

Diaspora High
Commissioner Zareh
Sinanyan Visits US

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

DETROIT — For the past week, High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Zareh Sinanyan has been visiting Armenian communities in the Midwest and West Coast regions of the US.

Touching down at Detroit Metropolitan Airport directly from Europe on Wednesday, June 1, Sinanyan, along with advisor Margarita Baghdasaryan, met with Detroit’s Armenian leadership and organizations and then moved on to Chicago where after similar meetings, they continued to California.

An interview was conducted by Senior Editorial Columnist Edmond Azadian and Staff Writer Harry Kezelian at the Edward and Helen Mardigian Library in Southfield.

Sinanyan, whose office has been under criticism recently along with the rest of the government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashin-



From left, Harry Kezelian, High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Zareh Sinanyan, and Edmond Y. Azadian in the Edward and Helen Mardigian Library

yan for its handling of the Artsakh war in 2020, has embarked on a fence-mending mission with diasporan communities.

Sinanyan said, “In the immediate aftermath of the ceasefire, clearly there is apathy, disappointment, and loss of confidence in many segments of the diaspora. And it’s natural; it’s the same type of sentiment that you would hear in Armenia. The only difference is people in Armenia don’t have a choice but to revive quickly and move on with life.”

Criticism has come from many camps, but especially in the Diaspora.

“For us that has meant having to exert more efforts in explaining what is going on and why it’s happening. And what the outlook for the future may be like,” he said.

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Riot police clash with opposition protesters in Yerevan, June 3, 2022.

Armenian Authorities, Opposition Blame Each Other For Clashes

By Naira Bughadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutjun) — The Armenian authorities and opposition groups continued to blame each other on June 6 for violent clashes between security forces and demonstrators demanding Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s resignation.

The clashes broke out late on Friday after riot police did not allow thousands of oppo-

sition supporters to approach the parliament building in Yerevan on the 34th day of non-stop anti-government protests.

The police fired stun grenades as some of the protesters tried to break through a police cordon in chaotic scenes that left at least 60 people injured. One of them, a protester, suffered a severe head injury and underwent surgery.

According to law-enforcement authorities,

40 police officers received medical assistance in hospitals after being pelted with bottles, stones and other objects and assaulted by demonstrators.

The Investigative Committee launched a criminal inquiry into “mass disturbances” which it said were provoked by unnamed opposition leaders. It did not say whether it would prosecute any of those leaders.

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Contemporary Art Collection of Joan Agajanian Quinn
Makes East Coast Debut at Armenian Museum

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America will present their largest contemporary exhibition, “On the Edge:

Los Angeles Art 1970s-1990s,” from the Joan and Jack Quinn Family Collection. This selection of work explores a period that is pivotal to understanding current practices and the West Coast mentality. Included are Lita Albuquerque, John Altoon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Lynda Benglis, Vija Celmins, Gregory Wiley Edwards, Claire Falkenstein, Frank Gehry, David Hockney, John M. Miller, Helmut Newton, Ed Ruscha, Andy Warhol and more.



E.F. Kitchen L.A. Portrait Series, 1985. Joan and Jack Quinn Archival pigment print 16” x 20” Courtesy of the Joan and Jack Quinn Family Collection

“On the Edge” premiered at the Bakersfield Museum of Art in 2021 and was curated by Rachel McCullah Wainwright.

“The work and artists on display have come to represent a period of history that transformed art making,” said Wainwright. “Art made in Los Angeles during the late 1960s and 1970s onward is defined by a unique spirit of anti-conformity, a play of new materials, a celebration of light, and the California cool ethos.”

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Vrej Agajanian Runs for Second
Term on Glendale City Council

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Vrej Agajanian is running for a second term as a member of the Glendale City Council. Glendale, with its large Armenian population, up until this upcoming June 7 election [after press deadline], has had three Armenians out of its five city council members. Eight candidates are running for the three council seats currently up for election, including two other incumbents, Ara Najarian and Dan Brotman. There is one new Armenian candidate, Elen Asatryan, a former

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Vrej Agajanian at his campaign kick-off in April, 2022

YEREVAN
Armenia
Defeats Ireland
in Soccer
Tournament



LOS ANGELES
Second
Queernissage
held in Los
Angeles



PARIS
A Fashion
Muse Rises



Mirror-Spectator Annual Vacation

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator will close for its annual two-week vacation in early July. The last issue of the Mirror before the vacation will be that of July 2. The first issue back will be that of July 23. Enjoy a safe and healthy summer.



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

US Praises 'Historic' Peace Efforts

WASHINGTON (PanARMENIAN.Net) — US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan has praised the “significant and historic” diplomatic efforts between Azerbaijan and Armenia toward a lasting peace.

Sullivan made the remarks at a meeting with Hikmat Hajiyev, Head of the Foreign Relations Department of the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan on Monday, June 6.

“Mr. Sullivan expressed support for talks hosted by President of the European Council Charles Michel. He conveyed the readiness of the US to engage closely and support progress through a variety of means, including in our capacity as a Co-Chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group,” the White House said in a statement.

State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said earlier the US is interested in facilitating direct engagement between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Foreign Minister Meets With POW Parents

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan on June 7 had a meeting with the parents and relatives of the Armenian prisoners of war who are still illegally held in Azerbaijan, the ministry said.

Mirzoyan touched upon the works aimed at presenting the issue of the release of the POWs and other persons held to international high-ranking officials, parliamentarians, human rights organizations and then answered to the questions of the meeting participants.

Mirzoyan reaffirmed that the Foreign Ministry makes all possible efforts for the quick release and repatriation of the POWs.

Bishop: Azerbaijan Seeks To Replace Dadivank's Armenian Clerics

YEREVAN (news.am) — Azerbaijan wants to achieve the withdrawal of the Armenian clergy from Dadivank Monastery and their replacement by the clergy of the Russian Diocese of Baku, Bishop Vrtanes Abrahamyan, Primate of the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, told NEWS.am on June 7.

“I believe this information is completely in line with Azerbaijan’s policy pursued today. They do everything to bring what they want to fruition and remove our clergymen from Dadivank. They saw that they could not achieve anything with the visits of the Udis, and [therefore] they resorted to this option,” Bishop Vrtans said.

“Besides the fact that they will remove the Armenian clergy, they will also say that there is no need for Russian peacekeepers [in Artsakh] anymore. I am sure that the Russian Orthodox Church will not give way to that move.”

The Primate added that intensive negotiations are underway to resume the entry of Armenian pilgrims to Dadivank.

For Artsakh, for Justice: First Major Peaceful Protest in Stepanakert

By Lilit Shahverdyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

STEPANAKERT — On May 28, the anniversary of the First Armenian Republic, the people of Artsakh stood together to voice their discontent with their country’s current state and prevent possible future threats. They also demonstrated support to their compatriots in Yerevan who had been protesting for around two months on France Square in Yerevan.

More than 10,000 people gathered at Renaissance Square, and the Artsakh people’s demands were heard again after the 1988 movement. The Square is significant as the place where the Karabakh Movement was pioneered in February 1988, resulting in the declaration of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in 1991. The demonstration started with a march from St. Hakob Church and fanned out through the central streets of Stepanakert to reach Renaissance Square.

The demonstration was organized mainly by the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF) of Artsakh, the youth branch of Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). Two other parties also took part in organizing the event, the Democratic Party and Ardarutyun (Justice) Party.

On the way from the church, the protesters were accompanied by a car with patriotic songs. They called to recognize the Artsakh Republic and demanded the resignation of the Armenian government, which the demonstrators characterized as defeatist and treacherous. Throughout the march, people welcomed the demonstrators



Protests in Stepanakert

from their homes and streets, supporting them with slogans and hanging the Armenian and Artsakh flags from balconies. The participants, in their turn, carried banners expressing solidarity with the opposition movements in Yerevan (Zartnir, Lao) and called the international community’s attention to the protection of the Artsakh people’s self-determination. Some of the slogans were “Unity, Fight, Victory,” “Fight for Artsakh,” and “Armenia without Turks,” which people hear in Yerevan streets every day. In contrast to the protests in Armenia, the Artsakh government didn’t take any measures to disperse the demonstrators and allowed the peaceful process of the gathering with-

out acts of violence.

At 7 p.m., the heart of Stepanakert was full of kids, youngsters, and adults with their fists up, as one of the accompanying songs, Ver Bazukd, (put your fist up), to inspired them. For the first time since the end of the war, the square hosted thousands of people to voice their demands from their government and the international community. Among the speakers were activists of the 1988 movement, widows, soldiers, and refugees.

Lyudmila Grigoryan, a doctor and an activist in the 1988 Karabakh Movement, said during her speech, “Artsakhtsis should never look at Mrov Mount (the highest peak in Artsakh) the way we watch Ararat from afar. Our mission is to unite and save our independence. We need endurance, courage, and unity.”

Mher Kirakosyan, a displaced resident from the Kashatagh region of Artsakh who fought in the 44-day war, said, “Today, as I am standing here, I see that everyone shares a single idea, that is saving our homeland. We will fight for justice to the end as Artsakhtsis’ spirit is unbreakable. We are the owners of our homeland. Artsakh! Hayastan!”

After the manifestation, Renaissance Square remained full as patriotic melodies became heard from the stage. “Genesis Armenia,” with the government’s support, organized the first concert in Stepanakert since 2020 in commemoration of the First Republic Day. The event carried a patriotic character and aimed to elevate the people’s spirit.



Signs at the demonstration say “We don’t forget, we don’t forgive”

Authorities, Opposition Blame Each Other for Clashes

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The committee brought instead criminal charges against most of at least 13 protesters arrested during or after the clashes. It said that they did not obey police orders and resorted to violence.

Armenian courts freed several detainees, including opposition activist Vahe Harutyunyan, over the weekend and on Monday, citing a lack of incriminating evidence.

Vahe Yeprikyan, a lawyer representing Harutyunyan and two other protesters, who remained under arrest, said investigators did not present any video evidence corroborating the accusations leveled against his clients.

Opposition leaders condemned the use of force as excessive and unjustified.

They singled out the use of stun grenades, saying that policemen mishandled them and wounded their own colleagues.

“Those who fired [the stun grenades] and their commanders should be tried or beaten up by other policemen for the fact that they are so unprofessional that they did not learn how to use those special means,” said Gegham Manukyan of the main opposition Hayastan alliance.

The police insisted that only two officers were injured by stun grenades and that other dozens of others were attacked by angry protesters. They also released on Monday a fresh video of the clashes meant to justify the crackdown.

The police did not comment on other videos posted on social media which showed several policemen punching pro-

testers as the latter were dragged away and arrested by other officers. None of those policemen was placed under investigation as of Monday evening.

Meanwhile, the Armenian Office of the Prosecutor-General said it has ordered an inquiry into the use of stun grenades and other instances of police brutality alleged by the opposition.

Opposition leaders demanded such an inquiry as they again rallied thousands of supporters in the center of Yerevan. One of them, Ishkhan Saghatelian, said the protests will continue in the days ahead. He said their organizers are now discussing “tactical changes” designed to “give us new impetus and expand our movement.”



ARMENIA

KorniTun: Bringing Hope To the Borders

YEREVAN — The All For Armenia (AFA) nonprofit organization announced that it is preparing to start renovations on its latest project in Armenia's border village of Kornidzor, the last village at the gates of Artsakh, overlooking the Berdzor/Lachin corridor on the Syunik side.

The project, named KorniTun — a combination of Kornidzor and “tun” (“home” in Armenian) — will function as both a community center and community home: the former as an after-school educational hub, and the latter as a lodging place for AFA volunteers, teachers, and guests from the Diaspora and beyond.

Renovations of the abandoned building — bombed during the First Artsakh War — which will house KorniTun are slated to begin in July. AFA is now launching the second phase of its fundraising campaign to raise the remaining half of the total funds needed.

“KorniTun has already filled our village with much-needed hope in the longevity of our community, encouraging our youth especially to be proud of their home,” says Lusine Qaramyan, former mayor of Kornidzor and member of the town council. Locals are encouraged by the prospect of Diasporans and friends of the Armenian nation coming to KorniTun for leisure, to work remotely, or even to give classes in language, computer science, graphic design, art, and other topics of interest. Indeed, AFA firmly believes that investing in these strategic border communities is an act of faith in the future of the Armenian homeland.

KorniTun is the first installment in AFA's scalable SahmanaTun concept. The SahmanaTuns (literally, “Border Homes”) will be a network of houses located in Armenia's most vulnerable border villages. The goal is to not only promote financial and cultural investment in these strategic areas, but also encourage a change in the prevailing mentality towards these communities and extend development beyond the capital city Yerevan. SahmanaTuns will add value to these regions, thereby securing their defense, preservation, and development as a priority for the Armenian nation.

In these times of turmoil and uncertainty for the Armenian nation, AFA draws inspiration from the resili-



All For Armenia Co-Founder and In-Country Director Matthieu Sahakian (left) at KorniTun with Shahan Zeytourtchian (right), philanthropist, retired surgeon, founder of Mirhav Hotel in Goris, and an early believer in the KorniTun project.

ience and courage of these border communities to invest in a brighter and sustainable future for the homeland. AFA calls upon Armenians worldwide to join in its efforts to preserve and strengthen these most vulnerable communities.

Conceived as a spontaneous initiative providing urgent humanitarian aid during the first days of the 2020 Artsakh War, AFA has grown into an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to launch sus-

tainable development projects in frontline villages of Armenia and Artsakh. To learn more, visit: allforarmenia.org.

Visit the KorniTun section on the AFA website to learn more about and donate. For donors who wish to have their name or a message of their choice displayed on a stone on the entrance wall of KorniTun (the Wall of Gratitude), AFA offers various sponsorship opportunities, available until November 1, 2022.

Armenia Defeats Ireland in International Soccer Tournament

By Haykaram Nahapetyan

Mirror-Spectator Video Correspondent

YEREVAN — Armenia defeated Ireland with the minimal 1:0 margin necessary to clinch victory, even though the Armenian national squad scored two goals; the first one by Tigran Barsegian at the 51st minute was dismissed as the goal check established Barsegian was offside. Slovan Bratislava's striker Barsegian dropped to his knees when the referees hoisted the offside flag.

The guests prevailed during the first half: statistically, the Irish squad possessed the soccer ball 66 percent of the time. It made six strikes to the goals: Davit Yurchenko,



the Armenian goalkeeper, saved his squad several times. The Armenian team made only one strike.

Right after the first half was over, an Armenian fan ran into the field and, despite the stewards' attempts to catch him, made



The match took place at Vazgen Sargsyan Republican Stadium

his way to Varazdat Haroyan and got the central defenders T-Shirt as a reward. After the break, perhaps it was Barsegian's dismissed goal that substantially shifted the game, inspiring the hosts to play more actively. The Irish squad had a big part of the second half to play defense.

The winning goal arrived at the 75th minute when Eduard Spertsian scored with an impressive effort from a distance. In the remaining time, the Armenian squad

played both deep defense and offense as well. Near the end of the game and especially during the extra four minutes added to the main time, the Irish soccer players made several attempts to salvage the game. Their goalkeeper was even spotted practically near the center of the field; however, they never converted this dominance into a goal. The final whistle sealed a victorious three scores for the Armenian squad and the first Irish defeat after eight consecutive

victories in their international games.

The Armenian players were very motivated today, noted Joaquin Caparros, the Armenian squad's coach, after the game. Armenia played its first UEFA Nations League game as a member of the B league.

The League of Nations is viewed as the third full national, international tournament for Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) members next to the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)'s World Cup and the European championship. This newly set up tournament breaks Europe's 55 teams into four leagues based on their FIFA ranking. Accordingly, the A-league brings together the top squads, and the subsequent leagues consist of the following national teams; among the B, C, and D leagues the team that wins is promoted to the higher league. In 2020, the Armenian squad prevailed in League C and was elevated to the B group. Today's win kicked off the new set of games in the B League. In a matter of 10 days, the Yerevan squad will play against Scotland (June 8, Glasgow, Scotland), Ukraine (June 11, Lodz, Poland), and Scotland again (June 14, Yerevan).

A video segment at mirrorspectator.com presents Spertsian's goal and Barsegian's goal without the score, as well as other exciting moments of the game.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Lavrov Slams Ban on Serbian Visit

MOSCOW (TASS) — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov slammed the decision of some NATO countries not to allow his plane to visit Serbia on June 6 as unprecedented, TASS reported.

“There were a lot of questions from the media last night and this morning regarding our reaction to the unprecedented decisions taken by some NATO member states and the decisions that prevented the Russian Foreign Minister from visiting the Republic of Serbia. The unthinkable has happened, of course; I understand the interest you are showing in our assessment of these outrageous actions,” Lavrov said on Monday at an online press conference on topical issues of the international agenda.

FlyOne to Expand to Middle East

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — FlyOne Armenia is expanding the geography of its flights, Chairman of the Board of FlyOne Armenia Aram Ananyan said at a press conference this week, adding that they consider several important destinations of the Middle East.

“We plan to include Tehran and Beirut this year, and if possible, we will expand the geography in other directions. Our goal is to increase the passenger flow to and outside Armenia. The demand for aviation services is increasing globally. Research shows that the current demand for aviation services passes the pre-pandemic figures. As an airline, we should do everything to meet this demand by responding to the international trends,” Ananyan said.

Starting June 17, the airline is resuming the regular direct flights from Yerevan to Lyon and Paris.

Russian Social Media Exec. Gabrielyan Dies in Arctic Circle Accident

MOSCOW (Public Radio of Armenia) — Vladimir Gabrielyan, the First Deputy Director General of Russian VK social media service, died as a result of a tragic accident on June 7, RIA Novosti reports citing a statement from the company.

“This morning it became known that Vladimir Gabrielyan and Sergey Merzlyakov died as a result of a tragic accident. We mourn with family, friends and relatives,” the message said.

Gabrielyan and the company’s Procurement Director Sergey Merzlyakov went missing in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug as two Sherpa all-terrain vehicles heading along the coast of the White Sea to Cape Kanin Nos turned over while crossing the Bolshaya Bugryanitsa River, 47 kilometers from the village of Shoina and were dragged into the sea.

Alena Gabrielyan and Sergey Olsevich, who were in one of the all-terrain vehicles, got out, Vladimir Gabrielyan and Sergey Merzlyakov, who were in the second all-terrain vehicle, went missing.

Montreal Armenians Raise Funds for Psychological Rehabilitation Program in Armenia

MONTREAL (Abaka Weekly) — A fundraiser took place on Thursday May 5, 2022, at the “Centre Armenie” of city of La-Val, near Montreal in Quebec, Canada, for the psychological rehabilitation program Posttraumatic Growth Therapy (PTG). This is a joint venture between Montreal and Yerevan, with the support of the Armenian Medical Association of Quebec (AMAQ) and generous donations of Armenians of Montreal. The event was attended by 200 Montrealers, including Ambassador of Armenia in Canada Anahit Harutyunyan, Honorary Council of Armenia in Quebec Levon Afeyan, Senator Leo Housakos of Canada, and representatives of Montreal Armenian organizations.

Drs. Rita Soulahian Kuyumjian and Belinda Gosdanian Yacoubian provided information about the event and the project. The PTG project was conceived and initiated by Kuyumjian and soon was joined by Gosdanian Yacoubian, a psychologist and member of AMAQ executive committee, as well as its vice president.

It is reported that 60 % of traumatized people will experience some kind of growth after trauma. Posttraumatic Growth Therapy facilitates people to change in this direction after trauma rather than have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The latter may become chronic and difficult to treat. With PTG, individuals are helped to live with what they have rather than with what they lost. PTG helps the traumatized person to appreciate life differently and become more resilient. It helps people to improve and appreciate interpersonal relationships on a deeper level. It helps them to find meaning in their loss, and rewrite the narrative of their life, from victim to a healthy survivor, and to become more spiritual. It also guides people to help others and grow from it — hence the name Post Traumatic Growth.

The PTG project began in September 2021 and has four primary goals. First, it intends to treat Armenian soldiers who suffer from the psychological consequences of the 44-day war by application of the PTG work-

book, which has been translated to Eastern Armenian by a volunteer. Second, it intends to treat all those, doctors, medics, ambulance drivers, widows, and grieving mothers who were exposed to the immediate effects of the war with PTG trained volunteers. Third, a public awareness campaign will be started to promote the idea that trauma cannot define our nation. Fourth, it will work to change the victim mentality of our public and to help to deal with shame and guilt caused by the war activities. It will do this via public lectures, radio and TV programs. It will work to introduce PTG based education in schools via the Ministry of Education, Health and Social Affairs. Finally, it will publish its before and after treatment data for the benefit of the international community on the psychological consequences of the war and treatment outcome with PTG.

The funds raised at the event will pay for two psychologists in Armenia, whose remuneration is supported by AMAQ members. After being trained in PTG by the joint team in Armenia and Montreal, they will start to treat soldiers under supervision. The rest of the project is done on a volunteer basis.

AMAQ celebrates its 45th anniversary this year. AMAQ is a member of the Armenian Medical International Committee (AMIC). In the audience during the event were two founding members, Drs. Arto Demirjian and Antranik Benohanian. Over the years AMAQ had several projects to help Armenia and Artsakh, among them a dental clinic in Artsakh, and provision of medical supplies during the 1988 earthquake and later on during 44-day Karabakh war.

AMAQ also provided the Montreal-area Armenian community with medical lectures, job fairs for high school graduates and guidance from members to Montreal youth. Dr. Raphael Vartazarmian, an emergency medicine specialist, as a member of AMAQ went to Armenia during the recent war for a month, and worked alongside Armenian doctors to save the life of wounded soldiers. Kuyumjian and Gosdanian Yacoubian not-



Dr. Raphael Vartazarmian

ed that their project is the continuation of Dr. Vartazarmian’s work, exclaiming: “If he helped to keep the soldiers alive, our project aims at psychological rehabilitation of the soldiers.”

At the event, Dr. Vartazarmian presented a sensitive, informative and uplifting account of his work in Goris region of Armenia during the war. His PowerPoint presentation received a standing ovation and his work won the gratitude of the audience.

Kuyumjian and Gosdanian Yacoubian appealed for ongoing support, declaring: “We hope that the Armenian community of Quebec will continue to support this sacred project. Krikor Naregatsi, our 10th century mystic philosopher, pleads with God, ‘God only you can grow sweet fruits in the desert’. We are hoping that with PTG we can give hope and a future of sweet life to our war heroes and all those who suffered due to war. We believe in the motto of ‘Healthy soldier, strong army and secure motherland’.”

The two also noted that the Sponsor a Teacher program of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada works towards the same ideal, though viewed from a different perspective.

For more information on AMAQ, see <https://www.facebook.com/AMAQ76/>.

(The above article is a condensed English version of an interview conducted by Avo Bakkalian and Berdj Kokorian and published in Abaka.)

French Singers Pay Tribute to Charles Aznavour

By Melanie Tuysuzian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

MARSEILLE, France — Charles Aznavour would have turned 98 this year. On May 21, the eve of his birthday, the Aznavour Foundation organized a solidarity concert called “Formidable Aznavour” to pay tribute to the French-Armenian legendary singer, who died four years ago. The show took place in the French Mediterranean city of Marseille, known for its huge

Armenian community, where thousands of genocide victims arrived by boat a century ago.

About 4,500 people gathered at the Dôme concert hall to celebrate the beloved troubadour. Nearly 40 singers, 10 musicians, and 500 chorists performed. The previous edition of the concert, in 2019, was a huge success. This year, various famous French artists gathered again to sing *Hier encore*, *La Bohème*, *Mourir d’aimer* and also *Emmenez-moi*. The actress and model

Géraldine Lapalus was the host of the ceremony. Many generations paid tribute to the musical artist, including Enrico Macias, Nana Mouskouri, Linda Lemay and other established singers as well as the new generation of young French artists, such as DJ Big Ali and Amaury Vassili.

The concert started with a flawless children’s choir, conducted by the pianist Erik Berchot, who played with Charles Aznavour for many years. They made a medley of his most iconic songs, a significant introduction before multiple voices started to strike up the song *La Bohème*. They restyled Aznavour’s songs respectfully and in a contemporary way. Aznavour used to write timeless songs and it’s even more obvious nowadays. Homosexuality discrimination, war, forbidden love, youth, family, Paris, and of course solidarity with Armenia are among the themes he touched upon.

All the funds collected by the show were dedicated to the Aznavour Foundation, a solidarity foundation founded by Charles Aznavour and his son Nicolas, who lives now with his family in Yerevan, and runs the foundation. It carries out educational, cultural and social humanitarian missions and numerous charitable programs in the country.



Members of the Aznavour Foundation



Community News

The Pride Of the Kurkjian

This Lou Gehrig Day, My Brother — and Best Friend — Is Facing ALS

By Tim Kurkjian

My older brother, Matt, is my best friend, and the strongest person I have ever met. We were born in the same year, just 11 months apart, and immediately inseparable. My parents sent me to kindergarten a year early because they couldn't imagine separating us. We were in some of the same classes in school, we played on the same sports teams, and since we were five years old, we shared a love of baseball. One of our favorite movies as kids was the Lou Gehrig story, "The Pride of the Yankees." We watched that movie dozens of times.

On July 11, 2021, I was nominated for the Career Excellence Award by the Baseball Writers Association of America. It was an incredibly proud moment for me and my family — we grew up in baseball, and perhaps the only people to whom the honor meant more were my father, my mother and my brothers.

But the greatest day of my professional life was followed by the worst day of my life. The very next day, Matt was diagnosed with ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease. I can't say — or write — those words without crying. Our family is devastated. Matt is the ringleader of our extended family, the adhesive that holds everyone together.

And yet, every time I break down, I look at my brother, who is 66 years old and is fighting this wretched disease every day without complaint, without pity, without tears. His speech is affected, but he can still command a room with his storytelling. His mobility is affected, but he still mowed his lawn until early April. His dexterity is affected, but he recently stood on a chair and repaired a mangled curtain. His positive attitude has always been his greatest asset, and it has been crucial through this ordeal. There are days when I need to be strong, and I'm not, but when Matt sees my pain, he rests his hand on my shoulder and says, "Tim-o, don't worry about me. I'm a happy guy every day."

He has always been at his happiest when he was with family, or playing baseball, which often was one and the same. Baseball was the primary language spoken in our house as a kid. My dad, Jeff, was a really good player. He taught his three sons to play the game, and to love the game. My mom, Joy, became a convert as she shuttled her boys from field to field.

My oldest brother, Andy, is one of the greatest players ever to play at Catholic University, a power-hitting catcher with a tremendous throwing arm. He was enshrined in the school's

see ALS, page 11



On May 26, the Diocesan Center in New York held an exhibit titled "Artsakh: Angel of Peace," featuring photo of churches and villages in Artsakh taken

Recording, Remembering And Preserving History and Monuments of Karabakh

By Florence Avakian

NEW YORK — It was more like an Armenian homecoming, as a curious but passionately interested audience gathered together on Thursday, May 26 at the Armenian Diocese to see exquisite photographs of Artsakh churches and villages, and hear of the latest developments from Dr. Marina Mchitarian who had spent many weeks visiting the area and speaking with several inhabitants.

The presentation titled, "Artsakh: Angel of Peace," is embodied and symbolized in two white statues before the Ghazanchetsots cathedral standing spiritual and proud. Following the catastrophic invasion of Artsakh by Azerbaijan and Turkey, almost 75 percent of this beloved territory has been occupied by the enemy, and the Armenian inhabitants in the 25 percent still under Armenian control are continually attacked.

The event was planned and sponsored by the Zohrab Information Center under the directorship of Dr. Jesse Arlen who was not able attend due to illness. Some attendees (including this writer) had visited this ancient and beautiful Armenian land, but many had come to learn more and see the display of unique photographs.

Opening the program, and introducing the speaker, the Diocesan Vicar, the Very Rev. Simeon Odabashian welcomed the crowd and called Mchitarian "a heroine." He stated that the "44-Day War and the occupation of our beloved land has deeply affected all Armenians."

Throughout her deeply emotional talk, accentuated by her passionate love for this millennia-long Armenian land with its picturesque landscape of mountains, greenery, waterfalls, lakes, churches, monasteries, and khachkars, Mchitarian revealed that she had first visited Artsakh in 2007.

Her last trip there in 2020, when she went to Dadivank Monastery in Kelbajar, the interior of which the enemy completely destroyed in the first Karabakh war, was for her a "goodbye forever" trip as the 2020 war started shortly after.

With Zohrab Information Center staff member Andrew Kayaian monitoring the video presentation, the speaker declared "Artsakh is our identity, a symbol of the unity of the Armenian people."

Two weeks before the war, she had visited the students of Artsakh State University. After the war, a 19-year-old student told her, "I dream of Artsakh rising from the ashes and blooming again."

Mchitarian also visited many villagers in the highlands of Artsakh, with the blossoming symbolic pomegranate trees. She spoke to young and old who declared their undying love for their land. One grandfather stated through tears, "We will struggle until our last breath for this land."



The angel at the Ghazanchetsots Church in Shushi

Second Annual Queernissage held In Los Angeles

By Brandon Balayan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES — The GALAS (Gay and Lesbian Armenian Society) held its second annual Queernissage in Los Angeles on June 4. The event featured a market with various creatives from the Armenian LGBTQ+ community.

Before the event, a Twitter user expressed her disagreement with the event, which caused other users to tweet about crashing it. The GALAS had security present because they believe it is the best practice for large events. Natalia Sookias, the main organizer of the event, said she messaged the woman who originally tweeted her disagreement, and asked her to kindly delete the tweet. She eventually did and despite the backlash, the event continued — hosting 21 vendors with the help of 20 volunteers. There were no incidents at the event.

Sookias is a GALAS board member and owner of Sooki Studio, a Los Angeles-based ceramic studio. She expressed how the intimacy of having a space where people can feel included and welcome was a priority for the



Glendale's Mayor Ardy Kassakhian, center, with GALAS' Board Director Erik Adamian (Right)

organizers. This allowed the talent of Armenian artists to be on display at the event.

"We're just scraping the surface of reaching out to LGBT Armenian artists and pulling them out of the woodwork and having them feel safe and welcome ... and be able to celebrate both parts of their identity without having to choose one," she said.

Glendale's Mayor Ardy Kassakhian was also at the event to show support to the community.

"If someone's going to threaten this group of people, I'm going stand there with them and make sure I'm there and present and show myself as a mayor of a large Armenian community — saying that I am here to serve every Armenian," Kassakhian noted.

The event was tucked in an alley in Studio City, making the area vibrant with the variety of people present, and with the crafts that vendors were selling. Attendees could have bought anything from spices, jewelry, pottery, posters, books, and even food.

see GALAS, page 6

COMMUNITY NEWS

Second Annual Queernissage held in Los Angeles

GALAS, from page 5

Erik Adamian, the co-founder of Charachchi and Board President of GALAS, spoke about the hypocrisy of Armenians who oppress LGBTQ+ voices within their community, and how this has historical-



GALAS Board President Erik Adamian at Queernissage

ly been done to Armenians by others for millennia. For Adamian, balancing his gay identity with his Armenian one has been an internal struggle that he says many people confront.

"I'm as much an Armenian and Iranian person as I am gay," Adamian said. "I struggled to find space for all of these identities together, because I was told I could either be queer, or I could be Armenian."

Adamian describes Charachchi as a multimedia project for queer Armenians. He says that queer Armenian stories are often rooted in trauma, so he takes a more light-hearted approach when telling their stories. He and Perch Melikyan co-founded the project and had a stand at Queernissage. They conducted interviews with attendees

who wanted to participate and asked them unconventional questions such as "What is the gayest part about you?" and told participants to curse them in Armenian at the end of their interview.

Adamian was 14 years old when he immigrated from Iran, and at the time did not understand the concept of coming out. He said he always knew he was attracted to men, but thought that he would just marry a woman and live out the rest of his life without being his true self. After high school he began to come out to himself, but also began to distance himself from the Armenian community during college. However, he felt a void that was caused by the absence of his ethnic identity.

"Something very big and important was missing from me. And that was my Armenianness and my Iranianness," Adamian said.

GALAS hopes to create a space that fosters the ability to not pick and choose between someone's sexual orientation, and their Armenian identity. Adamian says the organization also has Surj Sessions, where Armenians, both allies and LGBTQ+ people, can gather and talk about navigating their cultural identities with their sexualities. Although Queernissage is only held in Los Angeles, the group hopes one day for it to be held in Armenia, but more work needs to be done.

"If LGBTQ Armenians, with the help of allies, stick together and get the support that we need to elevate our voices and to bring visibility to the fact that queer Armenians do exist — whether you like it or not, we exist," Adamian said. "As I said before, we are as much Armenian as we are queer."



Natalia Sookias in front of her Sooki Studio stand at Queernissage.

OBITUARY

Merzia (Getzoian) Cronin Teacher at Belmont High School

BELMONT, Mass. — Merzia (Getzoian) Cronin of Belmont died on May 19, 2022, with her children by her side.

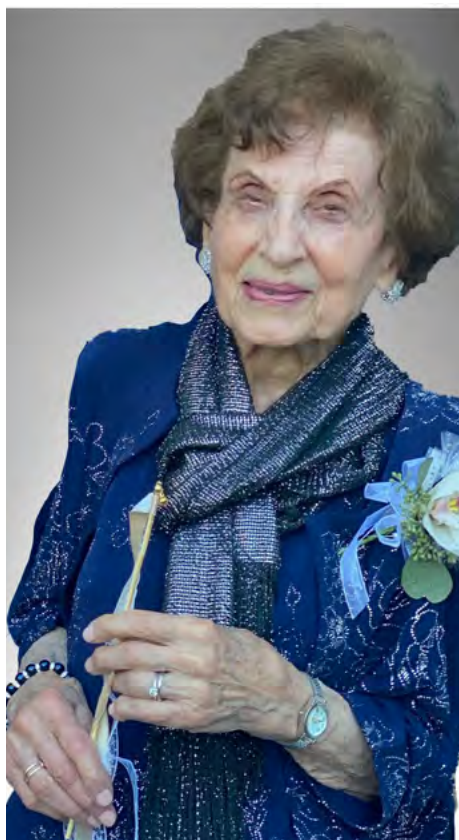
She was the wife of the late Richard A. Cronin. She leaves her children, Arlene Najarian and her husband Gary, Richard A. Cronin Jr. and his wife Maureen, and Suzanne Cronin; grandchildren Angela M. Breault and her husband Donald, Jack R., and Christopher J. Najarian, Richard A., Daniel J., and William J. Cronin. She was the sister of the late Sarkis, and Habib Getzoian, Naomi Topalian and Paroohy Jacobsen. She is also survived by many nieces, nephews, and dear friends.

Merzia received her bachelor's degree and master's degree from UMass Boston, (formerly Boston State College).

She was a retired Belmont High School foreign language teacher.

Funeral services were held at the First Armenian Church, 380 Concord Avenue, Belmont on May 25. Interment was at Highland Meadow Cemetery, Concord Avenue, Belmont.

Arrangements were by the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home.



THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932

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The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is seeking an intern for a six-week program this summer (mid-July through August, though it is possible to start earlier). The intern will receive a \$150 weekly stipend provided through the Armenian Students' Association of America's Internship Program.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Diaspora High Commissioner Zareh Sinanyan Visits US

SINANYAN, from page 1

According to Sinanyan, the polarization caused by the war has alienated certain segments of the Diaspora that were alienated as a result of the 2018 Velvet Revolution already, “in some instances to the extent of being hostile to the Armenian statehood. The polarization is multilayered. Old grievances also play a role.”

In recent years, Sinanyan says, organizations had been “rethinking the old way of doing things,” and “the Diaspora, much like the Armenian nation in general, is searching for a way forward.”

The war was a setback to some of this rapprochement because it endangered the homeland, Sinanyan said. “No matter what our differences may be, and they are many, we do have something in common, which is our Armenian nationality. And that nationality is embodied in the statehood of Armenia. And any blow to the statehood of Armenia weakens the bond between us... which means we should understand how important the statehood is and we should consolidate around it in a time of need and crisis, and not the opposite.”

Sinanyan continued, in relation to the Pashinyan government’s political opponents, saying “We saw many organizations do this [i.e., consolidate around the state of Armenia] immediately after the war. They realized how serious the situation was and they were there on the ground offering to help in the way that they could. Others reacted by trying to exploit this as an opportunity to come back to power. But they have not succeeded, and will not, because they don’t enjoy the support of the Armenian people.”

According to Sinanyan, the High Commissioner’s office has two major goals or aspects of its work. The first is “maximum integration between Armenia and Diaspora. Removing barriers. Increase Diaspora engagement with Armenia on every level. Make the relationship a beneficial arrangement.”

The second, he said, is “Creation of infrastructure for repatriation. Ironically, Armenia does not have the infrastructure for it.”

One of the major initiatives of the office is the iGorts program, which began in September 2020. Now preparing for its third year, the program “invites Diaspora Armenian professionals to serve in the public sector and the government of the Republic of Armenia,” according to the office’s website. The program offers fellowships, with stipends and medical coverage, for professionals from the Diaspora to work in Armenia for a year in government positions where their skills and expertise could be invaluable. Overshadowed by the Covid pandemic and the war, Sinanyan described the initiative as a success story.

“When it was formulated, it was not meant as primarily repatriation, it was meant primarily as ‘let’s use the professional skills of Diasporans to better our governmental system.’ Having said that, in the back of our minds we hoped a portion of them would choose to stay.” Now, two years into the program, Sinanyan relates that of the first year’s fellows, 14 are still working in the government, three of which are in high positions including deputy minister, head of innovation and information transfer institute. More than 70 percent of participants have remained in Armenia. Within the second year group, which is ongoing, there is already a person appointed chair of the Armenian tourism agency. Sinanyan continued, “we have every reason to expect that a similar proportion will remain within the government.”

Sinanyan is proud to relate that the iGorts program was recognized by the United



Zareh Sinanyan signing the guest book at Alex Manoogian’s desk in the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum

Nations as an example of “best practices.” He further shared that the office is creating a database of “diasporan potential” for internal use by the Armenian government.

Mission to the Diaspora

Sinanyan describes his office’s mission in a positive way. “We don’t try to counter things. We don’t build our philosophy around reactionary approaches to our work, but work towards something. If polarization means the cooling down of relations between our people, we work toward consolidation,” he explained.

He noted that after the war, the government had to employ certain strategies of outreach because of limited resources and the fact that the diaspora is numerically and geographically vast.

“Right after the war we made a major effort toward the Russian-Armenian diaspora,” which numbers around 2.5 million people. “Our efforts did bear fruit. We were able to communicate with large enough segments of the Russian-Armenian community. They understood what was going on and it allayed their fears. And brought back the focus around the statehood [of Armenia].”

Sinanyan discussed his relationship with the Armenian Diaspora of Russia and compared it to that of the United States. He mentioned that although there is a massive population of Armenians in Russia, many of whom are recent migrants from Armenia in the last thirty years, there is no one lobbying the Russian government comparative to what exists for in the United States with the Armenian Assembly and the Armenian National Committee of America.

Azadian had questioned why media outlets in Armenia, particularly pro-government ones, seem to insult leading Russians of Armenian descent rather than winning them over, in order to gain influence in

Russian government spheres. Sinanyan replied that these influential Russian-Armenians were from a different social background with a different mentality than the general Armenian community in Russia. “They have taken a certain position since April of 2018 that is hostile to the people of Armenia. The Armenian people don’t like being called dirt, being insulted, being told they should live under a corrupt regime. They’ve shown that in the revolution and in the June elections.”

On the other hand, Azerbaijan’s interests are advanced in Russia by powerful oligarchs of Azeri background who reside there. Armenians, for whatever reason, have not curried favor with the Russian government in a similar way. Sinanyan describes this as a failure of previous Armenian governments, saying “In addition to their multitude of failures, they haven’t allowed the Russian Armenian community to shape Russian foreign policy.”

Sinanyan did mention that he works with the Union of Russian Armenians, despite opposition from their leadership toward the Pashinyan government, stating “we work with all compatriots despite ideologies and approaches as long as they want to consolidate around statehood and support Armenia.”

On the other hand, Sinanyan vehemently objected to direct influence by the Armenian government on the Diaspora. In response to a question as to whether it was possible to create a lobby in Russia separate from the Union of Russian Armenians, Sinanyan stated that “we in Armenia cannot be building organizations outside the Republic of Armenia,” stating “that’s what we need from our local community.” He concluded, “very often we are accused of trying to ‘organize’ the Diaspora. They accuse the Armenian government of trying to

‘organize’ the Diaspora, and others accuse them of failing to organize them.”

Recent Crises

Sinanyan also discussed the issues of the Ukrainian and Russian migrants to Armenia. He stated that there are tens of thousands of Russian migrants in Armenia. “There are Russian waiters and delivery boys, in every sphere of life, in a very short period of time,” he said, but added that “we are not helping Russian emigres.”

In terms of the Armenians fleeing from the war in Ukraine, “we are providing a financial package,” Sinanyan stated. He estimated that there were over 6,000 people with Ukrainian passports, and that the government was providing a support package to them with funds supplied by the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), to which he expressed his gratitude.

The Office of the High Commissioner was also affected by Covid. “We had nine or ten months from June 2019 to mid-March 2020, that was the only period of relative normalcy. Covid was a major blow to our efforts because we basically had to close down programming for that year.” Like so many other organizations, “we turned to technology to fill the void,” Sinanyan stated. “We used Zoom to hold community meetings with various communities in the Diaspora. We had a 300-person virtual summer camp.” Sinanyan also mentioned that the World Congress on Information Technology (WCIT) held in Yerevan in 2019 “was a huge success, but the follow-up couldn’t be done because of Covid.”

Finally, Sinanyan mentioned that the IT sector continues to prosper and grow, “the Ukrainian war, as tragic as it is, is helping because of the influx of Russian IT companies. Without getting too much into it, if we can avoid war, we will come to a point where the IT sector’s degree of development will not be detached from military preparation.”

Midwest Hospitality

Following the interview, Sinanyan attended the annual banquet of the St. John Armenian Church Women’s Guild, which happened to be taking place that evening. He spoke to the room of 70 women, answering questions from the audience about current developments in Armenia.

The following day, Sinanyan visited the Manoogian Manor (Michigan Home for the Armenian Aged), the AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School where he addressed students, and St. John Armenian Church where he met with the local clergy as well as touring the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum and the Edward and Helen Mardigian Library. On Thursday evening, Sinanyan met with representatives of the leadership of the church and community organizations, including the Tekeyan Cultural Association, Knights of Vartan, and the church’s auxiliary groups.

Similar meetings were held in Chicago that weekend, coordinated by the Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Armenia in Chicago, which is headed by local businessman Oscar Tatossian. After his visit to Chicago, Sinanyan was scheduled to head to California, where the Western Region leadership of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation had already announced that he was “not welcome.” A similar protest incident was averted in Detroit.

Sinanyan assumed his role as high commissioner in 2019. Born in Armenia, he and his family emigrated to the US when he was a teen. He formerly served as the mayor of Glendale.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Vrej Agajanian Runs for Second Term on Glendale City Council

GLENDALÉ, from page 1

executive director of the Armenian National Committee of America-Glendale and Western Region, and interestingly, two candidates who married Armenians, Isabel Valencia-Tevanyan, with a Peruvian background, and Anita Quiñonez Gabrielian, born in Nicaragua.

Background

Agajanian, born in Tehran, Iran, came to the United States in 1975, and after going back to Iran, he permanently moved to the US in 1980. A graduate of Aryamehr University of Tehran, he soon achieved the California state certification of professional engineer, or P.E.

“From nine years old,” he said, “I have been involved continuously in Armenian organizations.” Agajanian was one of the founders of the Davidian and Marimian Educational Foundation in Glendale in 1987 but stated that he had to leave it later when he started his television work because of time constraints. He has been chairman of the Armenian Society of Los Angeles (ASLA) and president of the Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA).

While chairman of ASLA in 1999 and 2000, he related that the city of Glendale wanted to take over by eminent domain its building on Brand Boulevard in order to allow the building of the Americana at Brand shopping, dining, residential and entertainment complex. The city offered \$1.2 million but Agajanian realized that was not sufficient due to the high cost of real estate and parking. He negotiated aggressively and obtained a price of \$5 million cash, plus the city purchased the land plot he wanted as a replacement, which cost approximately \$2 ½ million, and agreed to provide 300 parking spaces in its nearby parking structure. He pointed out that otherwise it would have cost \$4 ½ million just to build 300 parking spaces. This negotiation took 2 ½ years and Agajanian considers it one of his major accomplishments for the Armenian community.

Over time, though working as an engineer, he said he became very knowledgeable about Armenian issues. He gave lectures in various parts of the United States, and even Europe, so at one point, he was invited to speak on an Armenian television program. He said he agreed hesitantly because deep down, he was a shy person, despite his active nature. He said that Armenian-language television in California at that time was not focusing on educating its audience overall. On the other hand, he said, “I am an engineer and everything I said was based on facts and figures. I guess they liked it and they invited me again and again.”

Eventually, he continued, “The owner of the TV station said why don’t you come and do a program. I started doing that and after a while, I guess I liked it so much that I took his station. It was not planned. It evolved somehow to become that. I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would become a TV station owner. Then I became so involved in it that 24 hours is never enough for me to do what I am doing.”

He said, “First I started with a TV station called AABC [Armenian American Broadcasting Corporation] TV, and I was running this station for a long time. Charter came to me and said, since you are doing such a good job, we want to offer you another TV station, which is not doing well.” The second one called High Vision TV and is in the Persian language. Both stations air almost exclusively in Southern California, including as far south as a portion of San Diego and are disseminated on cable via Spectrum and Charter Communications as well as on the internet.



Agajanian has kept his own talk show in the Armenian language running daily for some 21 years on AABC TV as a commentator on social and political issues of the United States. He said that he only covers major changes in Armenia, such as the change of regime on the show. Occasionally, he has guests like the Los Angeles County sheriff, Senator Robert Menendez, Congressmen Frank Pallone and Adam Schiff, or other English-speakers, so with them he will provide a brief Armenian translation for the small percent of viewers who do not understand English well, he said.

Agajanian said that on his television show, he does not want to get involved in partisan politics, but instead gives information on what Democrats or Republicans are doing. He said, “I don’t want to get myself involved in an issue. I want to educate our community. I have opinions about the issue which I explain but I never cross the line to go one way or another.”

He gave the example of reporting when President Bill Clinton had to return an item that he brought with him from the White House when he left in January 2001. That led to some upset callers who were Clinton fans exclaiming they did not know he was Republican. Similarly, when he reported President Donald Trump’s claim to have the largest attendance of presidential inaugurations as false by comparing it with videos of prior inaugurations that clearly showed larger crowds, such as that of President Barack Obama, he was attacked as a biased Democrat.

The Glendale City Council positions are nonpartisan, but when pressed for his personal political preferences, he declared, “I am a Democrat, but a Democrat like the ones I knew a long time ago...you can call me a conservative Democrat. I want to help the people.”

Agajanian said, “I am very familiar with the public and what they need because of the TV program. They are in contact with me because it is a live program. Whenever needed I bring guests, but the public is involved and can call and express their opinions.” Gradually this led him to enter into the world of politics. Agajanian said, “I thought I could help the public.” He ran unsuccessfully for Glendale City Council in 2005 and 2007 before finally succeeding in 2017. As city councilmember is not a full-time job, he continued also to run his television stations.

During his first term, he also served as chair of the Glendale Housing Authority and as a board member of the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority and was chosen as mayor by the council members for the 2020-21 term.

Agajanian served as mayor during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. He said together with the rest of the City Council, he tried to help businesses and renters. Businesses were going bankrupt because in Glendale, there were many small mom-and-pop stores which did not receive government assistance through the Paycheck Protection Program. They did not have

employees to make them eligible, so the Council voted to provide small businesses a reimbursable grant of up to \$500 for Covid-19 personal protective equipment. Renters faced steeply rising rents, so 1,000 qualified senior renter households were given \$300 for 24 months. There was also a general program for emergency renter assistance.

Glendale Housing

In particular, one issue really motivated him to go into politics – affordable housing – and he was able to create several relevant measures while in office. He said that the city over a period of 44 years made 1,462 affordable housing units for the public, which is an average of 31 units per year. He declared, “I thought this is unacceptable. Thirty-one units in a city with a population of 200,000 is a joke.” When 65 units were created, 6,872 families applied for them. He continued, “That is why I came up with the idea of creating 507 affordable housing [units] which will be ready in two years. This never happened before. I am just trying to catch up.” The housing shortage in Glendale is great, Agajanian said, adding that the state government had told Glendale that it was short 13,640 housing units in general. When asked about the 2021 California Senate Bills 9 and 10, which respectively are intended to increase housing by streamlining the provisions for dividing one single-family lot into up to four smaller ones for housing and creating even more units in areas close to public transit, job centers and existing urban areas, Agajanian said this will only create at the most some 700,000 additional housing units throughout California. He said, “It appears too many, but I am not sure of that, because California has a housing shortage and rents are going through the roof.”

Agajanian said he had encountered two specific cases which really bothered him in the past few years. In 2019, a big company bought a 43-unit apartment and raised the rent from \$1,424 to \$2,600. He said, imagine how the people living there must have been affected, as they most likely would not have been able to pay this newly increased rent.

The second case was a person who over the course of 10 ½ months had the rent increased four times. In other words, every two months or so the landlord came back to raise the rent \$150 or \$200. He exclaimed, “When I saw this, I said your house or your unit is your castle. You have to know for at least one year what your rent is. You cannot have landlords keep knocking on your door to raise the rent. This is not fair to the tenant.”

He said that to deal with unaffordable rents, he proposed rent stabilization in Glendale, with a limit of seven percent increases. He emphasized, “This is not rent control. I am against rent control because I experienced that before.” He said rent control in places like New York City or Los Angeles has led to buildings deteriorating because landlords either do not have the means or it is not worth it financially for him to fix them.

Despite two of his five colleagues on the council opposing this initiative and leaving the meeting, the other two joined him and so it passed. He also proposed a second qualification. If the landlord wants to take back a rental unit for whatever purpose, he is allowed but must pay six months of rent to the tenant if the latter had resided there for over five years. This both allows the landlord to then raise the rent as much as he wants after the tenant leaves, and gives some sense of security to tenants. Otherwise, the tenant in Glendale usually had to

pay first and last months rent plus a security deposit for a new apartment, but could not get back the deposit until after vacating the original unit. That made it difficult for people on tight incomes to move.

Agajanian explained, “The big real estate companies initially were against this but after a while came to realize that this is fair both to landlords and to tenants, while rent control, in my opinion, is not fair to landlords.” He added that he personally did not own any apartment buildings so had no personal stake in the matter.

Energy

An issue on which Agajanian states his point of view is different than many of the other council members is energy. The Grayson Power Plant has been serving Glendale since the early 1940s. When Agajanian was elected in 2017, he was offered a brief orientation as a new council member. There, a plan to replace the old gas turbine with a new one was explained. He refused to accept this if the new gas turbine would produce over 100 megawatts of energy, so eventually the level was lowered to 93 megawatts, which he accepted.

Then, a few months ago, he said his colleagues on the council proposed converting completely to renewable energy and ending all gas use. He pointed out that for 25 megawatts of clean energy, the cost was \$225 million. If you want a total of 262 megawatts it will cost \$2.2 billion to make this zero emissions. He said, “We can’t afford it. Who will pay for it? The residents of Glendale?” Instead, he said that with a little less than \$400 million it is possible to replace the plant with clean energy sources combined with 93 megawatts produced by gas. Only after the clean energy is used will the gas machines work to satisfy demand.

Agajanian said, “We have no choice, but because of the elections they did this [new proposal].” After the election period is finished, he is sure that everyone on the council will again agree with him. He added that because of the delay in adopting an approach the cost will end up \$40-60 million more.

Parks and Crime

On parks and recreational facilities, Agajanian observed that while the northern part of Glendale possesses excellent, large parks, the south has a very dense population and lacks them. For this reason, the council must spend millions of dollars to clean and renovate park areas, as well as to try to buy some more land suitable for this in southern Glendale.

When asked whether crime had increased over the last several years as in some other parts of the United States, Agajanian declared that in Glendale the situation did not change much because the city did not defund the police department. It is spending the same amount of money and starting this July will even increase the budget a little. He said, “There may be a little bit more crime now, but it is very minimal. We are still one of the safest cities, probably in the entire country.” He added that opioids and drug problems also have not changed much.

Armenians of Glendale

Agajanian said that he noticed that there was no street named after Armenians in Glendale despite the large numbers of the latter. He said, “I thought we deserved to have a street connected somehow to Armenians, and that is how we [in the council] came up with the idea of Artsakh Street.”

In response to a query about the effect of the rising cost of living in Glendale on the numbers of Armenians residing there, he replied that the Armenian population is not decreasing but remaining roughly constant.

continued on next page



COMMUNITY NEWS

from previous page

On the one hand, Armenians sometimes leave to other cheaper places nearby, but then newcomers come and take their places because they want to be close to their relatives. Once they are situated and comfortable, then they may think about moving to nearby areas. There are even Armenians with illegal immigration status who somehow make their way to Glendale, he added, sometimes via Mexico.

Agajanian estimated that there were almost 100,000 legal Armenian residents of Glendale and probably thousands more without legal status. Out of the 90-100,000 legal residents, only 40,000 are registered to vote. On the other hand, out of the remaining 100,000 non-Armenians of Glendale, there are 72,000 registered voters.


A recent change in the voting date may have affected the weight of Armenian influence in Glendale elections, Agajanian speculated. Originally, Glendale held its municipal elections on odd years for council members, Glendale Community College board members, school board members and local issues. In 2015, Governor Jerry Brown signed the California Voter Participation Rights Act (SB 415) into law. This bill stated that if any city's voter turnout for the previous four local elections is at least 25 percent less than average voter turnout for the last four state elections, it must hold its elections in synch with state elections on even years with the goal of increasing voter numbers. Glendale did not meet this criteria and so was forced to change its election dates. Agajanian conjectured that when the elections were only for Glendale, Armenians easily got elected to city council because some non-Armenians may have been less motivated to vote solely in local elections, but now that all elections are on the same date, more of the latter are voting and will outnumber Armenian voters in many cases.

Prior to the 2020 election, there were four Armenians out of the five city council members, but in that election, the first affected by the date change, one incumbent lost, leaving three Armenians on the council. This year's election is the second in the new format, so Agajanian admits it is still unclear what the longterm effect will be.

As to why Armenians register as voters in lower numbers than non-Armenians, Agajanian declared, "Generally speaking, Armenians come from countries where elections meant nothing, whether they came from places like Syria, Iran or the Soviet Union. That is why Armenians still do not believe in elections, or think they do not change anything. This country is very different, and I worked hard through my TV program over the past 22 years to raise the number of registered voters. But we are still lagging and falling behind because of our past keeping us away from today's realities. There is such hesitation to get registered."

Despite everything, Agajanian is optimistic about their role in Glendale in forthcoming years. He said, "When I came here forty years, this was a city which was asleep. Armenians in Glendale worked hard and made this city a different city. We have all these big Armenian companies, which is good for the city of Glendale. But mostly Armenians have small businesses. They try to keep their buildings nice and clean, and they love their city. As a result, this is a vibrant city."

Meanwhile, as far as his electoral race is concerned, he seems to have a solid base of Armenian community support, with all three "traditional" Armenian political parties having endorsed him this year through their grassroots lobbying organizations, though he declared he does not himself belong to any Armenian political organization.





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COMMUNITY NEWS

Washington’s 102-year-old Armenian: Former Secretary of the Navy Paul Ignatius

By Haykaram Nahapetyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WASHINGTON — Near the end of the 19th century, at the American Euphrates College in Kharpert located on historical Armenian territory, student Avedis Zhamgochian, inspired by the ideas of liberty, wrote a poem that cherished freedom and equality. The Ottoman Turkish authorities didn’t like his vision and persecuted him. Avedis was educated and spoke English quite well: he had even translated some Western authors into Armenian. The Zhamgochians were importers of cotton goods from Manchester, England. Using the British connections and his language skills, Avedis made his way to Manchester with his infant daughter Elisa. Later, by 1911 he settled down in what is now Glendale. In modern half-Armenian Glendale, which Avetis’s grandson Paul Ignatius described as Yerevan-West, his grandfather might have been perhaps the first-ever Armenian settler.

Avedis had six children: the eldest was born in Kharpert, the youngest in Glendale, and the rest in England.

During the same period, another Armenian-American, Hovsep Boghos Ignatiosian (Ignatius), ran a successful glass-manufacturing business in West Virginia on the East Coast. Soon after the Hamidian massacres (1894-1896), he, wary of new persecutions, found refuge in the US, became a factory manager, and eventually launched his own enterprise. Once, for business purposes, he came to Los Angeles, where he met and fell in love with Elisa Zhamagochian, the daughter of Avedis. Thereafter he stayed in California.

A US Secretary of Navy (1967-69) and US Deputy Defense Secretary, the most successful Armenian-American in the ex-



ecutive branch of the US government, Paul Ignatius, is the son of Hovsep and Elisa. Today, the retired and highly distinguished military commander resides in his Washington, D.C. apartment, where we met for an interview.

“I spent four years in the Navy in World War II, in a small aircraft carrier fighting against the Japanese,” recalls Ignatius. “We got into a lot of action. But we had a wonderful captain.” Once, the vessel was hit by two kamikazes near the Philippines. Several shipmates were lost, and a number of aircraft were damaged, but the crew was able to contain the fair and save the ship. “I learned a lot in combats. I learned how to take responsibility,” added Ignatius, citing his World War II background as an essential experience for his future career in Washington. His brother and two uncles served as officers as well.

When John Kennedy came to power in 1961, the White House began hiring professionals for the new administration. Paul Ig-

natius, who was running a consulting group at that point, was asked whether he would like to join the government. Consequently, Ignatius worked as Assistant Secretary of the Army and then Undersecretary of the Army.

“Then, for 3 1/2 years, I was an Assistant Secretary of Defense, and for the last roughly two years (1967-1969), I was the Secretary of the Navy. This was an interesting experience as I served as a Naval officer in World War II, and I ended up being the civilian leader of the Navy,” added Ignatius, recalling his meetings with several later presidents, from John Kennedy to Jimmy Carter. “We have a wonderful family photo with President Kennedy at the White House Rose Garden. He seems not interested in what I am saying but rather looking at my beautiful wife,” recalls Ignatius with a smile.

Along with highly successful careers,

the Ignatiosians engaged with the Armenian community. Hovsep Ignatiosian helped raise funds for NAASR (National Association for Armenian Studies and Research). Later, his granddaughter Sara Ignatius led NAASR for several years and retired after working extensively on the renovation of NAASR’s headquarters. “Right now, while we are talking, she is at Washington’s local Armenian church picking up some dolma, eggplants, and shish-kebab for our dinner tonight. And it’s really good,” added Paul Ignatius at the end of our conversation.

Paul Robert Ignatius has two sons and two daughters, with the sons being notable journalists and the daughters notable lawyers. In 2019, a USS battleship was named after Paul Ignatius.

(Another report with one more 102-year-old Armenian-American resident of the Washington, D.C. area Ed Alexander will be published in a subsequent issue.)



Avedis Zhamgochian with his family in England

On the Edge Los Angeles Art 1970s – 1990s
from the Joan and Jack Quinn Family Collection

On the Edge Los Angeles Art 1970s – 1990s
from the Joan and Jack Quinn Family Collection

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Detail from Larry Bell, *Ken & Lux*, 1989, Photo emulsion, 67 x 42 inches
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COMMUNITY NEWS

This Lou Gehrig Day, My Brother — and Best Friend — Is Facing ALS

ALS, from page 5

athletic Hall of Fame in 1999. Matt followed him there, playing four years (1974-78) at Catholic. Matt was a 5-foot-7, 125-pound third baseman who could hit, run, take a walk and catch anything that came his way. He had a major league throwing arm, and despite his kind and gentle demeanor, he would tear your throat out rather than allow you to beat him or his team no matter what the competition. “If we had nine Matt Kurkjian on our team,” said CU center fielder Val Vandeventer, “we would win every game.”

In Matt’s junior year, the 1977 CU team won the ECAC Division I Championship, beating heavily favored St. John’s, and came within two games of going to Omaha for the College World Series. That team is in the CU Hall of Fame, and everyone around it will tell you the guts of that group was Matt Kurkjian.

A few months after Matt’s diagnosis, CU had its first (and only) fall game: a doubleheader at Mount Saint Mary’s on Oct. 1. Ross Natoli, who has won nearly 750 games as the head coach of the CU team over the last 37 years, called me last September to ask if Matt could come to the game and throw out the ceremonial first pitch. The ceremonial first pitch is rarely, if ever, thrown out by someone representing the visiting team, but Coach Natoli had no trouble convincing Mount Saint Mary’s coach, Frank Leoni, to let Matt do the honors — especially after he described the enormous influence that Matt has had on the CU baseball program.

“Matt is the greatest teammate I have ever had,” says Natoli, who played against Matt in college, and with him for six years in the summers in the Maryland Industrial League. It is perhaps the most hallowed compliment in sports: to be a great teammate.

“Matt Kurkjian,” Coach Natoli says, “is the greatest teammate ever.”

When Matt heard he was asked to throw out the first ball, it confused him. Matt’s ALS has robbed him of the strength and dexterity of his thumb and index finger on each hand. He had to re-learn how to throw a baseball — jarring for a man who was born to throw a baseball. So ahead of the game, I played catch with him in the front yard (how many times did we do that as kids?). He wrapped his three remaining



Tim Kurkjian (from left) with his older brothers, Andy and Matt. Matt was diagnosed with ALS last summer, a month after MLB’s inaugural Lou Gehrig Day. Courtesy of Tim Kurkjian

working fingers around the ball, and within only a few minutes, he was throwing like a ballplayer.

When we got to the field at Mount Saint Mary’s, Matt was surprised to see his partner, Katherine, his son, Michael, and his daughter, Lane. My daughter, Kelly, was there, also, as was our close family friend, Mike Toomey, a former player, coach and scout (and one of the best baseball men I have ever met). Matt asked, “Why are they here?”

A few minutes before first pitch, Coach Natoli presented Matt with a CU jersey. On the back were Matt’s name and the number he wore in college: M. Kurkjian 2. It was an emotional moment. Matt was startled, but flattered and deeply honored. He put on the jersey, walked to the mound and, from the dirt at the front of the mound, threw an athletic strike to the plate to senior catcher Tyler Shaffer. So, typical Matt — he refused to fail on a baseball diamond.

And then came one of the most wonderful, most powerful moments I’ve witnessed in 44 years of covering baseball: As he walked off the mound, Matt looked to his right, and the members of his family were all wearing identical CU jerseys with M. Kurkjian 2 written on the back. He looked further to his right and all 47 players on the

Catholic University team were lined up, all wearing CU jerseys: M. Kurkjian 2. What a tribute. Matt burst into tears, it was the first time I had seen him cry since his ALS diagnosis. He hugged his family as he wept. He hugged coach Natoli. “This is the best ever,” he said. “I can’t believe they did this for me.”

Matt’s days at CU were the greatest days of his life.

Now he was looking at every player on the CU team wearing a jersey with his name and his number on it. And CU, wearing those jerseys for both games of a doubleheader, naturally won both games. That’s how baseball works.

And then Coach Natoli did it again on April 2. He had Matt throw out the first ball at a doubleheader at CU against Juniata College: another athletic strike, this one to Coach Natoli. Only this time, most of the players from the 1977 championship team were there standing right next to Matt. It was almost as uplifting as the first ball ceremony in October because this time, he was surrounded by his teammates, his boys, CU’s most decorated team.

“Matt is my best friend,” teammate Mark Travaglini said that day. “Matt is an even better teammate.”

This is why baseball is such a beautiful game. It recognizes the big moments. It celebrates its players — honors them. It makes sure they know how many people care. This is what CU baseball has been doing for my family for 50 years.

Our family kept Matt’s diagnosis quiet for several months. He didn’t want anyone feeling sorry for him, or feeling sad when they thought about him. But in February, my son, Jeff, a country music radio show host, and I spoke at an ALS fundraiser in Las Vegas. That day, I received a call from the father of Oakland Athletics outfielder Stephen Piscotty, Mike Piscotty, whose wife, Gretchen, died of ALS in 2019. I received a call from Mike Crawford, the father of San

Francisco Giants shortstop Brandon Crawford, who has had a long friendship with the Piscotties and joined their fight. Those are two of so many families in baseball that want to bring awareness, and eventually a cure, to this horrible disease.

At the fundraiser that night, I met Teresa Thurtle, the ALS TDI (Therapy Development Institute) ambassador. She, too, offered any help she could to my family. She lost her father and her grandmother to ALS. Both were 49.

“This is the worst disease to be a part of,” she told me. “But it has the best support system to be a part of.”

Since his diagnosis, Matt and I have heard from many offering help, including former minor league outfielder Drew Robinson, who, in 2020, survived a suicide attempt, and now helps others cope with mental health, illness and tragedy. I spoke with basketball writer Tom Haberstroh, whose mom, Patty, has ALS. Tom had a huge role in making Lou Gehrig Day an annual event in Major League Baseball. ALS patient Chris Snow, a former baseball writer and now an executive for the Calgary Flames, told my brother, “whatever you need, call me, any time.” I hear often from my friend, Chicago Cubs/ESPN broadcast-



Tim Kurkjian (from left) with his brother, Matt, and family friend Mike Toomey. Courtesy of Tim Kurkjian

er Jon Sciambi, who runs Project Main St., which supports ALS patients. Jon lost his best friend, Tim Sheehy, to ALS in 2007.

Someday, I will lose my brother and best friend to ALS. My life, and the lives of our entire family, will never be the same. July 12, 2021, changed everything.

I would give anything to have my brother healthy again. But I will never forget the love and support he has received from family, friends and strangers. I will never forget what Coach Natoli has done for my brother and our family. I will never forget Coach Natoli’s words.

Greatest teammate I’ve ever had.

Greatest teammate ever.

That’s my brother and best friend, Matt: The Pride of the Kurkjian.

(Tim Kurkjian is an ESPN Senior Writer. This piece originally appeared on the ESPN.com on June 2, Lou Gehrig Day.)



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Arts & Culture

A Daughter Of Diaspora Finds Her Spark in Armenia

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — I got acquainted with Seda Devletian Papazian, a Belgian-Armenian now living in Yerevan, at the presentation of my book about Rouben Mamoulian. I appreciated that a repatriate who does not read Armenian fluently (yet speaking fluent Western Armenian), obtained the book. What was more interested me is Seda being a dance teacher in the past, so our next meeting was not too late, during which the following conversation ensued.



Seda, I am glad to have found another Diaspora Armenian figure in dance. How did dance enter your life?

I have always loved dancing, but when I was 14 years old, I started to dance seriously and every day after school I went to a dance class at the Royal Theatre of La Monnaie in Brussels. Maurice Bejart's dancers also trained in the same building. My parents did not agree to my becoming a dancer, they did not like that atmosphere, but they did not mind me being a dance teacher, considering it a more acceptable job. Nevertheless, I have occasionally appeared on stage in various performances, including classical and modern ballet, as well as in opera performances, such as Wagner's "The Valkyrie." After school, I went to Antwerp, where I studied for two years at the school of the Royal Ballet of Flanders, which specializes in training ballet teachers. At the age of 20, I graduated with a degree, went to Paris, got married, and began teaching ballet at the Conservatory of 16th arrondissement of Paris. I taught for almost 20 years, and at the same time I started dancing in the Armenian "Nairi" dance group. When I met the dancer and musician Gerard Madilian, we formed the "Armen Dance" duo and started staging and presenting Armenian dance performances. We performed in Belgium and France (Paris, Lyon, Strasbourg and in 1988 at the Festival of Avignon).

see DANCER, page 13



The vertiginous heels, Minérale, from JN. Mellor Club

Karine Arabian A Fashion Muse Rises

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PARIS — She has designed shoes for Madonna and jewelry for the House of Chanel. Karine Arabian: stylish, architectural, artistically pristine. Modish in the best sense of the word, this French-Armenian designer of accessories and footwear soared to the top of the European fashion world while still in her 30s.

Along with Alain Manoukian, Francis Kurkdjian and Alain Mikli, Arabian is part of a growing contingent of Armenian creators who sit at the very top of their craft. Arabian's work, however, stands out even among this elite group.

You can't mistake an Arabian creation: whether inspired by Sergei Paradjanov's "The Color of Pomegranates" or street style from the Paris banlieue, art breathes from every stitch, beauty peers at you from every angle. Hers are not always the easiest pieces to understand precisely because they are so unique, so different: like a novel by Proust, a blue period Picasso or a poem by Rimbaud, something always stares back at you in an Arabian creation, whispering: What am I exactly? How do I fit in to your lifestyle? Arabian challenges the wearer to question their daily choices and aesthetic preferences.

Several years ago, she closed her eponymous line for personal and business reasons. Less than a decade later, like a butterfly emerging from a gorgeous haute couture chrysalis, Arabian has created JN. Mellor Club. The concept is hip, stylish, environmentally conscious: millennial yet ageless. I sat down with Arabian to discuss her fascinating family history and to pick her wonderfully creative brain:

AMS: Where were you born? Please tell our readers a bit about your background.



see FASHION, page 16

Stubbornly Diving Inwards

Alan Semerdjian's
'Algorithms for Loss'

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

"However painful and strange and alienating that act may feel," Alan Semerdjian is determined to deliver something that goes beyond the euphemisms, the look-aways, and the cover-ups. To convey something "real," that is something that bypasses the "press briefings trying to spin and jostle and wrestle the truth to the ground in ways we've grown too accustomed to seeing," the award-winning poet, musician and educator dives into the deepest reaches of the soul to unearth the truth that has been pushed down, perhaps because it is too dark to confront. Semerdjian is "not afraid of what's below," however. The fifteen entries — 7:53 am-11:53 pm — of his experimental essay, "Algorithms for Loss," (April 24, 2022), take us "deep into our hearts," to bring us closer to the truth.

The focus of the essay is April 24, 2020, the day Kim Kardashian, the celebrity who shares her ancestry with the poet, tweeted on social media about his spoken word album, "The Serpent and the Crane," (released on April 24, 2020), which made him world famous instantaneously. That day becomes for Alan a day of introspection and meditation, of anger and indignation, perhaps also a day of survival and celebration, but not of reconciliation. "We don't shake hands and make up. When we think of genocide, we do other things with our hands," writes the poet. What happened to his people on April 24, 1915, when our intellectuals, artists and poets were rounded up by the Young Turk leadership and executed, has for Semerdjian its own unique trauma that may be beyond recovery. For the "Grandchildren of Genocide," birth is not about babies and families.

"Algorithms for Loss" goes beyond the poet's Armenian identity, however. It connects to the global calamities — the displacements, the Palestinian people's ongoing ordeal, the 44-day Artsakh war in 2020, the recent invasion of Ukraine, to name only a few — which inundate our lives.

"Now is a great time" to awaken folks to "do something," urges the poet. "Explore whatever is fiercely urgent for [you] in [your] present, in [your] now," Alan tells his Poetry Workshop students. Outside his classroom door at Herricks High School in New Hyde Park, N.Y., hangs a quote from Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad, which reminds him to "Do something. Start by saying something."

Semerdjian's "Must we lose it all" see LOSS, page 17



ARTS & CULTURE

A Daughter of Diaspora Finds Her Spark in Armenia

DANCER, from page 12

Our most successful work was “The Princess of Armenia,” which we performed in French and Armenian schools. We used to tell fairy tales to the children in French. I was dancing solo, Gerard was dancing a *shalakho*, and at the end we all were dancing the *kochari* at the heroes’ wedding. It was a very successful performance, everyone loved it.

But you were more involved in pedagogy.

Yes, in parallel with the Conservatory, I managed the Seda Devletian Papazian Dance School in Paris for about 20 years. I had hundreds of students, from 5-6 years old to 40 years old and over.

Were there any Armenians among them?

Very few. Once a sweet African girl came to me and surprised me by speaking Armenian. It turned out that her father is Armenian and the mother is African. A few weeks later, she came with a sweet Japanese girl. “Is she your friend?” I asked. “No, she is my sister,” she answered. It turned out that her father’s other wife is Japanese.

I see, you are speaking about Anouche



Seda Devletian Papazian in Yerevan.

and Vartouhi Yezeguelian, the daughters of French-Armenian businessman Raymond Yezeguelian.

That’s right. Anouche is very fond of Armenians; she speaks Armenian very well.

Yes, we worked together for a short

time in Yerevan. Seda, have you ever performed on an Armenian theme at your school?

At the end of the year, we always showed my performances in the graduation events. After the 1988 earthquake, I staged a play dedicated to Armenia with the music of Aznavour and others.

Where are your ancestors from?

My father, Noubar Devletian, was born in Brussels. His father had left Constantinople before the Genocide because he felt that the situation was not good. And my father’s mother was a survivor of Trabzon massacres. My father was engaged in the cigarette business. My mother, Mano Petrossian Devletian, was an Iranian-Armenian from Tehran. At the age of 20 she decided to go to America for university education, went through Europe, met my father in Brussels and neither went to America nor entered university. My parents were very fond of everything Armenian, thanks to them I grew up a good Armenian. When I was in Brussels, there were very few Armenians, no people from Armenia at all. My mother learned French later, so mostly thanks to her I learned Armenian. As an Iranian-Armenian, she had a great desire to help her compatriots. My father was a very respected, honored person. The Armenian community in Belgium used to elect a chairperson every four years, and my father has been elected twice.

And it is not surprising that the child of such a family lives in Armenia today.

I have been in Armenia for five years, and my two sons came in Yerevan three years ago, while my daughter is in France. All three of my children are very fond of Armenia. My language is French, I think in French, but when my first child was born, I decided to speak Armenian with her. Although my daughter lives in France, she speaks Armenian better than me.

In fact, your children are fourth-generation European Armenians, but today two of them live in Armenia, which is wonderful, and one of them has two children. As a new repatriate, what would you say about the life in Armenia and what would you like to convey to Diaspora Armenians?

I want to say to the Diaspora Armenians: come to live and work in Armenia! You can have a good life here: sure, there are difficulties, but where are they not? When I am in Paris, Armenians always talk only about the bad sides of Armenia. I tell them to come to Armenia and see also the good sides of Armenian life and people. It is very difficult to stay Armenian in diaspora, so your children have to grow up here, go to school here, so they will stay Armenian. My sons, my daughter in law and my grandchildren are really very happy here.

Even after the war?

Repatriation after the war should be encouraged even more. No matter how patriotic they are in the Diaspora, it is impossible to remain Armenian there forever. If Armenians have to go and live in the Diaspora, for whom do we work, for an empty country? Come here, listen with your ears, see with your own eyes the advantages of Armenia. Here we have “iGorts,” “Armenian Volunteer Corps,” “Birthright Armenia,” “Repat Armenia” helping people to find job in Armenia - I will gladly work for such organizations. There is so much good youth, a great potential in Armenia. After leaving the teaching, now I see my job in strengthening the ties between Armenia and the Diaspora. I see it more necessary today to encourage Diaspora Armenians and help them to come and work in Armenia. So I repeat my call to Diaspora Armenians: Come to Armenia!



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ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian

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George Mardikian shows off one of his world-famous shish kebabs at his San Francisco restaurant, Omar Khayyam's in a 1938 photo.

George Mardikian's Famous Chicken Tchakhokbelli

The chef who brought shish kebab to America escaped from a Turkish prison first. At 15, George Mardikian ran away from home to join an Armenian guerrilla force to avenge his family. After Armenia gained its short-lived independence in 1918, he returned to his mother in Constantinople, but he was captured by the Turks when war broke out again. He escaped from the prison camp, and with the help of his brother and sister, both of whom had already immigrated to the United States, he came to San Francisco and Fresno in 1922.

Haig G. Mardikian, George Mardikian's son, adds, "The Near East Relief (now known as the Near East Foundation) was instrumental in assisting my father to come to America. He had worked in the huge Near East Relief orphanage in Gyumri, Armenia as a Boy Scout leader. They helped to get him out of prison and to assure that he got on a boat to America. The first 50 pages of *Song of America*, George Mardikian's autobiography details these events. Today I serve as the Chairman of the Board of the Near East Foundation." For information, go to: <https://www.neareast.org/>

Somehow, Mardikian channeled the pain, suffering, and hunger from his survival of the Armenian Genocide: He went from a dishwasher to a world-famous San Francisco restaurant owner, philanthropist, and humanitarian who won the Medal of Freedom and dedicated his entire life to feeding and helping people. And he did all of this with a smile. Omar Khayyam's became the "celebrated Armenian restaurant with a Persian name in an American city," and it was legendary even in that gourmet's paradise of a California town.

Omar Khayyam's was a dining destination for San Franciscans for more than 40 years at its underground location near the corner of Powell and O'Farrell streets. Celebrities, politicians, and professionals paid upscale prices while armed service members and refugees ate for free. Its authentic shish kebab and bulgur pilaf were the main draw for a largely American clientele unfamiliar with such food. But the restaurant drew its life force from, as William Saroyan called him, "the big man with the bright face coming over to your table."

The timing was perfect in the 1930s and 1940s — America was falling in love with outdoor barbecues and fresh ingredients, and Mardikian was happy to share his novel-yet-accessible menu. Mardikian became a regular, smiling presence in *Sunset Magazine*, with sketches of him cooking alongside recipes for his Omar Khayyam's specials, such as his famous chicken tchakhokbelli (braised chicken in tomato juice, sherry and paprika), kousou kzarima, roast shank of lamb, and Haigagan Kebab (Armenian Mystery Package).

Mardikian was among America's first celebrity chefs and was as close to an Emeril Lagasse figure as San Francisco had at the time in terms of fame, relentless optimism, and generosity. Fine-dining guides and San Francisco Chronicle columnist Herb Caen celebrated him, NBC gave him his own radio show in the 1940s, and he wrote an autobiography and cookbook. Mardikian's menu included popular American fare like baked ham, breaded veal cutlets, and roast turkey for the uninitiated. His khorovadz, as he referred to it in Armenian, "is to Armenians what corned beef and cabbage is to the Irish."

"For over 50 years, George Mardikian stood at the helm of Omar Khayyam's, his world famous restaurant in downtown San Francisco. Customers from all echelons came to 200 Powell Street not just to indulge in once-exotic dishes like shish kebab and dolma, but to mingle with the energetic and passionate Mardik-

ian himself, who LIFE Magazine once referred to as 'the most favorable man in America,'" says Liana Aghajanian.*

Sophene Books, an independent publisher celebrating the rich literary legacy of Armenia and beyond, has now made the treasures of old Armenian literature available to a modern audience. Including famed San Francisco restaurateur, chef, author and philanthropist George Mardikian's cookbook, *Dinner at Omar Khayyam's*, first published in 1944.

This is a new edition of the 1944 classic by George Mardikian, America's first celebrity chef. Foreword by William Saroyan. Order at: <https://sophenebooks.com/blogs/dig-deeper/tagged/dinner-at-omar-khayyams>

Mardikian was influential in introducing a range of "exotic dishes" from Anatolia, Armenia and the Middle East to the American diet in masses. In his cookbook for all Americans, America's first celebrity chef reveals the culinary secrets that made his San Francisco establishment so famous. The recipes are for Armenian food, prepared in the Armenian fashion, but seasoned to the American palate. The dishes were "exotic and different, but thrifty, healthful, and easy, even for amateur chefs to prepare. His food was sophisticated enough for parties, but economical and well balanced enough to serve the whole family."

"He was the chef who brought shish kebab, kufte, dolma and ajem pilaff to America escaped from a Turkish prison first. Somehow, Mardikian channeled the pain and hunger from his survival of the Armenian Genocide: he went from a dishwasher to a world-famous San Francisco restaurant owner who won the Presidential Medal of Freedom and dedicated his life to feeding and helping people. He pioneered the introduction of Middle Eastern food to the public as early as the 1930s, and American diners got a taste of 'exotic' and 'foreign' Near East delicacies, including seasoned lentil soup, baked eggplant, lavash, paklava, and rose-petal jam."

Here's one of George Mardikian's favorite recipes for Chicken Tchakhokbelli, also known as the "Prince Mdivani Special," that was featured in *Sunset Magazine's* Kitchen Cabinet in 1944.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 2-pound chickens (each cut in 4 pieces)
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 1/3 cup sherry
- 1/2 cup tomato juice
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Pepper

PREPARATION

Melt the butter and fry the chicken until light brown. Remove the chicken to a baking pan. Fry the onions in the remaining butter until limp and golden, then pour over the chicken.

Add the remaining ingredients. Bake uncovered in a hot oven (400°) for one hour, turning the chicken at the end of the first half hour. The juices in the pan make a delicious gravy. Serve with rice pilaf.

A note from <<https://www.sfgate.com/author/greg-keraghosian/>> Greg Keraghosian:

Omar Khayyam's opened in 1938 in San Francisco to great acclaim from the San Francisco Chronicle's Herb Caen: "Bo-kays to George Mardikian, the Armenian chef whose culinary sleight-of-hand is drawing the celebrities to Omar Khayyam's," he wrote that year. As Caen intimated, Mardikian was as brilliant a marketer as he was a chef. He found a way to present his culture, best known to white Americans as working class and downtrodden, in a storybook dining setting ("Omar Khayyam" was a <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0050799/>> feature film in 1957). People dressed up and eagerly descended the stairs to a low-lit, walnut-paneled space with murals on the walls depicting scenes from the Rubaiyat poems attributed to the real-life Khayyam, who died in 1131. "You felt your emotions get stirred up there," said Levon Der Bedrossian, who visited Omar Khayyam's soon after emigrating to San Francisco in 1968. Mardikian used Armenian lore to broaden his menu's appeal. Such as his arkayagan venison soup, which he said dated 3,900 years to when an Armenian king would serve it as a victory stew to his court. And he was a passionate advocate for the health benefits of yogurt, which Armenians <<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/08/obituaries/rose-colombosian-helped-start-first-yogurt-plant-in-the-nation.html>> played the leading role in bringing to Americans. To find the starter to make your own yogurt at home, Mardikian wrote, "just open any telephone book and find a name ending with 'ian.'"

Many of George Mardikian's recipes are featured in *Breaking Bread* with William Saroyan, an authentic Armenian recipe book derived from the heritage of William Saroyan's Fresno and Bitlis, Armenia. An artistic and literary gem, it is a one-of-a-kind collector book offering the opportunity to prepare and sample foods common to William Saroyan and his fellow Armenians.

Order today:

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E-mail: janicemstevens@cs.com

<https://www.diningindiaspora.com/stories/2017/8/11/the-life-and-times-of-george-mardikian>

Omar Khayyam's classic dinner menu is available at: <http://ciadigitalcollections.culinary.edu/digital/collection/p16940coll1/id/9506>.



ARTS & CULTURE

Collection of Modern Art Trailblazer Joan Agajanian Quinn Makes East Coast Debut at Armenian Museum

ART, from page 1

Part of what makes the collection so unique is its foundation in friendship between artist and collector. “Few individuals have left such an indelible mark on the artistic landscape of Southern California more than the Quinns” says Wainwright. Newly married in the 1960s, Joan and

Jack took to collecting early. “We reveled in our friendship with the artists as we brought our communities together,” notes Quinn. Jack used his skills as a prominent and influential attorney to help an array of emerging artists and their dealers navigate the worlds of law and business, while Joan found herself both muse and promoter.

The companion exhibit, “Discovering Takouhi: Portraits of Joan Agajanian Quinn,” curated by Natalie Varbedian and Gina Grigorian, includes Armenian artists such as Dahlia Elsayed, Jean Kazanjian, Silvina Der Meguerditchian, Ara Oshagan, Zaven Sarkissian, and Aram Saroyan. The distinctive works are a selection from Quinn’s unprecedented collection of portraits consisting of over 300 gifts by friends who have painted, sculpted and photographed her image in their style.

“We are incredibly excited to exhibit these prominent works owned by American-Armenian collector Joan Agajanian Quinn” says AMA Executive Director Jason Sohigian. “We are a living museum that pre-



Sophia Gasparian, Untitled (Portrait of Joan Agajanian Quinn)



Ed Ruscha Mocha Standard #28/100, 1969 Silkscreen 30 1/4" x 44 3/4"

serves and shares ancient and medieval artifacts and has a long tradition of also highlighting modern art in our galleries. These are certainly exhibits you will not want to miss.”

Quinn is the co-host of Beverly Hills View and has been the producer and host of the Joan Quinn Profiles for more than 35 years. The Los Angeles native was West Coast editor of Andy Warhol’s Interview, society editor of Hearst’s Los Angeles Herald Examiner, and the founding West Coast editor of Condé Nast Traveler. She has

been appointed to an array of city and state commissions, and in 2017 Joan received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

The exhibition opens on Thursday, June 16 with a reception for Museum members at 5 p.m. and a preview for non-members at 7 p.m. It runs from June 16 to November 30 and is generously sponsored by the JHM Charitable Foundation.

The Armenian Museum of America’s galleries are open Thursday through Sunday from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., and it is located at 65 Main Street.

‘The Hidden Map’ Premiering on PBS in Hundreds of U.S. Cities Beginning June 5

LOS ANGELES — Ani Hovannisian’s “The Hidden Map” is being about 1,000 times primarily between June 5-13, 2022, across the nation in cities from Boston, Massachusetts to Juneau, Alaska on PBS stations nationwide.

“The Hidden Map” takes viewers deep into the ancestral Armenian homeland, where a chance meeting between an Armenian-American granddaughter of genocide survivors and a Scottish explorer leads to a joint odyssey beneath the surface of modern-day Turkey, uncovering buried secrets, brave resilience and the hidden map.

“It’s time,” said Hovannisian. “To know

lease, viewers who pledge even a nominal amount to PBS will help ensure additional airings and receive unique gifts, including hand-crocheted dolls made by women in Goris, Armenia — among them displaced citizens of Artsakh working toward economic stability. This is a rare opportunity for individuals and communities to be directly involved with bringing this human story of heartbreak, discovery and hope to life for millions of Americans, while touching the lives of Armenians today.

To find program dates and times, which also include in-studio conversations with the filmmaker, viewers can check their



Filmmaker Ani Hovannisian and PBS host Carla Garapedian in PBS studio

that the silenced voices and stories of our people, of truth, are going to resonate into the homes and consciousness of perhaps millions of Americans is hugely filling.” She noted that she couldn’t have chosen a better home for her life’s most important work — four journeys and seven years in the making — and she is thankful that PBS feels the same.

PBS’s historic decision to distribute this independent film to 330 stations comes on the heels of an outpouring of viewer support when it debuted locally in Southern California. With the film’s national re-

lease, viewers who pledge even a nominal amount to PBS will help ensure additional airings and receive unique gifts, including hand-crocheted dolls made by women in Goris, Armenia — among them displaced citizens of Artsakh working toward economic stability. This is a rare opportunity for individuals and communities to be directly involved with bringing this human story of heartbreak, discovery and hope to life for millions of Americans, while touching the lives of Armenians today.

To find program dates and times, which also include in-studio conversations with the filmmaker, viewers can check their local schedules at pbs.org/tv_schedules/ or thehiddenmap.com. Most PBS stations have multiple channels. “The Hidden Map” has earned more than a dozen international awards and honors, and was considered for three 2021 Primetime Emmys, including Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking. Among many notable presentations in the U.S. and abroad was a special in-person screening in the U.K. Parliament.

Hovannisian has traveled the world producing stories for non-fiction television programs, and reported the Arme-



Steven Sim and Ani Hovannisian in the ruins of Khulavank, Kharpert

nian news on Horizon Television for more than a decade. She is the daughter of Prof. Richard and Dr. Vartiter Kotcholosian Hovannisian, beacons of truth and humanity

to whom she dedicates the film. Ani and her husband Armenio have two children, Sophe and Daron, named after the ancestral homes of their great-grandparents.



ARTS & CULTURE

Karine Arabian

A Fashion Muse Rises

FASHION, from page 12

KA: I was born and grew in Paris. I first studied literature at the Sorbonne Nouvelle and then my passion for fashion got the best of me and I entered ESMOD [École supérieure des arts et techniques de la mode, a French private school of fashion], then the Studio Berçot at the end of the 1980s, beginning of the 1990s. It was an effervescent and creative time for fashion. I started off as an assistant to a few designers and then the First Gulf War broke out. A whole bunch of us designers found ourselves out of work, so we started our own companies while we were rather young.

AMS: Where is your family from originally? When and under what circumstances did they come to France?

KA: My grandparents arrived during the 1920s as refugees from the Armenian Genocide. They came from the Anatolian heartland and like many Armenians found refuge in France. My paternal grandfather spoke excellent French: as a result, he quickly found work in Paris and was able to bring over his entire family. Both my parents were born in France in the same neighborhood, called Gentilly in the Parisian suburbs, where a large Armenian community thrived at the time. His entire family worked in the home crafts/clothing sector, so my father quite naturally became

KA: Researching the history of Armenians in fashion made me realize that I belong to a long and ancient line of artisans and designers who were obsessed with upholding only the highest standards. This emphasis on excellence was repeatedly drilled into my head at home.

When I discovered for example that Schiaparelli's surreal sweaters were made by an Armenian woman, I couldn't believe it! She not only knitted the sweaters, but she designed many of them herself — that is what interested me the most.

Which is to say that while Armenians have a long crafts tradition, what really fascinated me was to discover their creative power, the taste and refinement that these Armenians introduced to French fashion.

AMS: How did your own career kick off? What are most proud of?

KA: My career really began in 1994 when I participated in the "Festival de la Mode de Hyères" which is now the most important fashion contest in France. I entered my jewelry and accessories and won the competition. After that, I began designing jewelry under my own name but also for houses such as Swarovski and Chanel. This was a real learning experience for me, as it taught me the demands of working with a major luxury goods house.

In 2000 I founded my own line of shoes, leather goods, jewelry, and accessories. The company was in operation for 14 fascinating years, over the course of which I was able to create an entire universe of accessories which a woman can wear without it being a disguise of any sort — a universe at once sensual and creative without ever being excessive. I always try to find the true strength of each line that I create.

In 2000, I created my first line of shoes with rounded tips. This was a first, a precursor to later trends because at the time we were in the midst of "porno-chic," an aggressive style that favored sharp, pointy tips — a very sexed-up style of fashion.

After that, many designers followed in my footsteps, including Marc Jacobs and Chloé. By the year 2000, and then definitely by 2010, rounded tips graced most women's shoe wear...

The Karine Arabian brand: a Parisian imprint and an international success in Asia, the United States, Russia, etc. Clients included stars such as Audrey Tautou, Vanessa Paradis, Scarlett Johansson, Madonna, Beth Ditto and many others. That adventure ended in 2015. Then I took some time off to process those incredible and wonderfully hectic years. Running a business at the breakneck speed of the fashion world is exhausting and you have no time for a personal life. I started a family and reconnected with a more personal type of creativity.

AMS: Which brings us to your present endeavor. Let's talk about this wonderfully exciting new creation, JN. Mellor Club. What's special about this new line?

KA: I created JN. Mellor club with my partner Franck Blais, a graphic designer and artistic director and former art gallery



Unique objects made from cast-off pieces of leather

owner. JN. Mellor Club is meant to bring together our expertise as well as our common passion for creativity. It's a brand that makes objects and accessories that exist at the boundaries of fashion, where art and design intersect.

AMS: So the idea is to create leather goods and jewelry that double as works of art—is that correct?

KA: The idea is not to fixate on the everyday notion of what an accessory is, but rather to free ourselves from fashion's shackles and stereotypes. Going from the object to the accessory give us the freedom to broaden our creativity and to bring our own inspirations to life. And yes, that's also the idea: we create accessories that are as beautiful when worn on the body as when they rest in your living room like works of art.

AMS: The name you chose for your new brand is intriguing as well, mysterious in a way—what does JN. Mellor Club signify exactly?

KA: JN.MELLOR CLUB tells our own personal stories and what we want to convey through the brand. So, to begin with, JN are the initials of our respective mothers. Then we wanted a name that wasn't explicitly gendered, neither feminine nor masculine, or both or something in between. Mellor is the name of a society columnist from the 1920s but also the real name of Joe Strummer (John Mellor) who was the lead singer for the Clash — and 1/8 Armenian by the way! JN. Mellor therefore brings together questions of both gender and rock n' roll — two things of major importance to us. Then there is the word "club" itself which brings together the notions of community, of coming together, of transversality, but also an image that inspires us: that of a nightclub, a sports club, an English Club etc... JN. Mellor Club is a long name for a brand, and hard to retain, but once you have it fixed inside your head it stays there forever!

AMS: Where do you find your inspiration? Who has influenced you or your brand's style?

KA: We cling to the notion of creating accessories that privilege sensuality, and that are composed of exceptional materials that take on singular forms. We collect old leather material from the deadstock from the big luxury goods houses because this gives us access to the most beautiful leather and lets us participate in rigorous upcycling.

We're trying to free ourselves from any fashion influence per se and instead create bridges between art and design. We create objects from rubble that we find in the street or in construction sites, then we cover them in beautiful leather and sew everything by hand in the atelier tradition. Starting with found items, imposed on us by circumstance or hazard—this gives us the beginnings of our own personal alphabet. To take care of something that has been thrown away creates a puzzle. We take something that was considered obsolete and then we transform it, we change its status and offer it a second life. This is also another expression of the poetry that we find in our everyday lives.

AMS: Why a club though? That notion has something exclusionary to it, no?

KA: No. Here the club is a way of not isolating ourselves, of not remaining closed in on our own creativity. It means favoring collaborations with artists and designers, creating bridges between worlds, and growing our community. It also means that members of our club share our common values and the privileged moments that surround the creative process, in the wider sense of the word. It's a way of seeing luxury goods as a vector of social diversity.

AMS: What are your goals or aspirations for JN. Mellor Club? And finally where can one purchase or look at these truly beautiful objets d'art ?

KA: JN. Mellor Club is a place where one can buy accessories and art objects, but where one can also attend an exhibition or a poetry reading. We want to make JN. Mellor Club a brand centered around "the art of living." Until we have that location in place, we're going to organize events with art galleries or out-of-the-ordinary locations so that our creations can enter into a dialogue with other artists. We are also creating an e-shop accessible from our web site.

AMS: This is all very exciting. Thank you, Karine.

KA: Thank you Christopher.

Learn More About Karine Arabian and JN. Mellor Club: www.jnmellorclub.com

Read Les Arméniens de la Mode : <https://www.amazon.com.au/Karine-Arabian-Armeniens-Armenians-17th-21st/dp/2757200836>



A bag from JN. Mellor Club

a master tailor. On my maternal side, my grandfather worked in the family atelier — he then started his own business as a cobbler and bootmaker.

AMS: It's no exaggeration then to say that you have fashion in your bones?

KA: I remember the smell of leather and glue as a little child, and the work done repairing beautiful women's shoes. I used to create all sorts of costumes for my Barbie dolls using spare fabric left behind in my parents' atelier. I was at ease with manual work, so creating clothes and customizing them comes quite naturally to me.

AMS: In your gorgeous and informative book The Armenians in Fashion (Les Arméniens de la Mode) you describe the rather remarkable contributions that French Armenians have made and continue to make in fashion and luxury goods.



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

JUNE 16 — Opening of “On the Edge: Los Angeles Art 1970s – 1990s from the Joan and Jack Quinn Family Collection” and “Discovering Takouhi: Portraits of Joan Agajanian Quinn.” 75+ artists including John Altoon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Frank Gehry, Helmut Newton, Ed Ruscha, and Aram Saroyan. Members Reception 5:00, Non-Members Preview 7:00. Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown, MA.

JUNE 16 - Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Join us for **UNDER THE STRAWBERRY MOON**. Thursday at 8:30pm. Featuring Chocolate Dipped Strawberries, hosted by Overbird Café

JUNE 20 — Holy Trinity Greg Hintlian Memorial Golf Tournament. Marlboro Country Club, 11 a.m. shot gun, Scramble Format or Best Ball. Men and Women's Division Prize Prizes for Longest Drive and Closest to the Pin - Men and Women Morning Coffee, BBQ Lunch at the 9th Hole and Dinner. REGISTER NOW on line at: <https://htaac.org>

JUNE 24 — Sayat Nova Dance Company will celebrate its 35th anniversary with a Wine Soiree. Experience a summer's night under the stars in the company of friends, indulging in an array of Armenian wines. Friday, Gore Place, Waltham. Donation \$100. Purchase deadline June 15. Purchase tickets at Sayatnova.com/35th-anniversary.

JUNE 26 - Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Join us for **LABYRINTH WALKING WELLNESS** Sunday at 2 p.m. Introduction to the health benefits Kristin Asadourian and Katrina Piehler, co-facilitators

JULY 6 — Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway. Boston. Join us for **TEA & TRANQUILITY**. Wednesday at 4 p.m. Meet & Greet

JULY 14 — Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Join us for **UNDER THE RASPBERRY MOON**. Thursday at 8pm. Featuring the Hye Guys Ensemble

AUGUST 3 — Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Join us for **TEA & TRANQUILITY**. Wednesday at 4 p.m. Meet & Greet

AUGUST 14 — Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. Join us for **UNDER THE RASPBERRY MOON**. Sunday at 7:30 p.m. Featuring the Black Sea Salsa Combo

SEPTEMBER 9 — Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter invites everyone to a cultural event honoring author, editor, philologist, educator

and public figure, Jirair Tanielian from Beirut, Lebanon, for his 60 years of service and dedication to Armenian culture and the community. Friday, 7 p.m., Baikar Building, 755 Mt. Auburn, Watertown. Details to follow. For more information, please contact us at bostontca@gmail.com

SEPTEMBER 18 — Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston. **LET'S CELEBRATE THE PARK'S 10th ANNIVERSARY SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT THE PARK!** Sunday at 3 p.m. Featuring the Leon Janikian Ensemble.

SEPTEMBER 21 — Gala Benefit Celebrating Contributions of Our Nation's Immigrants. InterContinental Hotel, Boston. 6pm 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

NEW JERSEY

JUNE 17 — Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group in association with Huyser Music Ensemble presents “Huyser and Friends Project: Harmony,” an open-air concert dedicated to the 75th Anniversary of Tekeyan Cultural Association. Featuring Gohar Hovhannisyan & Band from Armenia. Friday, 7:30 p.m. at St. Thomas Armenian Church, 174 Essex Dr. Tenafly, NJ. Donation \$60, includes Aran Wines from Artsakh. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. For tickets call Marie: 201-745-8850 or Talar: 201-240-8541 or visit: www.itsmyseat.com/harmony

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.

WISCONSIN

JUNE 26 — St. Hagop Armenian Church Annual Madagh 2022 Picnic, Racine, Sunday. On the Johnson Park grounds. Open to the community/public with free admission, offering traditional Armenian food for purchase. For information, contact Zohrab Khaligian @ (262) 818-6437 or khaligian@netzero.net or https://www.facebook.com/Armenian-Madagh-Picnic-St-Hagop-Church-Racine-Wisconsin-250610052493495/?tn-str=k*F

Stubbornly Diving Inwards: Alan Semerdjian's ‘Algorithms for Loss’

LOSS, from page 12

to finally understand?” is heartbreaking. Indeed, the poet's endless questioning brings us frighteningly close to the (unutterable) truth: “How come they don't see it?” “When do we wake up?” “How far does one go before the articulation of trauma and loss become too much, unbearable?” “Are there limits to diving inwards?” Alan's questions haunt us, and not having any answers is frustrating. But isn't it all about asking the right questions, anyway?

Perhaps there is no happiness in our current context, and what the poet is trying to do is “to make sense of something that is incomprehensible.” He is in fact trying to put into words what no one can put into words. With the Fool in Shakespeare's King Lear, whose prophecy he is examining with his students, the devoted teacher knows full well that things have already fallen into decay, and that going after the truth only makes an “already difficult world” even more difficult. He is also aware, however, that there are “unknown treasures in the infinite depths of the soul waiting to be revealed,” as the great visionary Kahlil Gibran advises us. “Of what can I speak save of that which is even now moving within your souls?” the Prophet of the title of Gibran's classic tells the inhabitants of the town gathered to hear of “your truth.”

Semerdjian believes in the goodness of life. His writing affirms the value of life over “the senseless loss of lives,” and the responsibility of the human species — if it can still be considered human, that is — to

protect that life. The poet does not expect the truth to be so unpleasant that it needs to be hidden in the darkest corners of the soul. Perhaps add just enough weight for the heart to open up without breaking, and “maybe, just maybe, if the heart can bear the weight, it may open a bit...and just enough for some light to seep in,” he writes. It is no coincidence that Semerdjian uses Gostan Zaryan's, “Perhaps it is our function to illuminate some dark corner of the universe,” as the epigraph for his 2009 collection of poems, *In The Architecture of Bone*.

One of the world's most popular users of social media tweets about Semerdjian's album of poems focusing on raising global awareness of the Armenian Genocide and its century-long denial by the Turkish government. Kim's tweet gives Alan the recognition he deserves, but never got, his friends tell him. One wonders though if that is the kind of recognition the poet seeks. To what extent did Kim read the poems she tweeted about? Does it even matter?

“Algorithms for Loss” has earned its rightful place in my mind's library next to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, two novels that depict



Alan Semerdjian

one day in the life of respective characters making use of the stream-of-consciousness technique. Alan's experimental essay has a smaller scale, obviously, yet the poet's insights into the heaven we have made into a hell—“What did we once know and how did we know it?”—rank his writing among

“the best which has been thought and said,” to borrow the words of the celebrated nineteenth century English writer Matthew Arnold—with or without the recognition of Kim Kardashian.

“For my parents, all that mattered was being Armenian,” writes Semerdjian. Indeed, the poet speaks for every Armenian when he writes of his parents, who “used to talk about Cher, [the American singer of Armenian ancestry] as if she were a family friend.” His mom asks him to “invite Kim over for manti. Tanti Anahid knows someone who makes the most delicious ones,” he writes. The depth of reference of his, “most Turks know a little/Armenian; most Armenians know a lot of/Turkish—but I wasn't born there,” is stunning.

I met Alan years ago in Louisville, Kentucky, at the annual reading of the College Board's Advanced Placement Exam. On a professional night, reserved for teachers reading their own work, Alan took the podium with confident steps and, unapologetically, introduced himself as an Armenian American to a roomful of high school teachers and college professors. The young man's unusually strong sense of his Armenian identity was astonishing. “I owe it all to my grandfather,” he later told me.



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COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

Armenia, Greece and Cyprus Triangle
May be in the Offing



By Edmond Y.
Azadian

Armenia, Greece and Cyprus have been destined to be natural allies as victims of Turkey’s crimes against them, but for a variety of reasons, those friendly relations have not lived up to their potential. But the landscape is changing, once again due to the Turkish factor, and this coalition may finally bear fruit.

The competition to explore the newly-discovered wealth of hydrocarbon in the Eastern Mediterranean, the rise of Greece’s importance in the NATO structure and Turkey’s isolation in the Arab-Muslim world, have set into motion a new dynamic in the politics of the region.

Armenia, which was completely isolated during the 44-day war, except for some lip service from Europe, may join the fray to develop its defense capabilities. As Azerbaijan has been rearming, its authoritarian leader, Ilham Aliyev, has warned Armenia against “revanchism,” and against rearming itself, so that Armenia could remain at Baku’s mercy.

Russia needs Azerbaijan more than it needs Armenia and certainly will be cautious in supplying arms to Armenia. Given the existential threat from Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia is entitled to seek its defense needs elsewhere — or anywhere.

Although Greece and Turkey had joined NATO in 1952, Greece was always treated as the lesser member, with Turkey always being favored against the latter. To press the point, a ration of 7/10 was maintained in the procurement of arms to the two countries. That is why Athens was first to blink every time there was a standoff between the two countries.

The narrative around the Turkish occupation of Cyprus in 1974 has been distorted to present the Greek side to be the provocateur. This narrative suggests that the Greek military junta is to blame for orchestrating a coup against the legally-elected President Archbishop Makarios through an opportunist called Nikos Samson who vowed to unite the island with Greece (Enosis).

To begin with, that junta came to power through the good graces of Washington and could not dare to take any actions without the consent of the US. The junta’s actions legitimized Turkey’s aggression based on the 1960 agreements of Zurich and London assigning Turkey as the protector of Turkish minority (18.2 percent of the population at the time) although nobody had threatened that minority in the first place.

The crux of the matter is that when Turkey invaded Cyprus, Henry Kissinger, then US secretary of state, warned the Greek side to stay put, because if Greece tried to intervene, it would meet the US Airforce. Ever since, Turkey has been occupying 37 percent of the island and altering its demographic profile by settling Anatolian Turks in the Turkish Republic of Cyprus in the north, a country they carved out which is recognized by no country other than Turkey.

More recently, Greece’s former socialist government had reduced the country into a basket case. But Kyriakos Mitsotakis’ center-right New Democracy Party won a landslide election in 2019 and brought about a turnaround to the country’s economy and politics.

Although Turkey brags that it has the second strongest army after the US in the NATO structure, Greece no longer lags far behind. As Turkey continues to abuse its power and thus erode its standing in NATO, sympathy and support is shifting to Greece.

After Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in May, a spokesperson called the two countries to resolve their problems through diplomacy and characterized Greece as “an irreplaceable ally and key ally of the United States in NATO,” while describing Turkey as “an important US partner and important ally in NATO.”

The characterizations are very subtle but clear enough to make clear their place in US foreign policy.

Along with the US, other NATO members are realigning with Greece. One country notable in changing its tone is Germany, which historically has had an affinity for the Turks since World War I (and hence its complicity in the Armenian Genocide). That change seemed to come about when Ankara threatened the sovereignty of several Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. At a recent press conference in Berlin, a spokesperson for the government stated that Chancellor Olaf

Scholz “is of the opinion that, given the current situation, it is necessary for all NATO allies to stand together and refrain from provocations between themselves.” Invading Greek airspace and flying over Greek islands is not OK, adding, “we cannot accept the questioning of the sovereignty of member-states of the European Union.”

The change in the German stance came after the Greek premier met with the Scholz followed by a strong and clear statement from French President Emmanuel Macron in defense of Greece’s sovereignty in the face of Turkish threats.

Turkey has been violating Greek air space regularly and recently it has conducted mock raids on those islands in military exercises with Azerbaijani forces. Most probably, the latter is repaying its debt to Turkey, which helped Baku win the 44-Day War against Armenia.

Turkey’s Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also has threatened Greece a few times, asking Athens to demilitarize the Aegean islands, or face Turkish occupation (“challenge their sovereignty”). In his turn, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has scolded the Greek government, threatening them in his own unique style: “You keep putting on shows for us with your planes. What are you doing? Pull yourself together. Do you not learn lessons from history?”

This last threat was perhaps a reference to the Atatürk period, when Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos’ forces had occupied Smyrna and President Atatürk, supported by Russia’s Vladimir Lenin with arms, money and supplies, pushed the Greek forces to the sea as he expelled the Armenians from Cilicia. But what brought Mr. Erdogan’s anger to a boil was Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis’ successful trip to Washington in May, where he sealed a deal for F-35 fighter jets, while lobbying against including Turkey in the F-16 fighter jet program during his speech at the joint session of the US Congress.

Turkey has been trying to mend fences with Saudi Arabia and Israel. Erdogan’s trip to Riyadh did not yield any major results other than warm accolades from Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. The latter’s return trip to Ankara was initially greeted with jubilation, only for the Turkish government to find out later that the crown prince had included in the same trip visits to Greece and Cyprus as well, to balance his policy.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had earlier stood by the quartet of Greece, Egypt, Cyprus and Israel, which had isolated Turkey in the energy rivalry in the Eastern Mediterranean.

There are also some reports that the US may move its air base from Incirlik to Greece — its ace for pushing for its own agenda in the US. Mr. Erdogan had been complaining about the 12 military bases on the Aegean islands.

Greece has recovered its economy and military might and has responded to Turkish threats, saying that “Ankara will pay a steep price in any military adventure.”

Mr. Erdogan’s run of bad decisions and foreign policy snubs could not come at a worse time; his country’s economy is sagging and Turkey is further isolated while Erdogan has been strategizing to win the 2023 election, celebrate the centennial of the republic and anoint himself as the second Suleyman the Magnificent or Atatürk.

It looks like Armenia may make gains as a result of the Greek-Turkish standoff. For several years now, Armenia has had a military training program with Greece.

As Turkey threatens Greece with a new war, Athens has taken the courageous step of sending a military delegation to Armenia. Indeed, on June 2, Armenia’s Defense Minister Suren Papikyan received a Greek delegation headed by the Deputy National Defense Minister Nikolaos Hardalias. Papikyan presented an overview of the situation after the 44-Day War and emphasized the need to develop a partnership in the military-technical sphere. Mr. Hardalias noted that warm and friendly relations between the two countries oblige them to also meet the existing challenges.

Armenia has also similar relations with the government of Cyprus. Although these countries share the same history, this time around, Turkey has pushed them closer. Thus, Armenia will have an alternative source for developing its defense capabilities and Moscow should understand that an alternate choice in no way compromises its alliance obligations with Russia.

After all, Azerbaijan, under the same treaty obligations towards Moscow, has been building its arsenal through purchases from Belarus, Ukraine and in particular, from Israel, while offering no apologies to anyone.





COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Erdogan Expands Political Reach to France and Throughout Europe

I wrote last week about Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's plans to collect votes from Turkish Americans for his reelection next year by opening an office in Washington for his ruling party (AKP) and hiring his cousin, Dr. Halil Mutlu, as a registered lobbyist. Already, Erdogan has scored an initial political success in the United States with the victory of Turkish-American Dr. Mehmet Oz's in the Pennsylvania Republican primary for the U.S. Senate.

This week, I would like to report President Erdogan's similar political efforts in France by planting Turkish moles in the French legislature. This has been the long-term objective of Erdogan ever since 2010, when he urged his compatriots in France, during his visit to Paris, to run for political office.

Naturally, no one can object to Turks in France and the United States to run for political office. However, when such political action is prompted and supported by a foreign government, in this case Turkey, and its autocratic leader, serious concerns are raised that these Turkish politicians can become a tool in the hands of Erdogan to export his despotic policies beyond Turkish borders and propagate anti-Armenian positions.

Heeding Erdogan's marching orders, Ali Gedikoglu, founder of the Strasbourg-based Equality and Justice Party, "presented 50 candidates in the 2017 [French] legislative elections," Intelligence Online reported. "Gedikoglu is also known to be a long-time close associate of the Turkish foreign affairs minister and founding AKP member, Mevlüt Çavusoglu."

For the upcoming June 12 and 19, 2022 French Parliamentary elections, the Turkish news website Medyaturk, in collaboration with the French version of Turkish government-owned Anadolu Agency, has been promoting three Turkish candidates: "French-Turkish dual citizens Celil Yilmaz (for 5th constituency of Ain); Yalcin Ayvali (14th constituency of Rhône); and Ramazan Calli (5th constituency of Saône-et-Loire)," a candidate of the Union of French Muslim Democrats. All three are "involved in the Strasbourg-based association Cojep (Conseil pour la justice, l'égalité et la paix), whose name translates as council for justice, equality and peace," according to Intelligence Online. Created in 1985, Cojep has an annual budget of 300,000 euros. It "advocates for the interests of the Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 'Turkish Justice and Development Party' or AKP, to which its leadership is close."

Candidate Celil Yilmaz is President of the Cojep association and former

town councilor for Nantua (east of France). Cojep's director Gedikoglu is an active denialist of the Armenian Genocide in the European Parliament where he is registered as a lobbyist with the Parliament's Transparency Registry. He is also described as "the driving force behind the AKP's media presence and charity work in France," according to Intelligence Online.

Given the widespread recognition of the Armenian Genocide throughout Europe, Turks who deny the Genocide become the laughing stock of Europeans, just as in the United States, after both chambers of congress and President Biden recognized the Genocide. Turkish denials of the Armenian Genocide are the equivalent of trying to prove that "the earth is flat."

Candidate Yilmaz was "indicted in 2018 by the Paris prosecutor's office for 'incitement to hatred,'" according to Intelligence Online. "Yilmaz demonstrated his capacity to rally people to his side when, in just a few minutes via social media, he managed to gather a hundred Turks to counter a pro-Kurdish demonstration in front of the Turkish consulate in Lyon in January 2018."

Intelligence Online revealed that "Yilmaz also arranged for Cojep staff to meet with an official delegation from the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC] that had travelled to talk with senior AKP members at its headquarters in Turkey in August 2021. The DRC party included President Félix Tshisekedi's brother Roger Tshisekedi. Yilmaz also relies on Cojep's Vice President for international relations, Sati Arik, who is a substitute on the board of AKP's women's branch 'AKP Kadın Kollari.' Arik, who hails from Strasbourg, is close to the Turkish-German AKP Member of Parliament Zafer Sirakaya. According to her biography on the party's website, she writes reports on "Muslims in France" for Sirakaya. The other two candidates, Ayvali and Calli, only show their association with Cojep via social media, though Calli is its local contact person for Montceau-les-Mines, eastern France."

In addition to the United States and France, Erdogan has set up a chain of lobbying groups throughout Europe. They consist of "Union of European Turkish Democrats (Union des démocrates turcs européens) created by the AKP in Brussels [Belgium] in 2003 to back Turkey's candidature to join the European Union. This entity has since become the parent company of several micro-parties close to the AKP, such as "Be.one" in Belgium, the Multicultural Law Party (Multicultural Recht Partij) in the Netherlands and the Alliance for Innovation and Justice (Bündnis für Innovation und Gerechtigkeit) in Germany," according to Intelligence Online.

This extensive Turkish lobbying effort should be confronted by everyone, not just Armenians. Even though Turkey is a bankrupt country, President Erdogan, has chosen to use his country's limited financial resources to arm its military and disseminate Turkish propaganda around the world.

LETTERS

Why Is Jewish Online Magazine Lavishing Azerbaijan with Praise?

To the Editor:

What possessed *The Tablet*, "a daily online magazine of Jewish news, ideas, and culture," to publish filmmaker François Margolin's ludicrous paean to Azerbaijan, which has precious little in it that is Jewish, news, ideas, or culture? Anticipating blowback, the author attempts to preempt criticism of his work, claiming a sort of high ground by asserting that he is simply "looking into the topic, which is the founding principle of journalism and documentary filmmaking." However, his work in this article is light years from reaching such a standard.

Margolin claims that "Nagorno-Karabakh, seen from the Azerbaijani side, is a topic about which it is nearly impossible to write without finding yourself immediately accused of being funded by the government of Azerbaijan." Indeed, Margolin should be given the benefit of the doubt and not accused of such a thing without evidence. In practice, though, recirculating Baku's propaganda pro bono rather than for pay is a distinction without a difference.

Liam Hoare, writing in *The Tablet*, has cautioned against the instinct "to give Azerbaijan a pass for the simple reason that the state is good to its Jews, strong on anti-Semitism, and friendly towards Israel. It's a rare combination, I'll concede, but that instinct is lazy and sloppy, anti-intellectual and debasing, and ultimately dangerous." Although writing in 2015, Hoare's description fits Margolin's puff-piece to a 'T.' "Nothing should justify journalists conducting public relations for one of the most authoritarian governments in Europe," Hoare writes. "If Azerbaijan is an example of anything, it's how to pull the wool over impressionable visitors' eyes," he aptly observes. Unlike Margolin, Hoare provides facts to support his statements.

Azerbaijan's efforts to gain favorable depictions through bribery are well known. The corruption of Azerbaijan's ruling Aliyev/Pashayev clan has been documented by the Guardian and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), among other entities. Transparency International writes that "The ruling family has extended its reach into virtually all lucrative sectors of the economy and patronage networks permeate all spheres of public life and hamper the long-term economic and social development prospects of the country."

According to Human Rights Watch, "Azerbaijan's government continues to wage a vicious crackdown on critics and dissenting voices. The space for independent activism, critical journalism, and opposition political activity has been virtually extinguished as so many activists, human rights defenders, and journalists have been arrested and jailed, and laws and regulations restricting the activities of independent groups and their ability to secure funding adopted."

These assessments are not what Margolin would call "the Armenian point of view" nor are they manifestations of a (mythical) "Christian-centric, pro-Armenia narrative that saturates Western media," as Margolin absurdly claims. They are the damning verdicts of international watchdog organizations.

Margolin writes that "Azerbaijan has the reputation of being led by a horrible dictator, or rather a family of dictators who pass on power from father to son," giving the impression that Azerbaijan merely has an image problem. The fact is that by any objective measure, Azerbaijan is ruled by a brutally repressive regime whose crimes go far, far beyond the all-too-familiar cult of personality habit of having "presidential portraits adorn every road in the country," which is about the worst deed Margolin attributes to the government. It is led by a dictator: full stop.

Margolin, scrambling for euphemisms, allows that the Azerbaijani regime "can be described as authoritarian." It can be described as authoritarian because, if the word has any meaning, it is authoritarian: full stop. He admits that "Azerbaijan is far from being a paragon of democracy as we understand the word." Indeed, it is far from a "paragon of democracy" as anyone understands of the word, if they understand the word to mean that the Azerbaijani people have any say in how the country is governed. It is not a

democracy: full stop.

Likewise, it is simply not adequate to concede, as Margolin does, that in Azerbaijan "the press is not formally free." It is not free: full stop. If Margolin truly embraced the principles of journalism and documentary filmmaking that he purports to espouse he would have shared with his readers that Azerbaijan is currently ranked a dismal 154 out of 180 countries by Reporters Without Borders. Margolin "do[es] not believe Armenia is much better," even though he acknowledges that it is ranked 51 in the world. Margolin may not "believe" there is a difference between being ranked 51 (and thus with a higher press freedom ranking than Italy, Japan, and Israel, to name but three) and 154, but the issue is not one of belief or disbelief but rather of facts.

Margolin, however, unfazed by the ugliness of Azerbaijan's autocracy, is more interested in ooh-la-la-ing over the length of skirts worn by Azerbaijani women, the availability of alcohol in the country, and the abundance of oil and gas — as if anyone was arguing that Azerbaijan was an Islamic theocracy, and as if secularism and petroleum covered its multitude of crimes.

Margolin presents seemingly shocking information about the Armenian Garegin Nzhdeh (1886-1955), who is memorialized with a statue in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, and who, he states, "formed the Armenian Legion within the Wehrmacht [during World War II]. Thirty-thousand strong, the unit was responsible for numerous massacres of Jews in Ukraine, Crimea, and even the South of France." Generously, Margolin does not hold all Armenians responsible for the actions of "Nzhdeh's legion," which is fortunate, since he has almost all of his facts wrong.

If Margolin had "looked into the topic" he would have found that, whatever else one wishes to say about Garegin Nzhdeh, he did not form the Armenian Legion. Nor was the legion that was formed involved in massacres of Jews. As a responsible journalist and documentary filmmaker, Margolin might also have mentioned that in addition to the Armenian Legion there was also an Azerbaijani Legion in the Wehrmacht along with other "Eastern Legions," which were formed and led by the Germans. He would have consulted a serious work such as *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* by David Motadel

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Russia Reports Progress in Talks on Armenian-Azeri Transport Links

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Russia said over the weekend that Armenia and Azerbaijan narrowed their differences on planned transport links between the two countries during fresh talks held in Moscow.

A Russian-Armenian-Azerbaijani commission dealing with the matter met late on Friday, June 3 for the first time in six months.

“The parties discussed and brought closer their positions on border issues, customs and other types of control, as well as the safe passage of citizens, vehicles and goods on roads and railways through the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia,” the Russian government said in a statement.

The statement did not go into details of the meeting co-chaired by deputy prime ministers of the three states. It said the parties “will continue to work on the implementation” of relevant Armenian-Azerbaijani agreements that were brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin during and after the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Armenian government issued a virtually identical statement on the Moscow meeting.

Putin, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev reported decisive progress towards opening the Armenian-Azerbaijani border to passenger and cargo traffic after talks held in the Russian city of Sochi in November. However, the trilateral commission failed to put the finishing touches on their understandings at a meeting held in Moscow in December.

Yerevan and Baku continued to disagree on the status of a road and a railway that will connect Azerbaijan with its Nakhichevan exclave through Armenia. Aliyev said later in December that people and cargo passing through that “corridor” must be exempt from Armenian border controls. Pashinyan rejected the demand.

Moscow moved to revive the activities of the Russian-Armenian-Azerbaijani commission in April after accusing the West of trying to hijack its efforts to make peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The accusations followed Pashinyan’s April 6 meeting with Aliyev hosted by European Council President Charles Michel. The three leaders met again in Brussels for follow-up discussions on the transport links, the demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and a possible peace treaty between the two South Caucasus nations.

Aliyev continued to claim after the latest summit that Yerevan will open a permanent land corridor for Nakhichevan. Armenian leaders flatly denied that. A spokesman for Michel likewise stated last week that the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders agreed at Brussels that there would be no “extraterritorial claims with regard to future transport infrastructure.”

Why Is Jewish Online Magazine Lavishing Azerbaijan with Praise?

THE TABLET, from page 19

(Harvard Univ. Press, 2014) rather than uncritically repeating Turkish and Azerbaijani state propaganda. As Motadel and others have shown, Hitler had no trust in the non-Muslim, i.e., Armenian and Georgian, legions.

Margolin, “as someone who had always thought that there was a sort of metaphysical alliance between Jews and Armenians, the victims of the two largest genocides of the 20th century,” is brought “down with a bump” by his “discovery” regarding Nzhdeh. I am not sure what a “metaphysical alliance” is but there is an undeniable bond between many Armenians and many Jews formed out of similar histories of suffering and persecution. The bond is genuine, but it is one between people and not governments. Also genuine is the “bump” felt by many Armenians when the Israeli government, for its own strategic, realpolitik reasons, declines to recognize the Armenian Genocide and supplies Azerbaijan with weapons of death used against Armenians.

Margolin dismisses as “fake news” the reports that jihadist mercenaries fought for Azerbaijan during the war in 2020. But this has been documented by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *The Independent*, and Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights. It is startling that a writer with Margolin’s self-proclaimed zeal for journalistic integrity does not reference these respected sources that contradict his assertions.

“In reality,” Margolin writes, and by now, when he says “in reality” the reader can anticipate the exact opposite, “nothing is really clear” about Nagorno-Karabakh.

This is only true if one is prepared to ignore a huge body of literature and scholarship on the several millennia of Armenian presence there and Azerbaijan’s concerted efforts to fabricate an alternative history in which the Armenians don’t exist—and Margolin appears very much prepared to do so, claiming contra-factually that “This land was inhabited mostly by Azerbaijanis, but entire stretches of it were populated by Armenians.”

Margolin may be correct that for centuries Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Nagorno-Karabakh got along “more or less well.” However, when he offers as proof of this state of blissful coexistence the claim that “Stalin even created for them a single Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic,” one begins to wonder if he is laughing up his sleeve — as if Stalin bestowed this gift, which included placing Nagorno-Karabakh, which was at the time more than 90% Armenian, under the control of Azerbaijan out of his boundless wisdom and benevolence; as if much of the post-Soviet conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis is not traceable to Stalin’s divide-and-conquer nationalities policies.

Freely mixing fact, fiction, and relativization, Margolin throws sand in the eyes of readers. His noble words about the principles of journalism and documentary filmmaking are, in short, just so much hot air. But it is reassuring to know that he is not being funded by the government of Azerbaijan.

Marc A. Mamigonian
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