



Coaches Kerr and Kalamian with 350 Armenians fans (Photo credit: Golden State Warriors)

Two NBA Coaches Shine Spotlight on Armenians

Bay Area Armenians Come Together for ‘Armenian Community Night’ with the Warriors

SAN FRANCISCO — On a rainy Wednesday, January 4, 350 exuberant Bay Area Armenians gathered together to cheer on the Golden State Warriors during an action — packed Armenian Community Night at the Chase Center in San Francisco.

Immediately following a wild-buzzer beater game, Golden State Warriors Head Coach Steve Kerr and Detroit Pistons Assistant Coach Rex Kalamian came together for a lively court-side chat with the community members.

Wearing a customized Armenian Community Night t-shirt

that all guests received, Kerr thanked everyone for their support, sharing that his connection with Armenia runs deep.

“It seems not a week goes by when I don’t have an Armenian thank me for what my grandparents did 100 years ago and it’s truly humbling,” Kerr reflected. “I try to think of them at 21, 22 years old. Imagine that, and traveling to Turkey and Armenia, running an orphanage, and helping to save young children... It’s one of the things I’m most proud of in my family.”

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More Signs of Tension Between Armenian, Karabakh Leaders

YEREVAN/STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Ruben Vardanyan, the Nagorno-Karabakh premier, refused to resign over last weekend amid speculation that the Armenian government is seeking his ouster because of Azerbaijan’s continuing blockade of Karabakh’s land link with Armenia.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was criticized by Karabakh’s leadership after claiming on January 10 that the international community has always regarded the disputed region as an integral part of Azerbaijan. Pashinyan also said his government must only deal with Armenia’s problems and that the authorities in Stepanakert should themselves settle the conflict with Baku.

In a joint statement issued the following day, Karabakh’s government and main political factions said Pashinyan’s remarks undermine the Karabakh Armenians’ right to self-determination. Vardanyan went further, linking them with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s latest statements on the conflict also made on January 10.

Pashinyan responded on January 12 by urging the Karabakh leaders to tone down their rhetoric and negotiate with Azerbaijan in order to end the Azerbaijani blockade.

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French Speaker Urges End To Blockade of Karabakh During Visit to Armenia

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — French parliament speaker Yael Braun-Pivet expressed serious concern over Azerbaijan’s continuing blockade of the Lachin Corridor and reaffirmed France’s support for Armenia’s territorial integrity during an official visit to Yerevan on Friday.

“We are concerned because the blockade is creating a worsening humanitarian situation [in Nagorno-Karabakh,]” Braun-Pivet said af-



French parliament speaker Yael Braun-Pivet, left, with her Armenian counterpart, Alen Simonyan

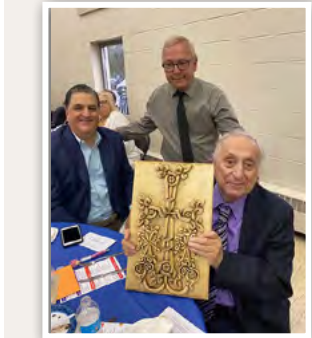
ter talks held with her Armenian counterpart Alen Simonyan.

“It is very important that free traffic between Armenia and Karabakh and electricity and internet connections be restored,” she told a joint

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Racine Community Celebrates Century of Roots in Midwest

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff



Seated, left to right, Jimmy Hardy and his father, Deacon Charles “Chuck” Hardy

RACINE, Wisc. — This past year the community of St. Mesrob’s Armenian Church in Racine celebrated its 100th anniversary with special banquets, picnics, and visits from high-ranking clergy.

Founded by immigrants from Anatolia and Western Armenia at the turn of the 20th century, the Armenian community of Wisconsin has always had its largest stronghold in what might seem like an unlikely place: Racine, a small industrial Rust Belt town on the shores of Lake Michigan, set between the large metropolises of Chicago and Milwaukee.

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Teachers and Students of Racine’s “Armenian National ‘Ghevont Tourian’ School”

ARMENIA

Armenians Continue Preservation of Islamic Manuscripts And Holy Places



GERMANY

Germans, Armenians Put the Nagorno-Karabakh Blockade on The Political Agenda



KARABAKH

Stuck in Limbo: Why Nagorno-Karabakh Needs a Legal Status More than Ever





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

ECHR Issues Urgent Notice To Monitor Implementation Lachin Corridor Decision

YEREVAN (News.am) — On January 17, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) sent an urgent notice to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in order to monitor Azerbaijan’s implementation of its December 21, 2022 decision to unblock the Lachin Corridor.

On December 22, 2022, Azerbaijan had appealed to the European Court, seeking the cancellation of the decision to apply an interim measure. At the same time, Azerbaijan demanded to apply interim measures against Armenia, that is, to take all the measures within its jurisdiction aimed at the adequate treatment of people in need of urgent medical assistance on the territory of Azerbaijan at the place of temporary deployment of Russian gamekeepers and to avoid creating any obstacles in this direction.

In response, in December 2022 and January 2023, the Office of the Representative for International Legal Affairs sent regularly updated information to the court about the difficult humanitarian situation in Karabakh. At the same time, the Office of the Representative for International Legal Affairs requested the court to send an immediate notification to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe regarding Azerbaijan’s failure to comply with the decision of December 21, 2022.

The court on January 17 rejected Azerbaijan’s claims, leaving the decision of December 21, 2022 in force. The European Court also rejected Azerbaijan’s request to apply an interim measure against Armenia.

Ombudsman: Azerbaijan Uses Artsakh’s Infrastructural Vulnerability to Terrorize Civilians

STEPANAKERT (Panorama.am) — Azerbaijan continues to use the infrastructural vulnerability of Artsakh to terrorize civilians, Ombudsman of Artsakh Gegham Stepanyan wrote on his Facebook on January 17.

“On January 17, 2023 at 1:00 PM, the Azerbaijani side once again deliberately disrupted the operation of the only gas pipeline running from and to Artsakh. With the cold winter weather 120,000 people in Artsakh are deprived of heating and hot water. This situation is exacerbated by the humanitarian crisis created by Azerbaijan’s blockade of Artsakh, which has already lasted 37 days. The situation has resulted in widespread and pervasive violations of vital human rights.

“The systematic crimes consistently perpetrated by Azerbaijan since the ceasefire of November 9, 2020, the total blockade of Artsakh, the deliberate disruption of infrastructure and other criminal acts are irrefutable evidence of Azerbaijan’s ambition to subject Artsakh to ethnic cleansing and genocide of Armenians of Artsakh,” he noted.

Azerbaijani Aggression Makes Life Unbearable In Upper and Inner Shorzha Villages

By Gevorg Gyulumyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

VARDENIS, Armenia — After the 2020 war, life became unbearable in a number of villages of the Vardenis district of Gegharkunik Province. The brief hostilities that followed the war and the fighting that lasted for several days in September 2022 made it difficult for the villagers to earn their livings. Among these villages are Verin [Upper] Shorzha (12 km. from Vardenis) and Nerkin [Inner] Shorzha (11 km. from Vardenis), which after the war for the first time in the post-Soviet era ended up having a border with Azerbaijan, which took control of the neighboring Karvachar region as a result of the 2020 war.

According to the 2001 census, there were 31 people living in Upper Shorzha, 44 people in Inner Shorzha, while as of 2011, there were 23 people in Upper Shorzha and 12 people in Inner Shorzha. These are, of course, only permanent residents, while there have also always been a lot of people engaged in animal husbandry there from neighboring villages. These villagers lived a relatively normal life until the 2020 war.

Today, there are problems of access to drinking and irrigation water, safe roads and human rights in those villages, because the Azerbaijanis occupying the territory of the Republic of Armenia constantly keep the villages under fire. At the end of last year, the Tatoyan Foundation conducted monitoring and informed international organizations and structures of the terrible situation in those villages. According to the foundation’s report, “There is no civilian population in the villages of Verin and Nerkin Shorzha. They have become abandoned villages. Water basins and natural water sources for Geghamabak, Jaghatsadzor, Ayrik, Verin Shorzha, Nerkin Shorzha and other villages came under Azerbaijani control or observation from May 2021, and this became more profound after the September 2022 war. There are either serious problems with access to water in the villages or there is no access at all.”



Map of Upper Shorzha Village area and Azerbaijani incursions (courtesy Tatoyan Foundation)

Artyom Yerosyan, the administrative head of the Inner Shorzha settlement, responded to the statement of the Tatoyan Foundation: “People will return again in the spring. They are wary of possible blockage of roads as a result of heavy snowfall. As you know, there’s a lot of snowfall in this area. People moved to Vardenis, Akunk and neighboring settlements, but they will return again. It was mainly soldiers who stayed in the village. The village remains under observation by the enemy.”

He added, “I want to mention that I am also in the village at the moment, because I am the administrative head. I will not leave. Fortunately, the houses in the village

are mostly standing and I am sure that everything will be fine. There are people who also have houses in Vardenis. They will return in March. This also is dependent on the weather. The population will be in place.”

Hakob Avetyan, head of the enlarged municipality of Vardenis, speaking about the problems of the villages, said that everything is being done to make the situation bearable, but it is very difficult because people’s lives are in danger. He declared: “There is a water problem in the villages. The hydroelectric plant is not functioning. There are no shops. The roads can be closed every minute and there is a shortage of essential medicines. People have left because of these reasons. Of course, people come to the villages from time to time, but not permanently.”

Avetyan mentioned that all kinds of educational rights are also violated in those villages, exclaiming: “Imagine that in the 21st century, when the whole world spares no effort to promote education, there are no schools, no kindergartens and no preschools in these villages. In other words, there are no students...because the enemy has made the life of these people unbearable.”

In his turn, Davit Shahnazaryan, one of the members of the council of the Vardenis enlarged municipality, mentioned that the condition of agriculture and livestock has also worsened. He said: “All lands and pastures are occupied, the rest are under direct fire from the enemy. People go out into the field and find themselves under fire. Of course, you have to endure, but it is difficult to ask or force people to live in a place, to work in a place, where they can be killed every minute, whether in a vineyard or in a field. It’s just unbearable. In settlements far from the border, people complain about water being cut off, lack of transport and lack of shops, but here, let the world know, there are no shops, no bakery ovens, no means of transportation, and practically no water. How can people live? I should also mention that during the autumn months, when people have to harvest fodder, Azerbaijanis deliberately set fire to pastures and meadows.”

French Speaker Urges End to Blockade Of Karabakh During Visit to Armenia

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news conference. “We will do everything to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.”

French President Emmanuel Macron urged Baku to “allow free movement along the Lachin Corridor” when he phoned his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev late last month. According to the French readout of the call, Aliyev expressed his “intention” to do so.

However, government-backed Azerbaijani protesters have since continued to block the only road connecting Karabakh to Armenia on ostensibly environmental grounds. Azerbaijani officials have endorsed their actions.

Later in December, the leaders of France’s mainstream opposition parties said Paris should establish a “humanitarian presence” in Karabakh and seek Western economic and political sanctions against Azerbaijan.

Braun-Pivet, who is affiliated with Macron’s LREM party, spoke out against unilateral French sanctions, saying that possibilities of dialogue with Baku have not been exhausted yet. She also noted that France does not recognize Karabakh as an independent republic “in accordance with international law.”

The speaker of the French National Assembly also said that she is visiting Armenia because she believes France “must stand alongside brotherly countries whose territorial integrity is threatened and attacked.”

“As you know, France has always been alongside Armenia to strengthen the country’s sovereignty and independence,” she said.

France is home to a sizable and influential Armenian community. Azerbaijan has repeatedly accused it of siding with Armenia in the Karabakh conflict.

Simonian said on Friday that Paris has always been an honest broker. He at the same time praised it for “doing everything to bring peace to the region and defend the interests of Armenia and the Armenian people.”



ARMENIA

More Signs of Tension Between Armenian, Karabakh Leaders

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That was followed by reports that Arayik Harutyunyan, the Karabakh president, wants to sack Vardanyan and force snap presidential and parliamentary elections. Artur Tovmasyan, the Karabakh parliament speaker, did not rule out the possibility of such elections when he spoke to RFE/RL's Armenian Service on Saturday.

"I am not going to resign, especially in the existing situation," Vardanyan wrote on social media later in the day. "At the same time, the possible resignation of the country's president and parliament is unacceptable."

"In this situation, we have no right to serve the enemy's agenda and surrender," added Vardanyan.

One of his political allies in Armenia said sacking Vardanyan and holding snap elections in Karabakh in the current challenging circumstances would be tantamount to "treason."

Davit Galstyan, a Karabakh opposition leader, suggested on Monday Pashinyan pressured Harutyunyan to replace the holder of the second-highest post in Karabakh's leadership. Harutyunyan has not bowed to the pressure so far, he said.

Armenian opposition figures likewise accused Pashinyan of seeking to get rid of Vardanyan to facilitate far-reaching concessions to Azerbaijan.

"It's possible that there was pressure from Armenia especially aimed at removing individuals who have a principled position contradicting the Armenian government's approaches," said Tigran Abrahamian, a senior lawmaker from the opposition Pativ Unem bloc.

Neither Pashinyan nor other Armenian government officials publicly commented on the political situation in Stepanakert. Some Pashinyan allies and supporters criticized Vardanyan in recent days, implying that his exit is necessary for ending the blockade.

Meanwhile, Harutyunyan on Monday, January 16, met with Karabakh lawmakers and insisted that "there is no political crisis in Artsakh." According to his press office, the Karabakh president said the authorities in Stepanakert should address "internal po-



Karabakh's State Minister Ruben Vardanyan (right) and President Arayik Harutyunyan (second from right) pray during a Christmas mass at Stepanakert's Holy Mother of God Cathedral, January 6, 2023.

litical problems" only after overcoming the humanitarian crisis caused by the month-long blockade. The office gave no other details of the meeting.

Vardanyan, 54, is a prominent Armenian billionaire who made his fortune in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s. He was appointed as Karabakh's state minister (basically prime minister) in November two months after renouncing his Russian citizenship.

Azerbaijan's government condemned Vardanyan's appointment, with Aliyev claiming that the former investment banker was sent to Karabakh by Russia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov insisted that Moscow "has nothing to do with Mr. Vardanyan" when he met

with his visiting Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov on December 23 less than two weeks after Azerbaijani government-backed protesters blocked the sole road connecting Karabakh to Armenia. Speaking at a joint news conference with

Lavrov, Bayramov said Vardanyan must step down and leave Karabakh.

Vardanyan has made defiant statements throughout the blockade. He has said that the Karabakh Armenians will continue to resist Baku's efforts to regain full control over the territory.

Talk to Azerbaijan

Pashinyan on January 12 urged Nagorno-Karabakh's leaders to tone down their rhetoric and negotiate with Azerbaijan in order to end the ongoing Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin Corridor.

"Political statements that make the situation even more deadlocked should be avoided because statements without a clear

vision of reaching the end point are of no use," said Pashinyan. "And then a political conversation between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan should begin, and our partners in Nagorno-Karabakh should not allow anyone to accuse them of disrupting a constructive conversation or making such a conversation impossible."

"The closure of the Lachine Corridor is a provocation, the ultimate goal of which is a new military escalation, and no steps desirable for those developing the military escalation scenario should be taken," he added during a weekly session of his cabinet.

Pashinyan spoke the day after Karabakh's government and main political factions criticized his statements on the conflict with Azerbaijan and, saying that they undermine the Karabakh Armenians' right to self-determination. In a joint statement, they pledged to continue to fight for independence.

Meanwhile, Alen Simonyan, the Armenian parliament speaker and a top Pashinyan ally, made it clear that Yerevan will not negotiate with Azerbaijan on the reopening of the sole road connecting Karabakh to Armenia. The Karabakh leadership negotiated with Baku shortly after Azerbaijani protesters blocked the road on December 12, he said, adding that the talks should resume.

Simonyan claimed that Baku may be keen to "draw" the Armenian government into such discussions in order to demand that Armenia open a similar corridor that would connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhichevan exclave.

"I presume that this is what the Lachin Corridor was closed for," he told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

The speaker also complained that despite its repeated promises given to the Armenian side, Russia is not doing enough to end the Azerbaijani blockade of the vital highway which is supposed to be controlled by Russian peacekeepers.

Armenian FM to OSCE: We Rule Out Exterritorial Corridor in Armenia

VIENNA (News.am) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan on Tuesday, January 17, delivered remarks at a special session of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council initiated by Armenia.

The session was chaired by North Macedonia's Bujar Osmani. After thanking Osmani for convening the meeting, Mirzoyan spoke about the blockade of the Lachin Corridor and its impact on the people of Karabakh.

"Unfortunately, the security crisis and challenges following the war of aggression by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and the subsequent aggression and occupation by Azerbaijan of the sovereign territory of Armenia threaten the Armenian democracy undermining the efforts of the Armenian government towards bringing peace, stability and security to the South Caucasus region," he said.

He also spoke about the effect of the war and the "large-scale unprecedented use of force for the settlement of conflict" by Azerbaijan.

"The 44-day war of aggression was accompanied by war crimes and widespread violations of international humanitarian law, targeting of civilian population and infrastructure, destruction of cultural heritage, which were not properly inves-

tigated and no one has been held accountable," Mirzoyan said.

He praised the OSCE for its methodology, adding, "it pains me to say this, but we have to recognize that the OSCE failed to apply this toolkit effectively and in a timely manner."

Mirzoyan added, "The absence of proper and robust reaction resulted in the impunity for the use of force as means of conflict settlement, in violation of the OSCE principles, commitments enshrined in its basic documents, leading to the legitimization of violence in the interstate and intrastate relations."

Following the signing on the November 9, 2020 of a trilateral statement on the cessation of armed hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia spared no efforts to achieve a normalization of relations with Azerbaijan and address the rights and security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, he noted. The Azerbaijani side, he complained, instead continued its destructive policy, attacking Armenia and Karabakh, seizing more land and causing much death.

He asked for help in opening the Lachin Corridor as the enclave's only lifeline. "On 12 December 2022, a group of Azerbaijanis claiming to be environmental activists blocked the Lachin Corridor, the lifeline, the only road linking Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and

the rest of the world, thus effectively isolating the 120 thousand people in Nagorno-Karabakh, 30 thousands of which are children. Over 1000 people, including 270 children, are unable to return home to Nagorno-Karabakh. Some of those children are separated from their parents and were temporarily sheltered in Armenia. From the very beginning, it was obvious that this blockade was a preplanned action directed and financed by the Azerbaijani authorities, using the cover of so-called "eco-activists" for plausible deniability," he said.

He added, "For more than a month now, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh remain under factual siege. Food, medical and energy supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh are almost completely halted. About 400 tons of essential goods, including grain, flour, rice, vegetables, fruits, medicines, and baby formula, were imported to Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia daily. After around five weeks of the blockade, there is a severe shortage of all essential goods. Moreover, the deliberate 3-day interruption of the gas supply in freezing winter conditions, followed by ongoing disruptions of the electricity grid and telecommunication lines in the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh are another evidence of preplanned actions of the Azerbaijani authorities. This severely impacts the daily life of the people and

leads to a number of adverse humanitarian consequences."

He then stated the demand by Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev to carve the "Zangezur Corridor" in Armenia, linking Baku with Nakhichevan.

"Recently the president of Azerbaijan acknowledged that it was himself who introduced the term of so-called 'Zangezur Corridor' in the international agenda and threatened to establish it sooner or later, regardless of whether Armenia wants it or not. And he said that he introduced this term after the signing of the November 9 Trilateral Statement," Mirzoyan said. "I would like to once again make it clear: we rule out any extrterritorial corridor on the territory of the Republic of Armenia and will not provide any corridor to anyone. This is a principled and irrevocable position, fully in line with the relevant provision of the November 9 statement. Moreover, the decision on providing a link between the western regions of Azerbaijan and Nakhijevan can be adopted swiftly, as soon as Azerbaijan admits that all communications should operate under the jurisdiction and legislation of the Republic of Armenia."

He concluded, "We believe that the OSCE can play an instrumental role not merely in achieving but also sustaining peace through the involvement of its structures."



ARMENIA

Armenians Continue Preservation of Islamic Manuscripts and Holy Places

By Gayane Barseghyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — According to research, there has been Armenian matrilineal genetic continuity in the South Caucasus for eight millennia. Armenia is also found on the World Map preserved in Psalm-Book dated 1250, Islamic Map dated 1570 (the origin of this map goes back to the Islamic cartography of the 12th or 13th centuries), World Map of Benedictine monk Beatus (12th century), World Map of Pomponius Mela (1st century; the map was printed in the 15th century), World Map of Herodotus (5th century BC), in Claudius Ptolemy's Geography (here Armenia Major and Armenia Minor are pictured), Claudius Ptolemy's "Third Map of Asia" – "Map of Armenia, Virk (Iberia), Colchis and Aghvank (Albania)" (the map was prepared by cartographer Sebastian Munster, engraved on wood in 1540) and other world maps. Armenia is also found on the oldest world map (dated 6th century BC) the Babylonian Clay Tablet, discovered in Iraq in the 19th century.

Eventually, Armenia fell under the rule of Persian Empire, Byzantine Empire, Arabs, Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia. Nowadays the territory of Armenia comprises about 10 percent of the Greater Armenia and the Lesser Armenia that existed thousands of years before.

After overcoming all hardships Armenians continued living and creating literary, cultural and architectural masterpieces in their motherland in peaceful times. So far Armenians not only preserved own cultural values, but also they honored and preserved Islamic manuscripts and Holy Places inherited from earlier periods, when Armenia fell under foreign rule.

First and foremost, the *Qur'an* has been translated into the Armenian language several times, namely the translation of *Qur'an* from Arabic into Armenian by A. Amirkhanyan (1838-1913), the translation into Armenian by E. Hakhverdyan (2004/2005/2006) and so on.

Of special significance are the manuscripts of the *Qur'an* preserved in the Matenadaran, the Mesrop Mash-tots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Armenia founded in 1959. It houses not only Armenian, but also foreign language manuscripts (Persian, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, etc.)

The book titled *Catalogue of the Qur'an Manuscripts of the Matenadaran* by V. Ter-Ghevondian, K. Sahakyan, V. Makaryan, M. Khecho, M. Minasian (Yerevan, 2016) lays theoretical background and lists all the manuscript copies of *Qur'an* dated to earlier ages and preserved by Armenians in the Matenadaran, the repository of ancient manuscripts in Armenia. The book under study consists of Preface, Manuscript Description, Bibliography, Index and Illustrations. It introduces the manuscripts preserved in the Arabic fund of the Matenadaran and it may serve as an invaluable research material for orientalists, Islamologists and historians.

Further, it is worth mentioning that "the manuscripts are written on both Oriental and Western paper, quite an important quantity is written on Modern paper [...] in 2013 a fruitful cooperation started between the Yerevan Matenadaran and the Islamic Manuscript Association (Cambridge, UK)." (p. 12)

As far as Islamic Holy Places are concerned, it is worth stating at this point that the Blue Mosque has been preserved in the center of Yerevan. The Mosque was reconstructed through an initiative by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Armenia with the cooperation of "Mostazafan va Janbazan" fund.

In addition, Gohar Agha Upper Mosque/Yughari Govhar Agha Mosque has been completely restored by Armenians. The restoration of 19th century Gohar Agha Upper Mosque commenced in 2014 and it was completed in 2019 by Armenian-funded Oriental Historical Heritage Foundation in cooperation with Iranian specialists.

Armenian monasteries and churches are being preserved and restored in the Islamic Republic of Iran, hence the full restoration of this mosque was aimed at paying homage to Islamic culture. "Archbishop Pargév Martirosyan, the Primate of the Diocese of Artsakh of the Armenian Apostolic Church, said he highly appreciated the restoration of the Iranian Mosque in Shushi [...] This mosque is a religious cultural monument which our friendly Iranian people have built. They are preserving and restoring our monasteries,

we must do the same. We are not a nation that tears down monuments" Armenpress reports.

Of special interest is the fact that Gohar Agha Upper Mosque composition bears a close resemblance to a caravanserai dated to the 12th century near Hadrut, as well as the three-vaulted hall of Hagobavank (12th century), Charekavank, Koshik (13th century) monasteries and so on. The three-vaulted hall composition of Armenian church architecture is obvious in comparison to other churches and monasteries. The latter statement was also recorded in the book *The Historical-Architectural Monuments of Nagorno-Karabakh* by Sh. M. Mkrtchyan (1984/1985).

Some Mosques in Artsakh/ Nagorno-Karabakh did not survive to the 21st century either because of wars and earthquakes or most probably they could have been pulled down during the Soviet Era (before the 1990s) because of



A mosque dating back to the 1910s in Gharaghle village in Artsakh

anti-religious Bolshevik regime.

The booklet "The Islamic Monuments of the Armenian Architecture of Artsakh" (Yerevan 2010) comprises the findings of the research project carried out by Samvel Karapetian and Ashot Hakobian. The research project sheds light on the Armenian architecture of some Mosques, Islamic Mausoleums and bath houses in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh.

As the foreword of the book states, "During the foreign domination of Armenia, outstanding Armenian masons were forced into carrying out different tasks within the construction activity of this or that ruler. Applying their knowledge of architecture, as well as their creative mind and efforts, Armenian masters were compelled to build castles, palaces, mosques, mausoleums, bridges, caravanserais and residential buildings for their foreign lords, all of these structures revealing the influence of Armenian architecture, and bearing the imprint of its traditional features." (p. 3)

There are similarities between the Islamic monuments in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian architecture.

Firstly, the mausoleum in the vicinity of Khachen-Dorbatli Village built in 1314 by Armenian architect Shahik Vardapet has identical ornamental reliefs with the church of Yeghvard near Yerevan built earlier in 1301 (the architect is the same Shahik Vardapet).

Secondly, there is a church-shaped mausoleum dated to the 14th-15th centuries near Vanotsa (Jijimli) Village. The mausoleum is completely similar to Armenian church domes.

Not only the above-mentioned mausoleum near Vanotsa (Jijimli) village is church-shaped, but a number of other mausoleums as well. The architecture of the mausoleum of the 14th century near Ivanian (Khojalu) Village, a mausoleum built from the 14th to 15th centuries near Nor-Maragha (Ghezel-Kengerli) Village, a mausoleum dated to the 14th-15th centuries in the neighbourhood of Thumas Village and the mausoleum dated to the 15th and 16th centuries in Yerkatavork (Demirchilar) Village are identical with Armenian church architecture. Moreover, a mausoleum dated to the 1900s near Muradbeklu Village was built by Armenian masons.

Further, the stonework archetype of the mosque dated to 1878-1879 and the bath-house in Vazgenashen (Abdal) Village is found in the 13th century churches of Bri Yeghtsi Monastery near Hatsy village.

The prototypes of the caravanserais of Gharghabazar Village are the monasteries in Mets Arants, Koshik and Yerits Mankants dated to the 13th to 17th centuries.

The mosque of the 17th century in Gharghabazar Village is identical to the uni-nave Armenian church composition.

Interestingly enough, one mosque dated to the 1910s in Gharadaghle Village was built in similarity with the composition of the houses of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh. The latter bears a close resemblance to the widespread composition of houses constructed since the 1860s.

Last but not least, it is of paramount importance to mention about Prophet Muhammad's Decree to the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem in 626 AD. The Armenian Patriarchate was set up in Jerusalem after Armenia adopted Christianity as state religion in 301 AD and Jerusalem became a pilgrimage Holy Place for Armenians. In 626 AD, being worried about conquests, the then Armenian Patriarch Abraham went to the holy city of Mecca to meet the Prophet Muhammad. At the end of the meeting, the Prophet Muhammad issued a decree.

The Armenian newspaper *Azdag* in Beirut, Lebanon brought to light Prophet Muhammad's Decree in the article by Dr. Garbis Harboyan.

Following this, Noravank foundation reported the *California Courier* column by Harut Sassounian headlined "Prophet Muhammad's Rarely-Known Decree to the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem."

We will represent Prophet Muhammad's Decree below from the source "The California Courier" cited by Noravank Foundation:

"I Muhammad, the son of Abdallah, prophet and servant of God, I pay my respect to Patriarch Abraham, I honor him and all archbishops, bishops and priests in Jerusalem, Damascus, and Arab regions, in other words, those people who are subject to Jerusalem, such as Ethiopians, Copts, and Assyrians. I recognize and guarantee their monasteries, churches, educational centers, properties and lands. I, Prophet Muhammad, with the witness of God, and the 30 people around me, I grant my patronage and protection, and I dispense my mercy to the Armenian churches, wherever they may be, throughout Jerusalem, the Holy Tomb of Christ. Sourp Hagop Church, Bethlehem Church, all prayer houses, monasteries, Golgotha road, and the holy sites. I also secure and ensure that my protection also extends to Christian hills, valleys and Christian income-generating institutions. I declare all of this in my name as Prophet and in the name of Muslim faithful."

In addition, it should be noted that in his scholarly article abstract Ashot Tsatryan from Yerevan State University states that "in the year 1187 Salah al Din al Ayyubi conquered Jerusalem and exiled all non-Muslims with the exception of Christian Armenians." The latter statement comes to prove that Armenians were still honored by Salah al Din al Ayyubi according to Prophet Muhammad's decree of 626 AD.

Thus, the study of the data revealed that Armenians have preserved Arabic Script 2723 Arabic Script Qur'an manuscripts and 611 fragments in the Arabic fund of the rich collection of the Matenadaran, Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Armenia. The volume copies of Qur'an are on Oriental, Western and Modern paper.

As far as the Islamic monuments and Holy Places are concerned, 4 Mosques, 7 mausoleums and caravanserais in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh bear a close resemblance and are identical with Armenian church and monastery composition (as well as domes and reliefs) dated to earlier periods. Putting two and two together, the data concerning all the afore-mentioned Mosques, Islamic mausoleums and caravanserais recorded within the Research on Armenian Architecture Project (2010), we arrive at the foregone conclusion that some Islamic monuments in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh possess Armenian architecture, the latter being the brainchild of renowned Armenian architects and masters.

On top of all, two Mosques (the Blue Mosque and Gohar Agha Mosque/Govhar Yughari Agha Mosque) have been completely restored by Armenians in cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, the study of the data comes to prove that all the afore-mentioned Islamic monuments which had survived the centuries have been preserved by Armenians.



INTERNATIONAL

Biden Administration Faces Resistance To Plan to Sell F-16s to Turkey

By Michael Crowley and Edward Wong

WASHINGTON (*New York Times*) — The Biden administration has informed Congress that it wants to discuss proposed major arms sales for Turkey and Greece, according to two US officials, but it already faces resistance on Capitol Hill to Ankara's request for new and upgraded F-16 fighter jets.

The \$20-billion arms package for Turkey would include 40 new F-16 fighter jets and 79 upgrade kits to refurbish the country's existing fleet of aging F-16s. Greece is asking to buy at least 30 F-35 fighter jets, the most modern planes in the US arsenal.

The Greek request is uncontroversial and very likely to be approved. But while Turkey is a NATO ally of more than 70 years, that package faces skepticism from members of Congress who are exasperated with the country's autocratic president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, including over his violation of civil liberties and his refusal so far to approve NATO membership for Sweden and Finland. The two long-neutral Nordic countries applied to join the military alliance after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

After the move toward congressional approval was reported by The Wall Street Journal on Friday, January 13, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey and a longtime critic of Erdogan, issued a stinging statement.

While saying he welcomed selling the next-generation F-35s to Greece, Menendez — whose position gives him the power to block such sales in his committee — said he “strongly” opposed selling “new F-16 aircraft to Turkey.”

In most cases, Congress must approve significant US arms sales to foreign allies, and rejection or inaction would kill President Biden's proposal.

“President Erdogan continues to undermine international law, disregard human rights and democratic norms, and engage in alarming and destabilizing behavior in

Turkey and against neighboring NATO allies,” Menendez said. “Until Erdogan ceases his threats, improves his human rights record at home — including by releasing journalists and political opposition — and begins to act like a trusted ally should, I will not approve this sale.”

Speaking to the Turkish news media in October, Erdogan was dismissive of Menendez's prior criticisms, telling reporters that “Menendez's objection alone cannot stop” such a deal, although it was not clear what he meant. A few weeks later, that procuring the jets would be “much easier” if Republicans were to win a Senate majority in the US midterm elections, which did not happen.

The Biden administration has not formally asked Congress to approve the sale. But it recently took the procedural step of notifying Congress that it is prepared to discuss the requests, which were made separately by Ankara and Athens several months ago and which require a congressional vote of approval.

Turkey and Greece are in a bitter dispute over their maritime boundaries, and Erdogan has hinted at the possibility of military action against the fellow NATO member, although few expect him to follow through with such dramatic action. By linking the two arms packages, the Biden administration appears to be signaling that it does not favor Turkey over Greece.

At a NATO summit in Madrid last summer, Biden told reporters that he was supportive of the F-16 sales to Erdogan's government. “We should sell,” Biden said. “I need congressional approval to be able to do that, and I think we can get that.”

He added that such a sale would not be a “quid pro quo” for Turkey's approval of NATO membership for Sweden and Finland, which is required under the alliance's policy of making decisions by unanimous consent.

But many experts on Turkey believe that Erdogan will not approve the NATO expansion, which Biden has called a ma-

jor strategic defeat for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, unless he is confident the new and upgraded planes are in hand. Erdogan faces an election this spring amid economic turmoil in his country.

Turkey says Sweden and Finland have been too sympathetic to the P.K.K., a Kurdish nationalist movement that Turkey, the United States and the European Union consider a terrorist organization.

Among other demands, Turkish officials have insisted that Sweden extradite several P.K.K. members and others whom Sweden's government says it will not turn over. It is unclear how such differences might be resolved. But US and NATO officials have repeatedly said they are confident that Turkey will ultimately approve the alliance's expansion.

Hungary is the only other NATO member not to approve the new applicants, but its leaders have said they will do so early this year.

NATO expansion is hardly the only obstacle the Turkish request faces in Congress. Menendez and others have sharply criticized Erdogan's autocratic governing style, which in recent years has included a harsh crackdown on media outlets, opposition parties and other sources of dissent.

They have also denounced Erdogan's relatively friendly relations with Putin. The Turkish leader ignored US admonitions against purchasing Russia's advanced S-400 antimissile system, and has not joined international sanctions against Moscow. At the same time, US officials call Turkey a vital ally in a strategic location, and Erdogan has played an important role in brokering an agreement between Ukraine and Russia to allow the export of Ukrainian grain to the outside world.

Biden officials have also sternly warned Turkey not to follow through with a threatened incursion into northern Syria to fight Kurdish groups there, saying it could jeopardize the effort to contain the Islamic State.

INTERNATIONAL

Canada Parliament Committee Convenes Karabakh Hearing

OTTAWA (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons of Canada will convene an urgent hearing on the blockade of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) by Azerbaijan, the Embassy of Armenia to Canada reported on January 16.

The hearing was initiated by the Bloc Québécois party and supported by the Conservative Party of Canada.

Armenia asks for UN Factfinding Mission

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — On January 16, Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan had a phone conversation with United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to discuss the recent developments in Karabakh.

Mirzoyan briefed Guterres on the humanitarian crisis unfolding there as a result of the blockade of Lachin Corridor, particularly stressing the need for a targeted response and efficient steps by international institutions, especially the United Nations. Minister Mirzoyan underlined that Azerbaijan grossly violates the provisions of the November 9 Trilateral Statement and the principles of international humanitarian law.

Under these circumstances, the Armenian side highlighted the importance of sending a fact-finding mission to Nagorno-Karabakh and Lachin Corridor, as well as ensuring unhindered humanitarian access to Karabakh for relevant UN bodies.

Iran Won't Accept Changes In Region Territorial Integrity, FM Says

ANKARA (News.am) — Iran will not accept any changes in the geography of the region, Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian said at a press conference with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Çavusoglu on January 17, IRNA reported.

“We believe that preserving the territorial integrity of countries is a fundamental principle,” he said, adding that changing the geography of the region is unacceptable.

“The opening of transport routes between the countries of the region is one of the important issues in this context, and we believe that resolving these issues will lead to flourishing trade and stable security in this region,” he said.

Delegation Headed by Yerevan Mayor to Visit Iran

YEREVAN (News.am) — Upon the invitation of Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani, the delegation headed by Yerevan Mayor Hrachya Sargsyan is schedule to pay an official visit to Iran's capital January 17-19.

The press service of Yerevan city hall reported that the delegation will sign an agreement on declaring Yerevan and Tehran sister-cities during the visit. Sarkisian will hold meetings with his Tehran counterpart Alirez Zakani and Mustafa Chamrani, chairman of the city council.

New Jerusalem Armenian Quarter Museum Re-Opens

By Ilan Ben Zion

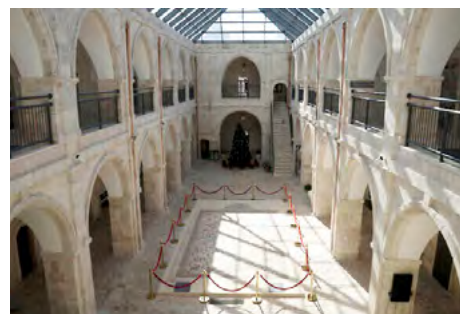
JERUSALEM (AP) — A hundred years after taking in scores of children whose parents were killed in the Armenian Genocide, a 19th-century orphanage in Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter has reopened its doors as a museum documenting the community's rich, if pained, history.

The Mardigian Museum showcases Armenian culture and tells of the community's centuries-long connection to the holy city. At the same time, it is a memorial to around 1.5 million Armenians killed by the Ottoman Turks around World War I, in what many scholars consider the 20th century's first genocide.

Director Tzoghig Karakashian said the museum is meant to serve as “a passport for people to know about the Armenians” and to understand their part of Jerusalem's history.

The museum reopened in late 2022 after a more than five-year renovation project. Before that, the building — originally a pilgrim guesthouse built in the 1850s — served as a monastery, an orphanage for children who survived the genocide, a seminary and ultimately a small museum and library.

Jerusalem is home to a community of around 6,000 Armenians, many of them descendants of people who fled the genocide. Many inhabit one of the historic Old City's main quarters, a mostly enclosed com-



Winter sunlight fills the Armenian Museum in the Old City of Jerusalem, January 11, 2023. (AP Photo/ Maya Alleruzzo)

pound abutting the 12th-century Armenian cathedral of St. James.

But the Armenians' link to the holy city stretches back centuries, from monks and pilgrims during the late Roman Empire to Armenian queens of Crusader Jerusalem.

The museum's centerpiece, filling the sunlit courtyard, is an exquisite 5th or

6th century mosaic adorned with exotic birds and vines discovered in 1894 on the grounds of an ancient Armenian monastery complex. It bears an inscription in Armenian dedicated to “the memorial and salvation of all Armenians whose names the Lord knows.”

For decades, the mosaic remained in a small museum near the Old City's Damascus Gate. In 2019, the Israeli Antiquities Authority and the Armenian Patriarchate undertook the laborious task of removing the mosaic floor and transporting it across town to the newly refurbished museum.

From elaborately carved stone crosses known as “khachkars” to iconic painted tiles and priestly vestments, the museum showcases Armenian material art, while also excelling in telling the Armenian story of survival. While Jerusalem changed hands as empires rose and fell, the Armenians remained.

“Surviving means to not be seen,” said Arek Kahkedjian, a museum tour guide. “We survived without people knowing what or who we are, and today we feel ready to show you and teach about the history and heritage, about the culture, and to show you how we advance and modernize with the times.”

INTERNATIONAL

Germans, Armenians Put The Karabkh Blockade on the Political Agenda In Berlin

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — For weeks, political forces in Germany have turned a blind eye to the ongoing Artsakh crisis, while mainstream press organs have observed a complicit silence. Now, as the humanitarian crisis created by Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin corridor worsens, public opinion in Germany and Europe is slowly waking up. This is largely the result of protest actions organized by human rights organizations. As reported last week, Tessa Hoffmann, chairwoman of the board of the Berlin-based human rights organization, Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA), issued a call to German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, demanding action to establish a humanitarian airlift for the blockaded population of Artsakh.



Tessa Hoffmann

On January 13, activists from the Theophanu Club, a German-Armenian grassroots movement, held a robust demonstration at the embassy of Azerbaijan in Berlin — the third such demo. On December 17, they had gathered in front of the embassies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chair countries (Russia, the US and France), and on December 29, protested in front of Azerbaijan's diplomatic site. In their leaflets and pickets they called for an airlift and an end to the

population of Artsakh. On December 15, she followed up with similar letters to German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Chancellor Olaf Scholz, as well as to Dr. Kamal Sido, Near East representative of the Society for Endangered Peoples.

On January 13, activists from the Theophanu Club, a German-Armenian



Protests outside the Azerbaijan Embassy in Baku on January 13 organized by the Theophanu Club

life-threatening blockade. Protesters held up pickets like: "Aliyev war criminal," "Hands off Armenia," "Free Armenian POWs," as well as "Azerbaijan committing genocide in Artsakh" and "Give your people justice, not Armenophobia!"

Lilit Kocharyan, who issued the call for the demonstrations, is also chairwomen of the board of Kamurdsch-Brücke (Bridge), a charity organization in Germany which organizes medical aid for patients and institutions in Armenia.

The following day, January 14, the national weekly Der Spiegel held a podcast, entitled, "What the Nagorno-Karabakh blockade has to do with Russia's war." Podcast host Olaf Heuser spoke with journalist Anna Aridzjanjan, from Yerevan, as well as Gayane Beglarian, one of the fortunate few who had been allowed to reach Armenia, to access cancer treatment for her daughter. In the course of the discussion, viewers learned the basic facts of the matter: that 100,000-120,000 Armenians, of whom 30,000 children, are cut off from food and medical supplies, drugstores are selling pills one by one, baby food is scarce, electricity is cut off-- all due to the illegal blockade.

Then the focus shifted to the role of Russia, and the manner in which Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev is exploiting the Ukrainian conflict to seize control of Artsakh. That ambition is not new, the moderator explained.



Lilit Kocharyan



Protests outside the Azerbaijan Embassy in Baku on January 13 organized by the Theophanu Club

Aliyev, and his father before him, have made no secret of the intention to force Armenians to become Azerbaijani citizens if they wanted to remain. And, despite its historical role as protective power, Russia is passive. Russian peacekeepers who have been there for five weeks, say they are unable to intervene on Azerbaijan territory. Is Putin too involved in the Ukraine war to deal with Armenia? Or is he exploiting the situation? Moderator Heuser recalled the meeting between President Putin and Aliyev just two days before Russia invaded Ukraine, during which they were filmed discussing cooperation and sharing jokes. The podcast referenced Armenia's dilemma regarding its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); if it leaves the military alliance due to lack of support, will that create a security vacuum that would invite Azerbaijan's aggression?

Press coverage and discussion of the crisis is necessary and useful, but to lift the blockade and solve the underlying conflict requires political action. Thus, the importance of applying pressure on political leaders and legislative bodies. On January 18, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, a thinktank related to the Green Party, will hold an online discussion on the "Humanitarian Crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict." A day later, the European Parliament is scheduled to discuss a resolution on the "Humanitarian Consequences of the Blockade in Nagorno-Karabakh." And the civil society protest actions will likely escalate.



Community News

German Cancer Patient Might Die Because of Azerbaijan's Blockade of Artsakh

LOS ANGELES — A German cancer patient in desperate need of a stem cell transplant might not get a chance to survive because of Azerbaijan's blockade of Artsakh, announced the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR).

On January 10, the German National Bone Marrow Donor Registry identified a stem cell donor in Artsakh who can potentially save the life of the patient in Germany. Once the Artsakh resident was identified as a potential donor, the German Registry urgently contacted ABMDR in Yerevan and requested that a CT (blood) sample of the donor be flown to Germany, for confirmatory typing, before a life-saving transplant could be performed.

The entire process, however, has now come to a grinding halt due to Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin corridor, which links Artsakh to Armenia. "Our potential donor in Artsakh is ready and willing to give a blood sample and eventually donate her stem cells to help save the life of the patient in Germany," said ABMDR Executive Director Dr. Sevak Avagyan. "The problem is, because of Azerbaijan's now-five-week-old



Dr. Sevak Avagyan

blockade of Artsakh, we cannot physically reach our donor in order to obtain her blood sample, and neither will she be able to travel to the ABMDR Lab in Yerevan for her stem cell-harvesting procedure, if she's confirmed and selected as the donor."

"This is an absolutely tragic situation, one which illustrates how Azerbaijan's blockade is impacting our global humanitarian work," said ABMDR President Dr. Frieda Jordan and continued, "Here we are, with all the means to help save the life of a patient in Germany, yet we're being callously prevented from doing our job. I cannot overstress the fact that as the patient in Germany struggles to stay alive, desperately waiting for a transplant, every minute counts!"

Jordan added that ABMDR has turned to the International Red Cross for facilitating the transfer of the Artsakh donor's CT sample to Germany.

For more information, visit abmdr.am.



Dr. Taner Akcam

NAASR to Hold 'Expanding Horizons' Program at Jonathan Club in Los Angeles

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host a special event, "Expanding Horizons—West Coast," on Sunday, January 29, to welcome Dr. Taner Akcam to the Los Angeles area and to connect with members and supporters. This evening get together will be held in downtown Los Angeles at the historic Jonathan Club, 545 South Figueroa Street. There will be a cocktail reception at 5 p.m. followed by dinner at 6 p.m.

In addition to celebrating the appointment of Akcam as the inaugural director of the Armenian Genocide Research Program at the UCLA Promise Armenian Institute, the occasion will mark the 60th anniversary of NAASR and UCLA's partnership in Armenian Studies, the first fruit of which was the establishment of the Narekatsi Chair in Armenian Studies, the oldest endowed chair at UCLA. This relationship continues to flourish today through collaborative programs involving NAASR, the Narekatsi Chair, the Richard Hovannisian Chair in Modern Armenian History and the Promise Armenian Institute.



NAASR Executive Director Silva Sedrakian

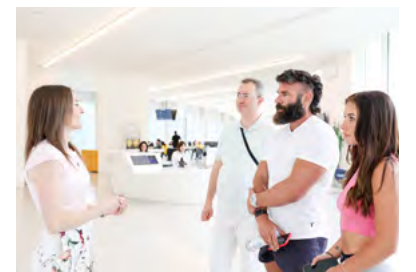
The evening will also include a special memorial musical tribute to NAASR Board Member and Benefactor Edward Avegisian (1937-2022), performed by Boris Allakhverdyan (Principal Clarinet, LA Philharmonic) and Alin Allakhverdyan (piano).

Those interested in attending should contact NAASR as soon as possible as space is limited. Tickets can be purchased online at <https://naasr.org/pages/expanding-horizons-west-coast>. Inquiries can also be made by email at hq@naasr.org.

Bilzerian Brothers To Host Charity Poker Tournament For COAF on Super Bowl Weekend

LAS VEGAS — Poker players from across the country will gather in Las Vegas on February 11 for a Charity Poker Tournament hosted by Adam and Dan Bilzerian in support of the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF).

All proceeds will go towards COAF's work in rural Armenia, including the establishment of a Child & Family Center (CFC), which will be named in honor of the tournament's winner. COAF's CFCs offer children and families access to early childhood education, speech therapy, and psychosocial services, bridging the resource gap in rural communities. In 2022, the Bilzerian Foundation established a Child & Family Center in the village of Karakert, providing critical support for more than five communities in the Armavir region.



Dan Bilzerian at the COAF SMART Center in Lori

"We are so grateful for the support demonstrated by the Bilzerian family," said COAF senior director of development, Haig Boyadjian. "Paul Bilzerian, and his sons Adam and Dan, are proud of their Armenian heritage and feel strongly about making a lasting impact for generations of Armenia's children."

In their quest to uplift their ancestral homeland and her people, Dan and Adam Bilzerian are determined to find new, compelling ways to bring attention to the plight of Armenians, particularly as Artsakh continues to face the stranglehold of Azerbaijan's blockade. World-renowned poker players and businessmen, the brothers are using their influence on social media and with their family foundation to support nonprofit work in Armenia.

By partnering with COAF to host a Poker Tournament, the Bilzerian brothers are raising COAF's visibility within their community. Both brothers will play in the Charity Tournament, giving guests the opportunity to go head-to-head with globally ranked players, within the exclusive atmosphere of Dan Bilzerian's estate. "Our family looks forward to hosting a fun and profitable event benefiting a very worthy cause," says Dan Bilzerian.

The deadline to register for the Bilzerian Foundation's Charity Poker Tournament is February 1. Interested individuals are strongly encouraged to register early and online at www.coaf.org. Space is limited and the event is expected to sell out quickly.



COMMUNITY NEWS

ATP Planting Future Forests

WOBURN/YEREVAN — Since 1994, Armenia Tree Project (ATP) has engaged in a variety of environmental projects, from environmental education to backyard nurseries and greenhouses. However, the primary focus of ATP is the reforestation of Armenia. This year, the group hired 179 seasonal workers, and the Forestry Division planted 570,000 native trees covering 170 hectares of land, the equivalent of over 200 soccer fields, in its target regions in Lori, Shirak, and Kotayk. The 570,000 trees planted are native to Armenia, and include oak, pine, birch, apple, ash and maple trees. Additionally, each tree was propagated by the ATP Forestry Division, or through the ATP Backyard Nursery Program.

Deforestation and forest degradation continues to impact Armenia due to mining operations and illegal logging for firewood. Additionally, disease and pest outbreaks are factors that impact the loss of forests. When we lose our forests, we lose the entire network they impact—trees filter the air we breathe, help to clean our waterways and soil. They help maintain our ground water through their root systems ensuring that fertile land does not become a desert. By reforesting, we are protecting the long-term sustainability for the animals and other plants that require the forest ecosystem to prosper.

The environmental and socioeconomic benefits of planting and preserving trees cannot be understated. ATP believes that involving communities with our planting projects is a necessary link for preserving our forests for generations to come, which is why ATP hires seasonal workers from the regions where we plant trees. Incorporating locals helps to further our mission of educating Armenians about the importance of trees, while also creating economic opportunities and assisting families to be self-sustaining in their villages.

Of the 179 seasonal workers, 77 were women (roughly 43percent), paying more than 37,000,000 drams (\$93,000) in salaries. The group intentionally hires women

with the understanding that when women are given the knowledge and resources necessary to make positive change in their communities, they will, and they will teach their children and grandchildren to do so as well. The caretaking and protection of the planted trees is something that will last many lifetimes. We hope that the education we've instilled in local tree planters encourages communities to caretake their own forests.

In addition to the 637,531 trees planted this year, ATP also engaged in other projects, with support from planting partners. With a generous donation from HSBC, ATP was able to plant 4,000 trees (roughly 1.2 hectares) in Lernanist- Kotayk Marz. Under the EU4Environment "Green Community, Resilient Future" grant project, ATP was able to plant 300,000 trees (roughly 51 hectares) in the Urasar and Mets Saria regions.

Next year, ATP plans to plant another 637,000 trees throughout Armenia, incorporating 10 additional planting sites (2 more than the 8 completed this year),



Trees being transported to Mets Saria planting site located in Shirak Region

and to maintain another 350,000 previously planted trees. In 2022, ATP undertook protective monitoring and maintenance on 27,000 of our trees, and reached a milestone in our organization's history: planting our 7 millionth tree!

In the long-term, reforestation efforts

are crucial for meeting Armenia's climate commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement to reduce national emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Our commitment to a green future for Armenians and for the world is unwavering and ever-expanding.

A Call to Action from Knights and Daughters of Vartan

The Knights and Daughters of Vartan have launched a fundraising campaign to raise funds for humanitarian aid to Artsakh. Our brothers and sisters need our attention and support more than ever. Armenians lived in Artsakh for centuries. They went through many turbulent and challenging times.

"We are facing serious challenges as we, who are safe and secure in the United States, witness the blockade of Artsakh. In 1916, the Knights of Vartan was formed to assist the survivors of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Now 107 years later, our brothers and sisters in Artsakh are in dire straits" said Grand Chairwoman Gloria Korkoian.

"We must stay united and reach out to our brothers and sisters in Artsakh in the time of Humanitarian crisis," said Grand

Commander Hunan Arshakian.

The Knights and Daughters of Vartan are calling on their entire membership and all Armenian communities to raise funds for Humanitarian Aid for Artsakh. The donations may be sent to the KoV Charities, Inc., which is a 501C3 maintained by the Grand Lodge of the Knights of Vartan. Please make checks out to the KoV Charities, Inc. and write in the memo section Artsakh Relief. Mail your donation to the KoV Grand Treasurer, Mr. Ronald Nazeley, 6558 Kentwood Bluffs Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045. Donations can also be made online via kofv.org website.

Donations are 100-percent tax deductible and the funds will be used for humanitarian aid to our brothers and sisters in Art-

sakh. The Knights are working with trusted 501C3 partners in Armenia and Artsakh.

\$25 will cover one week's supply of food and essentials for one family.

You can donate for one week, one month, or more for one family or any number of families.

This effort was organized by The Knights and Daughters of Vartan Action Committee established by Past Commander Garry Javizian and the Past Grand Commanders of Nareg-Shavarshan Lodge #6, Detroit, MI: PGC Vahram Fantazian, PGC Simon Javizian, PGC Edward Korkoian, and PGC Dr. Gary Zamanigian, along with Grand Chairwoman Gloria Korkoian, Grand Commander Hunan Arshakian, and Grand Lt. Commander Levon Thorose.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

ARF to Host Forum on Armenia, Artsakh Crisis

WATERTOWN — The ARF of Boston is hosting an in-person community forum providing updates on the looming crisis in Armenia and Artsakh. This free and open event will be held on Monday, January 23, at 7:00 PM at the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (47 Nichols Avenue, Watertown).

This community forum, hosted by Ani Zargarian, will feature Alison Tahmizian-Meuse, a veteran journalist who has spent the last one and a half years in Armenia.

Born and raised in the Armenian community of the Merrimack Valley, Tahmizian-Meuse is a graduate of George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs and a Middle East reporter. Over the past decade, she has served as a journalist for Agence France-Presse, NPR and the *Asia Times*. She has served in the Department of External Relations at the Office of former President Armen Sarkissian and as an instructor at the American University of Armenia. Currently, she serves as a strategic advisor for the Delhi-based consultancy DeepStrat.

In the summer of 2022, she moved to the village of Aghavno to support local leaders in their efforts to prevent the handover of the artery connecting Armenia and Artsakh. In this forum, she will walk us through how her fellowship in the Armenian government, teaching the new generation at the American University of Armenia, and engaging in civic activism in Armenia and Artsakh, afforded her a close-up view of the greatest challenge facing the Armenian nation in a century. The audience will have the opportunity to engage the speaker in a questions-and-answer session following her presentation. The ARF Sardarabad Gomideh of Boston will also outline its activities aimed at addressing the current crisis in Artsakh and invite the audience and the Greater Boston Armenian community to join in.

For all questions and additional information, contact the ARF of Boston at sardarabad@arfeastusa.com.



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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.

ADVERTISE IN THE MIRROR

Armenian Community Night with Golden State Warriors

SPOTLIGHT, from page 1

Steve Kerr’s grandparents, Stanley and Elsa Kerr, were instrumental in saving thousands of orphans in Marash from 1919-1922 and getting them safely to Beirut, where they then helped to build and run a Near East Relief orphanage for Armenian boys at Nahr Ibrahim. Thereafter, they remained in Beirut for most of their lives, educating generations of students, many of them orphans, at the American University of Beirut.

Los Angeles filmmaker Ani Hovannisian, who is currently working on a documentary that follows the giant footsteps of three generations of Kerrs and their century-long legacy of service to humanity, moderated the post-game panel.

Coach Rex Kalamian followed Kerr by recalling the story of his grandmother who survived the Genocide and lived in an orphanage like the one Stanley and Elsa ran, saving her life. He also addressed the current humanitarian crisis in Artsakh. “We have to keep them [Artsakh’s people] in our hearts, in our minds and we have to try to do whatever we can do to push forward and make change there.”

The coaches went on to discuss spreading the culture of basketball in Armenia. Kalamian, who coached the Armenian Men’s National Basketball team to victory in 2022 talked about introducing a Junior NBA program in Armenia and about the incredible work nonprofit Hoops 4 Hayastan is doing there to build courts and bring the joy of basketball to children, especially in rural areas. A portion of the event’s ticket proceeds will be used to support the group’s mission.

Coach Kerr added, “ We need a Basket-



Yerevan Dance Group Performers (Photo credit: Golden State Warriors)

ball Without Borders in Armenia,” which is a week-long youth basketball camp that promotes the game and positive social change in different countries each summer with the participation of NBA coaches and players.

The courtside conversation was the culminating event of an evening full of Arme-

nian camaraderie and culture.

Before the game, Armenian-American children lined the tunnel and high-fived the players from the Golden State Warriors as they ran onto the court. The Yerevan Dance Group performed a traditional Armenian dance, and Piedmont high-school student and KZV Armenian school graduate Danielle Zaroukian sang the national anthem in front of a roaring crowd just before tip-off.

During half-time, Moushig Andonian was honored with the Impact Warrior Award for his more than 40 years of dedication and service to Armenian youth and community in the Bay Area and beyond. “We are a nation of warriors,” he said. “I would do it for another 40 years if I could.”

Many Bay Area Armenian organizations and churches came together to participate in this memorable event organized by the Golden State Warriors with the support of Warriors staff, Community Relations Manager Claudia Leist and community member Kim Bardakian Demirjian. Plans are already underway for next year.



High School Student Danielle Zaroukian sings the national anthem (Photo credit: Golden State Warriors)



Community leader Moushig Andonian receives Impact Warrior Award



Warriors Coach Steve Kerr and Pistons Asst. Rex Kalamian with documentary filmmaker Ani Hovannisian who moderated the post-game panel. (Photo credit: Golden State Warriors)



COMMUNITY NEWS

Racine Community Celebrates Century of Roots in Midwest

RACINE, from page 1

At the same time very Americanized, yet steeped in Armenian traditions brought by the early immigrants, this unique community has marched to the beat of its own drummer for the past 100 years, and has often anticipated developments that would not be seen in other Armenian-American communities for decades. The tight-knit community life, social outreach and community service, and independent spirit of the Racine Armenians is evident to anyone who has visited the community. These traits are tightly wrapped up with their Armenian heritage and faith, as well as a very specific shared background. With very little immigration since the Genocide Era, most local Armenians trace their ancestry to the small town of Tomarza and its five surrounding villages, in what's now Central Turkey.

Keepers of The Flame

You would not expect someone with the name “Chuck Hardy” to be easily the most traditionalist Armenian in an entire US state. But Deacon Charles Hardy has been the staunch pillar of Racine’s Armenian community for some 50 years. Contrary to his name, both of his parents are Armenian; his father’s surname, “Kherdian,” was too difficult for the officials to spell when he tried to apply for citizenship. After being turned away several times being told “we can’t understand what you’re saying,” Hovhannes Kherdian came up with an Anglicized name, “John Hardy,” and finally got his citizenship papers. As for Chuck, his baptismal name is Garabed, which was often Anglicized to Charles in that era.

Churck Hardy was born and raised in Racine and is quick to say that not all Racine Armenians are from Tomzara. “The first Armenians to come to Racine were Kharperstsis, and they eventually brought a Tomarzatsi to act as their cook, and he brought in more Tomarzatsis, and they became the majority.”

Kherdian’s family was close with the 6 or 10 other families who hailed from Kharpert or nearby areas, like Palu. Most of them, including the Kherdians, were from the village of Khoulakiugh in the Kharpert plain.

Another family of Kherdians in Racine had migrated to Adana before coming to the US. Their son, David Kherdian, became a well-known author, poet, and novelist, who has written extensively about his youth in the Racine Armenian community and is married to prize-winning children’s author and illustrator Nonny Hogrogian. Kherdian is about as different than his distant cousin Chuck as one could imagine; though 8 years older, he was a devotee of the Beat poetry movement of the 1950s, moved to San Francisco in 1960 after graduating college,

and taught one of the first college courses on Beat poetry at Fresno State. After he met William Saroyan, the older writer decided to mentor him. Kherdian and Hogrogian are both devotees of the esoteric spiritual teachings of George Gurdjieff.

According to Father Arden Ashjian’s *Vijagatsouyts yev Badmoutiun Arach-nortagan Temin Hayots Amerigayi*, a parish-by-parish history of the Eastern Diocese published in Armenian in 1949, the first Armenian immigrants in Racine were Hagop Markarian, Avedis Der Margosian, and Khachig Torosian, natives of Khoulakiugh. They arrived in 1892 as factory workers, making 12 cents an hour. The three men had come west with a group of compatriots that had originally settled in Troy, NY, and later moved to Waukegan, Ill. to work in a factory there. The draw to Waukegan, interestingly, was the Washburn and Moen Manufacturing Company, whose wire factory was the primary employer of Armenians in Worcester, Mass., well known as the first organized Armenian community in the US.

When Washburn and Moen opened a new factory in 1891 in Waukegan, the company enticed their multiethnic immigrant laborers, including Armenians, to migrate west to work in the new factory. Markarian, Der Margosian, and Torosian continued north from Waukegan, finding different jobs in the factories of Racine, just across the state line. The following year, they were joined by more fellow natives of Khoulakiugh, relocating from Troy and Waukegan. At the time, all of these compatriot factory workers lived together in a rented house, a not-uncommon arrangement for single Armenian immigrant men, and known locally as “bekyar doon” meaning “bachelor house.” (see Bedros Keljik’s *Armenian-American Sketches*, for a portrait of that time and place, including the Waukegan factory in particular). Generally, a group of immigrant men would rent an entire



The original St. Mesrob Church on State Street, which was purchased from the Danish community and renovated

the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Tashnagsoutiun) also formed a chapter.

Most Armenians found jobs working for J.I. Case, manufacturers of farm equip-

Armenian and Caesarea to the Greco-Romans) in the Ottoman Empire, was apparently settled by Armenians in the 10th and 11th centuries. The Byzantine Empire succeeded in annexing almost all of Historic Armenia in the 11th century by offering the Armenian princes vast estates in the interior of the Greek populated domain immediately to the west, a region known as Cappadocia. Cities such as Sepastia, which already had a significant Armenian population, and Gesaria, an historic stronghold of Greek Christianity, along with their villages, were soon full of Armenians and under the rule of Armenian nobility. When the Byzantines forced Gagik II Bagratuni to hand over the city of Ani in 1044, they compensated him with a fortress called Bizou near Gesaria, and when the Byzantines themselves lost Ani to the conquest of the Turks, Gagik of Kars headed off the Turkish assault on his city and then relinquished it to the Greeks in 1064, being compensated with a place called “Dzamentav.”

The precise locations of Bizou and Dzamentav are still debated, but they are agreed by most to be to the immediate west of Kayseri, in the general vicinity of Tomarza. One of the more cogent arguments is that Dzamentav is a region and not a city; the valley of the Zamanti river where Tomarza sits, and the Tomarzatsis were proud to say that for a brief period in the 11th century, King Gagik of Kars ruled in exile from Dzamentav and the Catholicos Krikor Vgayaser was anointed there and had his seat there for many years (through the intercession of Gagik’s daughter, Princess Maryam with the Empress in Constantinople; Maryam also became lord of the land after Gagik’s death.)

More importantly for the history of Racine, Tomarza had a strong independent streak; it was populated by an overwhelming majority population of Armenians

see RACINE, page 12



Current pastor of St. Mesrob, Fr Avedis Kalayjian (at left), blessing the “Centennial Madagh”, summer of 2022.

house and split the expenses equally; they would hire another man to keep house and cook for them, sometimes the cook was the person who rented the house and acted as an organizer. In the case of Racine, the Kharperstsis hired an Armenian immigrant from Tomarza as their cook.

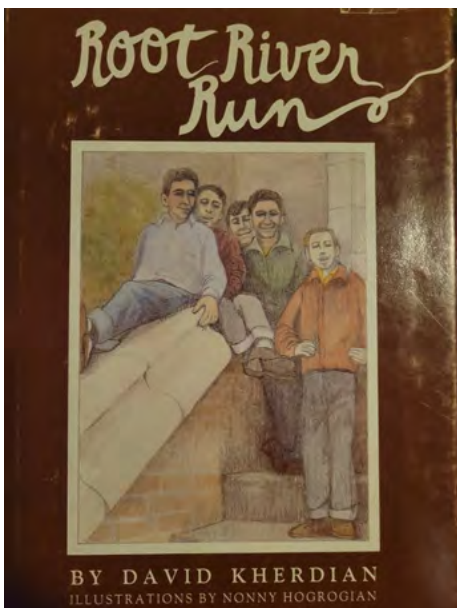
As more and more immigrants arrived from Tomarza, they organized a Racine branch of the Social Democrat Hunchagian Party in 1903, and in 1909, at a meeting in the house where the factory workers lived, they organized the Tomarzatsi Educational Society to send money back in support of the school in their hometown. Eventually

ment, and S.C. Johnson, which made wax products. Some opened their own small businesses, such as shoe repairmen; there were also lawyers and other professionals. There were two Armenian grocery stores, side by side — one was patronized by the Hunchags, and one by the Tashnags.

By 1950 the Armenian population was some 1,200 people, with 80 percent having roots in Tomarza as well as from the city of Gesaria and other villages in the region.

Tomarza, or ‘Little Zeitoun’

Tomarza, which was part of the Everek district of the *sanjak* of Kayseri (Gesaria in



Root River Run, David Kherdian’s memoir about growing up in Racine in the 1940s, published in 1984.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Racine Community Celebrates Century of Roots in Midwest

RACINE, from page 11

and was ruled by a clique of 4 Armenian “princes” (humorously referred to in Turkish as “chorbaji” or “soup seller”) from different prominent families who were responsible for the 4 quarters of the town. The Armenians only had to answer to a single Ottoman government official backed by a tiny police force; the official ran the town in consultation with the 4 Armenian “chorbajis.”

Such an arrangement is reminiscent of Armenian mountain strongholds like Sasoun, Artsakh, Hadjin, and Zeitoun in previous centuries, but is practically unheard of in a barely-defended lowland region such as Tomarza, lying in plain sight in the Kayseri plain. And like those famed mountaineers, the Tomarzatsis were known to openly carry firearms (illegal for most Christians) and even fight the Turks on various occasions. The people of the nearby, more urbane small city of Evereg-Fenesse named a hill outside their town after the Tomarzatsis after a vigilante band from Tomarza showed up one day to protect them from the local Turks and came out victorious in a skirmish with the authorities. Two well-known revolutionaries from Tomarza were Hagop Madaghjian of the Hunchag Party (his brother Toros settled in Racine and was a prominent community member), and Ghazar Ghazarian, known as “Marzbed” of the Tashnag Party (the Racine ARF named their clubhouse the “Marzbed Agoump.”)

Madaghjian survived the 1915 Genocide, but was killed in battle in 1920 defending



Fr. Yeprem Kelegian, always socially aware, poses in front of anti-Azerbaijan posters in Marseilles, where his father lived before coming to the United States

In keeping with the tradition of Princess Maryam, the women of Tomarza seem to have continually displayed an independent streak in church affairs. There were two nuns in Tomarza in the 19th century, and neither of them were really officially sanctioned by the church. One of them, named Marta, disguised herself as a man and lived in an all-male monastery as “Maroukeh” in order to satisfy her desire for monastic spirituality. It comes as no surprise then, that the Armenian women of Racine have also

was sent on the deportation, wandering through various cities in the Arab countries. In Damascus, Aghavni, who was a small child, was corralled with a group of other children by an older Armenian woman who wanted to teach them to read and write. For the rest of her days Aghavni remained indebted to that woman. In Racine, Aghavni herself invited a group of interested women to her home on a regular basis. Since none of them could read or write, she would read from the Armenian bible aloud and then explain the lesson that was contained in the story. Dergazarian recalls being awoken from sleep as a small child in her crib, by the Armenian *sharagans* (hymns) which the women sang at the end of their meeting.

Eventually, the group applied to the priest and asked for use of the church for their meetings. The priest complied and gave a key to the building to Aghavni. “You know how the men in our community are. If you aren’t married, you don’t have status, and if you are a woman, you definitely don’t have status. Aghavni was an unmarried woman with an education, and the attitude of some of the men was ‘who are you to teach me about anything,’” Dergazarian stated. One of the men in the community complained, saying that “women belong at home cooking and doing laundry” according to Dergazarian, and so the priest took the key away from Aghavni, who was forced to continue the meetings in her home. It wasn’t until about a decade later that during his tenure as primate, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan paid a visit to Racine and was asked if such an activity belonged in the church. “Of course they belong in the church,” the primate responded. Aghavni got the key back.

Dergazarian also reminisced about the close-knit nature of the Armenian community in Racine. People were always friendly, she stated, and her aunt Aghavni talked to anyone that came to church. “I’ve never seen that in our communities on the East Coast, and not even in Detroit. If you go to an Armenian church in a different city, they’ll just look at you,” she stated. All of the Armenians lived in the same part of town and most Armenian children her age went to the same elementary school. Even today, most of the Racine Armenians live in the same general area and their children go to the same high school.

Prior to 1918, the Racine community was served by the Chicago “parish.” In 1918, the Racine Armenians organized their own parish council, which included H. Poladian, Khachig Dadian, and Avak Kalfa Akgulian, but was still run jointly

with the Chicago community. In 1922, the Racine parish officially split off from Chicago, which is why St. Mesrob Church celebrated its 100th anniversary this past year. Initially, the Racine parish council was also responsible for the communities in South Milwaukee, Carrollville, and Kenosha (all in Wisconsin). Later, South Milwaukee would form its own church.

In the early days the church services were held at Wergeland Hall, a Norwegian-American social club. In 1923, it was decided to obtain an Armenian church, either by purchasing a church or building one. The Armenians were advised that it would cost more to build than to buy an old church and in 1924 started the process of fundraising.

In another recurring back-and-forth on women’s involvement, the original Building Committee had 19 members, which included 5 women. The following year, 1925, the women split off and formed their own Ladies’ Guild. At the time, the Armenians had been moving into a neighborhood near State Street previously inhabited by Danes. As the Armenians moved in, the Danes began moving out, and soon the Danish Baptist Church was up for sale. The Armenians



Avak Kalfa Akgulian, architect, stonemason and carpenter from Tomarza who built the St. Mesrob altar and renovated the original church

purchased the church and on December 25, St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church was consecrated by Bishop Dirayr Hovhannesian. The godparents of the church, Mr. and Mrs. Krikor Keishian, chose the name St. Mesrob in honor of the creator of the Armenian alphabet. As in other communities, much of the fundraising to pay off the mortgage was accomplished by the Ladies’ Guild.

Establishing an Armenian-American Community

Through the initiative of community leader Toros Madaghjian, a native of Tomarza and brother of martyred Hunchag revolutionary Hagop Madaghjian, the first Armenian Church School in America was started in 1935. Aghavni Keishian and her stepfather, Haji Hajinian, along with Madaghjian, initiated the school. At the time, such an idea was considered a Protestant innovation that was foreign to the Armenian people, and Madaghjian especially caught flak when he introduced Protestant hymns in the English language. Eventual

continued on next page



Racine’s ACYOA chapter in the early 1950s

the town of Hadjin from the Kemalists. Due to their independent and occasionally rebellious nature, the town of Tomarza was nicknamed “Little Zeitoun.”

Tomarza was also known for its religious piety. Father Yeprem Kelegian, former pastor of St. Mesrob’s Armenian Church, attributes the strength of the Racine faith community to their Tomarzatsi ancestry: “From the get go most of the people came from a region which was extremely faithful, Tomarza and its five villages,” he stated.

“They had a monastery, Soorp Asdvadzadin [Holy Mother of God] with 72 rooms; they trained clergy there, and the word from people that lived in nearby cities is that it was a destination for healing. They also had a parish church in the village, Sts. Peter and Paul. That’s the type of faith they brought over here to America.”

Kelegian stated that St. Mesrob’s parish was home to the first Sunday School in the Armenian Apostolic Church, and to his knowledge the first Bible Study as well.

shown a similar tendency. The “first Bible study” in the Armenian church was started by a woman, Aghavni (Anna) Keishian.

Keishian’s niece, Sarah Dergazarian of Midland, MI, is a 90-year-old retired public school music teacher. Dergazarian shared the story of her Aunt Aghavni who was one of the most remarkable figures in the history of the Racine Armenian community.

Dergazarian relates that most of the immigrant Armenian women in Racine in the 1930s could not read or write, including Aghavni’s mother (Dergazarian’s grandmother, Margaret Keishian Hajinian). She did note, however, that Aghavni’s mother had memorized by heart all the appointed Bible readings of each Sunday in the Armenian Apostolic Church, could recite them in *Krapar*, and also translate their meaning into spoken Western Armenian. The late Fr. Dajad Davidian was fond of quizzing Mrs. Hajinian on any given Sunday while listening with astonishment to her recitation.

During the Genocide, after the family



COMMUNITY NEWS

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ly, the school's activity was approved by Archbishop Mampre Kalfayan, with the proviso that traditional Armenian *sharagans* be sung instead of English hymns. Armenian language school had existed since the 1920s, but decisions by the diocesan authorities forced the community to combine the language school and the church school under one administration which ended up paying relatively little attention to the Armenian language, to Madaghian's chagrin.

By the early 1940s, a local youth group had developed associated with the St. Mesrob Church but with the departure of most young men (and three young women) to fight in WWII, it developed into a young women's group which focused on writing letters to soldiers and "holding down the home front." The broader Racine Armenian community broke a local record during the government's push for War Bonds, by purchasing \$50,000 worth of bonds at one time.

With the end of the war, the St. Mesrob women's youth group was transformed into the Racine St. Mesrob chapter of the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America, founded in 1946 by Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan. The local chapter was led by Shockey Gengozian, continuing the trend of female leadership, and they hosted the ACYOA National Convention and General Assembly in 1955. Dergazarian, who is Gengozian's cousin, recalled that other chapters weren't interested in holding the Convention in Wisconsin, so the Racine delegates played into the big-city prejudice – "we made the theme of our campaign 'cornstalks'." That was apparently humorous enough to get the delegates' vote, and a memorable Convention was held in Racine, which initiated the fundraising by the national ACYOA for a future youth camp, that eventually became St. Vartan Camp (the Ararat Center) which is owned by the Eastern Diocese in Upstate New York.

Keeping Traditions Alive

Many of the original Armenians who emigrated from Tomarza had planned to return to their homeland with earnings, said Dergazarian. With the advent of World War I, this was rendered impossible. Nevertheless, numerous men from Racine signed up to join the Armenian volunteer "gambavor" units in the Caucasus. Those who stayed home gained a positive reputation for the Armenian community by purchasing \$80,000 worth of Liberty Bonds. In the early 1920s, General Antranik himself even visited Racine.

When it became clear that the Armenians would stay in Wisconsin, not only was a church purchased and Armenian school instituted but one of the most long-held traditions of the Tomarza Armenians was organized in Racine for the first time in 1923 and every year since, namely the annual *madagh*. *Madagh* is a term in the Armenian Apostolic Church for a form of animal sacrifice inherited from pagan times, which has been lent a Christian meaning by blessing the animals before they are slaughtered and distributing the cooked meat to the poor and needy. The Racine *madagh* is prepared according to a special recipe handed down from Tomarza involving butter, yogurt, bulghur, and meat. The meat is prepared with onions in huge copper kettles and cooked over open fire pits in a local park. The *madagh* picnic is always held in the summer and serves the purpose of an annual church picnic; it became so popular that the church's annual budget was paid for from the proceeds of the *madagh*.

After the 1933 split and the founding of St. Hagop Armenian Church (affiliated with the Prelacy), there were two *madagh* picnics. St. Mesrob's *madagh* picnic of

1940 was one of the most memorable affairs according to locals, where 1,500 people attended. The traditional Armenian band led by old timers always played at these picnics; Ohannes Gurunian, a native of Gesaria, was the bandleader who played the violin on his knee like a kemenche and sang.

Today, out of solidarity, members of both communities attend the others' picnic; St.



Racine's Armenian Young Ladies Group, which sent letters and gifts to servicemen in World War II

Hagop continues the traditional outdoor *madagh* in late summer, while St. Mesrob sponsors a more toned down *madagh* prepared indoors for the joint April 24 Genocide Commemoration.

Progressive Leanings and Community Service

Racine Armenians have always been a bit progressive and certainly outside the box. In the political realm too, the Hunchag Party with its Social-Democrat and Marxist leanings was always popular in Racine. One of the early and notable events was the fundraising to buy a tractor to send to Soviet Armenia. Dubbed "the Hunchag Tractor," it was unveiled at a large picnic and shipped off to Russia, where the authorities promptly sent a letter back to Racine stating that they had no use for American-made tractors, as the Soviet government could manufacture and supply its own. (They kept the unwanted tractor, though.) By the 1960s and '70s, Racine's Armenian community, notably through the church, was more active than might be expected in civil rights and social causes.

Massachusetts native and later pastor of Watertown's St. James Church, Fr. Dajad Davidian, was pastor of St. Mesrob for most of the tumultuous years of the 1960s and was a frequent attendee of civil rights marches in the area. He also authored the ACYOA's controversial "Williams Bay Manifesto," a sort of Armenian Church youth equivalent of the Port Huron Statement that was drawn up in 1967 when the ACYOA's convention was held at a retreat center in Williams Bay, Wisc.. Fr. Yeprem Kelegian, who looked to Davidian as his mentor, stated that (perhaps surprisingly to some), Archbishop Torkom Manougian, the primate of the Eastern Diocese at the time, was in support of the Manifesto and in support of the Armenian Church being involved in the civil rights struggle and other causes. Kelegian states that the problem was more with the rank and file establishment types that dominated parish councils and other positions of leadership in the community.

In the late 1990s, Kelegian, who grew up in nearby West Allis, Wisc., became the pastor of St. Mesrob. Through his tenure in the

first two decades of the 21st century until his retirement, Kelegian was known throughout the Eastern US as the most progressive clergyman in the Armenian Church. He used to joke that at any given Armenian event he was "to the left of almost everyone in the room." He was also an inspiration to the youth, as he corralled them to be involved in the world outside the four walls of the Armenian Church and outside the ethnic com-

The Racine Armenians Today

In 1973, the St. Mesrob community built a new church in the suburbs. Avak Kalfa's handcrafted altar was moved to the new sanctuary where it is still used for *badarak*. Kelegian stated that "when I do morning service, I feel like I'm back in Tomarza."

Though the youth often move away to find jobs in larger cities, the pull of Racine's special close-knit community often draws them back; some will take a job in Chicago, live on the north side of the suburbs, and drive up to Racine on the weekend to go to church or to an event.

"There is a genuine goodness about the people. Everybody is very friendly, very humble, very modest, and they're just good people," said Danny Mantis, whose family came from Waukegan but was drawn to the Racine community in his youth and was motivated by Kelegian to become active in the church and Armenian community.

Monica Heller, who grew up in the church and traces her ancestry to Tomarza, stated that "Everybody kind of came from the same area, we have the grandparents, children, great-grandchildren, that what ties people back to the church, is the family, with the culture and religion, because you can't get the family and culture at any other church."

She added, "It's really nice to have a small community because you can go to anybody in the church anytime you need anything...it really is our own Armenian village, everybody is connected to each other." She points out that the two sides of the community are coming together more and more, with the St. Mesrob and St. Hagop churches jointly sponsoring a summer day camp for the kids that's "Armenian focused."

Fr. Avedis Kalayjian, the young pastor who has replaced Kelegian, approaches ministry with a combination of traditional and modern ideas, and is certainly creative, as evidenced by his creation of Armenian Alphabet Pasta.

The church has been involved in various controversies such as ordaining girls as acolytes or including more English in the services. But this is nothing new to the community; according to Sarah Dergazarian even her mother who was a child during the Genocide had been a candle bearer in the 1920s.

She attributes the independent spirit of the Racine community to the fact that there aren't so many other larger Armenian communities around to "look over their shoulder" and criticize them. Some might attribute it to their roots in Tomarza. But whatever it is, the Racine Armenian community has always been unique.



The Genocide Education Project

Job Announcement: Education Director Position

The successful candidate will be an individual committed to collaborating with educators, students, and community partners on teaching about genocide. They are charged with increasing the reach and impact of GenEd nationally by organizing participation in conferences, developing and leading teacher workshops, and supporting educators nationally to advance the teaching of genocide, including the Armenian Genocide. The Education Director will lead GenEd's newest nationwide initiative, the GenEd Teacher Fellowship Program, an immersive 9-day teacher training leadership program in Armenia.

Qualified applicants will have teaching experience, extensive knowledge of genocide studies, with particular expertise in the Armenian case, as well as organizational, budget, program management, and strong interpersonal communication skills.

Contract Basis: \$45,000 - \$60,000 depending on experience
Job Location: Remote, Occasional Travel
Applicants will be considered on a rolling basis until position is filled

Visit GenocideEducation.org for the full job description

Send cover letter, resume, and writing sample (1 page or less) addressing your commitment and teaching philosophy on genocide, including the Armenian Genocide to:
info@GenocideEducation.org

Arts & Culture

Kevork Malikyan

*‘My Work is International;
My Work is Global’*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / ISTANBUL — Kevork Malikyan (born in 1943) is a British-Armenian actor and teacher. He spent seven years training for priesthood at the Surp Haç (Holy Cross) Armenian High School Seminary in Istanbul, then moved to London in 1963 for to study acting. He received his acting and teaching qualifications from Rose Bruford College (1964-1967). Since 1968, Malikyan has acted in more than 95 films and TV series, including “The Man Who



Haunted Himself,” “Midnight Express,” “Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade,” “Flight of the Phoenix,” “Minder,” “Doctor Who,” etc. His first major TV series was “Mind Your Language,” attracting 18 million viewers, weekly. During his career, Malikyan has performed in a number of Shakespeare play including “Henry IV,” Parts 1 and 2 at the Shakespeare Globe Theatre in 2010. Malikyan also played in a number of roles in the Royal Shakespeare Company production, Arabian Nights, at the Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. Currently he lives in Istanbul, where we met briefly in 2015. This interview took place in written form: I left untouched some of his verbal idiosyncracies.

Haunted Himself,” “Midnight Express,” “Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade,” “Flight of the Phoenix,” “Minder,” “Doctor Who,” etc. His first major TV series was “Mind Your Language,” attracting 18 million viewers, weekly. During his career, Malikyan has performed in a number of Shakespeare play including “Henry IV,” Parts 1 and 2 at the Shakespeare Globe Theatre in 2010. Malikyan also played in a number of roles in the Royal Shakespeare Company production, Arabian Nights, at the Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. Currently he lives in Istanbul, where we met briefly in 2015. This interview took place in written form: I left untouched some of his verbal idiosyncracies.

Dear Kevork, your first 10 years were in Diyarbakır, historical Armenian Dikranagerd. We know about the Armenian life of this city from Megerdich Margosian’s stories. What memories do you have from your birthplace?

So many, sad, and, happy, it would, perhaps fill a book...When your birthplace is taken away from you, or you from your birthplace, memories take all sorts of colors. The time I spent at St. Giragos Church, playing in the Courtyard, or praying in the Church, with my beloved Father, are probably two I search for most...

Do you remember what was your very first role at Surp Haç Armenian High School Seminary?

I started student acting, at the Tibrevank doing plays in Armenian, in English, and, in Turkish.

What struck you most when you arrive first to London in late 1960s?

The cold, the fog, the quiet...

Actors with an appearance and background like yours seems to be

see MALIKYAN, page 16



Photographer Hrair “Hawk” Khatcherian at Gandzasar

Artsakh: The Photographer’s Eye!

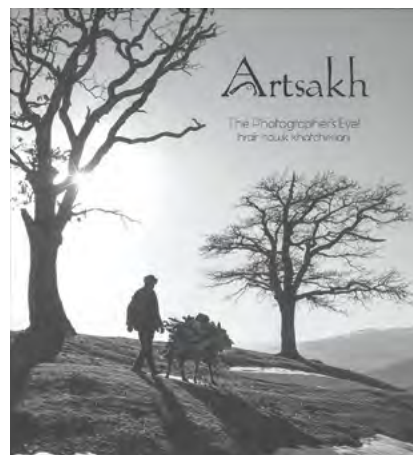
Hrair ‘Hawk’ Khatcherian to Present His New Book

FRESNO — Internationally-renowned photographer Hrair “Hawk” Khatcherian will speak on his new book, *Artsakh: The Photographer’s Eye!* at on Friday, February 3, at 7 p.m., in the University Business Center, Alice Peters Auditorium, on the Fresno State campus. The event is organized by the Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State and co-sponsored by the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Greater Fresno Chapter.

Since 1992, Khatcherian has been capturing the eternal images of Artsakh (Mountainous Karabakh) which he shares with his readers in his book, *Artsakh: The Photographer’s Eye!* His travels started in 1988, with his involvement and participation in various Armenian Diaspora activities related to the Karabakh Movement. Inspired by curiosity, he travelled to Artsakh regularly from 1992 until and including the year when the first conflict started, till 2020.

His travels to his ancestral lands allowed him to study its history, focusing on its culture, its people, its nature, and the sacred mountains of the region.

This book is a recap of stunning photographs, in black and white, as well as, in color. They say and represent everything that needs to be said.



Khatcherian was born in Lebanon in 1961. In 1982, he earned his wings as a commercial pilot in Hayward, Calif. He moved to Canada in 1984, working as a freelance photojournalist in Toronto. He moved in 1985 to Montreal where he works for the Paris-based Gamma press agency. In 1988, he actively participated in various activities of the Armenian Diaspora related to the Movement of Artsakh (Karabakh).

Hawk’s first trip to Armenia was in 1992. In 1993 he was told that he had terminal cancer, but he beat the odds, perhaps because of his personality — dynamic, hyperactive, combative, determined, optimistic and constantly enthusiastic.

Ever since that crucial year, Hawk lives for and by Armenia, Artsakh and all the fundamental references, values and fundamental benchmarks of the Armenian world.

For almost three decades now, Hawk has been presenting exhibitions, conferences, photographic lectures all around the globe, making Artsakh, Armenia and Western Armenia an accessible reality for all. His photographs have appeared in numerous magazines, newspapers, books and publications. He has reached the top of the biblical mountain Ararat, the sacred symbol of Armenians, and in that mythical place he has solemnly renewed his commitment and his oath, to pursue his work relentlessly.

A selection of his books will be on sale at the lecture including, *Artsakh: The Photographer’s Eye!*, *Armenia: Heaven on Earth*, and *100 (1915-2015)*.

The lecture is free and open to the public. Parking is available in Fresno State Lots P6 and P5, near the University Business Center, Fresno State. A parking pass is not required for the Friday evening presentation.

The presentation will also be live-streamed on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/armenian-studiesyoutube>.

Aida Zilelian Writes the Armenian Anti-Heroine

By Christopher Atamian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Anti-heroine: 1-female protagonist not confined by the expectations put upon her. 2-someone who makes “unconventional life choices.”

Aida Zilelian’s characters often lull the reader into a false sense of security or familiarity, in a verbal cat and mouse game of *fort-da*. The bored runaway who doesn’t seem to want to ever return home. The good girl immigrant daughter who goes along with whatever mamma says. The pothead who lets the mean Heathers have their say. Then suddenly after you think that you can no longer bear the self-abnegation, or that the anti-heroine risks falling into the trap of being just —well, kind of a loser perhaps—Zilelian bears her writerly claws. Both the protagonist’s nemesis and the reader are caught in an act of perfectly pitched rage. The street encounter turns to violence. The former pothead gives her old rival the verbal tongue lashing that she’s been keeping to herself for literally decades. The good girl finally tells mommy dearest what she



Aida Zilelian (International Armenian Literary Alliance Photo)

really thinks of her and her moldy old piano. A finely delivered one-two punch to the gut. Or as the French say: *la revanche est un plat qui se mange froid*.

A first-generation American-Armenian writer from Queens, New York and one of our most promising novelists, Zilelian delves into the under told stories of the Armenian outer boroughs. Her fiction explores the depths of love and family relationships, culture, and the connections between characters that transcend time and circumstance. Many novels about contemporary Armenian life are mired in sentimentality or outdated tropes. Not so the work of Zilelian, whose style is sparse and declarative, bold and unsparing. Zilelian made a splash with her 2015 Tololyan Prize-winning engrossing debut novel, *The Legacy of Lost Things*, which takes place in a Queens Armenian community like the one that Zilelian

see ZILELIAN, page 16



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Chocolate Chip Tahini Blondies (Photo courtesy Broma Bakery)

Broma Bakery’s Chocolate Chip Tahini Blondies

These decadent chocolate chip tahini blondies will make any day or holiday a whole lot better. They’re perfectly nutty and loaded with chocolate.

Discover these chocolate chip tahini blondies at the essential Broma Bakery baking blog. “With under 10 ingredients, these blondies are perfect to throw together in a pinch. You can always sub out the whole wheat pastry flour for normal whole wheat flour or all-purpose flour if it’s all you have on hand. Everyone knows that tahini is popular in Middle Eastern cuisine, and in recent years has taken off in the United States,” says Sarah Crawford. She is the successful photographer, writer, and baker for Broma Bakery. She also works in marketing, and has held a variety of positions in the food industry in Boston, New York, and Ann Arbor, where she now lives. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan.

“Tahini is a paste made from sesame seeds and is a staple in many cuisines, especially in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It’s vegan, gluten-free, tastes nutty, and is simple to use. I love to use tahini in hummus, falafel, dips, and salad dressings. And while it’s common in many savory recipes, you’re about to discover how incredibly amazing it is in desserts. These blondies are not dairy free or vegan, though, because we’ve added butter. Sorry vegans,” she adds.

Broma Bakery started small. A college student in 2010, Crawford developed the blog as a creative and artistic outlet that showcased recipes for classic desserts and pastries with unique twists. Gradually, her talent for food photography shined and people loved her treats. She now has an Instagram following that is over 597K. She developed her passion for baking from her gifted mom, Katherine Canfield. The recipes at Broma Bakery did not, in fact, get passed down from generation to generation. Rather, they come from every day, accessible pantry ingredients.

“We grew up with the chocolate cake on the back of the Hershey’s cocoa box,” Crawford says. When asked who taught her mom to bake, she says: “My mom was actually taught by her dad.”

“The key to these blondies is under baking them,” adds Crawford. “No one likes



Sarah Crawford of Broma Bakery (Photo courtesy Broma Bakery)

a dry cookie and I can tell you no one likes a dry blondie either. And blondies are essentially just cookies in bar form, so you should follow the following tips that you would with a cookie recipe.”

- Don’t over mix: This will lead to a tough blondie and totally throw the texture off.
- Don’t over bake: This is by far the most crucial thing you can remember with this recipe.
- Remember your baked goods continue to bake as they cool, so make sure you pull these out of the oven when they’re still underdone in the middle to keep them gooey and prevent from drying out.
- Don’t skimp on the chocolate chips.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/4 cup salted butter, melted
- 3/4 cup tahini
- 3/4 cup light brown sugar, packed
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg, room temperature
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup whole wheat pastry flour (this helps with the nuttiness)*
- 6 oz. dark chocolate, roughly chopped (can also use 1 cup chocolate chunks or chips)

PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 350°F and prepare an 8x8-inch baking pan with parchment paper. Set aside.

In a standing mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, cream together butter, tahini, and both sugars until fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add the egg, salt and vanilla extract and beat for an additional 2 minutes. Mix in baking soda and flour until just combined. Toss in the chopped chocolate and mix to combine.

Transfer the dough to the prepared pan, spreading it out evenly. Bake for about 30 minutes. They will look puffed and underbaked, but will continue to cook as they cool. Allow blondies to cool on cookie sheet for at least 10 minutes before transferring to a cooling rack. Top with a sprinkle of sea salt and serve.

*Note: If you don’t want to use whole wheat pastry flour, you can substitute it with 1 cup plus 3 tablespoons of all-purpose flour.

For Broma’s Complete Recipe Index, go to: <https://bromabakery.com/recipe-index/>

For 12 Baking Tools Every Baker Needs, go to: <https://bromabakery.com/baking-tools-every-home-baker-needs/>

For Foodtography School, see: <https://foodtographyschool.com/>

Check Broma Bakery regularly for numerous recipes (mostly desserts) and beautiful food photos. Shop for everything from cookbooks to your favorite home decor items -- you’ll also find a curated section of Broma Bakery’s favorite lifestyle items from around the web at: <https://bromabakery.com/shop-home/>

Watch as Sarah Crawford from Broma Bakery helps you step up your cookie decorating skills. She chats about all things baking and recipe development, with a few of your favorite cookies. Watch on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHuVcAudUV0>

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- <https://www.hourdetroit.com/restaurants-food/foodtography-101/>
- <https://www.michigandaily.com/arts/broma-bakery-style-food/>

Broma Bakery’s Orange Upside Down Cake

For Sarah’s Orange Upside Down Cake, go to: <https://bromabakery.com/orange-upside-down-cake/>

Tahini is used in the cuisines of the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean, the South Caucasus, as well as parts of North Africa. Sesame paste (though not called tahini) is also used in some East Asian cuisines. Although tahini is popular today, it has a rich history. It is said that sesame seeds have been cultivated in Egypt since at least 2 AD. Tahini is a butter made from hulled, ground, and toasted sesame seeds. It is a celebrated ingredient in Middle Eastern cuisine that is versatile enough to be used in a variety of dishes from hummus to pita wraps. “In addition to savory dishes, tahini lends itself to sweets, particularly halva, a sesame-based confection with a crumbly-meets-fudgy texture. In Lebanon, tahini is combined with carob molasses to make a dessert called dibs bi tahini (though maple syrup or honey can be subbed, too). In Armenia, tahini can be used as a sauce to put on lahmajoun. In Greece, tahini (Greek: ταχίνι) is used as a spread on bread either alone or topped with honey or jam. Jars of tahini ready-mixed with honey or cocoa are available in the breakfast food aisles of Greek supermarkets. In the U.S., tahini is gaining traction as a baking ingredient, bringing its creamy texture and subtly nutty flavor to banana bread, cookies and tarts, and as an emulsifier for dressings and dips.” See: <https://www.foodnetwork.com/how-to/packages/food-network-essentials/what-is-tahini>



ARTS & CULTURE

Kevork Malikyan: My Work is International: My Work is Global'

MALIKYAN, from page 14

“condemned” always to act ethnic roles in British cinema and TV. Has this ever bothered you?

“Condemn” is a strong word, perhaps, misapplied. An actor is happy to play any part, especially, in his early years of learning his trade. Their ethnicity is irrelevant. What they tell, I’ve concentrated on. All roles are “ethnic,” don’t you think? An American is of an ethnic race to an Armenian, an Armenian to an American (*laughs*). In any case, a long, and, complicated subject to talk about, the place of “ethnicity” in our trade.

The first time I saw you was in the series “Mind Your Language” about a group of foreigners studying English. There your character is Greek. Did you study the Greek pronunciations of English for that role?

Noooo... It was written as a Greek, and I played him as a Greek. Besides, Armenians are talented linguists. Given the chance, and, the time, they’ll speak any language beautifully, including English. I did do a little work on my Greek pronunciation, though, just to make him sound a little authentic...

Your role as the Turkish prosecutor in “Midnight Express” is small, but quite memorable. How would you describe that experience?

There is no such thing as a “small part” in my actor’s world... Forty years after the film, and, the Prosecutor is, still, remembered. So, it could not have been a “small part.” Steven Spielberg remembered me in the film when I met him for “Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade.”

How was it to work with Steven Spiel-

berg?

We established a wonderful working relationship from day one, as he did with all the players. A great man, a great director... George Lucas, Robert Watts, the producer, too.

You worked with legendary film stars like Sean Connery, Roger Moore, Harrison Ford, Anthony Hopkins, Sigourney Weaver, Michael Caine, Steven Seagal, etc. What kind of memories you can share with us about them?

Forgive me, but, Steven Seagal “legendary,” please !!!! I only worked on the film, because, I wanted to please my son, Sevan, who enjoyed his action work. Anyway, not a very pleasant experience, because, the man is not an “actor”... But, Connery, and, Ford, true legends, great human, wonderful working actors...

You have performed in a number of Shakespeare plays, as well as in a number of roles in the Royal Shakespeare Company production as far as I know, you are the first Armenian-born actor who has been involved in those theaters. What was special in this cooperation?

Indeed, my friend, I was privileged to have been asked to work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare’s Globe, and, the Royal National Theatre, on several terrific classical, and, modern plays... Perhaps, the first Armenian to do so... Let’s say the first Armenian Actor from Dikranagerd to do so, anyway...

You acted roles of different ethnic background, including Armenians (“The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles,” “Pascal’s Island,” “The Cut,” “The Prom-

ise”). Could you please tell us about them?

It was of course a great chance, at the late stages in my acting career to have been given the chance to play in films, like “The Cut” and “The Promise.” Both, huge attempts to tackle the Genocide of Armenians in, 1915, in which my own relatives perished. We can go on talking about both films for endless hours. But, for me, neither, achieved the desired international effect, recognition, the full story of the Armenian Holocaust as, my favorite Director, Steven Spielberg achieved with his “Schindler’s List,” so emphatically.

Have you ever visited Armenia? If no, you are always welcome.

Sadly, I have only visited Armenia once, very briefly, and, that was to arrange for Armenia (Sundukyan Theatre Company) to take part, to appear in Shakespeare’s Globe, “Globe to Globe” Festival, where Shakespeare’s 37 plays were performed in 37 different languages, including, Armenian. Another first, perhaps.

After a half century successful career in United Kingdom you decided to return to Turkey. Many perhaps have been sur-

prised by this decision.

My dear Artsvi, my work is International; my work is global...It should not surprise anyone that I worked in Turkey. The country I was born in invited me to work with them, and, over a span of 5 years I worked on several major theatre, TV, and, film projects. This opportunity gave me the chance to give several, major TV, and, newspaper interviews, where I talked about my people, my past, etc. Thanks to the Hrant Dink Foundation, I ended up celebrating 50 years in acting over a three-day festival of my work. It was simply magical. I cannot thank them enough. For the record, I have never been invited to work in Armenia, not even as a juror on the yearly film festival there. But, no probs, work goes on, life goes on...

And what do you do now?

Sort of semiretired now. But, still working, with some projects to be screened sometime this year, I believe.

Many thanks for this interview, dear Kevork. And I highly hope one day you will fill a book relating your life and acting experience!

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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 & Kutzu. Host: Cindy Fitzgibbon, WCVB TV5. To register and for details, email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

FEBRUARY 18 – Sts. Vartanantz Poon Paregentan (“Great Carnival”) Dinner-Dance. A terrific family evening of great food, music and dancing. Featuring the fabulous Ani Ensemble – Joe Kouyoumjian, Oud; Dave Anisbigian, guitar and vocals; Art Chingris, Dumbeg; and Ara Jeknavorian, clarinet. Also featuring the latest dance tunes from Armenia and America Pop music. 180 Old Westford Rd., Chelmsford. 5:30 p.m. Adults: \$30. Students: \$15. Children under 6: free. Paid reservation must be made by February 14 either on the church website, www.stsvartanantz.com or by contacting Corie Horan, coriehoran@gmail.com.

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 Gyozyan - “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.

Zilelian Writes the Armenian Anti-Heroine

ZILELIAN, from page 14

grew up in. Local private school girl and anti-heroine Araxi is a bored teenager rebelling against the social and ethnic restrictions that prevented her mother, born in the Armenian ghetto of Beirut, from marrying her true love. Both now live in America with their own families and their lives only occasionally overlap. One day Araxi can no longer bear the silences and unspoken recriminations that surround and threaten to engulf her. She runs away with her best friend and the tight bonds that once tenuously held her family together begin to unravel. Araxi is unsure herself if she will ever return. A chance encounters ensues and then this: “The image of Tom Jones’s battered face came to her. She remembered the rage that she had felt when she had lifted up the heavy rock and slammed it into his face. His broken teeth had caved inside his mouth, and his nose had split in several places. Despite how or why it had happened, she knew she needed forgiveness.”

As we move back and forth between present day New York City, a series of cities that Araxi escapes to and the Beirut of the 1960s, the reader anxiously hopes that she will somehow find her way back home. The novelist manages the difficult and subtle prestidigitation of examining Armenian diasporic life in a complex and exciting angle that will attract readers regardless of their background. Everyone in America who comes from an immigrant background or grew up as part of a minority community will recognize a part of themselves in these wonderfully conflicted characters who, almost suffocated by their pasts, gasp for air in their struggle to emerge into their true, free selves.

If the anti-heroine is usually defined as someone who makes unconventional life choices, then Zilelian’s characters don’t quite fit the bill either. Araxi is an anti-heroine because she makes all the wrong choices but at the same time because she is escaping and thumbing her nose at convention — she’s not just the obedient hard-working daughter her parents expect. Because she is in part living out a rebellion that her mother can never muster, we cheer her on. In her short story “How Far Can You Go Before You Set Yourself Free?” the main character grows up in a judgmental Armenian community: her classmates spoiled gossip mongers. As a teenager at home or on a field trip to Armenia, she cannot fight back the onslaught of abuse that comes her way. As an adult at an Armenian Fair, she meets her nemesis and now she is on fire when she confronts her: “That’s what you are, Anahid. A bitch. More than that.” Ibid with the main character in “The Piano” who after years of living under her mother carping dominion, finally explodes: “.....you didn’t give a *God damn* all the years I played. Not once. And now, because you have to get rid of it – you never wanted it – it’s a problem that you’re trying to put on me.” These explosive codas to her characters often life-long struggles with their own inner demons, come as a cold slap in the face to their intended victims, but a bracing one from her readers. Diasporan reality with a twist — delivered by Aida Zilelian, one of our most important, fearless writers.

Upcoming Works: *All the Ways We Lied* (novel, literary fiction)
Where There Can Be No Breath At All (short story collection, literary fiction)

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COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

Erdogan Begins to 'Behave' Conditionally



By Edmond Y.
Azadian

During the victory parade in Baku on December 10, 2020, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey stood on the dais as a hero next to Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, as he extolled the memory of Enver Pasha, one of the planners of the Armenian Genocide, and declared, "We are here to realize the dreams of our ancestors," meaning to bring the century-old genocidal policy to its logical conclusion.

Today, Mr. Erdogan wishes to project a different, more benevolent image, that of a peacemaker. Some of his friends have even suggested he should be considered for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Has Mr. Erdogan repented for his murderous ways and sought absolution for his sins? Certainly not. The key is the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey. They are scheduled to take place on June 18, but there is talk to move up that date for the convenience of the president.

Despite all appearances, Mr. Erdogan is not a statesman who shoots from the hip. His moves are calculated and far reaching. Thus far, he has been successful in spinning his web of international politics. During his rule, he has managed to shape Turkey's political life in his own image and intends to further his control for another decade.

But the next election poses many challenges for him and for his country; the polls indicate that if the elections were held today, Mr. Erdogan would not win.

Erdogan wants to turn the year 2023 into a year of celebrations marking the centennial of the founding of the Republic of Turkey by Ataturk and anointing himself as his heir, or better yet, the second Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent. He has planned to inaugurate mega projects such as the second canal across the Dardanelles and an atomic power plant at Akkuyu and many other similar grand developments.

One of the challenges for his reelection is his poor record in human rights, while the other one is the country's crumbling economy and runaway inflation (42 percent according to Reuters, with a stagnant GDP growth) and last but not least, his problematic relations in the region and with major world powers.

That is why Mr. Erdogan is in the process of a facelift.

A few months ago, Turkey's economy was in a free fall (80 percent inflation) but Russia's President Vladimir Putin came to the rescue, in return for Erdogan's favors. Indeed, Turkey, a NATO member, decided not to join the West in sanctions against Russia and was rewarded with a Ukrainian wheat deal with Russia and a contract with Moscow assigning Turkey as a major gas hub.

Turkey is working to ease all tensions in its international relations. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu is scheduled to visit Washington on January 17 to resolve some of the outstanding problems of the country with the US (although a story in Bloomberg suggests many Western powers are done with Erdogan).

Upon his return, Cavusoglu will fly to Moscow for a trilateral foreign ministers' negotiation with Russia's Sergei Lavrov and their Syrian counterpart, Faisal Mekdad, to work on a peace deal with Syria and plan a meeting between Erdogan and Syrian President Bashar Assad, his archenemy. A few months ago, Erdogan was planning to occupy 30 square kilometers in Syria when he received a hard no from Moscow and Washington. Now, the talk is about reconciliation with Syria and the removal of some Turkish forces from Syrian territory.

Mr. Erdogan's peace initiative has come to impact Armenian-Turkish relations; it was first felt in Armenian community life in Turkey. For many years, the Turkish government did not allow the churches and the Armenian charities (*vakfs*) to hold elections, despite the fact that many officers on those committees had resigned, retired or passed away and the management was left to some elderly members. Their pleas to the Turkish government to hold new elections were lost in the Byzantine

web of Turkish laws and regulations. Yet, on the eve of the national elections, the Justice Department suddenly granted them that permission and the board elections were held recently.

The tight control of the government extends to the seizure of many properties. One such property is the Sanasarian Han Building, in Istanbul, which had been confiscated in 1930. In 2011, the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul began legal proceedings to recover that valuable piece of property. After many setbacks, the Constitutional Court decided to return the property to the community in December, just in time for Mr. Erdogan's election gambit.

In another move, members of the Turkish football Federation this week visited the Armenian Patriarchate to invite the patriarch to a football match on March 25 between the Armenian and Turkish national teams.

Some positive movements were recorded on the state level with Armenia. On January 6, the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Turkey had lifted the ban on direct cargo flights with Armenia. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan characterized this initiative as a "positive move."

The Armenian special negotiator Ruben Rubinyan and his Turkish counterpart, retired ambassador Serdar Kilic, have been meeting to improve relations between the two countries. They have met four times in the past year in different capitals.

Now, they have decided to move these negotiations to Armenia and Turkey. As a result, agreements have been reached to open the border for the citizens of third countries. It is reported that technical work is in progress to open the land border between the two countries, although Mr. Erdogan had conditioned that move on the signing of the peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It seems that Turkey has temporarily relegated to Baku the task of harassing Armenia, in order to be able to

emerge with an innocent face looking towards the world political community.

There is no reason to cheer Turkey's moves, because any expression of gratitude may turn into a political tool in its hands to be presented to its partners as favors towards its victims.

Now it remains to be seen what Mr. Erdogan's moves in the region and in world politics will be. The elections are not too far away and coalitions are forming at this time. Mr. Erdogan's longtime nemesis has been Ekrem Imamoglu, Istanbul's combative mayor, who challenged Erdogan's AK Party in Istanbul's mayoral elections in 2019 and won. Erdogan cancelled the results and called for a new one. This time around, in 2022, Imamoglu won with a larger margin. Although he has not announced his candidacy for president, Erdogan is fearing the prospect and has arrested, convicted and sentenced him to a two-year suspended prison term for "having insulted government officials."

Another unannounced candidate is Ankara's powerful mayor, Mansur Yavas.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the 75-year-old head of the Republican People's Party (CHP), has been asking those two potential rivals to "clear my way. I will be the opposition candidate."

At this time, Erdogan's AK Party has formed the People's Alliance with the National Movement Party (MHP), an extremist nationalist party known as "Gray Wolves." The opposition has banded together in a coalition they call the "Table for Six," with the largest party being Kilicdaroglu's former Kemalist Party. These six parties have left the progressive People's Democratic Party (HDP) out because of the latter's pro-Kurdish leanings. (Armenian Member of Parliament Garo Paylan is a member of this party.) The party's two leaders, Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksedag, have been stripped of the parliamentary immunity and been jailed on trumped-up charges for years.

Many intellectuals, academics and politicians have received long jail sentences and are awaiting the end of the Erdogan era to return the country into a democratic republic. The forthcoming elections will decide whether they will continue languishing in prison or see Mr. Erdogan retire.



COMMENTARY

Stuck in Limbo: Why Nagorno-Karabakh Needs a Legal Status More than Ever

By Karolina Pawłowska

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

I have been told countless times during the past two years not to, as an anthropologist, engage in a politically active discourse. At the same time, we are entering the second month since Azerbaijani so-called eco-activists have blocked the Lachin Corridor — the only road leading to Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia. It has been over 30 days that no supplies of food or medicine can enter Artsakh. Grocery stores are empty. Children are being born in under-resourced hospitals. Over a thousand Nagorno-Karabakh citizens found themselves stranded and separated from their families during New Year celebrations. For them, this is not just another inconvenience, but the consequence of living in a constant state of conflict for more than two years. Even though in Yerevan we moved on with our lives after the 44-day war, the 120,000 residents of Artsakh still live in a perpetual state of insecurity — they are facing what Vicken Cheterian referred to as “the second siege.”

American journalist Lindsey Snell has already proven that the blockade has little to do with the environmental movement and, as Sossie Tatikyan states in an article in EVN Report, “consists mainly of members of Azerbaijani special services, military officers, beneficiaries of Aliyev’s foundation and other supporters of the state authorities.” Nevertheless, the truth remains irrelevant. Even though the members of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative called for at least modest assistance in the form of a humanitarian airlift, such an initiative seems impossible to undertake. The Responsibility to Protect Doctrine seems not to apply to the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In fact, there never was any humanitarian agency based in Stepanakert aside from the International Committee of the Red Cross. As the conflict froze in 1994, this territory

remained on a technical legal basis within the official borders of Azerbaijan, despite its de facto independence. Therefore, it became impossible to welcome international bodies without Azerbaijan’s permission. For the past 30 years, neither the United Nations nor Amnesty International operated in Stepanakert and even officials designated to issues related to conflict-resolution were not allowed to set foot in Nagorno-Karabakh, as this would have been understood technically as illegally crossing the Azerbaijani border. Ninety-nine percent of so-called experts who tend to be vocal regarding the issue have never visited Artsakh. Access is currently sabotaged by the Russian peacekeepers who, being useless in any other way, do surprisingly diligent work restricting foreign professionals from entry.

As an unrecognized state, Nagorno-Karabakh cannot be a member of any international agency, nor a party to negotiations over own status. It has never been a part of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Minsk Group, and instead was forced to solely rely on Armenia to represent its best interests. In the meantime, as Peter Osborne has recently reported in BylineTimes.com, United Kingdom and Russia have successfully sabotaged the efforts of signing a UN resolution calling for the immediate lifting of the blockade. As always, major institutions remain silent or produce condescending and harmful statements such as the recent tweet of the UN Human Rights Office calling on both sides to resolve the issue. The lack of recognition consequently locks Nagorno-Karabakh, in both a political and symbolic state of power imbalance, into an inability to demand fair and equal treatment. It took 30 days for Amnesty International to stand up for the values it claims to represent.

When shortly after the 44-days war the residents of territories passing under Azerbaijani control had only a few days to leave their entire lives behind, many considered



Empty refrigerated cases in Stepanakert (courtesy private photographer)

it a valid political solution. I, however, see this as a complete failure of all international agencies to maintain any humanitarian standards in the aftermath of the conflict. There was no attempt to advocate or to propose measures protecting these people from economic and psychological damage. The primacy of the political perspective silents the humanitarian aspect of the problem — any further border shift within Nagorno-Karabakh creates an opportunity for the gross violation of human rights and possibly an attempt of ethnic cleansing. I truly doubt that anyone proposing this variant fully embraces the moral and ethical weight of such solution. As anthropologist Eviya Hovannisian states, Artsakh soldiers who fought during the war would be the first to fall under persecution — accused of treason and severely punished. This would encompass a large percentage of its male population. There is no discussion of confidence building measures necessary to be enacted and systemic hate towards Armenians in Azerbaijan is consequently omitted in the public debate regarding the conflict.

We witness Nagorno-Karabakh being referred to as “disputed territory,” “occupied Azerbaijani territory,” or a “quasi state.” These labels, while technically accurate, continuously contribute to inaccurate framing of the issue as solely political in nature, which in turn perpetuates a myriad of grave consequences. If the problem is political, then any public reference becomes politicized and can be disregarded as influenced by an agenda, which successfully deters many forms of advocacy. As we see, not only activists, but also international agencies and press become reluctant to address

the issue.

A “disputed territory” brings a notion of temporality, a suspended status — it undermines the value of people inhabiting it. A discursive framework of an “occupied Azerbaijani territory” indirectly implies that as long as Nagorno-Karabakh formally belongs to Azerbaijan, its political elites are within their rights to use any form of terror towards its residents. It is not the first time that Azerbaijan uses humanitarian crisis as a tool of warfare. A five-year-old boy died during the last time when gas supply to Artsakh was cut on March 2022.

A “quasi state” is in fact a lapse of nature, a strange phenomenon not meant to exist in the nation-state politics of 21st century — an anomaly. Its residents remain invisible, lacking not only political, but also symbolic representation. Using the terminology of Edwin and Shirley Ardener, they are a marginalized, muted group whose voice remains structurally suppressed. Hearing those voices would require a radical discourse shift and moving from the rhetoric of territory and state towards a humanitarian perspective of human life and its value. And any form of a political representation is a first step towards battling the structural imbalance of power and holding international institutions accountable to values they claim to represent and principles they swore to protect. In the absence of it, the residents of Artsakh will remain vulnerable to any form of harm Azerbaijan decides to inflict on them in the future and the war of terror will only continue. We tend to forget that safety and stability are the ultimate conditions in which any reconciliation, any move forward can take place.



Queue for eggs in Stepanakert (courtesy private photographer)



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

How President Aliyev Became The Corrupt Despot of Azerbaijan

Journalist Fin Depencier wrote a lengthy exposé in the San Francisco-based Palladium Magazine, titled: “Ilham Aliyev and the Making of Azerbaijan.”

The article starts with Ilham Aliyev’s early years in Moscow when his father, Heydar Aliyev, was a member of the ruling Politburo of the Soviet Union.

At the young age of 16, Ilham Aliyev “was admitted into Russia’s most prestigious university, the Moscow Institute of International Relations,” through his father’s KGB connections. He graduated with a PhD in history and taught at the university from 1985 to 1990. He learned fluent English and specialized in British history.

In 1987, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev dismissed Heydar Aliyev from the Politburo. His son, Ilham, was fired from the University after “Heydar criticized Gorbachev’s government for the killing of Azerbaijani civilians in Baku.” Ilham was blacklisted and could not get a job. “He ended up in the clothing business, purchasing a factory on the outskirts of Moscow.... He then briefly relocated to Istanbul.”

In 1993, after Heydar became the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, he recalled his son to Baku and appointed him vice president of SOCAR, Azerbaijan’s state oil company. When Heydar was involved in a dispute with Western oil companies over Caspian oil rights, he spoke with the newly-inaugurated President Bill Clinton who pressured the companies to accept Aliyev’s conditions. Ilham flew to Houston and signed the agreement which gave SOCAR 20 percent share in the new oil consortium. The remainder was divided among British Petroleum, Aramco, Russia’s Lukoil, Pennzoil, and others.

After his father’s death, Ilham became President of Azerbaijan in a controversial election in 2003. He purged the old guard of oligarchs and officials and jailed “hundreds of functionaries belonging to the main opposition party, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan.” Among those jailed were “hundreds of journalists, activists, and other opponents of the government from the last two decades. As of 2015, Azerbaijan had more than twice the number of political prisoners as Belarus and Russia combined.” Nevertheless, “Aliyev expected most corruption to flow through him and his family.”

In 1983, “Ilham married Mehriban Pashayeva, whose grandfather was a famous Azerbaijani writer that already had amassed enormous wealth. He expanded the already-large Pashayev fortune by giving family members positions in government, which they have exploited for personal gain.” Here are several examples: “Nargiz Pashayeva, Aliyev’s sister-in-law, is the rector of Moscow State University’s Baku branch. His father-in-law, Arif Pashayev, runs the national aviation academy. Arif’s brother, Hafiz Pashayev, is a deputy minister of foreign affairs and served as U.S. ambassador for over 13 years. And so on it goes — the Pashayevs are now Azerbaijan’s wealthiest family by far. Their con-

glomerate, PASHA Holdings, owns seven of the ten largest banks in Azerbaijan, along with interests in tourism and insurance.” In 2017, President Aliyev appointed his wife as vice president of Azerbaijan to be his successor.

Aliyev has successfully silenced his foreign detractors “through intimidation and bribery. Azerbaijan manages a network of institutions whose purpose is to distribute funds throughout the West and ensure positive coverage in the media, allies in the business world, and defenders in politics. The network has been most active in Europe: in 2012, the European Sustainability Initiative used the term “caviar diplomacy” to describe Azerbaijan’s practice of bribing EU politicians. Doing state business in Azerbaijan is comfortable. The regime spends lavishly on hotel suites and dinners for its guests. Friendly journalists are offered access to Nagorno-Karabakh and other select locations. In 2017, Aliyev decided to give 255 loyal Azerbaijani journalists free apartments for their service to the regime.”

In 2017, the Global Anti-Corruption Consortium “revealed a scheme in which the Azerbaijani government laundered \$2.9 billion through four shell companies in the UK.... According to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, other recipients included “at least three European politicians, a journalist who wrote stories friendly to the regime, and businessmen who praised the government.... In some cases, these prominent individuals were able to mobilize important international organizations, such as UNESCO and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, to score [public relations] victories for the regime.” The European Sustainability Initiative described the scheme as the “biggest corruption scandal in the history of the Council of Europe.”

Journalist Depencier reported that British Petroleum “won the contract to operate the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. British mining giant Anglo American PLC has large investments in Azerbaijan and has benefited enormously from Azerbaijan’s victory in Nagorno-Karabakh, as mining sites were seized from the Armenians.... In 2021, it was revealed that Aliyev and his family had a secret real estate portfolio in London worth an astounding \$694 million.” British politicians were also coopted. “British Member of Parliament Bob Blackman has taken seven free trips to Azerbaijan since 2011 worth tens of thousands of pounds.”

Azerbaijan has also cultivated a close relationship with Israel. “A 2012 Wikileaks report showed that Israel has secret bases in southern Azerbaijan near the Iranian border. The strengthening of ties between Israel and Azerbaijan was encouraged by the United States.” U.S. officials theorized that “the Israel-Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan axis, supported by the U.S., would be a counterweight to the Syria-Iran-Armenia-Russia axis. Israel supplies Azerbaijan with 69 percent of its imported weaponry, and Azerbaijan supplies Israel with 40 percent of its energy needs in return.”

Depencier concluded: “Aliyev rules like a de-facto monarch with unquestionable power. He “isn’t afraid of being called corrupt, tyrannical, or malevolent.”

Despite its military alliance with Armenia, Russia did not defend Armenia from Azerbaijan’s repeated attacks. Meanwhile, the West, seduced by Azerbaijan’s oil and gas, turned a deaf ear to Armenia’s plight.

The Cruel Blockade Against Armenians Shows the World Order Has Collapsed

By Salpi Ghazarian

When two days before he invaded Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a declaration of military and diplomatic cooperation with Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev, it spawned a monstrous crisis that would rage alongside Russia’s war but receive much less international attention.

The declaration reinforced the two countries’ connection. It precluded Azerbaijan’s siding with the West against Russia’s campaign while effectively giving Azerbaijan carte blanche to wreak violence against the region’s Armenians — both within the sovereign Republic of Armenia and in Karabakh (or Artsakh, its Armenian name), an Armenian region that Azerbaijan controls.

And so Azerbaijan has wrought violence. In September, it attacked Armenia proper. Then in December, it decided to hold 120,000 Armenians in Karabakh hostage by blockading their only transport connection to the outside world. Prisoners of war have been shot. There are reports of prisoners and civilians being tortured and turned into social media fodder. Human life is devalued as dictators seek to eke out political resolutions to their liking.

The blockade comes after 30 years in which the area known as the Lachin corridor has been open and functioning, despite bitter tensions. The first time I went to Karabakh was in March 1993. The roads were unsafe. Ar-

menians were under attack from an Azerbaijani military not interested in honoring the region’s Armenians’ claim to self-determination — their right to decide for themselves who would govern them and how.

The Soviet Union had collapsed, Yugoslavia was exploding and everywhere people were clamoring for more rights. It was all-out war. When I returned to Yerevan, Armenia’s capital, a few days later, it was full of stretchers, IV drips and acutely wounded soldiers being transported to Armenia’s hospitals.

The fighting ended with a ceasefire formally codified by the three political entities: Armenians of the Autonomous Republic of Karabakh, and the leadership of the republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Karabakh connection to Armenia was assured through a corridor of land that Armenians controlled, to offer a lifeline — a link to the outside world — while negotiators worked to reach agreement on Karabakh’s future political status. When I returned to Karabakh a year later, I traveled along that corridor, in an old Soviet truck carrying children’s school supplies that came from France.

Since then, the corridor has been open. During the vicious 44-day war in 2020, it was open. Yes, during the fierce Azerbaijani onslaught intended to take complete control of Karabakh and its surrounding regions, which resulted in an estimated 7,000 deaths, the corridor was open. The new ceasefire document stipulated that the future of the corridor requires a negotiated resolution, and until that happens, Russian peacekeepers would ensure access and travelers’ safety.

To close it now, as Azerbaijan has done since early December, means strangling the Armenian population to force a desired political outcome. Food, supplies and medical help can’t get in. Energy shortages persist. People cannot travel out. Families remain divided.

Armenians are blockaded, and Russians are not keeping the peace.

Instead, Russia has made clear to Armenians that their

“Western ways” — democracy and an open, free society — are not only undesirable but punishable. Azerbaijan is pursuing control of the territory without its people, who want a continuation of the democracy they have experienced for nearly 30 years. Speaking of Armenians in Karabakh and Azerbaijan’s insistence that they live under its flag, President Aliyev cynically claimed that “just like all the other citizens of Azerbaijan, their rights and security will be provided.” It would be laughable if it weren’t so chilling. Azerbaijan’s dictator is unaccountable to his people, and his country has a track record of repressing its own citizens.

It is only the pressure or sanctions of the international community that has a chance of changing Azerbaijan’s actions. The United States and the European Union, along with members of the U.N. Security Council, have called on Baku to restore traffic on the corridor and open the route to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. They need to do more. The letter from Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and L.A. City Council President Paul Krekorian is a welcome move urging President Biden to take further steps to open air and land links immediately.

Armenians are now standing as a bastion of freedom in a volatile neighborhood. They are paying for it with a winter blockade, completely isolated and defenseless.

It is clear that the Russian war on Ukraine has upended all international rules. There seems to be no global order left. Sovereignty — which is always fragile — has lost its meaning.

Will the new world order be designed by autocrats for whom ethnic cleansing in broad daylight is a political tool? What is allowed to happen to the Armenians of Karabakh will be an indication of what kind of world awaits us all.

(Salpi Ghazarian is director of special projects at the University of Southern California Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies. This commentary originally appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*.)



COMMENTARY



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 Manoojian, 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.

What Is the Endgame of The Artsakh Blockade?

By Benjamin Poghosyan

As the blockade of Artsakh imposed by Azerbaijan passed the one-month milestone with no conclusion in sight, many seek to understand how this situation will end. To be able to answer that question, one must analyze the positions of the main actors who can influence the situation.

From the Azerbaijani perspective, this situation may continue for quite an extended period. By deploying self-described “eco-activists” in the Lachin corridor, Azerbaijan sought to create plausible deniability, claiming that the state has nothing to do here and that the blockade is the initiative of Azerbaijan’s “vibrant civil society.” However, very soon, this bubble burst and Azerbaijan changed its tactics. Now Baku rejects the mere fact of the blockade, claiming that either the road is open, or closed by Russian peacekeepers. President Aliyev reiterated this position during his January 10 press conference, arguing that there is no blockade, or at least the road is open for those who want to leave Artsakh.

So, from the Azerbaijani point of view, it is impossible to end the “non-existent blockade” — no emergency is there, and thus “eco-activists” may continue their protests as long as they want. Of course, Azerbaijan understands that every day of blockade adds more suffering for the Armenians living in Nagorno Karabakh, but this will only contribute to the realization of Baku’s official position — those Armenians who do not want to become Azerbaijani citizens should leave Nagorno Karabakh. Azerbaijan hopes that the growing sufferings of Armenians will force them to make a final decision — they have no future in Artsakh, and the only option to avoid starvation is to leave the region. Azerbaijan may end the “non-existent” blockade as a part of a package deal, which will include the signature of a peace agreement with Armenia on Azerbaijani terms, delimitation and demarcation of borders, and provision of a “Zangezur corridor” to Azerbaijan.

The Armenian government criticizes Azerbaijan for the blockade but states that it will not negotiate with Azerbaijan to end the blockade. During his January 10 press conference, the Armenian prime minister stated that Article 6 of the November 10, 2020 statement, which deals with the Lachin corridor, does not mention Armenia. Thus, Yerevan has no legal basis on which to negotiate regarding the end of the blockade. The government of Armenia applies to the international community, international organizations, and individual countries, seeking to raise their awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Artsakh and convince them to put pressure on Azerbaijan. Armenia also applied to the international courts, including the International Court of Justice, on the blockade issue, asking them to adopt interim measures to force Azerbaijan to end the blockade. Simultaneously, several representatives of the Armenian government, including the prime minister, are criticizing Russia and Russian peacekeepers for not realizing their obligations of securing free passage through the Lachin corridor. These actions spread more anti-Russian sentiment

among Armenian society while triggering a harsh reaction from Russian officials.

Simultaneously, the Armenian prime minister argues that the Nagorno Karabakh authorities should deal with the problems of Nagorno Karabakh, and they must start a direct dialogue with Azerbaijan and that the Armenian government should tackle the issues of Armenia. The call to the Artsakh government to start negotiations with Azerbaijan sounds quite strange, given that Azerbaijan rejects the existence of Artsakh/ Nagorno Karabakh and will never negotiate with the Nagorno Karabakh authorities. During his January 10 press conference, the Armenian prime minister once more stated that all countries of the world recognize Nagorno Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan, hinting to Karabakh Armenians that they should accept this reality and try to negotiate with Azerbaijani authorities to find a way to live under Azerbaijani jurisdiction.

The blockade of the Lachin corridor does concern Russia. The Kremlin is not interested in a new escalation in the region, is not happy with the growing confidence of Azerbaijan to challenge Russia and discredit the Russian peacekeeping mission, and probably does not want to see a further increase of anti-Russian sentiment in Armenia. Meanwhile, Russia understands that any use of force against “eco-activists” will not only provide Azerbaijan with an argument to demand the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers but also trigger tensions in Russia – Turkey relations. Given the growing economic cooperation between Moscow and Ankara, additional problems with Turkey are the last thing that Kremlin needs now. Thus, in the current situation, Russia cannot take decisive action to end the blockade and probably will continue political-diplomatic activities with little chances of success.

The US and the EU will continue to call on Azerbaijan and Russia to open the Lachin corridor. However, no Western country will impose any sanctions on Azerbaijan to stop the suffering of 120000 Armenians living in Nagorno Karabakh. Western politicians know very well that calls, statements, and publications on Twitter will not force Azerbaijan to end the blockade. Meanwhile, the West is only happy to see how the blockade tarnishes the Russian image in Armenia and triggers more anti-Russian sentiments. If Russian peacekeepers leave Nagorno Karabakh because they cannot secure peace, it will be another blow to the Russian influence in the post-Soviet space.

Thus, the current approaches of the main actors involved in the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict do not create the necessary conditions to force Azerbaijan to end the blockade. The current situation may continue, adding to the suffering of the Nagorno Karabakh Armenians. The only factor that may undermine Azerbaijan’s strategic goal to push out as many Armenians from Karabakh as possible is the determination of local Armenians to stay strong in their homeland.

(Benjamin Poghosyan is chairman of the Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies in Yerevan. The above article is special to the *Mirror-Spectator*.)