

Gyumri and Halle Twin

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

To judge by the number of visits to Berlin by Armenian political leaders, relations between Germany and Armenia are entering a new phase. In early February, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan came for a two-day working visit, and a month later Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan arrived, followed weeks later by Alen Simonyan, President of the National Assembly. All three held extensive meetings with their German counterparts, as well as a host of representatives from the political, cultural, and economic world. Discussions covered not only bilateral matters, but



The Armenian flag outside the Halle city hall (Photo courtesy of the German-Armenian Friendship Society Facebook page)

also strategic issues, including the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Such high-profile visits may have overshadowed another encounter; though not primarily political in nature, it has far-reaching implications for developing cooperation on multiple levels and over the long term. This was the ceremony on March 6, in which Gyumri and Halle (Saale) officially sealed their status as sister cities.

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To Our Readers

On the occasion of the death of our beloved friend and leader Edmond Y. Azadian, we have received numerous personal and institutional letters and expressions of condolence.

When a suitable period of time passes after the funeral, they will be published simultaneously in our various periodicals.

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Nagorno-Karabakh - Demonstrators carry a huge Karabakh flag in Stepanakert, September 2, 2022

Pashinyan Expects Karabakh Armenians to Negotiate With Azerbaijan

By Nane Sahakian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Thursday, March 30, encouraged Nagorno-Karabakh’s leadership to negotiate with Azerbaijan while accusing Baku of planning to commit genocide in Karabakh.

Pashinyan said that Azerbaijani forces are tightening the nearly four-month blockade of the Lachin corridor, blocking energy supplies from Armenia to Karabakh and systematically shooting at Karabakh farmers.

“Azerbaijan is making obvious preparations to subject the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to genocide,” he charged during a weekly session of his cabinet.

Pashinyan went on to declare that “con-

trary to all difficulties” his administration remains committed to its “peace agenda.”

“We hope that in the near future there will be concrete progress in both the Stepanakert-Baku and Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiation formats,” he said. “The Republic of Armenia is ready for such work, and we hope that in the Stepanakert-Baku format there will be a similar attitude from both Baku and Stepanakert.”

“It is clear, of course, that the activation of appropriate international mechanisms and safeguards is extremely important in this context,” added the Armenian premier.

Pashinyan similarly pledged last week to negotiate a peace treaty with Azerbaijan despite what he called Azerbaijani preparations for a fresh military aggression against

Armenia and Karabakh.

Baku was quick to reject Pashinyan’s latest “provocative” allegations about his genocidal intentions. An Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesman also defended Azerbaijani military movements inside the Lachin corridor that further complicated Karabakh’s land communication with Armenia.

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Azeri Troops Hold on To ‘Newly Occupied Armenian Territory’

By Susan Badalian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Azerbaijani troops have not withdrawn from community lands of an Armenian border village occupied by them last week, local residents insisted on Monday, April 3, denying the Armenian government’s implicit claims to the contrary.

Azerbaijani army units redeployed by the morning of Thursday, March 30, to more parts of the Lachin district sandwiched between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, completing a change in the route of the Lachin corridor which began last August. Armenia’s National Security Service (NSS) said hours later that they advanced up to 300 meters into Armenian territory at five local sections of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border adjacent to the village of Togh.

Local government officials and farmers said Togh lost a large part of its agricultural land and pastures. Some of them said that the Azerbaijani military made bigger territorial gains than is admitted by official Yerevan.

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David Phillips, Robert Avetisyan to Headline Times Square Demonstration

NEW YORK — The 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide taking place in Times Square on Sunday, April 23, at 1:30 p.m., will feature headline speakers David L. Phillips, director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights and founder of the Artsakh Atrocities Project — who will be presented with the Knights and Daughters of Vartan Humanitarian Award — and Robert Avetisyan, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh to the U.S.

Hosted by the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, the event, now in its 39th year, will feature remarks by elected officials and a musical interlude by Huyser Ensemble, accompanied by the Holy Martyrs Armenian

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David Phillips



Robert Avetisyan



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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Gabriel Sargissian Takes 3rd Prize at Rustam Kasymzhanov Cup

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian grandmaster Gabriel Sargissian came in the third at the international tournament Rustam Kasymzhanov Cup which wrapped in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on March 29.

With a total prize pool of \$70,000, the tournament featured 20 chess players from 9 countries competing two groups: masters and challenger. The participants played 10 rounds.

Sargissian won three games, drew five and lost just one in the final round.

Young Armenian Greco-Roman Wrestlers Win Big At Tallinn Tournament

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Greco-Roman wrestlers Karen Aslanyan and Davit Ovasapyan won gold medals at an international tournament held in Tallinn, Estonia, on April 3.

Earlier, other young wrestlers participating in the tournament snatched medals too.

Yuri Mkhitarian (45 kg weight category), Liparit Mkrtchyan (48 kg), Samvel Terteryan (60 kg), Petros Ashkaryan (65 kg) and Grisha Voskanyan (92 kg) all won gold.

Abgar Petrosyan, Hayk Kalajyan (60kg) and Gor Khachatryan (71kg), meanwhile, secured silver medals, while Yurik Karapetyan (55 kg), Artur Amoyan at (65 kg) and Erik Ter-Matevosyan (80 kg) won bronze.

Armenia Objects to US-Led Summit Declaration

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia has declined to join the United States and 69 other nations in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine in a joint declaration adopted by them during their US-led Summit for Democracy.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's office reported on Wednesday, March 29, that he "refrained" from backing an opening paragraph in the declaration that deplores the "dire human rights and humanitarian consequences of the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine" and demands that Moscow "immediately, completely, and unconditionally" withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory.

Pashinyan's office said it "does not reflect all conflicts and crises in a comprehensive and inclusive manner and fails to address the fact of Azerbaijan's ... occupation of some parts of the sovereign territory of Armenia."

Pashinyan thanked the US and other Western powers for their "clear condemnation of the aggression against Armenia." He said it helped to stop Azerbaijan's offensive military operations launched last September.

Yerevan is understood to have endorsed the rest of the extensive summit declaration which describes democracy as "humanity's most enduring means to advance peace, prosperity, equality, sustainable development, and security."

Armenian President Raises the Issue of Lachin Corridor in Meeting with President of Poland-Armenia Friendship Group

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On April 3, President of the Republic of Armenia Vahagn Khachaturyan received the delegation led by President of the Poland-Armenia Friendship Group Radoslaw Fogiel.

Khachaturyan said "I welcome you to the Republic of Armenia. I am well aware of the great work you are doing for the strengthening and development of Armenia-Poland relations, and I express my gratitude for the work you have done. Parliamentary diplomacy has a great place in our relations, which can also, of course, stimulate the joint work of other branches of government. Both our countries are going through difficult times. It is not peaceful in our regions. I am sure that our activities are aimed at achieving peace in these difficult conditions of the region. And in this regard, it is very important for Armenia that you are with us in these very difficult days for us. This refers to the closure of the Lachin Corridor. In our joint work, we have one goal to convey to you the information that is available, asking you to convey this reliable information to all our partners in other countries, because unfortunately, our neighboring country, having

great opportunities to spread misinformation, is trying to mislead our partners by saying as if Armenia does not want to hold peace talks, as if Armenia is causing tension in the region. I am sure that your visit will be very useful in this regard."

Expressing gratitude for the reception, Fogiel noted in his speech. "It is a great honor for us to be here. Certainly, we would all agree that parliamentary diplomacy is an essential part of real diplomacy. We are hopeful that our relations at both the parliamentary and executive levels will continue to deepen, taking a positive direction. We will work in different areas, our cooperation will develop in different areas, but the main emphasis will be on the issue of security both in this region and in Europe."

During the meeting, a wide range of issues of Armenian-Polish cooperation were discussed. Reference was made to the active interaction of the stock exchanges of Armenia and Poland and the prospects of the latter's expansion, as well as the possibilities of promoting Armenian-Polish trade and economic relations. During the conversation, Khachaturyan emphasized bi-

lateral and active cooperation with Poland both bilaterally and within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. The President emphasized that Armenia is committed to the agreements reached with the European Union and is committed to the principles of establishing democratic institutions and protecting democratic values. During the meeting, a number of regional realities were touched upon. The importance of establishing a stable and lasting peace in the South Caucasus, as well as the priority of humanitarian issues and the need for the normal operation of the Lachin humanitarian corridor were emphasized.

Fogiel and his delegation visited the Armenian Genocide memorial on Sunday, April 2.

The delegation was accompanied by the Head of Armenia-Poland Friendship Group Arusyak Julhakyan, laid a wreath and flowers at the Eternal Fire honoring the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

They also visited the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, learned more about the documents about the massacre, and viewed the exhibits.

Armenian Anti-Corruption Chief's Property Deal Raises Questions

By Artak Khulian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The head of an Armenian law-enforcement agency tasked with combating corruption reportedly halted a criminal investigation into a wealthy businessman in 2021 shortly after buying from his company a large apartment at a discount.

Infocom.am revealed on Wednesday, March 29, that Sasun Khachatryan, who runs the Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC), paid 71 million drams (\$180,000) for the 167 square-meter apartment in a new residential district constructed in Yerevan. He said this is significantly less than what the owners of other apartments located in the same building paid Jermuk Group, a private developer.

The ACC claimed on Thursday that Khachatryan was entitled to the discount because he had booked the property in advance of its construction. He did so earlier than other buyers, he told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

Infocom.am pointed out, however, that neither the ACC nor Jermuk Group provided any documentary evidence of the property reservation.

The publication also noted that the ACC investigated Ashot Arsenian, a well-known businessman who controls Jermuk Group, over vote buying alleged by the Armenian police in 2018. Citing a lack of incriminating evidence, the law-enforcement body suspended the investigation in October 2021.

seven months after Khachatryan formalized his property deal with Arsenyan's firm.

The author of the investigative article, Mkrtich Karapetyan, suggested that Khachatryan may have bought the apartment at a knockdown price in exchange for freezing the probe. Law-enforcement authorities must therefore investigate possible "corruption risks" involved, he said.

Armenia's Office of the Prosecutor-General, which oversees criminal cases opened by the ACC, would not say whether it will launch such an inquiry.

For its part, the Commission on the Prevention of Corruption, a state body scrutinizing asset declarations filed by senior Armenian officials, said it is looking into the Infocom.am article. A senior commission official, Karen Hakobyan, said it will also seek explanations from Khachatryan.

Khachatryan, 46, worked as a senior prosecutor under Armenia's former governments. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan appointed him as chief of the Special Investigative Agency, of which the ACC is the successor agency, after coming to power in 2018. Khachatryan also owns two other apartments in Yerevan, according to Infocom.am.

The SIS and the ACC have conducted dozens of high-profile corruption investigations, mainly targeting former senior state officials, including ex-Presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan. Government critics have accused Khachatryan of executing Pashinyan's orders, rather than

upholding the rule of law.

Incidentally, Arsenyan was, at least until recently, a figure very close to Sargsyan. The tycoon's son Vahagn was investigated for draft evasion before being elected mayor of the town of Jermuk on the ruling Civil Contract party's ticket in December 2021.

Khachatryan is not the only Armenian official to have bought expensive property in the upmarket Byuregh district built by Jermuk Group.

The investigative publication Hetq.am reported recently that Defense Minister Suren Papikyan acquired last summer an apartment there which is now worth an estimated at \$412,000. It said that Papikyan paid only \$168,000.

Pashinyan defended his defense minister and close political ally on March 14, questioning the market value of the apartment cited by Hetq.am. He said that just like tens of thousands of other Armenians, Papikyan obtained a mortgage to buy real estate and will repay it with his legal income.

Speaking at a news conference, the prime minister again claimed to have eliminated "systemic corruption" in Armenia.

Pro-opposition and independent media outlets increasingly accuse members of Pashinyan's entourage of enriching themselves or their cronies. Earlier this month, hackers hijacked the YouTube channel of the Yerevan daily *Aravot* as it was about to publish a video report detailing expensive property acquisitions by several senior government officials and pro-government lawmakers.

Pashinyan Expects Karabakh Armenians to Negotiate with Azerbaijan

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On Monday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's office again invited Karabakh's representatives to Baku for talks on the Armenian-populated region's "reintegration" into Azerbaijan. The authorities in Stepanakert dismissed the offer. They reiterated that Azerbaijani and Karabakh officials should continue to meet at the Karabakh headquarters of Russian peacekeepers and primarily discuss the reopening of the Lachin corridor.

There has been a significant increase in ceasefire violations reported from the Kara-

bakh "line of contact" in the last few weeks. On Thursday, Stepanakert accused Azerbaijani troops of continuing to fire at Karabakh Armenian villagers cultivating land in their communities. The Karabakh interior ministry registered two such incidents near the villages of Berdashen and Taghavard.

Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry claimed on March 25 that its troops opened fire to stop Karabakh forces from digging trenches "under the guise of agricultural work."

Earlier this year, Pashinyan said that despite the Azerbaijani blockade, the Karabakh leaders must exercise "restraint" and

not undercut his "peace agenda." Over the past year, he has refrained from championing the Karabakh Armenian's right to self-determination and spoke instead of the need to ensure their "rights and security."

The major policy change has fueled speculation in Yerevan and Stepanakert that the current Armenian government is ready to recognize Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh. In a joint statement issued on March 13, Karabakh's five leading political groups demanded that Yerevan avoid calling into question "the Artsakh people's right to self-determination."



ARMENIA

Samsung Innovation Campus in Armenia Celebrates The Graduation of Its First Cohort of Students

DILIJAN — Samsung Innovation Campus, a technology-based educational IT program by Samsung Electronics with its Armenian campus at the international school UWC Dilijan, celebrated the graduation of its first class of students. A class of 30 youngsters from Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor and other communities of Armenia have successfully completed the training course and presented their individual projects — mobile applications on the Android OS.

and skills acquired at SIC, as their final test for certification. The projects were presented to an evaluation panel consisting of Samsung-certified instructors, educators in the field of computer science and tech industry representatives.

“We are honored to have Samsung serving as UWC Dilijan’s partner for this pioneering initiative. A lot of work has been done to deliver the first results and achieve success. I can now say with confidence that our cooperation with Samsung opened a

strated the skills they have acquired as part of the course as well as tenacity and desire to succeed. They make us, and I hope Samsung, proud,” said Vardan Avagyan, Project Manager of Samsung Innovation Campus.

“Samsung Innovation Campus helps young people from all over the world to unlock their potential and career opportunities. Together with UWC Dilijan we are proud to contribute to the education of youth in Armenia and raise future IT tal-

plenty of opportunities ahead of us and we are looking forward to continuing our work together,” said Mr. DH Kim, Senior Advisor at Samsung Electronics CIS RHQ.

UWC Dilijan and Samsung Electronics, a world leading technological company, have established Samsung Innovation Campus in Dilijan, Armenia in 2021. The initiative is aimed at making a contribution to Armenia by enabling Armenian youth to develop their IT skills and learn the concepts related to Android mobile programming.

Samsung Electronics operates various technology-based education programs to nurture young talent that is capable of leading society in the future. One of these programs is Samsung Innovation Campus which at UWC Dilijan is built around the delivery, over the next three years, of a combination of online sessions and in-person training for 100 children annually. The initiative focuses on 14-16 year-old Armenian children. Samsung Electronics has equipped the facility with the state-of-the-art technology, including 25 computer stations, smart boards and other devices essential for the delivery of the Samsung Innovation Campus program in Armenia. T



The graduates with the UWC Dilijan and Samsung Electronics leaders

The participants of Samsung Innovation Campus (SIC) have passed a 9-month project-based course, divided into 5 modules: Fundamentals of Java programming language; Introduction to Object Oriented Programming; Fundamentals of Android Application Programming; Algorithms and data structures and Fundamentals of mobile application server side development.

After completing the course, the students presented their individual projects, which they have developed using the knowledge

new page in our capacity to contribute to the development of Armenia,” said Veronika Zonabend, UWC Dilijan Co-Founder and Chair of the Board.

“This is an exciting day in the development of the Samsung Innovation Campus program in Armenia. This intensive course bodes well with aspirations of Armenia as a hub for IT and a science-based economy. Our participants, with the help of highly-qualified Armenian instructors supported by Samsung Electronics CIS, demon-

ents. Samsung Innovation Campus educational programs not only increase students’ digital literacy and provide important IT related skills, but also contribute to the expansion of the innovative IT technologies throughout the country, developing its economic, social and other areas. Today we celebrate the first graduates of Samsung Innovation Campus Armenia who present truly impressive results thanks to the great attention of UWC Dilijan Management and the dedicated project’s team. There are

Azeri Troops Hold on To ‘Newly Occupied Armenian Territory’

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The Azerbaijani advance also caused an uproar in Yerevan, with Armenian opposition leaders blaming Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for the loss of yet another part of Armenia’s internationally recognized territory.

In another statement released on Saturday, the NSS claimed that the situation in that border area “improved significantly” as a result of negotiations held by Armenian and Azerbaijani officials. It did not elaborate.

Tegh residents said afterwards, however, that the Azerbaijani troops remained stationed in the newly occupied positions just outside the village.

“They keep digging in ... and haven’t retreated a single inch,” said Masis Zeynalian, a member of the local council who no longer has access to his wheat field.

“They’re staying put and continuing fortification works,” said another Tegh councilor, Argam Hovsepian. “Is this what they [the NSS] call an improvement?”

Armenia’s Deputy Defense Minister Arman Sargsian refused to comment on that “improvement” when he was approached by journalists on Monday.

“The Defense Ministry has a press service that periodically and promptly reacts to any issue,” Sargsian said vaguely.

The ministry has made no statements on the situation around Tegh so far. Speaking right after the Azerbaijani advance on Thursday, Pashinyan said that from now on the area will be patrolled and protected by border guards subordinate to the NSS, rather than the Armenian army.

Opposition leaders also blamed Pashinyan’s government for much bigger territorial losses suffered by Armenia during border clashes with Azerbaijan in May 2021 and September 2022. They regularly charge that it cannot defend the country and rebuild its armed forces after mishandling the disastrous 2020 war in Karabakh. Pashinyan and his political allies deny this.

Russia Bans Armenian Dairy Imports

YEREVAN (OC-Media) — A Russian regulator has banned the import of Armenian-produced dairy products, deeming them unsafe for Russian consumers. The decision came shortly after Russia criticized Armenia’s greenlighting ratification of the International Criminal Court (ICC) treaty.

On Friday, March 31, Russia’s Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance, Rosselkhoz nadzor, reported that they had requested Armenia’s Food Safety Inspectorate suspend the supply of Armenia-produced dairy products to Russia starting April 5.

In the same statement, Russia’s agriculture safety watchdog said that “Armenia could not guarantee the safety of its [dairy] products for Russian consumers.”

“The possibility of resuming imports will be discussed after all violations by Armenia are eliminated,” the statement said.

In a statement published on 28 March, Rosselkhoz nadzor claimed that they had the previous week inspected two Armenian dairy producers, and confirmed that ‘Armenian producers used raw materials

from Iranian enterprises that do not have the right to supply to Russia’.

Rosselkhoz nadzor also noted the week before, due to a “lack of proper control” by Armenia’s food inspection service, there was a “risk of low-quality and unsafe products” being imported to Russia, and that they had asked Armenia to “suspend certification” for those two producers.

Rosselkhoz nadzor did not specify which Armenian factories they had audited, only noting that the inspection was inspired by the growth in Armenian dairy imports to the Russian market this year.

On March 31, RFE/RL quoted the spokesperson for Armenia’s Food Safety Inspectorate as insisting that the recent Russian inspection did not find “any problem threatening people’s lives and health” and that the Iran-imported milk was safe.

Russian bans on food imports from neighboring countries have frequently coincided with a deterioration of relations.

Following Russia’s announcement on Friday, Armenia’s Minister of Economy, Vahan Kerobyan, denied that the decision

had any political context.

However, the ban came days after Russian authorities reacted harshly to Armenia’s Constitutional Court greenlighting the ratification of the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC), effectively reversing their 2004 finding that ratifying the Rome Statute contradicted Armenia’s Constitution.

On March 17, the ICC, a Hague-based international tribunal, issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Children’s Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova for the deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia.

Rosselkhoz nadzor’s decisions have been widely seen by experts on Russia as leverage in the Kremlin’s foreign policy agenda against its trading partners, having little to do with Russia’s national consumer safety.

In 2006, as Georgian-Russian relations deteriorated over the arrest of four Russian diplomats on espionage charges, the same Russian federal agency imposed an embargo on Georgia-produced mineral waters and wine. The ban was lifted following a change in Georgia’s ruling party.

INTERNATIONAL

UN Appeals to Azerbaijan To Open Lachin Corridor

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On April 3, five United Nations Special Procedure Mandate Holders published a communication where they appealed to the Government of Azerbaijan to take urgent action to ensure the freedom and security of movement through the Lachin Corridor.

The UN human rights experts stated, in particular, that the Lachin Corridor is the only transport link that connects Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and the outside world and is of a great humanitarian importance. The blockade has disrupted the delivery of food, medicine, fuel and other essential goods to around 120,000 people living in Nagorno-Karabakh. The humanitarian situation aggravated due to periodic interruptions of gas supply, which undermined the functioning of medical institutions. Educational institutions have also been unable to operate and had stopped their activities.

The Special Procedure Mandate Holders expressed serious concern that the prolonged blockade of the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to the outside world can lead to dire humanitarian consequences on the population and violate their rights.

The communication was dispatched by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities; the Special Rapporteur on the right to education; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; and the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons.

Russia's Southern Military District Launches Drills in Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — The troops of the military base of Russia's Southern Military District in Armenia has begun to pass a control check for the winter period of training at the points of permanent deployment and at the high-mountain training grounds Kamkhud and Alagyaz, the press service of the Southern Military District reported.

At the first stage, the level of combat readiness of the military personnel of the unit on combat duty, operational training of personnel, weapons and military equipment will be checked.

The theoretical knowledge of military personnel will also be tested.

During the next stage of the control check, the troops will perform combat training tasks in high-altitude conditions: exercises in driving wheeled and armored vehicles, firing from all types of weapons, and will also pass standards for special, technical, tactical, combat and physical training, military topography and radiation, chemical and biological protection.

Neck-and-Neck Race in Turkey Between Erdogan and Kiliçdaroglu

By Andrew Wilks

ISTANBUL (AI-Monitor) — With Turkey's presidential and parliamentary elections less than six weeks away on May 14, public opinion polls are showing a tight contest between the two dominant candidates President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and opposition leader Kemal Kiliçdaroglu.

Over the weekend one of Turkey's most respected polling companies, MetroPoll, revealed that its March research on voters' attitudes showed a slender 2.6 percent lead for Kiliçdaroglu, who heads the Republican People's Party (CHP) and is the candidate of the Nation Alliance.

Results from MetroPoll's research since the start of the year saw Kiliçdaroglu closing the gap. Support for Erdogan fell from 45.9 percent in January to 42 percent in March — a period that saw Turkey hit by devastating earthquakes, leading to criticism of the government's response — while those backing Kiliçdaroglu rose from 43 percent to 44.6 percent.

However, further details show a more nuanced picture in the race between the two favorites.

Responding to the question of whether Kiliçdaroglu would win the May 14 race, which could go to a runoff two weeks later if no candidate receives more than half of the votes, 43 percent said he would win while nearly 50 percent said he would not.

However, a growing number of people expect a Kiliçdaroglu victory, up from nearly 32 percent in December, when some 60 percent said he would not win. "In three months, the gap has closed to a great extent," MetroPoll director Ozer Sencar said.

The same question about Erdogan saw some 48 percent expecting the president to

cement his third term of office while 45 percent said he would lose.

Asked their likelihood of voting for Kiliçdaroglu, nearly 45 percent responded positively while more than 49 percent said they would not. Meanwhile, nearly 44 percent said they would back Erdogan and 52 percent refused to support his candidacy.

Commenting on Kiliçdaroglu's 2.6 percent lead, Sencar said the data showed that "the fate of the election will be determined by Muharrem Ince and the undecided." Ince is one of the four presidential candidates. He stood against Erdogan for the CHP-led alliance in the 2018 election, when he was defeated in the first round.

Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute, said Ince and the other candidate, Sinan Ogan, could drain votes from Kiliçdaroglu, "divide the opposition on May 14 and take the race to a runoff on May 28."

Other polls have shown greater levels of support for Kiliçdaroglu. TAG Research last week showed the CHP leader at nearly 51.8 percent while Erdogan polled 42.6 percent. The other candidates, Ince and Ogan, received 3.2 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively.

In the partisan world of Turkish opinion polls, however, there are some predicting a win for Erdogan. A survey carried out by Optimar Research in March showed Erdogan ahead at 47.4 percent while Kiliçdaroglu followed at 45.3 percent.

Among voter groups, research points to women and young people favoring the opposition.

Research published Thursday by the Social Democracy Foundation on women's voting intentions in the parliamentary election, which is to be held alongside the pres-

idential vote, showed a switch from Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) to the CHP.

Some 38 percent of respondents said they cast their ballots for the AKP in the 2018 parliamentary election but only 27 percent said they would vote for the ruling party in an immediate election. While 28 percent said they backed the CHP in 2018, that figure rose by two percentage points in the forthcoming vote.

Another crucial demographic is young voters. Some six million people will vote for the first time next month, a group that has known nothing but Erdogan's 20-year rule. Around 13 million voters under the age of 25 will take part.

According to Erdal Akaltun, president of Bupar Research and Consultancy, eight out of 10 young people will vote for candidates from outside the AKP-led People's Alliance.

"The possibility of a change in power in the existing order for the first time excites the youth," Akaltun said, citing a recent survey by his firm.

Edgar Sar, cofounder of the Istanbul Institute, said most young voters had been influenced by the government's increasingly authoritarian approach.

"Generation Z was 15 years old during the Gezi Park period in 2013," he said, referring to nationwide anti-government protests a decade ago. "From that age, they saw the period when the AKP started to become authoritarian and they could not access the social opportunities that the previous generation had."

(<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/04/neck-and-neck-race-turkey-between-erdogan-and-kilicdaroglu#ixzz7xvZwPqJ4>)

Erdogan Says His Door Is Closed to US Ambassador After Visit with Opposition Candidate

ANKARA (Greek City Times) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he has closed his doors to US ambassador to Ankara Jeff Flake following his meeting with opposition leader Kemal Kiliçdaroglu.



Ambassador Jeff Flake

"What is (US President Joe) Biden's envoy doing? He goes and meets with Mr. Kemal. Shame on you, use your brain," Erdogan was quoted as saying by Turkey's *Star* newspaper on Sunday amid growing tension between Wash-

ington and Ankara.

"You are an ambassador. Your interlocutor here is the president. How will you ask for a meeting with the president after this," Erdogan asserted, adding that his doors were now closed for the American envoy to "let him know his limits".

Presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey are scheduled for May 14. Kiliçdaroglu, nominated as the presidential candidate for the country's six opposition parties, is seen as the incumbent president's main challenger.

Muharrem Ince and Sinan Ogan are two other contenders in the presidential race. However, the main competition is expected to be a head-to-head race between Erdogan and Kiliçdaroglu.

The previous presidential election in Turkey was held in June 2018.

In early March, Ankara summoned Flake over top US general Mark Milley's visit to northeast Syria, as reported by the country's state-run news agency.

In February, Turkish Interior Minister



Kemal Kiliçdaroglu

Suleyman Soyulu slammed the US envoy after Washington warned Ankara about the export of chemicals, microchips and other products to Russia.

"Take your dirty hands off of Turkey. I'm being very clear. I very well know how you would like to create strife in Turkey. Take your grinning face off from Turkey," Soyulu was quoted as saying at the time.

"Every US ambassador who arrives in Turkey is hurrying to find out how to make a coup possible in Turkey," Soyulu had added.



INTERNATIONAL

Students Across the World Condemn Lachin Blockade and Lack of International Action

By Annie McGovern

MIDDLETON, Conn. — On Friday, February 3, Monday, February 6, and Thursday, February 9, students across the world protested the ongoing human rights violations committed by Azerbaijan towards ethnic Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh. Student representatives from Columbia, Cornell, George Washington University, Harvard, Princeton, Villanova, University of Buenos Aires, Imperial College London, London School of Economics, King's College and University College London participated in the events and publicly condemned the recent blockade of the Lachin Corridor.

Unfortunately, the decades-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh is rarely reported on by mainstream media or included in school curricula. Most Americans remain completely unaware of the current political situation.

On December 12, 2022, Azerbaijanis posing as eco-activists imposed a blockade, accusing Armenians of transporting military hardware to Nagorno Karabakh and illegally mining for resources in the contested region. In reality, many of the participants are Aliyev supporters, military personnel, members of the Turkish nationalist group Grey Wolves, and more. Further, RFE/RL found that the Azerbaijani government provided the tents that the



Gariné Morcecian from the University of Buenos Aires

protestors sleep in.

The Lachin Corridor is the main passageway linking Armenia to Nagorno Karabakh and is used to deliver hundreds of tons of food, medicine, fuel, and other essential goods to the residents of Nagorno Karabakh. The blockade has placed over 120,000 ethnic Armenians under siege for close to two months. Without their daily imports from Armenia proper, the residents of Nagorno Karabakh are suffering major food and medicine shortages. Businesses have closed, leaving thousands of Armenians unemployed, and markets remain empty. In addition, residents are experiencing sporadic disruptions to their power and energy lines, which lie in Azerbaijani territory. The government has started providing firewood and wood burning stoves so that residents can have a reliable source of heat and have shut down schools that lack energy supplies. These dire situations have exacerbated pre-existing health conditions, and without working hospitals and proper medical supplies, many patients' health remains in danger. Patients in grave condition that require transfer to the larger hospital in Yerevan have been prevented from accessing life-saving treatment by the blockade. This has resulted in at least one death.

When the blockade was first institut-



Students from across London gathered together to demonstrate their unity

ed, Armenians were still recovering from the military operations that Azerbaijan launched on September 13. The two-day attacks resulted in 207 Armenian soldiers dead, 293 Armenian soldiers wounded, 20 new prisoners of war, 7600 civilians displaced, and 3 civilians dead.

In addition to threatening Armenians physically, Azerbaijan has continuously engaged in hateful rhetoric, calling for the destruction of all Armenians and referring to them as parasites, dogs, savages, and terrorists. President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has publicly expressed his hatred of Armenians on countless occasions. In November 2020, he proudly declared: "We did, we brought [the Armenians] to their knees, and they are on their knees now! There is hardly anyone [Pashinyan] didn't call over the past 40 days, begging for help and humiliating himself. We have disgraced him, and we were absolutely right in doing so. When he danced drunk on Jidir Duzu in the sacred city of Shusha, he should have thought that this day would come. He would receive his punishment. Now he hides like a mouse as he takes this document and signs it in tears. We showed him his place. We taught him a lesson. We chased them out of our lands like dogs. I said that we would chase them, that we would chase them like dogs, and we chased them, we chased them like dogs. He is now signing this document out of fear, knowing that we will come to Aghdam, Kalbajar and Lachin. No-one can stop us. Everyone sees our strength; everyone understands what our iron fist is like."

The language Aliyev uses to describe and address the Armenian people has influenced colleagues, major media corporations, and everyday civilians. Other examples include: Hajibala Abutalybov, former Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan: "Our goal is the complete elimination of Armenians. You Nazis eliminated the Jews in the 1930s and 40s, right? You should be able to understand us."

Habil Aliyev, founder and editor-in-chief of the *Gundelik Baku* local newspaper stated: "I consider the Armenians my eternal enemies. Wherever I see Armenians, I will cut their tongues off and will call them perverts. Even if I am torn into pieces, I will always hate them...If I go to war again, I will not pity even the Armenian children."

An Azerbaijani citizen in a Facebook post declared: "We must drink the blood of these bastard Armenians, regardless of age and sex."

American media and politics has ne-

glected this crisis for far too long. The ethnic Armenian students and leaders from Armenian Student Associations (ASAs) on these 11 campuses therefore took it upon themselves to spread awareness within

stationed themselves at tables and engaged in dialogue with passersby. Princeton engaged in a week-long poster initiative to continue drawing attention to the issue. The participating schools all asked their attendees to sign a joint petition condemning Azerbaijan's actions. They also shared organizations to donate to and ways to contact Congresspeople to urge them to take action.

The skirmishes in September and the current blockade both occurred in direct violation of the 2020 Trilateral Statement. Our protest strove to shed light on all the human rights abuses that Azerbaijan has committed against Armenians over the past two years, in addition to the innumerable violations they have perpetrated for decades. The events of the last few months have placed Armenians in danger. If not held accountable, Azerbaijan will continue engaging in such illegal and inhuman behavior.

....

It is now March and numerous media outlets have failed to cover this international initiative, upholding, whether inten-



Members of Northwestern's Armenian Students Association

their respective communities. Columbia, George Washington University, Northwestern, University of Buenos Aires, and the London cohort held signs in public spaces on campus that advertised the devastating impacts of Azerbaijan's actions. Villanova hosted a discussion on Azerbaijan's recent violations of the trilateral peace agreement. Harvard Law and Cornell students

tionally or not, the tradition of silence in the face of Armenian discrimination. The blockade continues, entering its fourth month. It stands in defiance of the International Court of Justice, which ordered Azerbaijan to open the corridor.

And as the blockade continues, it attracts less and less media attention. Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh face a disengaged world as their situation grows more dire. Stories describing the pervasive impact of this siege on the daily lives of innocent people have diminished almost entirely. Why are we letting this overt act of violence persist?

This protest demonstrates that students across the world, the future leaders of America, are invested in this issue and watching to see how our current leaders react. International political figures, lawyers, and activists must act in accordance with their official duties and protect all Armenians from further atrocities.

To sign the petition and learn more about the conflict and places to donate, visit <https://linktr.ee/studentsforarmenia>.

(This article is an updated version of "Students Around the World Protest Human Rights Abuses in Nagorno Karabakh," *The Wesleyan Argus*, March 6, 2023.)



Two students pose with one of the many posters they hung around the Princeton University campus

INTERNATIONAL

Mirzoyan Visits Romania, Holds High-Level Meetings

BUCHAREST (Combined Sources) — Armenia's Foreign Minister visited Romania on April 3 and 4 and held high-level meetings with various officials.

During his meeting with his Romanian counterpart Bogdan Aurescu, he said Armenia views the European Union civilian mission on its international border with Azerbaijan as a "valuable instrument" for increasing security on the ground and contributing to peace and stability in the region.

Mirzoyan said he discussed a "broad circle" of issues of bilateral cooperation with Aurescu.

A 2023-2024 joint action plan was signed, he added.

"We've expressed our readiness to cooperate in the bilateral agenda, legal framework, regular political consultations, as well as in culture, education and science. We've expressed readiness to take steps in economic relations to utilize the entire potential in business ties," Mirzoyan said.

The foreign ministers also discussed the effective implementation of Armenia-EU political and security dialogue and the Armenia-EU CEPA.

Views were exchanged around cooperation within the framework of Eastern Partnership and the European Political Community.

"Sending EU monitors to the Armenian side of the international border between Armenia and Azerbaijan immediately after the Azerbaijani aggression against Armenia in September 2022 and then deploying a long-term EU civilian monitoring mission is the EU's important engagement in our region. We view it as a valuable instrument to increase security of people on the ground and contribute to peace and stability in the region. We appreciate Romania's valuable contribution in the relevant discussions in the EU," he said.

Azerbaijan is violating almost every clause of the November 9, 2020 trilateral statement, Mirzoyan said after his meeting with Aurescu.

Mirzoyan said that Armenia believes that its colleagues and the international community will play their role by sending an international fact-finding mission to Nagorno Karabakh and Lachin Corridor.

"I presented to my colleague the existen-

tial challenges and threats facing the Republic of Armenia and the people of Nagorno Karabakh. Unfortunately, the blockade of Lachin Corridor since December 2022, the terror, as well as Azerbaijan's other actions seek to force the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh to leave their homes. Azerbaijan's response to the international community's calls to address the issue of the rights and security of the people of Nagorno Karabakh has been a coordinated policy of ethnic cleansings," Mirzoyan said.

"The illegal blockade of the Lachin Cor-

"We believe that our colleagues, the international community will have an important role, by utilizing the respective tools and mechanisms, including by sending an international fact-finding mission to the Lachin Corridor and Nagorno Karabakh," FM Mirzoyan said.

Mirzoyan reiterated Armenia's readiness for constructive dialogue with Azerbaijan in an atmosphere void of hate speech, preconditions and belligerent rhetoric, seeking to reach peace and security in South Caucasus.

He added that Armenia has strong politi-

cal will to achieve peace and stability in the region. Mirzoyan said that Armenia continues dialogue with Azerbaijan in spite of all difficulties.

Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuca received Mirzoyan on the same day.

Ciuca and Mirzoyan discussed the security situation in the Extended Black Sea Region – generated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine – which Moscow calls a "special military operation" but many Western countries label an "unprovoked act of aggression" – as well as the events after the 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the developments of the peace process in the region.

Ciuca stressed the need to build on the good bilateral relations in order to increase the level of trade for the benefit of both countries. At the same time, Ciuca stressed the importance of stabilizing the region and the steps towards peace, announcing full support for the peace process launched by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and participation in the European peace mission in Armenia.

"The peace process must move forward and the situation in the region must be resolved on the basis of international law, with respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of all states," the Romanian Prime Minister said.

Mirzoyan also met with Vasile-Daniel Suci, the Vice-Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania. After the meeting, Ararat Mirzoyan and Vasile-Daniel Suci took part in the opening ceremony of the exhibition dedicated to the famous Romanian figure of Armenian descent, general Hakob Zadik (Iacob Zadik), held in the Chamber of Deputies. During the event, Varuzhan Pambukchyan, a Member of the Parliament of Romania, Chairman of the Group of National Minorities, and Varuzhan Voskanyan, First Vice-President of the Writers' Union of Romania, Chairman of the Union of Armenians of Romania, gave remarks. The contribution of representatives of the Romanian-Armenian community to the socio-political, scientific, educational and cultural life of Romania during different periods of time was highlighted, one of the vivid examples of which is the activity of general Hakob Zadik, who was honored by Romania and other countries.

President of the Romanian Senate, Alina Gorghiu, believes that Romania and Armenia should strengthen the parliamentary dialogue, she wrote on Twitter, publishing a photo with Mirzoyan.

"Meeting with Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan in the Senate of Romania. Romania and Armenia should strengthen the parliamentary dialogue. We have discussed steps towards this. I am glad that the gender quota works in Armenia," Gorgiu emphasized, expressing satisfaction that 36 percent of deputies in the Armenian parliament are women.

(Reports from Armenpress, panorama.am contributed to this story.)



Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, left, with his Romanian counterpart Bogdan Aurescu

ridor isn't the only explicit violation of the 9 November 2020 trilateral statement. There's almost not a single clause in the statement that Azerbaijan isn't violating. Continually holding Armenian prisoners of war hostage and demanding an extraterritorial corridor through the sovereign territory of Armenia, Azerbaijan is not ensuring internally displaced persons and refugees' return to Nagorno Karabakh and adjacent regions under the supervision of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Mirzoyan stressed that Azerbaijan continues to spread hate speech and belligerent rhetoric on the highest levels, and regularly takes aggressive actions and is occupying around 150 square kilometers sovereign territory of Armenia.

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Gyumri and Halle Twin

TWINS, from page 1

The festive event took place simultaneously in both cities, joined in a video conference, attended by the Mayor of Halle, Egbert Geier, and his counterpart in Gyumri, Vardges Samsonyan, as well as Armenian Ambassador in Berlin, Viktor Yengibaryan, Honorary Consul of the German Federal Republic in Gyumri, Alexan Ter-Minasyan, and the chairman of the Board of the German-Armenian Friendship Society Halle-Gyumri, Armen Klisch.

The idea originated from the Halle-Gyumri German-Armenian Friendship Society (<https://www.agsa.de/german-armenian-friendship-society-halle-gyumri.html>), which was founded in 2020. Like other sister-city agreements, this was to foster partnerships between the two communities, their schools and university institutions, and to sponsor group visits.

The Friendship Society has been providing support for Armenians moving to Halle, helping them to get acquainted with the city, and encouraging cultural exchange. Halle is the most populous city in the federal state in Saxony-Anhalt and is home to

a small (just over 100 members) but active Armenian community. It, together with its Armenian Apostolic Church Surp Harutyun in Halle-Ammendorf, has cultivated contact with Gyumri, which is Armenia's second largest city and the cultural capital. Halle is one of the few cities in Germany that host a Khachkar, two others being Bremen and Braunschweig. It was the Armenian community's initiative.

In May 2015, just weeks after the commemoration of the centenary of the genocide, a monument honoring the memory of the victims was unveiled in Halle, in the presence of church and state representatives of Armenia and Saxony-Anhalt. Beneath the stone cross are inscriptions in Armenian and German, which read: "This stone cross has been erected in memory of the millionfold victims of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire in West Armenia. Prayer and blessing for our martyrs. In commemoration of the Armenian victims and the German helpers of the survivors. Armenian Community of Saxony-Anhalt and the City of Halle 1915-2015." Between the two texts is an image of the Tsitsernak-

aberd memorial in Yerevan.

Halle is also the site of the interdisciplinary MESROP Armenian Studies Center of Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, established in 1998 as part of a joint memorandum on cultural and scientific cooperation between Saxony-Anhalt and the Republic of Armenia. Its founding director was Dr. Hermann Goltz (1946-2010), a well-known genocide researcher, and it is dedicated to strengthening Armenology in Germany.†

Addressing the official ceremony by live linkup, Ambassador Yengibaryan praised the years-long cooperation between the two cities, especially in the areas of education, science, and culture. He stressed the commitment of both sides to live up to the goals of the twin city agreement, which marks the beginning of new contacts between people, the construction of new partnerships, and further joint initiatives.

During the ceremony in city hall, Halle Mayor Egbert Geier also underlined the fact that the two cities share a rich cultural heritage. At the same time, he said, they both "face challenges in social, economic, and political transformation." Here he noted the role to be played by the Future Center for German Unity and European

Transformation (Zukunftszentrum Deutsche Einheit und Europäische Transformation). Very recently, on March 1, Halle was selected among many candidates to be the site of this new institution, and its scientific, cultural facilities played an important role in the decision. The Future Center is to honor the achievements in the eastern states of Germany. In the words of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, when he welcomed the jury's decision, it is not a matter of "nostalgia, but rather the acknowledgement of the important experience of East Germans during the peaceful revolution in the GDR and reform movements in eastern Europe."

Simultaneously, Gyumri mayor Vardges Samsonyan signed the document in his office, and was linked by video hookup. Samsonyan stressed that existing relations, "above all in the scientific realm at Halle University and social relations through the Armenian community, constitute a good basis for the partnership." Specific projects and activities to be undertaken jointly will be drawn up over the next months. And he concluded with congratulations to Halle for having been selected to host the new Future Center.

To celebrate the special occasion, the Armenian flag flew over Halle's city hall.



Community News

Ambassador Djerejian To Speak at Genocide Event

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Revolutionary Federation of Boston and the Armenian Assembly of America invite members of the community to a hybrid event in commemoration of the 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. This free and open event will be held at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (395 Concord Ave, Belmont) and on Zoom on Thursday, April 20, at 7 p.m. Those participating via Zoom may obtain an individual link by registering at https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAldO6vqDsoGN0gcgGW8Ks_5buRE-QivAOk.

This conversation, hosted by Dr. Ara Nazarian, will feature retired Ambassador Edward P. Djerejian who served in eight administrations from John F. Kennedy to Bill Clin-



Ambassador Edward P. Djerejian

ton. He was the US Ambassador to Syria and Israel, Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan and Deputy Press Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and was Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. After retiring from the Foreign Service, he was the founding director of Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy and currently serves as a Senior Fellow at the Middle East Initiative at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is on the board of trustees of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Entitled "The Armenian Genocide Continuum: Deir ez-Zor Yesterday, Artsakh Today," the conversation will include reflections on Ambassador Djerejian's career as an American diplomat of Armenian origin and examine the treatment of Armenians on their ancestral lands from western Armenia to Artsakh during the last century, the compassion and complicity of the international community, and the role of the United States Government from establishing the Near East Fund to a decades-long policy of denial and final recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

For all questions and additional information, contact the ARF of Boston at sardarabad@arfeastusa.com or the Armenian Assembly of America at info@aaainc.org.



Attendees gathered at the first EmpowerHour, broken down by industry. (Harout Barsoumian Photo)

AGBU Highlights Exemplary Female Leaders at Second Women Shaping the World Conference

NEW YORK — A few days after the world celebrated International Women's Day in March, attendees from the East and West Coast and beyond gathered at the sprawling Convene conference spaces in downtown New York to pick up where they left off three years earlier at the first AGBU Women Shaping the World (WSTW) event. The diverse group of nearly 150 ranged from students and AGBU Young Professionals of Greater New York to established experts in their industries, community volunteers, and supportive men.

The all-day agenda, organized by the female-led AGBU WSTW committee, was created for learning, sharing and networking. It featured two keynote speakers, a four-way panel discussion, and two breakout sessions for attendees—all with the purpose of reinforcing the overarching theme of resilience — made possible when empowered women empower other women.

A number of companies, including local and global business and donors like L'oréal Paris, SAINT, Lorens NYC, Gabriel Ceslov Paintings and the Haratunian Family, sponsored the event.

EmpowerHer to EmpowerAll

In her welcoming remarks, AGBU Central Board member and media consultant Arda Haratunian provided an update on AGBU's EmpowerHer programs — sharing that more than 450 women from Armenia and 45 from Artsakh have completed the Women Entrepreneurs (WE) Program. The comprehensive WE program is aimed to empower and encourage female business owners in Armenia and Artsakh, developing businesses from passion to maximize success.

Moreover, thanks to donor support, over \$500,000 has been made available for mini-grants. To date, the program has helped launch 209 startups and 255 scale-ups. Other dimensions of the EmpowerHer offering combine psycho-social components that work together to change preconceived notions of the role of women in society and teach essential skills to enterprising women seeking to gain financial and social independence as the key to an empowered life.

Another component of this program is the Women Coders program, designed to bring more female talent to tech. The training program, launched in 2020, offers a diverse range of technology courses, mentorships, workshops, and networking opportunities to women throughout Armenia and Artsakh. Over 200 participants have been impacted, with 66 percent finding jobs in the IT industry and 60 percent saying their lives completely changed after this program. Haratunian also asserted that empowering the women of Armenia and Artsakh with such programs would ultimately empower the Armenian nation overall.

Throughout the day, the AGBU Bookstore sold unique products from WE participants, which were available for sale with proceeds going back to the program. To purchase WE products, visit <https://agbubookstore.org/collections/agbu-women-entrepreneurs-collection>.

The Significance of Civility and Joy

The first segment opened with keynote remarks by Shelby Scarbrough, author, entrepreneur, and co-founder of the Global School of Entrepreneurship. Scarbrough detailed her career path from political appointee in the Reagan and Bush Administrations and working with elite leaders and heads of state on her journey to owning her own business. She recognized the men and women who shaped her life and advised the audience that intentional acts of kindness would always come back

see WOMEN, page 11

Northern California Community Hosts Armenian Museum Event

GLENDALE — The San Francisco Bay Area community welcomed the leadership of the Armenian American Museum and Cultural Center of California for a reception on Saturday, March 25. The event was organized and co-hosted by Vartan and Kim Demirjian and Beth Rustigian Broussalian at the Demirjian's residence in Oakland, Calif.

"We are so honored to host the Armenian American Museum leadership and bring together our Bay Area community to learn about such a historic project that is going to be the pride of our entire community throughout the United States and around the world," stated Northern California "Meet & Greet" Co-Host Kim Demirjian.

The Armenian American Museum was represented by Board of Trustees, Board of Governors, Executive Team, Committee, and Staff members as well as the Architect of the museum. Bay Area community members joined the event to learn about the museum and learn how to get involved to support the cultural and educational center.

"We support the Armenian American Museum because it is going to be an important cultural and educational destination for all Armenian Americans as well as children, families, and community members of diverse backgrounds," stated Northern California Meet & Greet Co-Host Beth Rustigian Broussalian.

Board of Trustees Co-Treasurer Talin Yacoubian representing the AGBU Western Region delivered formal remarks on behalf of the museum. Formal remarks were followed by a question-and-answer session with Executive Chairman

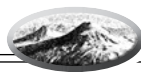


The Northern California organizing committee

Berdj Karapetian, Executive Director Shant Sahakian, and Architect Aram Alajajian.

The Northern California event served as the kick-off event of the museum's new Global Outreach Committee. The goal of the committee is to raise awareness for the landmark center throughout the country and around the world. The committee is currently organizing similar gatherings in additional communities to be held in the coming weeks and months.

The event in the Bay Area comes on the heels of the sold-out Armenian American Museum Elevate Gala held at the Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles on Sunday, March 19, 2023.



OBITUARY

Margot Stern Strom

Co-Founder of Facing History and Ourselves

By Bryan Marquard

BOSTON (*Boston Globe*) — To create Facing History and Ourselves, a curriculum that has helped millions of students around the world confront moral dilemmas while learning to reject hatred and bigotry, Margot Stern Strom drew inspiration from her Memphis childhood.

As a Jewish girl in a segregated southern state, she was told to not drink from water fountains marked “colored.” And in her classrooms, everyone seemed to know what could and couldn’t be said.

“There was a powerful silence about race and racism and no mention of antisemitism or the Holocaust,” she once wrote. “‘Bad history’ was best forgotten. The Civil War was the War Between the States and we were taught how the South won the major battles. In my Tennessee history class I did not learn who lost the Civil War.”

Strom cofounded Facing History in Brookline’s schools in 1976 and led the nonprofit for nearly 40 years while it expanded into classrooms in all 50 states and more than 100 countries. She was 81 when she died Tuesday, March 28, in her Brookline home of pancreatic cancer.

In an era when violent acts of antisemitism and racism are increasing, and some politicians want to ban books and curtail courses that teach about bigotry’s history, Strom pioneering work is seen by many as more relevant than ever.

“Margot had a drive and a vision to become a leader for teachers and students in a world in which too many people don’t acknowledge that there are patterns of hatred and prejudice that range from the playground to civil war,” said Martha Minow, a former dean of Harvard Law School who had served on the governing board of the nonprofit Facing History and Ourselves.

Nearly a half century ago, Strom and a colleague in the Brookline school system first discussed teaching students about the Holocaust, and that conversation led them to launch Facing History and Ourselves.

Throughout the nonprofit’s history, the organization and teachers have faced resistance from some educators and elected officials who want to ignore or barely mention certain disquieting historical subjects for political reasons, or simply because they worry about the impact the subjects will have on children.

“We’ve suggested in this curriculum and with this particular history and with the methods that we’re using that we have to allow for discomfort in the classroom,” Ms. Strom once said.

She believed that by studying how bigotry affected people in the past, and examining how hatred still roils today’s world, students could learn to make ethical and moral choices that will improve their lives.

“It’s scary to walk in someone else’s shoes,” Strom said in a 2015 interview with Harvard Ed., the alumni magazine of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. “But you can imagine it if you’re taught about it. There’s a need for truth telling and widening perspectives.”

Born in Chicago on November 10, 1941, Margot Stern was 5 when her family moved to Memphis, where her parents — Lloyd Stern and Fannye Wener Stern, who was known as Fan — ran a furniture store.

“My mother brought priests, poets such as Randall Jarrell, lectures on Shakespeare, and books from college into our home,” Ms. Strom wrote in a history of her non-

profit. “My dad, an author and an artist, clipped and saved articles about people and topics that would inspire his children. He gardened, made scrapbooks about successful women in all professions.”

Fan Stern, who had been a top student at the University of Alabama, was the household’s scholar and guiding light.

Gerald Stern, who was an attorney with the civil rights division of the US Justice Department under then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, said Ms. Strom “was very close to our mother, who led us: This is what you should be doing, this is what you should be reading, this is how you should be feeling.”

The middle child of three siblings, Ms. Strom went to Central High School in Memphis and studied history at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, graduating in 1964 with a bachelor’s degree.

While registering for classes with students lined up alphabetically, she met Terry Strom, who was standing next to her. They married in 1964, and he became a renowned researcher in organ transplant immunology.

“To know him was to adore him,” she said for his *Globe* obituary in 2018.

After college, Strom initially taught in Skokie, Ill.

“I knew that I did not want to be another link in a conspiracy of silence,” she wrote. “I wanted to honor my students’ potential to confront history in all of its complexity, to cope, and to make a positive difference in their school, community, nation, and the world.”

And in an approach that continued for the rest of her life, “I quickly discovered that although I was officially the teacher, I was learning about adolescents and myself from my students.”

After the Stroms moved to Brookline in 1970, she began teaching eighth-grade language arts and social studies at the Runkle School, and received a master’s from Harvard University in 1977.

In the early 1970s, some Brookline residents asked if the school system taught about the Holocaust.

Troubled by gaps in her own knowledge about the Holocaust, and by memories of how that history wasn’t mentioned when she was young, Strom and Brookline social studies teacher William Parsons launched Facing History and Ourselves in 1976.

Parsons, who later was chief of staff at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, died in 2016.

For Strom, “history was not something to be memorized. It was something to be ripped apart and fought with. The complexity was important, and not to be ducked,” said her son, Adam Strom of Brookline.

He worked with his mother for many years at Facing History and is now executive director and cofounder of the Boston nonprofit Re-Imagining Migration, of which Strom was a founding board member.

As a founder and the guiding force of Facing History for nearly four decades, until stepping down several years ago, Strom “was both a visionary and an incredible listener,” Adam said. “She got so engaged in everybody’s ideas, whether they were mine or my sister’s or anybody’s at work.”

At work and home with her children and four grandchildren, Strom “was the most present person in every aspect of what she was doing,” said her daughter, Rachel Fan Stern Strom of Brooklyn.

(PHOTO RINZE VAN BRUG)



In addition to her son, daughter, brother, and grandchildren, Strom leaves her sister, Paula Stern of Washington, D.C., who formerly chaired the US International Trade Commission.

A funeral service was held Thursday, March 29, in Temple Israel of Boston.

Working alongside and becoming friends with Ms. Strom “certainly changed the trajectory of my life and my career,” said Minow, who counts herself among those inspired by her friend’s drive, compassion, and ability to guide people of all ages to confront the complex ways bigotry and hatred have been powerful forces in history.

“Margot was always unusual in that she has combined a kind of charm and intellectual curiosity with a kind of nonlinearity,” Minow said. “So she would jump from the

most personal to the most historical, and yet you could see the patterns and creativity in her thought.”

Ultimately, Strom wanted Facing History and Ourselves to spare students far into the future from what she faced as a schoolgirl in Memphis.

“Who influenced my development and readied me to learn and teach about injustices? I will never know the answers to these questions,” she wrote.

“I only know that my teachers did not trust us with the complexities of history — the dogmas were more secure, more comfortable. My classmates and I were betrayed by that silence. We should have been trusted to examine real history and its legacies of prejudice and discrimination and of resilience and courage.”

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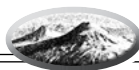
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COMMUNITY NEWS

UCLA Hosts First-Ever Conference Pertaining to Armenian Genocide Restitution Following US Genocide Recognition

WESTWOOD, Calif. — On Saturday, March 25, the Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) at the Promise Armenian Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the Center for the Study of Law and Genocide at LMU Loyola Law School, and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) co-hosted a conference pertaining to Armenian Genocide restitution. The conference was co-sponsored by the Armenian Bar Association, the Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA School of Law, and the Ararat-Eskijian Museum.

Titled “What’s Next?: Armenian Genocide Restitution in the Post-Recognition Era,” this historic conference explored whether congressional recognition of the Armenian genocide in 2019 and President Biden’s recognition on April 24, 2021 offer new possibilities to pursue legal paths toward restitution, as well as how other restitution initiatives can serve as a model for future Armenian efforts.

Panelists included international human rights lawyer Kathryn Lee Boyd, who litigated the first successful art restitution case related to the Armenian genocide, UC Davis art history professor Heghnar Watenpaugh, known for investigating the complex history of medieval Armenian manuscript, the Zeytun Gospels, and lawyer and academic Mayo Moran, who facilitated restitution-related progress for Canada’s Indigenous population.

“If American recognition is not to remain a merely symbolic gesture, must there not be certain legal ramifications to such recognition?” stated Taner Akçam, director of the AGRP at the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA, in his introductory remarks. “The main purpose for recognizing historical injustices is to bring in their wake the at-least-partial recompense for past injustices. Indeed, if such acknowledgment is not followed by some steps in the direction of obtaining justice for past wrongs, then the gesture is truly without meaning.”

“I think that what President Biden did on April 24, 2021 was truly historic and something no other president was willing to do, and that provides a legal framework to begin working on restitution of cultural property, religious property, artifacts, that were part of the Armenian genocide,” stated keynote speaker Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat in a pre-recorded interview. Eizenstat also underlined similarities between the Holocaust and Armenian genocide restitution movements, suggesting the latter take a path similar to the former. “[This conference] has the prospect of being the equivalent to the 1994-95 Bard Graduate Conference that really elevated the issue of Nazi looted art,” he concluded.

The first panel outlined the legal precedent for Armenian Genocide restitution cases within the United States, instances of foreign affairs preemption in such cases, and the importance of just attribution. During the second session, panelists discussed the global landscape concerning

looted art, including the story of Nigeria’s stolen Benin Bronzes and the restitution of Armenian cultural heritage. The third panel focused on “what’s next” for the Armenian Genocide restitution movement and how examples of political progress in other restitution cases can inspire a new path forward.

Conference participants all agreed that this event marked the beginning of a new era pertaining to the Armenian Genocide restitution movement. Organizers plan to take concrete steps to address the conference’s agenda, including establishing an inventory of Armenian looted assets in different countries. “It is now that we begin to build on what is undoubtedly a very promising future,” stated Dr. Akçam at the conference’s closing reception.

Watch the conference’s full proceedings on the Promise Armenian Institute’s YouTube Channel. A short documentary about the conference will be released this year by the Armenian Film Foundation.

The Armenian Genocide Research Program (AGRP) was established within the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA in early 2022. Led by Taner Akçam, the AGRP engages in research and scholarly activities pertaining to the study of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire during the early 20th century.

Richard Melik Simonian Charitable Trust Scholarship



The Richard Melik Simonian Scholarship was established for students of Armenian descent living in or attending school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

While consideration is given to character, academic achievement, and involvement in the Armenian community, awards are based primarily on both the student’s and the parents’ financial need. Applications are now open to Students who fit these criteria and can be submitted for review by the Scholarship Committee.

Awards may be used towards college, graduate school, or higher educational programs.

Application deadline is April 15, 2023. Awards will be determined by June 1, 2023.

Requests for applications may be made to Christopher Mitchell at (508) 792-2800, Ext. 228 or cmitchell@chwmlaw.com.

Armenian Genocide Commemorative Events To Take Place in Fresno

FRESNO — The Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee (AGCC) is a broad based coalition of the leading religious, educational, social and political organizations of the Armenian community of Central California.

The mission is to honor the 1.5 million Armenians who perished in the hands of the Ottoman Turkish government beginning on April 24, 1915 and ending in 1923. The committee is responsible for forming commemorative programs and educating the community about the Armenian Genocide to raise awareness and prevent future genocides from occurring.

On April 24, the AGCC will host the Annual Armenian Genocide Commemorative Program at California State University, Fresno (5241 N. Maple Ave, Fresno, CA 93740). The community is invited to lay flowers at the Armenian Genocide Monument at 6:30 p.m. (end of the Rose Garden, in between the Satellite Student Union and Peters Business Building) before the program formally begins.

The event will commence at 7 p.m. with the presentations of the flags. It will include a religious and civic service with keynote speaker Karnig Kerkonian, Esquire. Kerkonian is an international and appellate lawyer, writer, and co-host of Frontlines, a program on law, human rights, and the Armenian experience.

Additionally, the AGCC educational committee has partnered with the Genocide Education Project (GenEd) to bring workshops to local school teachers to train them on how to best teach their students about the Genocide.

The AGCC invites all members of our Central Valley community to participate in the upcoming commemoration program. Further information can be found at the AGCC website at www.agcfresno.com, on the AGC Fresno Facebook page and at agcfresno Instagram page.

Primate Marks 92nd Anniversary of Holy Ascension Church

TRUMBULL, Conn. — Diocesan Primate Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan joined more than 100 parishioners and friends at Holy Ascension Church, on Saturday, March 25, to celebrate the parish’s 92nd anniversary.

It was in June of 1931 that then-Primate Bishop Ghevont Tourian consecrated Holy Ascension as the 20th Armenian Church consecrated in North America.

At the anniversary event, Parsamyan presided as Primate. He was accompanied by Diocesan Vicar Fr. Simeon Odabashian.

Following the very well attended Peace Hour, group and Parish Council photos were taken in the sanctuary together with the Primate and Vicar.

All enjoyed a catered Lenten dinner in the Agahigian-Sherinian Church hall, donated by Parish Council Chair Heather Tarpinian, in memory of her late husband, Vinnie Crisci, whose untimely passing only two months ago, left the parish in a great shock and pain.

Serving as Master of Ceremonies was Deacon Thomas Dabakian, a longtime member with more than half a century of service to Holy Ascension, and the only person in the parish to have received the St. Nerses Shnorhali medal from the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, on the petition of pastor Fr. Untzag Nalbandian. Dabakian introduced the head table, which included the Primate, Vicar, pastor, Yn. Setta, parish council chair, and Deacon Levon Altiparmakian, Diocesan Council Liaison to the Trumbull parish.

Heather Tarpinian welcomed the Pri-



The assembled, with Primate Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan

mate, Vicar and Dn. Levon, as well as the guests and parishioners to this special event. She spoke highly of Nalbandian’s leadership all these years. During the dinner, those present enjoyed a video titled “Yeraz Im Yergir, Hayreni” (My dream country, Armenia), shown by Kit Kaolian.

Together the parishioners sang “Happy Anniversary to Soorp Hampartsum” and Heather extinguished the candle on the cake, enjoyed by all.

Fr. Untzag introduced the eight “Holy Ascension” Award recipients: Heather

Tarpinian and Vinnie Crisci; Dr. Robert Badrigian and Dr. Cynthia Gentes; Dorothy Bengoian; Kit Kaolian; Andy Daquesian; Tatyana Papyan; Chuck and Laura Tashjian; Tom Allen and Karen Nazaretian Allen. Fr. Untzag and the Parish Council established this award in 1990 to be given to worthy parishioners for their service or generosity or for both. More than 50 parishioners have received this award since 1990. Nalbandian spoke about each one and they received their “Holy Ascension” Award plaques from the Primate.

The audience enjoyed piano renditions by Narina Yakhshibekova of Arno Babajanyan’s Vagharshabad Dance and Hasmik Fomin played Aram Khachadourian’s Waltz Masquerade. Both talented performers are also Sunday organists.

In his remarks, the Primate shared the top priorities of the Diocesan Council, and praised Fr. Untzag for leading the parish for almost 40 years and thanked him for serving this Diocese for the past 45 years. He presented Fr. Untzag with an artwork by Michael Aram.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

AGBU Highlights Exemplary Female Leaders at Second Women Shaping the World Conference

WOMEN, from page 7

tenfold. She also advised that civility, or kindness, mends the path to success, not only in the workplace but in the quilt of life. “If we are society, and the patches on the quilt are the countries, states, cities, or towns that we live in, the stitches are the civility that binds us together,” she shared. Her recommendation to achieve civility was through spreading pockets of happiness with others. “If we spread joy, it’s a gift to everybody.”

As Scarbrough shared, open arms and a strong support system are key to empowerment. With this in mind, participants broke out into eight different EmpowerHour groups to network with like-minded professionals in their industries. Guests discussed obstacles within their fields, the short and long-term impacts these issues had on their career plans, and post-Covid shifts and adaptations their industries have noticed. Such trends included salary transparency, navigating success as female immigrants, jug-

(HAROUT BARSOUMIAN PHOTO)



Shelby Scarbrough

gling passions and expectations, overcoming the “mom” stigma, and advocating for better roles with all-male colleagues.

Participants from the health, medicine,

and science industry, for example, were able to share experiences, from students figuring out their preferred field or research to those navigating a fair salary and accomplished women balancing childcare, travel, and work. In another workshop focused on non-profit organizations, issues around recruiting volunteers, showing them proper gratitude, and understanding that every non-profit is run like a regular business were explored.

Next up was a panel discussion with a host of powerhouse individuals, moderated by independent film and television producer Alexis Alexanian, former president of the Board of New York Women in Film & Television (NYWIFT) with various award-winning production credits. She opened the dialogue with how refreshing it was to be in a room of Armenian women. “I’ve been working in the women’s space in film and television for a very long time, and I do this type of thing all the time, but never for my sisters, my compatriots,” she said.

“In film and television, we’re constantly bombarded by topics of diversity, more voices, women’s voices — but we never see us, do we? We don’t see our faces. We don’t hear our stories. But today, we have three very interesting and wonderful Armenian women and we’re here to listen, learn, and share.”

Zara Ingilizian, head of consumer industries at the World Economic Forum, kicked off the panel with the significance of impact, particularly within the health and wellbeing space. Her experience working with consumer companies and CEOs in the private and public sector has taught her to advance responsible consumption models with the end goal of improving people’s quality of life by identifying the major challenges within the food system. “Globally, we have a food system that is producing for the most part, affordable, accessible food, but it’s ultimately making people sick,” she said, emphasizing the importance of a healthy gut, known as the second brain. Ingilizian also shared insight into socially responsible



The WTSW panel with moderator Alexis Alexanian (left) in conversation with Zara Ingilizian, Maral Kazanjian, and Victoria Waterman

innovation and her journey with empowerment. “I have grown the most when I have taken on roles that were extremely challenging and were outside my comfort zone — and I did this twice.”

Maral Kazanjian, chief people officer at Moody’s Corporation and former chief people officer for WeWork, shared important insights into the workforce today. “Fifty percent of our world is women, 50 percent of entry-level companies are women, 38 percent are first-level management, 28 percent are senior management, and a very small number are executives,” she shared. “That pyramid has to become untrue for very simple commerce to function. We are in a powerful position to have agency and authority to advocate for the careers that we want.” She also chimed in on the hybrid model of work. “People need flexibility. They need agency. They need control over their life and their time within reasonable rules. And they need clarity about what’s expected of them.”

Victoria Waterman, CEO of Girls Inc. of Worcester and TedxNatick Speaker, has devoted her career to the advancement of women and inspiring girls to be strong, smart, and bold through the nonprofit — yet her biggest obstacle was believing in herself. She shared her journey into reframing her perception of her worth: “What was it about me that [recruiters seeking a non-profit leader] were seeing? Because I couldn’t see it. I don’t work for a company with deep pockets. I don’t come from a wealthy family,” she said. “And so I reframed — I don’t know anybody more qualified than me.” She has also taken on a new role as an author and documented the story of female Armenian resilience post-genocide with her upcoming novel, portraying the women as the protagonists rather than victims.

The panel ended with a reflection of Armenian identity in the workplace. “When I think of being Armenian, I think of it as being a great differentiator,” noted Ingilizian. And it’s only been an asset to be Armenian. Not just because of the values we are taught and this amazing history that we have, which obviously I’m extremely proud of and the contributions we have had in the world and continue to do. Kazanjian agreed, adding: “Armenians have a couple of very special qualities that differentiate us in the working world. One is our humility. We lead with humility whether we want to or not. We focus on education and we care about it so passionately and that combination is pretty special. And we care. We care about what we do and we care about the people around us. So that combination makes us really special.”

Mentors and Networks

Political satirist and news personality Hagar Hajjar Chemali closed the conference as keynote speaker with wise words about the world of government, politics, and media. “My network of mentors and champions is a key part in my success,” she said. “I’ve collected them along the way — from former bosses, friends, and leaders, and when I hit bumps in the road — and I hit bumps in the road — it’s my mentors and champions that catch me when I fall, who help me strategize my next steps, who see a perspective I might not be able to see and help me figure out what to do next or connect me to another person.” This was particularly helpful when she made the switch from working on policy in the Middle East in the White House to building her own brand of humorous political commentary for a Gen-Z audience, “Oh My World.” The video series is rooted in this mission that by raising awareness and by giving viewers the tools to act, they end up affecting change. “I’ve always been driven by following my gut — which is really all we have,” Chemali concluded.

Participants broke off into six smaller and more intimate EmpowerHours to discuss universal ways to get ahead and stand out for women in the workplace, including building a “brag” log at work, overcoming imposter syndrome and a fear of public speaking, using social media as a tool to get ahead, and maximizing the hybrid model of work to climb the ladder.

All participants left with new connections,

(HAROUT BARSOUMIAN PHOTO)



Hagar Hajjar Chemali

insights, and a sense of empowerment. One participant shared, “I learned that I have to set myself up to be heard at work. I was advised to learn the business of the business and ask myself, how does my job contribute to outcomes? Numbers and results make a difference when self-advocating.”

To learn more about the AGBU EmpowerHer program and volunteer and donor opportunities, go to <https://agbu.org/empowerher>.



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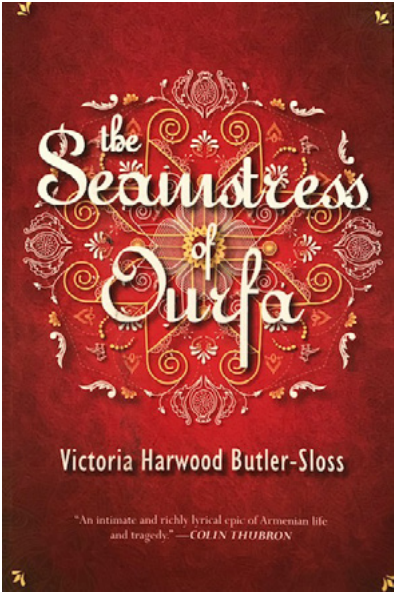
Arts & Culture

Books

‘Everything’s a Story:’ Victoria Harwood Butler-Sloss’s *The Seamstress Of Ourfa*

By Arpi Sarafian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

“This is it, Iskender, efendi. The end,” Aram Bohjalian, an old friend of the Agha Boghos family, tells his buddy as the Turks capture the Armenian quarter in Ourfa and the whole city goes up in flames. “The one person who could save Ourfa is dead and our hopes have died with him,” adds Aram. One wonders if it can be anything but “the end” when the only home one has ever known is left behind, one’s entire possessions lost, family members and dear friends killed or disappeared. This sense of an ending is repeatedly evoked in Victoria Harwood Butler-Sloss’s *The Seamstress of Ourfa*, (Armida Publications, 2018), a novel set in the later years of the Ottoman Empire, when the entire Armenian population



living in what is present-day Turkey were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands, deported into the desert, and massacred at the hands of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, labeled the “Red Sultan.”

Nonetheless, the novel ends with a new beginning for the eponymous seamstress Khatoun Agha Boghos and her family who, having crossed the border into Syria with the help of an Arab friend, arrive in Aleppo late one evening to start their “new life.” Khatoun leaves behind a flourishing sewing business and her dream house, with its many rooms and a patio filled with ferns “elegantly grouped around the stone fountain.” When she has difficulty falling asleep on the first night in her new home, “a room up a rickety staircase they were to sleep in,” she climbs to the rooftop, preferring to “enjoy the time awake rather than fret in bed.”

see OURFA, page 13



Emma Melikian *Dancing and Choreographing In Spain*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / ALICANTE, Spain – Emma Melikyan is a dancer of different dance styles, choreographer and dance instructor. She was born in 1984, in Yerevan; her father is violinist and her mother is psychologist. She has been dancing jazz and modern since the age of 11. Emma studied at Juan Carlos and Complutense Universities of Madrid, improved at the Royal Society of Choreographers in London and Broadway Dance Center in New York. In 2006, she was one of the main actresses of the “Desordances 2” dance performance in Teatro Madrid in Madrid. In 2000-2011 she taught hip-hop at El Orno and Beatrice Luenigo dance schools in Madrid, directed and danced at Dani Panullo’s dance theater, as well as performed during pop singer Maria Sanchez’s international tours. In 2009-2010 Emma Melikian was a paratherapy specialist at the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation in Madrid, and since 2013, a choreographer and choreographer at the Quiero Ser Artista Art School and the WOSAP Dance School in Madrid.

Emma, you dance and teach jazz, hip hop, street dance and other dances. Living in a country with such a rich dance culture, have you ever been interested in Spanish dances?

Sure, I have been very interested in Spanish dances: although never learned in a professional way, but I do not discard it. I always been focused on improving the styles I danced since I was little, but the power and personality of flamenco dance really do move me, so who knows, maybe in the near future I will decide to learn in a more professional way.



Armenian Pianists Win Top Prizes at Chopin Competition in Hartford

HARTFORD, Conn. — The Hartford Chopin Foundation sponsors the annual Chopin International Piano Competition. Now in its 14th year, the 4-day event (March 8 to 12) drew 85 aspiring pianists of various ages. This year’s edition saw participating pianists representing the US, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, China, South Korea and Armenia.

In the Professional category, pianist Seiran Tozlian of Armenia received the second prize. Along with a cash prize, the distinction included invitation for performances in Poland. Tozlian, 20, presented a range of compositions by Chopin, Debussy, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff and Ligeti in the preliminary and final rounds of the competition. He is also a prize winner at the Anselmo Academy of Music’s Fifth International Competition in New York and a semi-finalist at the 2023 Boesendorfer-Yamaha International Piano Competition. Tozlian, who currently studies at the Manhattan School of Music with Alexandre Moutouzkine, is also a prize winner at the Anselmo Academy of Music’s Fifth International Competition in New York and was a semi-finalist at the 2023 Boesendorfer-Yamaha International Piano Competition.

In the “Young Artists” category, Massachusetts resident Vartan Arakelian won second prize among 24 pianists ages 13 to 17. He is a ninth grade student at the Buckingham, Browne and Nichols high school in Cambridge and studies piano privately with Lilit Karapetian-Shougarian. He presented works by Bach, Chopin and Janacek in his audition. The prize included a cash award as well as an invitation to participate in the International Chopin Festival for young artists in Busko-Zdroj in Poland this summer. Arakelian was also the winner of the first prize in the Mildred Freiberg Middle School Competition in April 2022, an event sponsored by the New England Piano Teachers Association in collaboration with M. Steinert & Sons of Boston.

The international jury consisted of pianists Krystian Zmudzinski of Poland and the US, Josephine Koh of Singapore, Philippe Raskin of Belgium, Adolfo Vidal of Venezuela, Mina Perry of Japan, Michael Bulychev-Okser of the United States, and Mikhail Voskresensky of Russia.

Both Arakelian and Tozlian appeared in the Winners’ Gala concert on March 12 at the Asylum Hill Congregational church in Hartford.



Vartan Arakelian, left, and Seiran Tozlian

see MELIKIAN, page 14



ARTS & CULTURE

‘Everything’s a Story:’ Victoria Harwood Butler-Sloss’s *The Seamstress of Ourfa*

OURFA, from page 12

“Halab. Alep. Aleppo. City of song. I am ready,” she sings out to the city with “the glorious skyline.”

The story centers around the character of Khatoun, a seamstress whose magic and generosity make life for her four children and all those around joyful. Khatoun rejoices in the newfound love of her daughter Alice and of young Sarkis, while Digin Tatou calls off the engagement as a “ridiculous fantasy,” breaking the hearts of two youngsters who, the woman who “sews stars into the world” knew, clearly loved each other. Her husband recognizes that it is his wife’s “small stitches that will keep us together.” While he stays cloistered at home, smoking and drinking—“Her lover. Where did he go?”—the delicately built woman takes to the road to find material for coats and dresses to delight the Pasha’s wives. Digin Agha Boghos, whose insights “come from another place,” understands that if her husband’s presence were gone the house would be strange and empty.

Years later, in Nicosia, Cyprus, when Nene Khatoun puts her seven-year-old great-granddaughter Vicky to sleep, she comforts her with, “Don’t worry about us. We’ll all be here in the morning . . . and the next day, and the next and the next. And always.” Nestled into her heart, the little girl feels “the safest I have ever felt in my life.”

A dreamer like her great-grandma, Vicky describes her nene as “the rain....with me now and for always.” It is with her poetry and her images that Harwood Butler-Sloss conveys the reassuring presence of Nene Khatoun, who tells her great-granddaughter to “Open your eyes and you’ll always be able to hear me. I have many stories to tell.” The child knows Nene Khatoun tells her “important stuff.”

But then again, there is the wisdom of Iskender’s practical sister Ferida, who will say it all as it is, “not twisted and turned into a story for later.”



Victoria Harwood Butler-Sloss (Eduardo Fierro photo)

Ferida is “sick of the stench of pain and injustice.” Why delay death for the “endless stream” of “living corpses,” she wonders, knowing “how painful it is to survive.” Notwithstanding, Ferida is the life force of the household, “Everyone’s Umme,” shuffling across the floors with her slippers, attending to every childbirth and to anyone that needs help. Umme is in charge of the kitchen, and “yells,” “spits,” “snaps” and “barks” orders. She is quick to hurl her slipper at anyone who dares protest her orders: “Arshalous, help me undress

her. One of you, get me a clean nightdress. Hasmig, Manoush, sheets — rip them up. I need bandages . . . Oosht, all of you. Out! . . . Lolig, you finish the bread. Bzdig Shoushun, the children. Washed, dressed and fed. I made yoghurt. Look on the shelf, under the cloth. Hayde! Let’s get moving!”

The novel itself has its own distinct magic. The lives of female characters who sew, cook, and nurse, flow into each other and ensure the continuity of a centuries-old culture, even as their homeland burns to ashes. We too, miraculously survive the trauma

and emerge unscathed, or almost. Rather than submit us to endless descriptions of the atrocities, Harwood evokes the horror with her subtle images. “A lone swallow sing[ing] somewhere — surprised by its solitude,” “an ocean of children who are now fatherless,” the Millet khan, “hearth and home to travelers for centuries,” silent now, and the rhythmic repetition of “Baby Alice should not have witnessed the deportations,” help her utter the unutterable. Short, often incomplete, sentences give it all poignancy: “Bodies have become barter. A hidden ring in a loose flap of skin. A pair of embroidered slippers. Rich, virgin hair in an easily sliced braid. The dead don’t care. For the most part they grin and are to be envied—they no longer feel hunger.”

Rather than lament the loss of a city known as the cradle of civilization, the Seamstress of Ourfa celebrates the power of storytelling. When her mother weeps into Khatoun’s lap with, “My heart cannot take this,” “It doesn’t matter who is alive now. We’ll all be dead soon — it’s just a matter of time,” retorts Aram. “I know,” Khatoun nods, “but some of us will survive. Someone will live to tell the story. May God grant it be one of us.” The novel is evidence the stories have survived. The family are all together, even if their lives are scattered.

In her Acknowledgements, Harwood thanks her family who “continue to give [her] life stories.” “Essentially, the book is about my family, beginning with my great-grandmother Khatoun’s story. She is the Seamstress of Ourfa,” stated the author in a recent interview. “There is always time to remember your family . . . Always time,” says Khatoun’s father when they are gathered to say goodbye. “There is no leaving home. Home lies within,” writes Harwood.

The Seamstress of Ourfa is the first book in a trilogy. Harwood is currently getting the final draft ready for the second book, tentatively called *Love in Aleppo*.

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UCLA Armenian Music Program

Tekeyan Cultural Association
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Movses Pogossian, violin; Ela Kodžas, violin; Damon Zavala, viola; Niall Taró Ferguson, cello

MAY 9, 2023 DETROIT St. John Armenian Church Cultural Hall 22001 Northwestern Hwy., Southfield, MI Cosponsored by the Cultural Society of Armenians from Istanbul, and AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School 7 pm; for more info call 248-505-6159	MAY 11, 2023 BOSTON Cosponsored with Holy Trinity Armenian Church 145 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA 7:30 pm	MAY 13, 2023 MONTREAL Tekeyan Center 825 Manogian St. Saint-Laurent, Canada \$20/ticket, call 514 747-6680 8 pm
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ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR
OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CALIFORNIA

APRIL 13 — Opening reception for “Gojabashian: Blessed Hands of the Armenian Heritage” art exhibition, Leon S. Peters Ellipse Gallery, University Library, Fresno State University. 6-7 p.m. Artist Yervant Gojabashian is one of Armenia’s most prominent sculptors and painters. Admission free.

CONNECTICUT

APRIL 22 — The Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Connecticut will hold its annual program, on the 108th anniversary of the Genocide, on Saturday April 22 2023 at 11:00 am. The event will take place at the historic Connecticut House Chamber at the State Capitol, 210 Capitol Avenue, Hartford. The program will include the Martyrs’ Service, which was created in 2015 on the occasion of the centennial of the Genocide and the canonization of the Martyrs. Clergy from Armenian Churches in Connecticut will participate in the service. The keynote speaker will be Aram Hamparian, Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of America, (ANCA). A reception will follow the commemoration. For questions call Melanie at 860-651-0629.

MASSACHUSETTS

APRIL 10 — Monday, St. James Monthly Dinner & Fellowship, Joint meeting with the Knights of Vartan, Guest Speaker Jason Sohigian, Executive Director of the Armenian Museum of America. Losh Kebab and Kheyra Dinner. Social Hour [mezza] 6:15, Dinner 7 p.m., \$20 per person. St. James Armenian Apostolic Church, 465 Mt. Auburn St. Watertown. 617 923-8860.

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

APRIL 18 — “Opening Reception: From Cambridge to Yerevan: 35 Years of Friendship” exhibit of the Cambridge Yerevan Sister City Association, featuring the long term board members of the organization taking a trip down memory lane. The exhibit features documents, photos and posters connected to CYSCA’s 35th anniversary. The exhibit can be viewed for free on the first floor. Tuesday, 7 to 8.30 p.m., Main Library Community Room, 449 Broadway, Cambridge. Light refreshments will be served. All are welcome. Registration required, at <http://www.cambridgeyerevan.org>

APRIL 20 — Conversation in Commemoration of the 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, “The Armenian Genocide Continuum: Deir ez-Zor Yesterday, Artsakh Today,” with Ambassador Edward P. Djerejian, US Ambassador to Syria and Israel, and host Ara Nazarian, PhD., ARF Sardarabad Gomideh of Boston. Presented jointly by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation of Boston and the Armenian Assembly of America. Thursday, 7 p.m. Hybrid event, at NAASR, 395 Concord Ave., Belmont and online via Zoom. For all questions and additional information, contact the ARF of Boston at sardarabad@arfeastusa.com or the Armenian Assembly of America at in-fo@aa-inc.org.

APRIL 29 — The Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe and the Amaras Art Alliance will present a special concert of the world famous Nairyan Vocal Ensemble from Armenia. Sponsored by Hye Pointe ACYOA. Saturday, 6 p.m. doors open, social hour. 7 p.m. concert starts. After concert, meet and greet with singers. \$50 per person. Cash bar, coffee and dessert intermission. Gata will be available for sale. 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill, MA. For reservations call (978) 372-9227.

MAY 9-13 — The VEM Ensemble, the cornerstone of the Armenian Music Program at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music and under the artistic leadership of Founder/Director Movses Pogossian, consists of the VEM String Quartet and mezzo-soprano Lena Marandi. They will have concerts on May 9 in Southfield, Mich., May 11 in at Holy Trinity Armenian Church (co-sponsored by Holy Trinity), and May 13 in Montreal. Details to follow.

MAY 12 — Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Music and Theater Arts Department, MIT History, and UCLA Armenian Music Program Present: “Intertwined Legacies: Gomidas Vartabed (1869-1935) and Koharik Gaza-rossian (1907-1967)” Lecture and mini-concert by Dr. Melissa Bilal and UCLA VEM Ensemble. Friday, 12:30 p.m. MIT Building 4, Classroom 231 <http://whereis.mit.edu/> Co-sponsors: National Association of Armenian Studies and Research, Tekeyan Cultural Association.

JUNE 9 — Save the date! 70th Annual Armenian Night at the Pops featuring violinist Eva Aronian, soloist with the Boston Pops Orchestra, Keith Lockhart, conductor. Symphony Hall, Boston. 8 p.m. Presented by the Friends of Armenian Culture Society.

OCTOBER 27-28 — SAVE THE DATE. The Armenian Mirror-Spectator will celebrate its 90th anniversary with two programs, a panel featuring top-notch journalists on October 27 and a banquet on October 28. Details to follow.

NEW JERSEY

MAY 10 — The Armenian Missionary Association of America will host a book presentation by Adrienne G. Alexanian on her father’s memoirs, Forced into Genocide: Memoirs of an Armenian Soldier in the Ottoman Turkish Army. Venue/ Time - AMAA Headquarters, 31 West Century Road, Paramus. 7 p.m. Registration requested - Call Magda Poulos at (201) 265-2607 x 107 or e-mail mpoulos@amaa.org Book signing during reception. All proceeds from the sale of books will benefit the AMAA Syrian Relief Fund.

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

APRIL 30 — The Armenian Martyrs’ Memorial Committee of Rhode Island sponsoring the 108th Commemoration of the 1915 Armenian Genocide and Service for the Holy Martyrs Sunday, 12:30pm at Armenian Martyrs’ Memorial. North Burial Ground, Branch Avenue, Providence. Guest speaker, Dr. Taner Akcam with participation of the 3 Armenian churches and local organizations and public officials. Public is invited to attend.

Send Calendar Items to the Mirror-Spectator: To send calendar items to the Mirror-Spectator, email alin@mirrorspectator.com or alin.gregorian@gmail.com. You can also visit our website, www.mirrorspectator.com, and find the “calendar” section under the heading “More.” You can also mail them to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472. All calendar entries must be received by noon on Monday before publication. There is no fee for calendar entries.

Emma Melikian: Dancing and Choreographing in Spain

MELIKIAN, from page 12

In 2007, you received the award for best dancer for your performance in the video for the song *Toca Toca* by famous Spanish hip hop artist Mala Rodríguez, recognized as the best video of the year. Please tell us about this cooperation.

This cooperation was very interesting and a whole experience for me. Mala was one of the trending female artist of that moment, so working with her was a blessing. The video shoot was very fun and challenging; we danced in very high heels which were tied to our feet with tape, so we could not take them off during the entire shoot, which was very, very long. I also traveled with Mala to do some shows, so the entire experience was really positive.

How is it to live as a dancer in Spain?

I think in general, living as a dancer is a road of ups and downs. Being a teacher brings some balance to my profession.

Do you have students that made you proud of them?

Of course, and it is not about what they accomplished

professionally, it is about their growth as dancers and human beings. I teach not only dance, but also, I work on their confidence, mental strength, balance, self-esteem, and overcoming fears. Becoming someone better is a part of being a better dancer, and that is so much to be proud as a teacher!

You have been living in Spain since you were 9. How do you manage to be able to read and write in Armenian and keep your Armenian identity in that country?

Well, even though I grew up in Spain, I grew up in a very Armenian family, so keeping my identity was not a choice. It is true, that when I was an adolescent, I blended in with Spanish culture more than now, as with growing my roots got much stronger. Reading and writing is a whole challenge because I had to learn by myself and I really have to train every day to maintain the knowledge, but I do it with love and pleasure and challenging myself and looking forward to the moment I go back to Armenia. I also very strong in maintaining my roots and identity to be able to teach my daughter who she is.

Please tell us also about your cooperation with danc-

ers of Armenia.

I lived in Armenia for some years and cooperated with many Armenian dancers, and it was one of the best experiences of my life. In Armenia there are so many talents, so much passion, and I enjoyed every single day working there surrounded by dancers, doing what we love. Definitely, I am looking forward to some future collaborations, which I cannot reveal for now, but hopefully - soon.

And what do you do currently?

Currently I am teaching Heels dance in Alicante, a style based in jazz technique, with a sexy, feminine twist. My style is very personal and classy inside of Heels dance, and a lot of girls and women are willing to learn this style of dance. I am giving group classes and private lessons, as well as professional preparation for dancers. In addition, I work as a choreographer for local and international singers, performing mainly rhythm and afro fusion.

And what about Armenian dances?

Actually, I never tried, I do learn some movements and obviously get inspired by Armenian dance, but I never had the chance to learn... For now ...



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Zatiki Chorek Armenian Easter Bread

This traditional Armenian chorek is rich and scrumptious. Its sweet, enticing aroma lingers in the kitchen for days. It's truly heavenly.

This chorek recipe is featured at Cafe Osharak by Nouné, a talented and creative Armenian food blogger. "In my blog, you will find globally-inspired dishes, with an emphasis on Armenian and Italian cuisine. 'Osharak' is an Armenian word that means 'the nectar of the fruit,' typically known as a drink which is refreshing, satisfying, energizing and colorful. I am an Armenian native, living in Colorado, married to an Italian from New York. Most of my recipes are heirlooms of both our families that became staples and true favorites.

Cafe Osharak is where I can be harmonious with myself, where I can write what I am passionate about, and what excites and completes me."

"The food I make and write about is created with love, it's made from scratch with fresh, wholesome ingredients, and seasoned with an array of herbs and spices. Even though I don't follow any particular diet path, I am inclined towards Mediterranean food choices, where vegetarian dishes are paired with whole grains and legumes, and occasionally with some fish and meat on the side. Whether it's a weeknight meal or a special occasion, I like to serve and style with visual appeal. I am a baker and love to express my passion through celebratory cakes, breads and fine pastries, too. Follow me on my journey," she adds.

"Today I am baking chorek, traditional Armenian Easter Bread. My aunt Victoria, who we call Viki, always makes chorek and gives it away as gifts at Easter. This recipe was passed down to me, and I am pleased to share it with my readers. As a young girl I made this recipe with my mother. She would give us a piece of dough and we would shape them into flowers, letters, birds, or most of the time, some abstract figures. My mother would make braids and roulades filled with walnuts or apricot preserves, sprinkled with poppy or sesame seeds," she says.

"The aroma of the baked chorek is sweet and enticing, and it lingers in the kitchen for days. It penetrated into all the nooks and crannies of my senses and became engraved in my memory. Recently, I came across an article which had an excerpt from an autobiographical book, entitled, *My Grandmother: An Armenian-Turkish Memoir* by Fethiye Cetin and translated by Maureen Freely. The book is about her grandmother, one of the many Armenian women who were forced to become Muslims to survive and escape the death march during the horrendous events of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1922."

"This small passage tells a story of chorek and how it was a secret message between the Islamized women who had the same fate. Women who tried to hide their identities from their children and grandchildren but hold on to a sense of their roots by sharing their customs with one another."

"Do you know that when I was a child, my grandmother and I came to your house? My grandmother baked chorek all day. After sitting for a while, after tasting my grandmother's chorek, we also visited Shasho Ibrahim's wife, Aunt Seher, and Aunt Tatumi. It caught my attention that day that all the people we went to see served chorek. The choreks we tasted in other houses were like the ones we

made in your house. When I was expecting a different kind of hospitality, I was always disappointed to see the same pastry. My grandmother ate and drank tea in the homes of all the people we visited. It was only years later that my attention was drawn to the hospitality of that day and the community of homes we visited. 'Shasho Ibrahim's wife, Aunt Seher, was Armenian, and Aunt Tatumi later converted to Islam, like my grandmother.'"

What's Special About Zatiki Chorek: Armenian Easter Bread?

"Easter heralds the end of Lent and celebration of new beginning, awakening and rebirth. The enriched bread chorek is loaded with eggs and butter, milk and sugar, similar to brioche, challah, pana pasquale. What makes chorek so different and memorable is the unique spice called mahleb. It gives chorek its distinctive taste and enchanting aroma. Mahleb is the wild cherry stone kernels that is not as bitter as ordinary cherries, but has a very delicate and exquisite flavor. Known for its medicinal properties, mahleb was used since ancient times, and eventually made its way into the kitchen as one of the spices prevalent in countries around the Mediterranean."

Shaping Ideas and Options

Braids: I typically make the braids with 500-600 grams of dough. I use three strips. There are more elaborate braids, but I am sticking to the traditional one. I divide the dough into three equal parts, knead each piece, and give each an initial sausage shape.

Roulades: To make a roulade with the walnuts or jam, I portion 400 grams of dough. No initial shaping is required; I simply knead and ball the dough and set it aside covered.

Chevron: For small chevron shaped rolls, I portion 70-100 grams of dough, knead them into the little balls and set them aside covered.

Here are Nouné's specific ingredients and directions:

300 grams butter (1 1/3 cups), melted

6 eggs

1 1/2 cups sugar + 1 tablespoon for starter

1 1/2 cups milk + 1/4 cup milk for starter

900 grams flour (about 7 1/4 cups)

1 teaspoon yeast (not instant/rapid rise)

1 teaspoon mahleb

1 large egg for egg wash

Sesame, poppy or nigella seeds, if desired

PREPARATION:

Starter:

Mix 1 teaspoon of yeast with 1/4 cup of lukewarm milk. Add 1 tablespoon of sugar and flour to make a creamy consistency. Cover and let rise for 15-30 minutes.

Dough:

Start mixing the melted butter with 1 cup of flour in a standing mixer with paddle attachment. Then add the eggs and sugar and beat well.

Add the milk followed by the starter. Sprinkle with the ground mahleb.

Replace the mixer with the dough hook. Gradually add the flour. After adding the flour, scrape the mixing bowl from the bottom and continue kneading (8-10 minutes).

The dough should feel smooth and elastic but not sticky. If it feels sticky, add more flour until it no longer sticks.

Once the dough is kneaded and glossy, place it in a bowl where it has room to rise; cover and place in a warm place.

Let it rise for 2 hours. It should double in volume. The ideal temperature is 75°F (24°C).

Punch the dough down and make a couple of folds by bringing the dough from the bottom across diagonally over. Repeat for all sides. Cover and let it rise a second time.

Once the dough rises the second time, divide it into portions.

Preheat the oven to 350°F, while you shape and make the breads. Make the braids, rolls, any shapes you want.

Beat the egg with a little bit of water and brush it on the ready breads. Let them rise again for 15-20 minutes. Sprinkle with seeds and bake for 20-40 minutes.

The smaller breads will bake quicker. The thicker braids will require about 40 minutes.

Armenian blogger Nouné at Cafe Osharak

For this recipe, go to: <https://www.osharak.com/chorek-armenian-easter-bread/>

Also see: <https://www.osharak.com/about/>

For Armenian Tolma, Vegetables Stuffed with Meat, Rice and Herbs, see: <https://www.osharak.com/armenian-tolma-vegetables-stuffed-with-meat-rice-and-herbs/>

For more Armenian recipes, see:

https://www.osharak.com/category/armenian_food/

Welcome to Osharak cafe where you can find globally-inspired dishes, with an emphasis on Armenian and Italian cuisine.

Connect at:

<https://www.facebook.com/CafeOsharak>

<https://twitter.com/osharak>

<https://www.instagram.com/osharak.cafe/>

My Grandmother: An Armenian-Turkish Memoir Paperback - July 4, 2012 by Fethiye Cetin (Author), Maureen Freely (Translator)

Fethiye Cetin is a Turkish human-rights lawyer who has represented, among others, Hrant Dink, the Turkish-Armenian journalist assassinated in Istanbul in January 2007. This is her first book. Growing up in the small town of Maden in Turkey, Fethiye Cetin knew her grandmother as a happy and respected Muslim

Azg Newspaper Interviews Aram Arkun in Yerevan

YEREVAN (*Azg*) — The Future Armenian Convention assembled around 200 participants under the same roof for three days, from March 10 to 12, of which 100 were from different communities of the Armenian diaspora and represented different social and professional spheres. The majority of Armenians chosen from Artsakh to participate were prevented due to the blockade of the Berdzor (Lachin) corridor.

The Future Armenian intends to bring together the potential of the Armenians for the sake of future progress of the Armenian people. Historian Aram Arkun, who is the executive director of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (with headquarters in Watertown, Mass.) and managing editor of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, came to Yerevan from the United States in order to participate in the convention.

What follows is an edited version in English of the original Armenian language interview.

Perspectives on Armenia and the Future Armenian

The last time I came to Armenia was before Covid and the 2020 war. I have visited many times, starting from childhood with my family in the Soviet era. I was born in the United States, as was my mother, but I have always felt a special connection with Armenia and a desire to help and support it.

It was very interesting for me to meet participants from far-flung places like Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Turkey, and many European countries, as well as from various Armenian provinces, within the framework of the Future Armenian convention, and to hear their views on creating a prosperous and positive future for Armenia. Apart from the issues of historical responsibility, including Armenian Genocide recognition, and the preservation of Armenian identity and culture, the strengthening of Armenia-diaspora ties, and demographic issues were discussed. The birth rate in Armenia has declined to below replacement rate. What should be done, for example, to avoid the deleterious consequences? Three days of discussions took place on the aforementioned topics, debating and finally voting on what measures should be put forward and what ideas should be introduced in order to solve these problems that threaten the future of Armenians.

Each of the participants should ideally continue to work in his own home country, in his immediate environment, and uses his connections so that the discussions have a practical continuation and effect.

However, without the participation of the governments of Armenia and Artsakh, in my opinion, it is not possible to implement a large number of the proposed plans. The state should also be involved in the process of implementing strategic ideas in a variety of fields, whether economic, political or cultural. It is necessary to choose a strategy for the future of Armenia, coordinate problems and find means to solve them.

The Future Armenian initiative collected more than 110,000 names and contact addresses. These are largely self-motivated people who can play a big role in the development of the future of Armenians.

In my opinion, the Tekeyan Cultural Association's role in many ways is consonant with the approach of the Future Armenian.

The Tekeyan Cultural Association has been acting as a bridge between Armenia

and the diaspora for decades. Our organization has always been involved in various spheres of Armenian life, both in the Soviet and independence periods.

Moreover, the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* newspaper has been supportive of Armenia and of course Armenian communities throughout the world in many ways. It highlights the problems of Armenian life and external political challenges. The editorial staff of our newspaper works to create a site where Armenia and the diaspora can better get to know each other. We have writers from Armenia proper as well as from many parts of the world.

The Complex and Multilayered Diaspora

The Armenian diaspora is a very complex structure. Sometimes, it seems like in Armenia it is understood as if it were akin to a single country, but is not, and its features cannot be easily summarized. The diaspora has many rifts due to political and economic issues.

We can start with religion. The majority of Armenians profess the same religion and creed, yet in the United States they have two rival administrative structures: one is officially subordinate to Echmiadzin (to the Catholicosate of All Armenians) the other to Antelias (the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia). Consequently, contrary to canonical law, there are two Armenian cathedrals and dioceses/prelacies in New York. The Boston community, where I am located, has churches subordinate to Echmiadzin and Antelias. At one time, even families became divided due to this split, which was connected to Armenian politics and the Cold War. There are of course also various Armenian Protestant and Armenian Catholic churches in the United States.

There were also the different and rival traditional political parties: Social Democratic Hunchakian, Armenian Democratic Liberal, Armenian Revolutionary Federation, and Progressive or Communist. Even cultural initiatives were divided according to parties and church affiliation.

Among the new generation, this societal split is no longer that acute. However, there are traces left of the old divisions, as well as some new political divisions based on current developments in the Republic of Armenia. Furthermore, each new wave of immigrants to the United States from countries like Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon always have problems with the prior generations of Armenian-Americans.

Those Armenians who moved from Soviet or post-Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan to the US did not need to develop the habit of helping and serving the Armenian community on a voluntary basis through organizational structures to preserve their identity back in the homeland. They also do not necessarily have close ties with the church, which they visit only on major occasions. Consequently, they have not become engaged on a large scale in traditional diasporan institutions. Another issue which still is being resolved is which language should be taught in Saturday schools: Eastern Armenian or Western Armenian?

Four generations of Armenians live side by side in the diaspora. Due to intermarriage, in recent generations fewer and fewer remain fully Armenian by ancestry, but some continue to attend church. How can they participate in the liturgy if they do not understand Armenian? Some argue that the divine liturgy should be celebrated in English, just as the Catholics abandoned Latin and now celebrate the divine

liturgy in different languages.

There are many more issues, some of which differ not only in different countries but even within regions of countries where Armenians live, and a person living in Armenia cannot imagine their diversity if he has not lived in the diaspora.

About the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* newspaper, in addition to an experienced editorial staff of three (longtime editor Alin K. Gregorian, staff writer Harry Kezelian, and myself), has correspondents and columnists in various parts of the world. Two of its columnists live in Armenia and present analyses of Armenian political issues and external challenges in English.

Our most senior and experienced editorial columnist, Edmond Azadian (who himself is a leading figure in the Armenian community) [he unfortunately passed away only a week after this interview], actively analyzes and writes about Armenia's internal and external political issues and similarly about the diaspora. The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* is a weekly newspaper, but it also has a website that is constantly updated with important news. We work to maintain impartiality and balance. We often present current developments through interviews, not taking sides. We allow the reader to make his own conclusions.

On developments in Artsakh, for example, recently, I interviewed former Minister of State of Artsakh Ruben Vardanyan, Human Rights Defender Gegham Stepanyan, and former Foreign Minister and Advisor to the President of Armenia Davit Babayan. We have shown video reports from Artsakh television periodically, with English captioning, and have had some local correspondents. We always follow life in Artsakh and Armenia, as well as of Armenian communities around the world. In American politics, we reflect the efforts of Armenian-American organizations which work to communicate with and influence the US Department of State and the international community, so that international events affecting Armenia and Artsakh are not left without response.

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* is one of the periodicals representing the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, founded 91 years ago. We will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the newspaper this year (though actually it took place last year). In the United States, we also publish the *Baikar* weekly, written in the Armenian language, whose founding precedes that of the *Mirror-Spectator*.

Although we adopted an electronic version of the *Mirror-Spectator*, we still publish some 1,300 copies of the printed newspaper for our traditional readers, who often tend to be from the older generations. At the same time, we regularly try to use new technological means to make the website more interesting for readers primarily from younger generations.

Diaspora Mulls Various Scenarios for Armenia and Artsakh

Armenia's security is the most vital issue that concerns the diaspora, as well as of course Armenia. We go to sleep every day with the fear that we will wake up and learn that Azerbaijan has attacked Armenia again, attempting to occupy Zangezur or other bits of the territory of the republic, let alone what is left of Artsakh. Azerbaijan demands a corridor through the south, which will be disastrous for Armenia.

There could be an even worse scenario:

Iran also gets involved in a regional war. Azerbaijan wants to take the north of that country. Turkey might also enter into military operations. The US could also intervene, at least indirectly, and in the process, Armenia may lose its southern territories, or worse. Iranian fighters could enter southern Armenia in order to stop Azerbaijani advances, but then no one knows what could happen next there. Such scenarios are being thought about and worried about in the diaspora. I hear these concerns in Armenia as well.

We can draw some parallels between the current situation in Armenia with similar developments after 1918.

And we don't know what the solution is. One thing is clear: Armenians have no leverage. Many hope that something favorable for Armenia will happen in the international field, and there will be a change. For this reason, to a certain degree, it may be possible to delay the signing of settlement treaties with Azerbaijan until changes occur in the Russian-Ukrainian war or in the relations between our neighbors in the region.

American Soldiers Will Never Come to Armenia

Although we live in America, we are not sure whether the West or the US can play a decisive role in the Caucasus. America's main goal is not to morally support Armenia, but to reduce Russia's influence in this region.

If Armenia shifts its allegiances fully from Russia to the West, the US will be very happy about it, but if Armenia enters the Western world, Turkey and Azerbaijan will have a much higher status in that world, because the interests of US foreign policy more often coincide with those of that duo.

There is an Armenian community in the US that can raise a voice of protest, but ultimately it cannot shift American policy. Armenia is a small, poor country that does not have much to give, and therefore, is not in much of a position to demand.

Something can be done diplomatically, but it is not realistic that America will come and save Armenia if Azerbaijan or Turkey attack. At best, the US will say that Azerbaijan attacked Armenia and something very bad happened, but American soldiers will not come here.

Becoming Overtly Anti-Russian Is Dangerous

Today Russia's interests are very different from before and are not favorable for Armenia. While Russia might still do some positive things for Armenia, it can threaten it if Armenia takes a position diametrically opposed to it.

Armenia is in a very bad situation today, and it should try to get support from somewhere, but it should also act very cautiously, and not be overtly anti-Russian. It's a very difficult path to follow — how far you can go, while buying time and not falling down, is unknown.

In Boston, we organized a demonstration in front of the State House in support of Artsakh. It is clear that Artsakh will endure the blockade, but in the end, this situation cannot continue for long. Azerbaijan's goal is clear: by killing or making life miserable, to depopulate Artsakh and thus achieve its goal of ethnic cleansing [territory without the troublesome Armenian populace].

This is politics. No country will do more than issue statements and appeals, let alone apply sanctions against

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COMMENTARY

Diversification of Armenian Security and Defense Policy and The Role of India

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

The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war has significantly changed the balance of power in the South Caucasus, increasing the role and influence of Turkey. The direct involvement of Turkey in the war and the lack of action by Russia to prevent this NATO member state from challenging the Russian zone of influence in the post-Soviet space crushed the basics of the Armenian foreign and security policy. Since the end of the first Nagorno Karabakh war in 1994, Armenian military doctrine has been based on the core belief that Russia will not allow direct Turkish involvement in a new war against Armenia. Thus, Armenia prepared itself for the war with Azerbaijan while outsourcing to Russia the deterrence of Turkey. Meanwhile, this mindset also resulted in a Russia-focused defense and security policy. Armenia was buying weapons mainly from Russia, almost all Armenian officers were studying in Russian military universities, and the structure and operating mode of the Armenian army was solely based on the Russian model. Armenia developed limited defense cooperation with other nations, including the US, Greece, and Poland, and signed its first Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO in 2005. However, these sporadic interactions did not change the basics of Russia-focused foreign and military policy.

The Armenian political and military leadership failed to assess the transformation of the global and regional order, including the changing nature of Russia – Turkey relations, especially after the 2016 failed military coup. Thus, the 2020 war was a wake-up call for Armenia, indicating that the country needs diversification in its defense and security policy. The growing assertiveness of Azerbaijan, including direct aggressions against Armenia in May, November 2021, and September 2022, military actions against the self-proclaimed Nagorno Karabakh Republic in March and August 2022, the blockade of the Lachin corridor, and permanent threats of new escalations against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, have amplified the necessity of quick modernization of the Armenian army. Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine and the complete rupture of Russia – West relations created significant complications for Armenia in its quest for defense and

security policy diversification. As Armenia continues its strategic alliance with Russia and the Russian peacekeepers deployed in Nagorno Karabakh are the only guarantee preventing large-scale atrocities against local Armenians, the boost in defense and security cooperation with the West may create tensions in Armenia – Russia relations. The same is also valid for the West. For many Western countries, defense cooperation, especially the supplies of modern weapons to the CSTO member and Russian ally countries, is an option which is off the table.

Another option for Armenia could be Iran. Tehran is concerned about growing Azerbaijan – Israel defense cooperation and is clearly against Azerbaijan’s vision of creating a “Zangezur corridor.” In recent months Iran sent clear signals to Azerbaijan that it would not tolerate the change of borders in the region and expressed its willingness to expand its cooperation with Armenia. However, the growing Russia – Iran cooperation, including the alleged supplies of Iranian drones to Russia, which the Kremlin uses against Ukraine, and the impasse in the negotiations to restore the Iranian nuclear deal have transformed Iran into another pariah state for the West. The US and other Western countries accepted the expansion of economic cooperation between Armenia and Iran, including the launch of Iran – the Armenia gas pipeline. However, defense cooperation with Iran, joint military drills, and supplies of Iranian weapons to Armenia will trigger a backlash from the West.

Meanwhile, the growing threat of new aggression by Azerbaijan has made the modernization of the Armenian army urgent. Russia can only partially satisfy Armenian demands, while expanding defense cooperation with the West or Iran may create complications. In the current environment, India appears as a natural partner for Armenia in its efforts to diversify its defense and security policy. Armenia and India enjoy historically friendly relations. The establishment of the Azerbaijan – Turkey – Pakistan partnership and the possibility to connect India with Europe via Iran, Armenia, Georgia, and the Black Sea have added geopolitical and geo-economic dimensions to the bilateral relations. Since the first-ever visit of the Indian minister of external affairs to Armenia in October 2021, bilateral relations started to develop quickly, and in 2022 several arm purchase deals were made, including Pinaka rocket launchers and Marg 155/39 self-propelled howitzers. India pursues a balanced foreign policy amidst the Russia – West confrontation. It did not join anti-Russian sanctions and significantly increased the purchase of Russian oil while simultaneously fostering strategic partnership with the US within QUAD and I2U2 initiatives. Thus, increased defense and security cooperation of Armenia with India is less contentious for the West and Russia while allowing Armenia to push forward its modernization of armed forces. In this context, Armenia and India should also look to other opportunities, including joint peacekeepers drills and cooperation in defense education and strategic planning.

(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.)

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Azerbaijan. If Azerbaijan wants to occupy the south of Armenia and create a new border with Iran on that side, maybe Iran will not allow it and intervene, but only to protect its own interests, not acting for the sake of Armenia. The issue of the Berdzor Corridor does not concern Iran much. It is interested in preventing a “Zangezur Corridor.” Iran works to solve its vital issues, just like the Americans.

Why should the US impose sanctions against Azerbaijan? It is not in its interests at present. America has plans to help Armenia, but it has bigger plans for Azerbaijan. Aid programs for the latter should have been suspended due to Azerbaijan’s behavior towards Armenia and Artsakh, but no program has been interrupted, right?

If the Russian soldiers who are there in Artsakh (and Armenia) cannot resolve the current problems, what will the Americans do from America. How will they help the people of Artsakh or Armenia? I think that if the Russian soldiers leave here, American soldiers will not come to replace them. What happened in Georgia? Georgia took an anti-Russian position and turned its face towards America. What happened as a result? Georgia lost territories, and America did not help it at all physically. The US can help Armenia economically, but it will not provide military support. How much will it even take advantage of Turkey’s weakened state to put pressure on that country to reconcile with Armenia?

Artsakh and Cilicia appear to be in the same situation. The Armenians of Cilicia

returned to their homes in 1919, and then they were expelled in a few years, with several tens of thousands massacred in the process. Like the Cilician Armenians, the natives of Artsakh are connected to their land and some will refuse to leave and even fight. But sometimes there are unexpected changes in politics.

Until then, along with diplomacy, Armenians must prepare in many ways, rearming and strengthening ourselves.

Until Armenia Helps Itself, No One Will Help It

During the 44-day war, a large amount of money was sent from the US. To this date, we do not know what that money was spent on. The Tekeyan Cultural Association, for example, collected and sent more than \$100,000. This inspires mistrust in the diaspora and the suspicion that our funds were not used properly.

If Armenia cannot organize itself, stand up, and defend itself, then it should not wait for someone to protect it. Only by taking certain definite steps can one expect help from others.

The decisions of international courts will not be implemented if Armenia cannot make its voice heard, and if there is no consistent follow-up.

No matter how defeated and weakened Armenia is, it should be able to make Azerbaijan understand that not everything is permitted, and in particular that the sovereign territory of Armenia remains the sovereign territory of Armenia. If Azerbaijan can present its maps, Armenia can also

bring its own maps.

The diaspora understands that it cannot do without Armenia. We also feel and understand that Armenia’s very existence is at stake. The diaspora is nourished by the

motherland. If that nourishment disappears, only the name will remain of the Armenian diaspora.

(Original interview conducted by Nair Yan)

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.



THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
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COMMENTARY

International Community Miserably Failed Lachin Blockade Litmus Test

By Dr. Arshavir Gundjian C.M.

It may be an understatement to say that the Armenian world is currently overwhelmed by the daily devel-opments at the level of an existential crisis in Artsakh and Armenia. Armenians have been in a heightened state of turmoil ever since the infamous 44-Day War of Artsakh in 2020.

Their anxiety stems from the search for solutions to innumerable existential issues. Previously, they had been living for almost three decades in an unjustified and irresponsible bliss of thinking that they had not much to worry about their territorial integrity. The disastrous end of the war was a painful wakeup call for the entire nation, which includes certainly a highly dispersed, oversized diaspora.

Since the ill-fated ceasefire agreement of November 9, 2020, nearly three years have passed. Almost no opportunity has been given to the diaspora, to become seriously involved in the crises, while the authori-ties in Armenia, together with their Artsakh counterparts, have been struggling with, and literally dancing around, innumerable diplomatic initiatives and international meetings. There have been almost contradicto-ry attempts for creating new alliances, and signing or promising to sign, new peace agreements, in the hope of giving Armenia and Artsakh some kind of protection from the insatiable and openly aggressive appetite of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. He seems to want to simply invade anything that still bears any trace of the Armenian national identity.

The fact is that all the traditional political and diplomatic understandings and expectations that historically Armenians had nurtured and relied on for decades or even centuries have suddenly become void, based on the realpolitik of the “new world conditions.” Thus, Armenia has had to question the value or efficiency of its traditional alliances based in the East, and take unprecedented steps towards opening itself to the West. The latter in turn has shown, at least on the surface, an unprecedented encouraging interest in the issues that Armenia faces, and to this day continues to give many signs of seemingly serious support, which Ar-menians certainly need to cling on until proven wrong.

Those who are at the helm of the Armenian political strategy and decision-making process have, at this point in time, the grave responsibility to evaluate the results achieved this far while following whatever strategy that they may have been following. A decision needs to be made to either continue the thus far seemingly failed strategy, or to make fundamental changes.

Such a review needs to adopt a measuring stick or a fundamental test that will serve to render the evalua-tion process free from emotional and romantic predetermined positions. The result of this factual evaluation must then be used as a guide to reorient and adopt new strategies and perhaps even a new decision-making process.

The purpose of this article is to propose that the litmus test to evaluate the currently implemented Armeni-an strategy, assuming that there indeed was a consistent one being followed, is the Lachin corridor block-ade issue, including all the attempts that have been made at all levels to achieve its resolution, and its sta-tus at this point, more than 100 days since its start in December 2022.

The Lachin corridor crisis is a nonpolitical, purely humanitarian crisis, where Armenians would have ex-pected swift and effective intervention. Beyond condemning unconditionally the Azerbaijani brutal action, international action would in addition have forced the full opening of the corridor within a matter of a few days at the most.

The sad reality is quite the opposite. The fact is that international political and humanitarian organizations at all levels are all fully aware of the criminal Azerbaijani action. Armenia submitted the ongoing crisis to the judgement of the International Court of Justice, where some fifteen nation representatives have prose-cuted the case at length and reached a unanimous verdict of clear condemnation of the Azerbaijani action, and demanded, as officially as it can be, the immediate opening of the corridor for free and unimpeded pas-sage in both directions. The European Parliament itself has officially urged Azerbaijan to do the same. In addition to all this, the representatives of the US and France, both permanent members of the UN Security Council, have condemned Aliyev and demanded that he put an immediate end to his illegal blockade. Dif-ferent kinds of international observers have been dispatched to the crisis region and they all have witnessed the ongoing unjustified humanitarian drama.

Despite all of the above, the corridor still remains shamelessly blocked by Azerbaijanis under the watch of the evidently helpless yet mighty Russian peacekeepers. As a result, the humanitarian crisis at all levels in Artsakh continues now after almost four months. To add insult to injury, Aliyev remains not only

com-pletely defiant towards all the above, but goes even further to shamelessly qualify the present international-ly recognized territory of the Republic of Armenia, a full member of the UN itself, as a Western Azerbaijan territory.

Aliyev’s behavior is quite openly that of an international mafia boss. The more Armenia tries to stick to a “policy of peace and appeasement,” at the cost of even remaining ambiguous concerning guarantees for Artsakh’s Armenian character, autonomy and security, the more belligerent become Aliyev’s open and ag-gressive declarations about his aim to even remove Armenians altogether from the map!

Thus, there is hardly any need for a debate to decide that the litmus test to evaluate the strategy followed thus far by the authorities of Armenia and Artsakh and the related effectiveness of the international commu-nity to protect us from the Azerbaijani mafioso Aliyev, shows they have simply failed completely and mis-erably.

As a result, Armenia’s attitude and language used in its rhetoric towards Azerbaijan and Aliyev, during all further international communications and any so-called staged negotiations, must be fundamentally changed.

Any ill-conceived expectation that an attitude of appeasement or accommodation towards Azerbaijan and Aliyev can moderate the latter’s aggressiveness and presumably prevent a new war of invasion of Armenian territories must be put aside. It must be clear to all that Aliyev and Azerbaijan are actually preparing them-selves every day a bit more to invade Artsakh and Armenia in order to finish off the job that was simply interrupted in November 2020. Lately, they have been testing the resolve of anyone, be it from the East or the West, to come to the “rescue of the Armenians.” They have fully satisfied themselves that in reaction to their new aggression, voices may be raised from various quarters, but at the end, unless Armenians are capable to defend themselves, no one else will raise a finger or the barrel of a gun to help them in any shape or form.

Thus, following this infallible litmus test, Armenians, just for show, certainly ought to continue their mul-tipronged diplomatic maneuvers with the East, the West, the South and the North. However, simultaneous-ly they must resolutely adopt the following lines of action.

1. Armenia must relentlessly and unceasingly develop its self-defense and combat readiness, be it in terms of acquisition or manufacture of the most effective modern arms, as well as in terms of a well-trained army that may include its entire adult male and female population. This would be exactly what any other self-respecting nation such as Israel would have done.

2. Armenia must henceforth use clear language to relentlessly defend in any and all international forums its historic and territorial rights, and debunk all the distortions of historic facts on which Azerbaijan spends enormous means and funds to inundate the media and the world opinion. Most specifically, Artsakh and Armenia must refresh the historic realities about Artsakh as an Armenian land, part of its multimillennial history, way before Azerbaijan even existed on the map barely a century ago. Artsakh’s legitimate declara-tion of its independence on December 10, 1991 must be clearly brought back into the political limelight, and Armenia must clearly recognize the independent republic of Artsakh. Furthermore all resources of Ar-menias, Artsakh and the widespread diaspora must be mobilized in order to educate the world about the his-toric realities of Artsakh, and hence stage a war of information to neutralize the Azerbaijani war of disin-formation.

3. Armenia, as a fully independent nation, must use the platform it occupies in the UN to instantly inform the world every time Aliyev repeats its delirious statements about Armenia and Yerevan “being part of Western Azerbaijan.”

The above proposal for a fundamental change in the posture of Armenians on the international political scene is realistic and essential but first a clear national resolve must be reached to escape the full annihila-tion of our nation. Otherwise, this is guaranteed to take place, in case the current meek policy of appease-ment continues.

Pashinyan and the current authorities in Armenia are urged to make this clear correction in the orientation of their current failed policy. Simultaneously, they are also urged to create an atmosphere of political inclu-siveness in order to enrich their ranks with all the politically experienced and constructive elements that exist in Armenia. They also need to make a genuine effort to reach out and tap the resourceful, yet unor-ganized enormous diaspora.

If the current authorities are unable to meet such challenge, for whatever reason, they should be requested to simply retire and allow more courageous elements to carry out this difficult yet existential enormous strug-gle for the survival of our nation.



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Ottoman Parliament and Senate in 1918 Acknowledged ‘The Armenian Massacres’

I wrote an article in January 2016, titled: “Turkey was first country to recognize the Armenian Genocide in 1918.” However, most people are still unaware that ‘the Armenian Massacres’ were discussed and acknowledged by the Ottoman Parliament and Senate in 1918.

More recently, two Armenian members of the Turkish Parliament, Selina Dogan and Garo Paylan, raised the issue of the Armenian Genocide in the Parliament on January 14, 2016. Earlier, in November 2014, Parliament member Sebahat Tuncel submitted a resolution on the Armenian Genocide to the Turkish Parliament, asking Erdogan to issue an apology, declare April 24 as an official Day of Mourning, make public the documents in the Turkish archives about this mass crime, and pay material and moral restitution to the descendants of the victims. The proposed resolution was ignored by the Turkish Parliament.

Since writing my 2016 article, I came across a detailed analysis written by Prof. Ayhan Aktar in the History Workshop Journal, titled: “Debating the Armenian Massacres in the Last Ottoman Parliament, November – December 1918.” That debate took place following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in WWI and occupation of Constantinople (Istanbul) by the victorious allied countries.

In the last two months of 1918, the Ottoman Parliament discussed over several days the Armenian Genocide, described at the time as massacres. A motion was presented which stated: “A population of 1 million people guilty of nothing except belonging to the Armenian nation were massacred and exterminated, including even women and children.” In response, Interior Minister Ali Fethi Okyar declared: “It is the intention of the government to cure every single injustice done up until now, as far as the means allow, to make possible the return to their homes of those sent into exile, and to compensate for their material loss as far as possible.... Yes, Gentlemen, I also say that our officials butchered many Armenians, including women and children and that their properties were plundered.”

A Parliamentary Investigative Committee was set up to collect all relevant documents showing the actions of those responsible for the ‘Armenian deportations and massacres.’ The evidence was turned over to the Turkish Military Tribunal, and those found guilty were hanged or given lengthy prison sentences.

Here are some excerpts from Aktar’s article: “Discussion of the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Parliament began with motions calling the Union and Progress governments to account. When on November 4, 1918 the Ottoman Parliament convened in Istanbul the political attempts to find the perpetrators started with the first motion, tabled by Baghdad-Divaniye Deputy Fuat Bey a few days earlier. This demanded that members of the Sait Halim Pasha and Talaat Pasha cabinets be tried by the High Court.... Clause 10 [of

the motion] made direct reference to the Armenian deportations and to the Teshkilat-i Mahsusa (the Special Organization), an irregular military force organized by the CUP [Committee of Union and Progress] leadership that had carried out deportations and massacres.”

Some of the parliamentarians who belonged to the old guard of Unionists, which were the majority in the parliament, without denying the Armenian massacres, made excuses similar to today’s Turkish Government, stating that Turks were also killed during this period.

Six Armenian deputies of the parliament submitted a motion demanding that “the deportation decision of May 27, 1915 and the decree of September 27, 1915 concerning expropriation of abandoned properties and real estate should be revoked, and that those deported from their native land be permitted to return. It further asserted that the administrative measures facilitating the sharing out among local notables of properties which had belonged to deported Armenians went absolutely against the spirit of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876.”

In response to accusations that some Armenians on the Eastern front had rebelled against the Ottoman Empire, Armenian Deputy Matyos Nalbandian responded: Even if some Armenians had committed illegal acts, does that justify “the removal and extermination of all Armenians” and “the confiscation and plunder of their properties?” Nalbandian also made a distinction between the Turks killed at the warfront and the innocent Armenian civilians who were massacred.

A similar discussion took place in the Ottoman Senate on Nov. 21, 1918. Ahmet Riza Bey made a motion demanding that “the atrocities committed under the name of deportation’ be investigated; that the negative impact throughout the country be determined; and that those involved in these affairs be prosecuted.”

Former Governor and Minister of Interior, Reshit Akif Pasha, stated that his investigation indicated that “these orders of deportation had been given by the well-known Minister of Interior [Talaat Pasha] and officially communicated to [governors in] the provinces.”

On December 9, 1918, Minister of Justice Haydar Molla told the Ottoman Senate that the crimes against Armenians were committed by state officials, politicians and ordinary Turks.

Importantly, none of the deputies, regardless of their party affiliation or background, denied the occurrence of the deportation and massacres of Armenians.

On December 21, 1918, the Ottoman Parliament was dissolved by Mehmed Vahdettin, the last Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. “When the Parliament finally reconvened with the newly-elected deputies on January 12, 1920, it was dominated by supporters of the resistance movement which had developed in Anatolia, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Atatürk),” wrote Aktar.

The Turkish Military Tribunals in 1919–20 tried and sentenced to death in absentia the masterminds of the Armenian massacres, Enver, Djemal and Talaat, the Young Turk leaders who had fled the country.

Aligning Interests with Global Players

Part 1: The Case of Armenia-Iran

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

I have had the chance to point out many times in my previous articles that the only opportunity for Armenia in this difficult period in its history is to align its interests with those states that attach fundamental importance to our region. In this series of articles, my goal will be to present the opportunities and challenges that Armenia is facing today and the solutions which could be of fundamental importance for our future. Let’s not forget that the only positive opportunity at present is to form a combat-ready army and acquire self-defense weapons, as well as the development of a proactive, balanced and professional foreign policy.

In this context, I will first address Iran, a friendly and neighboring country to Armenia, which has serious problems with the West, particularly the USA, and has been under sanctions for decades. Naturally, under such conditions, the question arises as to how far it is possible to cooperate with Iran without spoiling relations with the US. The answer to this question is clear. Such an oppor-

tunity for cooperation definitely exists.

First of all, it should be taken into account that, to Washington’s credit, the US has never demanded that Armenia completely stop trade, cooperation and all contact with Iran. To Tehran’s credit, Iran has never confronted Armenia with such a dilemma either. This means that both states understand Armenia’s limited capabilities to cooperate in the region, taking into account the Turkish and Azerbaijani aggressive approach towards Armenia and the blockade implemented since the independence of Armenia.

In fact, the USA has never imposed sanctions against Armenian organizations for cooperation with Iran. While Iranian air companies and banks operating in Armenia have come under sanctions, this was not on the grounds of operating in Armenia, but on the basis of being Iranian.

Now let’s turn to the main questions. What common interests do Armenia and Iran have? First of all, let’s note that Armenia has two windows to the outside world, Georgia and Iran. Secondly, Iran is the only country through whose territory Armenia has the opportunity to import weapons and ammunition, considering that Georgia has declared neutrality in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and has closed its airspace to military planes that may come from Russia.

It is known that Armenia acquires weapons and ammunition mainly from Russia, and its delivery to Armenia can only take place through Iran, taking into account the geographical and regional realities. In fact, Armenia used to buy about 90 percent of weapons from Russia simply because it was two times less expensive than all alternatives.

Can Armenia get what it needs from Iran? This is an extremely important and delicate question. One might think that if Armenia acquires weapons (such as drones or rockets) from Iran, it will come under American sanctions, because the acquisition of weapons from Iran could lead to this point.

At the same time, if Armenia acquires weapons from Russia, it could also lead to the same results, because Russia is now under even more sanctions than Iran. The question arises as to how Armenia can organize in self-defense, if it finds itself in such a situation.

The counterargument may arise that Armenia can acquire weapons from the West, but the import of these weapons to Armenia may be physically problematic, because it will not be possible to do this via Georgia, Iran, Azerbaijan or Turkey. It turns out that Armenia has no possibility of self-defense and this may lead to a second genocide of Armenians. This is where the idea comes in that the lack of alternatives needs to be discussed openly and directly with Washington, where perceptions might be shaped in the light of these realities.

In addition to the aforementioned economic aspects of cooperation, the second interest Armenia has in common with Iran is the issue of security of the Syunik region of Armenia that borders Iran. Syunik is extremely important for Iran and Tehran cannot allow the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem to cut Syunik from Armenia, which would mean the loss of Iran’s external border in favor of Turkey. Moreover, for Iran, the Armenian-Iranian border is the only external land border between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union, with which Tehran seeks cooperation. So, the territorial integrity of Armenia is really a red line for Tehran, as has been pointed out many times. Let’s not forget that Iran is considered a counterbalancing power against Turkey with all its consequences.

(Suren Sargsyan is an expert on US foreign policy, researcher and author. He is a graduate of Yerevan State University, American University of Armenia and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Suren Sargsyan is a founder of the Armenian Center for American Studies, a research center based in Yerevan.)



New Anti-Armenian Flyers Posted in Glendale

GLENDALÉ (Fox 11 LA) — Anti-Armenian flyers, promoting the completion of the Armenian Genocide, were spotted in Glendale Friday, March 31.

The flyers were posted on light poles near St. Mary’s Armenian Apostolic Church and other areas of the city. Glendale police say a passerby saw the disturbing flyers and called police to report it.

“As mayor of Glendale, I’m very disturbed and upset that speech inciting violence against Armenians has visited our city by way of individuals vandalizing our city with hate-filled flyers,” Mayor Ardy Kassakhian said in a statement. “Our police are taking this issue seriously and will be investigating this as a hate crime. I speak for our residents and our council when I say that Glendale is not a place for hate speech against Armenians or any other group.”

The flyer read “NEVER AGAIN does not apply to GOYIM (Armenia) Israel FULLY SUPPORTS our Azeri-Turk Brothers to complete Armenian Genocide.”

Police are canvassing the area and looking at surveillance video to see who is responsible.

“So far we do have a surveillance footage of a subject, unfortunately unidentifiable, but he is dressed in all black, carrying a satchel with what appears to be more flyers in his satchel,” said police captain Robert William. Police said they found at least 11 flyers posted throughout the city Friday morning.

Similar anti-Armenian flyers were posted in Beverly Hills in January.

The Armenian National Committee Glendale Chapter condemned the hate incident and said the incident in Glendale and Beverly Hills showcases a troubling trend of anti-Armenian sentiment and rise in hate crimes.

“As an organization dedicated to the well-being and advancement of the Armenian-American community, we are deeply disturbed by these hateful acts, and we call on local authorities to thoroughly investigate these incidents and hold the perpetrators accountable,” the ANCA wrote in a post online.

In September 2020, Azerbaijan launched a full scale war on the Republic of Artsakh (also known as Nagorno-Karabakh). Art-



sakh is occupied by indigenous Armenians and has been under a blockade by Azerbaijan for over 100 days. The Lachin Corridor has been closed by Azerbaijan since December 12, limiting Artsakh’s access to food and medical care. During the blockade, Azerbaijan cut off power to Artsakh, leaving residents without heat in the freez-

David Phillips, Robert Avetisyan To Headline Times Square Demonstration

HEADLINERS, from page 1
Day School and the Brooklyn Armenian School.

In conjunction with the Times Square Commemoration, the Knights and Daughters of Vartan will sponsor its annual global student essay contest that gives Armenian youth the opportunity to express their voices and concerns regarding genocide awareness and human rights. Winners will be announced at the Commemoration and selections from each essay will be read.

The momentous Armenian Genocide Commemoration will reinforce the memory of the first genocide of the 20th century that claimed the lives of 1.5 million Armenian martyrs by the Young Turk Party of the Ottoman Empire. Thanks to the overwhelming support by Members of Congress, both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate unequivocally stated U.S. affirmation of the Armenian Genocide in 2019, preceding President Joe Biden’s acknowledgement on April 24, 2021.

The Armenian Diaspora will continue its vigorous efforts to remember, to honor, and to educate the world about this devastating chapter in world history that continues to be denied today by the Turkish government, and will not rest until Turkey recognizes the Armenian Genocide.

“As the next generation of Armenian Americans, we strive to continue bringing awareness to the Armenian Genocide here in the U.S., while ensuring the strength and vitality of the Armenian people,” said Co-Chairs Haig Gulian and Christopher Artun. “We appreciate the ongoing support from our diasporan communities to hold our annual Armenian Genocide Commemoration year after year in such an influential location as Times Square, in New York City. We look forward to gathering together once again to honor our ancestors and utilize our collective efforts towards global recognition.”

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 Committee of America, Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, Tekeyan Cultural Association, Armenian National Council of America, 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 Evangelical Union, Armenian Catholic Eparchy, Armenian Network of Greater New York, Homenetmen Scouts of NY & NJ, Armenian Youth Federation, and national Armenian youth organizations.

The Armenian Radio Hour of New Jersey and Knights of Vartan will livestream the event.

