shirked his responsibility for Genocide recognition. He said recently that Hay Tad has never been on the government's agenda. The locomotive of the Hay Tad has been the diaspora, he added, a statement which has to be taken with a grain of salt. Indeed, after President Robert Kocharyan made the recognition of the Genocide a part of Armenia's foreign policy agenda, a number of countries recognized it, with the most recent being the United States.

Now Armenia has to prepare itself for fateful negotiations with Turkey and with Azerbaijan.

In the case of a failure, maybe the president will regret his decision forever, mistiming his resignation at a very crucial juncture in Armenian history.



# Thoughts on Nation Building for Armenians

By Souren A. Israelyan

The Second Karabakh War and its aftermath left undeniably deep wounds for the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian nation spread throughout the world. The wounds have not fully healed and emotions still run high. Thus, it is difficult to objectively self-assess, a step necessary for healing. Added to the difficulty is that an assessment necessarily involves looking back, which would bring back emotions, feelings, attitudes, etc., adding fuel to the fire. This is not unique to the Armenian nation and social psychologists can better explain the stages of the societal trauma imposed by war and the methods to overcome it to move forward. The Second Karabakh War is not the first time the Armenian nation has suffered massive trauma. The difference is that it happened in our lifetime and we should have better knowledge to understand and overcome the trauma.

A lot of discourse has run along the lines

of what went wrong and who is at fault for the Second Karabakh War and its aftermath. Accordingly, there is always the “blame” dynamics. I submit that it is not a productive discourse. The better approach might be to focus collective efforts on building the nation and the country to such sovereign strengths that similar losses would be objectively improbable.

As time passes, perhaps the following few thoughts might enter our collective deliberations.

To build a strong sovereign Armenia, one has to have an agenda and national vision. Naturally, the national vision has to jive with the national strengths existing in the country and the nation. Allow me to list some of the well-known ones. You are well familiar with them and they will not create any special excitement. The point is to push the pedal to the floor on these strengths and in some cases make minor adjustments — and they would propel the country and the nation to new heights.

The Republic of Armenia needs to tap into its national spirit, the spirit that made

this nation defeat the evil that was dead set to exterminate it. This nation has known sacrifices and has known wars, indeed many of them, and from all sides. The Armenian nation maintained itself not because it was convenient or easy, but because for itself it was the only righteous way to walk on earth. Without the national spirit, no amount of money in the world and no amount of military technology or equipment could protect Mother Armenia when evil knocks on the door. It is our mountains, our churches, our children, our mothers and fathers, our ancestors, our generals, our culture and our history that make the spirit of the Armenian nation, which is unconquerable and eternal.

Armenians are relentless business and technology innovators and creators. Armenia is a center of innovation and creativity, which supplies the region and the world with new innovations and creations.

Armenians are consummate network creators for the benefits of its members. The Julfa Armenian trade network, the oil networks in the beginning of the last century,

and multiple other examples and experiences attest to the Armenians’ creation of successful networks over the centuries that propelled the human progress. Armenians easily interact with people and cultures from the Far East to the Americas. Armenia as a regional and global platform for networks, e.g., for new technologies, for banking and finance, for wealth creation, for dispute resolution, for athletic tournaments, for cultural exchanges and for rapprochements.

Armenia + Armenian Diaspora = Armenian Nation. There is no difference between the Armenians from Buenos Aires, to Cairo, to Yerevan, to Stepanakert, to Singapore, or to any of the thousands of cities and towns around the world where they live. All their hearts beat for the Armenian Nation. The Republic of Armenia as the guardian of the Armenian Nation. The Republic should necessarily make certain adjustments to assure that there are no obstacles, legal and otherwise, for the diaspora’s meaningful and comprehensive involvement in the life of Armenia. In its daily affairs, the Republic should consider the interests of the Armenian Nation. The diaspora, in its turn, should no longer give a carte blanche to the Republic to do as it wishes without adequately considering and consulting with the diaspora’s interests.

During and after the Second Karabakh War the importance of Armenian culture and its preservation became painfully apparent. It is in the time of temporary peace that the Armenian nation can focus on its language and culture. Armenian culture is created and its language is spoken in most of the countries of the world. Armenia as a center for the Armenian language and the Armenian culture, which are the treasures of humanity.

Certainly, the above is not an exhaustive list. Each of the points, moreover, could be further expanded over many pages with subsections and sub-subsections. Others may express the same ideas better. However phrased, the above could strengthen Armenia’s sovereignty and standing, as well as assist in preparation for the next war.

Around the world over 10 million Armenian hearts beat 100,000 times per day for the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Nation. When the time is right, and it might be now, let us gently pivot those hearts toward the nation building and development for the one and only Armenian nation, which is the Armenian Diaspora and the Republic of Armenia inextricably intertwined.

Souren A. Israelyan is an attorney based in New York City.

## Wounded Soldiers To Receive Civil Aviation Jobs

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The servicemen wounded during the 44-day war receiving rehabilitation treatment at “Soldiers House” will have a job in the field of civil aviation, the “Soldiers House” rehabilitation center informed on its Facebook page this week.

The “Soldiers House” rehabilitation center and the Civil Aviation Committee today signed a memorandum of cooperation.

The Civil Aviation Committee will organize courses for all those servicemen of Soldiers House who will express willingness to specialize in this field and work. The physical limitations of the servicemen, according to the president of the committee, are not an obstacle.



## Tekeyan Cultural Association

# 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary



## Sponsor a Teacher

in Armenia and Five Artsakh Villages



SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 2001, THE TCA SPONSOR A TEACHER PROGRAM HAS RAISED \$793,560 AND REACHED OUT TO 7,163 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 \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to:

Tekeyan Cultural Association—Memo: Sponsor a Teacher

Mail your check to:

TCA Sponsor a Teacher  
5326 Val Verde, Houston, TX 77056

Your donation is Tax Deductable