

FM Mirzoyan Rallies German, European Support

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — If the growing crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh has finally landed on the political agenda in Berlin, it has a lot to do with the working visit of Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan to the German capital last week. In two packed days, he met with the people and institutions that could make a significant contribution: his German counterpart Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Chancellor Scholz’s foreign and security policy advisor, senior members of parliamentary committees, the head of the Munich Security Conference,



Ararat Mirzoyan and Baerbock

as well as representatives of German experts and thinktanks. In all venues, his primary focus was on the need for action by Germany and the European Union to lift Azerbaijan’s blockade of the Lachin corridor. In remarks delivered during a joint press conference on February 7, Baerbock finally demanded the blockade be ended and outlined concrete commitments to actions aimed at achieving security and durable peace in the region.

On the first day of his two-day visit, the Armenian foreign minister see SUPPORT, page 5



Aid to Turkey from Armenia enters by the Margara Bridge.

Armenia Sends Humanitarian Aid to Turkey Through Long-Closed Border

YEREVAN — Armenia has sent humanitarian aid to earthquake-stricken Turkey across the long-closed border separating the two historic enemies, the government in Yerevan said. (See related editorial on page 17.) “Armenia has sent humanitarian aid to Turkey. Trucks with humanitarian aid have crossed the Margara bridge on the border and are on their way to the earthquake-stricken region,” Vahan Hunanyan, the press spokesman for the Armenian For-

eign Ministry, wrote in a Twitter post on February 11. “Trucks with humanitarian aid crossed the Armenian-Turkish border today and are on their way to the earthquake-affected area. Happy to have been able to assist,” Ruben Rubinyan, vice president of the Armenian National Assembly, wrote along with a photo showing an Armenian truck entering Turkey from the bridge. see AID, page 4

Karabakh to Widen Food Rationing as Blockade Continues

STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh announced on Monday, February 13, plans to ration more staple food items two months after Azerbaijan blocked Karabakh’s land link with Armenia and the outside world. The authorities handed out first ration coupons to Karabakh’s population last month to try to alleviate increasingly serious shortages of food caused by the blockade. Every local resident has since been able to buy one liter

of sunflower oil and one kilogram of rice, macaroni, buckwheat and sugar a month. Armen Mangasaryan, Karabakh’s social affairs minister, said that “it is planned to expand from February 21 the list of essential goods provided with coupons” when he addressed a meeting of a Karabakh task force dealing with consequences of the blockade. “Currently, organizational and technical works are being carried out in that direction,” see RATIONING, page 2

US and France ‘Combining Efforts’ Against Karabakh Blockade

Russia Warns About Interference

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The United States and France are working together to try to end Azerbaijan’s continuing blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh’s land link with Armenia and the outside world, the French Foreign Ministry said on Friday, February 10. The ministry said that French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the issue in a phone call on Thursday. It said they “emphasized the need for free movement along the Lachin corridor to be immediately restored.” “The serious humanitarian consequences of the current deadlock on the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are unacceptable, and France and the United States are combining their efforts to end the situation, through their contacts between [Armenian] Prime Minister Pashinyan and [Azerbaijani] President Aliyev,” added a statement released by the ministry. French President Emmanuel Macron spoke with Pashinyan by phone on Monday, February 13. According to the presidential Elysee Palace, Macron said the reopening of the corridor, blocked by Azerbaijani government-backed protesters on December 12, remains a “priority” for him. He also voiced “France’s full solidarity with the Armenian populations facing growing humanitarian needs.” The US and France have repeatedly called for an end to the road blockade compounded by disruptions see BLOCKADE, page 7

Arman Ordyan Advances Armenian Cinematography

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Usually when we think about the creators of films the names of directors or producers, or maybe scriptwriters, come to mind, alongside the actors. We seldom think about the art and technical aspects involved in the actual filming. Forty-five-year-old Arman Ordyan, director of photography in feature films like “Zulali” and “Big Story in a Small City,” reveals his experiences over more than two decades in various aspects of filming in the Republic of Armenia.

The Road to Film

As a student, Arman was interested in drawing and mechanics. He would bring pieces from his mother’s workplace to make car alarm systems at home to earn some money. He joined an after-school program or club on cosmology organized by the paramilitary Soviet sports organization DOSAAF [Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation and Navy] and did experiments, participated in discussions and even built model rocketry like space shuttles. Ordyan said, “I thought that there was something

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Foreign Minister, OSCE Envoy Discuss Blockade

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — On February 13, Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan met with Andrzej Kasprzyk, the Personal Representative of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Chairman-in-Office.

During the meeting, issues on regional security and stability were discussed. The two touched upon Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, developments on the draft peace treaty.

The situation in Karabakh resulting from the blockade of Lachin corridor by Azerbaijan was also discussed.

Eshoo: US Must Step Up Efforts to End Humanitarian Crisis in Artsakh

WASHINGTON (Public Radio of Armenia) — US Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-Ca) called for greater U.S. efforts to end Azerbaijan's blockade of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), on February 13.

"As Azerbaijan's cruel blockade of Artsakh enters its third month, the U.S. must step up our efforts to bring an end to this man-made humanitarian crisis," Eshoo tweeted.

"I'm proud to be an original cosponsor of H.Res.108, a bipartisan resolution condemning this inhumane blockade and urging the Biden Administration to hold the Aliyev regime accountable by sanctioning Azerbaijani officials and ending U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan," she said in another tweet.

Charges Brought Against Opposition MP

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Charges have been brought against Armen Charchyan, MP from Armenia faction, Gor Abrahamyan, spokesperson of the Investigative Committee of Armenia said on February 13.

According to law enforcement officers, the former director of the Izmirlian Medical Center Charchyan gave a false conclusion about the health condition of Artur Sargsyan, who was a defendant in the case of the capture of the police regiment in 2017.

Charchyan was stripped of parliamentary immunity on February 9.

Tatoyan Shares Video of Azerbaijanis Insulting Artsakh People

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Former Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan recently shared a video of Azerbaijani government-backed protesters insulting the Artsakh people.

The video was filmed on December 14, two days after Azerbaijani "eco-activists" blocked the sole road connecting Artsakh to Armenia to protest what they claim is illegal mining operation in Artsakh.

"This video chronicle is one of multiple episodes which depict the true intentions of the 'eco-activist' agents of the Azerbaijani government who have blocked the only road connecting Artsakh to Armenia and the outside world for two months," he wrote on Facebook.

Catholikos Karekin II Admits to Strain Between Church and Government

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian Apostolic Church's relationship with Armenia's government has become merely "ceremonial" during Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's rule, Catholicos Karekin II said in a newspaper interview published on Tuesday, February 14.

"The relations between the authorities and the Church are of a ceremonial nature," he told the *Hraparak* daily. "Yes, there are some disagreements with the authorities."

Karekin refused to go into details. He said instead that the church has remained faithful to its traditional "calling and mission towards its believing children" and committed to the "strengthening of Armenian statehood."

"The positions expressed by the Church in relation to national and public issues should be understood in this spirit," added its supreme head.

The ancient church, to which the vast majority of Armenians nominally belong, enjoyed strong government support until the 2018 "velvet revolution" that brought Pashinyan to power. The prime minister's frosty relationship with Karekin has only deteriorated since then.

Karekin and other senior clergymen joined the Armenian opposition in calling for Pashinyan's resignation following Armenia's defeat in the 2020 war with Azerbaijan. The prime minister openly attacked them when he campaigned for the June 2021 parliamentary elections.

Pashinyan and members of his government and political team have since boycotted Christmas and Easter liturgies led by Karekin. They have also effectively excluded the Catholicos from official ceremonies to mark major national holidays and remembrance days.

Last year, the church repeatedly signaled concerns over Pashinyan's conciliatory policy towards Azerbaijan and Turkey. Its Supreme Spiritual Council headed by Karekin issued a statement in November saying that "the Nagorno-Karabakh people's right to self-determination is non-negotiable."

The statement also urged the government to "eliminate the dividing lines in our national life, stop discriminatory approaches motivated by political beliefs, overcome the atmosphere of hatred and hostility and initiate a meaningful and healthy dialogue" in the country.

Also in November, the church's Mother See in Echmiadzin authorized one of its archbishops to address an opposition rally in Yerevan that warned Pashinyan against recognizing Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh.

Karabakh Leader Fuels Talk of Resignation

By Artak Khulian

STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Arayik Harutyunyan, Nagorno-Karabakh's president, has sparked fresh speculation about his impending resignation after proposing a major constitutional amendment.

The draft amendment announced late on Monday, February 13, would empower the Karabakh parliament to elect an interim president in case of Harutyunyan's resignation. The president would serve for the rest of his five-year term in office which ends in 2025.

Under the unrecognized republic's existing constitution, Harutyunyan's resignation would lead to the automatic dissolution of the parliament and the conduct of fresh presidential and parliamentary elections. Most local political actors agree that Azerbaijan, which has been blocking Karabakh's land link with Armenia for the last two months, could thwart such polls.

Harutyunyan's spokeswoman, Lusine Avanesyan, said that the constitutional change was proposed in view of "geopolitical regional developments" and "external and internal political challenges" facing

Karabakh. She told RFE/RL's Armenian Service that the Karabakh leader has no plans to resign.

Karabakh and Armenian opposition figures as well as some Yerevan-based media outlets speculated, however, that Harutyunyan drafted the amendment under pressure from Armenia's government. They said Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan wants to install a new Karabakh president who would be completely loyal to him.

Vahram Atanesyan, a Karabakh pundit and former politician, disagreed, saying that Pashinyan's relationship with Harutyunyan is not strained. Atanesyan also argued that Pashinyan would have trouble getting Karabakh legislators to elect a president handpicked by him because Harutyunyan's party does not control the majority of parliament seats.

Harutyunyan's initiative came amid reports of a rift between him and the Karabakh premier, Ruben Vardanyan, connected with the blockade.

Harutyunyan reportedly tried to sack Vardanyan and force snap presidential and parliamentary elections last month. Vardanyan publicly made it clear that he will



Arayik Harutyunyan not step down.

Opposition leaders claimed at the time that Pashinyan pressured Harutyunyan to replace the holder of the second-highest post in Karabakh's leadership and thereby facilitate far-reaching concessions to Azerbaijan. The Armenian government did not officially comment on those allegations. But some Pashinyan allies and supporters criticized Vardanyan, implying that his exit is necessary for ending the Azerbaijani blockade.

Karabakh to Widen Food Rationing as Blockade Continues

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read an official statement on the meeting. It did not specify the additional foodstuffs that are due to be rationed.

Ruben Vardanyan, the Karabakh premier who chaired the meeting in Stepanakert, was quoted by the statement as saying, "Although the challenges are profound, the society is responding to them with dignity."

The two-month blockade, compounded by disruptions by Azerbaijan in electricity and natural gas supplies from Armenia, has also halted much of economic activity in Karabakh. More than 5,000 of the territory's estimated 120,000 residents have lost their jobs as a result, according to the Karabakh government.

The government decided earlier this month to pay each of them 68,000 drams (\$170) in compensation. In addition, unemployed parents of children are to receive 40,000 drams per child.

The United States, the European Union and Russia have repeatedly called on



Ration coupons distributed to residents of Karabakh, January 19, 2023.

Azerbaijan to reopen the Lachin corridor blocked by Azerbaijani government-backed protesters on December 12. Baku has ignored these appeals, continuing to defend the protesters demanding an end

to "illegal" copper mining in Karabakh.

Armenia has condemned the blockade as a gross violation of the Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement that stopped the 2020 Armenian-Azerbaijani war.

Future Armenian Convention Expert Committees Conclude Meetings

YEREVAN — The work of the Expert Committees of the Convention of the Future Armenian is coming to an end. On February 4, the last meeting of the committees took place in the format of a mini-Convention. This time, the participants discussed not only recommendations of their own Expert Committee, but also recommendations of the other two Expert Committees.

The work of the Expert Committees has been going on for about 5 months, bringing together more than 100 representatives of the world-wide Armenian expert community. The final scenarios and programs will be discussed at the first pan-Armenian Citizens' Convention.

The Citizens' Convention will take place on March 10-12 in Yerevan. The first round of the selection process for participants has already taken place, but the organizers encourage people to continue to register because other rounds will take place soon. You can register to participate in the Convention via the website <https://futurearmenian.com>, email convention@futurearmenian.com, or telephone +374 60 700 800 (ext. 333).



Last meeting of the expert committees of the Convention of the Future Armenian

Artsakh Officials Discuss Humanitarian Crisis with MEP François-Xavier Bellamy

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Artsakh's Deputy Foreign Minister Feliks Khachatryan, State Minister's Advisor Artak Beglaryan and Human Rights Defender Gegham Stepanyan held a meeting with French Member of the European Parliament François-Xavier Bellamy on February 12.

The meeting took place at Artsakh's Permanent Representation in Armenia.

The officials discussed the consequences of the humanitarian crisis caused by Azerbaijan's ongoing blockade of Artsakh as well as efforts to counter its criminal policy, the ombudsman [said](#) in a social media post on Sunday.

"I thanked him for endorsing the European Parliament resolution on the humanitarian crisis in Artsakh resulting from the Azerbaijani blockade of the Goris-Stepanakert highway (known as the Lachin corridor under the trilateral statement) and his unceasing support for the Artsakh people's rights, freedoms and security," he wrote.



From left, Gegham Stepanyan, Feliks Khachatryan, François-Xavier Bellamy and Artak Beglaryan

Azerbaijani Speaker Demands 'Territory' From Armenia In Moscow

MOSCOW (News.am) — The Chairman of the Azerbaijani Parliament Sahiba Gafarova has been meeting with her colleagues in Moscow for the second day.

On February 14, she met with Speaker of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Valentina Matviyenko. The Russian side reported in detail on bilateral inter-parliamentary cooperation, and briefly talked about regional issues: they discussed the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement and the Lachin corridor.

The Azerbaijani side listed in great detail all the claims voiced by Gafarova. "According to her, despite Baku's initiatives, "Armenia continues to occupy a destructive position in the negotiations and, in open violation of the requirements of the trilateral statement, has not yet fully vacated Azerbaijani territories, but rather prevents the opening of all economic and transport links in the region," the Azerbaijani speaker said.

"Gafarova thoroughly informed the Russian side about the recent situation with the Lachin road. She stressed that Azerbaijan strictly follows the trilateral statement and has completely fulfilled all its obligations under it. Paragraph 6 of the document says that Azerbaijan ensures the safety of two-way traffic of citizens and goods, and the movement of vehicles in both directions along the Lachin road," Azerbaijani media quotes, "At that it was noted that Armenia has been misusing the Lachin road for over 2 years to transport mines, ammunition and military personnel, as well as to export Azerbaijani natural resources looted here from Azerbaijan. The protest action against illegal economic activities in the places of temporary deployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan as well as against the exploitation of natural resources and misuse of the Lachin road is the realization of the legal right of Azerbaijani citizens. It is necessary to fulfill the just demands of the protesters. () She stressed that the statements of the Armenian side about the alleged blockade of the Lachin road by the Azerbaijani side, the blockade of the Armenian population and the humanitarian crisis are completely groundless. Every day, various vehicles, including vehicles of peacekeeping forces, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Armenian ambulances pass along the Lachin road to refute the groundless allegations of the Armenian side. So, all this proves that Armenia is resorting to manipulation in an attempt to mislead the international public," Gafarova said.

INTERNATIONAL

Russian State Duma and Azerbaijan Parliament Sign Cooperation Agreement

MOSCOW (news.am) — The Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin met with the Chairman of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan Sahiba Gafarova in the State Duma, the website of the State Duma noted.

Vyacheslav Volodin and Sahiba Gafarova signed an agreement on cooperation between the State Duma and Milli a. This is the first such agreement with the Azerbaijani parliament. It was also decided to establish a high-level inter-parliamentary commission.

“Relations between our countries are developing dynamically. I must say a word of gratitude to our presidents, who ensure this dynamics, lay a strong foundation for the development of relations,” the Chairman of the State Duma said. The Chairman of the State Duma said that the agreement signed today is a momentous event that will open a new level of cooperation between the State Duma and the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

“Relations between Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation are based on centuries-old ties of friendship, good neighborliness, mutual understanding and trust between our countries. Most importantly, everything is based on the friendship of our peoples,” agreed Sahiba Gafarova, chairman of the Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan.

Mexico Senate Recognizes The Armenian Genocide

MEXICO CITY (Public Radio of Armenia) — On February 8, the Senate of Mexico adopted a document, recognizing the Armenian Genocide, highlighting the importance of respect for universal human rights.

At the same time, the Senate urges the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote the official recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Mexico, the Armenian Embassy in Mexico reported.

Turkey on Thursday, February 9 slammed the resolution on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Anadolu Agency reported.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry described the recognition as an “invalid attempt to rewrite history.”

Turkey reacts the same way every time a foreign government or parliament recognizes the Genocide.

Karen Khachanov Retains 13th Spot on ATP Rankings

MOSCOW (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Russian Armenian tennis player Karen Khachanov has retained his position in the 13th spot of ATP Rankings, last updated on Monday, February 13.

Khachanov reached his second consecutive grand slam semi-final at the Australian Open in January.

During his wins against Frances Tiafoe and Yoshihito Nishioka, Khachanov signed the camera by writing “Stay strong, Artsakh”, referring to the blockade of Nagorno Karabakh since mid-December.

In Turkey, Israel’s Foreign Minister Meets Erdogan, Promises Earthquake Aid

By Rina Bassist

ANKARA (Al-Monitor) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan received Israel’s foreign minister on Tuesday, February 14, in Ankara, where Eli Cohen expressed Jerusalem’s support for the victims of last week’s earthquakes.

The last such meeting took place five months ago, when then-Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid met with Erdogan in New York, at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Israel’s new ambassador to Turkey Irit Lillian presented her credentials to Erdogan Dec. 27, officially ending more than a decade of sour bilateral relations. Relations started deteriorating in 2010 after the Mavi Marmara flotilla to Gaza, where nine Turkish nationals were killed by IDF fire, and continued deteriorating over Erdogan’s pro-Palestinian anti-Israel stances. That has changed some two years ago, leading to reconciliation between Ankara and Jerusalem.

At the meeting, Cohen conveyed condolences on behalf of the Israeli government and people, and promised Israel would continue providing humanitarian aid to disaster-stricken areas.

Cohen noted that the bilateral relations are important for the stability of the region.



Israel’s Foreign Minister Eli Cohen meets with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara, Turkey, Feb. 14, 2023

He added, “Friends are measured in times of trouble. At this difficult time, Israel is reaching out and expressing solidarity with the Turkish people.”

Before meeting with Erdogan, Cohen met in Ankara with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

Speaking at a joint press conference with Cavusoglu, Cohen noted that Israel was among the first nations to send rescue teams to Turkey, dispatching than 450 specialists

immediately after the earthquake to save lives. “We have brought hundreds of tons of medical equipment and humanitarian aid and built a field hospital to attend those who need medical treatment,” added Cohen.

Israel has sent two teams to Turkey. The rescue team, which arrived first, assisted with the search for survivors, managing to find and rescue 19 people from the rubble before returning to Israel on Monday. The second team of medical staff brought some 60 tons of humanitarian assistance including food, medicine, tents and warm clothes. It set up a medical facility that will continue operating for several more days. After his meetings in Ankara, Cohen traveled to the city of Kahramanmaraş in the south of Turkey, where he visited the Israeli field hospital.

At their meeting, Cohen and Cavusoglu also discussed the resumption of direct flights between the two countries by Israeli airlines. Cohen announced that the first such flight is scheduled to depart on Thursday.

The new government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is determined to continue the rapprochement between Jerusalem and Ankara reached under the previous government. Erdogan also made it clear after the Nov. 1 elections that he wishes to continue deepening bilateral relations.

However, on Monday, Ankara joined the US State Department and the European Union in condemning Jerusalem over its plans to regularize nine illegal West Bank outposts and promote the construction of thousands of new homes in West Bank settlements.

A statement issued Monday by the Turkish Foreign Ministry warned that these unilateral steps by Israel would further escalate the rising tension in the region. “We call on Israel to end its actions which may trigger a new spiral of violence in the region and contravene international law and the established UN parameters,” it read.

Quebec’s National Assembly Condemns Artsakh Blockade

Special to the Mirror-Spectator/Abaka

QUEBEC CITY, Canada — On Wednesday, February 8, 2023, during a session of the National Assembly of Quebec Province of Canada, Sona Lakhoyan, a member of the Liberal Party, read a resolution condemning the blockade of Artsakh by Azer-

bec (CAQ), Quebec Liberal Party (QLP), Québec solidaire (QS) and Parti Québécois (PQ). unanimously voted for the resolution, without any abstentions.

The resolution was presented at the session by Michelle Setlakwe (QLP), Celine Haytayan (CAQ), Joel Arseneau (PQ) and Haroun Bouazzi (QS) and in this way all the political parties of the National Assembly of the Province of Quebec were co-authors of the resolution. By the decision of the National Assembly, the decision will be submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Canada and the Embassy of Azerbaijan to Canada.

In addition to other contributions, credit should be given to the important background work that was done to support this successful action by Montreal political activist Viken Attarian.



From left, Fr. Gomidas Mirzakhanyan, Andre Morin, Sona Lakhoyan, Michelle Setlakwe, Marwa Rizky, Aida Karibian, Christine Frechette (Quebec minister of immigration), as well members of the Armenian community in the background

baian, which was adopted by all parties of the National Assembly. One hundred and nine deputies of the Coalition Avenir Qué-

Armenia Sends Humanitarian Aid to Turkey Through Long-Closed Border

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Serdar Kilic, a former Turkish ambassador to several countries — including the United States and Japan — and currently Ankara’s special envoy to Armenia, thanked Yerevan and wrote that a 28-person search-and-rescue team and technical equipment had been sent by Armenia immediately after the earthquake.

In addition, he said, “Five truckloads of 100 tons of food, medicine, water, and other emergency aid packages from the people of Armenia passed through the Alican border gate this morning and set off for Adiyaman.”

“I will always remember the generous aid sent by the people of Armenia to help alleviate the sufferings of our people in the earthquake stricken region,” he wrote.

Turkish state-run news agency Anadolu said the border crossing was last used in 1988 when the Turkish Red Crescent sent aid to Armenia, which itself had been hit by a devastating earthquake.

Humanitarian aid and rescue teams have begun flowing into Turkey following the catastrophic earthquake five days ago that killed at least 25,000 people and injured tens of thousands more.

The land border between Turkey and Ar-

menia has been closed since 1993.

A phone call on July 11, 2022, was Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s first direct contact with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The leaders pledged in that call to build on a recently established process aimed at normalizing travel, trade, and diplomatic relations between their two countries.

Ankara has long made the opening of the border and establishment of diplomatic relations with Yerevan conditional on a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that is acceptable to Azerbaijan.



INTERNATIONAL

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met Christoph Heusgen, Chairman of the Munich Security Conference. This, the largest and most important international security conference, has been meeting every year in the Bavarian capital since 1963. This year's gathering, which takes place February 17-19, will see the biggest delegation ever from the US, with a third of the Senate, as well as 45 heads of government and state, and hundreds of ministers. Mirzoyan briefed Heusgen on the humanitarian crisis created by the Lachin corridor blockade, stressing Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing policy against Armenians and calling for international efforts to prevent it. The two discussed cooperation, including in the context of the Munich Security Conference, which hopefully means the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis will be on the agenda.

On February 7, a large group of the senior members of key Bundestag (parliamentary) committees convened for a discussion with their Armenian guest. These included committees on foreign affairs, defense, human rights and humanitarian aid, and EU issues. Present at the meeting were members of the Germany-South Caucasus Friendship group, whose chairman, Dr. Johann Wadephul, received Mirzoyan before the gathering.

The German-Armenian Forum, which co-organized the event, is a caucus of parliamentarians, civil society representatives, academics, diplomats, and others, which promotes political, economic, and cultural relations between the two countries. In his welcoming remarks, its president, FDP parliamentarian Till Mansmann, said Germany "supports the EU's stabilization efforts for stability and peace in the region," adding that the most important task is opening the Lachin corridor. Mirzoyan underlined the importance of this ongoing inter-parliamentary cooperation, for its contribution to enhancing the bilateral agenda and deliberation on regional issues. Their discussion covered progress in Armenia's reform agenda, which has enjoyed the support of Germany and the EU. Mirzoyan, who briefed participants on the ongoing humanitarian crisis, expressed his appreciation for their commitment to unblocking the corridor and reinstating free movement. He also brought them up to date on the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process, which, he said, was being undermined by Baku's warmongering rhetoric, maximalist ambitions, and aggressive stance.

The same issues dominated the exchange between the Armenian Foreign Minister and Jens Plötner, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Foreign and Security Policy Advisor, when they met on February 7. The emphasis was on the need to lift the Lachin corridor blockade immediately to address the humanitarian crisis. Both stressed the importance of further deepening bilateral ties as well as the EU-Armenia partnership. The most important development in this connection is the recent decision by the EU to send a long-term monitoring mission to the region, along the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Concrete Steps by Germany, EU

Mirzoyan and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock held extensive bilateral talks on February 7, followed by a joint press conference. Both prefaced their remarks with condolences to the families of earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria, and pledges of assistance. Germany had dispatched rescue teams with search dogs and Armenia, "despite the complexity of relations and realities," Mirzoyan said, was

sending humanitarian aid as well as rescue teams.

Bilateral relations, economic cooperation and trade, as well as political collaboration were at the top of their agenda. Mirzoyan commended the high level of their political dialogue, singling out Germany's



Ararat Mirzoyan (left center) and Christoph Heusgen (r.)

support for his country's ambitious democratic reforms. Equally important is the positive dynamic in economic cooperation. Germany, Armenia's most important trading partner in the EU, is expanding investment, facilitated by financial and technical aid provided by the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and German Development Bank (KfW). The GIZ, active in Armenia since the early 1990s, supports sustainable economic development, urban planning, and technical training, whereas the KfW, which started work there in 1998, is a state-owned investment and development bank.

Beyond nation-to-nation cooperation, Mirzoyan expressed appreciation for progress in Armenian-EU relations; here Germany plays an important role, for example, in the dialogue on visa regime liberalization. Progress continues as well in the context of the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership, signed in 2017 and in effect since 2021.

Regarding the critical security situation in the region, Mirzoyan stressed above all the importance of the most recent EU initiative. "I would like once again to commend and express our gratitude to the European Union regarding the decision to deploy a new long-term monitoring mission in Armenia." He expressed his confidence that "it will play a crucial role for the human security on the ground and stability in the region, as well as for the timely and reliable presentation of the current situation to our partners in the EU and its member states." The objective of the mission, as announced in an EU release, is "to contribute to stability in the border areas of Armenia, building confidence on the ground, and ensuring an environment conducive to normalization between Armenia and Azerbaijan supported by the EU." The new unit is to replace an earlier, short-term mission, include 100 monitors, and have a mandate of 2 years.

Mirzoyan elaborated on the issue of regional security and stability, reporting on the briefing he had given his interlocutors in Berlin during his working visit. He went through the facts and figures of the blockade, 120,000 Armenians suffering a humanitarian crisis, lacking food, medicine, and vital energy supplies. He specified that the single goal pursued by Azerbaijan through aggressive actions prior to and including the blockade, is "a systematic pol-

icy of ethnic cleansing." The consequences of Azerbaijani aggressions against the Republic Armenia itself in May and November 2021, as well as September 2022, still have not been eliminated: prisoners of war, civilian hostages, the unknown fate of those forcibly disappeared, as well as the

destruction of Armenian cultural heritage sites. In concluding, Mirzoyan stressed the importance of Germany's position for peace and democracy, and as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group.

German Foreign Minister Baerbock has been under pressure to not only speak out against the Azerbaijani blockade, but to engage in humanitarian efforts to provide vital food and medicine to the besieged population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Demonstrations have taken place regularly in Berlin and the minister has received petitions and letters by human rights organizations. To date, no official responses have appeared.

Before addressing this central concern, Baerbock recalled that 2022 marked a 30 year jubilee in bilateral relations, and highlighted achievements in the cultural realm; a new cultural cooperation agreement is in process, to add to the 49 cooperation pacts between institutions of higher learning. Contacts are expanding in film, theater, ateliers, monuments, and universities. The foreign ministry wants to ensure that Yerevan has a fully functioning Goethe Institute, which is the country's official cultural representative abroad.

Coming to strategic issues, Baerbock stated Germany's recognition of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The reestablishment of independence for both in 1991, she said, was an important juncture in the region; at the same time, "30 years of conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh have brought enormous human suffering." Detailing the human and material destruction, she said it would be an illusion to expect quick solutions, as indicated in the ongoing humanitarian disaster created by the blockade, which has halted deliveries of food and medicine; families are divided, children are freezing in unheated classrooms. "This is the reason why it is so important that the Lachin corridor blockade be immediately lifted. This is the responsibility of Azerbaijan and Russia."

Baerbock detailed the purpose and function of the new civilian EU Mission stationed along the border of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Through presence and dialogue, the mission members are to create stability and above all trust. The concrete instruments to achieve this include hotlines set up between capitals and between local

authorities, in hopes that reliable communications channels may lessen the risk that "tiny sparks might ignite blazing fires." The responsibility Germany assumes in the Mission involves the participation of police, state and federal officials, as well as civil experts. It will thereby "not only provide a significant share of personnel, but also the head of the Mission." It is to be a neutral observer group, tasked with providing security for both sides. Clearly, a durable solution, she added, requires negotiations, in this case mediated by EU Council President Charles Michel.

In the interests of reaching a secure peace, with guaranteed minority rights, and a solution to the drama of missing persons, Baerbock and Mirzoyan discussed four concrete areas of collaboration. First, Germany will assist the International Committee of the Red Cross in the recovery, identification, and return of the deceased, in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Second, Germany offers its assistance in border demarcation, and third, it will continue its role in mine clearing operations. Finally, Germany wants to find areas of security cooperation, for example, in cyber security, out of concern for destabilizing activities by Russia.

Germany's engagement in the South Caucasus, she concluded, is in Europe's own interest. Security among neighbors opens opportunities for economic growth. Here Baerbock referenced the EU's Global Gateway, a project for enhancing investment and trade, without ulterior motives. "We want a close connection of the Caucasus with Europe and stronger regional networking between the Caucasus and Central Asia."

Regional Peace

What perspectives are there for achieving a durable peace in the region? Baerbock outlined the areas for joint action that she had discussed with Mirzoyan, and noted that peace can come about only through direct negotiations among the concerned parties. In answer to a question by the press about new proposals to Azerbaijan by Armenia for a draft peace treaty, Mirzoyan answered at some length. First, he explained that, due to the blockade, Armenia postponed participation in a meeting with the foreign ministers of Russia and Azerbaijan, Sergei Lavrov and Jeyhun Bayramov, planned for December in Moscow. That notwithstanding, he confirmed he had presented new proposals for a peace treaty to Azerbaijan. He reported that "a few days ago," Armenia had received Azerbaijan's reply, along with other proposals, without going into further detail. He emphasized that this shows that, despite the blockade, "the negotiation process is not at a standstill, the negotiations are ongoing." In response to a further question regarding Armenia's assistance to earthquake victims in Turkey, Mirzoyan recalled his own country's experience in 1988 and Armenia's appreciation of the importance of international solidarity. He added, with regard to Turkey, that Armenia was continuing the dialogue to open borders and to reestablish diplomatic relations; "there is some progress ... the process is a little slow," he said, "but it is still very positive." One example is the decision to lift the ban on air cargo transportation.

Germany and the EU are responding to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, albeit with significant delay. Minister Mirzoyan's visit to Germany has provided valuable input. It is to be hoped that Baerbock, whom he invited to visit Armenia, will do so sooner rather than later.

INTERNATIONAL

Armenians Among Victims of Aleppo Earthquake and Its Aftereffects

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

ALEPPO, Syria — The 7.8 magnitude February 6 earthquake, with its epicenter in Turkey, so far has killed 29,605 people and according to the World Health Organization data, the earthquake claimed about 8,500 lives so far in Syria.

Dozens of Aleppine buildings were destroyed and the search for survivors amidst the ruins continued for days. Search and rescue teams from Switzerland have rescued the three-month-old Armenian baby Vartan and his mother, Yasmine, from the rubble more than 100 hours after the devastating earthquake in Syria, according to Zartok Media, the Swiss television reports.

Rescue efforts in Aleppo have ended, according to Armenia's Consulate General in Syria.

According to several local Armenian sources, despite the winter weather, the majority of people in Aleppo are still sleeping either in their cars on the street, or in Armenian clubs or churches, out of fear. Some have apartments on high floors and don't want to risk staying there. Others cannot stay in their homes because of the damage. Staying in various community centers also



Damage to the Tekeyan Cultural Association center in Aleppo

prices of all foodstuffs has increased.

The wounded Armenians are being taken care of in local Armenian institutions. Meanwhile, most people cannot work. Some aid arrived in Syria from Armenia by airplane on February 9 according to Armenian government reports, and a team of 29 rescue workers arrived February 8 in Aleppo.

Various Armenian organizations throughout the world are now conducting aid campaigns.

Meanwhile, volunteer organization Syria Civil Defense, also known as the White Helmets, after

searching for 108 hours, said on February 10 it believes no one trapped under the rubble is still alive.

Armenia has sent a rescue team to Syria, as well as to Turkey to help the countries search for survivors and deal with the consequences of the earthquake that has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Thirteen ethnic Armenians have been killed in last week's major earthquake in Turkey and Syria, Hovhannes Aleksanyan, the head of the Strategy Development Department at the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, said on Monday.

The death toll across Turkey and Syria following the February 6 devastating earthquake has reached at least 36,217.

Speaking at a news conference in Yerevan, Aleksanyan said two Armenians, a mother and her son, were confirmed dead following the earthquake in Aleppo.

Eleven ethnic Armenians, including singer Zilan Tigris, were killed in the earthquake in Turkey.

Armenians are also reported among those injured in the catastrophic earthquakes. Some of them have successfully undergone surgeries and continue treatment, while others have suffered minor injuries, Aleksanyan noted.

Also, the quake has damaged Armenian churches, educational institutions and community buildings in Syria, he said. (news.am, panarmenian.net and panorama.am contributed to this report.)



The Aleppo building in which two Armenians died and two were wounded

helps people feel better as they can console one another.

The temporary local Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) meeting place, a private library, had some damage, with computers and other items dashed to the ground. The original TCA center was damaged during the fighting in Syrian during the prior decade and now the earthquake has made the building potentially unstable, making members fear that the roof may collapse.

People need food, water, blankets and other provisions. The American sanctions had already caused shortages of various items such as milk for children prior to the earthquake. Many stores are closed and the



Armenian rescuers in Aleppo

US and France 'Combining Efforts' Against Karabakh Blockade

BLOCKADE, from page 1

in Armenia's electricity and natural gas supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh carried out through Azerbaijani-controlled territory. Azerbaijan has ignored these appeals, continuing to defend the protesters demanding that Baku be allowed to inspect "illegal" copper mines in Karabakh.

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov reaffirmed Baku's position during a phone conversation with US Assistant Secretary of State Karen Donfried on Friday. Bayramov reportedly told her that the protesters' demands are "legitimate" and must be fulfilled.

Donfried also spoke with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan. According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, Mirzoyan reiterated that the "illegal" blockade must be lifted "without any preconditions."

The French co-chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, Brice Roquefeuil, telephoned Mirzoyan earlier on Friday.

The Minsk Group was for decades led by the US, France and Russia. Their joint mediation format collapsed following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Russia Warns EU

In what appeared to be a stern warning to Armenia's leadership, Russia's State Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said on February 13 that European bodies must not be involved in efforts to resolve the Arme-

nian-Azerbaijani conflict.

Singling out the European Parliament and the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), Volodin claimed that they can only fan regional tensions. Armenia and Azerbaijan should stick to their agreements brokered by Russia during and after their 2020 war, he told Azerbaijani parliament speaker Sahiba Gafarova during talks held in Moscow.

"And those who make statements in the direction of European institutions may simply lose the country," warned Volodin, who is a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

He said that the European Parliament, the PACE and other Western bodies have never settled any conflict and have instead caused the breakup of Yugoslavia and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

"Therefore, while wishing to involve the European Parliament and the PACE, they should think ten times and weigh up how that could end, using the example of Ukraine, Yugoslavia and other countries," Volodin went on. "Anyone who wants peace, who wants to resolve the situation, must not only stay away from these quasi-parliaments — both the PACE and the European Parliament — but clearly understand that their involvement will aggravate the situation, create more and more problems. And if they do that, they must be held accountable for the consequences."

Both the European Parliament and the PACE discussed at recent plenary sessions Azerbaijan's continuing blockade of the sole road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

The European Union legislature urged Azerbaijan to "immediately reopen" the Lachin corridor in a resolution approved on January 19 and hailed by Armenian officials. The resolution also condemned the "inaction" of Russian peacekeeping forces in Karabakh and called for their "replacement with OSCE international peacekeepers."

Late last week, the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs released a report accusing Russia of conducting "disinformation campaigns" against the West in Armenia. It also demanded the immediate withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from Armenian territory seized during deadly border clashes last September.

Armenian leaders regularly complain about Russia's reluctance to condemn what they see as the Azerbaijani military aggression. They say that this is why they asked the EU to launch a new monitoring mission along Armenia's border with Azerbaijan.

Much to the dismay of Moscow, the EU agreed last month to deploy more than 100 monitors there on a two-year mission. The Russian Foreign Ministry accused the 27-nation bloc of seeking to "push back Russia's mediation efforts at any cost."



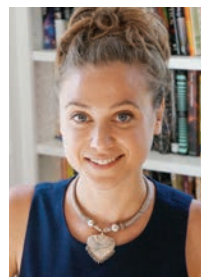
Community News

Pioneer US Activist Christopher Oscanyan Topic of Talk

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) will host an online lecture by Nora Lessersohn on Tuesday, February 21, at 7:30 p.m. Eastern / 4:30 p.m. Pacific, titled “The Sultan of New York: Armenian-American Entertainment and Politics (1834-1895).” This program is co-sponsored by the NAASR and the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS).

The webinar will be accessible live on Zoom (registration required) and on NAASR’s YouTube Channel.

This talk will introduce the life and work of Christopher Oscanyan (1818-1895), one of the first known Armenian-Americans, and his efforts to connect the U.S. with the Ottoman



Nora Lessersohn

Empire — especially its Armenian Christian population. For most of his career, Oscanyan used a wide variety of popular American entertainments to try to “correct erroneous impressions” of “the Turks” and cultivate what he called “mutual diplomatic relations” between his two countries. Owing to changing politics in the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s, however, as well as increasing Armenian immigration to the U.S. in the 1880s, Oscanyan embraced Armenian nationalism and an Armenian-American identity that allowed him to champion human rights in the face of what he identified as rising “Turkish tyranny and persecution.” On the whole, Oscanyan’s work shows how he repeatedly (re) invented an Armenian-American identity decades before a large Armenian community lived in the United States.

Nora Lessersohn is a PhD candidate in History at University College London, supported by a Calouste Gulbenkian Armenian Studies Scholarship. She was most recently the 2021-2022 Joe and Wanda Corn Pre-doctoral Fellow at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) and the National Museum of American History (NMAH). Her work, which has been published in the Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association, Comparative Studies in Society and History, and Memory Studies, looks at issues of entertainment, politics, and transcultural interaction as they relate to Armenians, Turkey, and the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. She earned her A.M. in Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University (2015) and her A.B. in the Study of Religion at Harvard College (2009).

For more information contact NAASR at hq@naasr.org.



From left: Jan Tognozzi, Areni Apik, Danielle Hairabedian, Mesrob Chelebian aka Baboog, Esther Chelebian Tognozzi, Nyree Apik, and Aiki Apik

Tarzana Grocery & Deli, Home of Original Pita Wraps, Celebrates 50th Anniversary

TARZANA, CA – In 1969, Mesrob and Vartouhi Chelebian immigrated to the United States with their five young children with not much more than the clothes on their backs.

Armenian immigrants from Kessab, Syria who did not speak English, this dedicated couple took a giant leap of faith as they began a new life in Southern California’s San Fernando Valley. In November, as the Tarzana Armenian Grocery & Deli, home of the Original Pita Wrap, celebrated 50 successful years in business, the family continues to light up their unique corner on Ventura Boulevard with amazing Armenian foods, culture, tradition, service, and commitment.

Attending the Tarzana Armenian Grocery & Deli’s 50th Anniversary celebration were family members, friends, and employees, as well as local dignitaries, including Fr. Razmig Khatchadourian, former Los Angeles City Council Member Dennis Zine, West Valley Warner Center Chamber of Commerce CEO Diana Williams, and Director of Public Safety & Special Assignments Gregory Martayan, who presented a scroll of congratulations on behalf of Paul Koretz, Council Member of the 5th District.



Tarzana Armenian Grocery & Deli founders Vartouhi and Mesrob Chelebian in 1957

Determined to become a success in business, Vartouhi, with the able assistance of her brother Vartkes, opened the doors to her sandwich shop on a small side street in Tarzana in 1972. At a time when ethnic food was considered foreign and unfamiliar, she began creating new, delicious sandwiches wrapped in fresh pita bread for her customers, and introduced healthy Armenian and Middle Eastern ethnic foods on her menu -- and a family business tradition was started. Working around the clock to support their children, Mesrob and Vartouhi created a stable, happy lifestyle for their family while providing a haven for many new Armenian immigrants to Southern California to come together and meet on a regular basis. Their patrons were from different ethnic backgrounds and walks of life who remained loyal and devoted customers for decades. As Mesrob and Vartouhi grew older, their children and grandchildren came forward to spend many hours working together in the family business in order to continue the family tradition.

For the last 20 years, son-in-law Jan Tognozzi has been operating the business along with his wife, Esther. Together they have continued Vartouhi’s legacy of spreading love through outstanding food and connecting the Armenian diaspora to its roots. The family is proud of their “Little Armenia” section of the grocery, where customers can find the essentials of an Armenian kitchen, along with many products either made in Armenia or by Armenians.

Tarzana Armenian Grocery & Deli became one of the top delis in Los Angeles with their “Knockout Pita Wraps!” as written by Los Angeles Magazine in 2005. For decades, customers have enjoyed a famous “Pita Wrap at The Armenian Deli.” The Pita Wrap with Turkey is the deli’s most popular, along with the Soujouk and

see TARZANA, page 9

Knights & Daughters Of Vartan Announce Writing and Visual Arts Contest in Conjunction with Times Square Commemoration

NEW YORK — The Knights and Daughters of Vartan are holding its annual writing and visual arts contest in conjunction with the 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and its subsequent commemoration in Times Square, on Sunday, April 23. High school students (grades 9-12) are invited to participate in a writing and visual arts contest to enhance awareness of the Armenian Genocide.

Winners will be announced publicly in Times Square on Sunday, April 23, 2023, and to mainstream All and Armenian media on Monday, April 24.

“The Knights and Daughters of Vartan are once again pleased to sponsor the writing and visual arts contest for high school students, who can use their voices and creativity to spread awareness about the Armenian Genocide as we commemorate the 108th anniversary of this dark chapter in Armenian history,” said Times Square Co-Chairs Haig Gulian and Christopher Artun. “The contest’s theme allows students to learn more about survivor testimonies and to find deeper meaning and inspiration behind their words and resilience.”

All submissions must be emailed to april24nyc@gmail.com by 11:59 pm on Monday, April 10, 2023.

The prizes are: first place, \$300; second place, \$200 and third place, \$100.

The prompt is “Survivor testimonies bring to life the tragic circumstances Armenian Genocide survivors endured to escape the first genocide of the 20th century, that took place from 1915-1923, and saw the murders of 1.5 million Armenians. Although the Turkish government continues to deny the Armenian Genocide ever occurred, scores of witness testimonies prove otherwise. The USC Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archive collection contains over 600 interviews relating to the Armenian Genocide. Please select one testimony and describe through writing or an art form of your choice how an Armenian Genocide survivor’s experience can serve as an inspiration to make meaningful change in today’s society.”

Essay must respond to the prompt and include the name of the survivor whose testimony is cited.

Responses must be between 750-1000 words typed in Times New Roman 12-point font and double-spaced.

Please include the applicant’s first and last name at the top of each page along with contact information.

Accepted file formats include.doc, .docx, .pdf

Please note your essay will be judged on its originality, clarity, see CONTEST, page 9



OBITUARY

Grace Pinajian

Dedicated St. Leon Church Supporter

WYCKOFF, N.J. — Grace Pinajian passed away peacefully early Friday, February 3, after a brief illness. Grace was predeceased by her husband, Charles Pinajian, and her younger brother, Robert in October 1988. She is survived by her son, Paul Pinajian (Dorota Lada), daughter Lynn Beylerian (Arthur), granddaughters Aline Knaian (Nicolas) and Christine Beylerian (Matthew McNally). She was 92 years old.

Grace was born and raised in New York City on November 30, 1930 to two survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Her parents were both originally from Sepastia (current day Sivas) in Historic Armenia (current day Turkey).

After graduating high school, she worked in the B. Altman Furniture warehouse office.

Grace was a charter member of the ACYOA (Armenian Church Youth Organization of America) at St. Gregory Armenian Church in Manhattan. Charles was a charter member of the ACYOA chapter in Paterson, NJ. They met during a committee meeting to plan the President's Ball in 1952 and were married two years later.

They bought their first home in Clifton and started their family while Charles was a public accountant. Twelve years later they worked side by side to establish National French Cleaners in Wyckoff, where they eventually moved to be closer to the business. They raised their two children who both earned business degrees and became successful in their own right.

In the early 1960s, the late Yn. Rose Halajian asked Grace to form and supervise the Mothers' Committee of St. Leon and be responsible for fundraising functions, communion breakfasts and holiday parties for the Sunday School Students. Grace has responded with "Yes" ever since and served her parish in many ways. In 1957, she joined St. Leon Women's Guild and has chaired and co-chaired innumerable banquets, dances, anniversary celebrations, and picnics. Whatever was needed, Grace was up for the task, whether it be snipping stems off grape leaves, cleaning parsley, or weighing dough for choreg. The camaraderie of the ladies in the kitchen was a great source of enjoyment for her and many of her friends.



She served on the Management Committee of the St. Leon Community Center and since 1988 ceaselessly offered her organizational and interpersonal skills to aid the Armenian earthquake relief efforts, first at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital and then followed by the Hospital for Joint Diseases and as a group leader at Valley Hospital for the AGBU Air-Lift project. Grace was named "Volunteer of the Week" by *The Record* newspaper in June 1990, for her co-chairmanship of the "Love the Children

of Armenia" project sponsored by St. Leon Women's Guild. Grace spearheaded fundraising and collection of layettes, first aid kits, medical supplies, and jaundice lights for newborns worth thirteen thousand dollars which were flown to Armenia in conjunction with the Armenian Health Alliance.

Grace and Charles visited Armenia 16 times and Grace would have been the first to tell you that she traveled everywhere she wanted. Through their work with the earthquake relief, Grace and Charles comforted and housed Ruzanna Torosyan of Leninakan (current day Gyumri). Ruzanna came to the US for surgery, stayed with Grace and Charles for three months during her recovery, and later became their goddaughter. Grace and Charles provided for Ruzanna's well-being from that time on and for the rest of her life.

Grace and Charles were proud to spearhead the donations to St. Leon to start fundraising for what became the Charles and Grace Pinajian Youth Center. They wanted to always be remembered in their much-beloved community. The legacy continues through their children as their daughter Lynn was a member of the Building Committee and their son Paul oversaw the construction of the entire building.

Grace and Charles always enjoyed spending time with their family and friends, but especially their granddaughters. Whether it was teaching them how to play card games, eating ice cream together, or traveling, Grace instilled in them her sense of style, planning capabilities, and passion for giving back. They spent the best of times together eating salad, chicken cordon bleu and mint chocolate chip sundaes. Grace was a woman who always had more to say. When you hung up the phone and heard it ringing again, it was bound to be Grace.

The family thanks Felicia, Mayra and Juliet who were at her side for the last few years and in these final weeks.

The Funeral service was at St. Leon on Monday, February 6. Interment followed at George Washington Memorial Park in Paramus.

Doris Mary (Allukian) Maranjian

Nurse, Descendent of Genocide Survivors

BOSTON — Doris Mary (Allukian) Maranjian, age 92, died peacefully on February 5 after a brief illness. She was born on July 6, 1930, in Boston, the first child of the late Myron and Mary (Nahabedian) Allukian Sr., who were originally from Aintab in Turkish Armenia. Her mother was an Armenian Genocide survivor.

Doris was raised in Watertown and Boston's South End. She was a role model and

working in her father's meat market, the Standard Meat Market on Tremont St. in the South End.

After graduating from Boston Clerical, she worked in the Personnel Department at the State House and Governor Christian Herter's office.

During these times, she always enjoyed family get-togethers with all her aunts, uncles and cousins.

After a severe illness, she entered McLean Hospital School of Nursing and graduated in 1963 getting her RN. Following graduation, she worked at McLean and Danvers State hospitals. Doris was a very conscientious nurse and a warm, loving human being; always ready to help others, especially the underserved. She was a very strong advocate for the neediest of the hospital's patients.

In 1964, she married Azad Maranjian, who died in 2010. They lived in Lynnfield and Cape Cod. The last years of her life, she lived in South Dennis, Watertown and Rogerson House in Boston.

Doris was an active and meticulous gardener, she loved babies, children and animals, Armenian and modern dancing, going to church, Armenian cooking, her mother's dolma, the Cape's beautiful beaches, especially at low tide, bicycling and dancing to Elvis Presley's song "Can't Help Falling In Love" with her niece, Alexandra.

Doris leaves behind her brother, Dr. Myron Allukian Jr. (and his wife Ruth Alluki-

an) and their six children, her loving nieces and nephews: Dr. Myron Allukian III (and his wife Dr. Lindsay Rogers) and their three children: Myron IV, age 9, Connor, age 7 and Charlotte age 5, Drs. Kristin and Alison Allukian and Alison's son Raphael, age 11 months, Jason, Alexandra (and her wife Olivia Zetter), Nathan Allukian (and his wife Nicole Thomas) and their daughter, Anastasia, age 2 months. Doris's lifelong childhood friend was her cousin Lora (Bakerjian) Oliver (now deceased), and her loving husband Paul. Garbis and Angel Allekian were also her loving peer cousins.

Funeral Services were held at The Armenian Memorial Church on Saturday, February 11.



mentor for her younger brother, Dr. Myron Allukian Jr.

Doris graduated from Boston's Girls' High School in 1948 and Boston Clerical School in 1950. During that time, she loved

Sarkis O. Paskalian

LEONIA, N.J. — Sarkis O. Paskalian of Leonia passed away on February 8, 2023.

He played an important role as an Armenian dancer and dance choreographer and teacher in the 1960s and 1970s and made a significant difference in the artistic and cultural life of the Armenian diaspora.

Sarkis Paskalian was born in Beirut, Lebanon on September 10, 1938 to two survivors of the Armenian Genocide, the late Hovhannes and Rose Paskalian.

He was a pillar in the Lebanese community, Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) dance ensembles around the world, and a devout supporter of his country, Armenia.

He is survived by his loving wife of 48 years Arlene; his sisters, Hasmig Khat-chikian of Canada, Sossi Kelegian of Armenia and Seta Kantardjian (Zareh) of New Jersey; his nieces and nephews, Ara Kantardjian (Jennifer), Lena Terzian (Haig), Karen Khatchikian, Michael Khatchikian and Daniel Kelegian (Mary); and his great-nieces and great-nephews, Lisa (Milad), Lara (Orlando), Daniel (Elyse), Alex (Stacey), Sacha (Tanya), Arshak, Christine, Andranik-Sarkis and Roman.

The funeral was held on February 11 at St. Leon's Armenian Apostolic Church of Fair Lawn, NJ.

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

Notice to Our Subscribers Regarding Print Version

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

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

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

We apologize and ask for your continued understanding.

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COMMUNITY NEWS / OBITUARY

4090 Foundation and TCA Raise Funds for Artsakh Veterans through Joint Banquet

ALTADENA, Calif. — A banquet organized by the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Pasadena-Glendale Chapter, the TCA West Coast office, and the 4090 Charity Foundation from Armenia on Friday, January 20, at the TCA Beshgeturian Center in Altadena was attended by 180 guests. It was an unusually pairing of an organization from Armenia and an organization from the diaspora. In addition, representatives of Istanbul Armenian and Iraqi Armenian groups came to support the event.

Artists, primarily painters, had donated their artwork to raise funds. The 4090 organization representatives who had come

from Armenia and Doha, Qatar, and local Armenians had brought with them many gifts, artwork, Armenian products and souvenirs for sale that were displayed and sold through silent and live auctions.

TCA West Coast Executive Secretary Mayda Kuredjian welcomed the guests on behalf of the Tekeyan Cultural Association and spoke about the role that TCA has played in the Armenian global diaspora for 75 years, with centers and schools working to advance the Armenian heritage and culture and supporting artists, scholars, and intellectuals, while also supporting Artsakh and Armenia through philanthropic efforts. Most recently, TCA has sponsored



TCA West Coast Secretary Mayda Kuredjian addresses the banquet guests

Murad ‘Mardy’ Kozelian

Longtime Owner of Watertown Sunoco Station

BELMONT, Mass. — Murad “Mardy” Kozelian of Belmont died on February 6, 2023.

He was the husband of the late Virginia Bekarian Kozelian, father of John and his wife Julie; Murad Jr., and Janet Pelosi and her husband Michael. He also leaves



longtime owner of Watertown Sunoco Service Station in Coolidge Square for more than 40 years.

Mardy was born in 1932 in Amman, Jordan to Hovaness and Mary Bakalian Kozelian. In 1955 he immigrated to the United States first spending two years in the Chicago area and over time moving to Watertown, MA. In 1957 he met his wife, Virginia Bekarian, getting married on January 1, 1961 and having their three children, John, Murad Jr and Janet.

Mardy had an incredibly strong work ethic, proven by being first of his family to come to America, and was able to provide a wonderful life in Belmont, MA for his family. One of his great pleasures was spending time at his Falmouth Heights Cape house, where he loved to relax and enjoy the cape life when he was not working.

As time passed, he enjoyed spending time with his growing family as his three children eventually gave him a total of 8 grandchildren. Things changed in 2008 when his 47 year marriage was cut short with the death of Virginia in 2008 at age 72.

After his wife’s passing, Mardy took the initiative to provide all of the Armenian cooking for the family. He loved to cook all the delicacies that the family had growing up with so that they would not be lost.

The funeral services were held at Bedrosian Funeral Home on Saturday, February 11.

grandchildren Olive, Alex and Adam Kozelian, Danielle, Lee Lee and Malachi Kozelian, as well as Jami and Rachel Pelosi.

He is also survived by one sister and two brothers and his late wife’s brother and sister-in-law and many nieces and nephews.

Mardy was a Belmont resident and the

an Artsakh Aid Fund.

The 4090 charity’s Executive Director Irina Pahlevanyan thanked TCA and gave a PowerPoint presentation about the organization’s work, helping to pay tuitions for Artsakh war veterans to complete higher education in Armenia’s universities. Dr. Garo Harmandarian, a board member of

the local California executive of the organization, also said a few words and thanked everyone for their support. The 4090 Charity Foundation was established after the 44-day war in Armenia and its name is taken from the height in meters of Armenia’s Mount Aragats. For more information, see <https://www.4090foundation.am/>.

Knights & Daughters of Vartan Announce Writing and Visual Arts Contest

CONTEST, from page 7

historical accuracy and understanding of the essay contest theme.

For the visual arts requirements, each entry submitted should have an accompanying statement (up to 250 words) from the artist describing the piece.

Submissions can include various artistic mediums, including watercolor, charcoal, pencil, pastel, chalk, oils, or acrylics, as well as photography or computer-generated images.

Submissions can include photographs of the artwork.

All submissions must be the sole creation of the student artist.

The 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide will take place at Times Square, New York, on Sunday, April 23, from 1:30 to 4 p.m. Thousands of people from around the country will come together in unity to honor the victims of the Armenian Genocide, secure global recognition, and champion human rights.

The annual Armenian Genocide Commemoration in Times Square is sponsored by the Knights of Vartan and Daughters of Vartan, a national fraternal organization, and co-sponsored by the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian National Commit-

tee of America, Tekeyan Cultural Association, Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, Armenian Bar Association, and the Armenian Missionary Association of America; participating organizations include the Diocese of the Armenian Church, Prelacy of the Armenian Church, Armenian Presbyterian Church, Armenian Evangelical Union, Armenian Catholic Eparchy, Homenetmen Scouts of NY & NJ, Armenian Youth Federation, and several national Armenian youth organizations.

Founded in 1985 by the late Sam Azadian, a former Brooklyn, New York resident, who lost four siblings during the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian Genocide Commemoration at Times Square has honored the 1.5+ million Armenian lives lost during the horrific events of the 1915 Genocide of the Armenians by the Young Turk Government of the Ottoman Empire. This internationally-recognized annual event draws thousands of Armenians and non-Armenian participants to commemorate the solemn occasion. The event features speeches and tributes delivered by prominent political figures and civic leaders, officials of the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, representatives of major Armenian-American organizations, and distinguished scholars and educators as well as high-ranking Armenian and non-Armenian clergy.

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Tarzana Grocery & Deli Celebrates 50th Anniversary

TARZANA, from page 7

Basterma Wraps (both Ohanyan’s brand), and the authentic Greek Salad and Veggie Plate. Customers can enjoy and take home fresh hummus, tabbouleh, stuffed grape leaves, and fresh eggplant salads, many of which are made from Vartouhi’s original recipes.

The deli uses the finest meats and cheeses, including those from Boar’s Head Meats. Healthy vegetarian offerings include Veggie Wraps, Lentil Wraps, Lebni Wraps and Stuffed Grape Leaves Wraps. These delicious sandwiches come on fresh pita bread with mayonnaise, Armenian string cheese,

tomatoes, pepperoncini, and California avocado. The deli often likes to replace mayonnaise with their homemade hummus for an authentic flavor of the Near East.

Supportive of their Armenian homeland, the Chelebian and Tognoz families continue their efforts to back veterans and their families in Armenia, especially over the last few years as their homeland has faced incredible hardship and adversity. The family makes its own baklava and carries a variety of nuts, seeds, dried fruits, coffee, teas, and Armenian pantry staples such as bulgur, tomato paste, hazelnut spread, jams, spices, and crackers.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Basmajian Bakery Serves Up Western

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. — Caroline Basmajian has always wanted to be in the food industry.

“My mom used to do it, my sister did it, I do it,” she says. “We can be in the kitchen 24/7 and we won’t say no, that’s how much we love cooking.”

Caroline, along with husband Berj and son Harout are the proprietors of Basmajian Bakery, which Harout describes as a “pop-up” in Southfield.

If owning her own restaurant or catering business was Caroline’s dream, Harout is the entrepreneurial brains behind making his mother’s dream a reality.

“My previous career was working with sales, but the last job was in PR and reputation management with a major Canadian telecom company. Quite a bit of social media influence as well. I wanted to be an entrepreneur, but Canada does not encourage entrepreneurship. So, I moved here and sold my belongings. And sine mom was moving this way we decided why not, let’s all move here,” he said.

Though Caroline moved to Detroit in 2015 and Harout moved in 2017, their roots in the area run much deeper than that.

Caroline was born in Beirut, Lebanon, to an Armenian Catholic father from Kessab, Syria, and a Lebanese-Armenian mother with roots in Evereg, a small town outside of Kayseri (Gesaria) in Central Anatolia.

Her mother, Sossi Kayayan Basmajian, is the spirit and inspiration behind the family business. After the Lebanese Civil War broke out, the family moved to the Detroit area, settling in Southfield in 1976. Sossi found a job as a



Caroline Basmajian and son Harout show off their cheese bread and lahmajoun

babysitters and her mother-in-law in Montreal was too old to take care of two kids. “So every summer we’d come here for two months.”

“I’ve always loved Detroit growing up, my grandmother and grandfather were here, as a kid we came here all the time. I became a teenager and I started driving here by myself,” said Harout. “We have roots, so it’s great, and we want to be more a part of the community as best as possible.”

Moving Back to Michigan

After some 35 years in Canada, Caroline was getting tired of the life there. “We were always working for other people; I used to work for a trust company and my husband worked for manufacturers. We weren’t advancing, and it was time to pick up and go,” she said.

The more business-friendly climate in the US and the heavy competition in the Armenian food industry in Montreal also played a role.

“I always had a side hustle. I used to make sweets and pastries in Montreal. And my sister used to do catering here in Michigan,” Caroline said. However, “to have your own company in Canada, it’s too much competition, there are a lot of Armenians and Lebanese in Montreal [in the business].”

Although there are scores of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean restaurants in Southeast Michigan,

mostly run by Lebanese, but also Yemeni and Chaldean families, as well as a huge Greek presence in both the Mediterranean and American diner style restaurant business, there are very few food service businesses run by Armenians in the state, despite the relatively large community. But Caroline felt that even if the city was full of kebab places, she could succeed if she offered more

Armenian-specific specialties, like lahmajoun, which has now become Basmajian Bakery’s mainstay. “My husband always wanted to do lahmajouns all the time.”

It has been a journey to get to where they are now, however. After working with her sister, Pauline, in her catering business for five years, and son Harout’s subsequent relocation to Michigan, the family acquired a restaurant and catering business, “Filo Fresh,” from a Chaldean man looking to get out of the business, in January 2020. They weren’t exactly prepared for the pandemic to hit the US merely two months later.

Filo Fresh was a catering business and a restaurant for Mediterranean cuisine, but “we made our own version, which is Armenian or Lebanese style — stuff that we generally cater; kebabs, salads, fattoush, tabbouleh, hommos, babaghanoush...”

When Covid hit, they were fortunate in that they were allowed to be open as a curbside takeout. But there was no business. “We were literally sitting around doing nothing, we’d go in and sit around. There were days when we had nothing to do, and he [son Harout] said ‘let’s try lahmajoun.’ I said, ‘I can’t do lahmajouns, I’ve never done lahmajouns.’” So he said “well, let’s work on Nene’s recipe, and then we’ll take it from there.”

Harout’s plan worked. The craving for thin-crust lahmajoun, associated with historic Aintab and Ourfa, was strong in the area; old-line Detroiters were used to Gary Reizian’s unique, more meat-heavy “Sepastia style” lahmajoun, but immigrants from Lebanon and Syria as well as East Coast transplants had long craved a reliable local source for the thin crust type which is prevalent in most Armenian communities around the world.

The lahmajoun orders picked up to the point where it became their predominant business. It was no longer profitable to even bother with making salads or sandwiches as opposed to selling dozens of lahmajouns. They were getting so many orders that the small convection oven they had was no longer cutting it; they needed a pizza oven. “We invested a lot of money into that place to make it more ‘restauranty,’” said Harout, but ultimately they had to sell it, in November 2021.

But with Reizian’s retirement and his Uptown Catering, a long-standing community institution, closing its doors, the field was wide open for Caroline and Harout to open Basmajian Bakery. They just needed a location.

“Somebody told us about this place with a grocery store and there’s an oven in the back where nobody’s using it,” Caroline stated. The owner of the small Arab grocery store told her they could make a deal. “And it ended up that my mom used to come there, shop there, and I didn’t know. So that was like, ‘ok, it’s a sign, mom was here.’”

continued on next page



The logo of Basmajian Bakery logo depicting matriarch “Nene” Sossi Kayayan Basmajian



Lahmajoun from Basmajian Bakery

cook at the Manoogian Manor - Michigan Home for the Armenian Aged.

“My mom was a great cook and chef at Manoogian Manor. She made lahmajoun, dolma, sarma, kufta. A lot of the recipes we are using are from her, including the lahmajoun,” said Caroline.

Sossi Kayayan Basmajian passed away 9 years ago.

Caroline graduated from Southfield High School and then married her husband Berj, a Montreal Armenian who was also born in Beirut, to a family hailing from the Kharpert region. She moved to Montreal and the couple had a family. Son Harout was born and raised there, graduating from the Sourp Hagop School.

Despite being born in Canada, Harout always had a special connection to Detroit.

“Granted, she [my mom] has roots here, I’m completely new here, I’ve met so many great friends, and I feel back at home, more so here than I do back home [in Montreal].”

Caroline relates that growing up, her kids were in Detroit every summer because the family couldn’t afford



Berj prepares the lahmajoun dough



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Home Cooking in Michigan

from previous page

“The reason we call it Basmajian bakery is because it’s my mom’s recipe for lahmajoun,” says Caroline. “And then to have Nene’s picture on the logo,” added Harout. “It’s a tribute to her.”

Big Dreams

Harout has always wanted to be an entrepreneur, and with the bakery, his dream and his mother’s dream have combined. “Here the environment allows you to, encourages you to. We’ve been blessed that the community has been welcoming, and has been accepting of our product, and we’ve been blessed on that front where we’ve been encouraged. The industry is very niche in this area. But it’s a certain service that is necessary. Every new customer I meet, says ‘we’ve always wanted to have an Armenian restaurant in this city.’”

Currently, Caroline, Berj, and Harout run the bakery with two part-time employees. Caroline’s sister Pauline has her own pastry business making pakhlava and ghourabia out of her home, but sometimes helps with the bakery.

Basmajian Bakery sells lahmajoun, zaatar bread, cheese breads and other manaish flatbreads, including cheese bread with soujoukh on it. (“Back in Montreal, we have a few places that specialize in this kind of thing,” explained Harout.) They also make cheese beoregs, spinach pies, and meat pies; manti and kufta (sold uncooked and frozen), and yalanchi sarma. They have added cheoreg to the list of options in anticipation of this upcoming Easter and they also continue to do kebabs and salads for catering; they recently catered a meeting of Armenian Assembly representatives and local Armenian community leadership with Sen. Gary Peters (D-Michigan).

The wish constantly expressed by customers for a full-fledged Armenian restaurant in the area is one shared by Harout and Caroline. “We want to have our own place.

It’s a pop-up location [right now]. It’s hard to find what we’re looking for, and also money issues,” said Harout.

“We have big dreams,” Caroline added. “Slowly but surely.”

“We can do so much, but we need the time and the place,” explained Harout. Finding help, also, is one of the hardest things today in the food service industry. “Covid has caused a paradigm shift,” said Harout. “It used to be that in a diner, the more tables you had, the more business you could do. Now people don’t want to sit down; more and more of the business has shifted to take-out. So it’s caused a shift in the business where real estate is not necessary. We don’t need the space, we need the help to make up for the work that you’re going to have to do,” he concluded.

Despite the difficulties, as much as his mother is dedicated to her restaurant dreams and her love of cooking, Harout, the entrepreneur, is also passionate about food service. “Food is what we do every single day, he says. Food is our people’s love language!”

On the connection between Armenian and Lebanese food, Harout stated, “most of the cuisine in Lebanon is Armenian because our people had a huge influence on the cuisine over there, and vice-versa. To this day Lebanon



Tray of manti from Basmajian Bakery

is known for the best food in the region. The food that comes out of Lebanon, it is made literally with love. Love is what gives it that different taste. And that’s how we show our heritage, we just try to do our part, and always remember where we came from. Our people are artists. We showcase that art in written word, in paintings, in music and in food!” he concluded.

Basmajian Bakery is located in the back of Altas Market in Southfield, at 29225 Greenfield Road. You can check out their Facebook page.



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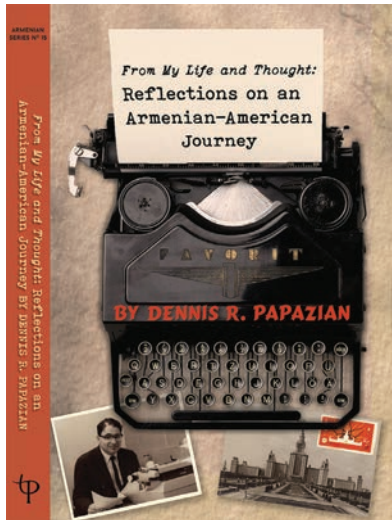
Arts & Culture

Dr. Dennis Papazian To Speak about His Book at Fresno State

FRESNO — Dr. Dennis Papazian, professor emeritus of history and founding director of the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, will speak on “Dr. Dennis Papazian: Reflections on an Armenian-American Journey” on Thursday, February 23, 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 Knights and Daughters of Vartan and is free and open to the public.

Papazian’s memoir, *From My Life and Thought: Reflections on an Armenian-American Journey*, was published in 2022 by the Armenian Series of the Press at California State University, Fresno.

According to writer Michael Bobelian, “this memoir provides readers with a much-needed front-row seat of the post-genocide twentieth-century Armenian-American experience. Dr. Papazian’s account of the changes endured by the Armenian-American



community in the period offers a behind-the-scenes look at some of the leading institutions and individuals of his generation: Alex Manoogian, William Saroyan, and the Catholicos all make appearances in these pages. What makes Dr. Papazian so atypical is the different hats he wore. As a scholar, community leader, and spokesperson, Dr. Papazian served the Armenian-American community in myriad ways: participating in academic organizations, speaking to the press, lobbying politicians, delivering speeches, doling out grants, and so much more.”

In his talk, Papazian will share his reflections on a quintessentially 20th-century American life shaped by the challenges of the immigrant experience, his family’s struggle to create a life in a new land, and his determined efforts to secure an education that would ensure a life of security and the promise of the American dream.

Papazian became a key leader in the emergence of an Armenian-American community just finding its footing 50 years after the 1915 Armenian Genocide, where he made significant contributions to multiple Armenian community, religious, academic and political institutions. His story is told with humor and wit and see PAPAIZIAN, page 13



Pegasus: The Orchestra led by Karén Hakobyan

Pegasus: the Orchestra Celebrates Fifth Anniversary With Suren Bagratuni Concert

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

NEW YORK — Pegasus: the Orchestra, founded and led by conductor, composer and pianist Karén Hakobyan, will continue celebrating its fifth anniversary with a special program on March 3 with celebrated cellist Suren Bagratuni, silver medalist of the prestigious Tchaikovsky International Cello Competition (1986) and professor at Michigan State University.

In this concert conducted by Karén Hakobyan, the program features Mozart’s *Divertimento in D major*, K. 136 and Grieg’s *Holberg Suite* “Suite in olden style” in the first half. Following intermission, Schnittke mirrors Grieg in his “Suite in old style” for cello, string orchestra and harpsichord. The concert concludes with Haydn’s *Cello Concerto No 1 in C major*.

The concert will take place at Christ & Saint Stephen’s Church (by Lincoln Center) 120 West 69th Street, New York, at 7.30 p.m.



Cellist Suren Bagratuni

Bagratuni has not performed as a soloist in New York for quite some time and according to Hakobyan, “it’s an event we have been anticipating with great excitement. He has brought up generations of internationally acclaimed cellists and has contributed so much to not only Armenian but also international music scene.”

Hailed as “a cellist of uncommon attainments” by the *Boston Globe*, Bagratuni was winner of the Silver Medal at the 1986 Tchaikovsky Competition while still a student at the Moscow Conservatory. He has gone on to a distinguished international career as a soloist, recitalist, chamber musician and recording artist. In addition to performing throughout the former Soviet Union, he has toured worldwide earning enthusiastic praise in both traditional and contemporary repertoire.

As soloist Bagratuni has performed with numerous orchestras in the former Soviet Union, including the Moscow Philharmonic, appeared with the Stuttgart and Württemberg Chamber Orchestras, with National Philharmonic Orchestras of Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Armenia as well as the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Camerata Georgia, Armenian National Chamber Orchestra, and many others. Recital and chamber music appearances have included guest invitations with the Newport, Hamptons, the “Russian Winter”, El Paso, and numerous international festivals in Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Mexico, Korea and Taiwan. Other solo appearances have included recitals in major concert venues of North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia and South Africa.

Bagratuni has been featured on CBC Radio Canada, the Bayerischer Rundfunk in Germany, and WNYC in New York, NPR, and WGBH Radio in Boston.

He is a professor of cello at Michigan State University where he maintains a very busy teaching schedule and serves as Chair of String area. He is the artistic director of the International Music Academy in Todi, Italy and the annual Cello Plus Festival, called “one of the premiere classical happenings.”

Bagratuni has presented master classes throughout Europe, South America, the Far East, South Africa, Armenia, Canada and at many Schools in the U.S. including the New England Conservatory, Peabody Conservatory and the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Born in Yerevan, Armenia, Bagratuni began his musical education at age 7. In 1988, he won first prize in the Vittorio Gui International Competition in Italy.

continued on next page

Concerts in Memory of Composer Levon Chaushyan

PROVIDENCE — Exactly one year ago, the noted Armenian composer, teacher, public figure Levon Chaushyan died prematurely. His name is widely known as the author of symphonic, instrumental, chamber, vocal works, which are widely published and performed all over the world.

Chaushyan founded and has been the permanent president of the Armenian Musical Assembly for the past 25 years. At various times he was deputy chairman of the Union of Composers of Armenia, chairman and jury member of many international competitions and festivals. O was also the chairman of the council for awarding presidential prizes to young talented musicians, and was



Levon Chaushyan

the chairman of the Armenian Center for Symphonic Music. As a professor at the Yerevan State Conservatory after Komitas, Chaushyan educated a large galaxy of young composers.

Chaushyan had received the title of Honored Artist of Armenia.

In memory of this outstanding composer, the Amaras Art Alliance, and the Cultural Committee of the Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church have organized memorial concerts in his memory, in which his works, as well as the music of other Armenian composers, will be performed. The composer’s daughter, pianist Anahit Chaushyan from England, as well as singer Knarik Nerkararyan and pianist Levon Hovsepian will take part. Opening remarks by composer Konstantin Petrossian.

Concerts will take place on Saturday, March 11 at 7 p.m., at the Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence, RI, and on Sunday, March 12 at 5 pm, at the Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic Street, Arlington, MA.



ARTS & CULTURE

from previous page

Bagratuni comes from an artistic family. His grandparents were actors and opera singers, and his father was one of the best known opera directors/producers. His mother is a doctor, but happens to be a huge music lover and an amateur pianist.

It is no surprise then that Bagratuni at a young age tapped into his life's work. "My journey started while in fourth grade of Tchaikovsky Central Special Music School in Yerevan. That first recital of mine made me realise that this what I wanted to do all my life. Since then I've been playing my cello, enjoying great masterpieces of different periods, collaborating with wonderful musicians and talented composers, sharing my experiences with my students and colleagues. Music has an amazing quality: musician can never feel bored or lonely - that is one thing making us fortunate and in most cases happy," Bagratuni said.

Bagratuni noted that he came of age at a different point than Hakobyan, and thus, Armenia was different with regard to helping up-and-coming musicians, as was the Western system. "I come from times when an agency used to work for you. Nowadays often a musician is working for the agency, if he or she is signed by one. My life has been slightly different from this 'commercial' arrangement — I play when I want, with whom I want, and what I want. Perhaps because I do have a secure job as professor, and don't have to rely on multiple concerts to make a living. Naturally, I love playing, and appreciate an invitation to perform, like in case with Karen. I do have a manager for my concerts, and our relationship is based on mutual respect."

He noted that he was not up to date with the situation regarding the arts in Armenia, "especially after the passing of my dear friend, Aram Gharabekian," the Iranian-Armenian artistic director and principal conductor of the National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia.

For such a small country, Armenia has produced some amazing classical musicians, including opera soloists, pianists, and of course, Hakobyan and Bagratuni. One has to wonder why. According to Bagratuni, it is "education, the basics, great teachers, and a cultural life around

us. There is great interest in classical music from people of almost every background. Opera, symphony orchestras, chamber orchestras — at the time I was growing up and forming as a musician, music wasn't considered a business. Everything was funded by the state and concerts were very affordable. (In 1986, the price of ticket to Vladimir Horowitz' concert was 5 roubles, less than a dollar!) Oh, and very important: no YouTube or easily available platforms, which young students use today to copy or 'learn' new pieces. Reading about composers' lives, using one's imagination, going to multiple live concerts — I find these conditions were very important for my overall musical growth."

Pegasus: the Orchestra is a nonprofit professional orchestra with a mission to empower rising musicians with artistic freedom and promote innovative repertoire in an environment of creative thought and expression. Founded by Hakobyan in late 2017, the orchestra brings together musicians and audiences of diverse backgrounds and cultural heritages by harnessing the power of music.

Pegasus: the Orchestra has had a Monira Foundation residency at Mana Contemporary cultural center in Jersey City, NJ. Some of the highlights from Pegasus's engagements outside of its residency include: Debut concert at Merkin Concert Hall on November 23, 2019 featuring Glenn Dicterow, the legendary former concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic, and Pegasus's own concertmaster, Eiko Kano, performing Bach's *Concerto for Two Violins*, alongside works by Hakobyan and Tchaikovsky conducted by Hakobyan. A program of American music at the Friends of Music concert series in Stamford, NY on September 15, 2019, an event that illustrated a key aspect of its mission: to bring the sounds of a symphony hall to intimate spaces and locations where live music of a high caliber is rarely heard. Pegasus often performs orchestral works in special arrangements by Hakobyan. These are tailored for the Pegasus ensemble to take on the road and perform in venues of different sizes. Pegasus' chamber series, featuring its world-class principals, fulfills its mission to provide an artistic platform through performance opportuni-

ties.

Several news outlets have showcased Pegasus, including Al Jazeera, Voice of America TV Network, Ardzagang Armenian TV, the Russian Television Network of America, The Voice of Armenians TV program on the NYC Life Channel, WGCH (Greenwich, CT) Talk Radio, WQXR New York Classical Radio, WSKG Radio and Get Classical's online journal.

Pegasus had its Lincoln Center debut at Alice Tully Hall in October 2022, featuring the complete Rachmaninoff Piano Concerti performed by five pianists in a single evening.

Hakobyan has been described as "a musician of abundant gifts and bountiful ideas" by *New York Concert Review*, and "an immensely talented and dynamic performer" by *Deseret Morning News*.

Like Bagratuni, Hakobyan was ensconced in a musical cocoon in Armenia. "I was fortunate to study with some of the most incredible teachers there. This played an enormous role in my musical journey, from writing symphonies at age of 9 to winning international piano competitions to becoming a conductor and creating my own orchestra," he said.

Hakobyan has worked hard to get to where he is now, professionally. He said, "On December 31, 2001, I arrived in the United States at the age of 16, completely alone, from Yerevan, Armenia. I had \$200 and a full scholarship as a double major in piano and composition from the University of Utah. After earning my B.A., I continued my studies in New York's Manhattan School of Music, and today, I am the first Armenian conductor to create a high caliber professional orchestra on the East Coast. Its name is Pegasus: The Orchestra; I am its founder, director, and principal conductor."

He noted that since the pandemic, "It has become increasingly more difficult for musicians and composers, to secure funding as well as performing opportunities. This is the case for both Armenia and the West. We all must do what we can to provide the support for performing artists and composers."

Hakobyan said his orchestra hopes to cast a wide net and bring in non-Armenians as well as Armenians. "We have been ded-

icated to bringing symphony hall sounds to intimate venues, making full-bodied orchestral arrangements accessible to everyone. Of course, it will be meaningful to have a strong presence from the Armenian community at the concert," he said.

The works Pegasus has performed has run the gamut from Baroque to new music, and everything in between. He noted, "We have performed Bach, Bartok, Khachaturian, Babadjanian, Copland, Gershwin, Grieg, Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky, and more. I am passionate about so many composers but of course, it is always special to feature works by Armenian composers."

With Pegasus, Hakobyan is aiming high. "As humans we often dream of defying gravity and music does just that! It gives us wings. This was the source of inspiration behind creating Pegasus: The Orchestra, I wanted winged Pegasus to symbolize our musical aspirations," he explained.

To learn more about Pegasus or to purchase tickets, visit: <http://www.pegasusthe->

Dr. Dennis Papazian to Speak about His Book

PAPAZIAN, from page 12

is one that will inspire readers of all generations and backgrounds and give hope to all who join him on his journey.

From My Life and Thought: Reflections on an Armenian-American Journey will be on sale at the presentation.

The lecture is free and open to the public. Parking is available in Fresno State Lots P6, near the University Business Center, Fresno State. A parking pass is required for the event and free parking code may be obtained through the Armenian Studies Program.

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

For information about upcoming Armenian Studies Program presentations, visit its website, <https://cah.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies/index.html>.

ARTS & CULTURE

Arman Ordyan Advances Armenian Cinematography

ORDYAN, from page 1

there that broadened my world view – that everything is not small but much larger. That, I think, gave me something great, on how I view things even today.”

Arman first was accepted to the Foreign Economic Relations and Management Institute, a private university, and the next year also applied to the Agricultural Institute’s Mechanization, Material and Technical Management engineering specialization, whose buildings were only 200 meters distant from those of the Economics Institute. Arman soon had to leave for his army service, and when he returned, he only needed to pass the final examinations for the Economics Institute, and needed one more year at the Agricultural Institute.

Arman was filming video clips with a small camera when his aunt came to visit from the US in 1999 and traveled around the country. The aunt was a friend of Arsen Aslanyan, who was director of the Kroong Armenian Pop Music Festival and several other programs, so she invited Arslanyan to the Ordyan home. Arslanyan was impressed by the quality of Arman’s work as an untrained amateur, and invited Arman to work with him as a cameraman.

“I asked him what that was because I didn’t know at that time,” Arman said. “After going several times, I realized I liked this field very much.” He also decided he didn’t need to continue his formal education at the two institutes where he had been studying because, he said, everything was corrupt and diplomas were merely formalities at the time.

Aslanyan sent Arman to various specialists with decades of experience to learn. “When I started with Arsen, he did not give me day or night off. He told my mother once that I am putting him under pressure so that he learns everything quickly.”

Right away, Arslanyan took him to the place where filming was taking place for an advertisement for eggs. Aslanyan recalled: “He said, go film. This was the first time that I saw the big camera. I was looking and everything was blurry. I asked, what should I do? He said, turn the focus, and I filmed an advertisement for the first time.” In a year, Arman said, he was able to start filming documentary films.

Arman had learned English in public school, where Russian was only the third language used, and this knowledge led him to be placed in various projects which came from abroad. He began working as a second cameraman, and technical groups were subject to him. In this position, he said, “You have to coordinate the work of the technical specialists who have come from different countries and translate for one to the other. This was a great experience for me, to learn technical things which didn’t exist then in Armenia, and learn of different stylistic schools. In the Soviet Union, there was only one school.”

He said that this allowed him to move forward more quickly than if he were to have studied cinematography formally at Armenian universities. He taught himself how to do video editing, he said. At that time, computer editing still had not spread in Armenia. He also learned how to do animation.

He was forced to learn new things, he related, because “I would film something and there would be no specialist to do what I wanted. I never was afraid of trying new work. On the contrary, I would always put myself in that situation and say to myself, now get out of it.”

He gave the example of when Armenian public television was preparing a New Year film called “*Siro Astgh*” [Star of Love] (2004), he was asked to do the editing. He

brought his computer and turned public tv director Suren Rshtuni’s office into an editing room. “We edited and for one month I didn’t go home,” Arman related. The 3-hour-40-minute film ended up including 16 musical clips.

Ordyan Family

It is not coincidence that Arman often has collaborated with director and producer Hayk Ordyan on films and other projects. They are related, being the great-grandsons of two brothers. The Ordyan or Ordunts family has roots that can be traced back around 700 years, according to Arman, and many ancestors were teachers or educators. In the 18th century, his ancestors went from Nakhichevan to Gharabagh (Karabakh) and then from there to Armenia, where one part settled in Aygedzor village of Shamsadin (now Tavush Province) and the other in the Goris area of Syunik. Parenthetically, on Arman’s maternal side, his mother’s father’s ancestors were perhaps even more illustrious, being *meliks* or local princes, and on his mother’s mother’s side, included an abbot of Gladzor Monastery, part of the Ter Grigoryan clan.

Arman as a youth had lost contact with the Ordyns. Arman was born in Yerevan but his father Rafik, an engineer who created a race car which won the Grand Prix of the Soviet Union, died in 1979, when Arman was two years old and his family moved several times.

Years later, when Arman was working in Armenian television, and was around 22 years old, he was in the office when someone came to look for him. It turned out that it was Hayk who had found him, exclaiming, you are my brother! Another relative, a sculptor, had also found Arman, so ties were reestablished with the Ordyns living in Aygedzor.

Innovation in Films

In the early 2000s, the Italians had just filmed a festival in the Karen Demirchyan Yerevan Arena for Sport and Music (called “*hamalir*” for short) with a Western-style controlled crane and left it there at night. There were no Western-style film cranes yet in Armenia. Instead, you had to sit with the camera and rise up together. Arman recalled that the technical workers from state television channel H1 went and drew the crane’s parts and were then able to construct one. Though difficult to use, Arman figured out how to best operate it and was often asked to film with it.

A few months later, Arman said that he was filming a video for Karo Sarafyan. When Gor Kirakosian, who was born in Armenia but grew up in California, needed to produce a film for his diploma, he came to Armenia and cameraman Gagik Hambartsumyan, who was a teacher of Gor in America, advised him to meet Arman. Arman was using the new Western-style controlled cranes for the Sarafyan video and Gor observed him. Convinced of his skills, he first asked Arman to work as his cinematographer on Zara Papayan’s “Adana” music video clip. Instead of the usual image of the singer standing before the camera, Arman said that he set a precedent for future clips by giving it an artistic nature and colors.

After this Gor, with Arman as director of photography, completed the short film “I Hate the Story about Romeo & Juliet” (released in 2004). A year or two later, Arman worked once again as cinematogra-

pher with Gor, this time on the feature film “Big Story in a Small City” (2006 release), starring Hrant Tokhatyan. “These two films changed a lot in the field of Armenia cinema,” said Arman. “They changed the stereotype that it is not possible to film with one’s own means and succeed. Moreover, everyone said that because the theme of ‘Big Story’ was the death and burial of a person, this would not work in Armenia.”

“Big Story” had to deal with many technical issues. Lights were made by hand, copying outside equipment, and though heavier and not as mobile, they worked. Despite these complications, it was an innovative film. Arman attested that it was the first full length high definition (HD) film made in Armenia.

Arman declared, “We were young, and the actors and everyone else were young.

That was very good because there were no older experts to give us advice. We improvised and did whatever we wanted. Yes, we made some mistakes too but this allowed us to establish ourselves as who we are, each one of us in

turn. That was a very important thing.” Arman said that “Big Story” remains as one of his most remembered works and still is loved by many now even in the younger generations.

Arman worked as cameraman on Gor’s next feature film, the comedy “Lost and Found in Armenia” (2012), which was an American production in the Armenian language. He recalled that Armenia still did not have much film equipment at that time, so they went to neighboring Georgia to find certain things. He said, “There, one company could provide the equipment needed for doing six films at once. In Armenia, you needed to collect equipment from six companies to get half the equipment needed for one film.”

The benefits of learning many technical abilities did not only help Arman personally. He said, “This also helps the filming work, because the most expensive thing in the field of film is time. When you know what you can get from what now, and afterwards, what that can be turned into in post-production, then the work becomes easier, the quality increases, and you avoid troubling the entire technical team.” This team, he pointed out, could be over 100 people, subject to the director of photography.

More Feature Films

The next film he worked on, again directed by Gor, was “Qayl Dziov/Khod Konem” [The Knight’s Move] (2013), a comedy shot in Kazakhstan and Armenia. Arman worked with Filip Vandewal of Belgium on this film as well as in “Lost and Found in Armenia,” and, he said, it was a great opportunity to learn from one another.

During “Lost and Found,” Arman said, he and Vandewal always fought. “Our style and lighting ideas were very different,” he said, but while working on “Knight’s Move” in Kazakhstan, they went out to drink beer after the first filming at the state museum and managed to combine their ideas. “We became close friends and partisans of the same ideas,” he said.

In the dramatic film “A.K.A., Nerir u Prkir Kez” [A.K.A., Forgive and Save Yourselves] (2019), Arman as director of photography for the first time on Armenian streets (closed for this purpose) filmed

street racing on a large scale with modern technology.

As his career progressed, Arman said, “I was able to do many things to change the culture of the film world. The technical workers began to appreciate themselves more. One important thing I did was that [work] time became clearly defined. Beyond that came overtime. People are specialists and must be respected.”

‘Zulali’

More recently, Arman was director of photography for the feature film “*Zulali*,” directed and produced by Hayk Ordyan (2021). He felt this was a difficult story to turn into a film, and Narine Abgaryan, author of the eponymous novel, even felt it to be impossible, Arman related. However in the end, he said that she approved of the film.

“I tried to make ‘Zulali’ in such a fashion that, since the movie is narrative, the protagonists speak outside of the shot... Hayk accepted my proposals to introduce into the film a documentary nature, with artistic analyses. There are many visual effects interventions, such as with light, but the viewer does not feel these interventions. Whatever was done was done naturally,” Arman related. He said that the film visually had continually to switch quickly from maximalism to minimalism in order to stress the different layers of meaning through images.

The path of the market, for example, begins and then extends so far that practically no one can be seen traveling on it, Arman noted. The protagonists’ psychological state are reflected or depicted through images. In this huge world, people are very small things, yet at certain times they appear very large.

Even the village setting of the film is actually composite. The images of nature were filmed in Aygedzor village of Tavush, which is at a comparatively low elevation, while the house chosen as Zulali’s home was located in Navur village, which is very elevated.

Arman said that the Navur house was a 100-year-old abandoned and broken-down old house, but he insisted on using it, and after hearing his explanation, Hayk Ordyan agreed immediately. “If you look at it, it has 360-degree windows. The house is very narrow and small, but the light coming from outside is a symbol of the psychological state and character of the protagonists. They are in such difficulties, but at the same time they are good and they look towards the good. They have not been broken,” he explained. The house had to be entirely rebuilt for the film.

Arman noted that everything in the film has its own meaning or symbolism and did not take place on its own. For example, he said that when the young Nazaros sits in the house eating an apple, through the window you can see the mountains and a horse tied, which the filming team set up. He said, “I like such things because it adds layers. Each time you view it, you see new things, new layers.”

The rhythm of the film’s imagery is also important. “It is important that the tempo of the film begins slowly, as if you are watching something on television, and then it engrosses you and engrosses you, till in the end you find that you are breathless,” he said.

The script for the film went through a long gestation period and received advice from several outside script readers. Arman made his suggestions to the director’s script as cinematographer, but was involved from the start. The preproduction was very long but the filming was intended to be short. However, on the fourth day of filming, Ar-





ARTS & CULTURE

man said, snow fell in Navur and the team had to light fires and melt ice with fans so that they could film sections as if it were summer.

“For ten days, we fought with nature. For example, in the market scene, we cleaned the entire field completely of snow with brooms so that it would appear as if it were a beautiful autumn. We came in the morning and there was snow and so cold that though we set up two large military tents with two stoves in each one, it still would not get warm. Wherever I went with the camera, we built a fire on top of an iron [piece], but it still was cold,” Arman described. After ten days, they saw it was not possible so they postponed filming, but in the spring Covid began and again prevented their work. Finally, Arman said, the next fall with great difficulty they completed the filming, though funding was running out, and then the 2020 war started.

The music for the film was composed by Tigran Mansuryan. Arman said he and Hayk already knew Mansuryan because Hayk had filmed a documentary about him. For many years Mansuryan had refused to compose for any films. At first, said Arman, it seemed that Mansuryan was not able to say no to the two cousins because they were close to him – but he also was unable to say yes. Eventually they screened for Mansuryan the market scenes that they had first filmed for *Zulali*, and, as Arman described: “When Mansuryan came to the office and viewed them, he said, give me a pen and paper and began immediately writing down the notes.” Obviously, what Mansuryan had seen was only a fraction of the filmed material, but, as Mansuryan himself declared, this melody immediately came to him from the first images.

During the war, Hayk went to Karabakh and when he returned, he was in a bad state emotionally and could not do the editing, recalled Arman. At this point, it was Mansuryan who persuaded Hayk, declaring that he had already written the music and had to start the recording. Arman simultaneously did the color work on the film.

Arman proudly says that “*Zulali*” is a purely Armenian film, in good part because of Mansuryan’s music. Moreover, he observed that until this film, there were only two other Eastern Armenian dialects used in Armenian cinema, those of Lori and Gyumri, but now the Tavush dialect is added to this roster for the first time, making “*Zulali*” unique. The actors learned the dialect, which was adjusted slightly, Arman said, so that non-natives could understand. The young boy playing Nazaros already spoke the dialect as he was chosen from around 60-70 children in Tavush.

The film has been making the rounds of various international festivals, starting with its premiere at the Moscow Film Festival, the second oldest festival in the world. It has screened in the Salento Film Festival of Italy and in an Egyptian festival, in addition to various Armenian festivals, and has won various awards.

On a practical level, the filmmakers attempted to also help the inhabitants of Tavush province by buying their food always from homes, not stores, so that the villagers would earn money. Over 60 people working on technical aspects of “*Zulali*” had come to Tavush from Yerevan. They stayed either in Navur or Berd. When local villagers were filmed in mass scenes they were paid symbolically.

Freedom

Arman said that he valued his work on “Big Soul” “because this was my first film where I was completely free.” Another such film in which he said he felt free is the short “Hogevark” [Agony] (2014), in which he was cinematographer and Hayk Ordyan director. “Freedom is very important for a cinematographer. The director al-

lows you to freely create, whereas others say, that is a good idea but too expensive, so do it like this....When you are free, you both get pleasure from your work and you rise one level too,” he said.

In “Agony” Arman said that he was able to film in one small room the condition of a country and the fate of a people. “Its most important message is the emigration – Armenia is being emptied. People leave and families are left halved. The country is growing old and itself is in agony. It is not only the story of a grandfather and grandmother but its layers extend into the nation. Its details say much,” he added. For example, the rice being cleaned by the grandmother symbolizes the people dispersed.

As director of photography and editing, in “Guests,” also called “Ine Musaner” [Nine Muses] (2010) and “Toast Modern” (2015), Arman came up with a new approach for filming the paper sculptures created by Karen Sargsyan of Holland. Each of the nine muses deliver a message through dance. Arman created a stage for the figures, and through camera movements, Arman said he made them come alive, not through their own movements. Hayk Ordyan called this approach visual performance.

Documentaries

Arman has filmed a number of documentaries over the years as director of photography. The first major one, prepared with Arsen Aslanyan, is called “*Christian Armenia*” (2007), where Arman also did the editing. Arman said that they had to use money from videos and commercials they sold in order to fund that film about the introduction of Christianity to Armenia. Later, they prepared a documentary for the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. In 2017, Arman served as director of photography of the short film “Portrait,” which was about Charles Aznavour and his house-museum in Armenia.

Arman also had the opportunity to film for a different type of documentary, basically a reality show. After “Agony,” he and Hayk were invited to work on two episodes of a Russian-language show, “*Land of Leopards*,” on Siberian leopards and tigers in the taiga, together with a Russian team. Arman said, “Reality shows are performance art: you film and you don’t know what will happen. There is no script – only an idea. You go to film and whatever that person does, you have to follow him.”

The taiga was dangerous at first, because if you stay outside at night, you will not survive until morning. Arman said, “The taiga was interesting because the first day you say they cannot give me enough money to come here, because death is walking alongside you....A week later, when you learn how to live there – you need to walk and breathe differently for example – everything changes. Once you learn, you say there is no better place in the world. It is heaven.”

This documentary’s reception was so good that the team then was asked to go to Bolivia for a Russian company and prepare a series there called “*Bolivian DNA*” (2017). They went to Lake Titicaca, where the leader of the Aymara people lives. Each year, the leader is changed. He is a fisherman, so the Ordyan team had to start filming at 5 a.m. in the morning. At first, again Arman thought this was not his place. Unlike artistic films, in documentaries you don’t create things. However, after a few days, he understood how to guess what would happen and it became interesting for him, he said. Among the five episodes, there was one on President Evo Morales

Armenian Cinema

One important thing missing in Armenia are cinema laws, he said. Without such laws, protecting investors, it is hard to find people to make such investments. There

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

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 19 — Amaras Art Alliance presents the US premier screening of the award-winning film “Zulali.” Sunday, 4 p.m., Regent Theater, 7 Medford street, Arlington. Tickets 35.00 www.amarasonline.com. Information 617-331.0426.

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.

MARCH 6 — St. James Men’s Club Dinner Meeting, Father-Son Night. Monday, featuring Guest Speaker, Tony Massarotti, Author and former Sports writer for the Boston Globe and Boston Herald. Speaking about his book, *This is Our City, How Boston Became the most Dominant Sports City in the World*. Books will be available for sale and signing. Social Hour [mezza] 6.15 p.m., Dinner 7 p.m. Losh Kebab and Kheyra dinner. 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Wt. town. New members welcome.

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

MARCH 18 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York presents “Payts,” a new show from comedy great Vahe Berberian. Tickets \$75. Talia (917) 238-3970 or RSVPtaliab@gmail.com. Numbered seating and mezza and cash bar. Cocktails at 6.30 p.m., program to start at 7.30. St. Leon Church, Abajian Hall, 12-61 Saddle River Road, Fair Lawn.

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

RHODE ISLAND

MARCH 11 — The Cultural Committee of Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church and Composers Union of Armenia Presents Armenian Music Concert in memory of composer Levon Chaushyan, Featuring Anahit Chaushyan, piano (UK), Knarik Nerkararyan, soprano, Levon Hovsepian, piano. Saturday, 7 p.m. Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence. Donation \$20. Refreshments after performance.

also must be insurance available for films. Arman said, “The talent is there. With these components in place, Armenian film would advance very quickly.” He added that film is the most powerful weapon in the world and until the Soviet Union, there was indeed a recognizable Armenian cinema: “Now we must just restore it. There are such great youth.”

There has been some progress recently. Arman said that the National Cinema Center of Armenia, a state funding body with Shushanik Mirzakhanyan as director, has a transparent competition with juries and pitching of projects, which are openly discussed. He said that in the old times, grants would be given to the same person who 100 times before had made films. “Zulali” was one of the films which recently received state support.

Arman suggested that a “film city” or base could be established in Tavush province. This was originally Hayk Ordyan’s idea. “With one or two hours travel you

can find whatever natural condition, season or environment you desire, forest or snow. That makes the cost of production of films very cheap,” Arman said, but a state plan is necessary to turn this into a reality.

As far as his own work goes, Arman said that whether for commercials or feature films, he refuses to film bad things or get involved in politics. He won’t do ads for cigarettes or alcohol, for example. “If I do not like something, I won’t compromise. I may lose work and money, but I have always tried to live this way according to my principles,” he said. He always will defend his teams, he remarked. Consequently, he said, “Gaffer Davit Gevorgyan and the rest of the technical team call me ‘the most *duk-hov* [spirited] cameraman in Armenia’.”

Arman is working now on a new film with actor/director Mikayel Poghosyan, with whom he became friends while filming the feature film “Hay Hake” [Armenian vs. Armenian] in 2021. They are constantly exchanging ideas while perfecting the script.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe
Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



Foul. Photo courtesy OF Memories of Aleppo Our Favorite Middle Eastern Recipes.

Memories of Aleppo’s
Favorite Foul (or fūl)

LOS ANGELES — “Foul, fool, (or fūl) is an ancient Middle Eastern breakfast going back (some say) to Egypt of the 5th century BC. It was mentioned in the Talmud Yerushalmi, indicating it was used in Middle Eastern countries since the 4th century,” says Alec Ekmekji. “It is a beloved dish across the Levantine and Middle East region, and is a common part of the cuisines of Arab, Middle Eastern and African cultures. Ful medames is consumed as part of the Lent diet by the Christian communities in Arab countries. There are many restaurants that serve nothing but this dish in Aleppo, either for eat-in or take-out.”

In Syria, the dish is prepared in two basic ways: Foul Mdammas Bez-Zeit (fava beans with olive oil) and Foul Mdammas Bel-Laban (fava beans with yogurt). The “mdammas” or “medames” part (spellings vary) is said to refer to the way it is prepped and describes how it is “mashed” or “mixed” with other ingredients. This version is from the celebrated Memories of Aleppo, Our Favorite Middle Eastern Recipes published in August 2016 by Aleppo natives and authors Seta Ekmekji and Rhoda Margossian.

“Some writers have suggested that ful medames dated all the way back to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt> Ancient Egypt. Some evidence of the use of ful is a cache of 2,600 dried fava beans unearthed at a late Neolithic site on the outskirts of <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazareth>> Nazareth. This cooking method is mentioned in the <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem_Talmud> Jerusalem Talmud, indicating that the method was used in Horn of African and Middle Eastern countries since the fourth century.”**

A few years ago, Seta Ekmekji (Alec’s mother), and her sister-in-law, Rhoda Margossian decided to document their family’s recipes to leave to their children and grandchildren, a project that slowly developed into a life of its own, and turned into an impressive ethnic cookbook. “Memories of Aleppo is a collection of one family’s treasured recipes that can be made and enjoyed for many generations, including this recipe that perhaps is the best breakfast dish in the whole world,” adds Seta.

Aleppo, Rhoda says, can boast one of the richest, most diverse cuisines in the world. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world; it may have been inhabited since the 6th millennium BC. Excavations at Tell as-Sawda and Tell al-Ansari, just south of the <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_city_of_Aleppo> old city of Aleppo, show that the area was occupied by <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amorites>> Amorites by the latter part of the 3rd millennium BC.

Syrian cuisine as a whole is a fusion of foods from all around the Middle East. It consists mainly uses eggplant, zucchini, garlic, meat (mostly from lamb and sheep), sesame seeds, rice, chickpeas, fava beans, lentils, cabbage, cauliflower, vine leaves, pickled turnips, cucumbers, tomatoes, olive oil, lemon juice, mint, pistachios, honey and fruits. “Despite its wide acclaim, only a handful of Aleppo dishes are ever served at Middle Eastern restaurants today, including here in Los Angeles,” says Alec. “It remains an ancient cuisine of many enormously talented and gifted cooks and chefs.”

Aleppo’s Abu Abdo, for example, is a ful parlor specializing in ful, a typical breakfast meal: fava bean soup with a splash of olive oil, lemon juice and Alep-

po’s red peppers. This family business has been open for over 70 years. “On a recent day, the owner ladles ful into plastic bags for the to-go crowd — workers as well as businessmen — because it’s the best in town. Abu Abdo has become a kind of trademark for the ful in Aleppo,” says Samir Akkad, a regular customer and a native of the city.”***

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 15-ounce can fava beans (drained and rinsed)
- 1/4 cup water
- 1-2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon cumin powder
- 1 teaspoon Aleppo red pepper
- Salt to taste
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice, to taste
- 1 medium or large tomato, chopped finely
- 1-2 tablespoons parsley, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 medium white onion, sliced lengthwise into wedges
- Sliced boiled eggs
- 8 sprigs fresh mint, to taste
- Fresh pita bread

PREPARATION:

Add the fava beans to a medium pot. Add the water and bring to a full boil. Simmer the beans uncovered for 5-10 minutes or a little longer. Remove from stove top.

To the pot, add the garlic, cumin, Aleppo red pepper, salt, and lemon juice, and stir. Adjust seasonings to your taste. At this point the fava beans should taste sour. Add more salt or lemon juice to taste.

To serve, place a serving of the cooked fava beans in a bowl, top with chopped tomatoes and their liquid, as well as parsley and olive oil. Serve with pita bread, onion, sliced boiled eggs, and fresh mint, if desired.

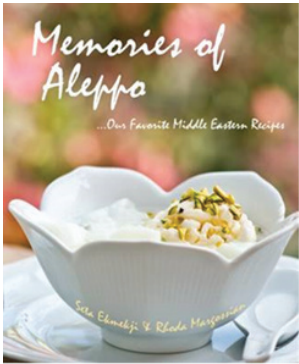
Tip: The best way to eat this dish is to scoop the fava beans up with a piece of pita bread. Serve with extra chopped tomatoes, if desired.

Serves 2.

Memories of Aleppo, Our Favorite Middle Eastern Recipes

Published August 2016 by Seta Ekmekji (Author), Rhoda Margossian (Author)

Memories of Aleppo is a collection of one family’s favorite Middle Eastern recipes written by two Armenian sisters-in-law who were both born and grew up in Aleppo, Syria. The recipes in this book are the traditional cuisine of the Armenians who lived in Aleppo. Many of the dishes are vegetarian and vegan. The dishes were photographed by their son/nephew, Raffi Alexander at Spider-box Photography. To purchase, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Memories-Aleppo-Seta-Ekmekji/dp/1693380234> or <https://www.blurb.com/b/7271714-memories-of-aleppo>



REFERENCES:

*** “Aleppians take pride in their cuisine and fool or fūl or has a special place in it. The old city of Aleppo used to have the best Fawwals. In al Jdeydeh for example, Haj Abdo alFawwal was the most famous place in town. People came from different cities to taste one of the best fool dishes in the world at his little authentic restaurant. Haj Abdo was always there himself to open his shop every day at dawn and would serve fool until five in the evening. Haj Abdo made ful medammes for over fifty years in the <<https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Al-Jdayde>> Al-Jdayde (Jdeideh) District of Aleppo. Abu Abdo al-Fawwal (<https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Arabic_language> Arabic: وذبغ وبأ is a <https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ful_medames> ful parlor located in <<https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Aleppo>> Aleppo, <<https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Syria>> Syria. The shop was established in 1885 by Abdel Razzaq “Abu Abdo” al-Masri at <https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Al-Hatab_Square> al-Hatab Square, near the Zamaria house in the <<https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Al-Jdayde>> Jdeydeh Quarter of the <https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ancient_City_of_Aleppo> Ancient City of Aleppo. The parlor was famous for Levantine and Aleppo style fūl dishes. Usually, the fava beans are left simmering in large copper jars throughout the night, to be served from the next morning on; the beans swim in tahini and olive oil, completed with a hint of red pepper paste over the top. The sauce of tahini, lemon and garlic is added and then once the fool is brought back home, people add olive oil and some spices. Aleppians like to eat fool with a large white onion – as sweet as an apple, as people from the city often say. Alongside, you should have a large cup of sweet tea. The shop was one of the oldest, most famous parlors in Aleppo. Before the conflict in Syria, on any busy street in Aleppo on a Friday morning you would see a long queue in front of one small shop. Everyone in the line, including children, would be carrying a big bowl and would be waiting to take home fool, the traditional breakfast of choice for the people of Aleppo. In 2013 the shop was severely damaged during the clashes between the Syrian Army and the militants of the armed opposition. The shop was relocated to a nearby street since late August 2012.” See: <https://www.thealeppoproject.com/tag/haj-abdo-alfawwal/>

Connect at:

- <https://www.facebook.com/memoriesofaleppocookbook/>
- <https://www.blurb.com/user/Spiderbooks>

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

SINCE 1932



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EDITORIAL

A Moral Dilemma: Should Armenia Send Disaster Aid to Earthquake-Stricken Turkey?



By Edmond Y.
Azadian

Another hot topic was tossed into the already superheated public debate in Armenia amid the Armenia-Russia standoff, blockaded Lachin corridor and the stalled Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty negotiations, among other issues. (See related story on Page 1.)

Indeed, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's administration's initiative to send rescuers and aid to Turkey rocked the news and social media in Armenia. Most opposition

voices criticized the initiative, while the government sources and regime-friendly news outlets defended the move, on several grounds. The debate continues to rage in Armenia as worldwide attention is focused on Turkey and Syria, whence traumatic and tragic images of rescue work are being beamed.

Armenia dispatched a rescue team of 28 to Turkey, accompanied with five truckloads of food, water and medical supplies. Armenia also sent a rescue team of 29 to Syria, while Azerbaijan and Georgia have refused to help Syrians. For the first time in 33 years, Turkey opened the land border at Margara bridge to receive the aid package from Armenia destined to Adiyaman province, one of the hardest hit by the devastating quake of February 6, the epicenter of which was in Gaziantep.

"I will always remember the generous aid sent by the people of Armenia to help alleviate the suffering of our people in the earthquake stricken region in Turkey," said Ambassador Serdar Kiliç, the lead negotiator for restarting diplomatic relations with Armenia, to his counterpart, Ruben Rubinyan.

Prime Minister Pashinyan called President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to express his condolences, to which Mr. Erdogan replied, "The Turkish government highly values Armenia's support, emphasizing that step also from the point of view of further deepening the dialog between the two countries."

Of course, these exchanges do not extend beyond the limits of protocol. However, an optimistic message is emerging from the Armenian side in an effort to justify the initiative. Thus, explains Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, "We ourselves saw what disastrous consequences an earthquake can have and we were not alone at that time. ... There is a dialogue, as you know, about the opening of the borders and the establishment of diplomatic relations."

Opposition parties in parliament have reacted negatively to the actions. "Turkey opened the Margara border crossing because it needed that and it will keep the border closed until Armenia meets all of Turkey's demands," said Arthur Khachatryan, a member of the Hayastan Alliance.

Tigran Abrahamyan of the Pativ Unem party, added, "I don't think that Armenia's humanitarian aid and statements of support will be important for getting Turkey to correctly position itself in the Turkish-Armenian relations."

Outside the framework of the government debate, the media is bursting with commentary, some outlandish and bizarre, asking Turkey to repent or compensate Armenia for the Genocide, or recognize Armenia, in return for the disaster aid.

There is something called disaster diplomacy, which calls for responsible government heads to behave in a certain manner, no matter what the prevailing politics would dictate. In 1999, President Robert Kocharyan sent a condolence message to Turkey, where an earthquake had hit the Izmit area, resulting in 17,000 casualties. Similarly, President Levon Ter-Petrosian attended the funeral of President Turgut Ozal, as the Turkish Red Crescent had sent aid to Armenia during the 1988 quake in Gyumri. Still, few Armenians have forgotten the cheers and whoops of joy from Turkey when the

earthquake struck Armenia in 1988.

During all these activities, the existing political conditions did not place an impediment for the states to take humanitarian stands.

If we view Armenia's aid to Turkey on an emotional level or from the perspective of current political realities, we certainly would refrain from such charitable acts, particularly in view of the message that President Erdogan has sent to President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, in receiving the latter's condolences and offer for support. Mr. Erdogan lauded Aliyev for Azerbaijan's aid, stating that Azerbaijan stands with Turkey just as Turkey stood by Azerbaijan during the 44-Day War.

Armenia must choose the moral high ground, whether Turkey appreciates it or not. It has to live by its own values and should not allow Turkey — or for that matter any other party — to define Armenia. Armenia has to be defined by its own values. As part of the international community, it will be judged by its own policies, which is certainly in line with those of the civilized world.

The magnitude of this earthquake and the devastation in Turkey will certainly serve as a watershed for Erdogan's maximalist policies in the region

and around the world. Turkey and Azerbaijan will never change their political goals but the tremendous resources needed for the recovery will not sustain their ambitions.

All kinds of mercenaries, jihadists and criminal elements sheltered by Turkey for its foreign adventures have already gotten loose and are hampering the rescue activities of foreign groups and they will certainly turn against the Erdogan regime when he cannot control them.

The polls taken before the quake already indicated the declining popularity of Erdogan. The earthquake will certainly lower them further, because he will not be able to meet his deadline of reconstructing the disaster zone within a year.

The recovery effort will need a hefty sum of money from the Western world, particularly from the US, which in return will seek to tame Erdogan's bullying tendencies, such as his blackmailing of NATO allies by blocking Finland and Sweden's admission into that structure. Also, he will no longer be able to continue to spite his benefactors by cutting separate deals with Russia, compromising Western interests. Ankara's policies will become more predictable and controllable as it becomes more dependent on the West.

What's more, the earthquake has damaged Turkish oil facilities in Iskenderun, at least delaying plans to render Turkey an energy hub through cooperation with Russia.

A configuration of forces was emerging, bringing together Turkey, Azerbaijan and Israel to spark a conflict with Iran. Already Azerbaijan's war rhetoric and Israel's drone attacks against Iran have constituted a prelude to a major conflagration in the region, making Armenia so much collateral damage. That adventure would have to be tabled or postponed for an indefinite period, unless Israel goes it alone.

With Ankara's support restricted and the stationing of European Union observers on Armenia's borders, Azerbaijan's belligerence will be contained for a while, allowing a respite for Armenia to recover and rearm (we hope). Ankara's constant prodding was making Baku keep Armenia under the threat of imminent and perpetual war.

The earthquake will impact Turkey's domestic politics as well, seriously damaging Erdogan's chances of reelection on May 14. Either he has to postpone the elections or play a trick to turn away the wave of popular discontent emerging from the disaster. He is already blaming others for shoddy construction and has been touring affected areas with lavish

see DILEMMA, page 18





COMMENTARY

The Future of Peacekeeping Operations in Nagorno Karabakh

By **Benyamin Poghosyan**
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Azerbaijan’s blockade of the Lachin corridor and the emerging humanitarian crisis in the self-proclaimed Nagorno Karabakh Republic highlighted the immediate challenges faced by Nagorno Karabakh Armenians. The lack of basic food and medicine and interruptions of gas and electricity supplies have brought the population to the brink of starvation. Azerbaijan rejects calls from the international community to end the blockade, and Russia cannot use force to open the corridor due to its dependence on Turkey. The West does not want to impose economic sanctions on Baku as it is interested in receiving additional gas and electricity from Azerbaijan. In these circumstances, the immediate task of the governments of Armenia, Nagorno Karabakh Republic, and Armenians worldwide is to look for additional ways to put more pressure on Azerbaijan to stop the blockade.

In this emergency, it may seem that discussions about the future of Russian peacekeepers after November 2025 are entirely out of touch with reality. However, no one should forget that the existence of Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh after the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war depends on the presence of foreign military forces. No foreign military presence in Nagorno Karabakh = no Armenians there. Given the more than 30-year anti-Armenian propaganda in Azerbaijan, this equation will be valid for decades.

The Azerbaijani position is unequivocal: President Aliyev and other high-level members of the Azerbaijani establishment have repeatedly reiterated that Azerbaijan would demand the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Nagorno Karabakh after November 2025. According to the November 2020 trilateral statement, Armenia and Azerbaijan may call for the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers six months before the end of their initial five-year mandate. It is challenging to predict regional geopolitics in 2025, and much depends on the course of the war in Ukraine.

If Russia ends the conflict on preferable terms, the Kremlin will probably be able to keep its peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh. In this scenario, facing a victorious and empowered Russia, Azerbai-

jan may agree to the automatic extension of the Russian peacekeepers’ mandate, in order not to anger Russia. However, Baku may demand the signature of a new bilateral Russia – Azerbaijan agreement on deploying Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh beyond November 2025, which will clearly state that Russian peacekeepers will be deployed in Azerbaijani territory. It is impossible to assess the potential Russian reaction to that offer. However, Armenia and the Nagorno Karabakh Republic authorities should be ready for such a scenario and prepare some course of action. Should Armenia, and especially Nagorno Karabakh, agree to this option, or should they demand that the peacekeeping mission extension occurs within the framework of the November 2020 trilateral statement?

On the other hand, the war in Ukraine may end with less favorable conditions for Russia. In this case, Azerbaijan will be happy to exploit Russia’s weakness and push the Russian peacekeepers out of Nagorno Karabakh. Russian failures in Ukraine in early September 2022 contributed to the perception in Azerbaijan that they could play hard in the region. It was not a coincidence that Azerbaijan launched a large-scale aggression against Armenia only a week after the successful Ukraine counter-offensive in the Kharkiv region.

One of the options which Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh may choose is to stand by and wait for the results of the war in Ukraine, hoping that its end will not encourage Azerbaijan to be more active in its efforts to push out Russian peacekeepers and finish once and for all the issue of Nagorno Karabakh, kicking out most, if not all, Armenians from the region. Meanwhile, Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh can argue that Russian peacekeepers should remain in Nagorno Karabakh an additional 15 or 20 years, and Armenia can state that it is ready to sign an agreement about the extension of the Russian peacekeepers’ mandate at any moment. However, this path is perilous and may lead to catastrophic implications for the Armenian population in Nagorno Karabakh.

As long as the November 10, 2020 statement remains the only document guaranteeing the deployment of peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh, this option cannot be excluded, and Armenia can do little to

change the situation. Armenia has zero capabilities to influence the outcome of the war in Ukraine. If Russia fails, Armenia has zero chances to prevent Azerbaijan from pushing out Russian peacekeepers from Nagorno Karabakh after November 2025.

To be able to separate the results of the war in Ukraine from the continued presence of peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh, it is necessary to start exploring ways to secure the deployment of peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh beyond the November 10, 2020, statement. Thus, granting some international mandate or signing a new multilateral statement/agreement regarding the deployment of peacekeeping forces in Nagorno Karabakh becomes crucial for Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. If Yerevan and Stepanakert can secure such an outcome, it will detach the continued deployment of peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh from the outcome of the war in Ukraine. This is a challenging task. Any international mandate for peacekeepers requires either a decision of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the UN Security Council.

Given the Russia – West confrontation, it would be too naïve to hope that the US, UK, and France will grant an international mandate to Russian forces for peacekeeping operations anywhere in the world, including in Nagorno Karabakh. A representative of the Russian foreign ministry recently stated that Russia did not believe there was any need for an international mandate for the Russian peacekeepers deployed in Nagorno Karabakh. It is also impossible to imagine an

agreement by the OSCE or UN SC on some joint “Russia + other countries” peacekeeping operation anywhere. At the same time, Russia will veto any option to replace Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh with forces from other countries. Another obstacle is Azerbaijan’s position, which rejects the possibility of an internationally mandated peacekeeping operation in Nagorno Karabakh.

Thus, Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh should not waste resources to reach these goals. The only possible solution, which still requires a lot of diplomatic skills and hard work from Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, is the launch of multilateral negotiations with all interested parties – Russia, the US, the EU, and Iran, about potential ways to secure the peacekeeping mission in Nagorno Karabakh beyond November 2025. This cannot be solely a Russian mission but should include a solid Russian presence. Of course, these parties may not agree, and even if they reach an understanding, Azerbaijan may reject any such idea. There are no straightforward ways to overcome Azerbaijani objections. However, starting this complicated and tricky path with no guaranteed success is better than pursuing the wait-and-see strategy, hoping that Russia will not be weakened too much by the war in Ukraine and Azerbaijan will not be able to push Russians out of Nagorno Karabakh after November 2025.

(Benyamin Poghosyan is chairman of the Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies in Yerevan, and Senior Research Fellow at the Applied Policy Research Institute (APRI) of Armenia.)

Why Syria’s Assad Opened Two Border Crossings for Earthquake Aid

By **Adam Lucente**

The United Nations announced late Monday that the government of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has agreed to temporarily open two more border crossings into Syria following this month’s devastating earthquake that left more than 35,000 dead in Syria and Turkey.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said after meeting Assad that the Syrian president has agreed to open two border points from Turkey into northwest Syria. The crossings at Bab al-Salam and al-Rai will remain open for three months for humanitarian aid, according to a UN statement.

Bab al-Salam and al-Rai are both on Turkey’s border with northern Syria.

The UN’s emergency relief coordinator said Tuesday that trucks carrying aid entered Syria via Bab al-Salam following the announcement.

Background: In 2014, the UN Security Council authorized four border crossings into Syria for humanitarian aid deliveries:

Al-Yarubiyah in northeast Syria on the Iraqi border, an area controlled by Kurdish-led forces

Al-Ramtha in southern Syria on the Jordanian border, an area that has since been recaptured by Syrian government forces

Bab al-Salam in rebel territory in northern Syria on the Turkish border

Bab al-Hawa, also rebel territory in northern Syria on the Turkish border

In 2019, Russia and China used their veto power on the UNSC to stop the renewal of al-Yarubiyah and al-Ramtha. Both countries support the Syrian government in the conflict and want aid to go through Damascus. Northeast Syrian officials are still calling for the al-Yarubiyah crossing to be

reopened.

In 2020, Russia and China vetoed the renewal of authorization for Bab al-Salam, leaving Bab al-Hawa as the sole UN-approved aid crossing into rebel-held northern Syria.

Last week, the Syrian government said it agreed to allow cross-border aid into areas outside its control. Griffiths and Assad then met Monday in Damascus to discuss the humanitarian situation.

Why it matters: The earthquake hit both government- and rebel-held parts of northern Syria, killing thousands and destroying numerous structures. The situation is particularly troublesome in rebel-controlled areas. Rebel territory in northern Syria was already heavily damaged by the ongoing war and from hosting more than two million displaced Syrians from other parts of the country.

The International Rescue Committee, which is among the nongovernmental organizations responding to the earthquake in northern Syria, said people in the region need “urgent” support.

“We are concerned about critically low levels of medical supplies as well as damage to hospitals and health care facilities. Survivors also urgently need clean water, a roof over their heads and heating supplies to deal with the freezing temperatures,” a spokesperson for the group told Al-Monitor Tuesday. “We need to see life-saving humanitarian aid entering Syria at the scale and pace to meet the needs we are witnessing on the ground. This means the international community urgently ramping up their support and ensuring it reaches NGOs on the front lines.”

Even before the earthquake, humanitarian groups working in the region had see ASSAD, page 20

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promises of help, which he cannot afford. He has been jailing his critics and has been taking credit for all the foreign help.

The construction boom in the last 20 years seems to be Erdogan’s doom. Most of the contracts during that boom period were awarded to Erdogan’s cronies, who either took advantage of lax building codes or ignored them altogether. During that period, contractors bypassed building codes increasing benefits and putting residents at risk.

A video taken during the 2019 local elections in Marash shows Erdogan bragging that “We solved the problems of 144,150 citizens of Marash with zoning amnesty.”

In another stop in Hatay province, Erdogan announced, “We have solved the problems of 205,000 citizens in Hatay with zoning peace.”

The Turkish publication *Duvar*, as cited by Insider, writes, “Buğra Gökçe, the deputy secretary general of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, as saying that 294,165 buildings in the affected areas had taken advantage of” the 2018 construction amnesties, suspending tough earthquake zone building codes. Forty thousand of those certificates are in the hard-hit Gaziantep region.

The opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu said, “If there is a person responsible for all this, it is Erdogan.”

The opposition is pulling together, seeing an opportunity to unseat Erdogan – something they could not have dared hope a month ago.

Erdogan is a crafty political survivor and it will be interesting to see if he will survive all this by applying his old methods. With or without Armenia’s help, Turkish politics will run their course.



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Aid from Armenia to Turkey Generates Heated Debate Among Armenians

The Armenian government's decision to send massive humanitarian aid and dozens of rescuers to Turkey following the powerful earthquake generated much controversy among Armenians.

The Turkish government is not a friend of Armenia or Armenians. Turkey is a mortal enemy having committed the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and continuing its denials until today. More recently, the Turkish military and imported Islamic terrorists supported Azerbaijan during the 2020 Artsakh War, causing the deaths of thousands of Armenian soldiers. Last week, Pres. Recep Tayyip Erdogan acknowledged that Azerbaijan was reciprocating for Turkey's support during the 2020 war by sending several hundred rescuers to the earthquake zone. Erdogan then added his often repeated mantra, "Azerbaijan and Turkey are one nation, two states." Furthermore, a week ago, while Armenia was providing humanitarian aid to Turkey, the Turkish government, in the midst of the disastrous earthquake, found the time to condemn the Mexican Senate for recognizing the Armenian Genocide.

Armenia's sending 27 rescuers and 100 tons of food, medicines and other relief supplies to Turkey was controversial because the aid was provided not only to an unrepentant enemy and on the heels of the Armenian losses inflicted by Turkey during the 2020 War, but during the current humanitarian crisis in Artsakh due to Azeri blockade of the Lachin Corridor, which is supported by Turkey. While 120,000 Armenians in Artsakh are slowly starving to death being deprived of food and medicines for over 60 days, Armenia's Prime Minister, President and Speaker of the Parliament, ignoring Armenian sensitivities, announced sending aid to Turkey. They naively insisted that their humanitarian action will help bring peace between Armenia and Turkey.

Naturally, when a major disaster happens anywhere in the world, most countries rush to the rescue of those afflicted. Armenia could not remain indifferent. However, Armenian leaders could have softened the public's backlash if they had issued a more delicately-worded announcement regarding the aid to Turkey while acknowledging that they are mindful of the plight of Artsakh Armenians due to the blockade of the Lachin Corridor.

It is important that Armenians distinguish between the Turkish government and Turkish people. Armenia and Armenians have a justified demand from the Turkish government for the Armenian losses suffered during the Genocide, but they should not antagonize individual Turks who played no part in the Genocide, since they were not even born at that time. However, if a Turk denies the Genocide and insults the memory of the Armenian martyrs, he or she should be condemned just as the denialist Turkish government.

One of the consequences of the disastrous earthquake in Turkey is the collapse of Erdogan's already low political rating. There are claims by the Turkish opposition that Erdogan has unfairly dispatched most of the Turkish rescuers to the earthquake regions inhabited by his supporters who had voted for him in the past. He has been subjected to harsh criticisms due to the Turkish government's slow actions to rescue the large number of victims of the earthquake. Tens of thousands of Turkish citizens died due to the collapse of poorly constructed hundreds of high-rise apartment buildings, as a result of Erdogan government's corrupt practices. Many buildings that were properly constructed did not collapse.

The Presidential election in Turkey is scheduled for May 14, 2023, three months from now. Knowing that his chances of winning re-election fairly is low, Pres. Erdogan will probably delay the election, giving him time to come up with various schemes to boost his rating. Getting re-elected is a must for Erdogan because if he loses the election, he will not just lose the presidency. He risks ending up in jail for the rest of his life because of his and his family's massive corruption.

Therefore, Erdogan will do everything possible to remain in power. Even though he has no legal right to postpone the election, he will order the judiciary to rule that given the emergency situation in the country, delaying the election is legal and justified.

Erdogan is already making lavish promises to his potential voters. He has promised to millions of homeless Turkish survivors of the earthquake that the government will give them free apartments in one year. Erdogan is forgetting that he has no right to make such a promise because a year from now he may not be the President of Turkey.

Erdogan will also provide large amounts of money to the public to win over their votes. To rebuild the devastated areas of Turkey, foreign countries and international financial institutions will donate billions of dollars which Erdogan will distribute lavishly to the voters to get re-elected.

Thanking Aliyev's Inadvertent Assistance, Artsakh Must Demand Recognition of Its Independence

By Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, C.M.

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

IT IS TIME for Artsakh and Armenians around the world to wake up and realize that somehow the Lachin blockade has made us unable to see the forest for the trees. The avalanche of catastrophic developments since the end of the 44-day Artsakh war in 2020 seems to have caused Armenians to almost forget that the core issue about Artsakh, ever since the historic start of the Artsakh movement in 1988, is its outright independence, certainly not just the maintenance of an open Lachin corridor to the Republic of Armenia.

It seems to be forgotten that Artsakh on December 10, 1991 carried out all the internationally prescribed steps of that time, and based on the overwhelmingly positive results of a referendum, declared its legal independence as the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh (Artsakh).

The fact that in the mumbo jumbo of all the deliberations of the Madrid, Minsk and various other so-called negotiations following the 1994 ceasefire of the first Artsakh war, the Armenian side has allowed this crucially important fact to be forgotten has yet to be properly analyzed by historians, who no doubt will harshly blame the Armenian negotiators.

At this point, however, rather than try to revive and reclaim the validity of the December 10, 1991 historic referendum, Armenians must realize that Artsakh is being offered spontaneously, and surely inadvertently, a new path that allows it to claim its independence with the equally strong backing of international law and precedents. Consequently, they must act now forcefully and without hesitation or delay.

Paradoxically, we may even thank Aliyev for having paved the way and provided all the legal and humanitarian arguments that establish the solid legal grounds for Armenians in Armenia and Artsakh to confidently present their case today for the outright independence of Artsakh to the International Court of Justice.

As we know, at this point, Armenia has already presented to the International Court of Justice its case only for the opening of the Lachin corridor. I submit that while the latter has certainly merit in order to resolve at least temporarily the immediate humanitarian crisis of 120,000 Armenians who are suffering the increasingly life-threatening consequences of the blockade, there is the much larger and far-reaching fundamental issue of the right of Artsakh to independence at stake, which finds now suddenly a realistic path towards realization.

The Kosovo independence case, backed and endorsed by the International Court of Justice ruling in July 2010, which has been invoked by many already several times as a precedent for Artsakh, has become now a salient precedent.

The major obstacle so far to Artsakh has been the claim by Azerbaijan to its internationally protected right for territorial integrity and its hypocritical claim that Artsakh and its Armenian population can very well live and prosper within Azerbaijan as citizens of that country. Let us put to one side the well documented tragic stories of the 1980s Sumgait Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijan. The ongoing brutal behavior of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev during the 50+ days of the current Artsakh blockade, in addition to the open implementation in Azerbaijan of his racist policy of hatred towards Armenians, offer unexpected help for, and make solidly defensible in the International Court, the case for the Artsakh population's claim that living a tolerable free human life within Azerbaijan is for them an unquestionable impossibility.

This establishes an almost perfect parallel between the case of Kosovo, which declared independence from Serbia unilaterally in February 2008, and the Artsakh case today.

Thus, it should be an urgent priority for Artsakh, while still pursuing all the processes to secure the opening of the Lachin corridor, to mobilize immediately the best of its human and legal resources to create a very high-profile task force that prepares and undertakes the official recourse to the UN's International Court of Justice and submits an official demand for a ruling on Artsakh's right for independence. The presence of Minister of State Ruben Vardanyan at the head of the Artsakh government is certainly expected to be an asset at this critical juncture.

This obviously daring diplomatic move should have been taken already at some point within the 30 years since the first Artsakh war ceasefire in 1994. Instead, the hesitancy and the total lack of any well thought out even though somewhat tricky but well-structured, Armenian diplomatic strategy has instead led Artsakh and Armenia to the current diplomatic trap.

A blunt and courageous, yet well programmed daring move is now the only way out of this hole!

We expect the Republic of Armenia to be the first country to back officially this vital Artsakh demand, and to facilitate Artsakh's demand of the International Court of Justice. We also expect logically all the countries which have backed Kosovo in 2010 to follow suit today in favor of Artsakh. Finally, the most talented Armenian diasporan experts in this field are certainly expected to offer their unreserved services for Artsakh to achieve finally for its population the right to live an honorable life and prosper freely within the family of all 195 other free nations of our planet.

In my view this proposed action for Artsakh to declare its independence is now a national emergency.



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 and have asked for our aid, but we hesitate.



How Much
Longer Must
the People
of Artsakh
Suffer?

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 families with children to allow them to purchase much needed life-sustaining supplies.

TCA immediately sent an initial \$10,300. Another \$10,090 was raised from donations and sent at the start of February. So far, 212 families have been helped through TCA, and its fundraising campaign continues.

**LIVES, AND THE VERY FUTURE OF
ARTSAKH AND ARMENIA ARE AT STAKE**

Please donate as much as you can online at <https://givebutter.com/YCrT8P> or mail checks made out to the Tekeyan Cultural Association, Memo: Artsakh Aid, to Tekeyan Cultural Association, 755 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA 02472.

For more information, email tcadirector@aol.com.

Why Syria's Assad Opened Two Border Crossings for Earthquake Aid

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warned that one border crossing at Bab al-Hawa is insufficient to deliver aid to northern Syria. The first UN aid delivery via Bab al-Hawa in response to the earthquake crossed on Feb. 9, three days after the disaster struck.

Some Syria observers believe that the new authorization is still insufficient to help over 3 million affected Syrians.

Aid to Syria is complicated by US sanctions, the ongoing civil war and a variety of logistical issues. The United States in particular opposes delivering aid through the Assad government. Last week, the US Treasury Department issued a six-month sanctions exemption for earthquake aid to Syria, though the United States has long maintained that its sanctions do not affect humanitarian aid.

A significant amount of assistance is starting to flow to the Syrian government nonetheless. A Saudi jet carrying aid landed in Aleppo Tuesday, the official Saudi Press Agency reported. This was the first time a Saudi plane has landed in Syrian territory since 2012, according to Agence France-Presse. The kingdom had sent earlier planes to help the recovery efforts in Turkey and Syria, but the previous flights landed in Turkey.

According to the Saudi Press Agency, Saudi Arabia also sent trucks carrying aid to Syria Saturday via a crossing that connects Turkey to rebel-held territory in northern Syria, known as the "Olive Branch" crossing. Turkey opened the crossing in 2019, according to the official Anadolu Agency. A map from the UN's Of-

fice for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs from this month listed the crossing as "sporadically open."

Like other Arab states, Saudi Arabia cut off relations with Syria and backed rebel forces in the early years of the Syrian civil war. However, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other countries in the region have pursued rapprochement with Syria in recent years.

Other countries that sent assistance to Syria include Iran, the Palestinian Authority, Russia and Italy. Non-state actors have also dispatched aid, including the Iran-backed Lebanese militia Hezbollah.

A Romanian military plane landed in Lebanon Tuesday with aid destined for Syria, the Syrian state-run SANA reported.



Aid from Saudi Arabia arriving in Syria

The death toll in Turkey and Syria from the earthquake has passed 35,000, though figures in Syria vary. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said last week that more than 5,000 people had died throughout the country.

(<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/02/explainer-why-syrias-assad-opened-two-border-crossings-earthquake-aid#ixzz7tKta4400>)



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