

Armenia's President Khachaturyan Aims to Alleviate Domestic Tensions

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — The position of president of the Republic of Armenia has largely been a ceremonial one after 2018, when the prime minister and National Assembly became the main wielders of power as the result of a change in the Armenian Constitution. Nevertheless, the president is the head of state and obliged to uphold compliance with the Constitution, as guarantor of the latter. The current president, 64-year-old Vahagn Khachaturyan, assumed office on March 13, 2022. He provided some insights into his post and his work during a May 18 interview.

The first president to hold office in the new parliamentary governmental system, Armen Sarkissian, resigned in January 2022, claiming that the constitution did not give him enough powers. During his presidency, he called for increasing the powers of his office, and after the 2020 Karabakh war pushed for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's resignation and the creation of a government of national accord. However, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) discovered Sarkissian had dual citizenship a few years before becoming president, which contradicts the stipulations of the Constitution. Sarkissian resigned about a month after the OCCRP sent him a letter asking about this, leading to speculation that this may have been the immediate spur.

Foreign Relations

Unlike his predecessor, Khachaturyan declared that he is in harmony with the work of the current government headed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and that in general, the president as the representative of the Armenian republic must not express views contrary to that of

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PM Pashinyan Attends Erdogan's Inauguration



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu welcomes Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and EU chief Charles Michel meet in Chisinau, June 1, 2023.

EU Hosts Another Aliyev-Pashinyan Meeting

YEREVAN (Azatutyun/Politico) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met on Thursday, June 1, for the third time in less than three weeks for fresh peace talks mediated by the European Union.

They reported no concrete agreements following the meeting held on the sidelines of a European summit in Moldova's capital Chisinau.

Aliyev and Pashinyan were joined by EU chief Charles Michel, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Michel said they focused on an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty as well as "the security and rights" of Nagorno-Karabakh's population, the restoration of trans-

port links between the two South Caucasus nations and delimitation of their long border. He did not say whether the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders narrowed their differences on these issues.

"This meeting has been a good preparation for the next meeting," Michel told reporters after the talks that lasted for about 90 minutes. "It will take place in Brussels on July 21."

"It means that we are working hard and we intend to support all the positive efforts in the direction of normalization of the relations," he said, adding that the EU "will do everything" to facilitate the conflict's resolution.

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Tekeyan Takes VEM Ensemble to Detroit, Boston and Montreal

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Once again, the VEM Ensemble of the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music was welcomed by hundreds of listeners in Detroit, Montreal and Boston this May in its second North American tour organized by the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA).

Each stop included community outreach sessions at local Armenian schools as well as full concerts held with local cosponsoring institutions and organizations. Dr. Melissa Bilal, associate director of the UCLA Armenian Music Program, also gave



Prof. Movses Pogossian at Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Cambridge



VEM at the AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School of Southfield, MI

lectures in Detroit and Boston in conjunction with the VEM performances.

In its current configuration as a string quartet, the VEM members include Prof. Movses Pogossian on violin, master's student Ela Kodzas on violin, master's student Damon Zavala on viola, and UCLA alumnus

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

US to Host Fresh Armenia-Azerbaijan Talks

YEREVAN (Panorama.am)

— The United States looks forward to hosting a new round of peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Washington later this month, U.S. Department of State spokesman Vedant Patel said on Monday, June 5.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov, are expected to start a new round of marathon talks in Washington on June 12.

“We look forward to hosting another round of talks in Washington later this month as the parties continue to pursue a peaceful future for the South Caucasus region,” he told a press briefing.

“As you’ve heard me say before, direct dialogue is key to resolving issues and reaching a durable and dignified peace. The U.S. is pleased that talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan are proceeding in different venues, including the recent meeting of leaders as well. But I don’t have anything else to offer on that,” Patel added.

\$70 Million Metallurgical Plant under Construction in Armenia

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net)

— A major Armenian-American metallurgical plant with \$70 million investment is under construction in the town of Yeraskh, Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan said on social media on Saturday, June 3.

“The plant is a 30-meter-high structure with an area of 16,500 square meters, where the annual output will be 180,000 tons,” Kerobyan said.

“Two hundred workers are already employed [in the plant], and once it is launch the number of workers will be 1000,” he added.

Sotk Gold Mine Operations Halted Partially Because of Azeri Shootings, Governor Says

YEREVAN (Panorama.am)

— Operations at the Sotk gold mine in Armenia’s Gegharkunik Province have been halted partially because of cross-border fire from nearby Azerbaijani army positions, Gegharkunik Governor Karen Sargsyan said on June 6.

“The Sotk open-pit operations have recently been stopped due to safety concerns, but the underground mining continues there. The Sotk mine is working partially,” he told reporters.

The governor could not specify the number of the mine employees put on unpaid leave, but said some of them were expected to retire soon.

“Discussions regarding the other workers continue. There are two-three options for their re-employment. We are due to meet soon to discuss them,” he said.

Armenia’s President Khachaturyan Aims to Alleviate Domestic Tensions

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the rest of the government on foreign relations. He said, “it must be thus for somebody in my position. A situation existed in the past, where different discussions took place in this [presidential] building, the governmental building and the foreign ministry building, which caused great damage to the Republic of Armenia...I am that man who carries out the state foreign policy accepted by the government of the Republic of Armenia.”

More specifically, he said he participates in various foreign negotiations in agreement with the Armenian foreign and prime ministers, for which he receives the necessary authorization from the latter officials, as per the current state constitution. As a representative of the state, he said, “I have the possibility to speak on particular issues, to speak or meet with individuals, to transmit or deliver those approaches, those messages that we wish to deliver.”

His role appears wide-ranging. He said, “Let me tell you, the president of the republic and this institution, with its international contacts, has fairly extensive possibilities to convey all those concerns which exist connected with our country, with Mountainous Karabakh, with the defense of our borders, and, in general, with the domestic and foreign policy of Armenia.”

Artsakh

“I am among those people and a member of the political team who always insisted that the Karabakh question should have been solved as soon as possible. Mutual concessions are always in international politics the condition that leads issues to solutions. If we are not ready for mutual concessions, we must be ready for worse results,” Khachaturyan declared.

He felt Armenians made a big mistake, awaiting a miracle for 20 plus years: “We did not want to confront reality. This is one of the greatest errors. In our imagination, we are always the most correct and always have been the most correct, and the others are all guilty. This has always been true in our history, not just now.” Whoever raised his voice to point out weaknesses in the army was accused of being a traitor.

As far as the current blockade of Karabakh is concerned, Khachaturyan said, “We must find international partisans, fellow thinkers, who must place pressure on Azerbaijan and through the results of that pressure, we will reach our goal. Till now, sadly, that pressure has been insufficient... The matter lies in how much the international community, including Russia, is ready to place pressure on Azerbaijan, so that free travel through the Lachin corridor is restored...If it is not ready, then we must understand what we are to do. Are we going to go to extremes, or try to find another way to solve the matter?”

Khachaturyan, as noted above, is in consensus with the Pashinyan government on most issues, and the Karabakh issue is not an exception. That means apparently trying to improve conditions for Karabakh’s Armenians while accepting Karabakh under duress as part of Azerbaijan after the 2020 war. Khachaturyan said, “We have placed two important factors on the agenda for our compatriots of Mountainous Karabakh: the right to live and security. This is possible for all sides. ... We say to them in that case, let us secure the realization of this through an international presence. That can be a country, that can be a group of countries, or an international organization, which guar-

antees that Azerbaijan is that state where 120,000 of our compatriots in Karabakh can realize their rights and live safely. We are in that matter. We are trying to solve this issue.”

Domestic Tensions

The defeat of the 2020 war has led to great domestic turmoil in Armenia. “Today,” Khachaturyan said, “tension, polarization impede our progress. In reality, this comes from two things – there are objective conditions which no one can deny. This was conditioned by the 2020 44-day war. What is objective here is that we were defeated, and, most importantly, we had human losses...and we cannot give full explanations about those losses. A part of the public does not accept them. It unconditionally wants to see a responsible party, and see that responsible party punished.”

Khachaturyan stated, “We have no question of hiding anything. Why did it take place that way? We all must be able to know truly and understand whether it could have been avoided.” He added that the prime minister is willing to this end to be interrogated on this topic by a commission established by the National Assembly.

He pointed out that in 2021, when there was tension after the war, the ruling party held new elections to offer a solution. However, the defeated political forces did not accept the result and still does not accept it. He said, “In civilized normal democratic countries, this is not acceptable. Though people have a rostrum in the form of the National Assembly, they are not using this rostrum and decide to use other platforms.”

In this circumstance, as president, Khachaturyan said, “I have that role [to try to bring together the factions], and must do it, though I have not succeeded until now. That too must be recorded, as a negative aspect ascribed to me. I myself am thinking. I want to find ways so that I can decrease the tension.”

One way is to speak with people and try to understand the goal or meaning of their positions, he said. Two situations are unacceptable to him and serve as obstacles in this. First is any attempt to seize power at all costs by the defeated political elements in the country. The second obstacle, he said, “for me to begin that discussion is the vocabulary used, and all those interpretations made about the regime and individuals, considering one an enemy, considering one a traitor, and expressing this with even worse words. I consider that we are all citizens of the Republic of Armenia, and all in this way have equal rights and responsibilities. We are not the ones to decide the question of being a traitor or not...If there is a legal issue, there are legal conventions. There is the understanding of a traitor to the state, for which there are serious punishments.”

The roots of the difficulties in sitting around a table and having civil discussions are cultural and profound. Khachaturyan declared: “This is our peculiarity. By not listening to each other, to answer, by raising voices to try to show the advantage, whereas these are all negative aspects.” He added, “This is a matter which we must solve through our kindergartens, our schools, all our educational, pedagogical processes. This is what we are lacking today, which as a result hinders us from talking to one another, discussing with one another, [and] listening to each other, which is the most important.”

Ultimately, people should understand, he said, “that we all are yoked to the same

task, which is to strengthen our statehood, to preserve our statehood.”

Early Political Involvement

Born in Sisian in the south of Armenia, Khachaturyan graduated from the Yerevan Institute of National Economy in 1980 as an economist. After serving in the Soviet army, he taught at the same institute for a decade, and also worked as an economist at the HrazdanMash (Hrazdan Instrumental Production) Enterprise until 1989, becoming head of the economic research laboratory.

Khachaturyan recalled that after public gatherings with ecological aims took place in the town of Abovyan (today in Kotayk Province) for several days in 1988, he had heard their continuation was going to take place in Yerevan. He said, “Like many others, when the February 1988 events began in Yerevan, when at the Opera Square (at that time it was not yet Liberty Square), we learned that gatherings were taking place... we young men, academics, decided that we were going to participate too. We were working in the Myasnikyan Public Library on our scholarly theses. We all in 1988 came to the square, and I always say that we have not gone home till now, as we never imagined that the Karabakhian struggle would last this long, but life turned out in that way.” He said they thought they were serving the general good, and at first believed that they could solve their problems within the framework of the Soviet Union.

In 1990, he was elected as one out of 181 representatives of the Yerevan City Council, and, he said, when the mayor resigned, in December 1992 he was elected to his post, which at that time was called chairman of the Executive Committee of the City Council. He continued in this post until 1996, and from 1996 to 1998 was an adviser to President Levon Ter-Petrosian, while serving as a deputy of the National Assembly from 1996 to 1999.

Privatization

The process of privatization of state property and the creation of market relations in the formerly Soviet Armenia began in the 1990s. Khachaturyan said that in general, nobody in any country has been satisfied with the results of privatization, as there are always people or organizations which receive more, while others receive less. “However,” he said, “the basic motivation was the creation of a new social order and a new class,” which would have the ability to work privately. What was unique about Armenia was that it began this process and came under a blockade due to the first Karabakh war.

As mayor, Khachaturyan was involved in privatization insofar as the city government had state property such as stores or houses. He said that it was decided that in Armenia, all structures in trade and services which used to belong to collectives would be given to the collectives, so in Yerevan, around 2,200 stores, restaurants and service places were given away. Furthermore, whoever was living in a residence would become its owner. All this was without any need for payments.

“I can say that there were no protests. Nobody said you took it from us. It was decided internally in the collectives what happened next,” Khachaturyan said. “It is something else whether a director in a collective or someone else was able to gain the shares of the works and turn into a 100 percent owner.”

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ARMENIA

Scholars Meet in Yerevan for Conference on Children and Genocide

YEREVAN — A conference of international scholars, “Children and Nation: Forceable Child Transfer and the Genocide Convention Through Historical and Contemporary Lenses” was hosted by the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute and Memorial (AGMI) in conjunction with the Canadian Museum of Human Rights and AGBU on May 12-14.

The conference was co-convened by Donna-Lee Frieze of the Centre for Contemporary Histories at Deakin University in Melbourne; Edita Gzoyan, deputy director of the AGMI, and Peter Balakian, Donald M and Constance H. Rebar Professor of the Humanities at Colgate Uni-

versity. Distinguished Holocaust Scholar Deborah Dwork, director of the Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity at CUNY Graduate Center, was the key note speaker. AGMI Director and scholar Dr. Harutyun Marutyan presided over the conference.

Scholars from Australia, Canada, Finland, Israel, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland and the United States presented papers on the theft and brutalization of children during and after episodes of genocide. Topics included Indigenous genocides of children in Canada, South Africa and Australia, forcible removal of Cambodian, Armenian and Spanish, and children in the Holocaust.



The scholars at the conference



The scholars at the Armenian Genocide Monument

The scholars also focused on legal understandings of article 2 (e) of the Genocide Convention and understanding the forcible removal of children through literary, testimonial, legal, anthropological, historical and philosophical frames.

Five years in the making, the conference was originally set for April 2020 but due to the global Covid-19 crisis, was postponed several times. The ethical importance of this issue and cohesion of the conference led the group to plan to continue their work together in future meetings.



Edita Gzoyan, Deputy Director of AGMI

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Large enterprises, on the other hand, were only privatized in general after the year 2000. Khachaturyan said that until 1998, it was only attempted to privatize 10 large enterprises as an experiment to see which model should be followed. For example, 25 percent of the shares of the enterprise could be given to the collective and the rest placed for sale by auction. A second way, privatization through investments, was not widespread in Armenia until some 10 years ago.

He noted that some problems could be witnessed in Yerevan, with many enterprises abandoned by their owners. No new investments can be made in them because legally they belong to a company or individual whose rights cannot be infringed, yet no legal mechanisms exist to change this situation.

Khachaturyan claimed that a system of oligarchy in Armenia only formed after 2002, with people in business becoming involved in politics. “The full significance of the 2018 Velvet Revolution,” he said, “was that it destroyed that system.” However, it also led to polarization, because the corrupt had to be deprived of their ill-gotten wealth and they resisted.

He said that Armenia did not have the potential to create as many ultra-rich people, multimillionaires and even billionaires, especially those connected to the government, as it has. Even millionaires in the army were found when the legal bodies began investigations, with nearly all the generals rich from sources outside their wages, Khachaturyan said. Such accumulated wealth is now used to attack the current government.

In Opposition

After Levon Ter-Petrosian resigned in 1998, Khachaturyan entered the ranks of the opposition, in which he was active for twenty years. In 2000, he became one of the founders of the Armat Democracy and Civil Society Development Center, along with other supporters of Ter-Petrosian, and

in 2006 was a founder of the Alternative Sociopolitical Initiative, a similar organization. He served as a member of the Armenian National Congress (ANC), a party led by Ter-Petrosian, from 2013 to 2022, and head of its economic committee. He led the ANC list in the 2013 Yerevan City Council elections.

During the March 1, 2008 protests after the presidential election lost by Ter-Petrosian, Khachaturyan said, “I was forced to hide. Some of my friends were killed or later arrested. It was by chance that I was not.”

By 2018, he had decided to return to academic work which he had stopped as a result of the 1988 movements. Khachaturyan said, “I was not a participant in the Velvet Revolution. I did not take to the streets with the youth.” However, he continued, “What took place in 2018 was very acceptable to me. My support of the 2018 events was through my lectures, analyses and economic academic work.”

While not directly involved with the 2018 movement, Khachaturyan declared that he knew its leader, Nikol Pashinyan, for several decades. They first met in 1993. “At that time, Mr. Pashinyan was a young journalist and I the mayor. He was reporting on our activities...and he did interviews of me. After 1995, we had closer relations. Later, we had joint political activities.” These included the aforementioned Armat and Alternative movements and the 2008 protests, but when Pashinyan formed his own new political force, Khachaturyan had chosen a different path.

As far as relations with the Civic Contract leaders today, Khachaturyan said, “I have not had concrete political differences with that team which today is the government, though we may have had ideological differences of some sort.”

From 2018-2020 Khachaturyan continued with his research, teaching and academic work. He taught at the Yerevan State University, and at Shushi’s university. He was invited to be a member of the board of

ArmEconBank from 2019 to 2021.

In August, 2021 he returned to government when he was appointed Minister of High-Tech Industry. As such, and as president now, Khachaturyan said, “I consider myself a representative of the liberal ideology...I try to realize my ideas in today’s government, in state programs, as much as is possible, because in the end, the government is responsible for the political line and its realization.”

The Office of the President

Khachaturyan said that currently there are 105 people working in the office of the president, while the annual budget of his office is roughly one billion drams (approximately \$2,597,000) or slightly greater. Some budget items are unchangeable and fixed by law, while others vary from year to year and are on demand. For example, this year the office wishes to renovate all their security systems and internal communications systems, which have become old, but next year this obviously will not be necessary. Similarly, renovation work has to be done on the physical offices periodically, especially on the older part of the presidential building which dates to 1958.

Last year, the entire budget allotted was not spent, primarily due to some vacant staff positions. Khachaturyan said that his office has asked the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs for assistance in finding specialists in the diaspora, and he appealed to legal specialists in the diaspora to apply directly if interested in working in his office.

While most positions in his office are civil service and thus protected there are a limited number of people with discretionary positions who are advisors or assistants for which a new leader has the possibility of changing. For example, there are around 2-4 such people with each minister, and somewhat more with the president. Khachaturyan said, “I assure you, I worked as a minister for 8 months and after that as the president of the country, and when I worked as a minister, even with the greatest desire, I could

not remove any civil servant from his post, and this never took place. I was only able to appoint assistants or advisers.”

He went on to remark that one of the greatest issues facing Armenia today was that of the system of justice, or courts. He said, “The public’s trust in the authorities is lacking, because generally the attitude towards the justice system is very negative. This is a situation coming from the past... The matter is that there are people in the operating legal system who have discredited their authority through their activities in the past.” Here he said there was much to do still.

While the judiciary is independent constitutionally, Khachaturyan as president of the republic has a certain involvement in the appointment of judges. When the Supreme Judicial Council, as an independent body, presents its candidates, Khachaturyan can over a span of three days either confirm them or send them back. If the same names are sent a second time, he either has to sign or they will be appointed by force of law.

To the Diaspora

Khachaturyan promised that he will come to visit the United States on an official visit one day and looks forward to meeting readers of the *Mirror-Spectator*. He concluded, “I am also thankful for the assistance and activities that you have always done from the very first days of the independence of the Republic of Armenia and continue to always do. My request – believe us, trust us, as the current authorities, and me as the representative of the government, president of the Republic of Armenia, that in reality we do everything for the strengthening of our statehood, to raise the prestige of our country, and through this to turn your goals into reality. So I wish you all success, achievements in personal life, and success in the work of the establishment of our statehood to all of us, so that we can in this grievous, difficult situation find solutions and emerge with the least losses. Success to all of us.”



Fallen Soldier's Mother Goes on Trial

By Naira Bulghadarian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A woman accused of attempting to “kidnap” Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s son was moved to house arrest and again taken into custody a few hours later as she went on trial on Monday, June 5.

Gayane Hakobyan, whose son Zhora Martirosyan, was killed during the 2020 war in Karabakh, was detained last month after an argument with Ashot Pashinyan.

Armenia’s Investigative Committee charged Hakobyan with tricking the young man into getting into her car and trying to drive him to the Yerablur Military Pantheon where her son was buried along with hundreds of other soldiers killed in action. Pashinyan Jr. jumped out of the car on their way to Yerablur.

Hakobyan’s arrest sparked angry protests in Yerevan attended by several dozen other relatives of fallen soldiers and hundreds of their sympathizers. Nikol Pashinyan sought to justify it during a May 22

news conference.

Hakobyan again strongly denied the accusations at the beginning of her trial. If convicted, she will face between four and eight years in prison.

“I had no evil intentions. Nobody forced him to get into my car,” she told a Yerevan court of first instance.

“I just wanted us to go to Yerablur, my home and my holy site,” she said. “Bad things are not done in holy sites.”

Hakobyan’s high-profile trial began hours after Armenia’s Court of Appeals released her from custody and moved her to house arrest. A trial prosecutor and Ashot Pashinyan protested against that decision during the first lower court hearing in the case.

They both demanded that the defendant be arrested again, with the prime minister’s son saying that she committed a “grave crime” and must remain behind bars. The judge presiding over the trial promptly satisfied their demands.

One of Hakobyan’s lawyers respond-

ed by accusing the judge of executing a “high-level” political order. “The legal problem raised by us is that there is direct influence on the court from the prime minister and this was proven during today’s hearing as well,” he told journalists.

Armenian opposition leaders and other critics of the government claim that Pashinyan ordered Hakobyan’s arrest in a bid to muzzle the families of deceased soldiers who have staged demonstrations over the past year to demand his prosecution on war-related charges.

Pashinyan triggered their regular demonstrations in Yerevan in April 2022 when he responded to continuing opposition criticism of his handling of the disastrous war. He said he “could have averted the war, as a result of which we would have had the same situation, but of course without the casualties.” The soldiers’ families say Pashinyan thus publicly admitted sacrificing the lives of at least 3,800 Armenian soldiers killed during the six-week war with Azerbaijan.

Ex-Armenian PM Warns Against Handover of ‘Enclaves’ to Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — There is no legal ground for the handover of “enclaves” to Azerbaijan, Armenia’s former Prime Minister Vazgen Manukyan claimed, warning it would clear the way for renewed war within Armenia’s territory.

“The existence of the enclaves was not stipulated by any Soviet law. They were once handed over to Azerbaijan by the consent of the local leadership. Accordingly, it has no legal force. They are de-jure Armenian territories,” the politician said in a statement on Tuesday, June 6.

“The handover of enclaves to the



Vazgen Manukyan

enemy will create more favorable conditions and temptation for them to continue the war on Armenia’s territory. As a result, the peace treaty will become a war treaty,” Manukyan warned.

Separately, he rejected the “absurd” claims that surrendering Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) to Azerbaijan would open up an era of peace in the region.

“The mere fact that Armenia, regardless of the principle of territorial integrity, does not defend and promote the Artsakh people’s right to self-determination and independence humiliates us before the whole world. How can we live like this?” the politician wrote.

Manukyan urged the military and law enforcement authorities to protect the state.

“You did not take an oath to protect Nikol Pashinyan, but to protect the homeland, state, Constitution and laws. Nikol Pashinyan’s activities and plans, first of all, run counter to the Armenian Constitution and laws, thus his rule is already illegitimate,” the former PM said, accusing Pashinyan of treason.

“I urge the law enforcement agencies to keep a close eye on the developments in the country and to stop the state crime in time to be ready to join the larger part of the people who are resisting the national and state crime and are trying to prevent a national disaster and disgrace,” read the statement.

Armenia, Azerbaijan Continue to Disagree on Border Demarcation

By Ruzana Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Armenia and Azerbaijan have still not reached an agreement on the key parameters of delimiting and demarcating their long border, Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said on Monday, June 5.

Baku insisted, meanwhile, that the two sides made no progress on the thorny issue during recent peace talks.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev discussed it at their most recent meeting held in Moldova’s capital Chisinau on Thursday on the sidelines of a European summit. They were joined by European Union chief Charles Michel, French President Emman-

uel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Pashinyan described the talks as “useful.” In particular, he said, Baku now seems open to accepting an Armenian proposal to use 1975 Soviet maps as a basis for delimiting the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

The secretary of Armenia’s Security Council, Armen Grigoryan, likewise said on Sunday that “progress” was made in Chisinau regarding the use of those maps. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry denied that on Monday, however, accusing Grigoryan of misrepresenting the Chisinau summit.

“The Armenian side is well aware that at this and other meetings no agreement was reached on using any maps as the basis for

the border delimitation,” the ministry said in a statement.

The statement noted that Azerbaijan has demarcated its borders with other neighboring states “on the basis of analyzes and examination of legally binding documents, rather than any specially chosen map.”

Speaking in the Armenian parliament later in the day, Mirzoyan acknowledged that Yerevan and Baku still disagree on the border delimitation mechanism. But he also claimed that during the Chisinau meeting Aliyev “did not seem to object” to using the 1975 maps.

Aliyev said ahead of that meeting that the demarcation process must be carried out on Baku’s terms and warned of fresh military action against Armenia.

Nominations Close for the 2024 Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity

YEREVAN — Nominations are now closed for the 2024 Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity, awarded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors. The nomination period opened on June 1, 2022, with the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative encouraging people all around the world to put forward modern-day heroes. In total, 730 submissions for 676 unique candidates have been received for the Prize, hailing from 74 countries including USA, Kenya, Armenia, Nigeria, Germany, Pakistan, Canada, India, UK, Czech Republic, Georgia, and Iran.

“I have been very fortunate in my life to meet and get to know people who are always strong in their commitment to helping others, and I know that recognition can be crucial in allowing them to continue their life-saving work. I can’t wait to meet the 2024 Aurora Humanitarians and Laureate,” said Dr. Tom Catena, Chair of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and 2017 Aurora Prize Laureate.

Each nomination will now be carefully reviewed by a group of professionals in the humanitarian field comprising the Aurora Prize Expert Panel. These specialists will prepare a shortlist of nominees to be assessed by the Aurora Prize Selection



2021 Aurora Prize Laureate Julienne Lusenge

Committee, who will then select the 2024 Aurora Humanitarians and ultimately the Aurora Prize Laureate.

“I’m happy to see that Aurora continues to provide the means for the world to recognize and honor humanitarians, help them connect with each other, and work together against violence and injustice,” noted Jamila Afghani, founder of the

Noor Educational and Capacity Development Organization (NECDO) and 2022 Aurora Prize Laureate.

The name of the Laureate will be revealed in the spring of 2024. The Laureate will receive a US \$1,000,000 award and a unique opportunity to continue the cycle of giving by supporting the organizations that help people in need.



INTERNATIONAL

Pashinyan Attends Erdogan's Inauguration

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attended the inauguration of Turkey's newly reelected President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on June 3.

Erdogan had won the run off on May 28.

Pashinyan, who is accused by his political opponents of making unilateral concessions to Turkey and Azerbaijan, rushed to congratulate Erdogan on winning reelection in a run-off vote on May 28. He said he hopes to continue "working together towards full normalization of relations between our countries."

Erdogan's first presidential inauguration in 2014 was attended by then Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian.

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

Pashinyan was welcomed by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu at the presidential complex. There, he met with many leaders, including Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev.



Prime Minister Pashinyan congratulates President Erdogan as NATO's Stoltenberg looks on.



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan shares a light moment with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and his wife and vice president Mehriban Aliyeva.



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, left, with Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev

Georgia Hedges Its Bets on the EU — and Russia

By JAMIE DETTMER

TBILISI (Politico) — Even by the disorderly standards of Georgian politics, last week's Independence Day celebration in Tbilisi's Liberty Square was strikingly odd, with the country's feuding president and prime minister delivering dueling speeches to the crowd.

President Salome Zourabichvili — who stood as an independent candidate in 2018, winning with the support of the ruling Georgian Dream Party — renewed her criticism of the government for what she dubbed its "anti-Western policy," and focused sharply on the recent restoration of direct flights with Russia.

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili insisted that Georgia's "progress on the path to European integration is particularly impressive," reassuring the packed square that he's sparing no effort to persuade the EU that Georgia deserves to be granted candidate status.

However, his apparent enthusiasm for the EU would have had more force if the government buildings overlooking the square had been flying EU flags as they usually do. But for the first time in years, this Independence Day, the Cabinet decided to decorate the city with only Georgian flags. And according to both opposition lawmakers and pro-EU activists, this absence is evidence of a tilt toward Russia.

That was certainly the view of a few hundred pro-EU activists too, as they waved EU flags and chanted "Georgia, Europe," while blocked from nearing the Liberty Square celebrations by a police line.

And according to government critics, the country risks standing alone in the neighborhood, as Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — all members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization — are cooling on Moscow, while Georgia appears to be getting friendlier.

The "current authorities want rapprochement with Russia," said opposition lawmaker Giorgi Vashadze. But they're doing it surreptitiously be-

cause "the population is against this and is committed to the Euro-Atlantic course," he added.

And by current authorities, he means not just Garibashvili but, more importantly, Bidzina Ivanishvili — the billionaire businessman who amassed his fortune in Russia in the 1990s and briefly served as Georgia's prime minister a decade ago. The secretive and reclusive Ivanishvili founded Georgian Dream and is widely seen as the real power in the land.

"He is the government," said Ghia Nodia, a university professor, former education minister and chair of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development.

Last week, critics — including Zourabichvili — reacted furiously when Ekaterina Vinokurova, daughter of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, was allowed to attend a wedding in Georgia despite being on the EU's sanctions list. Meanwhile, other critics highlight Georgia's decision to not join in Western economic sanctions against Russia, its second-largest trade partner.

But government supporters say Georgian Dream has little alternative but to tread carefully. Only 15 years ago, the country fought its own brief war with its vast neighbor over two Moscow-backed breakaway regions — Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Nikoloz Samkharadze, chair of the Georgian parliament's foreign relations committee and a Georgian Dream lawmaker, believes opposition politicians are offering a false story. "Their only narrative is that Georgian Dream is a pro-Russian party, and they have been spouting it for years. I suppose when you start saying just one thing, you have to continue no matter whether it's right or not," he said.

"We have not taken any steps to signal any tilt toward Russia. And if you look at our policy, it has always been consistent. We clearly say that there will be no normalization of relations with the Russian Federation until our territories are de-occupied and until Russia recognizes the

territorial integrity of Georgia," he noted.

Georgia's government has condemned Russia's invasion and expressed solidarity with Ukraine and sent humanitarian aid and is currently sheltering around 25,000 Ukrainian refugees. Georgia was also one of the 38 countries that applied to the International Criminal Court to investigate Russia's war crimes in Ukraine.

And joining the sanctions would be damaging for the country's economy. "We would destroy Georgia's economy, we would damage the interests of our country and we would damage the interests of our people if we impose some kind of economic sanctions on Russia," Garibashvili noted last week.

Still, there remains the impression that there's some hedging going on. Last week, he echoed Moscow's narrative, blaming the war in Ukraine on NATO enlargement and Ukraine's determination to become a member.

Nodia suspects Ivanishvili doesn't want to "burn bridges" with either the West or Russia. Ultimately, the outcome of the Kremlin's war on Ukraine will determine the final direction of travel, he predicts.

"That will be very important. Ivanishvili is an opportunist. I don't believe he has a political vision. He wants to keep power basically but he also sort of knows that this is a small, vulnerable country," he said.

But David Darchiashvili, a political scientist at Ilia State University in Tbilisi, thinks rapprochement with Russia was always part of Ivanishvili's preferred plan. "He and his clannish supporters have always had this mindset from the very beginning when they came into power," he said.

The reforms they would have to advance for EU membership "would complicate their lives, and that's why they are not keen, really, to see much progress on the candidacy status — despite what they say," he maintained.

INTERNATIONAL

Governor Welcomes Plans To Open Russian Consulate in Syunik

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Syunik Governor Robert Ghukasyan claims the planned opening of a Russian consulate in Armenia's southern province would help enhance its security.

Speaking to reporters in the parliament on June 6, he highlighted the opening of an Iranian consulate in Syunik in October last year.

"In both cases, extensive work has been done and the impact could be great. I hope it [the Russian consulate] won't be the last consulate to open in Syunik," Ghukasyan said.

In response to a journalist's remark about Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's "second plan to turn Syunik into a Russian-Turkish zone of influence," Ghukasyan said: "Syunik has been and will remain Armenian. It is an inseparable part of our homeland. Every Armenian should think so, and it's out of the question. At least, these plans have not worked out so far and it's very good that they haven't."

Flyone Armenia Launches Yerevan-Tehran Flights

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Flyone Armenia launched direct Yerevan-Tehran flights on June 6.

The airline will fly from Yerevan's Zvartnots airport to Tehran's Imam Khomeini airport four times per week, on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, offering affordable prices and convenient schedules for everyone.

Flyone Armenia Chairman of the Board Aram Ananyan personally visited Zvartnots airport Tuesday morning for the ribbon cutting ceremony marking the first flight to Tehran.

"The launch of Flyone Armenia's direct flights from Yerevan to Tehran ... will be as highly demanded as the rest of our nearly two dozen travel destinations. The new flights will ... help promote the strong cultural, economic and tourism ties," Ananyan said at the ceremony.

Azerbaijan Preparing Nakhichevan for 'Zangezur Corridor' Opening

YEREVAN (news.am) — The authorities of Azerbaijan are intensively preparing the country's exclave of Nakhichevan for the opening of the "Zangezur corridor."

"Opening of Zangazur [(Zangezur)] corridor necessitates the renewal of railway infrastructure in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, it was reflected in the 'State Program for 2023-2027 on the socio-economic development of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic' approved by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev," APA reported on June 5.

It was noted that for this reason, railway infrastructure will be reconstructed, and safe, fast, and stable transportation services will be provided.

Armenia is not mentioned at all in the official statements by the representatives of Azerbaijan.

INTERNATIONAL

EU Hosts Another Aliyev-Pashinyan Meeting

MEETING, from page 1

Michel described the talks as “substantive” on his Twitter page. “Important to implement commitments,” he wrote.

Pashinyan’s office confirmed that he and Aliyev will hold another trilateral meeting with Michel on July 21.

The three men made progress towards the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace deal at their last meeting in Brussels held on May 14. In particular, Pashinyan confirmed that Yerevan is ready to recognize Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh through such an agreement.

Aliyev and Pashinyan also held talks in Moscow on May 25. The talks hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared to focus on the reopening of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border for commerce and cargo shipments.

Pashinyan has described his latest meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev as “useful” but disclosed few of its details.

Pashinyan and Aliyev met in Moldova’s capital Chisinau on Thursday on the sidelines of a European summit. They were joined by EU chief Charles Michel, French

President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. No concrete agreements were announced as a result.

Michel said the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders will meet again in Brussels on July 21. According to Pashinyan, their foreign ministers will hold fresh talks in Washington on June 12 in preparation for the next summit.

“On the whole, I consider the discussion useful,” Pashinyan told a group of ethnic Armenians from Moldova and Ukraine in Chisinau later in the evening.

Aliyev last week insisted that the border demarcation must be carried out on Baku’s terms and warned of fresh military action against Armenia. Yerevan condemned his threats.

Baku also shed a little light on the Chisinau talks. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry on Friday accused Macron’s office of misrepresenting them. But it did not specify which concrete parts of a French read-out of the talks “distort the positions of the parties.”

Macron Comments

French President Emmanuel Macron, who held a press conference on the results

of the European Political Union summit in Moldova on June 1, stressed the need to resolve ongoing conflicts in Europe. Speaking about the war in Ukraine, and the tension in Kosovo, Macron also touched on the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

“We brought together Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev together with President Michel and Chancellor Scholz. The goal is to continue the negotiation process between these two countries and achieve peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. For this, the sovereignty of both countries and the security of people, including minorities, must be respected. This is important for us,” Macron said.

“The European leaders called on Armenia and Azerbaijan to respect all their commitments, especially the commitment to release prisoners of war soon. They also mentioned the importance of the contribution made by the monitoring mission of the European Union in Armenia. Finally, the importance of determining the rights and guarantees for the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh was emphasized. President Emmanuel Macron particularly insisted on the importance of not allowing any hostile rhetoric and con-

tinuing efforts to return to peace for the sake of the well-being of the entire population in the region,” the Press Service of the French President noted.

On the same day, Aykhan Hajizada, the Press Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, said that the statement issued by France about the meeting distorted the position of the parties.

“Within the framework of the European Political Community summit in Chisinau, the press release on the results of the meeting between the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia with the participation of the President of the EU Council Charles Michel, the President of France and the Chancellor of Germany was given by Charles Michel as the organizer of the Brussels format according to tradition. Later, the statement made unilaterally by the French President about the meeting does not reflect and distorts the parties’ position. Unfortunately, this is not the first case of such behavior by France, and it does not make a positive contribution to the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia, peace and stability in the region,” Hajizada added.

Turkey Inches Toward Ratifying Sweden’s NATO Bid

By Nazlan Ertan

IZMIR, Turkey (AI-Monitor) — Ankara and Stockholm will come together next week in an attempt to clear the obstacles to Sweden’s NATO accession as pressure grows on Turkey to ratify Sweden’s membership bid ahead of the alliance’s summit in mid-July.

The announcement of a new round of talks between Sweden and Turkey follows a charm offensive by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Carl Bildt, Sweden’s former prime minister who has political sway with both President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the current Swedish government. Both attended Erdogan’s swearing-in ceremony over the weekend. Stoltenberg also held a separate meeting with Erdogan as well as the foreign and defense ministers in the new Cabinet Sunday, during which the two discussed the alliance’s July 11-12 summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, where many NATO members would like to see Sweden sit beside newcomer Finland as a member.

Urging Ankara to ratify Sweden’s accession as soon as possible, Stoltenberg maintained that Stockholm had fulfilled its pledges on addressing Turkey’s security concerns such as stepping up counter-terrorism cooperation, including against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is on the terror organizations list of Ankara, Washington and Brussels.

“President Erdogan and I agreed today that the permanent joint mechanism should meet again in the week starting on June 12,” Stoltenberg said Sunday, referring to the diplomatic platform set up last year to address Turkey’s requests from the two Nordic states for greenlighting their accession to NATO. The meeting, expected to be held at senior officials level, will also include Finland, although the Turkish parliament unanimously approved Helsinki’s membership in March.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said Monday that he had a phone conversation with Stoltenberg earlier in the day, and he agreed with Stoltenberg that Sweden had done “all it could” to address Turkey’s security concerns. “We have fulfilled our obligations, including changing our laws.

The decision now rests with Ankara,” he was quoted as saying by Turkey’s Anadolu agency in a presser in Madrid.

NATO heavyweights such as the United States, United Kingdom and Germany also put pressure on Turkey by gently prodding Turkey’s new foreign minister, former intelligence tsar Hakan Fidan, by referring to the NATO alliance in their congratulatory messages.

Brushing aside their history of neutrality last May, Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. But Turkey said the two aspiring members had to address Ankara’s security concerns to get a green light. In a trilateral memorandum, Ankara urged Stockholm and Helsinki to keep a tighter rein on groups that Turkey considers a threat to its security, lift arms embargoes against Turkey and extradite or deport more than a hundred people Turkey considered “terror suspects” who lived in the two Nordic states.

Unlike Finland, Sweden, which has liberal laws on freedom of expression and assembly, has not yet persuaded Ankara that it has fulfilled its commitments, notably after Stockholm failed to stop a Danish-Swedish ultra-right politician from burning the Quran in front of the Turkish Embassy last January.

Give Swedes a Chance

To prevent a new crisis over the anti-NATO and anti-Turkey demonstrations in Stockholm on June 4, Stoltenberg told Erdogan that blocking Sweden’s entry over protests would be to play into their hands. “I understand it is hard to see demonstrations against Turkey, and against NATO, in Sweden ... But we should remember why these demonstrations are taking place. The organizers want to stop Sweden from joining NATO. They want to block Sweden’s counter-terrorism cooperation with Turkey. And they want to make NATO weaker. We should not allow them to succeed,” he said in Istanbul after talks with Erdogan.

The NATO chief also argued that Sweden has taken “significant concrete steps” to meet Turkey’s concerns, pointing out that crucial new anti-terrorism legislation came into force on June 1 in addition to the consti-

tutional amendments and lifting of embargoes against Turkey earlier this year.

The announcement of a new round of talks immediately after the change of guard in the Foreign Ministry and Turkey’s muted response to the anti-NATO and anti-Turkey demonstrations in Stockholm (which in the past were usually followed by a terse statement and a summoning of the Swedish ambassador) have led to cautious optimism among analysts in Turkey and abroad.

Right Time, Right Man?

Paul Levin, director of Stockholm University’s Institute for Turkish Studies, told AI-Monitor that now is a good time for Erdogan to show his pragmatism. “In Turkey, there is a new Cabinet, there are no pending elections, and no chance for Erdogan to look weak on his stance against terrorism before an electorate,” he said. “In Sweden, the last piece of the government’s anti-terrorism laws has come into force as of June 1 and, for the first time, a public prosecutor is expected to open extortion and financing terror charges this Friday.”

“I am cautiously optimistic that the process on Sweden’s accession is moving in the right direction now that there is a new post-election era,” Fatih Ceylan, the former ambassador to NATO who currently heads the Ankara Policy Institute, told AI-Monitor Monday.

According to Ceylan, it would be difficult for Ankara to continue to drag its feet after the political and legal moves by Sweden. “This would also alienate friendly nations within NATO. My analysis is that Ankara would adopt a more positive attitude in this new period that starts on the week of June 12.”

Ceylan said that Turkey could continue to push for its security concerns once Sweden was part of the military alliance. “Though NATO does not have a ‘terrorist organizations list’ like the European Union, it does have considerable *acquis* [body of regulations, measures and methods of cooperation] on anti-terrorism, developed since 9/11 and enhanced in 2016,” he said.

“Intel chief Fidan in the driver’s seat as Turkey’s foreign minister has solidified Sweden’s chances to enter NATO, so long as Stockholm delivers to Ankara some solid items per its new counter-terrorism law,” Soner Cagaptay tweeted as Fidan took the

helm of the Foreign Ministry from Mevlut Cavusoglu, who has held the post for 8.5 years. Cagaptay said that it was unlikely that Fidan would want his initial public offering to be as a great disruptor to Turkey’s relations with the West.

Two scenarios

In the handover ceremony Monday, Fidan — an elusive figure who does not have a Twitter account — declared he was honored to join the Foreign Ministry on the centennial of the Republic of Turkey and the 500th anniversary of the establishment of Turkish diplomacy. “During my tenure, I will do my best for the unity, security and prosperity of our state ... in line with the vision and values our president — who has been reelected with the strong support of our people — represent,” he said.

Ceylan focuses on two scenarios leading up to Vilnius. “The good scenario is that Turkey completes the ratification before mid-July and Sweden, like Finland, attends the Vilnius summit as a NATO member. The bad scenario is that Turkey continues its bargaining right into the summit and tries to get an 11th-hour agreement, alienating even friendly nations in NATO,” he said. In that case, as in last year’s Madrid summit in which Erdogan played brinkmanship games in the alliance, there would be no ratification but a declaration of intent.

Levin adds a third. “Erdogan would continue to block Sweden’s accession, which may also happen, particularly if something radical and unexpected — such as Quran or Turkish flag burning — happens.”

Turkey to Send Battalion to Kosovo

On Sunday, Stoltenberg also thanked Erdogan for Turkey’s decision to send a commando battalion to Kosovo in response to a NATO request to send 700 more soldiers to join the peacekeeping operation following recent violent unrest.

The Turkish Defense Ministry shared a video Sunday showing troops arriving in Kosovo wearing the logo of the Kosovo Force, a NATO-led peacekeeping mission established in 1999. A ministry statement called for “restraint and constructive dialogue” between Kosovo and Serbia, saying the conflict could harm regional security and stability.



INTERNATIONAL

‘Armenia Is Not Russia’s Ally In War with Ukraine,’ Pashinyan Tells Czech Interviewer

YEREVAN (JAM News) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in an interview with CNN Prima News on June 1, talked about the country’s geographic and geopolitical problems, and the need to improve relations with its closest neighbors. He answered a question about the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, the humanitarian crisis in the region, and “why Azerbaijan is doing all this.” He also touched upon allied relations with Russia and Armenia’s problems with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) military bloc operating under its leadership. The host of the program also asked Pashinyan personal questions, in particular about his relationship with Vladimir Putin and the challenges he faced when he took office after the 2018 Velvet Revolution.

He also said that Armenia does not support Russian aggression in Ukraine.

On the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh

CNN Prima News: Obviously Armenia’s main problem today is the situation with Nagorno-Karabakh. At the moment, about 120,000 Armenians remain in Nagorno-Karabakh. They depend on one land corridor controlled by Russian troops. So what is the current economic, humanitarian and security situation of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh?

Nikol Pashinyan: You know that since December last year Azerbaijan has illegally blocked the Lachin corridor. Why do we say illegal? Because according to the tripartite statement of November 9, the Lachin corridor was created to ensure the connection of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, Nagorno-Karabakh with the Republic of Armenia.

And according to the tripartite statement, Azerbaijan should not have any control over this corridor. Moreover, the corridor is not only a road, but also a 5 km wide security zone. So blocking it is illegal.

As a result of the blockade in Nagorno-Karabakh, a humanitarian crisis has arisen, because, firstly, people are deprived of the right to move, and secondly, the supply of food and essentials occurs intermittently and only through peacekeepers and the Red Cross. And the consequence of this is that people can only buy goods in stores with coupons issued by the government of Nagorno-Karabakh, so that food supplies can be managed.

Since December last year, there have been intermittent interruptions in the supply of natural gas and electricity to Nagorno-Karabakh, and at the moment, natural gas and electricity are not supplied to Nagorno-Karabakh. The most important consequence of this during the winter months was that all schools and kindergartens, higher educational institutions were closed, and about 30,000 children and students were deprived of the right to education. Of course, with the warming of the weather, kindergartens, schools, universities have opened, and the educational process has been restored.

The next important circumstance that should be noted in this context is the following: in February 2023 the International Court of Justice adopted an interim decision obliging Azerbaijan to unblock the Lachin corridor to ensure the movement of citizens and goods along the Lachin corridor. Azerbaijan not only failed to comply with the requirements of this decision, which has legal force, since the International Court of Justice is the highest international court, but also illegally established a checkpoint in the Lachin corridor about ten days ago. This is a violation not only of the tripartite statement of November 9, 2020, but also of the decision of the International Court of Justice.

Why is Azerbaijan doing all this? Our assessment and conviction are that these are not isolated actions, but preparations for ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh. Speaking of ethnic cleansing, we mean that, according to Azerbaijan, Armenians should not live in Nagorno-Karabakh at all.

On Relations with Russia

CNN Prima News: Armenia has been heavily dependent on Russia for security since the early 90s, you have a Russian military base in Armenia, you have Russian weapons, both countries are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, so the question is twofold: was it a reasonable move, and did you have alternatives?

Nikol Pashinyan: In fact, today we are in a situation where there is some disappointment in the activities of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, because the CSTO is the main mechanism through which the Republic of Armenia had to ensure its security.

But during the aggressions undertaken by Azerbaijan in May and November 2021 and in September 2022, the inadequate reaction of the CSTO caused a certain disappointment, first of all among the people of Armenia, since there was a certain confidence that the Collective Security Treaty was a reliable security mechanism.

But this did not happen, and for this reason, we did not consider it possible to reach consensus on a number of fundamental documents during the CSTO Yerevan summit. But I want us to look at the issue from the opposite side, because it is also harmful for the organization, because, in fact, what happened to Armenia in the period I have indicated, first of all, hits the authority of the CSTO. This will have certain consequences for the organization itself.

CNN Prima News: Throughout the war, and at the Yerevan summit last November, when you refused to sign the document, Mr. Lukashenko was in shock and Mr. Putin was clearly angry, I have not seen him so angry in a long time.

Nikol Pashinyan: These are working situations, and after the moment you mentioned we had a working lunch in a calm atmosphere, in an atmosphere of mutual respect we discussed the current state of affairs and ways out of the situation.

On Relations with Putin

CNN Prima News: What is your personal relationship with Vladimir Putin? He seems to be a very cold person, almost unemotional. Do you have a working relationship with him or a personal relationship, or is it a relationship between two states?

Nikol Pashinyan: In general, I must say that the impressions that are visible on the screens, the impressions from real life, the difficulties we have encountered and the difficult period in which we live are, in fact, different layers.

And yes, our communication with the President of the Russian Federation was very intense and continues to be intense.

We will meet at least two times during the current month [talking about the meetings planned in May, the interview was recorded during the Prime Minister’s visit to the Czech Republic on May 4-5]. And I must say that these are personal contacts, political contacts, and working contacts. Another thing is that, especially now, we have little or no discussion of issues that are not on the agenda of our bilateral relations or our regional agenda.

I must honestly say that Armenia has too many problems to carry the burden of the wider region and continents on its shoulders. Unfortunately, our concerns are more than enough, and in relations with the European Union, the United States and Russia, we are trying to solve the problems of

our agenda, which, as you see, is not always successful.

War in Ukraine

CNN Prima News: And what is Armenia’s position on the Ukrainian war, Russian aggression against Ukraine? Because on the one hand you are an ally of Russia, on the other hand we are witnessing many undesirable actions on the part of the Russian Federation in Ukraine.

Nikol Pashinyan: You said that we are Russia’s ally. Of course, this has never been said aloud, but I think it is noticeable: we are not Russia’s ally in the war with Ukraine. And our feeling about this war conflict is anxiety, because it directly affects all our relationships.

In the West, they notice that we are an ally of Russia, i.e. notice it more. They see that we are not their ally in the war against Ukraine. And it turns out that we are nobody’s ally in this situation, which means that we are vulnerable. That being said, there seems to be an option to tack in all of these clashes, but the truth is that the more complicated the situation, the narrower the opportunities to tack become. We maneuver not because we have no opinion about the situation, but for the reason I mentioned a minute ago: unfortunately, there are so many of our worries that they do not allow us to be more involved in solving other worries.

On the situation in the region and EU assistance

CNN Prima News: Armenia is in a very difficult political situation: Turkey is your big neighbor; Russia is another major regional power; there is also Iran, and the European Union seems to be quite far away. How can the European Union really help to solve the difficult issue of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh? Are there any options at all?

Nikol Pashinyan: First, our strategy is based on exactly what you said. Look, you say that we are in a difficult geopolitical situation. In fact we are not in a difficult geopolitical position, we are in a difficult geographical position.

The complexity is not in geopolitics, the complexity is in geography, because no matter how the geopolitics in the world changes, our geography will not change from this.

And for this reason, especially now, we offer and have offered our people the following political vision: the main goal of our foreign policy should be normal relations, first of all, with our immediate neighbors. No matter how difficult it may sound even to the ear, because history has brought with it a lot of difficulties, a lot of negative legacy.

Ground Broken for New Checkpoint on Armenia-Iran border

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — A groundbreaking ceremony was held on June 2 for a new border crossing point at the Iran border. The ceremony was attended by Chairman of the State Revenue Committee Rostam Badasyan, Head of the Yerevan Office of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) George Akhalkatsi, Syunik Governor Robert Ghukasyan, representatives of international structures and other state bodies.

The reconstruction and modernization of the Meghri border crossing point is being carried out with credit and grant funds provided by the EU and the EBRD.

Armenia and EBRD signed an agreement on loan of 21,146,263 euros on February 7, 2020.

The current infrastructure at the Meghri BCP is outdated. The operational, techni-

cal, engineering, environmental and safety conditions at the BCP need to be improved in order to meet modern safety and security requirements and adhere to international border management standards.

The project aims to reconstruct and modernize the road border crossing point facilities at Meghri BCP. The Project involves demolition of the existing outdated buildings, construction of new modern facilities and installation of modern equipment for the performance of border, customs and other controls in line with modern standards.

The construction works will be carried out by Tana Energy Management Company, winner of an international tender. Roughton International Limited Company will carry out technical quality control of the construction works.



EBRD’s George Akhalkatsi, left, with Chairman of the State Revenue Committee Rostam Badasyan



Community News

Armenian Wine May Be Thousands Of Years Old, But It's Never Been More in Vogue

By Ani Duzdabanyan

LOS ANGELES (*LA Times*) — Wine has always been an inseparable part of Armenian history. Just look at Areni-1, an ancient winery discovered in the village of Areni in 2007, with well-preserved clay vessels, a wine press for stomping grapes, drinking cups and withered grape vines, skins and seeds. Armenian wine even withstood a 70-year-long Soviet ruling that decreed grapes were to be used only for brandy, vodka and fortified wine production. It was only after independence was proclaimed in 1991 that a few vintners were able to take the first steps to reestablish the winemaking traditions of the new Republic of Armenia. Now, Armenian wine has emerged as a global player in the modern era.

“Armenian wine is ancient and also entirely new,” said Master of Wine Christy Canterbury, who participated in L.A.’s Armenian-wine-centered GiniFest virtually from New York. “Today, producers are experimenting and rediscovering how best to make their wines but also how to plant and farm their vineyards. The possibilities are endless.”

This new chapter started with growers such as the Mkrtchyan family of Voskeni Wines, Zorik Gharibian of Zorah Wines, Varuzhan Mouradian of Van Ardi Winery and others who chose winemaking as an investment in their homeland and a way to honor their ancestors. With the help of prominent winemakers, Armenian vintners worked with the terroir to bring out the intense flavors of the grapes.

“Armenia’s terroir relates to some of the hottest topics in the wine industry today: volcanic soils and high-altitude, cool-climate vineyards,” said certified sommelier Irina Ponomarenko. These conditions are ideal for grapes growing in Armenia’s winemaking regions of Aragatsotn, Tavush, Armavir, Ararat, Vayots Dzor, Syunik and the Republic of Artsakh, and part of what separates them from Old World wines produced in France, Italy or Germany.

Areni, Voskehat and Sireni are the most popular wine grape varieties native to Armenia, dating back 4,000 to 6,000 years, and used to create wines ranging from sparkling to still, and even dessert wines. With thick, dark skin, Areni is disease-resistant and strong enough to survive the country’s harsh winters, lending itself to elegant, full-bodied wines. Voskehat, which translates to golden berry, is considered the queen of the Armenian varieties. Not as disease-resistant as Areni, it makes delicate white wines with aromas of fruits and wildflowers. Sireni is the indigenous grape variety of the Republic of Artsakh and is known for its robust flavors.

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More than 350 young adults from across the Eastern Diocese met over Memorial Day Weekend, for the 2023 ACYOA General Assembly and Sports Weekend at St. Leon Church in Fair Lawn, NJ. Photos by Vardan Sargsyan and Diran Jebejian

Faith and Action Shine at 2023 ACYOA Sports Weekend

By Andrew Yenicag

FAIR LAWN, N.J. — More than 350 Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA) Seniors and young adults from across the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America met for the 2023 ACYOA General Assembly and Sports Weekend over Memorial Day Weekend, hosted by the ACYOA Seniors of St. Leon Church in Fair Lawn, NJ.

Presiding over the General Assembly, addressing the delegates, and taking part in the whole weekend of spirited fellowship was the Primate of the Eastern Diocese, Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan.

The weekend kicked off on Friday, May 26, with the 2023 ACYOA General Assembly. Some 65 ACYOA chapter delegates, observers, and Diocesan clergy came together for a day of reflection on the ACYOA’s past year of ministries, discussions about the organization’s bright future, and elections to the ACYOA Central Council.

The 2023 Assembly also marked the dawn of a new era for the ACYOA, as the voting body officially approved a series of revisions to the ACYOA Bylaws. The ACYOA will move forward with a Stewardship Program for its membership, in place of fixed membership dues. In addition, current and future ACYOA chapters will have the option to form regional chapters and to establish campus groups, providing additional opportunities for young adults to engage with the ACYOA.

In addition to the Primate, and St. Leon pastor Fr. Diran Bohajian, a large contingent of clergy attended the ACYOA Assembly and Sports Weekend. These included Fr. Simeon Odabashian (Diocesan Vicar), Fr. Aren Jebejian (St. John, Southfield, MI), Fr. Andreas Garabedian (St. Gregory, Chicago, IL), Fr. Avedis Kalayjian (St. Mesrob, Racine, WI), Fr. Krikor Sabounjian (Holy Translators, Framingham, MA), Fr. Haroutiun Sabounjian (Holy Resurrection, New Britain, CT), Fr. Nigoghos Aznavourian (St. Mark, Springfield, MA), Fr. Stepanos Doudoukjian (St. Peter,

see ACYOA, page 10

NAASR Awarded \$150,000 Cummings Foundation Grant

BELMONT, Mass. — The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) is one of 150 local nonprofits that will share in \$30 million through Cummings Foundation’s major annual grants program. The Belmont-based organization was selected from a total of 630 applicants during a competitive review process. It will receive \$150,000 over three years.

Board Chairperson Judith Saryan said, “We are extremely grateful to the Cummings Foundation for their generous support that will allow NAASR to work with teachers and librarians to promote active engagement and newfound understanding to help prevent future genocides. NAASR is a prime institution of research and education in Massachusetts with a vast collection of valuable and trustworthy primary sources of the Armenian genocide as well as the Holocaust and other genocides.”

The funding from the Cummings Foundation aims to provide librarians and teachers with trustworthy genocide education materials leading to a more accurate and enriched understanding of genocide for educational purposes in schools and in their communities. The funds will be used to create an online curated genocide resource center featuring leading documentary resources suitable for users at a high school level education and to promote the new online genocide resource center to librarians and schoolteachers within the communities of Essex, Middlesex and Suffolk counties.

The Cummings Foundation’s \$30-million grant program primarily supports Massachusetts nonprofits that are based in and serve Middlesex, Essex, and Suffolk counties.

Through this place-based initiative, Cummings Foundation aims to give back in the areas where it owns commercial property. Its buildings are all managed, at no cost to the Foundation, by its affiliate, Cummings Properties. This Woburn-based commercial real estate firm leases and manages 11-million square feet of debt-free space, the majority of which exclusively benefits the Foundation.

“The way the local nonprofit sector perseveres, steps up, and pivots to meet the shifting needs of the community is most impressive,” said Cummings Foundation executive director Joyce Vyriotes. “We are incredibly grateful for these tireless efforts to support people in the community and to increase equity and access to opportunities.”

The majority of the grant decisions were made by about 90 volunteers. They worked across a variety of committees to review and discuss the proposals and then, together, determine which requests would be funded. Among these community volunteers were business and nonprofit leaders, mayors, college presidents, and experts in areas such as finance and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion).

see GRANT, page 12



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center Welcomes New Executive Director Renato de Leon

JAMAICA PLAIN, MA — Residents, families and staff members gathered together to “meet and greet” Ren de Leon, the new Executive Director at Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. It was a festive occasion, with Ren remarking how thrilled he is to be joining the organization.

“A drive and passion for senior care has propelled me to keep reaching for excellence,” stated Ren. “I can’t think of a better organization than ANRC to continue my career. I am looking forward to getting to know each and every one of our families and residents.”



Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center is a not-for-profit membership organization, which has been in existence for over 100 years. The organization is dedicated to serving elders locally and internationally through the sponsorship of elder service programs Drawing on its rich history, generosity of spirit and work ethic of the Armenian community, ANRC provides short-term rehab and long-term care, aiming to ensure the good health and well-being of all Armenian elders and others in the surrounding area.

Pictured above, from left, Salpy Yeterian, Indira David Alvarez, Renato de Leon, Yolene Bernard, Maria Felicitas Labao Santiago (Mafe)

Kristen Hekimian Graduates Summa Cum Laude from UMass. Amherst

BEDFORD, Mass. — Kristen Mary Hekimian of Bedford is a 2023 graduate of the state’s flagship university, the University of Massachusetts - Amherst, graduating Summa Cum Laude, with a perfect 4.0 (grade point average). On May 25 and 26, she graduated from the University of Massachusetts - Amherst, Commonwealth Honors College, and the College of Natural Sciences, receiving dual bachelor’s degrees in biology, and the neuroscience track from the Department of Psychology.

After graduation, she will be conducting research with the renowned molecular biologist, Dr. Douglas Melton of the Harvard University Stem Cell Institute. Dr. Melton’s lab applies developmental biology using stem cells and regenerative biology to understand and change the course of diabetes, and potentially Parkinson’s disease. Due to his research, Dr. Melton was named in 2009 as one of *Time Magazine*’s top 100 people who would most affect our world.

Hekimian will be utilizing her laboratory and investigatory skills, applying them to regenerative biology, while also looking forward to pursuing graduate studies.

She was the recipient of numerous



scholarships and awards by Armenian Students Association, Armenian International Women’s Association, Hai Guin (Armenian Women), the Armenian American Veterans, Lowell, MA, and was only one of six to receive a UMass Scholarship and award for excellence, in addition to being the recipient of numerous other grants and awards.

Hekimian is the daughter of Mary Kay Elloian, MBA, JD, Esq., and Jano Hekimian of Bedford, MA.

Armenian Wine May Be Thousands of Years Old, But It’s Never Been More in Vogue

WINE, from page 8

Historically, multiple varieties were planted together in a single vineyard, with all of the different grapes harvested at the same time and made into a single wine. Today, Armenian winegrowers are separating the varieties in order to understand how each of the grapes performs differently.

“Armenian wine brings us grapes we don’t see grown anywhere else in the world, grapes that are uniquely Armenian,” Canterbury said. “Take Areni, Armenia’s signature red grape. It is an ancient grape that has been largely isolated in this part of the Caucasus. It’s a rugged survivor. Also, it is grown at very high elevation, around and even over 4,000 feet above sea level. These conditions give the grape a remarkable intensity of flavors and structure.”

Recently, a collaboration between Armenian producer Maran Winery and the Institute of Molecular Biology revealed another lost indigenous grape variety — Areni Blanc. This grape now is being used by Maran Winery in its white and orange wine production.

In celebration of Armenia’s winemaking traditions, every year winemakers fly

from Armenia to Los Angeles to offer their craft at GiniFest (*gini* translates to wine in Armenian), an Armenian wine and spirits festival founded in 2018 by sommelier and winemaker Anush Gharibyan O’Connor with L.A. philanthropist Stepan Partamian.

“When I was earning my degree at the Agrarian University of Armenia, my teacher would often speak with great enthusiasm and admiration about Bordeaux wines,” O’Connor said. “I couldn’t help but wonder if Armenian wine would ever garner the same level of recognition, and how I could help facilitate that. Could Areni become a grape that would be known in other countries like the United States?”

Starting with only 10 wineries, year by year GiniFest has grown. This year’s festival brought more than 50 Armenian winemakers from around the world, offering more than 200 wines made from indigenous Armenian varietals and aged in traditional clay vessels and oak barrels.

Husband-and-wife Alex and Talar Sarafian bought their 15-acre Sarafian Vineyards in Artsakh in 2005 as a passion project, selling indigenous Sireni grapes to other wineries. In 2018, the pair began

producing estate-grown wines under their new Aran Wines label, including the first rosé made with Sireni grapes. “We like full-bodied wines, like Cabernet Sauvignon, that we are used to drinking here in the U.S.,” Alex Sarafian said. “When we first tried Sireni, we knew we wanted our wines to be made from that grape.”

Founded in 2013 by the Karapetyan family, less than two kilometers from Areni-1 Cave, Hin Areni vineyards replaced a factory that produced dessert wines during the Soviet Union. On 32 hectares surrounding Areni Village, Hin Areni works specifically with single varietals, highlighting the fresh white fruits and citrus flavors associated with Voskehat and the cherry, black currant and pepper aromas in Areni grapes. A decade after opening, Hin Areni is in the process of building a museum, a guest house and a new vineyard to expand its operations.

GiniFest has introduced Armenian wines to restaurants and wine shops across the U.S., but in Los Angeles in particular. In Studio City, the entire wine list at Rouge restaurant is dedicated to Armenian wines, with more than 20 wineries featured on its list.

“We’ve made it a point to educate all of our guests on the rich history behind the wines, the grape varietals and the ancient winemaking process that is unique to Armenia,” said Rouge co-owner Kevin Zadoyan. “Once in a while, a guest will be confused because the wines are different from what they are used to drinking, but that moment is usually fleeting, and it leads to a second glass more often than not.”

As a new crop of Armenian chefs enters

L.A.’s fine-dining arena, many are bringing a modern approach to the far-ranging cuisine of their homeland, while still upholding the tradition of Old World Armenian wines.

“[Wine] works hand in hand with food and cuisine,” said Alex Sarkissian, owner of Momed restaurant in Atwater Village. “Eastern Mediterranean flavors and spices are now being used by established chefs in well-known restaurants, so we can expect wines from those regions to become more popular.”

According to advanced sommelier Paul Sherman, the rise of Armenian wines couldn’t be better timed.

“Culturally, they’re as ‘Old World’ as they can possibly be, but with winemaking traditions that are currently in vogue with the natural wines being made today,” Sherman said. “More importantly, their wines are made with the unique, native grapes of the region, often with no added or needed adornment from oak.”

And with modern wine consumers displaying different preferences, such as a recent trend toward orange and natural wines, Armenian producers are well positioned to capitalize on the moment.

“Armenia provides energetic wines that nonetheless have character and offer a true sense of place,” said Robert Vartanian, advanced sommelier and director of wine at Wally’s. “So much of what makes wine special, even spiritual, is the story behind the bottle: the vineyard, the year, the personalities and cultures that dedicate their lives, even generations, to crafting something beautiful and delicious. Armenia’s is the oldest story.”

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COMMUNITY NEWS



Diocesan Primate Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan at ACYOA Sports Weekend, with the athletic squad from hosting parish St. Leon Church of Fair Lawn, NJ. Photos by Vardan Sargsyan and Diran Jebejian

Faith and Action Shine at 2023 ACYOA Sports Weekend

ACYOA, from page 8

Watervliet, NY), Fr. Daniel Karadjian (St. Stepanos, Elberon, NJ), Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan (Holy Martyrs, Bayside, NY), and Fr. Voski Galstyan (St. George, Hartford, CT).

The ACYOA members were overjoyed by this show of support, and expressed thanks to all of the clergy of the Diocese for their continuing encouragement of the organization and its youth.

Elections and Awards

During the assembly sessions, delegates elected the officers to serve on the 2023-24 ACYOA Central Council. Re-elected for a second two-year term were Ani Misirliyan (who will serve as Chair) and Andrew Yenigag (Communications). Jackie Russell was elected as a new member, and will serve as Vice Chair. These will join returning Cen-

tral Council members Mardig Klachian (Ministries and Outreach), Yn. Lucine Sabounjian (Ministries and Outreach), Madie Ovassapian (Secretary), and Michael Sarafian (Treasurer). The elected alternate is Elizabeth Kalfayan (Holy Resurrection, New Britain, CT).

The ACYOA Central Council members expressed gratitude to outgoing member Christine Beylerian McNally for her dedicated and passionate service to the ACYOA and Armenian Church.

During the Friday afternoon Primate's Luncheon, ACYOA Central Council presented its annual awards to individuals and chapters for their service and dedication to the organization and Armenian Church. Awards and recipients appear immediately below.

ACYOA Seniors "Chapter A" Award: St. Gregory the Illuminator ACYOA (Chica-

go, IL)

Sam Nersesian Service Award: Charles Babikian (St. Gregory the Illuminator, Chicago, IL)

Gregory Arpajian Leadership Award: Aline Tashjian (St. Leon, Fair Lawn, NJ)

Very Rev. Fr. Haigazoun Melkonian Award: Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian (St. Sarkis, Carrollton, TX)

Rev. Fr. Haroutiun and Yn. Patricia Dagley Award: Zaven and Marilyn Dadian (St. John, Southfield, MI)

Social Functions and Sports Competitions

On Friday evening, weekend attendees relaxed at Stumpy's Hatchet House in Upper Saddle River, NJ. Guests participated in axe throwing and a variety of other games, while getting to reunite with old friends and meet new ones.

Saturday marked an action-packed day of sports as teams representing ACYOA chapters across the Diocese competed in Co-Ed Volleyball, Men's Basketball, Women's Basketball, Backgammon, Chess and two e-sports. Crowds gathered to witness the spirited competition at River Dell High School in Oradell, NJ and at the St. Leon Armenian Church Youth Center for the championship games on Sunday.

The following teams and individuals brought home first place trophies to their parish communities:

Co-Ed Volleyball: St. John (Southfield, MI)

Men's Basketball: St. Leon (Fair Lawn, NJ)

Women's Basketball: St. John (Southfield, MI)

Backgammon: Lucine Beylerian (St. Leon, Fair Lawn, NJ)

Chess: Hovsep Nahapetyan (St. Sarkis, Carrollton, TX)

Mario Kart: Jack Dadian (St. Leon, Fair Lawn, NJ)

Super Smash Bros.: Andre Balian (St. Leon, Fair Lawn, NJ)

On Saturday evening, participants danced at Carpaccio's, a restaurant at American Dream Mall in East Rutherford, NJ, offering views of New York City and MetLife Stadium.

Final Blessings

On Sunday, attendees participated in the Divine Liturgy at St. Leon Church in Fair Lawn, celebrated by the Primate, Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan. Following the *badarak*, attendees mingled with parishioners of the St. Leon community during fellowship hour and watched the championship games.

The weekend concluded with the Sunday evening gala banquet. After inspiring messages from the Primate and Fr. Diran Bohajian, attendees enjoyed live entertainment by Harout Bedrossian.

The ACYOA Central Council congratulates the New Jersey General Assembly and Sports Weekend Committee, St. Leon ACYOA Seniors, and the parish community for their incredible efforts in organizing the weekend.



Diocesan Primate Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan at ACYOA Sports Weekend, with the athletic squad from St. John Church of Southfield, MI. Photos by Vardan Sargsyan and Diran Jebejian



COMMUNITY NEWS

ACYOA Juniors Meet in Watertown for Hye M'rtsoom Weekend

WATERTOWN — Over Memorial Day Weekend, 130 Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA) Juniors from 11 parishes throughout the northeast, together with their chaperones, enthusiastically gathered at St. James Church in Watertown, MA, for the 45th annual Hye M'rtsoom ACYOA Juniors Sports Weekend.

This year's gathering, hosted by the St. James ACYOA Juniors chapter and parish, was the first Hye M'rtsoom event since 2019.

On Friday evening, participants gathered with anticipation as buses began to arrive from out of town to kick-off the weekend. Its theme, "Aim Hye," was selected by the ACYOA members.

Saturday's events began with a morning service and welcome from parish pastor Fr. Arakel Aljalian, Youth Minister Maria Derderian, and Dn. Adam Bullock representing the Eastern Diocese. The service was followed by a day of sports competitions, including basketball, volleyball, and individual sports.

Opportunities for fellowship continued throughout the weekend, including an ice-breaker before the games began, and a service project, where participants prepared sandwiches for donation to a local shelter.

Evening events on Saturday and Sunday gave participants opportunities to enjoy fellowship, dancing, and a trophy ceremony on Sunday to celebrate the tournament's victors (see below for the roster of award-winners).

Participants, host families, chaperones, and volunteers gathered for breakfast on Monday morning before returning home with new friends made and new memories formed. The weekend was a welcome return to the beloved Hye M'rtsoom tradition.

2023 Hye M'rtsoom Awards

Beginner Tavloo: 1st Place – Cameron Santerian (Holy Trinity, Cheltenham), 2nd Place – Christina Hovnanian (Holy Trinity, Cambridge)



For Memorial Day weekend, 130 ACYOA Juniors from 11 parishes gathered at St. James Church in Watertown, MA, for the Hye M'rtsoom ACYOA Juniors Sports Weekend.

Beginner Chess: 1st Place – Arek Gulbankian (Holy Trinity, Cambridge), 2nd Place – Ishkhan Ishkhanian (St. James, Watertown)

Advanced Tavloo: 1st Place – Andrew Gorgissian (Holy Martyrs, Bayside), 2nd Place – Mark Boyajian (Holy Translators, Framingham)

Advanced Chess: 1st Place – Vardan Karapetyan (Holy Trinity, Cambridge), 2nd Place – Gary Nercessian (Holy Martyrs, Bayside)

Girls Ping-Pong: 1st Place – Perri Simonian (St. Sahag & St. Mesrob, Wynnewood, PA), 2nd Place – Lucine Chagnon (St. James, Watertown)

Boys Ping-Pong: 1st Place – Harry Chakmakian (St. James, Watertown), 2nd Place – Alex Kurkjian (St. James, Watertown)

Girls Basketball: 1st Place – Holy Trin-

ity Cambridge team, including players from Holy Martyrs, Holy Translators, and St. George, 2nd Place – Sts. Vartanants/St. Leon Combined Team

Boys Basketball: 1st Place – St. James A, 2nd Place – Philly A

Volleyball: 1st Place – St. James A, 2nd Place – Holy Trinity, Cambridge A

3 Point contest: Boys, 1st Place – Christian Diaz (St. James), Boys, 2nd Place – Paul Kasaryan (St. Leon), Girls, 1st Place – Christina Hovnanian (Holy Trinity) and Girls, 2nd Place – Grace Yacobe (St. Sahag & St. Mesrob)

Sportsmanship Awards: Boys – John Kurkjian (St. James) and Girls – Jessica Ciaffi (Holy Translators)

Overall Champion: St James Watertown Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan Vision Award: Jacob Topakbashian (St. Sahag & St. Mesrob, Wynnewood, PA)



Fr. Abraham Malkhasyan (Bayside, NY), host parish pastor Fr. Arakel Aljalian (Watertown, MA), Fr. Khachatur Kesablian (Chelmsford, MA), and Dn. Adam Bullock of the Eastern Diocese's Ministries department, along with two young tbrs, during services at the ACYOA Juniors Hye M'rtsoom weekend.

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FAR Seeks Director of Institutional Marketing and Development

Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) seeks an experienced development and fundraising professional to be its Director of Institutional Marketing and Development.

This is a great opportunity to have a leading role in the strategic growth of one of the most trusted and effective development organizations in Armenia.

FAR's work is organized within the five broader program areas of education, child protection, economic development, healthcare and social services. FAR fundamentally works on building and strengthening infrastructure and systems in the country, and by providing empowerment to individuals, families and communities through opportunity and support.

If you have significant experience in fundraising and institutional marketing, including social media, are able to engage with and market to all types of donors, and possess a solid understanding of design and visual content principles, please email your CV and cover letter to gnanagoulian@farusa.org.

For more information go to www.farusa.org to see the full job description.





COMMUNITY NEWS

Volunteers Sought for Armenian Research Project at NAASR Exploring Armenian Obligation and Desire

BELMONT, Mass. — Zepure Merdinian, junior at Belmont High School will pilot a research project she co-created with two youth engagement specialists made possible by the National Association of Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR). The research team is looking for interested volunteers to explore why and how they participate in the Armenian community through suggestions on what their community needs.

Four focus group conversations will be conducted by age group at NAASR on 395 Concord Avenue,

Armenians Like You:
Exploring Obligation and Desire to Contribute to the Armenian Community



RSVP Today!

395 Concord Avenue, Belmont, Massachusetts 02478

Come share your thoughts! Support a focus group interview research project in your age group.

Sign up now! Use the QR Code!

Saturday, June 24
9am-10:30am (ages 65+)
12pm-1:30pm (ages 18-24)

Sunday, June 25
1:30pm-3pm (ages 25-45)
5pm-6:30pm (ages 46-64)

Refreshments will be served.
Contact or Sign Up
ArmeniansLikeYou@gmail.com



Zepure Merdinian is a junior at Belmont High School and a volunteer at NAASR. Her research is supported by Sarah Lambert Derian, M.Ed. Diana Marginean, Ph.D. Made possible by National Association for Armenian Studies and Research.

Belmont, MA. Sign up at <http://tinyurl.com/3upt7r2b> to RSVP for the upcoming focus groups or to express interest in future ones.

Saturday, June 24, 2023 9 a.m.-10:30 a.m. ages 65+
Saturday, June 24, 2023 12 p.m.-1:30 p.m. ages 18-24

Saturday, June 25, 2023 1:30 p.m.-3:00 p.m. ages 25-45

Saturday, June 25, 2023 5:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. ages 46-64

Anyone who self-identifies as (a) a member of the Armenian diaspora, (b) a member of the Armenian-American community, (c) a contributor to the Armenian-American community, or (d) a supporter of the Armenian-American community is invited to participate.

This research is led by Zepure Merdinian, Sarah Lambert Derian, M.Ed. and Diana Marginean, Ph.D. They can be reached via email at ArmeniansLikeYou@gmail.com.

NAASR Awarded \$150,000 Cummings Foundation Grant

GRANT, from page 8

“It would not be possible for the Foundation to hire the diversity and depth of expertise and insights that our volunteers bring to the process,” said Vyriotes. “We so appreciate the substantial time and thought they dedicated toward ensuring that our democratized version of philanthropy results in equitable outcomes that will really move the needle on important issues in local communities.”

The foundation and volunteers first identified 150 organizations to receive three-year grants of up to \$225,000 each. The winners included first-time recipients as well as nonprofits that had previously received Cummings grants. Twenty-five of this latter group of repeat recipients were then selected by a volunteer panel to have their grants elevated to 10-year awards ranging from \$300,000 to \$1 million each.

Cummings Foundation has now awarded \$480 million to greater Boston nonprofits. The complete list of this year’s 150 grant winners, plus nearly 1,500 previous recipients, is available at www.CummingsFoundation.org.



St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School

St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School (SSAES) is seeking applications for School Office Manager.

School Office Manager - Position Summary

Under the direction of the Head of School, perform a variety of management duties, involving both specific routines and broadly defined policies and procedures; work cooperatively with staff, students, visitors, and parents, and perform other related duties as assigned.

Job Hours

12-month position 7:45 am – 3:45 pm (40 hrs./week).
Summer flex hours will be determined on an annual basis.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS:

School Management

- Maintain and operate school management software (RenWeb & FACTS).
- Generate and maintain various lists, schedules, and calendars.
- Coordinate extracurricular programming including after school activities, picture arrangement, Graduation Ceremony, Armenia Trip, and school field trips.
- Establish, maintain, and monitor accurate and efficient electronic and manual filing systems.
- Maintain students' records.
- Manage supplies, equipment, purchase orders, and inventory.
- Ensure the upkeep of all supplies and materials in common faculty areas (ie. resource room and faculty/staff room).
- Coordinate custodial care of preschool and elementary buildings as well as school events.
- Coordinate substitute faculty when necessary.

Administrative Support

- Interact and communicate with parents, students, visitors, and employees in routine situations, which require tact, discretion, courtesy, and confidentiality.
- Update the annual school and monthly calendar.
- Communicate special alerts to families.
- Maintain classroom key distribution and record-keeping.

Minimum Qualifications

- Associate's or bachelor's degree preferred.
- Minimum of 3 years relevant experience.
- Able to fluently work with administration, faculty, and parents to build a tightly integrated and smooth running school.

Knowledge of:

- Modern office practices, procedures, and equipment.
- Record-keeping techniques.
- Strong oral and written communication skills.
- Interpersonal skills using tact, patience, and courtesy.
- First Aid and CPR (or willingness to obtain certification after hire).
- Knowledge of Armenian language is preferred.

Ability to:

- Compose routine correspondence independently and timely.
- Work independently with minimal direction.
- Establish and maintain cooperative and effective working relationships.
- Learn, interpret, apply and explain rules, regulations, policies and procedures.
- Compile and maintain accurate records and prepare reports.
- Maintain confidentiality.

* Perform other tasks as needed.

Benefits

- Competitive salary
- Health and Dental Insurance Coverage
- 403(B) plan with match
- Professional development opportunities

Interested candidates should submit a cover letter, résumé and three letters of recommendation to careers@ssaes.org



Arts & Culture

IALA's 2023 Young Armenian Poets Awards Deadline Extended

The submission deadline for the International Armenian Literary Alliance's annual Young Armenian Poets Awards has been extended until June 14. YAPA, organized in partnership with h-pem, is a contest for exceptional Armenian writers between the ages of 14 and 18.

Over the past two years, the Young Armenian Poets Awards (YAPA) has provided a space for Armenian writers to express themselves and have their voices heard on the global stage. This year is no exception.

This year's entrants are asked to submit work that grapples with the notion of visibility as it relates to Armenian identity and experience. How visible are Armenia and Armenian issues on the world stage? What is the extent to which we feel visible as Armenians in our respective communities outside of Armenia?

Submissions — to be read by IALA board members and judges Gregory Djanikian, Armine Iknadossian, and Raffi Wartanian — are encouraged from any young writer who identifies as Armenian, no matter gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, creed, national origin, socio-economic class, educational background, personal style/appearance, citizenship and immigration status, or political affiliation.

Monetary prizes will be granted for the top three poems, which will be published online on the h-pem website and shared on IALA's social media platforms in the fall. Winning authors will be invited to read their work at IALA's annual Emerging Writers Showcase.

"Literature is a vital element of a people and a culture — we are our stories," says founder Olivia Katrandjian. "As writers, we must support each other if we want to thrive not only as individuals, but as a literary community. As a people, Armenians must support our writers if we want the world to listen to our stories."

"We continue to honor and create a platform for the next generation of exciting Armenian poets who have so much to teach us," says contest director Alan Semerdjian, "and we're thankful for those who will spread the word about this fantastic opportunity."

"Being involved in the Young Armenian Poets contest gave me a way to put the feelings I had been struggling to understand for years into flowing sentences and share them with the world, enabling me to see how my words can truly affect others and touch their hearts," says 2022 YAPA winner, Ani Apresyan. "Winning recognition and hearing what other like-minded Armenian youth have to say fills me with indescribable hope for the future that Armenia is taking steps towards fostering."

For more details, full submission guidelines, and more information on past winners, please visit IALA's website, www.armenianliterary.org, or contact Alan Semerdjian, Young Armenian Poets Awards Founder and Director, at ialayoungpoetsawards@gmail.com.



Tanya Sklyar, War (I.), Heart (Wound), 2023 (Galerie Wolf&Galentz photo)

Artists from Countries at War Exhibit Together

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — The war in Ukraine has annihilated human lives and homes, entire cities and their infrastructure, economic activity, places of worship and every other institution of social existence. Civilians from the belligerent nations have fled from their homelands in search of safety. Among those suffering "collateral damage" are artists, intellectuals, individuals active in the cultural realm. Not only collaboration, but simple coexistence among performers in music, art, and the theater has become a rarity. Thus, it comes as welcome news to learn that a group of women from three countries involved have defied the undeclared war on culture, to appear together and present their works.

The venue is the Gallery Wolf & Galentz in Berlin, which was established in 2019 by Armenian artist Archi Galentz and gallerist Andreas Wolf. Exactly one year ago, they hosted an exhibition on the theme of war, "Comments on Betrayal and Violence," with participation of painter Gagik Kurginian from Ukraine. (<https://wolf-galentz.de/en/comments-on-betrayal-and-violence/>) The current show, titled "Heartbeat, a joint exhibition (by artists from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia)," held a vernissage on June 2 and runs until August 16. The artists declared their purpose: "We as artists from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia are participating in this exhibition. Yes, we are performing together. We all go through pain and anger. But we do not accept hatred between the artists of our countries. Hate is what the regime that started the war wants. If we start hating each other, they will have won. They will not win."

Tanja Sklyar, from Odessa and Berlin, said she was taking part in the exhibition, "because I hope for an emotional contact between us, artists from different countries, through visual messages. This is an opportunity to preserve ourselves as a person in this Hell of War." Liudmila Belova (St. Petersburg and Rose, Montenegro) said she lamented the lack of "possibilities of verbal communication," where all "words seem to be either lies, or manipulation or speculation, depending on the perspective of both speaker and listener. In times of war, poetry and music more accurately express emotions and 'pronounce' the unspoken. My participation in the exhibition Heartbeat is an opportunity to express myself through artistic means on the topic of war."

Julia Katan (Odessa, Berlin) seeks "a balance of dark and light forces" in her art, "gravitating toward the light side ... even under the weight of historical times." Now, when hatred reigns, she wants "to put a grain of love on the scales. It is important to unite. To create in the name of life, not death. To notice the halftones between light and darkness. Recognize and accept our emotions, then they will not be poison to others, and to ourselves." She believes that "the most terrible event can be turned for good. Perhaps not immediately. But by putting love and openness into our actions, we make the soil fertile, and in it, sooner or later, the flowers are sure to sprout."

Marina Koldobskaya (St. Petersburg and Berlin), who is curator as well as exhibitor, is half-Ukrainian, her family is from Zhytomyr. "Now," she says, "one of my homelands is attacking my other homeland, trying to destroy it and destroying its own future.

see EXHIBIT, page 16

Patrick Radelet

French Musician Is Committed to Armenia And Artsakh

Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / REIMS, France — Patrick Radelet is a French singer, pianist and composer. He studied singing at the Paris Conservatory, where he was awarded a first prize. He has been a baritone with the Radio France Choir (Paris) since 1991, where he has sung as a soloist under the direction of many renowned conductors. Outside of Radio France, he also sings as a soloist in numerous oratorios, as well as in recitals. He participates in concerts as a pianist (accompaniment of singers and chamber music) and regularly collaborates with the German publisher Bärenreiter in making piano-chant arrangements of orchestral scores of operas.



Dear Patrick, your concert "For you, Artsakh," on April 25 at the Aram Khachatryan House Museum in Yerevan with your daughter, cellist Mathilde Radelet, was quite memorable, not only because you presented only Armenian songs and music, but also because we discovered talented musicians. I would like to thank you for your moral support to Artsakh, but also for your high-quality art! How would you describe this concert?

I will leave it to all those who attended the concert to talk about what they heard. I can only tell you what it means to me, that is, my desire to interpret Armenian music, my desire to express my support and total solidarity with all the Armenian people, my desire for communion with them, a communion that I felt very well during the two concerts in Yerevan and in Kapan. This concert is also the culmination of all that I have undertaken since November 2020 and the crystallization of my love for Armenia, its people and its culture.

Kapan is a border town that does not usually receive guest artists, although it has great artistic traditions. How did you decide to go there?

I also wanted to do this concert in Kapan for two essential reasons. The
see RADELET, page 16



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



Kbeibat: Middle Eastern Dumplings From Antonio Tahhan

“Kbeibat dough is usually made with a combination of bulgur and farina/semolina. My aunt Masy soaks, strains, and purées bulgur in a food processor, and then kneads in some farina and water. The filling is made with ground beef, spices (in my family’s case, just some black pepper), onion, and parsley. Some cooks fill their kbeibat with raw meat and some fill theirs with sautéed meat — there are pros and cons of each method, and each result is totally different. The sautéed filling has that seared-meat flavor, which nicely contrasts with the subtle flavor of the boiled dough. On the other hand, the raw filling gently cooks along with the dough, and result in a more satisfying texture. To see an example of semolina kbeibat, made with the raw filling method, check out my friend Tony Tahhan’s kbeibat.



Antonio Tahhan leads a Zoom cooking class, teaching fellow Master of Arts in Arab Studies (MAAS) program students at Georgetown to make Aleppo-style fattah

Either way, you can’t go wrong,” says Kathryn Pauline, the food writer, photographer, and recipe developer behind the Savor award-winning food blog, Cardamom and Tea.

Antonio Tahhan is a Syrian-Venezuelan American food writer, researcher, and blogger who moved to Florida with his family when he was younger. He pursued degrees in Math, Economics, and Spanish Literature at Cornell University. He studied food anthropology and became fascinated by its stories, traditions, and taboos. In 2010, he was awarded a Fulbright Research Grant to go to Syria, where he studied the midday meal in three contexts: at homes, in restaurants, and in the streets. From cooking to eating, food was a natural vehicle for cultural exchange and one that Antonio continues to explore.

“I enjoy making Middle Eastern dumplings called kbeibat, Assyrian-style semolina-bulgur dumplings stuffed with a spiced lamb kofta filling. The first time I made them without my Syrian grandmother, she was there the entire time, over the telephone, walking me through each step,” he says.

Antonio documents recipes and stories from Aleppo and his many travels, bringing people together online and in person around the love of food. During the recent pandemic, he even launched a web series called “Teta Thursdays,” a virtual conversation on food, culture, and identity. Each week, he interviewed food writers and researchers who specialize in the food culture of the Arab world. He was accepted to the Master of Arts in Arab Studies program at Georgetown University where he plans to attend this fall. “The dough for these dumplings is basic: bulgur, semolina and water. My first attempt at making the dough was a complete disaster. According to my grandmother, I over-soaked the bulgur and added more water than I needed.”

The dough starts with the bulgur:

“You want the water to cover the bulgur by about one inch. After 15-20 minutes, discard any remaining water from the bulgur and mix with the semolina flour to

make the dough. There will be little if no water left to drain.”

The meat filling:

“The filling is the same as for kefta kabobs: ground beef, onions, parsley, ground allspice and salt. Since we’re not adding any extra fat and we’re boiling these dumplings, you’ll want to make sure to buy a fairly fatty selection of ground beef.”

The dumpling work flow:

Tip: Use ice-cold water to help keep the dough from sticking to your hands.

Cook dumplings in simmering water. Dumplings cook in 4-6 minutes.

Ingredients:

1 cup bulgur wheat, #1 grind (fine)

1 cup fine semolina flour

Water, for dough

1 lb. 85% ground beef

2 medium onions, grated

1 cup flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped

2 teaspoons allspice, ground

Kosher salt, to taste

Preparation:

Rinse and strain bulgur using cold water. Soak bulgur in cold water to cover the surface by a finger or two, no more. Let bulgur sit for at least 15-20 minutes. In the meantime, prepare the meat mixture by mixing together the grated onion, parsley, allspice, and salt with the ground beef.

Mix bulgur, semolina, and a little salt (1/2 teaspoon kosher salt) to form the dough. Knead until it comes together. If wet, add a little more semolina. If dry, add more water. Cover dough until ready to use.

Fill a bowl with ice water to keep your hands wet while shaping the dumplings.

Roll a 1-inch wide ball of dough between your hands. Open a hole using your pointer in one hand, while rotating and holding the shape of the ball with your other hand. Once the hole is wide and the dough casing is thin, stuff it with a spoonful of meat mixture and seal by pressing the edge of the hole together. Alternatively, you can follow the easier disk method outlined in the diagram on the blog post (below).

Arrange the dumplings on a large sheet pan lined with parchment paper (or lightly coated with oil) to prevent them from sticking. Bring a medium sized pot of water to a simmer and season with salt (as you would when you’re making pasta). Simmer the dumplings for 6-8 minutes in batches.

Check the raw meat for seasoning by cooking a tiny piece on a skillet. It’s easier to work with and shape the dumplings when your hands are wet. It will help keep the dough from sticking to your fingers.

Yield: Approx. 36 dumplings

For this recipe, go to Antonio’s blog:

<http://www.antoniotahhan.com/2010/04/27/middle-eastern-dumplings/>

For more recipes, see: <https://www.antoniotahhan.com/recipes/>

Over 1.58K subscribers have viewed Antonio’s YouTube videos at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@antoniotahhan>

Connect at:

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

<https://mobile.twitter.com/antoniotahan>

<https://www.instagram.com/antoniotahhan/?hl=en>

<https://linktr.ee/antoniotahhan>

<https://www.antoniotahhan.com/projects/>

“One of the most popular social events this semester was a two-part virtual cooking class hosted by first-year MAAS student and food writer Antonio Tahhan. Participants gathered the necessary ingredients in advance and then followed along, cooking at home, while Antonio demonstrated how to make yogurt, rice pudding, and Aleppo-style fattah. Food was also a gateway to the community Antonio found in the <<https://ccas.georgetown.edu/academics/maas/>> Master of Arts in Arab Studies program, from which he will graduate this month. An established culinary writer and researcher, he attended a <<https://ccas.georgetown.edu/>> Center for Contemporary Arab Studies symposium on Levantine cuisine at Georgetown and was motivated to apply for the center’s MAAS graduate program. During his time at The Walsh School of Foreign Service (SFS), Antonio has continued to explore his passion for the food cultures of the Middle East and is a contributor to the recently published volume Making Levantine Cuisine: Modern Foodways of the Eastern Mediterranean. After graduation, he intends to produce a documentary about the food cultures of the Syrian diaspora, which he hopes will ‘highlight the ways Syrians are more than just vulnerable communities that we often see portrayed in the media.’”

See: <https://ccas.georgetown.edu/2021/03/02/the-pandemic-and-our-community/>

Also:

<https://cardamomandtea.com/289/kbeibat/>

<https://www.tasteofbeirut.com/kurdish-kibbeh-kuttelk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/SalpysInternationalKitchen/posts/kbeibat-my-style-assyrian-dumplingsoriginal-recipe-by-salpys-international-kitch/973302009488576/>

https://issuu.com/georgetownsfs/docs/winter-spring_2022_ccas_newsmagazine/s/15752594

References:

*Special thanks to Robyn and Doug Kalajian at <https://thearmeniankitchen.com> for their assistance with this story. See: <https://thearmeniankitchen.com/antonio-tahhan/>



ARTS & CULTURE

Tekeyan Takes VEM Ensemble to Detroit, Boston and Montreal

VEM, from page 1

Niall Tarō Ferguson on cello. The music they performed included works by Komitas, Aram Khachaturian, Tigran Mansurian, Dimitri Shostakovich, Arno Babajanyan, Edvard Mirzoyan, Goharik Gazaroossian, Khosrovidukht and Johan Svendsen.

Pogossian at each performance masterfully presented background information which made the pieces more accessible and piqued the interest of the audience. For ex-



Dr. Melissa Bilal speaking at the Vartan Room of St. John Armenian Church of Southfield, MI

ample, he spoke about the personal friendship between the composers Edvard Mirzoyan and Dmitri Shostakovich, which led to the latter to compose his *Adagio from String Quartet No. 10, Op. 118*, while sojourning at the Dilijan Composers' Resort on Mirzoyan's invitation.

He also revealed that one of the VEM members, Niall, was not only a performer but also had arranged the lullaby *Orim Orim* collected by Mihran Toumajan for VEM to perform.

Detroit

The May 9 Detroit concert was hosted and cosponsored by St. John Armenian Church in Southfield, with additional cosponsors the Cultural Society of Armenians from Istanbul and the AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School. TCA Detroit Chapter Chair Diana Alexanian was the master of ceremonies and St. John's pastor Fr. Aren



Three of the VEM Ensemble members performing at Detroit's St. John Armenian Church

Jebejian made some moving closing remarks. A special element of the Detroit visit was the lecture given by Dr. Bilal at the same church on Sunday, May 7, titled "Unearthing Mihran Toumajan's Life and Work." This lecture, as well as the main concert, was dedicated to the memory of beloved local Armenian-American educator Dickran

Toumajan, who had passed away in 2022. A community outreach performance also took place at the local AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School on May 9.

Boston

Boston's primary concert was held and co-sponsored by Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge on May 11. A special section of the concert featured pianist Lilit Karapetian-Shougarian, with two pieces dedicated to the memory of her late husband, Ambassador Rouben Shougarian. TCA Executive Director Aram Arkun served as master of ceremonies along with Holy Trinity pastor Fr. Vasken Kouzouian.

VEM also performed at a reception for *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* supporters on May 9 at the Baikar Building in Watertown, which is the headquarters both of the *Mirror-Spectator* and of the Tekeyan Cultural Association. The group gave a demonstration on May 12 at St. Stephen



Children trying to answer Prof. Movses Pogossian's questions at St. Stephen's Armenian School

Armenian Elementary School in Watertown, entrancing young listeners with Armenian classical music in an interactive format of music. Principal Houry Boyamian welcomed the musicians to the school and introduced them to the students.

VEM also performed at MIT on May 12 as part of Dr. Bilal's lecture titled "Intertwined Legacies: Gomidas



VEM cutting a welcome cake after the Boston concert



Three of the VEM Ensemble members performing at Detroit's St. John Armenian Church

Vartabed (1869-1935) and Koharik Gazaroossian (1907-1967)." This was cosponsored by MIT Music and Theater Arts, MIT History and MIT Women's and Gender Studies Program, and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, as well as the Tekeyan Cultural Association. Professor Lerna Ekmekçioğlu of MIT introduced Bilal.

Montreal

The main concert in Montreal took place at the Haroutiun and Sima Arzoumanian Hall of the Tekeyan Center in St. Laurent on May 13. TCA Montreal Chapter executive Harout Kouyoumjian recognized the notables in the audience, including Primate of the Armenian Church of Canada Bishop Apkar Hovakimyan, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Canada Anahit Harutyunyan, Fr. Komitas Mirzakhanyan, pastor of the Holy Cross Armenian Church of Laval, TCA President Dr. Arshavir Gundjian and Sona Lakhoyan Olivier, deputy of the National Assembly of Quebec. Samuel Keushkerian served as the master of ceremonies.

On May 15, TCA Montreal Chapter Chair Nourababikian arranged the visit of VEM to the AGBU Alex Manoogian School of Montreal, where they were hosted by Principal Chahé Tanachian. Music Teacher Artur Margos-



Amb. Anahit Harutyunyan, left, speaks with three of the VEM Ensemble members at the Montreal Tekeyan Center

sian gave VEM a special treat by having his students sing a song accompanied by flutes and percussion before VEM made its own presentation.

Reactions

The reactions to VEM were overwhelmingly positive, just as during the 2019 tour sponsored by TCA. For example, Fr. Kouzouian declared at the Boston concert: "Yesterday, I received a phone call from Fr. Aren Jebejian, the pastor of the St. John's Armenian Church in Detroit, where the VEM Ensemble just performed two nights ago and he said the following to me, 'They are going to blow you away. They are *phenomenal*, the epitome of professionalism!' And to that I will add, *PERFECTION*. I think we all agree with his words."

The VEM members in turn found the tour useful and enjoyable.

Kodžas declared: "Having the opportunity to perform for audiences ranging from school children to Armenia's Ambassador in Canada was incredibly memorable and really left us with the impression of how important performing this music is to all members of the Armenian communities."

Zavala observed: "It was truly touching the way that each community, though so far apart in miles, welcomed us! We thoroughly enjoyed getting to perform for and interact with such enthusiastic audiences. We all feel very privileged to have met pillars in each of the Armenian communities in Detroit, Boston and Montréal!"



VEM with students and staff of the AGBU Alex Manoogian School of Montreal and Montreal Tekeyan leaders

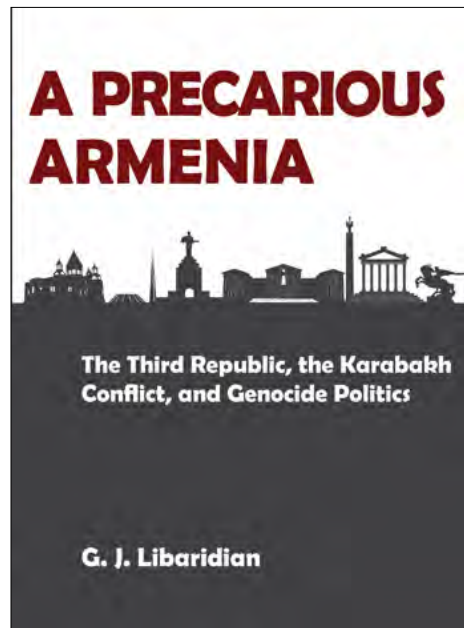
ARTS & CULTURE

Books

New Volume on Karabakh Conflict by Libaridian to Be Released by Gomidas Institute

LONDON — The new book, *A Precarious Armenia: The Third Republic, the Karabakh Conflict, and Genocide Politics*, by Dr. Gerard J. Libaridian, will be published later this month Gomidas Institute.

In this mammoth volume, Libaridian explores a number of fundamental issues regarding Armenia's foreign and security policies and scrutinizes Armenian political culture as the framework within which positions have been defined and solutions have been sought. The previously published and unpublished material collectively analyze the political thinking that characterized the response to the challenges that the Third Republic faced and failed to address from the standpoint of statehood versus a vague but powerful nationalist discourse. The author achieves this difficult task by studying themes such as Armenia and Armenians as agents of their own history as opposed to



the dominant sense of victimhood, maximalism confused with patriotism, the role of mediators and other states as saviors, the comfort zone of illusions and legends as opposed to hard realism and pragmatism. Libaridian argues that the dominant but faulty framework led leaders of the state and Diaspora to a policy that bet on war rather than peace, a second Karabakh war that Armenia lost in 2020, a war that should have been avoided.

Libaridian is a retired historian and diplomat. Between 1991 and 1997 he served as advisor to the first President of Armenia and was First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Secretary of the National Security Council, and negotiator with Azerbaijan and Turkey. He has taught and written on Armenian history and authored numerous books, articles and reports on contemporary Armenian, Middle Eastern and South Caucasus politics and international relations. He has also taught and lectured extensively in institutions of higher learning in the US and internationally. Most recently (2000-2012) he was Alex Manoogian Professor of Modern Armenian History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he also served as Director of the Armenian Studies Program. Libaridian is currently working on a number of book projects.

BIBLIOINFO: Gerard G. Libaridian, *A Precarious Armenia: The Third Republic, the Karabakh Conflict, and Genocide Politics* (London: Gomidas Institute), xlvii + 586, ISBN 978-1-909382-76-3, pb. US\$55.00/UK£45.00

For more information, visit books@gomidas.org

Artists from Countries at War Exhibit Together

EXHIBIT, from page 13

It is unbearable." She is taking part in the exhibition "because I do not accept hatred between artists of our countries. The causes of violence are fear and hatred." For Katja Tishkevich, from Minsk, "War is a great pain that cannot be accepted, understood, and then forgotten. It does not leave anyone indifferent." Her participation "is an opportunity to show the emotional involvement of the tragedy, the sharing of common pain in joint action against it."

In his introductory remarks at the vernissage, Archi Galentz stressed the importance of the intense cooperation among the six artists in preparing all aspects of the exhibition; without this, it could not have succeeded.

As the shared dismay and shock experienced by artists from the countries in conflict motivated the initiative, many of the works on display – paintings, sculptures, videos, and paper constructions – were created especially for the exhibition. Not surprisingly, war is the dominating theme, depicted not in general terms but as the personal experience of human suffering, linked in one way or another with the tragedy afflicting the artists' homelands. In her graphic and sculpted works, Katya Tishkevich, for example, shows the bodily pain, trauma, and horror of the destruction of the human being. Marina Koldobskaya's uncompromising, primitivist painting depicts a blind, bestial, all-consuming aggression. In a video, Liudmila Belova shows the terrifying, endless anticipation



Marina Koldobskaya, *Queue*, 2023 (Galerie Wolf&Galentz photo)

of an unknown, but compelling catastrophe. The catastrophe itself is only implied, and yet in her graphic works one sees the sad image of the "landscape after the battle." Tania Sklyar's objects symbolically show the pathological damage inflicted on the collective body of humanity, the collapse of consciousness leading to the destruction of life itself.

Julia Katan's works are surrealist. Inspired by Ukrainian folklore, they hint at

dark forces, beyond the power of reason, that determine the course of our lives. And in her mystical videos, Masha Garash deals with the violation of the "moral law within us," without which no way to the "starry sky above us" can exist.

Although presenting the horrors of war, the six artists succeed in communicating hope, by demonstrating in their collective endeavor the power of cooperation and creativity.

Patrick Radelet: French Musician Committed to Armenia, Artsakh

RADELET, from page 13

first one is my will to bring my support to the whole Syunik, seriously threatened in the same way as Artsakh. Kapan is the most important city of this region of Armenia, so it is an important symbol, and its geographical position very close to Artsakh is an additional one in my eyes. Moreover, during my first trip to Armenia with my family in August 2022, we came to Kapan to visit my friend Mari Khachatryan's family. At that time, I promised them to come and sing there.

The concert was very well received by the large audience (about 400 people). We went to Kapan by road, the Yerevan-Kapan test flight had taken place just two days before, so the connection was not yet open. But it is a pleasure to drive this road, to cross villages and to admire the very varied landscapes that Armenia offers.

It is normal for professional musicians to play without a score, but you also sang Armenian songs without reading them! How did you manage to memorize the Armenian words and sing with the right pronunciation?

I worked very hard, first to get to know Armenian music, to absorb its unique expression and to understand its very essence. Then, I chose what I wanted to interpret and I started to work on the texts of the songs: pronunciation and translation. For this, I was first helped by Mari Khachatryan and her mother Anahit, then by my friend Anna Gabrielyan from Yerevan who helped me enormously without ever counting her time. Thanks to these friends and hard personal work, I managed to achieve what I was aiming for: to sing in Armenian by heart, knowing the meaning of each word, and accompanying myself on the piano.

We also thank you for composing the beautiful piece "Artsakh" for pi-

ano and cello. I would like this work to be played in many countries. How a French musician without Armenian origin managed to write this composition?

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about this composition. For a long time, I had the idea of writing something for Artsakh. To do so, I wanted to use - in part - Armenian melodies from Artsakh. During my stay in Armenia last year, I was able to bring back about fifteen of these melodies. I chose three of them and used each of them, harmonizing and developing them, for each of the three pieces constituting "Artsakh." Of course, I wrote my own melodies and combined them with Armenian themes with the aim of building something coherent and trying to stay close to the Armenian expression. During our trip to Armenia in August 2020, we travelled through many parts of the country. I was deeply marked by the Armenian landscapes, the mountains, the monasteries... We met refugee families from Artsakh who had lost everything. It was these very strong impressions and emotions that allowed me to write this music and to express in it what I seem to have grasped of the Armenian spirit and what it provokes in me.

This was your second visit to Armenia. What can Westerners find in this country?

I find so many elements in Armenia that reinforce my attachment to this country and its people. I will try to explain...

First of all, there are the encounters that one makes there. In Armenia hospitality is not an empty word: it is absolutely extraordinary. We have always been received in an extremely generous and loving way. All the people I have met, whether it was a private, professional, public or simply a spontaneous conversation of a few minutes with a cab driver or an unexpected

meeting at the corner of a street, all these people have always shown themselves to be warm, pleasant and of a benevolent humanity. Then there is the country itself, its marvelous landscapes, its mountains so beautiful and diverse, the architectural beauty so characteristic of the monasteries and churches scattered even in the most remote places of the mountains, the language and its magnificent alphabet celebrated in many places in and out of the cities, and which is one of the pillars of Armenian identity. There is the Armenian cuisine and the way it is shared. The whole country breathes Armenian culture. There is the general atmosphere, human and safe. Whether in the city or in the mountains, in the prestigious places or in the more underprivileged areas, I feel at home everywhere in Armenia.

You wished to obtain an Armenian passport, whereas some Armenian citizens dream of having foreign passports.

I feel extremely close to Armenia and Armenians. This attachment is growing day by day, and is increased tenfold after each of my visits to Armenia. This application for Armenian nationality is my wish to give concrete expression to this deep attachment. It is the expression of my ardent desire to belong to the Armenian people. For me, it is the logical and natural continuation of the path that carries me more and more towards Armenia.

Thanks again, Patrick, to Mathilde and to you! And I wish you to present Armenian music all over the world and to come to Armenia again and again!

To spread and make known the Armenian culture through music, and thus draw attention to Armenia and Artsakh is now my main concern and my dearest desire. I will continue to work on it, to participate in the measure of my modest means in the advent of a finally secure and serene life for all Armenians on their ancestral lands.



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

JUNE 11 — St. James Armenian Festival – Annual Picnic! Delicious Armenian food, Live Armenian music, children's activities with moon bounce, face painting, and more! Rain or shine. Noon-5pm. St. James Armenian Church - 465 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown MA. For more info visit www.stjames-watertown.org/festival or call 617.923.8860.

JUNE 11 — Mirak Chamber Music Series: Treasures of Armenian Classical Music, Organized by the Armenian Cultural Foundation and co-sponsored by Amaras Art Alliance. Naira Babayan, piano; Christina Gullans, cello. Works by Ghazarosian, Hovounts, Sayat Nova, Komitas, Baghdasarian, Harutyunyan. Sunday, at 4 p.m. Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic Street, Arlington. (781) 646-3090. For tickets contact: amarasonline.com

JUNE 13 — Let's Party for the Park! InterContinental Hotel, Boston. Wine Tasting featuring the extraordinary Storica Wines: Wines from Armenia. Benefit for the Park's care during 2023. Advance Reservations required. For details and link to reserve, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support

JUNE 13 — LET'S PARTY FOR THE PARK! InterContinental Hotel, Boston, 6:30pm. Friends of Armenian Heritage Park's fabulous Wine Tasting Party featuring the extraordinary Storica Wines: Wines from Armenia Advance Reservations required. Benefit for the Park's Care during 2023. 21+ Party. For reservations, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Support.

JUNE 21 — Tea & Tranquility. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Bos-

ton at 4 pm. Meet & Greet. Together at the Park. Marvel at the Abstract Sculpture. Tie a Ribbon on The Wishing Tree. Enjoy ice tea and luscious cookies. RSVP appreciated, hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

JULY 2 — Armenian Church of Cape Cod - Kef Time Fourth of July weekend - Dinner & Dancing. Sunday, 6 to 11 p.m. at The Cape Club - 125 Falmouth Woods Road, North Falmouth Chicken Kebab & Losh Kebab dinner; music by Leon Janikian, Harry Bedrosian. ages 21 & over \$85; 16 to 20 \$50; 8 to 15 \$35; under 8 free Tickets on sale Eventbrite Kef-Time. For more information: Andrea Barber (617)201-9807.

JULY 22 — Armenian Church at Hye Pointe Men's Club New England Clambake Church Fundraiser, 1280 Boston Road (Rte 125) Haverhill MA. Menu: lobster or steak, clam chowder, steamed clams and mussels, corn on the cob, coleslaw, baked potato, tossed salad, strawberry cheesecake or shortcake. Children's menu: hamburger, hotdog, corn, chips, ice cream. 3 p.m. appetizers and cash bar, Dinner served promptly at 4 p.m. Donation \$95.00 per adult, children 12 and under \$20.00 Please RSVP by July 17, 2023, by calling the Church office at (978) 372-9227, or texting Myles Couyoumjian at (978) 852-2859, Ed Kibarian at (781) 838-1056, Mark Kazanjian at (508) 633-7447 or Michael Bebirian at (603) 785-6090.

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.

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.

Ara Oshagan Photography and Installation Exhibit at Armenian Museum Of America Explores Issues of Dislocation and Cultural Identity

WATERTOWN — The Armenian Museum of America (AMofA) recently announced the opening of its next contemporary art exhibition, "Ara Oshagan: Disrupted, Borders." The show follows the AMofA's blockbuster exhibit, "On the Edge: Los Angeles Art 1970s-1990s from the Joan and Jack Quinn Family Collection," which received rave reviews and was viewed by thousands of visitors.

"Disrupted, Borders" at AMofA is an expanded version of what was previously exhibited at Stockton University Art Gallery in New Jersey, and the show is being curated by Ryann Casey. "This exhibition connects many of the diasporic and homeland entanglements that have occupied me over the past decade or more, from Los Angeles to Beirut to Artsakh," stated Oshagan. "The works articulate a certain 'diasporic liberation,' as so well stated by *Hyperallergic* editor Hrag Vartanian in his introductory essay about the exhibit."

The exhibition combines photography, collage, installation, and film, the last of which runs in the AMofA's Rose and Gregory A. Kolligian Media Room. "The installation at Stockton was quite impressive in person and we knew this was something we wanted to bring to our Adele and Haig Der Manouelian Galleries," said Executive Director Jason Sohigian. "Ara's photography is from the diaspora in Los Angeles and Beirut, as well as Armenia and Artsakh so it connects many historical elements with contemporary issues facing Armenians today."

More than 55 works are on display including a massive mural from Oshagan's "Beirut Memory Project," as well as six large medieval manuscripts printed on fabric and overlain with photographs of people from Shushi, Artsakh. Eighteen Armenian Hmayil prayer scrolls are also reproduced for an installation in the middle of the gallery space. The scrolls are created from the digitized collections of the Library of Congress and other institutions, and they are modified with "interventions" from Oshagan that reflect on travel, family, culture, and politics.

"Visitors will notice that some of the gallery walls are painted red. This color choice was intentional, and it is actually the color of the dye made by the Cochineal insect that is indigenous to the Ararat plain and Arax River Valley," explained Sohigian. "*Vordan Karmir* is a familiar color in Armenian rugs, and Oshagan selected it with the curator to accent the exhibit. It adds another layer of meaning to the issues that Ara brings to this show around Armenian identity and culture."

The mural and manuscript portraits on fabric, which are part of Oshagan's Shushi series, are some of the largest works that have ever been exhibited in the AMofA gal-



In the mural image, Beirut Memory Project #56 (Digital Collage, 2018-2021),

leries. "Ara's innovative style allowed us to bring these larger-than-life images into the space so this installation offers many surprises from color to scale to medium, and a mix of time and place that will resonate with visitors," added Sohigian.

"Oshagan manages to seamlessly weave together different geographies, historical sources, and a range of mediums to consider the impact of dislocation on our personal and collective history," explained Curator Ryann Casey. "Bringing the past to the present, Oshagan asks us to reflect on our connections to place and community while highlighting the importance of memory on our shared future."

Ara Oshagan is a multi-disciplinary artist, curator, and cultural worker whose practice explores collective and personal histories of dispossession, legacies of violence, and

identity. He works in photography, film, collage, installation, book art, public art, and monument-making. Oshagan has published three books of photographs, is currently an artist-in-residence at 18th Street Art Center in Santa Monica, and a curator at ReflectSpace Gallery in Glendale.

Curator Ryann Casey is a New Jersey based artist and educator. She is an adjunct professor of photography, art history and critical theory at Stockton University, and her current photographic and curatorial projects focus on themes of loss, trauma, and memory.

"Disrupted, Borders" will be exhibited in the AMofA's third floor contemporary galleries through October 29, 2023. For more information, visit www.armenianmuseum.org/disrupted-borders. The gallery hours are Thursday through Sunday from 12:00 noon to 6:00 p.m. The Armenian Museum of America is located at 65 Main Street.

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



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EDITOR

Alin K. Gregorian

MANAGING EDITOR

Aram Arkun

ART DIRECTOR

Mark (Mgrditchian) McKertich

STAFF WRITER

Harry Kezelian III

CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Atamian, Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Florence Avakian, Christine Vartanian Datian, Dr. Arshavir Gundjian, Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, Ken Martin, Gerald Papasian, Benjamin Poghosyan, Suren Sargsyan, Harut Sassounian, Hagop Vartivarian

REGIONAL

CORRESPONDENTS

LOS ANGELES: Ani Duzdabanyan-Manoukian, Kevork Keushkerian, Michelle Mkhlian
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PARIS: Jean Eckian
SAN FRANCISCO: Kim Bardakian
CAIRO: Maydaa Nadar

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jirair Hovsepian, Ken Martin

VIDEO CORRESPONDENT

Haykaram Nahapetyan

The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is published weekly, except two weeks in July and the first week of the year, by:

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FAX: 617-924-2887

www.mirrorspectator.com

E-Mail: editor@mirrorspectator.com

For advertising: mirrorads@aol.com

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What Next after Erdogan's Victory?

By **Benyamin Poghosyan**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey were perhaps the most anticipated political events of 2023. There was a feeling among politicians, experts, and academicians that the 21-year rule of Erdogan may end. Given the transition of the global order, the Russia–West confrontation, and the prominent role of Turkey in shaping the balance of power in multiple regions stretching from the Middle East to Central Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean, the foreign policy choices of Turkey are of utmost importance for all global actors.

Erdogan's efforts to pull Turkey out from its usual role of junior partner of the US and transform the country into an independent regional player has significantly deteriorated relations between Turkey and the West. The US support to Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria, the purchase of Russian S-400 air defense systems, the suspicions in Turkey about potential American involvement in the July 2016 botched military coup attempt, rejection of Turkey's request to extradite Fethullah Gülen, and Turkey's reluctance to agree to the NATO membership of Sweden and Finland, brought US–Turkey relations to their lowest point since the end of the Cold War. Turkey's position on the Russia – Ukraine war also did not fully satisfy the Americans. Turkey supports Ukraine economically and militarily, but Turkey rejects calls to decrease its economic relationship with Russia, while playing a crucial role simultaneously in organizing exports to Russia.

The growing authoritarianism in Turkey added an additional layer to Turkey's elections. Many in the West viewed the potential defeat of Erdogan as a signal to other strongmen in the world that authoritarianism could be defeated. As the collective West seeks to increasingly depict the geopolitics of the 21st century as a fight between democracy and autocracy, many hoped that the defeat of the authoritarian Erdogan would change the trend of assertive and successful authoritarian rule. In general, there was a perception in the West that Erdogan's defeat would be good for the US and the EU, while his victory would benefit Russia. Russia fueled this mindset by taking clear steps to support Erdogan before the elections, including Russia's agreement to postpone Turkish payments for Russian natural gas and a Russian offer to establish a gas hub in Turkey.

Besides geopolitics and the democracy vs. autocracy fight, the economy was also a significant aspect of the Turkish elections. President Erdogan's economic policy resulted in a very high inflation rate in Turkey, which hurt the emerging Turkish middle class. The devastating earthquake in February 2023 revealed many problems in the Turkish construction sector, including the lack of control of standards and rampant corruption.

Thus, it seemed that all the ingredients were there to de-

feat Turkey's strongman, especially as the opposition managed to unite its forces bringing together Kemalists, a part of the nationalists, and former allies of Erdogan under one umbrella. Before the elections, many were convinced that Erdogan would at least lose the parliament while seeking to keep the presidency. The conventional wisdom was that defeat will not only end Erdogan's political career but will also put in danger the personal security of Erdogan and his inner circle. Some analysts were discussing the prospects of political destabilization after the elections, arguing that Erdogan probably will try to rig the elections and the opposition will bring millions of protestors to the street.

However, the reality emerged quite differently. Erdogan managed to win the parliament and secure his presidency through the runoff elections. Yes, Erdogan won around 52 percent of the votes, which is a sign of the deep polarization in the country. However, the opposition did not reject the election results, and there were no protests.

What will be Turkey's foreign policy after the elections? Turkey will likely continue its current strategy of balancing between Russia and the West, seeking to gain benefits from both sides. Turkey will continue to push for active involvement in multiple areas of the world, trying to boost its presence and interests.

However, first of all, Turkey needs economic stabilization. The country's economy is in a very dire situation, and immediately after Erdogan's victory, the Turkish currency started to decline further. This will further boost inflation, negatively impacting large swathes of the Turkish population. President Erdogan may agree to increase interest rates, returning to orthodox foreign policy, but more is needed. Turkey needs foreign investments and loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This may force Erdogan to take steps to improve relations with the West, and the issue of Sweden's membership in NATO may be a litmus paper to assess any changes in Turkey's foreign policy. The US and other NATO member states demand the finalization of all procedures by the time of the upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius, and Turkey will probably agree to this.

As for the South Caucasus, Turkey will continue its current strategy to gradually increase its presence and influence at the expense of the Russians and Iranians. Turkey will not take any tangible steps towards the normalization of its relations with Armenia as long as an Armenia – Azerbaijan peace treaty is not signed based on Azerbaijani terms. Meanwhile, in the long-term perspective, Turkey will not abandon its vision to have a direct land border with Azerbaijan by taking fully or partly the Syunik or Vayots Dzor regions of Armenia.

(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.)

Secretary of State Antony Blinken's Ego Will Cost Armenian Lives

By **Michael Rubin**

The warning signs about atrocity are flash red, but Secretary of State Antony Blinken persists in forcing through a peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, a traditionally Armenian-populated enclave in what is now Azerbaijan.

Blinken may see a peace deal as a success he can trumpet against the backdrop of a tenure devoid of other accomplishments, but the consequence of Blinken's actions will be huge.

He may want a Nobel Peace Prize, as might Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan or even Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. It is unlikely, but should the Norwegian Nobel Committee oblige, the Blinken prize would herald a humanitarian disaster, as did the Nobel Committee's award to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2019.

The problems with Blinken's peace plan are huge.

Democracies should not bully fellow democrats into conceding to terror in the face of aggression. Nor should the State Department dismantle democracies and force their submission to dictatorship. Most alarming, Blinken actively ignores Aliyev's abuses, even as Aliyev incites genocide and denies the legitimacy of an entire population.

As Armenian lands have fallen under Azerbaijan's control, Azerbaijanis have demolished churches and destroyed a millen-

ium-old cemetery. They, like Palestinian extremists do toward Jews in the Holy Land, denied any historical connection between Armenian communities and the lands on which they have lived for thousands of years since founding the world's first Christian state 1,722 years ago. This is why Azerbaijani restorers sandblast Armenian inscriptions from churches and insist they belong to ancient Albanians rather than Armenian interlopers.

That Blinken is silent as Azerbaijan demands Armenian priests abandon the Dadivank monastery suggests indifference to cultural eradication.

Aliyev, meanwhile, finds solace in sycophants who deny any legitimacy to Armenia's population, dismissing their community in Nagorno-Karabakh as no more real than "Narnia." That said, Blinken's silence is the rule rather than the exception. Be it in Nigeria, with regard to the Uyghurs, or in the South Caucasus, Blinken has been the worst secretary of state for religious freedom, at least since Cordell Hull insisted on sending Jews back to Nazi Germany as the Holocaust loomed.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Armenian community in Nagorno-Karabakh has organized itself democratically. Freedom House has ranked them more democratic than Azerbaijan, a country Freedom House lists among the world's worst dictatorships.

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COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Advice to Aliyev: Continue Destroying Azerbaijan's Reputation

Even though Azerbaijan, with the help of Turkish and Israeli weapons and hired Islamic terrorists, won the 2020 Artsakh War, Pres. Aliyev has been destroying his

country's international reputation.

With his barbaric actions during and since the war, Aliyev has undermined the interests of Azerbaijan. As a result, he has made himself a hated pariah and the laughing stock of the entire world. While Russia is cuddling him for its own political interests, the West is tolerating him to benefit from Azerbaijan's oil and gas.

I am very pleased that Aliyev is doing so many negative things in the eyes of not only Armenians, but also the entire world.

There are many examples of Aliyev's misdeeds. Here are some of them:

During the 2020 war, Azeri soldiers committed barbaric acts that violate the international law, such as: beheading captured Armenian soldiers and civilians, mutilating their bodies, torturing them, trying the captives in court and sentencing them to lengthy jail terms.

In violation of international conventions, Azerbaijan used banned cluster and phosphorous bombs to kill Armenian soldiers during the 2020 war.

Azerbaijan systematically destroyed and defaced hundreds of Armenian cultural monuments and desecrated dozens of Armenian churches in Artsakh in violation of the Hague Convention on "the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict."

Azerbaijan continues to violate the ceasefire agreement signed by Pashinyan, Aliyev and Putin at the end of the 2020 war. Here are some examples: Not releasing many of the Armenian Prisoners of War, shooting at civilians in Artsakh, occupying parts of the territory of the Republic of Armenia, taking new Armenian hostages, and threatening Armenia and Artsakh with further attacks if they do not comply with Azerbaijan's wishes.

Aliyev has dehumanized and demonized Armenians by describing them with vile adjectives, such as "leeches" and "wild animals." In 2005, during the visit of a German delegation, the Mayor of Baku, Hajibala Abutalybov, shamelessly told them: "Our goal is the complete elimination of Armenians. You, Nazis, already eliminated the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s, right? You should be able to understand us."

Aliyev dispatched dozens of fake eco-activists to block the Lachin Corridor during the last six months, depriving 120,000 Artsakhtsis of food and medicines. These so-called eco-activists were more like eco-terrorists. Azerbaijan then placed a checkpoint at the Lachin Corridor further violating the 2020

agreement.

In addition, Azerbaijan periodically cuts off the Internet and electricity of the Artsakh population, keeping them isolated, in the dark and without heat in freezing temperatures.

Instead of a simple transit road, Azerbaijan repeatedly demands a corridor to cross from eastern Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan, which implies Azeri sovereignty over Armenia's territory, in violation of 2020 agreement. By insisting on the Corridor, Aliyev is actually delaying Azerbaijan's access to Nakhichevan through Armenia.

Aliyev declares that all of the territory of the Republic of Armenia is 'Western Azerbaijan.' This is sheer nonsense. Whereas Artsakh and Armenia are thousands of years old, Azerbaijan did not exist until a century ago.

Aliyev made the ridiculous pledge that Artsakhtsis will live under Azerbaijani rule just like all of its other citizens who are also repressed. Artsakhtsis remember well their barbaric mistreatment by Azerbaijan. Blockading them now shows how much worse they will be treated in the future.

Aliyev repeatedly urges Armenia to sign a peace treaty with Azerbaijan. Any treaty signed by Azerbaijan is a meaningless piece of paper as we see from Aliyev's violations of the 2020 agreement.

To make matters worse, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller welcomed Aliyev's outrageous statement that he will give amnesty to all Artsakh officials who resign. Instead, Miller should have condemned Aliyev's unacceptable threats to invade Armenia and Artsakh.

Aliyev dismissed the demands of scores of world leaders and international organizations as well as the UN Security Council, the World Court and European Court of Human Rights to release the Armenian POWs and unblock the Lachin Corridor.

After the 2020 war, Azerbaijan established a racist Military Trophies Park in Baku, displaying wax models of Armenian soldiers with hooked noses and distorted faces. After complaints and condemnations by the international community, the exhibit was closed down.

In February 2004, an Azeri soldier, Ramil Safarov, used an axe to chop the head of a sleeping Armenian soldier in Hungary during a NATO program. In return for Azerbaijan loaning Hungary several billion dollars, Safarov was released prematurely with the understanding that he will serve the rest of his life sentence in a Baku jail. However, Aliyev welcomed Safarov as a national hero, pardoned him, promoted him to the rank of major, and gave him a free apartment and eight years of back pay. This is Azerbaijan's compensation to Safarov for committing a cold blooded murder.

As a result of all these war crimes, Aliyev has destroyed his and Azerbaijan's reputation around the world. He should be arrested and tried by the International Criminal Court as a war criminal.

Despite Aliyev's reprehensible actions, world powers keep closing their eyes ignoring his many crimes, blinded by Azerbaijan's oil and gas.

Plea to OSCE Minsk Co-Chairs To Protect Children Of Artsakh

By Lt. Gen. Hayk Kotanjian and Arthur Atanesyan

Address to the Presidents of Russia, the USA, and France

Dear Messrs Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, Joseph Robinette Biden Jr., and Emmanuel Jean-Michel Frederick Macron!

On International Children's Day, June 11, we once again have the honor to address you on behalf of the scientific community of the Armenian people, the first Christian nation in the world.

The end of the Azerbaijani-Turkish military aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh in November 2020, in violation of the prohibition on the use of force and the threat of force, by a trilateral statement involving the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, as well as the subsequent negotiations, not only failed to resolve the Karabakh conflict but also became the beginning of the deportation of Karabakh Armenians from their autochthonous territory of thousand years of residence. Unfortunately, we have to remind you that on the background of hundreds of children killed as a result of military operations in Ukraine and other regions of the world, thirty thousand children of Artsakh have been living under the direct threat of genocide, hunger, deportation, living in constant fear, experiencing the cruel consequences of the blockade of their motherland - legally self-determined Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) for more than half a year. Since December 12, 2022, due to the ongoing genocidal aggression of

Azerbaijan, thirty thousand children among 120 thousand Armenians of the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh Republic) are cut off from the outside world by the blockade of the Lachin corridor.

At a time when on the occasion of International Children's Day meetings of juvenile lawyers are held at the level of international associations and organizations on child rights, the urgent threats in the modern world and assistance to children in need are discussed, such assistance, unfortunately, often comes at the last moment when many things cannot be changed anymore. Today, by virtue of the inter-bloc confrontation, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group Co-Chair states do not properly respond to the dreadful hardships befallen by the 30,000 or so children of the blockaded Nagorno-Karabakh.

As a result of Azerbaijan's genocidal and deportation policy against the indigenous Armenian population of Karabakh, it is impossible to provide medical care to sick

AS A RESULT OF MILITARY OPERATIONS IN UKRAINE AND OTHER REGIONS OF THE WORLD, THIRTY THOUSAND CHILDREN OF ARTSAKH HAVE BEEN LIVING UNDER THE DIRECT THREAT OF GENOCIDE, HUNGER, DEPORTATION, LIVING IN CONSTANT FEAR, EXPERIENCING THE CRUEL CONSEQUENCES OF THE BLOCKADE OF THEIR MOTHERLAND - LEGALLY SELF-DETERMINED NAGORNO-KARABAKH REPUBLIC (NKR) FOR MORE THAN HALF A YEAR.

children in need of routine operations due to the blocked delivery of necessary medicines and medical instruments to NKR. During the winter months, 6,828 children could not attend pre-schools and were deprived of full nutrition and normal living conditions for six months because of the blockade and shelling of towns and villages of Artsakh. Unlike their contemporaries living in many countries of the world, the children of Artsakh have already experienced cold and malnutrition. Graduates of schools in Nagorno-Karabakh know, as do their parents, what it means to lose their homeland, their relatives and friends, their homes, their rights, and opportunities to continue their education.

As participants of the long-term scientific-expert cooperation with respected colleagues-strategists from Russia, the USA, and France, we highly appreciate the positive role of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs in achieving a fair, balanced, and dignified settlement of the Azerbaijani-Karabakh conflict in order to establish a long-term peace in the region. At the same time, we believe that the encouragement of Baku's destructive and bellicose policy runs counter to the desire for positive developments in the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

On International Children's Day, we have had the honor to close our appeal with the request to take concrete steps to curb the corrupt dictatorial regime of Azerbaijan, which in full view of the international community continues to deny the irreproachable fact of legal self-determination of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, recognized by the authorities of Russia, USA, and France, and to implement purposefully its policy of expulsion and extermination of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh.

(Lt. Gen. Hayk Kotanjian (retired) is a Doctor of Political Science, Honorary President of the Political Science Association of Armenia, Professor in State Security and Strategic Studies (Russian Academy of Public Administration), International Counterterrorism Fellow and ex-Visiting Professor (US National Defense University), ex Visiting Research Fellow (Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University). Arthur Atanesyan, Chairman of the Political Science Association of Armenia, Doctor of Political Science, Head of Chair of Applied Sociology, Yerevan State University.)



Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s Ego Will Cost Armenian Lives

BLINKEN, from page 18

Things have heated up this week.

On May 28, Aliyev demanded the surrender of Nagorno-Karabakh’s elected president, but suggested he would offer amnesty for other ethnic Armenian administrators and elected officials should they accept Azerbaijani rule. Bizarrely, the State Department praised Aliyev’s offer.

This sets up a humanitarian disaster.

As soon as ethnic Armenians put themselves under Aliyev’s rule, they become Azerbaijani subjects with no civil or human rights of which to speak. Aliyev has already shown disdain for Armenians by subjecting them to a five-month blockade of food, medicine, and fuel. He has separated elementary school-age children from

their parents and senior citizens from their caregivers by allowing some to visit Armenia, only to deny them the right to return.

During the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War and after, Azerbaijani forces embraced terror as a tactic. They circulated videos of prisoner beheadings and mutilations and destruction of graveyards to both desensitize their own population and force the flight of Armenians.

Should Blinken impose peace, expect that Azerbaijani tactic to accelerate.

Azerbaijan may want Nagorno-Karabakh, but it does not want its residents. It will treat regional capital Stepanakert like Serb nationalists treated Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica. The logic remains the same: Murder 8,000 but force 10 times that num-

ber to flee by exposing the impotence of peacekeepers and diplomats.

It is time to end the moral equivalence. Democracy should be a precursor to peace. So too, is an end to the incitement of ethnic hatred in Azerbaijan’s textbooks and media. Delaying the demarcation of borders until after peace only gives Azerbaijan a green light to renege on its commitments.

During the Obama administration, Jake Sullivan’s ego, naivete, and ambition

played into Iranian hands and brought the Islamic Republic to the brink of nuclear breakout. The cost for Blinken’s ego, naivete, and ambition will be paid in tens of thousands of Armenian lives.

(Michael Rubin (@mrubin1971) is a contributor to the *Washington Examiner’s* Beltway Confidential blog. He is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. This commentary originally appeared in the *Washington Times* on June 5.)

Azerbaijan Advises Citizens against Travel to Iran

BAKU (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Azerbaijan on Saturday, June 3 advised its citizens against traveling to Iran after it sent a note of protest to Tehran over a missing Azerbaijani student, Anadolu Agency reports.

“Citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan are strongly recommended not to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran without necessity, and those entering this country should remain as vigilant as possible,” the Foreign Ministry said in a written statement.

It also advised that Azerbaijani citizens, who are currently in Iran, observe “the safety rules.”

On Friday, June 2, Azerbaijan sent a note of protest to the Iranian side in connection with the arrest of Azerbaijani citizen Farid Safarli, whom the Iranian authorities accuse of espionage. Safarli, a university student in Germany, arrived in Iran in early March. Since then, contact with him has been reportedly lost. The Azerbaijani side demands the Iranian authorities clarify his fate.

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR-SPECTATOR Seeking Summer Intern

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* is seeking an intern for a six-week program this summer (mid-July through August). The intern will receive a \$150 weekly stipend provided through the Armenian Students’ Association of America’s Internship Program. The *Mirror* also is looking for interns during the regular year.

The intern should be in college or graduate school and does not necessarily have to be studying journalism. Most likely, the internship will be done long distance, via electronic communications, so location is not an issue (but native speaker knowledge of English remains important).

Aside from writing for the paper and working on the *Mirror* website, the *Mirror* is looking for help in sparking new marketing campaigns and obtain more digital advertising.

If interested, please email tcadirector@aol.com or alin.gregorian@gmail.com with your resume and tell us of your interests and relevant skills.

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