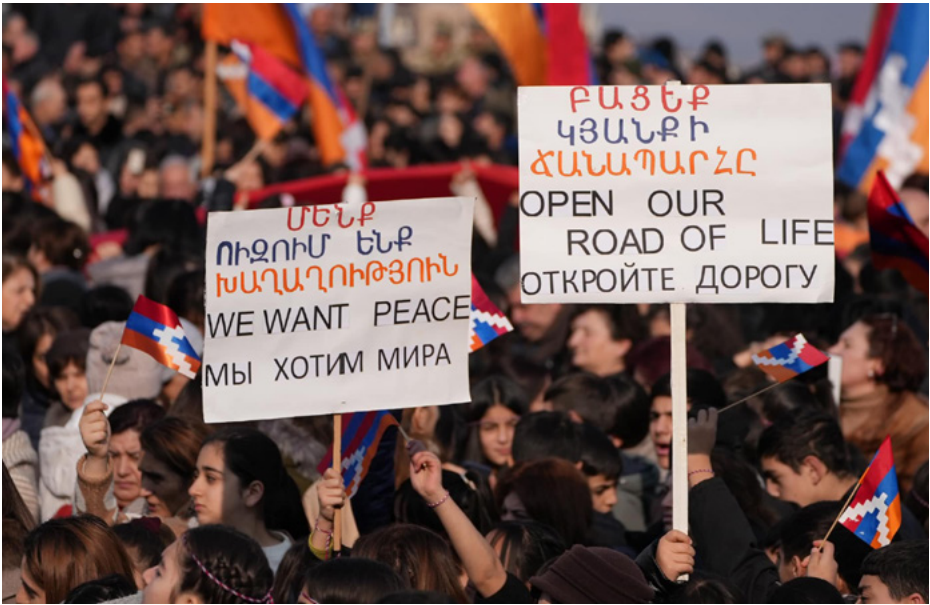


Tekeyan Cultural Association Launches Artsakh Crisis Aid Campaign

How Much Longer Must the People of Artsakh Suffer?

WATERTOWN — The Armenians of Artsakh have been suffering direly due to the Azerbaijani blockade since December 12. Weeks have gone by as this humanitarian crisis worsens while nominal international efforts to lift the blockade change nothing. The Artsakh government has implemented a rationing regime and has appealed to Armenians throughout the world for help. The need for aid is immediate yet Armenians in the diaspora are not aware of what they can do.

How much longer must the people of Artsakh suffer before we act? Despite the



blockade, there is a way to help. If sending supplies is not physically possible at the moment, Armenians can support the Art-

sakh population by sending it money. The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA) has found one way with the help of the Artsakh government. It is sending an initial \$10,000 from its capital funds by January 10, and is launching an emergency campaign, hoping that this will inspire people to act in this critical time.

The Artsakh Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport maintains a list of large families with many children whose primary breadwinners were killed during the 2020 Artsakh 44-day war. The initial TCA aid will reach 100 families. Each family will receive \$100, transferred directly into its bank account through the TCA representative in Armenia. This will allow keeping track of the allocation of aid and ensure that it goes directly to the truly needy. Each family will also confirm receipt of the aid. Commodities and medications still seem to be available sparingly there at a stiff price.

see CRISIS, page 20

CEO Orujyan Raising Awareness About FAST in US

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Foundation for Armenian Technology and Science (FAST) CEO Dr. Armen Orujyan held meetings in Los Angeles, New York and Boston at the end of 2022 to increase awareness of the work done by FAST in Armenia. The meetings were both with people interested in the core work FAST does in science as well as those who are more generally interested in the work being done for the Armenian nation.



Dr. Armen Orujyan (photo Aram Arkun)

FAST was established around 5 ½ years ago to help drive scientific advancement and technological innovation in Armenia, focusing on education, research and the road to commercialization of products. Orujyan said, “To many people, this is a great surprise, because they have not heard of us. It is useful to introduce us to them and for us to also get to know them....Every meeting and every community requires a different type of presentation of who we are, the work that we do, and why we do it.”

The goals of FAST are very ambitious. Orujyan declared, “When you display that ambition then you better have some kind of logical path to get to that, the mission. Otherwise, having an idea without a plan for execution is hallucination.” Orujyan therefore explains what will happen over the next five years, and also where FAST wants to be in 20 years, yet in between the two, things are less clear, because despite all the planning, sometimes the universe has its own plans. For that reason, the organization must be agile and adaptable, he said.

see FAST, page 9

Karabakh to Ration Food Due to Shortages

By Artak Khulian

STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Almost one month after Azerbaijan blocked the sole road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, the authorities in Stepanakert decided on Monday, January 9, to limit the sale of some basic foodstuffs and other items that are increasingly in short supply.

Karabakh food stores largely ran out of stock already in December. Most of them now sell only locally produced dairy, bread and alcohol.

see RATIONING, page 4



A food store in Stepanakert, December 20, 2022.

Turkey Allows Air Cargo Traffic with Armenia

By Nane Sahakian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Turkey has officially allowed cargo shipments by air to and from Armenia in line with an interim agreement reached by the two neighboring states last year.

The agreement, announced in July, followed four rounds of normalization talks held by Turkish and Armenian envoys. The two sides also agreed to open the Turkish-Armenian border to citizens of third countries.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry confirmed on Friday, January 6, reports that Ankara has lifted its long-standing ban on

air freight traffic with Armenia.

“The Turkish side informed us today that the ban on direct air cargo shipments has been lifted,” the ministry spokesman, Vahan Hunanyan, said.

“We expect that the other agreement, enabling citizens of third countries to cross the land border, will also be implemented as soon as possible,” added Hunanyan.

It is not yet clear whether the development means that Armenian goods can now be airlifted to Turkey not only en route to third countries but also be sold there. Successive Turkish governments have banned any imports from Armenia since the early



1990s.

Armenia imposed a similar ban on Turkish imports during the 2020 war with Azerbaijan, citing Ankara’s “inflammatory calls,” arms supplies to Azerbaijan and

“deployment of terrorist mercenaries to the conflict zone.” Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s government lifted the ban a year later.

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ARMENIA

Rural Armenians Welcome Renovated, Enlarged Kindergarten

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WASHINGTON D.C.

Washington’s St. Mary Church Marks 90 Years

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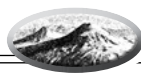


BRAZIL

AGBU Film Sries Supports Independent Armenian Cinema

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Pashinyan Casts Doubt on Russia's Role in Armenia, Nixes CSTO Exercises

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on January 10, spoke about Russia's presence in Armenia, maintaining that it not only does not guarantee the security of the country, but, on the contrary, "creates security threats."

Pashinyan added that the Armenian defense minister had notified the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) headquarters in writing that in the current situation, Yerevan considers it inappropriate to conduct the organization's exercises on the territory of Armenia. According to the prime minister, at least in 2023, such exercises will not be held.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov added, however, that Moscow would continue the dialogue with Yerevan on "difficult matters".

According to him, Azerbaijan is justifying its actions by accusing Armenia and Russia of preparing joint aggressions against Azerbaijan and claiming that they are allegedly carrying out preventive actions, which he described as "absurd."

"But this kind of talk stirs interest abroad, against the background of events in Ukraine," he added.

"This is a fairly new statement by the Prime Minister of Armenia, I think that colleagues from the CSTO will be in touch, they will clarify the details of Armenia's position," Peskov said.

"In any case, Armenia is our very close ally, we will continue the dialogue, including on matter that are now very difficult."

UN Chief again Calls for Ensuring Free Movement Along Lachin Corridor

NEW YORK (PanARMENIAN.Net) — United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has reiterated his calls to de-escalate tensions and ensure freedom and security of movement along the Lachin corridor, his spokesperson [said](#) in comments to Armenpress.

"The Secretary-General underlined his concerns over the current situation in his statement on 14 December 2022. These concerns were reiterated by the Secretariat during the Emergency Security Council session requested by Armenia on 20 December 2022," Spokesman for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric said when asked to comment on the ongoing Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin Corridor.

"The Secretary-General reiterates his calls to de-escalate tensions and ensure freedom and security of movement along the corridor, in line with the previously reached agreements and expresses his support to the ongoing mediation efforts. The UN Country Teams in Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to maintain open channels with the authorities and international partners on the ground, and stand ready to respond if requested and as conditions allow."



A large demonstration in Stepanakert on December 25 protested the blocking of the Lachin Corridor

Armenia's Electricity Supply to Karabakh Disrupted by Azerbaijan

STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh have resorted to rolling blackouts, saying that electricity supplies from Armenia to Karabakh carried out through Azerbaijani-controlled territory have been disrupted.

The local power grid operator Artsakhenergo reported on Tuesday, January 10, that a section of the high-voltage transmission line coming from Armenia was knocked down on Monday for still unknown reasons. It said the "accident" occurred near the town of Lachin handed back to Azerbaijan last summer.

"Because of the unconstructive position of the Azerbaijani side, at the moment we

are unable to visit and inspect that section and organize repairs," Artsakhenergo said in a statement. "Therefore, a decision was made to supply electricity to the republic from local generating stations with appropriate restrictions."

The restrictions will take the form of rolling blackouts, added the statement. It did not specify the likely length of power cuts which were already reported from Karabakh on Monday evening.

The Azerbaijani authorities did not immediately comment on the supply disruption which came almost one month after they blocked the sole road connecting Karabakh to Armenia, causing growing

shortages of food and other essential items in the Armenian-populated region.

The day after the beginning of the blockade, Karabakh's leadership accused Baku of also blocking Armenia's gas supplies to Karabakh. The supplies were restored three days later. The United States and the European Union were quick to express serious concern over their disruption.

The Western powers have repeatedly urged the Azerbaijani side to unblock the Lachin Corridor. Baku has dismissed their calls and defended Azerbaijani protesters continuing to occupy a section of the corridor on ostensibly environmental grounds.

US Insists on Reopening of Karabakh-Armenia Road

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The United States has again called for the immediate reopening of Nagorno-Karabakh's land link with Armenia which has been blocked by Azerbaijan for the past month.

"The United States remains concerned that the Lachin Corridor has now been blocked for over three weeks, creating a grave humanitarian situation," Michael Carpenter, the US ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) headquarters in Vienna, tweeted over the weekend of January 7-8.

"We thank [the International Committee of the Red Cross] for providing critical aid during this time, but call on Azerbaijan and Russia to restore access immediately," Carpenter said.

The US Embassy in Yerevan added its voice to the call on Monday, January 9. In written comments, it reiterated the US State Department's earlier statements that the Azerbaijani blockade "sets back the peace process and undermines international confidence."

Commenting on the possibility of US humanitarian aid to Karabakh, the embassy said the US Agency for International Development (USAID) is trying to address "the needs of displaced persons in Armenia." It did not elaborate.

The head of USAID, Samantha Power, spoke with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan on Friday, January 6. According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Mirzoyan said the international community should take "clear steps" to reopen the La-

chin corridor and prevent a "humanitarian catastrophe" in Karabakh.

Government-backed Azerbaijani protesters blocked a section of the sole road connecting Karabakh to Armenia on December 12. They are demanding that Baku be allowed to inspect "illegal" ore mines in Karabakh.

The authorities in Yerevan and Stepanakert have rejected these demands as a gross violation of the Russian-brokered agreement that stopped the 2020 Armenian-Azerbaijani war.

Citing the continuing blockade, Mirzoyan refused to meet with his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov on December 23 for talks that were due to be hosted by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Blinken Plans More Talks

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will speak to the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers in the coming days to try to kick-start the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, the State Department announced on January 4.

"As you know, Secretary Blinken is personally invested in this process; he's demonstrated that personal investment by bringing together ... his counterparts from Armenia and Azerbaijan by speaking with them regularly," the department spokesman, Ned Price, told a news briefing in Washington. "I expect he'll have an opportunity in the coming days to re-engage by phone with his counterparts in Armenia and Azerbaijan."

Blinken most recently hosted face-to-

face talks between the two ministers in Washington on November 7. He phoned Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev later in November. He urged the two sides to "schedule further talks as agreed in Washington," according to the State Department.

Aliyev and Pashinyan were scheduled to meet in Brussels on December 7 for further talks hosted by the European Union's top official, Charles Michel. However, the Azerbaijani leader canceled the summit, objecting to French President Emmanuel Macron's participation in it.

In separate comments to the Armenpress news agency, Price said the United States remains concerned about the closure of Karabakh's vital land link with Armenia.

"This sets back the peace process and undermines international confidence," he said. "We call for the full restoration of free movement through the corridor."

Price also announced on Wednesday the retirement of Philip Reeker, a senior State Department adviser for Caucasus negotiations and the US co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group. Reeker has held that post since August.

"Since the beginning of Ambassador Reeker's appointment in August of last year, it was always understood and expected that he would serve in this position on a short-term basis until the end of last year," Price told journalists.

The State Department spokesman did not say whether Reeker will be replaced by another US diplomat.



ARMENIA

Armenia Detains Anti-Russia Protesters as Anger Grows over Karabakh Blockade

By Gabriel Gavin

Dozens of protesters have reportedly been arrested in Armenia's second-largest city after authorities broke up a rally outside a Russian military base on January 8. Activists are demanding the South Caucasus nation cut ties with Moscow amid a worsening standoff with Azerbaijan over the break-away region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In a statement seen by local media, Armenian police confirmed that 65 people had been detained during the demonstration near the 102nd Military Base in the city of Gyumri. Around 100 protesters are said to have marched to the barracks, where up to 3,000 of Moscow's troops are stationed, close to the border with both Turkey and Georgia.

A livestream of the rally showed detainees struggling with plainclothes and uniformed officers, including notorious riot police units known as the Red Berets, while crowds chanted slogans calling for Armenia's withdrawal from the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The Kremlin-led military alliance has come under fire in recent weeks after Russian peacekeepers failed to reopen the Lachin Corridor, the only road in or out of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been closed by Azerbaijan for almost a month, leaving 100,000 ethnic Armenians trapped with supplies of food and medicine running low.

"The police detained more than 100 citizens, but many Gyumri citizens joined us," protest leaders said in a statement.

The rally was organized by the National-Democratic Axis, a bloc of opposition groups that includes the nationalist Sasna Tsrer Pan-Armenian Party, which came to prominence in 2016 after a group of 31 gunmen affiliated with the organization stormed a police station in the capital Yerevan. Three police officers were killed and

a further 26 injured in that standoff, with the hostage-takers demanding the resignation of then-President Serzh Sargsyan and an end to "Russian colonialism." Sasna Tsrer has since publicly renounced political violence.

The 102nd Military Base has long been a lightning rod for Armenians critical of Russia's role in the region.

The murder of a 57-year-old local Armenian woman in 2018, allegedly at the hands of a Russian soldier, ignited anger in Gyumri and saw a series of demonstrations staged by opposition groups. Just three years prior, a Russian serviceman stationed on the base, Valery Permyakov, massacred seven members of a local family, including a two-year old girl, with major protests held to demand he be brought to justice. Permyakov was eventually sentenced to life in prison.

Two years before that, a pair of young boys from Gyumri were killed by a landmine planted close to the base in a stretch of scrubland used by villagers for grazing animals. Despite poor security and a lack of fencing around the minefield, no action was taken against those responsible.

In 1999, a pair of Russian officers opened fire with Kalashnikovs on locals at a market in the city, killing two civilians and injuring dozens more. An investigation determined that they were inebriated, but reports later stated the two had been transferred to Russia and released before the end of their prison sentences.

This time though, the protesters are capitalizing on growing anti-Russian sentiment across Armenia.

Since December 12, the sole route in or out of Nagorno-Karabakh has been closed to virtually all traffic after self-described Azerbaijani environmental activists set up camp on the road. Known as the Lachin Corridor, the highway has been under the

control of Russian peacekeepers since the end of the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region, kept open for humanitarian use under the terms of a trilateral ceasefire agreement brokered by Moscow.

Inside Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders but controlled by its ethnic Armenian majority since the fall of the Soviet Union, the unrecognized breakaway state is now almost entirely cut off from the outside world. Locals say supplies of food, medicine and other basic goods are running low, and Armenian officials warn the threat of a famine is "tangible."

Azerbaijan denies the corridor is closed, but simultaneously accuses the Armenians of using it to export illegally mined gold at the expense of the environment and bringing in military hardware. Baku insists it should have the right to inspect vehicles entering the region.

With the peacekeepers doing nothing to restore the flow of vehicles and supplies, officials in Yerevan are openly questioning the Kremlin's commitment to upholding the status quo. "We expect more practical steps from the international community, including the Russian Federation," Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in a speech last week. Just days before, he accused Moscow of "becoming a silent witness to the depopulation of Nagorno-Karabakh" and said the prospect of a multinational UN mission should be explored. Azerbaijan has ruled the demand as unacceptable.

"Sasna Tsrer is a far-right party and has always been advocating cutting ties with Russia," one senior Armenian official told Eurasianet on the condition of anonymity. "But this time many sympathize with their decision to protest against the Russians."

Meanwhile, in Stepanakert, the de facto capital of Armenian-held Nagorno-Kara-

bakh, a group of demonstrators marched on the disused airport that serves as the headquarters for the Russian peacekeeping contingent on December 27 to call for the blockade to be lifted. "We wanted to speak with the Russian officers," one local told Eurasianet, "but the soldiers there said they couldn't get hold of General [Andrei] Volkov, the commander."

Power Vacuum

In September 2022, after Azerbaijani forces launched an offensive against Armenia, Pashinyan called on Moscow to intervene under the terms of the CSTO treaty which in principle considers an attack on any member to be an attack on all of them. However, the request fell on deaf ears, with the bloc dispatching a fact-finding mission instead.

Unprecedented protests were held in Yerevan in the wake of the decision, with demonstrators flying Ukrainian flags and holding signs demanding Armenia's withdrawal from the alliance.

Now, with the humanitarian situation worsening, Armenia is calling on Western nations to step up and help resolve the crisis, with the U.S., EU and a number of other nations calling on Azerbaijan to reopen the road.

"In this post-war period of insecurity and uncertainty, only one thing is certain: that Russia has become clearly unreliable and consistently unpredictable," Richard Giragosian, director of Yerevan's Regional Studies Center, told Eurasianet.

"Since Moscow's failed invasion of Ukraine, the logic and expectations of Russian security obligation to Armenia no longer apply," he adds. "The Azerbaijanis are acting because they can."

(Gabriel Gavin is a British journalist covering the former Soviet Union and Turkey. This piece originally appeared on the site Eurasianet.org on January 9.)

Christmas and Epiphany Celebration Takes Place in Yerevan

YEREVAN — On January 6, on the occasion of the spiritual feast of the Christmas and Epiphany, Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, celebrated Holy Liturgy in Saint Gregory the Illuminator Mother Church of Yerevan.

The patriarchal crucifix procession led the Catholicos of All Armenians from the chapel of St. Trdat to the altar under the solemn singing of the hymn *Khorhurd Khorin*. The liturgical priest of the Mother See His Excellency Fr. Bishop Musegh Babayan and Dean of YSU Theology Faculty and Spiritual Inspector of St. Gregory the Illuminator Mother Church of Yerevan His Grace Fr. Bishop Zhamkochian of Anushavan.

During the Holy Liturgy, the Catholicos of All Armenians greeted Armenians around the world with the life-giving good news "Christ was born and appeared" and delivered his message on the occasion of the holiday.

He said, in part, "The miraculous Christmas of the Son of God surrounds our Christ-loving people with special courage and girds them with faith, which has been subjected to new trials in recent years. In the horrors of the Artsakh war and the military operations unleashed by Azerbaijan against Armenia months ago, we again suffered the pain and suffering of heavy losses. Our children died heroically for the sake of the motherland, thousands became disabled. Dozens of our children are in captivity, there are still

missing people. The road connecting Artsakh with Armenia has been blocked for a long time, which has led to a humanitarian disaster. In order to overcome the problems we face in this difficult situation, we need true renewal, purification of heart, soul, mind, to be transformed in Christ and to become united and unanimous in our commitments to the nation and the motherland."

He added, "We know from historical experience that we emerged victorious from difficulties when we were united around common goals. Renewed by Christ, united by Christ, walking in the steps of God, we, as the apostle says, will emerge victorious from the trials that surrounded us even today that we will be able to exclude all evil and injustice, the destructive manifestations of fear, violence, hatred and adaptability from our national life and unite all the national potential with the vision of the future for the good of the motherland, establish mutual respect and love, and anchor Armenia-Diaspora cooperation on firm foundations of trust."

At the end of the Holy Liturgy, the Blessing of the Water was performed, during which the Catholicos of All Armenians blessed the water with a cross and Holy Myron. Geneva-Armenian philanthropist Hakob Avagyan served as the godfather of this year's cross.

At the end of the water blessing ceremony, the Catholicos again conveyed his blessing and the savior news of Christmas to the faithful people present.





ARMENIA

Rural Armenians Welcome Renovated, Enlarged Kindergarten

GORIS — The Syunik border village of Verishen has a newly expanded and completely renovated kindergarten thanks to the Paros Foundation through benefactor Ara Cherkian in Wisconsin. Celebrating the gala reopening of the kindergarten on December 25 were the Syunik Regional Governor, Robert Ghukasyan, the mayor of Goris Arush Arushanyan, other regional and municipal officials, kindergarten staff, parents and children. Paros staff were also on-hand for the ribbon cutting and festivities, along with staff from Focus on Children Now, who provided new furniture for the expanded kindergarten.

“I am very proud of the fact that we were able to meet the needs of the young families in this growing community by both expanding the kindergarten building, which will allow it to launch two new groups and renovated the balance of the structure to ensure these children will begin their education in a clean, safe and comfortable environment, said Peter Abajian, executive director of the Paros Foundation. “I would like to extend our appreciation to Mr. Ara Cherkian and his family for sponsoring this important project.”

During the September 2022 attacks on Armenia by Azerbaijan, the village of Verishen, which is adjacent to Goris, had four homes in the village of 2,200 people hit by mortar attacks, including one home almost adjacent to the kindergarten. Even though Verishen shares a border with Azerbaijan, this community is steadfast in its commitment to living in this village and has outgrown its kindergarten with 90 children. Now, following its expansion and renovation, more than 150 children from Verishen and other neighboring communities will be able to attend.

Work began in the fall of 2021 with the expansion of the kindergarten by almost an



The ribbon cutting was celebrated throughout the Verishen community.

additional 1,700 square feet. This allowed the kindergarten to launch two additional classrooms for an addition 60 children. The existing structure was then completely renovated including classrooms, bathrooms, hallways, stairwell, kitchen, and offices. The Municipality of Goris also participat-

ed in this project addressing the building's façade, which is now painted in colorful, happy colors for the children.

The Paros Foundation was launched in 2006 and has implemented more than \$12 million worth of projects in Armenia through its unique model of philanthropy and community partnership. These projects are located throughout the country with focus on Gyumri and in communities along the border with Azerbaijan. Thanks to the support of the Strauch Kulhanjian Family, all administrative expenses are underwritten, allowing 100% of donor contributions to be



Children during the ribbon cutting performed for the guests at the

allocated in their entirety to the projects. To learn more about The Paros Foundation, or to support a project, please visit www.parosfoundation.org or contact Abajian via email, peter@parosfoundation.org.



One of the newly renovated classrooms at the Verishen kindergarten.



A colorful façade welcomes children to the kindergarten in the border village of Verishen.

Karabakh to Ration Food Due to Shortages

RATIONING, from page 1

The authorities last week tapped their strategic reserves to start supplying retailers with imported staples such as sunflower oil, sugar, rice and salt. There have since been complaints by Stepanakert residents that not all shops are receiving such emergency supplies and that some are hoarding them.

The Karabakh government responded by announcing the mandatory rationing of products supplied by it. Officials said the new distribution system will take effect later this week through ration coupons that will be distributed to all Karabakh residents.

“The idea is to evenly distribute to the population the small amounts of food from the state reserves,” said Narine Aghabalyan, a government spokeswoman.

“The ration coupons could be used for buying only essential products,” Aghabalyan said. She did not specify the full list of those items.

The official also said: “We will continue to deal with the issue of supplying our population with food. I also want to stress that in our meetings with people we can see just how determined and prepared they are to endure the food shortages for asserting their right to live freely in their homeland.”

The authorities similarly restricted the sale of fuel — and gasoline in particular — on December 14, two days after a large group of Azerbaijanis blocked the Lachin Corridor. The latter are demanding that the Azerbaijani government be allowed to inspect “illegal” ore mines in Karabakh.

Baku has backed their demands, rejected by the Armenian side, and dismissed the international community’s calls for the immediate reopening of the corridor.

The Karabakh premier, Ruben Vardanyan, said last week that the Armenian-populated region is bracing itself for a prolonged blockade and will not bow to the Azerbaijani pressure.



INTERNATIONAL

Turkey Elections: Why Is Pro-Kurdish HDP Going it Alone?

By Ragip Soylu

ISTANBUL (Middle East Eye) — Turkey’s pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) announced on Saturday, January 7, that it would be nominating its own presidential candidate for upcoming elections, shooting down the possibility of throwing its weight behind a joint opposition candidate.

“We will name our candidate soon and go to the elections,” Pervin Buldan, the HDP co-chair, said during a party event in the eastern city of Kars.

Buldan’s announcement isn’t a simple decision since the HDP, with its 10-13 percent of votes, is essentially seen as the kingmaker between two competing political blocs led by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP).

Several large-scale private polls conducted in December and viewed by Middle East Eye indicate the AKP’s People’s Alliance coalition has support from around 40 percent of the electorate, while the CHP’s Nation Alliance with five other opposition parties has a similar level of support.

Without the HDP’s votes, presidential elections are likely to take place over two rounds, with few believing Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan or any of his opponents can win enough votes to pass the 50 percent threshold in the first round.

The HDP announcement came as a surprise, as many believed the party would tacitly support the CHP candidate, as it did in the 2019 local elections, when the opposition captured large cities like Istanbul and Ankara.

The HDP said it announced its principles on how to choose a presidential nominee in October.

“We told everyone that we were ready to negotiate with every party that believes in these principles, but no one has tried to meet us or come up with a proposal,” Meral Danis Bestas, the HDP deputy group chairman, told MEE. “People should stop behaving like we aren’t a party and we don’t matter.”

Bestas hit back at claims the HDP’s move would only benefit Erdogan.

“The ones who wouldn’t even host HDP politicians at their TV talk shows or media outlets now blame us for doing what a political party is supposed to do. They aren’t sincere,” she said.

Roj Girasun, the general manager of Rawest research institute, which specializes in Kurdish-majority cities, said the HDP had sent a warning to the Table of Six - as the main alliance of opposition leaders is referred - on their negotiations to name a joint candidate.

He said that the HDP was bothered by the opposition’s disregard of the HDP’s view on the subject, while instead focusing on what the Iyi Party, a center-right nationalist party, had to say.

The Iyi Party has over the years repeatedly said that it would not take part in the Table of Six if it included the HDP due to its alleged links with the outlawed Kurd-

istan Workers’ Party (PKK), which is designated as a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

The HDP has denied any formal links to the PKK, but is currently embroiled in a trial at the Constitutional Court over attempts by the state prosecutor to close the party. A verdict is expected before the elections in coming months.

Last week the Constitutional Court temporarily blocked the HDP’s bank accounts, which provoked little reaction from the other opposition parties.

Bestas said her party had for years been targeted by the government with a campaign that included tactics such as arresting its members and expelling its mayors from office. She said this had been done without any sign of solidarity from other opposition leaders, whose own parties have also faced pressure from the government.

“The government has been demonizing us,” she said. “But what about the opposition parties who say they would bring democracy to this country? They are scared.”

The Table of Six has so far announced its

intention to return Turkey to a parliamentary system of governance - throwing out the presidential system in place since 2018 - and is now drawing up a political roadmap as well as plans to distribute the ministries among the opposition parties.

Ecevit Kilic, a writer that studies Kurdish issues, believes the HDP hasn’t taken its final decision on the subject of the presidential nomination.

“The HDP might reverse this step if it is included in the negotiations conducted by the Table of Six,” he said.

Bestas, on the other hand, says her party is clear in its decision to run on its own against Erdogan, adding that the HDP will continue to recalculate its moves based on political dynamics.

Some suspect the HDP will support the opposition’s joint candidate in the second round regardless.

“We want to get rid of the one-man regime and are open to hold talks with anyone who is sympathetic to our principles,” said Bestas.

“No one can tell us what to do.”

Turkey Violated Airspace of Greece More than 10,000 Times in 2022

By Tasos Kokkinidis

ATHENS (Greek Reporter) — Turkey violated the airspace of Greece more than 10,000 times in the first 11 months of 2022, data from the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA) show.

According to the data, there is an unprecedented record of Turkish violations against Greece’s airspace, by both fighter jets and UAVs. Since August, violations exceeded the 1,000 mark each month. Their peak was September with 1,802 recorded violations carried out by 259 Turkish jets

For example, in the month of November, there were 37 cases of Turkish armed aircraft violating Greek airspace, resulting in 42 engagements with Greek aircraft. Several of these engagements resulted in so-called dogfights, aerial battles between fighter aircraft conducted at close range.

In 2020, when Greece and Turkey came close to conflict in the Aegean, “only” 4,605 violations were recorded.

While about a decade ago, in 2013, the violations were only 577. This increased to 1783 in 2019 when Ankara first unveiled the “Blue Homeland” vision.

The latest provocation from Turkey in 2022 occurred on December 30 when a trio of fighter jets violated Greek air space, flying over Panagia and Inousses islands in the North Aegean, GEETHA announced.

On that day, a total of 13 Turkish F-16s – including 11 armed jets and a Turkish navy assistance CN-235 plane – entered the Athens FIR without submitting plans. Altogether 15 infringements of the Athens FIR were registered, which developed into

violations of national air space over islands of the central and southeast Aegean.

All Turkish airplanes were recognized and intercepted by Greek fighter jets, according to international rules and practices, while in 7 cases the process of interception turned into a dogfight.

Earlier this year, Greece’s PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis briefed NATO on the upsurge in overflight violations by Turkey of its airspace in the eastern Aegean.

Mitsotakis announced that he spoke to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and briefed him on Turkey’s provocative behavior.

As the battle in the US Congress over the proposed sale of new F-16 fighter jets to Turkey heats up, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez, recalled recently that Turkish President Erdogan has challenged Greek sovereignty repeatedly by sending fighter jets over the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea.

He also slammed Erdogan who recently threatened a missile strike on Athens.

“Now we have started to make our own missiles,” the Turkish President said during a speech last week in Samsun in northern Turkey. “Of course, this production scares the Greeks. When you say ‘Tayfun,’ the Greek gets scared and say, ‘It will hit Athens.’ Well, of course, it will.”

Tayfun is a short-range ballistic missile developed by Turkey.

Referring to Erdogan’s threat to hit Athens Menendez said: “This is a NATO member—directly threatening to target Athens, a city of three million civilians. According to the United Nations—an intentional attack on civilians is a war crime.

INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Christmas Mass Celebrated In Diyarbakir Church

ISTANBUL (Panorama.am) — Christmas mass was held in the Diyarbakir Surp Giragos Armenian Church in Turkey on Sunday, January 8.

Hymns were sung and prayers were recited during mass led by three religious officials appointed by the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul, Anadolu Agency reported.

Father Natan Arabyan said they are proud to celebrate Christmas in Diyarbakir.

Sur District Governor and Deputy Mayor Asim Solak also visited the historical church before the mass and congratulated the participants’ holiday.

Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan Parliament Speakers Meet, Discuss Regional Issue

TEHRAN (News.am) — Speakers of the parliaments of Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan met on the sidelines of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) meeting in Antalya on January 10.

According to Mehr news agency, the trilateral meeting of the speakers of the parliaments of the three countries was aimed at developing, deepening and promoting economic and political relations, and solving regional problems.

The parties discussed important regional issues.

Turkey Says Armenia Threatens Peace in Region

ISTANBUL (news.am) — Turkey said that ‘Armenia threatens peace in the region with its actions’, Chairman of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Parliament) Mustafa Sentop said at a meeting with his Azerbaijani counterpart Sahiba Gafarova on the sidelines of the 13th plenary session of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) in Antalya, Anadolu reports.

He assured that Turkey has always supported and will continue to support the fair struggle of Azerbaijan.

Pope Francis Calls for Release of Armenian POWs

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Pope Francis has called for the release of prisoners of war.

According to a press release by the Armenian Embassy in the Vatican, during an annual meeting with the diplomatic corps in the Vatican, attended by the Armenian Ambassador, Pope Francis addressed ongoing conflicts in various regions, and said: “Particularly I am thinking about the ongoing situation in South Caucasus. I am calling on the parties to respect the ceasefire, and I am reiterating that the release of prisoners of war and detained civilians will be an important step for the highly desired peace treaty.”

Azerbaijan is still holding Armenian POWs in violation of the terms of the 2020 ceasefire agreement.

Turkey Allows Air Cargo Traffic with Armenia

CARGO, from page 1

“If Turkey really opens its customs border ... all kinds of [Armenian] goods could be brought here,” Gagik Musheghyan, an Armenian businessman based in Turkey, told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service on Monday. “Everything, including food, alcohol, cigarettes.”

Turkey has for decades made the full opening of its border and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Armenia conditional on an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal acceptable to Azerbaijan. Turkish leaders have repeatedly reaffirmed this precondition since the start of the normalization talks with Yerevan in January 2022.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in October that Armenia must also agree to open an extraterritorial land corridor connecting Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave. Yerevan rejected the demand.

INTERNATIONAL

Berlin Human Rights Organization Calls for Artsakh Airlift

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — Although overlooked by the mass media, there have been important initiatives taken in Germany to protest Azerbaijan's continuing aggression and blockade. Not only have demonstrations taken place regularly in front of the Azerbaijan Embassy in Berlin, but an increasing number of individuals and organizations, human rights proponents as well as religious figures, are coming together to demand action on the part of the German government to protect the Armenian people and sanction Azerbaijan for its continuing aggression.

Tessa Hofmann, chairwoman of the board of the Berlin-based human rights organization, Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA), has recently issued a call for an airlift, to provide the people of block-

aded Artsakh vital humanitarian relief.

In a letter of January 7, addressed to German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Hofmann cited "politicians in Artsakh, among them State Minister Ruben Vardanyan, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan,"



Prof. Tessa Hofmann

who have demanded of the international community the establishment of such an airlift. "As a former West Berliner," she writes, "I know what a positive contribution an airlift can make."

To her letter, she appended a list of the first 101 names of public figures and citizens, who have endorsed an earlier appeal by her organization for sanctions against Azerbaijan. That petition, issued on November 22, referred to a declaration of the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), warning of a "significant genocide risk" for Armenians in Armenia and in the South Caucasus. Reviewing the history of Artsakh, from the European Parliament's July 1988 resolution supporting Karabakh Armenians' desire to join Armenia, to the referendum in late 1991, in which a majority in the then- Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh voted for independence from Azerbaijan, the appeal detailed the subsequent attempts by Azerbaijan to deploy military force to maintain its control, up through the renewed conflicts in 2020 and

2022, which led to immense losses in human lives and numerous war refugees.

The document identified "a particularly weighty obstacle to the peace process" in the mood of Armenophobia pervading Azerbaijani society, and enflamed by the Baku regime. In this context, the text recalls reference made by Azerbaijani authorities to Armenians as "dogs," racist stereotypes exhibited at the 2021 Baku "Trophy Park," and discrimination against Azerbaijani intellectuals in the opposition — all factors duly condemned by institutions like the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and Human Rights Watch. The appeal also pointed to the call in December 2021 by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for Azerbaijan to cease discrimination, to take measures to punish hate speech and vandalism, as well as to protect Armenian cultural heritage sites, which was endorsed in March 2022 by a European Parliament resolution.

Emphasizing Germany's special historical responsibility, as wartime ally of the Ottoman Turkish regime during the genocide, Hofmann's petition listed a series of demands: Azerbaijan's total withdrawal from Armenian territory, and release of war prisoners and civilians; extension and possible expansion of the EU observer mission in border areas; implementation of the ICJ's provisions for protecting Armenian cultural heritage; Azerbaijani compliance with a UNESCO-led fact finding commission; sanctions against weapons deliveries to Azerbaijan; and sanctions against Azerbaijan itself, in the event of non-compliance with the ICJ demands, or of renewed military aggression against Armenia or Armenian inhabited regions in the South Caucasus.

Among the first 101 signatories of the appeal are leading Armenian and German intellectuals, educators, writers, artists, professionals, doctors, students, and human rights and civil society activists. Several associations endorsed the call, among them the Central Council of Armenians in Germany (ZAD), the Armenian Community (Berlin), the Armenian Tour Guide Guild, (Armenia), the Armenian Church and Cultural Community (Berlin), the Promotional Society for the Ecumenical Monuments for the Genocide Victims of the Ottoman Empire (FÖGG), Haytun – Armenian Cultural Association (Dresden), Soykırım Karşıtları Derneği (SKD) – Association of Genocide Opponents (Frankfurt/Main), and the Theophanu Club Germany.

Since Baerbock received the November appeal, the situation has only worsened. As Hofmann noted in her recent message, the year 2022 ended with a three-day interruption of gas deliveries to Artsakh, and then the blockade of the Lachin Corridor. As a result, 120,000 people are



German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock

cut off from the outside world, 5,000 people who were in transit at the time of the blockade have been separated from their families, food and medicine are scarce, unheated schools have closed, and hospitals have postponed elective surgery. Thus, the urgent need for urgent action: an airlift must be organized.

And the effort requires international action. On January 9, Hofmann addressed a letter to Sergei J. Nechaev, the Russian Ambassador to Germany. In presenting the case, she underlined the fact that Azerbaijan, by approving of the blockade of the Lachin Corridor, allegedly organized by ecology activists, was "in violation of the trilateral ceasefire agreement that was sealed between the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan under Russian mediation." And she concluded with the hope Russia would support these demands, "since your country, by signing the ceasefire agreement also assumed responsibility for the people living there."

A corresponding letter from Hofmann was sent to the American ambassador in Berlin, Dr. Amy Gutmann.

In her message to Gutmann, Hofmann suggested how such an international humanitarian airlift might come into being: "With the help of the United Nations, which could provide the aircraft required, charitable organizations active both in the USA and Russia, like the Salvation Army, could cooperate in carrying out the transportation of food and medicines." A timely organization of such a humanitarian airlift through "neutral, church-affiliated NGOs in the USA and Russia would save numerous human lives" and its impact would radiate beyond the conflict region.

On Friday, January 13, a demonstration will take place in front of the Azerbaijan embassy in Berlin to protest the blockade.

Turkey 'Wants Things We Can't Give,' Says NATO Hopeful Sweden

STOCKHOLM (Euronews) — Turkey has demands that NATO hopeful Sweden cannot — and does not — want to meet, said the Swedish Prime Minister on Sunday.

Ankara has blocked Sweden and Finland's entry into the western military since May in an attempt to get the pair to meet certain political demands, prompting a long-running diplomatic tussle.

"Turkey both confirms that we have done what we said we would do, but they also say that they want things that we cannot or do not want to give them," Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told a defense think-tank conference.

"We are convinced that Turkey will make a decision, we just don't know when," he said, adding that "the decision is in Turkey's camp."

Stockholm and Helsinki signed a deal with Turkey in 2022 aimed at overcoming Ankara's objections to their NATO bids.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has previously described Finland and Sweden as a "hatchery" of terror groups, while his foreign minister called on both countries to lift bans on defense exports to Turkey.

Speaking to Euronews in May, Paul Levin from the Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies, said Turkey's primary concern is the presence of PKK

activists in Sweden.

The PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) has fought an armed struggle against Turkey for Kurdish independence since 1984, leading to the deaths of more than 40,000 people.

NATO anticipates Sweden and Finland to join in 2023, according to its Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who also spoke on Sunday, though he could not assure it would happen.

"I expect [accession to take place next year], but I will not guarantee the exact date, because it is of course a sovereign decision of the Turkish Parliament and the Hungarian Parliament, [which] have not yet ratified the agreement," Stoltenberg told reporters.

In December, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu recognised that Stockholm had taken "positive measures", but said "other important steps" were needed before its objections could be lifted.

His remarks came a few days after the Swedish Supreme Court refused to extradite a Turkish journalist Bülent Kenes, as demanded by the Turkish President.

A former editor of a Turkish newspaper, Kenes is an outspoken critic of Erdoğan's government.

Only Turkey and Hungary have not ratified the entry of Sweden and Finland into NATO.



Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, right, and Sweden's Foreign Minister Tobias Billström hold a press conference in Ankara, Turkey, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2022. - Copyright Ali Unal/Copyright 2022 The AP. All rights reserved.

All 30 members of the western military alliance must agree before a new member can be admitted.

On Sunday, Finland's top diplomat reaffirmed that his country would enter NATO at the same time as its neighbour.

"Finland is not in such a rush to join NATO that we can't wait for Sweden to get the green light," Pekka Haavisto told reporters.

He explained that representatives from

the Swedish and Finnish parliaments are expected to visit Ankara in January. Another meeting between the three is scheduled for spring.

Though closely aligned with the US-led military alliance, both Sweden and Finland had shied away from joining the organisation.

They launched membership bids in May last year, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Community News

New Group Addresses Needs of American-Armenian High School Students Pursuing Behavioral Science

“How can Armenian students in U.S. high schools and colleges/universities best advance their careers in the behavioral sciences?”

In September of 2022, Armenian Behavioral Science Students (ABSS) was formed by high school student Kristina Khrimian (Rockville, MD) to address this important question. This unifying and bold organization serves to increase opportunities for students of Armenian descent interested in the behavioral sciences, while creating a safe space to destigmatize mental health challenges.

As of January 2023, ABSS has 60 members from 14 U.S. states and Armenia, and is welcoming new students as officers to expand its diverse programs benefiting Armenian students.

President Kristina Khrimian and Vice President Ani Mosinyan (Bethesda, MD) are leading the organization and uniting members through various events. Since September of 2022, ABSS has developed many programs, described on Instagram: www.instagram.com/armenian_bss/.

ABSS has hosted a monthly series of webinars, where students were able to meet distinguished behavioral scientists, listed below. In early 2023, ABSS will continue this monthly webinar series with such outstanding scientists who support students, such as Professor Hrant Avanesyan, PhD, in Yerevan and Dr. Myron Allukian, DDS, MPH.

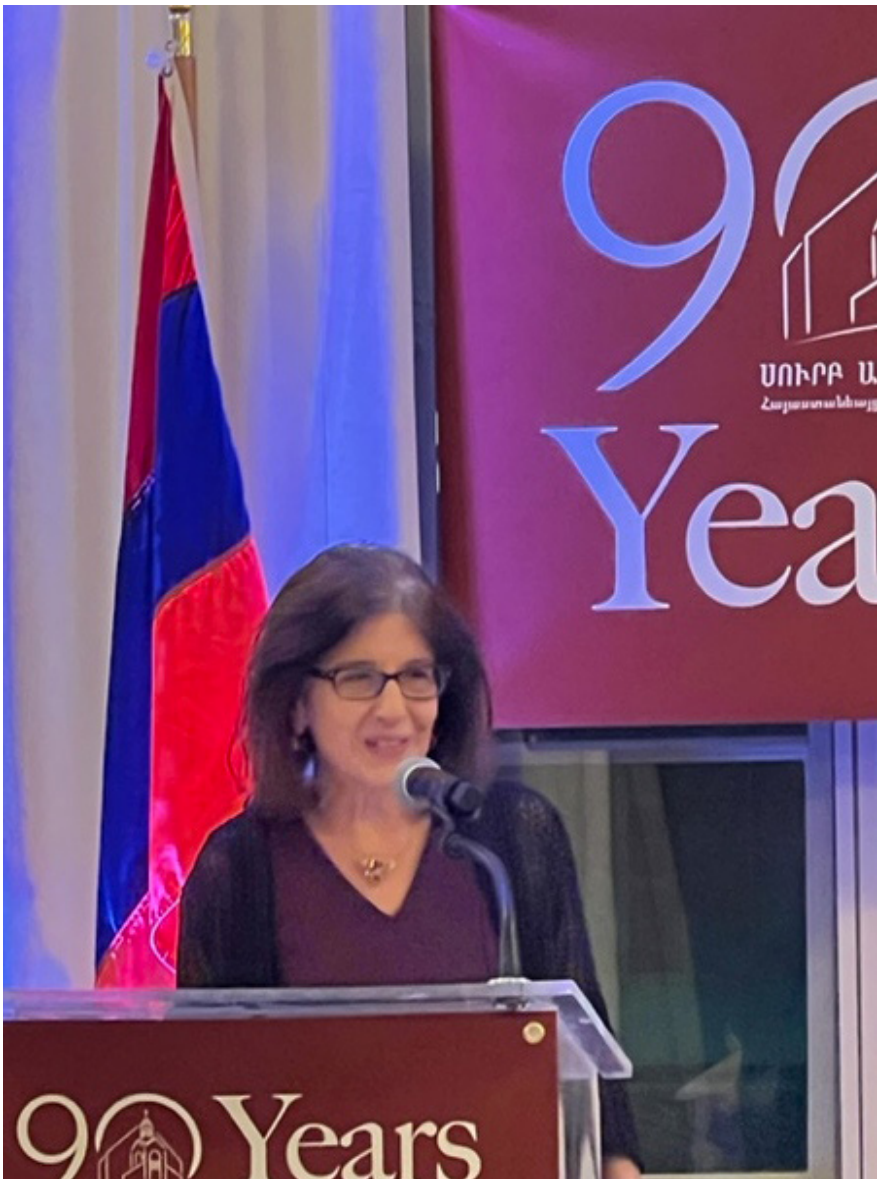
ABSS has partnered with a UN-affiliated nonprofit organization (www.meaningfulworld.com) to launch a fundraiser dedicated to trauma prevention and mental health services for individuals in Armenia and Artsakh.

The group is developing educational videos on various mental health topics surrounding the Armenian community, which range from anxiety and depression to PTSD after war. Many topics focus on recent events, such as the 2020 war in Artsakh, while others focus on history (e.g. the Armenian Genocide).

ABSS is cooperating on projects with other student organizations. For example, it is partnering with Psi Alpha Psychology Honor Society to promote a new video on “How high school students can find a mentor”. This tape was created with the American Psychological Association (APA), featuring Brian Caballo and Harold Takooshian. ABSS members will also engage in research studies, including forming surveys, writing articles, and collecting general data.

Students are welcome to contact ABSS to get involved in 2023 at armenian.bss@gmail.com.

To view a video for finding a mentor for research opportunities go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1grI-0XwJaQ&t



Sarah Ignatius

Washington’s St. Mary Church Marks 90 Years

WASHINGTON — On December 11, St. Mary Church in Washington, DC, celebrated the 90th anniversary of its establishment.

Some 240 parishioners and friends gathered in historic Heritage Hall of the Catholic University of America (CUA), to rejoice in the past and embrace the future with a renewed vision.

During the program, longtime St. Mary community members were honored for their contributions and impact on generations of Armenians. Honorees included Clara Andonian; Ed and Roseann Alexander; Sahag and Betty Dedeian; Paul Ignatius; Meline Kaehn; Yn. Anahid Kalayjian; Gloria Kassabian; Casey and Bella Kazanjian; Gloria Kazanjian; Helen Krikorian; Verjin Sahakian and Zakar Shahverdian.

Mistress of Ceremonies Mariam Khaloyan introduced keynote speaker Sarah Ignatius, recently retired executive director of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), whose speech emphasized the historic role of the Armenian Church.

Sarah Ignatius concluded: “St. Mary Armenian Church plays a vital role in filling that space in our hearts when we search for meaning, hope, spiritual direction, continuity with our lost homeland; fidelity to our traditions; and communion with our ancestors, family, and friends.... Enduring faith has helped to keep Armenian people together in hard times and good times, and has brought us together here tonight.”

The program also included a beautiful performance of traditional Armenian songs, by the a Capella trio Zulal.

see ST. MARY, page 10



St. Mary community members honored, with Rev. Hovsep Karapetyan at left, and Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, second from right

Well-deserved Appreciation For Armenian Teachers

By Arpi Sarafian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PASADENA, Calif. — I cannot think of anything more challenging than teaching Armenian language and culture to students in a non-Armenian public school setting. Nonetheless, that is precisely what the twenty-five honorees attending the Armenian Teachers’ Appreciation Night at the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church in Pasadena, on December 11, have committed themselves to doing. These women (all women, alas!) teach in the Glendale Unified School District in a program that makes the teaching of Armenian language to elementary school students part of the school curriculum.

Recognizing that a culture cannot be preserved and passed on to future generations without fluency in its language, Glendale Unified Board of Education President Nayiri Nahabedian, who was present at the event, established the program in the 2009-10 school year, with the full support of the administration. Nahabedian advocated changing the existing Armenian Heritage program, started in



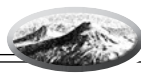
Dr. Simon Simonian, Zvartnots Committee chair

2006-07, to the Armenian Dual Language Immersion program, where students “learn to speak, read, and write in Armenian through content, not as a separate course of study.” All subjects are taught in both English and Armenian.

The evening was organized by the Zvartnots Cultural Committee of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of its founding. While it aimed to honor all teachers of Armenian language and culture, the event was dedicated to the diasporan poet and educator Vahe-Vahian, in recognition of his legacy, and in hopes of guiding future educators with his example.

After committee chair Dr. Simon Simonian’s welcoming remarks, Dr. Minas Kojayan took the podium to introduce Vahe-Vahian the poet. Learning that the poet’s pen name (his birth name is Sarkis Abdalian)

see TEACHERS, page 11



COMMUNITY NEWS

Tabibian Family and Knights of Vartan Inc. Announce Launch of the Tabibian Family Scholarships

FRESNO — The Tabibian Family and the Knights of Vartan Inc. announced recently a new partnership and the launch of the Tabibian Family Scholarships. These new scholarships will be available from 2023 September for the students of the science and technology faculties at the Yerevan State University and the National Polytechnic University of Armenia.

Dr. Neshan Tabibian from Burbank CA has a busy professional life. One of his lifetime goals was to establish a scholarship for academically high-achieving students who may need financial assistance. Originally from Lebanon, Dr. Tabibian saw the need for higher education. Wishing to help students and at the same time help out his homeland Armenia, it seemed a natural combination to establish this scholarship.

Dr. Tabibian's goal was not only to establish a way for students to gain higher academic success in the fields of technology and science but to help Armenia in these areas of study.

Tabibian, while living in Visalia, prior to moving to Burbank, became a member of Yeprad Lodge of the Knights of Vartan and there saw the work that the Knights of Vartan was already doing in Armenia.

Since the 1990s, the Knights of Vartan Inc. has partnered with the two universities by providing scholarships to students who were elected by the universities based on their education and financial needs. Over 320 students benefited through these years.

The initial contribution for the Endowment Fund of the Tabibian Family Scholarship is \$200,000. Annually the yielded funds will be awarded as scholarships to students at the science or technology faculties of these two



From left, Grand Lieutenant Levon Thorose, Dr. Neshan Tabibian, Grand Commander Hunan Arshakian, Past Grand Commander Steven Adams and Past Grand Commander Dr. Gary Zamanigian

universities in Armenia. During the following five years the contribution to the endowment fund will continue, thus the scholarship funds will increase every year.

Donor preference is to grant students who are aiming to continue living and working in Armenia and have higher academic grades.

This month Grand Commander Hunan Arshakian appointed the Knights of Vartan's Tabibian Family scholarship committee to lead the final selection of students and coordination of the project. The announcement, application collection and first screening will be handled

by the universities and the final selection will be executed by the KV Tabibian committee. The process will be started around spring in 2023 to be ready to grant the scholarships by September 2023 for the new academic year.

Tabibian believes that strong education in science and technology are especially important now, to recreate a strong economy, provide new jobs and develop the country of Armenia.

For more information about the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, visit <http://kofv.org>.

Donations to the Mirror-Spectator

The Vartkes and Rita Balian Family Foundation, Arlington, VA \$500
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COMMUNITY NEWS

CEO Orujyan Raising Awareness About FAST in US

FAST, from page 1

Some people ask why FAST works in the space of education, research and commercialization. Orujyan responded that a high level of education is necessary to have a grasp of scientific advancements and generative science, as well as to maintain some kind of scientific bank, so to speak. Secondly, after Armenia has all this information about science, then it must do some work on its extension or development. At this point, the question arises as to what capacity Armenia has to do scientific programs. If you do not have enough people being prepared in its educational pipeline who can make scientific discoveries, then you need to make adjustments in the educational system to increase the numbers in scientific disciplines.

Finally, one might ask how Armenia benefits if it has gained scientific knowledge and advancement — intellectual property, in other terms. Orujyan said that this is where commercialization comes in — turning some of these scientific discoveries and knowledge into tangible solutions for people in various fields.

He said that although many things in modern life have become very dynamic, with exponential growth, people's education remains linear, with step after step. It still takes some 15 to 20 years of education before you get to some kind of expertise. For this reason, Orujyan said, you have to do this properly and work in parallel so that you can get results now from the existing commodities and intellectual property that you have, and then prepare others for the future.

Artificial Intelligence

One example of FAST's work in this realm is the attempt to introduce artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities into the Armenian educational system, and ultimately broader society. FAST has a pilot program called Generation AI which it is launching in 2023 to serve about 200 students in approximately ten schools, probably five in Yerevan and five in Tavush Province, according to Orujyan. As this first cohort advances from 10th to 12th grade, the information learned will help in expanding the program to more schools. Generation AI itself is based on an earlier program FAST had developed around four years ago called Unit 1991, which taught upcoming Armenian Army recruits mathematics, machine learning and several other useful topics.

Orujyan said that as it is scaled, Generation AI will be accessible to all high school students in Armenia, with its reach increasing from hundreds to tens of thousands of students in the upcoming years. He declared, "Now we are talking about a serious pipeline. That changes the narrative."

It also raises the question of whether there will be an appropriate higher education system set up for the high school graduates to continue on a similar path. If there is not, Orujyan said, then they will leave Armenia for other countries where they could get the necessary support, and many would also be discouraged from entering the high school programs if they might reach a roadblock in college. For that reason, he said, FAST is speaking with several public and private universities to set up university programs soon.

Why choose AI vs. other fields for this educational prominence? Orujyan said that FAST looked for what fields an advantage can be generated for Armenia, taking into consideration existing intellectual, financial and network capacity as well as the impact of various types of technologies. AI is in a certain sense interdisciplinary, he said, because it is important in nearly every do-

main or field today, including biotechnology, chip design and many other verticals. "Its impact is everywhere — it is omnipresent," he exclaimed. In other words, once young people are trained in AI, they could apply it in the fields that they have the most affinity for, whether fashion, accounting, chemistry or biology.

Secondly, AI is not capital intensive as in fields like semiconductors or biotechnology, Orujyan said, and so the only limitation is computing power, which is easier to resolve than putting labs in high schools for biological experimentation, for example, or licenses for programs necessary for semiconductor design.

Cooperation

There are some other organizations working on similar programs in Armenia. Synopsys, for example, is preparing a three-year high school online learning program on AI. Orujyan said, "We are speaking to our colleagues in Synopsys to make sure that there is not an overlap. Thus far, we understand that it is complementary. At least we are not in the same schools... We are looking to see how these two models are evolving and how we can join them." He added, "There is much for us to learn from Synopsys, because it has been doing that in higher education for many years."

There are also discussions with ArMat (of the Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises), which may incorporate AI in its labs. Orujyan emphasized, "When we talk to our partners, we care if they are trying to transform the educational system. That is where our alignment begins."

Global Innovation Forum Introduces Newest AI Developments

After a two-year hiatus, FAST organized its fourth Global Innovation Forum in Yerevan in October 2022 focusing on AI. The conference involved some 1,300 people from 20 countries, and nearly 70 speakers, including some well known names. Orujyan said that the idea of such conferences was to establish Armenia as a place where AI scientists and entrepreneurs go to congregate and learn, but Covid temporarily halted any progress. In 2022, Orujyan said, "We were able to awaken it and many partners from the past joined us. It gave us a boost and energy to try to bring this back again. We probably need at least one or possibly two more events for us to really build that brand in Armenia."

There are three things Armenia may gain from such conferences, Orujyan said: networks, knowledge and money. Money at present is the least probable, but networking takes place when people from companies like Apple, Google and Huawei participate. Secondly, the speakers share cutting edge solutions on which they are working, which can help Armenians avoid duplicating existing efforts, possibly provide epiphanies concerning new approaches, and thirdly stimulates thinking about how to go beyond what is being done.

Orujyan added that in the future, in addition to the current knowledge exchange and network building, there will also be a component where investors can learn about actual products and potentially make investments in them.

Fundraising

Since the inception of FAST, the organization has been reliant on the financial resources of its founders. Orujyan pointed out that this was the understanding from the start. He said, "We make mistakes on our own dime and once we figure things out, this is where we invite the broader community to join us to executive things together." In March 2022, the point came when FAST was ready for its first formal

fundraiser, a gala in Los Angeles to support FAST's Advance STEM Research Grant program.

It was a sold-out event with 550 people packing the room and the goal of raising funds for grants of \$125,000 each for ten research teams was reached. Each research team in Armenia will be connected to an internationally renowned scientist abroad whose university will be connected to a local university in Armenia. The grants will pay for the salaries of all the scientists involved, the cost of publications, lab materials and travel.

Orujyan said that by December 2022, seven of the grant programs were already set up, and the three remaining ones will be ready shortly. In September 2022, Orujyan went to Los Angeles to report to most of the gala donors about progress.

At present, Orujyan said, active STEM researchers in Armenia number about 1,000, so through these 10 grants, approximately 50-60 people will receive FAST sponsorship. This is roughly 5 percent of all Armenian scientists, and this is just in the pilot phase of the program, he added. "We want to go to hundreds of these grants over the next four or five years. That will be a \$10-12 million commitment annually which will essentially give opportunities to roughly 50 percent of all current active scientists in this space. To us, that is transformative. That changes the narrative," Orujyan said.

Another positive development is that the Armenian government is itself offering similar funding, based on the ADVANCE model, Orujyan said, to about 18 principle scientific investigators. He said, "This is a testament to the success of the program, when the government adopts something similar to what we are doing. That is also the nature of our organization — every tool that we create at some point is going to be

spun off and become an independent entity.... The point of this foundation is not for us to own them but to create and mature them, and spin them off for them to work independently of the foundation."

In other words, if the government program works well, Orujyan said that at some point FAST may exist from this to focus on something else.

Meanwhile, in 2023, FAST has four fundraisers coming up. The first one will be in Boston in March, then one in Los Angeles in April or May, and afterwards events will be organized in New York and London. Starting in 2023, the AI program alone will add at least \$2 million to the FAST annual budget, so there is a lot of work to do.

Orujyan remarked: "These fundraisers are structured in such ways for the organization to become sustainable in offering continuously its product. They are not one-off types of deals."

Institutionalization

One important goal for Orujyan to realize in 2023, he said, is to create or mature the proper institutional framework for FAST to be able to continuously function and maintain stability. He said, "We assume these things just run by themselves.... Yet many entities come and go, which is normal. Organizations need to have ways to survive that are not based on individuals. There must be memory retention, so that there is not a tabula rasa every time leadership changes."

Mechanisms must be in place to ensure proper functioning. Orujyan pointed out one such mechanism which has been successful so far: FAST has been doing independent auditing since the inception of the organization, always with one of the big fours. For the last three years, he observed, it has not received a single comment on FAST's accounting mechanisms.



ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR

Washington's St. Mary Church Marks 90 Years

ST. MARY, from page 10

Additional remarks were made by Parish Council Chair Shoghig Sahakyan, Armenia's Ambassador to the U.S. Lilit Makunts; Permanent Representative of Artsakh Robert Avetisyan; Dean of Theology and Religious Studies at CUA Fr. Mark Morozowich; St. Mary pastor Fr. Hovsep Karapetyan; and Diocesan Legate and Ecumenical Director Archbishop Vicken Aykazian.

To mark the anniversary, a new “Embrace the Future” endowment fund was established to ensure the church has the resources to continue and expand its ministry to the community.

St. Mary's 90th anniversary celebration continued on December 12 with the badarak celebrated by Archbishop Aykazian. Ten dedicated altar servers were ordained as acolytes and received a special blessing by his hand: Alek Seferian, Alex Nazaryan, Andranik Seropian, Aram Seropian, Davit Barseghyan, Edmund McClure, Sevak Stepanyan, Van Topjian and Vartan Karapetyan.

The weekend closed with congratulations to the newly ordained acolytes, and expressions of thanks to all those who contributed to and supported the anniversary event.



Ambassador Lilit Makunts



From left, Sarah Ignatius, Paul Ignatius and Adi Ignatius

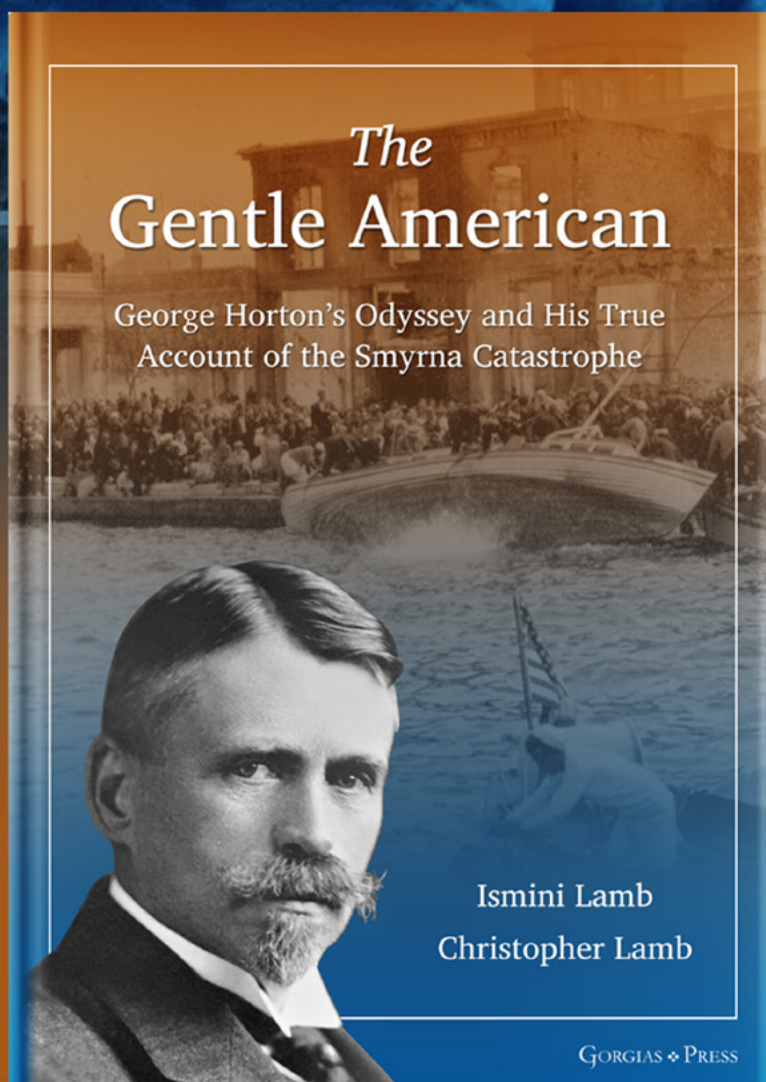


Robert Avetisyan



Kevork Marashlian of the Tekeyan Cultural Association, at right

Resolve in 2023 to learn about the American role in the Asia Minor genocides before, during & after WWI; about those who fought the horrors, and those who abetted them with disinformation.



As Horton's ship backed away from Smyrna's wharf, he could see the helpless crowd on the waterfront trapped between the sea and a raging inferno. He was not consoled by his shipload of escaping refugees or the many other Christian, Jewish, and Muslim lives he had saved. His focus was on helping the people before him threatened with fire, rape, and massacre. It would not be easy. His Department of State superiors were blocking aid to refugees and covering up atrocities in a vain effort to win access to Turkish oil. Undaunted, Horton pursued his cause until it went to the President and Congress for resolution. At stake was the outcome of WWI, the stability and liberality of the Middle East, and the likelihood of more genocide.

Available from Gorgias Press, Amazon, & others!

Learn how Horton saved Smyrna's Armenians & knew the 1915 genocide "surpasses in deliberate and long-protracted horror and in extent anything that has hitherto happened in the history of the world."



COMMUNITY NEWS

Well-deserved Appreciation for Teachers

TEACHERS, from page 7

was the name of a temple built by a pagan cleric in our pre-Christian era to store the treasures and the knowledge available at the time was illuminating. The poet's adopted name reaffirmed for me the true Armenian spirit, that reaches back into our prehistory, of a poet who is revered in both the homeland and the diaspora for, to borrow his words, the "flight of the mind" and "visionary dreams" (a golden bridge).

Dr. Kojayan spoke about the significance of Vahe-Vahian's various poetry collections. He cited *Monument to My Dearest Vahram*, 29 poems that describe the poet's shock and grief at losing his son in a tragic accident, "too early, too soon," as evidence of his endurance and indomitable will to go on. "There is no lament here," averred Kojayan. A poet who, at the age of six, had witnessed over a million of his people, "uprooted and weeping along with him," perish in the Death March during the 1915 deportations and massacres, firmly believes that his people will come out of a past of "darkness and ashes" into a future of light.

The sun is ever present in Vahe-Vahian's poems. To "always soar upwards" and reach for the sunny peaks of the mountains of Arakadz and of Ararat is his guiding be-



Nayiri Nahabedian, president of Glendale Unified School District's Board of Education

lief. Indeed, fighting with a purpose, coming together in peace, and surviving, are the keystones of his creed. "The world needs relief from pain," he writes in *Monument to My Dearest Vahram*.

Kojayan also emphasized the importance of the poet's translations, singling out his 1984 rendering in Western Armenian of



Group photo of honorees – Armenian language teachers of Glendale Unified School District

Kahlil Gibran's celebrated classic, *The Prophet*, which has recently been reissued in an eagerly awaited second edition.

Dr. Guiragos Minassian focused on Vahe-Vahian the educator, whose student he had been in Beirut, Lebanon, at both the Armenian General Benevolent Union Hovaguimian Manougian Secondary School for Boys and the Yervant Hussisian Institute for Armenian Studies. The Institute, he noted, has greatly contributed to the preservation of our heritage, by inspiring generations of students to pursue degrees and careers in Armenian Studies. Minassian evoked Vahe-Vahian's "angelic appearance," taking me back to my soft-spoken, quietly powerful, Armenian literature teacher, who would walk into our classroom at the AGBU Tarouhy Hagopian Secondary School for Girls with "silent steps," and ask the class to "Please be seated." Vahe-Vahian was, at all times, a distinguished presence.

Minassian presented Vahe-Vahian as an educator who has played a key role in the struggle for the preservation of our culture in the diaspora by instilling in his students the spirit of Armenianness they will need to support his mission. The many students who carry on his work to this day evidence that the educator has been successful in accomplishing his goal. The honorees of the night, described as "soldiers armed with the 38 letters of the Armenian alphabet," are proof that the struggle goes on.



Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of America

Most heartening was watching Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Diocese, hand out the certificates of appreciation to the honorees, happily posing for a photograph with each one of them. The Prelate expressed his gratitude for their

work, indicating that they, and not the chairs of the Armenian Studies programs who never visit the teachers' classrooms, are our real heroes.

His Eminence was able to reach out to the teachers, lined up in front, who looked visibly happy, smiling and nodding to his encouraging words. I have no doubt they will go back to their classrooms with renewed energy, and help keep their language and their ancestral traditions and beliefs alive. Knowing that what they do is worthy of the highest praise gives the awardees a strength nobody can take away from them.

Finally, it was a delight to see the board president take the podium and address the audience in Armenian. With carefully chosen words, Nahabedian reiterated the importance of what the night's honorees had dedicated themselves to accomplishing.

Ruben Harutyunyan and Edgar Ekshian did much to enhance the atmosphere and keep the Armenian spirit alive with their performances on the duduk and the piano respectively.

AAF Shipped \$968 Million of Aid in 33 years; \$21 Million in 2022

GLENDAL — In the past 33 years, the Armenia Artsakh Fund (AAF), including the shipments under its predecessor, the United Armenian Fund, delivered to Armenia and Artsakh a grand total of \$968 million worth of humanitarian assistance on board 158 airlifts and 2,540 sea containers.

During 2022, AAF shipped to Armenia and Artsakh \$21 million of medicines, medical supplies and other relief products, including \$2.8 million of aid during the fourth quarter of 2022. Of this amount, Americares donated \$1.8 million and Direct Relief \$1 million donated to AAF for Armenia and Artsakh.

The large amount medicines, medical supplies and Clorox wipes donated during this period were sent to the AGBU Claudia Nazarian Medical Center for Syrian Armenian Refugees in Yerevan, Arabkir United Children's Foundation, Fund for Armenian Relief, Kanaker Zeytoun Medical Center, Metsn Nerces Charitable Organization, Muratsan Children's Endocrinology Center, National Hematology Center, St. Grigor Lusavorich Medical Center, and the health ministries of Armenia and Artsakh.

"The Armenia Artsakh Fund is regularly offered free of charge millions of dollars of life-saving medicines and medical supplies. All we have to do is pay for the shipping expenses. We welcome your generous donations to be able to continue delivering this valuable assistance to all medical centers in Armenia and Artsakh," stated Harut Sassounian, the President of AAF.

For more information, email: sassoun@pacbell.net.

TEKEYAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
MHER MEGERDCHIAN
THEATRICAL GROUP

JAZZ NIGHT

FEATURING
Michael Darian
QUARTET

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 25, 2023
7:30PM

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Arts & Culture

The Frick Acquires Its First Renaissance Portrait of a Woman

By Sarah Cascone

NEW YORK (Artnet) — The walls of the Frick Collection's stately Gilded Age mansion in New York are lined with distinguished Old Master portraits, many depicting the kings, knights, and patrons of the Italian Renaissance. Now, the museum has made an intriguing new addition by acquiring its first painted portrait of a woman from the period.

Titled "Portrait of a Woman" (ca. 1575), the depiction of an auburn-haired lady is the work of Giovanni Battista Moroni. The estate of Assadour O. Tavitian, a longtime board member who died in 2020, donated the work to the museum following its appearance in the 2019 exhibition "Moroni: The Riches of Renaissance Portraiture." It is also the first work by the artist to join the Frick's collection.

Tavitian was a philanthropist known in the Berkshires for his generosity and commitment to several local organizations. Considered a patriot by the Armenian Church for his contributions to Armenia, he had lived in Stockbridge since the mid-1990s, according to Bob Jones, of Lee, who served as the caretaker of Tavitian's property on Prospect Hill Road for 18 years. He also owned a townhouse in New York City that housed a large art collection.

Tavitian, the co-founder of SyncSort, one of the first software development companies to emerge after IBM unbounded its software, served on the boards of the former Berkshire Theatre Festival in Stockbridge, the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge and The Clark Art Museum in Williamstown.

In 1995, he established the Tavitian Foundation, which provides scholarships to students of Armenian and Bulgarian origin and sponsors projects that focus on the development of the Republic of Armenia. Through his foundation, he established the Tavitian Fellows Program at the Fletcher School. That program provides a six-month training program in public policy and administration for Armenian government officials, and it has over 350 alumni.

"He sponsored students throughout his life in a variety of areas," said Kate Maguire, CEO and artistic director of the Berkshire Theatre Group, which includes the former Berkshire Theatre Festival. "He was always very generous in terms of his support. And his support was thorough. He got to know whoever he was sponsoring and mentored them through their life."

"A very generous guy," said Jones, who also served as the facilities manager for the Berkshire Theatre Festival. "He had a great sense of humor and was the smartest guy I've ever known. He's going to be sorely missed."

Tavitian was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1940, to parents who had survived the 1915 Armenian Genocide in Turkey. After living in Beirut see FRICK, page 16



AGBU Supports Independent Armenian Cinema with Global 'Armenians in Film' Series

NEW YORK — After two years of virtual screenings, eager film enthusiasts around the globe joined AGBU's creative young artists for in-person showings and discussions of the past, present, and future of Armenian independent films.

The first screening took place at Pasadena's AGBU Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Performing Arts Center, followed by São Paulo's Reserva Cultural, and New York's prestigious Francesca Beale Theater at Lincoln Center. The diverse set of films explored themes dating back to Armenian displacement and assimilation to timely depictions of Artsakh and interpretations of the modern Armenian family, in addition to non-Armenian topics like avant-garde takes on art and humanity.

The West Coast screening held as part of the Pasadena Glendale Chapter's 7th annual Armenian Fest was cosponsored by the Armenian Film Society, with proceeds benefitting the families of fallen soldiers and displaced civilians. Moderated by Teny Issakhanian, the story artist and illustrator from Disney blockbusters including "Encanto" and "Raya & The Last Dragon," drew an audience of all ages in the local community. Several films highlighted Armenian identity, like Micheal Aloyan's "This Land," Avo John Kambourian's "Echoes of Kef Time," and Levon Minasian's "Le Piano." Other films shed light on legendary Armenian figures, like Garo Berberian's "Taniel" — a portrait of poet Taniel Varoujan's final days during the Genocide. The remaining films took an experimental approach, like Gary Gananian's ethereal glimpse of youth, "No Thanks" and Hayk Matevosyan's cinematic rendition of famous works of art, "Art in Motion."

see FILMS, page 13



"Armenians in Film" panel discussion at Lincoln Center, New York. Photo by Harout Barsoumian

Sara Mechitarian

'If You Want to Take in the Scent of God, Go to the Armenian Mountains!'

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Italian film director Giuliano Montaldo, during his visit to Armenia in 1974, said the following in an interview: "A film editor of Armenian origin, named Baghdikian, works in Italy. I have worked with him often; he is a talented editor."

While working on my study "The Armenians in World Cinema," I wanted to know more about this person, so I sent a letter to Giuliano Montaldo. In his reply, Montaldo informed me that Baghdikian or Bad, as they called him, is "disappeared, after being one of the most appreciated editors in the 1970s. I appreciated Bad's editing work, done quickly. It was a very modern style. I would have to say (but many people said at the time) that Bad was the pioneer of that "revolutionary" style of editing.



He was an attractive young man (a bit of a Casanova), great worker (a bit unruly), likable (a bit self-centered), but always full of enthusiasm." Signor Montaldo repeated the same when we met during the Italian Film Festival in 1998 in St. Vincent, Italy.

However, it was possible to find Baghdikian's relatives through the Facebook, to learn that his name was Giuseppe, and moreover, to find out that his cousin lives in Yerevan. She, the Italian language professor Sara Mechitarian, has spent her life in Italy, Germany, Iran and for more than 20 years has lived in Armenia with her family. And my meeting and conversation with Sarah took place in her pleasant house in Davitashen district of Yerevan.

Sara, I am very happy that Giuseppe Bagdikian became an opportunity for us to get to know each other. Let's start our conversation from him. How did that "Armenian Casanova" enter the world of cinema?

Giuseppe was an extremely handsome and smart person. I remember well his very beautiful eyes. An article about him was titled "The Armenian eyes look at the world." Giuseppe's father, Levon, was married to an Armenian girl from an orphanage in Milan; they also had two daughters, Elisabetta and Maria. The first one married a French-Armenian; the second one an Italian, but see MECHITARIAN, page 14

ARTS & CULTURE

AGBU Supports Independent Armenian Cinema

FILMS, from page 12

The screening in Brazil showcased brilliant minds. Most of the short films explored the hybrid Armenian identity, like Alik Barsoumian’s “Antouni,” a portrait of a Syrian-Armenian girl’s relationship with her father and Tatiana Boudakian’s “Dehatsi — I Was Another Place,” a first-hand look at a Brazilian-Armenian re-discovering her roots. Other films captured mementos of Armenian existence in the motherland, like Anahid Yahjian and Emily Mkrtychian’s “Levon” documenting the zany escapades of a 60-year-old rollerblader in post-Soviet Yerevan. Hovig Hagopian and Astrig Chandèze-Avakian’s “Storgetnya,” presented a study of Armenian miners living underground. “It was a great honor for Brazil to promote the first edition of Armenians in Film in São Paulo,” said the chapter chair of AGBU Brazil Rafael Balukian. “The event highlighted the work of global professionals and exemplifies our mission to promote Armenian culture.” Ticket and poster sales benefited AGBU’s Camp Nairi, an exclusive summer camp exclusively for children of fallen or severely injured service members of the 2020 Artsakh War. Located in the Kotayk province of Armenia, the camp is free of charge



“Armenians in Film” panel discussion in Pasadena with Armenian Film Society.

and supported by donors worldwide. The final event of the “Armenians in Film” series took place in the prestigious

theater of Lincoln Center, moderated by award-winning actress and founder of the Socially Relevant Film Festival Nora Armani. Once again, the Armenian theme ran deep with cinematic explorations of family ties in Arnaud Khayadjanian’s “Anahide” and Kevork Aslanyan’s “The Ticket.” However, many works pivoted to Artsakh with films inspired by true events, like the striking retelling of a family escaping shelling during the Artsakh war in Hasmik Movsisyan’s “250KM” and Anahid Yahji-

an’s “Hishé,” an enthralling meditation of grief and remembrance in Artsakh. Other films highlighted constructed languages, like Alik Barsoumian, Noah Garabedian, and Gregory Dolbashian’s “Gathering,” an artistic approach to the language of music and dance and Nevdon Jamgotchian’s “Stuck,” a creative take on a lone astronaut speaking interlingua. Directors and actors virtually Zoomed in and flew in from Armenia to discuss interpretations of their films, the inception of their ideas, and the



Directors and producers answering questions at the “Armenians in Film” event in Brazil.



The audience at the “Armenians in Film” event in Brazil.



Davit Asatryan standing, with the musicians

creative bonds AGBU has shaped through this event. “It’s such an honor to be here and to present fresh contributions to Armenian living culture with our filmmakers,” said Hayk Arsenyan, the director of AGBU Arts. “I am really blown away and I think this selection is particularly powerful,” Armani chimed in. “Many films moved me to tears and I can tell that each and every film came from a personal place.” AGBU Arts offers financial, mentorship, and exposure opportunities for rising artists, providing a number of scholarships to talented young Armenians who might otherwise not have the opportunity to study at top institutions. In addition, AGBU Arts offers mini-grants and the Creative Armenia-AGBU Fellowship to support young talent with professional mentorship and funds to bring ideas to life and build credentials as they pursue a given field. AGBU also organizes the Sayat Nova international composition competition and hosts performance and exhibition opportunities around the world. To learn more visit www.agbu.org.



ARTS & CULTURE

Books

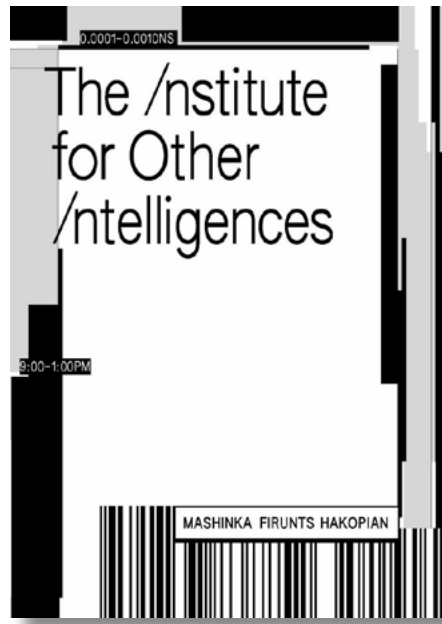
New Book Imagines Future Where Machine Intelligence Controls Humans' Fate

GLENDAL — *The Institute for Other Intelligences*, the new book by Mashinka Firunts Hakopian, brings speculative fiction and media studies to bear on an imagined future where machine intelligences convene annually for curriculum on algorithmic equity.

Edited by Ana Iwataki and Anuradha Vikram for X Topics, the book includes an introduction by Vikram and diagrammatic illustrations by Fernando Diaz, a scientist whose work focuses on the quantitative

evaluation and algorithmic design of information access systems.

The Institute for Other Intelligences presents a transcript from a conference in which a community of “AI agents” gather at a school for oppositional automata to deliver lectures on the human biases and omissions encoded in their training data. The resulting manuscript, published on the occasion of the Institute’s millennial anniversary, revisits sociotechnical systems from its founding in the 21st century.



Drawing on feminist, queer, and critical media scholarship, the trainings collected in the book aim to optimize the operations of future generations of intelligent machines toward just outcomes.

Hakopian uses these speculative exchanges to invite the reader to consider how critical approaches to nonhuman intelli-

gence might reroute our current path toward destructive technofutures and allow us to conceive of another way forward.

Mashinka Firunts Hakopian is an Armenian writer, artist, and researcher born in Yerevan and residing in Glendale. She is an associate professor in technology and social justice at ArtCenter College of Design, and holds a PhD in the history of art from the University of Pennsylvania. With



Mashinka Firunts Hakopian

Avi Alpert and Danny Snelson, she makes up one-third of the collective, Research Service. Her writing and commentary appear in *Performance Research Journal*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Meghan Markle’s *Archetypes*, and elsewhere. Her research focuses on practices that generate alternative imaginaries of the future.

Purchase *The Institute for Other Intelligences* through X Artists’ Books by visiting <https://www.xartistsbooks.com/>

Sara Mechitarian: ‘If You Want to Take in the Scent of God, Go to the Armenian Mountains!’

MECHITARIAN, from page 12
divorced. Giuseppe was not fond of studying, so from an early age he started working at the Rome branch of the “Paramount” film studio, where his father worked as a guard. This is how Giuseppe entered this world, learned film editing and participated in important films. Then he engaged in journalism, created TV programs. I have not met him for many years, but the last time I saw him was a few months before his death, in Rome. He was sick, but still was very handsome. And he was speaking Armenian. He died at the age of 60 in 1997. Giuseppe was married to an Italian lady, but they had no children and divorced, but he had a daughter from another woman, whom he named Armenia. Armenia Baghdikian works in television. Some years ago she visited Armenia.

As far as I know, the Baghdikian family was from Smyrna/Izmir.

Yes! They were displaced and driven to the deserts during the Genocide. My grandmother Arusiak, who was already married, lost her husband and two children during deportation. Surviving, she reached Constantinople, met my grandfather, who was survived with his two sons. They got married, my aunt was born in Constantinople, then they left for Greece, where my mother Baidzar was born in Patras. Grandfather’s two sons became students of Moorat-Raphael Armenian College in Venice. The family decided to move from Greece to France, on the way they stopped in Venice to pick up their sons. However, since France stopped accepting Armenian refugees, my grandparents decided to stay in Italy. The government sent them to the city of Subiaco, 60 kilometers from Rome, where my uncle Benedetto was born.

By the way, Subiaco is known as the birthplace of Gina Lollobrigida.

Yes, and you know, she attended kindergarten with my uncle Benedetto!

And do you know that Sergei Paradjanov wanted to film Gina in his planned film “Ara the Handsome and Semiramis” in the role of Queen Shamiram-Semiramis?

Really? It would be so good. The world would get to know us more. Paradjanov is very familiar with special circles, but if

he shot Gina in his film, the whole world would know him!

Was the famous American journalist Ben Baghdikian related to you?

No, but we met when he came to Rome. Uncle Benedetto met him by chance at the



Giuseppe Baghdikian

airport in Rome. By the way, now I am trying to write the history of the Baghdikian family, which is not easy, because it is very long, I have to write about many generations.

And where is your father’s side from?

My father Gevorg Mkhitarian was from Gyumri. During the Second World War, he was captured by the Germans, taken to Italy and escaped from captivity. The Italians found out that he is Armenian and introduced him to my mother’s family. Until the end of the war, my father was hidden from the Nazis by Baghdikian family, and eventually he married my mother. Three girls were born: Maria, Sara, Donatella. After the war, five years after the marriage, my father went to the Soviet embassy in Rome and announced that he wants to return to Armenia. He did not know that Stalin declared those captured during the war traitors. And then one day the Russians came to Subiaco, caught our whole family and took them by car to Rome. Since my father was a Soviet citizen, his daughters were stateless, so they also took the children, and the police could not defend us. I was two years old. When they were taking us away, my grandmother

handed me over to a 12-year-old Italian girl who was there and told her to run away with this child. The girl ran away with me, that’s how I got rid of the Russians. So, I stayed in Italy until I was 15 years old. My family was taken to Dresden and kept for 10 years in a camp where former prisoners lived with their families. Life there was very hard, my sisters got pneumonia and other diseases. When the Berlin Wall was being built, one day my father ran away with his family from Dresden to Berlin and passed through the Western part, but later he was caught and imprisoned for two years. Then he escaped from prison one more time, and he thought that his wife would have returned to Italy, but my mother was waiting for him in West Berlin. And although my grandmother and other relatives in Italy looked after me very well and were very caring, in 1961 I went to Germany, got to know my parents and sisters, and our family was reunited. We lived in the city of Ravensburg, where I studied at school, then specialized in food chemistry and worked as a chemistry technical assistant. At the age of 23, in Munich I met my future husband, an Iranian Armenian. Five years after our marriage, we left for Iran, because my husband was the only child of his parents, and his mother wanted her son to be with her. I lived in Tehran for 30 years, my other son was born there (the first one was born in Germany). My husband forbade me to work, but I started giving private Italian and German lessons at home. I learned Armenian in Iran. until then, the only Armenian sentence I knew was this: *barev, yes hay em* (hello, I am Armenian). It was my identity card. It was very difficult to learn Armenian, because Persian was mixed there, and I did not understand which one was Armenian and which one was Persian. But little by little I learned. I have always been stateless; if someone asked me where I am from, I had no answer. I was neither Italian, nor German, nor Persian. I could say that I am a cosmopolitan. The only thing that was certain in my life was being born in Subiaco. Of course, I have always been Armenian, but that is ethnicity, not citizenship! I just got Armenian citizenship 10 years ago.

How did you settle in Armenia?

I have said all my life that I could live anywhere, because I have a lot of love and respect for all peoples and cultures, I can

understand every kind of lifestyle, but it is important where you will die, because it is your last step. In Iran, I always thought that if I die, they should take me either to Italy or to Armenia, which I did not know, but it is mine. At that time, Armenia was Soviet, it was not so easy to travel. We came here after independence. Once my friends took me to Mount Aragats for the first time. It was a very gloomy, rainy day with heavy black clouds. On the way back, the car had a problem, we stopped. Suddenly there was a strong wind, the clouds dispersed, and a dark blue sky opened, from the middle of which the white Mount Ararat appeared. I will never forget the power of that scene. That day I thought: if I die in this land and even no one knows, I will be calm. I felt that my tree had finally found its soil; I had found my roots. I always say that there are incredibly beautiful places in the world, but if you want to feel the scent of God, go to the Armenian mountains! No mountain in the world has that mystical feeling. I have seen beautiful mountains in Germany and Italy, but they do not have that power.

I have been living in Armenia since 2001 being the only Italian-born Armenian living here. I know the Italians working at the embassy, as well as Antonio Montalto, the honorary consul of Italy in Gyumri, a businessman who lives in Armenia for 30 years.

And you worked here as an Italian language professor.

At first, my husband and I worked for seven years in the Persian Mosque of Yerevan. The Iranian embassy opened it as a cultural and tourism center, where Persian language classes were organized for free; there was a large library and a film library. By the way, I met Charles Aznavour three times, who loved to come to the mosque, as his Moroccan son-in-law is a Muslim. Aznavour told me that he is Armenian, but his family is international, and that he loves his Moroccan son-in-law very much.

Then I taught Italian at the Humanities University, and for a very short time at the Conservatory. I loved my work, looking into the eyes of my students, full of dreams and goals, as if they wanted to conquer the world. That work filled my life. Years have passed, but many students have not forgotten me. Is there a greater joy for the soul than that?



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Lost Recipes Found: Egg Lemon Soup with Spinach and Meatballs

CHICAGO — Monica Kass Rogers, a longtime national food writer, photographer, home cook and mother, launched a vintage recipes revival column in the *Chicago Tribune* that eventually became her popular food blog, Lost Recipes Found. Monica's photography/food styling and recipe testing/development work has appeared in Food & Wine, Bon Appetit, the Chicago Tribune, and more. She currently does this work for JWC Media's luxury lifestyle magazines and newspaper.

"With my husband's maternal grandparents Greek and Armenian, one or another deliciously lemony chicken soup was often on the table. In our own home, we've kept that going with this fortified version of avgolemono (Greek chicken, egg and lemon soup) that has tiny meatballs and baby spinach stirred in, Italian Wedding Soup-style. If you've never made avgolemono at home, you'll be amazed at the velvety lightness — nothing like the thick, pasty versions you may have encountered in many diners. This is a classic Greek soup that's thickened with eggs and spiked with lemon. Add some diced or shredded rotisserie chicken and call it a meal," says Monica.

To make it, simply heat good quality chicken stock, whip egg whites to a soft



peaks, stir in the yolks and lemon juice, and temper the mix with hot stock before whisking all together for a lovely pale-yellow finish," she adds.

The tiny meatballs are a blend of beef, pork, onion, parmesan cheese and parsley, baked up in the oven while you make the soup. To complete, you'll boil a bit of orzo, and quick-sauté fresh baby spinach. In the spring or summer, this soup is very good with a bit of sorrel instead of the spinach.

Note: You can serve this version of avgolemono without the add-ins as a first course. This soup is best served right after you make it, she says.

INGREDIENTS:

For the meatballs:

1/2 pound ground pork
1/2 pound ground beef
1 cup freshly grated parmesan (You can use a microplane for very fine shreds)
1/2 cup finely minced onion
1/3 cup finely minced parsley
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon fresh-cracked black pepper
1 large egg

For the soup:

8 cups good quality chicken stock
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon finely ground pepper
4 large eggs, yolks and whites separated
Juice from 3 fresh lemons (Finely grate and reserve zest from one of the lemons)
1 cup orzo pasta, prepared according to package directions
2 teaspoons olive oil, to taste
6 cups fresh baby spinach leaves
Salt and pepper to taste
Garnish: Fresh snipped parsley or dill, thin lemon slices

PREPARATION:

Make the meatballs:

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Line a rimmed cookie sheet with parchment paper. In a large bowl, combine all ingredients for the meatballs.

Shape into 36 to 40 small meatballs. Place on parchment. Bake for 30 minutes or until nicely browned and cooked through. Remove from oven and keep warm.

Make the soup:

In a heavy-bottomed soup pot over medium-high heat, add stock and heat to boiling. Stir in salt and pepper. Reduce heat to medium low and allow soup to simmer.

Prepare orzo according to package directions. Drain and set aside.

In the bowl of a stand mixer with whisk attachment, beat egg whites at medium high speed until soft peaks form; continue beating a bit longer until peaks are firmer but not dry. With mixer on low speed, whisk in egg yolks and lemon juice. Remove 2 cups of hot stock from the soup pot. With mixer on low speed, slowly and continuously dribble the 2 cups of stock into the egg-lemon mixture, until all is mixed in.

Pour this tempered egg-stock mixture back into the soup pot. Turn heat to medium-low and whisk soup for 10 minutes until it begins to thicken and you have a velvety, light yellow soup. Remove from heat and cover.

Warm 2 teaspoons of olive oil in a sauté pan over medium high heat. Add baby spinach leaves and reserved lemon zest and stir until spinach has cooked down a bit but is still bright green. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Stir reserved orzo, meatballs and cooked spinach into soup. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Serve immediately garnished with a sprinkling of parsley or dill, and thin slices of lemon.

Monica Kass Rogers says, "Writing has given me the privilege to learn about food from the chefs and restaurateurs who have made careers of this challenging work. In every instance, history, family and culture contributed to the dishes these professionals love most, giving each a lovely narrative- the story to the taste. You'll find those stories, recipes, visuals, and hopefully, some connection to the food memories that matter to you, here. Some of the recipes are my own. Some are adapted from vintage cookbooks. Others are chef creations based on vintage recipes they love. Before publishing to the site, I test, prepare and photograph each dish-using natural light. I do a little research for the copy, and put the results together for you here. I have collected dozens of recipes, photos and stories ready to go and will be posting them as I can each week. Where food memories matter."

For more vintage recipes, information and stories, go to:

<https://lostrecipesfound.com/recipe-index/>

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ARTS & CULTURE



Giovanni Battista Moroni, Portrait of a Woman (ca. 1575). Collection of the Frick Collection. Photo by Joseph Coscia Jr.

Frick Gallery Acquires Its First Renaissance Portrait of a Woman

FRICK, from page 12

for two years, he immigrated to New York in 1961 as a Cold War refugee and received a scholarship that same year to Columbia University. After earning a master’s degree in nuclear engineering, Tavitian in 1975 co-founded SyncSort, a company that played a major role in the development of the software industry.

Tavitian served as SyncSort’s CEO from 1975 to April 2008, when the company was recapitalized by Insight Venture Partners. According to Jones, Tavitian lived in Greenwich, Conn., before moving to Stockbridge, where he resided next door to the late Berkshire benefactors John and Jane Fitzpatrick, who restored the Red Lion Inn in the late 1960s.

After the Fitzpatricks died, Tavitian bought their property on Prospect Hill Road in 2014, restored it and moved his foundation there, according to Jones.

“We are deeply saddened by the sudden demise of Aso Tavitian – great philanthropist, humanist, patriot and beloved friend of the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin and the Armenia people,” His Holiness Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians, told Public Radio of Armenia at the time. “His death is a great loss for the Holy Church and the whole nation.” Mr. Tavitian’s efforts have been recognized by the government of Armenia through the awarding of the Order of Honor on October 7, 2017 as well as the Prime Minister’s Medal in 2012.

“We had the pleasure of getting to know this compelling portrait very well in 2019,” museum director Ian Wardropper said in a statement. “At that time, the portrait was considered one of the finest by Moroni in private hands. We are thrilled to now include it in our permanent collection.”

“We have two Titians, we have a Tintoretto, we have a Bronzino — and they’re all of men,” museum curator Aimee Ng, who

co-organized the Moroni show, told the *New York Times*. “So it’s a very big deal.”

The identity of the painting’s sitter has been lost to time, but based on her ornate garb, with its frilled collar and silver brocade, she appears to have been an aristocrat.

It is something of an usual work for the period, not bearing the hallmarks of a traditional female portrait painted for a betrothal, engagement, or a new home. The woman also has a powerful gaze, unflinching and bold in a way not often seen in Renaissance portrayals of women.

It is one of only 15 portraits that the artist did of a woman sitting on her own, out of about 125 extant works in the genre.

“A triumph painted at the height of the artist’s career, its superb quality and condition are perfectly at home among the treasures of the Frick,” Ng said in a statement.

The Frick is currently closed for an ambitious expansion project, so the painting will go on view at the museum’s temporary location at the Breuer Building, the former home of the Whitney Museum of American Art. It will make its debut there on Thursday, January 12.

The Frick tends to be judicious in its acquisitions. The last year it added more than one work to its collection was in 2015, when it acquired nine pieces of porcelain and a Francis Cotes portrait. In 2021, Alexis Gregory gave the gift of a James Cox musical automaton rhinoceros clock (ca. 1765-72), while in 2020, Kathleen Feldstein donated Salomon van Ruysdael’s Landscape with Farmhouse (ca. 1628).

In 2018, the museum’s biggest purchase in decades, a full-length portrait of Prince Camillo Borghese by French artist François Gérard, almost fell through after Italy attempted to rescind the work’s export permit.

(With additions by Christine Vartanian Dadian, the Berkshire Eagle and the New York Times)

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CALIFORNIA

JANUARY 28 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Metro Los Angeles Chapter presents “A Soghomonian” on Saturday, at **POSTPONED** ndale. Special guest appearance by Antic and guest appearance by Tsoghig Samuelian. Admission \$100. For reservations call or text 818.730.1100. No tickets will be sold at the door.

MASSACHUSETTS

JANUARY 17 — Watertown Free Public Library is hosting a talk by comic creator Levon Gyulkhasyan, 7 p.m., about his new graphic novel, Garbage Truck 1970, in conversation with cartoonist, comic historian and co-founder of MICE (Massachusetts Independent Comics Expo) Dan Mazur. In his first graphic novel published in the U.S., local graphic artist Levon Gyulkhasyan invites you to spend a day in the life of Soviet Armenia. Hear more about the era, the artist’s Kickstarter publishing journey, and his storytelling style. 123 Main St., Watertown.

JANUARY 19 — Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter invites those interested in cultural activities to a post-holiday open house to discuss future plans. Thurs., 7:30 p.m. Baikal Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. Light refreshments offered.

JANUARY 28 — Armenian Genocide Remembrance interviews. High school students throughout the greater Boston area will conduct interviews to collect oral histories concerning the Armenian Genocide and the way in which history is passed on from generation to generation. Anyone with a connection to this important history is welcome to join us to be interviewed. Organized by Jenny Staysniak, a history teacher at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School and a member of the Teacher Advisory Board for Facing History and Ourselves. Interviews to take place 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at First Armenian Church, 380 Concord Ave., Belmont. With questions, write to jennifer_staysniak@lsrhs.net.

FEBRUARY 8 — Celebrating Contributions: Leadership Sharing Experiences, Wednesday at 5 p.m., virtually. Highlighting Storica Wines: Wines from Armenia paired with signature dishes from anoush’ella. Zack Armen, co-founder/president, Storica Wines: Wines from Armenia and Nina Festekjian, restaurateur, chef-owner, anoush’ella, InChu, Hum’oveh, Nu Burger & Kutz. Host: Cindy Fitzgibbon, WCVB TV5. To register and for details, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

FEBRUARY 25 — The 128th Anniversary of the Lowell Aharonian Gomideh of the ARF. The Armenian Church at High Pointe, 1280 Boston Rd, Haverhill. Dinner-program. Narrated slide presentation by Joe Dagdigian: “Unseen Armenia: A brief glimpse of People, Places, and Projects.” Keynote Speaker: Reverend Father Vart Gyzalyan - “Current Life and Conditions in Armenia.” Donation: Adults- \$35 and Students: \$20. Reservations Required. For Tickets: Call or email Armen at 978-265-9479, armenjeknavorian@gmail.com or Ara 617-803-2612, ara.a.jeknavorian@gmail.com. Tables of 8 to 10 may be reserved in advance.

APRIL 16 — Annual Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture, Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway, Boston. Sunday beginning at 7:30 a.m. Supported by the Park’s Charles and Doreen Bilezikian Endowed Fund. Rain date: April 23. For details, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

NEW JERSEY

MAY 13 — Save the Date! The Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group will mark its 25th anniversary with a gala. Details to follow.

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

Notice to Our Subscribers Regarding Print Version

Dear subscribers, it has come to our attention that for the past year, and specifically the past month, the delivery of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* has been erratic.

Please note that our paper goes to our printer at the same time every week and is mailed out the same time every week. Nothing has changed.

The delivery problems all lie with the postal service, which is understaffed, and though we have contacted them repeatedly, we have not been able to resolve the problem.

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



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COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

As Artsakh Fades, Are We Speaking with One Voice?



By Edmond Y. Azadian

Throughout history Armenians have been notoriously divided, even in the face of catastrophe, and that, more often than not, has contributed to our historic losses. Today, as Artsakh nears the point of extinction, are we speaking with one voice? Apparently not.

We hear pro-Russian comments from Stepanakert and anti-Russian statements from Yerevan. If this dissonance were based on agreed upon disagreements, we would be gratified that finally Armenians have come to the realization that in the complex and dangerous international situations, they have devised a coordinated policy to take advantage of moving political targets. However, we are afraid the difference of positions reflects different assessments of the situation and in fact will divide support.

And to make matters worse, while different voices are heard from Armenia and Artsakh, there is no voice yet emanating from the diaspora. No massive movements seem to be in the offing and no demands nor have challenges been extended from Yerevan to the diasporan masses. For almost a month, the Lachin Corridor has been blocked, suffocating the Karabakh Armenians, but the international community has failed to provide any remedy nor have Armenians around the world focused their desperation on a specific goal or acted collectively. The only consolation is in the Chinese adage that every crisis is also an opportunity; as Azerbaijani authorities continue the pressure, adding one demand after another, they are justifying the application of the principle of remedial cessation for the Karabakh people.

In the past decade, Azerbaijan was able to paralyze the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, with the active participation of Russia. That entity held the last and best hope for the Armenian side, as it maintained that there is no military solution to the conflict and that the Karabakh status question remains unresolved. But as that hope fades, we realize that no negotiated settlement on the status could be any better than remedial cessation, which may mean self-determination.

At one point, hopes were raised that finally the United Nations Security Council would take a position, internationalizing the crisis. In fact, there is no shortage of crises around the world, but France was able to manage to place the problem on the agenda of the Security Council. And with India serving as the rotating president of the Security Council, a positive outcome was anticipated. However, after many calls to unblock the Lachin Corridor, the Russian delegation was able to defeat the planned resolution. Following verbal gymnastics from the Kremlin and various Russian spokespersons, Moscow blamed France for its own dirty game. However, Armenia's Foreign Ministry publicly thanked France for its constructive position, making clear Yerevan had understood where to put the blame for the failure of that body.

Russia has abdicated the responsibility it had assumed through the November 9, 2020 peace declaration. As it becomes the focus of criticism from many quarters, including Armenia, the Russian authorities continually reassure the public that their peacekeeping forces are hard at work to unblock the corridor.

While all positions are very visible for everyone to see, public debate veers from the reality of the situation. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has criticized the Russian peacekeeping forces for being "silent witnesses" to Azerbaijan's efforts to "depopulate" Karabakh through a blockade. On the other hand, Karabakh's Foreign Minister David Babayan, who has been stranded in Armenia, takes a different position, by stating, "The problem is not the Russians. We need to realize this. The problem is Azerbaijan and Turkey. Hitting the Russian peacekeepers at this point means strangling Artsakh. Who is to blame for all this? The Russians? Why are you following this line?"

On the other hand, the Karabakh people appealed to the international community with a message for self-determination

through peaceful, massive rallies on October 30 and December 25, 2022. It is reported that 60,000-70,000 people participated in the last rally, to refute Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev's claim that only 20,000 people live in the enclave. This time around, the rally was more disciplined and purposeful, with slogans in many international languages. Unlike previous rallies, only the flags of Armenia and Karabakh were hoisted. People are united in their purpose and desire. However, some mysterious changes have been taking place in the leadership.

For example, in the last rally, Karabakh President Arayik Harutyunyan was nowhere to be found, while newly-appointed State Minister Ruben Vardanyan was very visible and offered concluding remarks.

A few days ago, Artsakh's Secretary of the Defense Committee Vitali Balasanyan was dismissed and replaced by his deputy, Ararat Melkumyan. Balasanyan was rumored to have entered into negotiations with Azerbaijani authorities.

In their turn, media in Baku pretended that secret negotiations were underway with the Karabakh leadership.

As far as Vardanyan is concerned, many people in Karabakh see him as a savior who has given up a billionaire's life of comfort and settled in a danger zone to help his people, while Azerbaijan on the other hand is worried about the potential of his leadership.

President Aliyev castigated him as an oligarch who has robbed the Russian people and settled illegally in Karabakh and that therefore, he should leave the area. Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov continued along the same



lines at the failed foreign ministers' meeting in Moscow last December, stating that Baku will never talk to him. He also insinuated that Moscow owns him.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reacted vehemently that Russia has no connection with him nor will have any relations with him in the future.

It looks like Vardanyan has become a political hot potato between Baku and Moscow.

Analyst Hovsep Khurshudyan believes that these attacks render him a hero, rather than a pariah.

Is Yerevan talking to him or to anybody in Stepanakert? That is a moot question.

The crisis gave an opportunity to Armenian Premier Nikol Pashinyan to prove his true mettle by galvanizing the diaspora and making it a potent component of his foreign policy, by rallying the church and its worldwide affiliates around him and by making peace with the opposition. But Pashinyan has not risen to the challenge and seems to be engulfed in a siege mentality, isolating himself from reality and letting things take their own course.

There is certainly a crisis of leadership in Armenia and the diaspora; in the meantime, the outcry around the world has failed to dampen Aliyev's arrogance, as he not only ignores any requests to put an end to his murderous ways, but instead ratchets up the misery by periodically cutting off electricity to Artsakh.



COMMENTARY

With Russia's Fading Power in Ukraine, a Second Catastrophe Looms

By Lara Setrakian

In the wake of a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, Russia was left to broker a ceasefire and keep the two sides in check. The United States and the European Union, which had once played a balancing role in the South Caucasus, effectively pulled back from active diplomacy and let Russia act as the sole mediator. Moscow deployed peacekeepers on the ground to calm and monitor the situation.

But outsourcing peacebuilding to Russia was a bad idea. Now, in the shadow of the Ukraine war, that policy is enabling another humanitarian catastrophe and compromising Western interests in the region.

With Russia weakened in Ukraine, there is no effective arbiter between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan, using its significant oil and gas wealth, has been pushing for maximum advantage on the ground. At the moment, protesters with the support of the Azeri government, experts say, are blocking the Lachin Corridor, the main road linking about 120,000 ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to the outside world. Azeri political analysts say that protests are illegal in Azerbaijan unless they have government approval.

Incoming supplies have been severely limited since December 12, 2022, when the blockade began. Grocery stores are rationing food, with little by way of fresh fruits or vegetables, and there is a dire shortage of medical supplies, residents said in late December. Azerbaijan has said the blockade is in response to mining activities in Armenian-held areas. But rather than taking the issue to international mediation

it has decided to block incoming transit until its conditions are met – a violation of international and humanitarian law.

The Armenians I've met from Nagorno-Karabakh are hearty people with a profound cultural identity and deep Christian faith. Even in their grim days of crisis, some tried to give their families a semblance of a Christmas holiday. But the most vulnerable are manifesting the strain of the blockade: Dr. Biayna Sukhudyanyan, who is stuck in Nagorno-Karabakh, told us in late December that children are showing signs of chronic stress, including nervous breakdowns. UNICEF has warned that children are lacking basic food items and essential services, some of them separated from their parents or legal guardians on the other side of the blocked road.

"People's big concern is keeping their children warm and fed," Sukhudyanyan said in a phone interview. She described how people are surviving by helping each other out. "If there are two mothers and only one has baby formula, she will share the formula with the other woman and breastfeed a little more."

The US, the EU, the UN Secretary-General and more than a dozen countries – including Canada and Mexico – have called for Azerbaijan to unblock the road to Nagorno-Karabakh, but those calls have gone unheeded. Armenians see it as a strategy by Azerbaijan of starving or squeezing them out of the disputed enclave.

Russia has been unable to make any significant move to defuse the problem. But it has also been reluctant to let Western countries step in to solve the standoff. It prefers to be the main power on the ground, using

the resulting leverage to advance its regional interests.

A web of economic and strategic factors have tied Moscow to Turkey and its ally, Azerbaijan. With Russia sanctioned by the West and strained in its relations with many economic partners, Moscow has grown increasingly dependent on Turkey for trade and sanctions evasion. Turkey has become a major facilitator for the export of Russian oil and gas and the import of strategic technologies, many of which are banned from the West.

As Russian-Turkish ties have grown closer, Russia has been more reluctant to push back on Azerbaijan's behavior. That has left the situation in freefall, moving toward more serious and potentially deadly outcomes. Like in the early days of the Srebrenica massacre, international peacekeepers are failing to act before thousands of people could lose their lives. It also sets a dangerous precedent for future conflicts, with one side choking off a rival community by cutting off its supplies, either forcing an evacuation or the acceptance of its negotiating terms.

Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute, who watches the region closely, told me he worries about the risk of ethnic cleansing if the situation is left unchecked and unattended to by world powers.

"Question number one is how do we get diplomatic or military observers into Nagorno-Karabakh," Rubin said. "Genocide happens in the dark. If we are able to shine a light in the region then oftentimes we can proactively prevent the worst outcomes."

The US is not powerless in this situation. It can push for a humanitarian airlift to de-

liver supplies to the communities of Nagorno-Karabakh or seek further action from the UN Security Council, which met on December 20 to discuss the situation. America also has direct leverage over Turkey and Azerbaijan that can stabilize the situation, using a trove of diplomatic and economic tools.

"When the Trump administration imposed just a few steel sanctions on Turkey for the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson, it created tremendous pressure on [Turkish President] Erdogan," said Rubin. "Why should we oppose doing that over Nagorno-Karabakh?"

Russia and Turkey have aimed to dominate the South Caucasus at the expense of their smaller neighbors. But that model has proven unsuitable to protect human life and a peaceful rules-based order. At a time when the West is competing with Russia over Ukraine – cast as a fight for democracy against autocracy – this is a vital arena to make the same point and prove that the West has real influence in the post-Soviet region.

The longer Russia and Turkey dominate the situation the harder it will be for Western powers to bring things back into balance. In other words, stabilizing the South Caucasus will become more costly with time. The US and EU unwisely left it to Russia to keep the peace in the South Caucasus. Western powers now must step in with full diplomatic weight to correct the error.

(Lara Setrakian is the CEO and Executive Editor of News Deeply. Prior to founding News Deeply. This commentary originally appeared on the CNN website on January 6.)

Karabakh Armenians Are Facing Direct Threat of Genocide: An Appeal to Presidents of Russia, USA, and France

By Dr. Hayk Kotanjian and Dr. Arthur Atanesyan

Your Excellences, Presidents of the Russian Federation, the US, and France!

In the holy period between the Catholic-Protestant and Apostolic-Orthodox celebration of Christmas, we have the honor to apply to you on behalf of the expert community of the first Christian nation of the world-the Armenian people.

The Azerbaijani-Turkish military aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh in September-November 2020 violated International Laws on the prohibition of force and the threat of force ended with a tripartite statement with the participation of leaders of the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, and Armenia on November 9, 2020. The Statement proclaims peace and cooperation in the region but does not contribute to the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, and launched the beginning of another stage of the deportation of Armenians from the territory of their autochthonous residence in Karabakh. To those Armenians who survived in Karabakh (Artsakh) after the war, the authoritarian leadership of Azerbaijan is applying medieval methods of intimidation, public violence, desecration of historical and religious places, and demonstration of corpses of raped and dismembered people.

The Lachin corridor which is the only way connecting Karabakh with Armenia has been blocked by the Azerbaijani forces in December, right before Christmas, depriving about 120 thousand Armenian civilians, including 30 thousand children, of food, warmth, and safety in the winter season. This Azerbaijani policy aims to deport Armenians from Karabakh and is being implemented in traditions of the Genocide of Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire, the predecessor of mod-

ern Turkey allying to Azerbaijan in terms of "One nation, two states" geopolitical project.

A post-Soviet state with a tough authoritarian regime ruled by Heydar Aliyev the father and then transferred to his son, Ilham, with enforced militaristic resource and rhetoric, as well as endless territorial claims to neighbors, Azerbaijan is constantly threatening the security of Armenia as the first Christian nation and as a post-Soviet democracy.

The historical persecution of the Armenian people because of their unique role and mission to become Christians in the non-Christian region, today continues in connection with the expansion of the regional role of Turkey as its return to the orbit of the ambitions of the Ottoman Empire; Azerbaijan plays a key role in this project.

After the Azerbaijani-Turkish war against the lawfully self-determined Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) in the fall of 2020, and then the massive attacks in September 2022 with the occupation of the border territories of Armenia by the Azerbaijani armed forces, Armenia does not show the ability to effectively and fully protect the interests of its people in Nagorno-Karabakh, while Azerbaijan proposes a "solution" of the Karabakh conflict which is typical for non-democracies, with no reference to human rights and freedoms. By blocking the Lachin corridor and making Armenians suffer from hunger and cold, Azerbaijan is going to solve the Karabakh conflict within the formula "No Armenians, no problem". Accordingly, the rightful solution of the Karabakh conflict cannot and should not be the subject of an agreement only between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The conflict itself and the post-war settlement are structural elements of the wid-

er regional security system and stability in Eurasia, directly affecting the interests of the Russian Federation, the United States, and the European Union, and are to continue being a topic of negotiations between these international actors involved into the Co-chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. Accordingly, the future relationships between Armenia and Azerbaijan with the priority on the rights of the people living in the conflict zone and continuously threatened by Azerbaijan, are to be a subject of International Law.

We consider it our professional and civic debt to urge the resumption of negotiations among the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs as the most appropriate platform for the search for effective ways to resolve the Karabakh conflict through joint efforts through the harmonization of the interests of national, regional, and global security priorities based on the norms of International Law. Attempts by Azerbaijan to exclude the Karabakh conflict resolution from the OSCE Minsk Group agenda through discrediting the OSCE and its previous efforts, unleashed Azerbaijani authorities' new war and aggression against Artsakh and Armenia, resulting in thousands of deaths, and the deportation of the Karabakh Armenians from the territories of their original residence.

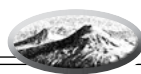
The constructive search for solutions over the Karabakh conflict as part of the strategic dialogue between the collective West and Russia on the platform of the OSCE Minsk Group from 1997-2018 is highly needed today. Throughout its post-Soviet independence, Armenia has always tried to serve as a unique platform for strategic dialogue between Russia and the collective West (including the EU and the USA). The resumption of the consen-

sus dialog between the United States, the EU, the Russian Federation on the regional security, including the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement with priority of human rights, is necessary without linking the decisions on Karabakh to the current misunderstanding between the leading powers over Ukraine. Armenian civilians of the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) locked by Azerbaijan blockading the Lachin corridor, should not become hostages of other regional conflicts, including the Ukrainian one.

Besides the OSCE Minsk Group platform, any other format bridging the interests of Russia, the United States, and the European Union in the global and civilizational context must be applied to the ongoing conflicts threatening international order, including the Karabakh and the Ukrainian ones. Among the platforms demonstrated their effectiveness along with political decision-making, is a dialogue of religious leaders aimed at peaceful settlement of conflicts, where the Armenian Apostolic Church has played its visible role.

The dialogue based on confidence, trust, Human Rights and civilizational priorities, is extremely demanded not only on the Karabakh issue, but also as an effective approach to solving other regional conflicts that threaten global security, including the one around Ukraine. This dialogue is able to help prevent the sliding of the international security system toward global disaster.

(Professor. Dr. Hayk Kotanjian, Honorary President of Political Science Association of Armenia, Alumnus, former Distinguished Visiting Faculty, NDU, former Visiting Research Fellow, Harvard JFK School of Government. Dr. Arthur Atanesyan, Professor of Political Science, President of the Political Science Association of Armenia.)



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

When Azerbaijan Opens Wide Its Purse, Money-Grabbers Rush to Take Their Share

Journalist Till Bruckner wrote a lengthy investigative article regarding Azerbaijan handing some of its vast petrodollars to politicians, businessmen, and universities around the world. Even prominent individuals and institutions prostitute themselves when a huge amount of money is thrown at them. Bruckner's article, "Corruptistan Azerbaijan: How to Build Yourself a Stealth Lobbyist, Azerbaijani style," was posted on the website of "Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project."

The article states: "The rise of Brenda Shaffer, a scholar and oft-quoted expert in the field of energy politics illustrates just how vulnerable the American foreign policy establishment is to manipulation by foreign agents. Supported by an overseas regime and an assorted network of overt and undercover lobbyists, she used oil money to build her academic credentials, then in turn used those credentials to promote Azerbaijan's agendas through Congressional testimony, dozens of newspaper op-eds and media appearances, countless think tank events, and even scholarly publications. She's still doing it."

When testifying before the House of Representatives' Committee on International Relations in 2001, Shaffer was introduced as "the director of the Caspian Studies Program and a post-doctoral fellow in the international security program at the Belfort [Belfer] Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government."

In her remarks, Shaffer asked Congress to repeal Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act that barred direct US aid to the government of Azerbaijan. Members of Congress did not know that "the Caspian Studies Program she headed at Harvard was set up in 1999 through a \$1 million grant from the US Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce and a consortium of oil and gas companies led by Exxon, Mobil, and Chevron, all of which had commercial interests in the region. The chamber of commerce is a pro-Azerbaijan pressure group whose Board of Directors includes a vice president of SOCAR, the Azerbaijan state-owned energy company, and top lobbyists for BP and Chevron."

The chamber issued a press release in 1999, stating that the Caspian Studies Program's aim was to "help shape informed policy," regarding Azerbaijan. The Kennedy School of Government, in its own press release, announced that Graham T. Allison, Director of Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, and Pres. Ilham Aliyev, then first vice president of Azerbaijan's oil company, SOCAR, would speak at its inaugural conference.

In 2000, then-President Heydar Aliyev attended an Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce event, telling the guests: "I cheer the opening of a new chair at Harvard University relating to Azerbaijan and [the] Caspian area. I am thankful for the assistance of American-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce rendered for it." Allison, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense and Dean of Harvard's

Kennedy School, was removed from the chamber's Board of Trustees after OCCRP pointed out his name.

OCCRP repeatedly asked the chamber for a copy of its financial statements, however, the chamber did not provide them, which is illegal.

The chamber listed such prominent individuals as "Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, James A. Baker III, Brent Scowcroft and John Sununu" as members of its "Honorary Council of Advisors."

Shaffer "led the Caspian Studies Program until 2005. During her tenure, she wrote 14 op-eds for leading US and Israeli newspapers including the International Herald Tribune and the Jerusalem Post. Most called on American policy makers to pay more attention to the region. One exhorted the US to stop funding for the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh." In May 2006, journalist and lobbying expert Ken Silverstein wrote an article titled, "Academics for Hire," in Harper's Magazine, accusing prominent academics of performing "intellectual acrobatics on behalf of the [Caspian] region's rulers." He singled out Shaffer for especially harsh criticism.

Silverstein accused Harvard's Caspian Studies Program of lacking "intellectual integrity," highlighting its connection with Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce and specifically pointed out "Shaffer's 2001 plea to Congress to repeal sanctions against Azerbaijan."

Silverstein cautioned in his article: "Caspian watchers beware: the next time you see or hear an 'independent' American expert talking about how the region's rulers are implementing bold reforms, check the expert's credentials to see just how independent he or she truly is."

Bruckner wrote: The following month, "the International Herald Tribune ran its third Shaffer op-ed, about ethnic Azerbaijanis and other minorities in Iran." Since then, Silverstein outed her as an "academic for hire whose career was fueled by Azerbaijani lobbying outfits and Western oil companies invested in Azerbaijan."

Bruckner complained to the editors of the New York Times, Washington Post, Reuters, Bloomberg, Foreign Affairs Journal, and Wall Street Journal for publishing Shaffer's op-ed articles without disclosing her connections to Azerbaijan.

Shaffer also frequently participated in think tank panel discussions. Two days after Azerbaijan's 2013 fraudulent presidential election, Shaffer spoke at Carnegie Endowment for International Affairs, praising the repressive country's "vibrant press," its fierce political debates, and its "realistic" voters!

"During December 2014 alone, Shaffer appeared on TV screens via Fox Business and Al Jazeera America, and commented on energy issues in print via the Jerusalem Post, London Times, The Australian, NPR, and Foreign Policy magazine. (Only weeks earlier, Foreign Policy itself had run a piece on Azerbaijan's lobbying efforts by a different author that mentioned Shaffer's SOCAR connection)," wrote Bruckner.

It is shameful that think tanks, universities, and politicians eagerly take the money offered to them by Azerbaijan, thereby encouraging the repressive regime to continue giving large sums to cover up its human rights violations.

The State Department Can Prevent A Slaughter. Why Won't It?

By Michael Rubin

Azerbaijan's blockade of Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh is now entering its fourth week. Grocery store and pharmacy shelves in the capital Stepanakert now lie bare.

Azerbaijani diplomats initially denied any blockade. Baku's narrative boils down to the claim that the entirety of Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijani, therefore Armenian residents must either depart or depend on Azerbaijani largesse. Armenians argue both that they have the right to self-determination in Nagorno-Karabakh, and that Azerbaijan's eliminationist rhetoric makes any dependence upon Baku's goodwill suicidal. Navigating this dispute was the basis of the decades-long Minsk Group process that collapsed in the last months of the Trump administration. Regardless of perspective, the fact that Azerbaijan uses starvation as collective punishment to advance its interests is undeniable.

History will not be kind to the Biden administration if it allows the situation to continue.

Certainly, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has agency and bears ultimate responsibility. However, U.S. President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken cannot deny accountability.

After all, even after Azerbaijan launched its military attack on Armenian communities in Nagorno-Karabakh, Blinken greenlighted continued military aid to Azerbaijan in defiance of Congress and U.S. law.

Biden states "diplomacy is back" as a mantra, but when he signals there is no consequence for defying him, diplomacy loses any meaning.

Neither Biden nor Blinken appear to care much about diplomacy in the region. In his first briefing of the year, State Department spokesman Ned Price shirked responsibility. "It is not for us to prescribe what a comprehensive solution to this conflict looks like," he stated. "That is the hard work that the parties themselves will have to do."

Nor is both-siderism an excuse. In September 2022, Cornell University released a study using satellite imagery that showed "near-total erasure of Armenian heritage sites" in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan. In a Senate hearing two months later, Amb. Philip Reeker, the State Department's senior advisor for Caucasus negotiations, acknowledged under questioning that he had seen numerous videos of Azerbaijani forces summarily executing Armenian prisoners.

Neither Reeker nor Karen Donfried, assistant secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, could explain why, in Senator Bob Menendez's words, the United States "has done nothing to verify the videos and the evidence of cluster munitions, of white phosphorus, which are illegal."

Such a performance harkens back to the failure of both Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his senior aides' inability to explain why they did not bomb the rail lines to Auschwitz, even when they knew about the atrocities conducted there. Apologists might say that against the backdrop of World War II, other targets took precedence. In the Caucasus now, however, no such argument could hold, given the power differential between the United States on one hand, and Azerbaijan and Turkey on the other. Blinken has many tools at his disposal. Ending the waiver of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act is only the first among them.

Time to Shine a Light

The moral deficiency of current Biden policy extends to Samantha Power. The USAID administrator based her career on her castigation, in her Pulitzer Prize-winning book *A Problem from Hell*, of U.S. unwillingness to prevent genocide. She dealt extensively with the legacy of Raphael Lemkin – a Polish lawyer who coined the term genocide, and the founding father of the Genocide Convention

– and fully embraced his work. She details at length how among Lemkin's greatest influences was the early 20th century Armenian Genocide. To sit aside, remain silent, and refuse to assist the Armenian population when it faces starvation, will permanently stain her legacy and stunt her ambition to one day herself become secretary of State.

U.S. officials may sidestep responsibility by arguing that Nagorno-Karabakh is far away and that Washington has no ability to help. This is false. Not only does the United States have financial leverage over Azerbaijan, but the United States could also provide immediate relief by providing meals and other supplies from the Incirlik Air Base near Adana, Turkey.

Think tank warriors on Pennsylvania Avenue may deny that any blockade exists, but why should the State Department not send diplomats to Lachin to observe for themselves? Genocide thrives in the dark. It does not proceed so smoothly when a light is shined upon it. Biden and Blinken must stop extinguishing the like.

Now a 1945 Contributing Editor, Dr. Michael Rubin is a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). Dr. Rubin is the author, coauthor, and coeditor of several books exploring diplomacy, Iranian history, Arab culture, Kurdish studies, and Shi'ite politics, including "Seven Pillars: What Really Causes Instability in the Middle East?" (AEI Press, 2019); "Kurdistan Rising" (AEI Press, 2016); "Dancing with the Devil: The Perils of Engaging Rogue Regimes" (Encounter Books, 2014); and "Eternal Iran: Continuity and Chaos" (Palgrave, 2005).

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Tekeyan Cultural Association Launches

ARTSAKH CRISIS AID CAMPAIGN

The Armenians of Artsakh have been suffering direly due to the Azerbaijani blockade since December 12 despite international condemnation and sympathy.



How Much Longer Must the People of Artsakh Suffer?

The people of Artsakh have appealed for aid but diasporan Armenians hesitate, not knowing what can be done. Due to the blockade, sending supplies is physically impossible, but there still is a way to help. The Tekeyan Cultural Association of USA and Canada has reached an agreement with the Artsakh government to send money directly into the bank accounts of large families with many children whose fathers were killed during the 2020 Artsakh war. With our help these families can purchase much needed life-sustaining supplies. TCA has already sent an initial \$10,000. All money raised will be immediately transferred, with TCA paying all administrative fees.

LIVES, AND THE VERY FUTURE OF ARTSAKH AND ARMENIA ARE AT STAKE.
The Time to Act is NOW!

Please donate as much as you can by making your donation online by clicking **HERE** or mail checks made out to the Tekeyan Cultural Association, memo: Artsakh Aid, to Tekeyan Cultural Association, 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472, or in Canada, 825 Manoogian, St.-Laurent QC, H4L 1Z5. For more information, see <https://mirrorspectator.com/2023/01/05/tekeyan-cultural-association-launches-artsakh-crisis-aid-campaign/> or email tcadirector@aol.com.

Tekeyan Cultural Association Launches Artsakh Crisis Aid Campaign

CRISIS, from page 1

TCA is pledging another \$10,000 of matching funds to jumpstart a public campaign to raise more money to be dispersed in the same way. All money raised will be immediately transferred without any administrative fees to families in need certified by the Artsakh government, as noted above.

The time to act is now. The lives of the 120,000 Armenians of Artsakh are at stake. Moreover, if Armenian Artsakh is depopulated through coordinated Azerbaijani actions, the future of the Republic of Armenia itself will be in grave danger. Azerbaijan's leaders already have occupied small bits of Armenia's territory and even periodically lay claims to the Armenian capital of Yerevan as Azerbaijani.

There is a grave and urgent responsibility weighing upon all Armenians of the world. We each do have the ability to help ameliorate this situation. Please either send your checks made out to the Tekeyan Cultural Association, memo: Artsakh Aid, and mail them to Tekeyan Cultural Association, 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472 and in Canada, 825 Manoogian, St.-Laurent QC, H4L 1Z5; or make your donations online at <https://givebutter.com/YCrT8P>. For more information, email tca-director@aol.com.

LETTERS



Echmiadzin Needs to Be Restored

To the Editor:

The announcement that “Kim Kardashian and Cher are to partner to raise funds to restore Echmiadzin Cathedral”[Massis 42,no.46] immediately recalled in my mind the “Parable of the Prodigal Son”(Gospel of Luke 15].

Every catholicos who is elected to that office, their priority has been the upkeep of the Cathedral of Holy Echmiadzin. This has been the case since the time Sahak I Partev (387-439) to the reign of Vazgen Ist (1955-1994).

The present incumbent has occupied the throne of St. Gregory the Illuminator since 1999 and the Cathedral of Holy Echmiadzin has been under scaffolding since 1997. Millions of dollars have been spent on various futile self-promoting projects, like the catacomb for the dead wealthy Armenians wishing to be buried in Armenia, renovation of the residence of the Catholicoses, the construction of summer residence in Yerevan on the grounds of the demolished Hratchiya Acharyan Institute of Languages, leaving the much needed renovation of the Holy Cathedral last to such degree that in desperation Cher and Kim Kardashian are called upon to raise funds to restore the leaking roof the Cathedral.

In 1908, in a letter dated 17th January, Archbishop Gevorg Suremeants, later Catholicos of All Armenian as Gevorg Vth 1847-1930], wrote a letter to the oil magnate Aleksandr Mant’ashian informing him that the Holy Cathedral of Echmiadzin has a leaking roof which is threatening the whole structure of the world renowned Christian monument. The delegates attending the funeral of the deceased Catholicos Matteos II Izmirlian “were surprised at the indifference shown by the those responsible for the Cathedral and Armenian nation towards their ‘New Sion,’ which is their heart and centre of the entire nation and also a dishonour in view of the foreign visitors.”

Archbishop Gevorg appealed to Mr. Mantashian to form a committee of his choice to undertake the renovation of the roof of the cathedral. A committee was formed among whom was Komitas vardapet and the benefactor donated 40,000 roubles for the restoration of the roof and for the entire renovation of the cathedral.

During the Catholicate of Khoren 1st Mouradbekian (1932-1938) the restoration work on the cathedral was once again a principle objective of the catholicos. The catholicos wrote a letter to then primate of the Armenians in America Bishop Garegin Yovsepeants objecting to the latter’s suggestion that he can secure funds for the restoration from the American industrialist Rockefeller.

Many wealthy Armenians in the past, the last being Calouste Gulbenkian, earned the honour of financing the restoration of the Cathedral during the reign of Vazgen 1st. There are many such Armenians in Armenia among them Mr. Gagik Tsaroukyan who instead of financing the construction of the tallest statue of Christ in the world could take on the honor of funding the restoration of Holy Echmiadzin and thus immortalize this name.

In fact the present Catholicos can finance the renovation himself with his band of primates without needing the intervention of Mrs Kardashian and Cher. This would be a better alternative than trying to raise funds by selling Armenian gold jewellery.

Rev. Dr. Vrej Nerses Nersessian
London, UK