

Six Months After Lachin Blockade: Danger Ahead Without Course Correction

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON — It has been six months since Azerbaijani forces, under the guise of an ecological protest, blocked the Lachin Corridor, the only route connecting Karabakh (Artsakh) to Armenia, the only friendly country on its border. The governments in Stepanakert and Yerevan, starting on that day on December 12, 2022, noted that indeed, this was not ecological protest but a wily, aggressive move to speed up the gobbling up by Azerbaijan of the remaining 30 percent of Artsakh that Azerbaijan had not seized after the 2020 war. The truth of that assertion was reconfirmed as the self-styled eco protestors, whose record of actions were replete with horror scenes of hunting animals and killing a dove in the process of setting it free, were replaced by an official checkpoint and military border guards.

Political scientist, journalist and international relations specialist Prof. Vicken Cheterian, when asked about the state of Karabakh and Armenia, suggested the leaderships of Armenia and Karabakh had to grapple with realities on the ground especially about their foreign policies to get on the right path — or even survive.

The Lebanese-born Cheterian is a lecturer in history and international relations at the University of Geneva, and at Webster University in Geneva. He is also a regular contributor to *Agos* in Istanbul, among other publications.

Lachin Blockade

In an interview from his office in Geneva, he made it clear that Armenia and Artsakh are facing formidable adversaries but are showing little initiative in combating their narratives or actions

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Karabakh Running Out of Food, Medicine

By Susan Badalian and Narine Ghalechian

STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Residents of Nagorno-Karabakh struggled with worsening shortages of food and medicine on Monday, June 19, four days after Azerbaijan completely blocked relief supplies to the Armenian-populated region.

Many essential items had already been in short supply since Baku blocked last December commercial traffic through the sole road connecting Karabakh to Armenia. Only vehicles escorted by the Russian peacekeeping forces and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been able to pass through the Lachin corridor for the last seven months.

The movement of these humanitarian convoys was halted on Thursday, June 15, following a shootout near an Azerbaijani



Empty shelves at a supermarket in Stepanakert, January 17, 2023.

checkpoint illegally set up in the corridor in late April.

Armenia's National Security Service (NSS) said that its border guards stopped a group of Azer-

baijani servicemen manning the checkpoint from advancing into Armenian territory and placing an Azerbaijani flag there. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry in-

sisted that they did not cross into Armenia while trying to hoist the flag on a bridge located right next to the checkpoint.

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Russian-Israeli Blogger Lapshin Tours the Americas, Still in Pursuit of Justice

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — Russian-Israeli blogger Aleksander Lapshin, once imprisoned by Azerbaijan for having visited Artsakh

several times, is on a tour of the Americas. He recently held meetings in New York City with Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Committee to Protect Journalists, and planned to speak at a United Nations pan-

el on human rights, though due to the Canadian wildfires this has been postponed till the fall.

Lapshin said, "I began to prepare for this trip a couple of years ago. I have been to America a number of times but this time it



Aleksander Lapshin in New York City

is different. I just want to meet people like politicians, journalists and human rights defenders." He is giving some talks to the Armenian community, including at the Armenian Catholic Church of Toronto for the Armenians in Canada Social Network on June 3, and at Holy Martyrs Armenian Church in Bayside, Queens on June 11.

Lapshin had taken three trips between 2011 and 2016 to Karabakh, and was accused by Azerbaijan of illegally crossing its state border through Armenia in an attempt evidently to intimidate

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France Honors French Resistance Hero Missak Manouchian

By Jean Eckian
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PARIS — On the day of the commemoration of General Charles de Gaulle's "Appel du 18 juin" [Appeal of June 18] 1940 speech, the start of the French Resistance to the Nazis, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that the ashes of the great French-Armenian resistance fighter of the Second World War, Missak Manouch-



Missak Manouchian at the Luxembourg Garden, Paris

ian, and his wife, Méline, will be brought within the walls of the Panthéon institution on February 21, 2024, the anniversary of Manouchian's execution by German soldiers in 1944.

Since 1791, the most illustrious men and women of the French Republic have been laid to rest at the Panthéon, a sacred site where Voltaire, writer-philosopher, was the first among them. The building's pediment bears the inscription "Aux grands hommes, la patrie reconnaissante" [To great men, a grateful nation].

Missak Manouchian was born on September 1, 1906



L'Affiche rouge [The Red Poster]

in the Ottoman Empire. Self-taught, he worked as a laborer, then became a carpenter. He fled to France in 1925.

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GERMANY

Little Singers of Armenia Celebrate Bach Jubilee and Their Own

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BOSTON

Anoush'ella Named One of '40 Absolute Best' Restaurants In Boston

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Mirror-Spectator Annual Vacation

WATERTOWN — The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* will close for its annual two-week vacation in early July. The last issue before the vacation will be that of July 1. The first issue back will be that of July 22. Enjoy a safe and healthy summer



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Artsakh President to Testify About War

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The parliament select committee probing the 2020 Second Nagorno Karabakh War will summon Nagorno Karabakh President Arayik Harutyunyan for a testimony, the chair of the committee Andranik Kocharyan said on June 19.

He said that other high-ranking officials will be invited after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as well.

“We plan to invite the President of the Artsakh Republic. We postponed the invitation to the Defense Army Commander, I’d like Jalal Harutyunyan to come a bit later,” he said.

UN Human Rights Head Asks Azerbaijan to Open Lachin Corridor

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The 53rd session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations was convened in Geneva on June 19, under the second item of the agenda, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk presented a report on the current situation of human rights in the world.

Referring to the South Caucasus region, he called on Armenia and Azerbaijan, in particular, to anchor peace efforts on human rights. The commissioner emphasized the importance of free and safe movement through the Lachin Corridor and he need to avoid any humanitarian impact on civilians.

Türk noted that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has sought for years access to areas under the de facto control of authorities in the South Caucasus region. People are being made more vulnerable by the absence of regular monitoring by, and contact with, the UN’s human rights machinery.

UK Ambassador, British Council President Meet With Education Minister

YEREVAN (news.am) — Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Zhanna Andreasyan on June 19 received the ambassador of the United Kingdom (UK) to Armenia, John Gallagher, and the director of the Global Network of the British Council, Charlie Walker, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia informs Armenian News-NEWS.am.

Andreasyan, reflecting on Armenia’s implementation of joint programs with the British Council in education, science, culture, sports and youth affairs, noted that these programs can create new opportunities to further expand effective cooperation.

The course of Armenia’s reforms in education and culture was also addressed, and the parties reaffirmed their willingness to collaborate more effectively in the phase of implementing sectoral strategies.

During the meeting, it was proposed to consider the possibilities of cooperation in higher education, too.

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internationally. The results can be catastrophic for what little remains of Artsakh.

“It’s clear Azerbaijan is increasing the pressure step by step, and if there is no reaction from the side of Stepanakert, especially the side of the Yerevan, we can expect ethnic cleansing and the destruction of what is left of Armenian life and Armenian autonomous organizations in Artsakh. There is no doubt about it,” Cheterian said.

He expressed his disappointment with the leaderships of the two republics.

“We know the challenge but ... we don’t see any serious effort to take responsibility for the defeat, to say ‘OK, we were wrong and want to change our methods,’” he said. What is needed, he said, is “a new degree of organizational leadership and mobilization. And that’s not happening either in Stepanakert nor Yerevan. To be honest, I don’t know what they are doing.”

He stressed that the Artsakh leaders need to take stock of what happened in 2020 and take responsibility for the loss, rather than “blaming outside forces.” In short, he added, there needs to be a thorough analysis of what happened.

“Were they overconfident? Did they underestimate Azerbaijan as a danger and overestimate the role of their allies? They need to reevaluate all that. They need to explain what went wrong. They need to articulate a new discourse around which to mobilize the forces of Karabakh. For the moment, I am not seeing this,” Cheterian said. “I don’t see a leadership in Karabakh that inspires confidence.”

Nor did he mince his words when it came to evaluating the Yerevan authorities.

He said: “We can say the same about Yerevan. They were saying something very different before the war and during the war. They were saying *hakhteloo yenk* [we will defeat them]. And what we received was a shameful defeat, a painful defeat. ... The only explanation [by the government] was that there were traitors. This is not an explanation. Or that Russians didn’t help us. Were you expecting that they help us? Were they saying they would come to our help?”

And, he added, there has been no explanation after the defeat.

Karabakh Movement

Cheterian harkened back to the original Karabakh Movement launched in 1988 and stressed that Armenia must protect the small enclave, at all costs.

“Armenia’s *raison d’être* as a sovereign state is to protect Karabakh Armenians,” he explained. When the movement came to be in March 1988, he noted, it was because the “Soviet state was not protecting the life and security of Armenians in Azerbaijan after the Sumgait pogroms,” he said.

The thesis was “we need sovereignty to protect Karabakh,” he added.

Now, Armenia is abandoning that mission without an explanation, which “goes against history,” he said.

One question that often crops up is why no nation — not even Armenia — has recognized Artsakh’s independence after that republic’s overwhelmingly approved referendum for independence and eventual joining with Armenia, in 1991.

Cheterian explained that the initial argument under then-President Levon Ter-Petrosian was that if Armenia recognized Karabakh as an independent state, some doors may close.

“The argument in Yerevan was, if we recognize that independence, we are cutting the bridges of any possible negotiations with Azerbaijan,” he explained.

After the cease fire of 1994, Cheterian said, it was clear that without a permanent negotiated peace, a second war was inevitable. And playing a huge part in this second war was Turkey.

“What I morally, ethically, philosophically, existentially have huge problems with, is that Turkey, as a country responsible for a genocide against Armenia, took part in this second war,” Cheterian said. “Overall, we will not be able to understand the Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan without bringing in this Ottoman and Turkish dimension into our analysis. To be honest, I am very worried about the future of Armenia. A Turkey that does not recognize its moral and political responsibility in what happened in 1915, will always be a Turkey which is antagonistic toward Armenia. And an Armenia that has these two enemy nations is not a sustainable Armenia. It’s a very, very big problem we have.”

The leaders of Turkey and Azerbaijan have talked frequently since the end of the 2020 war of carving out the “Zangezur Corridor” in southern Armenia, to link Baku to the exclave of Nakhijevan and from there to Turkey.

Cheterian explained that he thought the corridor presents two problems, if it is created. First, he said, is that Armenia would lose autonomy over some of its southern territory and second, “Azerbaijan and Turkey want exclusive passage in southern Armenia, but what I want is normalization of relations and opening up of all communication,” between Yerevan and all the Turkic world.

If it happens, that might just whet the Azerbaijani appetite for more. Dating back to the older Aliyev, Heydar, Azerbaijani leaders have expressed the desire to absorb Armenia, he said.

“Now, we can hear official Azerbaijani circles talk about ‘Western Azerbaijan’ and ‘Western Azerbaijan’ is not Kars or Igdir, but it is exactly current Armenia. What they are doing is preparing the ground for future conflict,” he said.

“Even after they won, Azeri anger toward Armenia is not ending,” he said. “He [Ilham Aliyev] has the means to ask for more. Either there will be a new balance of forces that will stop him or he will go on,” Cheterian said.

As for overtures from Armenia to Turkey, Cheterian said, “I think what Pashinyan is doing is symbolically telling them we want to be friends.” While he said that is a positive move, it is not enough. “Turkey, being the country that we know under [President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan, they will not give anything in return for kind words.”

Instead, he said, Armenia needs to create leverage which will make it worth Turkey’s better attitude.

2020 War

The original war for independence, referred to as the first Karabakh war, roughly lasted from 1988 to 1994. The astonishing victory of the ragtag fighters against a much more organized enemy, became the stuff of legend. The war in 2020, by contrast, was short, with a brutal defeat handed to the Artsakh and Armenian forces by Azerbaijani forces, aided greatly by Turkey. Between the two wars, more than 15,000 Armenians died.

One major factor, according to Cheterian, was Azerbaijan’s wealth from oil.

“The problem is that on the one hand, Azerbaijan, especially with Ilham Aliyev coming to power in 2003, and the pipeline being constructed in 2005, and oil money starting flowing Baku in 2006, started

spending enormous sums on its army,” he said. “Plus, Ilham Aliyev, from the beginning, was not interested in diplomatic negotiations and he was threatening to take back what he considered his, by force.”

Cheterian added, by contrast, during this time, Armenia was not putting in “serious efforts neither diplomatically nor militarily.”

One problem, he cited, was that after independence, the Armenian armed forces’ structure was set up in a “very old fashioned” way. “They were structured after the first war on the Soviet model, very top down, very bureaucratic.”

In the first Karabakh War in the 1990s, he said, by contrast, the forces fighting were more along the lines of *fedayeen* volunteers who took action based on the needs they saw on the battlefield, in real time.

“In 2020, the Armenian army could not react It was a paralyzed army from its strategic thinking to organization to the battlefield. Basically, Armenia was preparing itself for a very different kind of war,” Cheterian noted, adding the government expected that after one week of war, Russia would intervene, despite no sign from Russia that it was willing to do so.

He also dismissed Armenia’s anger toward lack of action by the Collective Security Treaty Organization, of which Armenia is a member, suggesting it exists only on paper, and at the whim of Russia. The Armenian authorities had roundly criticized the organization and its member countries for not sending help.

“Yerevan should have known what Russia was ready to do,” or not, he said. “Armenia did not know because Armenia did not develop mature state institutions to be able to answer these questions. Armenia does not have proper diplomacy, or proper analytical services.”

Otherwise, he added, the military and political leaders of the country would have known the position or behaviors of all major actors, including Russia, the US, Iran, etc. when war broke out.

“This was not an army ready for the next war” in 2020, Cheterian said. “This is so surprising. I was not expecting this level of daydreaming,” he said.

He had even harsher comments for the Karabakh military leadership. “I don’t understand this from Karabakh Armenians. Every day, they were guarding trenches. They should have known that a second war was in the making. At least after 2016 it was evident.”

The four-day war of “2016 made it clear that Aliyev was serious about a second war,” he said.

From April 1 to 5, 2016, Azerbaijani forces without warning attacked Artsakh, near Martuni, killing around 90 Armenian civilians and soldiers, according to official sources.

“What Armenian political leaders are very good at is doing speeches but not problem solving,” Cheterian said, extending the shortcoming to Armenians to Karabakh and the diaspora.

“I believe that in spite of Turkey supporting Azerbaijan massively and Russia not coming to the support of Armenia,” the latter has to take responsibility for the defeat. “In Armenia there were no factories producing Kalashnikov bullets. This country was not ready. If they had prepared for a second war, they could have understood the weak points of Ilham Aliyev and they could have hurt him. Eventually, Armenia was defeated not by a modern industrial

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ARMENIA

Pashinyan Speaks to Parliament about the War

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan delivered a speech before the parliamentary select committee probing the causes and course of the 2020 war at the committee on June 20. He spoke about the negotiations and what ultimately cause him to sign the ceasefire agreement.

There were several proposals for ceasefire, he added.

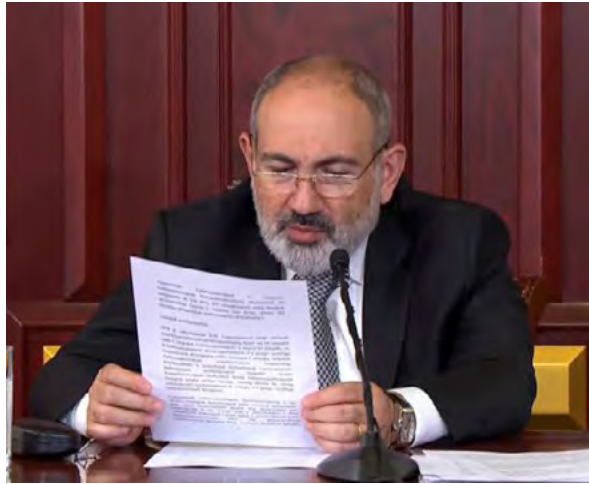
The November 9, 2020 ceasefire agreement was the fifth attempt to end the war, Pashinyan said. The first such conversation took place on October 7, when Pashinyan phoned Russian President Vladimir Putin on the latter's birthday. Putin attached importance to Pashinyan's willingness to compromise. Putin told Pashinyan that he wants to mediate for a swift end of hostilities.

"I told him that I agreed and asked under what conditions the hostilities would end. Our understanding was that hostilities had to end without preconditions, the sides had to stop at their present positions, followed by talks on which compromise the parties agree to. I said that this option was acceptable for us. I had a second phone call with the Russian President later on that day, and he said that he had talked with the Azerbaijani President, but the latter had told him that he wasn't ready to go for a ceasefire, meaning he didn't agree to establish ceasefire," Pashinyan said.

President Putin told Pashinyan that he'd talk with the Azerbaijani President again the next day.

The next day, Putin told Pashinyan that Azerbaijan had a precondition for a ceasefire: it expects Fizuli to be surrendered without a fight, and that Armenian forces must retreat from along the Araks River to the Khuda Afering reservoir, so that the reservoir stays under Azerbaijani control to be able to take water for irrigation. In addition, the Azerbaijani leadership expected to repatriate two convicts that were serving prison terms in Nagorno Karabakh for kidnapping and murder.

"Furthermore, and end to hostilities wasn't being declared for this, but simply a humanitarian ceasefire, to organize the burial of the dead, without any condition



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan speaking before the parliamentary select committee.

or obligation on not resuming the fighting afterwards. I said that the preconditions were unacceptable because we agreed with the Russian President that a ceasefire was to be established without preconditions. And moreover, even if I were to agree to the retreat of troops there was no guarantee that Azerbaijan wouldn't continue its offensive during the retreat," Pashinyan said.

Putin told Pashinyan on October 9 that Azerbaijan was ready to establish a ceasefire starting October 9-10. The foreign ministers of the two sides were invited to Moscow for discussions, and the exchange of captives and bodies of the dead was also supposed to be discussed. Pashinyan said he agreed to the offer.

The Kremlin then published a statement. After this statement, Pashinyan ordered the military to maintain the ceasefire. But after a short pause, Azerbaijan launched a more intense attack, bombarding Stepanakert, Martakert and assaulting Hadrut.

"Of course, the troops were ordered to take every necessary action to stop the Azerbaijani attack, but simulta-

neously diplomatic efforts were underway in the direction of the Moscow document on establishing a ceasefire. The deployment of Russian military observers on both sides of the line of contact for monitoring the situation was being considered. But Azerbaijan was constantly avoiding going for such a solution and was intensifying its military operations," Pashinyan said.

Pashinyan said that the October 19, 2020 proposed deal to end the war envisaged the deployment of peacekeepers in Meghri to ensure the connection between the western regions of Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan, but he rejected the proposal because he did not approve an extraterritorial corridor to be created in the territory of Armenia.

"The peacekeepers were supposed to be deployed not only in Karabakh and along the Lachin Corridor, but also in Meghri, to ensure connection between the western regions of Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan. I did not agree to this, I did not agree for a corridor, a layer not under Armenia's control to emerge in Armenia's territory. I said that I agree to a road but not a corridor," Pashinyan said.

The Armenian PM said he maintains the same stance — the roads must be opened, Azerbaijan's western regions must have the opportunity of connection with Nakhichevan, but this cannot constitute an extraterritorial corridor, the road must be under Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction.

Putin had said in an interview that under the October 19 option Shushi was to remain under Armenian control, but that he had rejected the proposal.

Pashinyan said that the fall of Shushi played a crucial role in signing the 9 November 2020 trilateral statement.

He said what mattered was not only the symbolic but also strategic value of Shushi. After the fall of Shushi, Stepanakert would be targeted, the pressure on Martuni would unavoidably become stronger, and there would be a risk of nearly 25,000 Armenian troops being besieged.

The next session of the will take place on June 27, during which lawmakers will have the chance to ask questions to Pashinyan.

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nation, but by a corrupt dictator who has only one weapon: oil and gas exports."

"If we want to play the game of international relations, we need to understand the rules of the game," he said.

International Diplomacy

Before the 2020 war, there was a lot brewing in the neighboring regions, including wars in Syria and Iraq, and unrest involving the Kurds, including the non-recognition of the Kurdish regional independence referendum in Iraq in 2017. In other words, the atmosphere was tense.

"We live in a period of international relations when only power relations matter. Discourse about human rights, women's rights, environmental rights, is very nice, but they have no place in the real world of international relations," Cheterian said.

As for appealing to the United Nations, the "UN is a big NGO." The world does not have a global governance organization, only major players, such as the US, Russia, European Union, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, etc.

"If Armenia wants favors from these people, they should go and barter. That's what Azerbaijan did. They went to these places and they bought people. What did Armenia do? They were not even in the room. Either you behave like a state or you don't," he said. "Armenia had other instruments. They could have used them. They did not do it."

Such lackluster diplomacy is not only the fault of Nikol Pashinyan's administration. Instead, he said, things have been working the same way since independence.

"I think the problems we have in Armenia are long term. Armenia has major problems, look at the map. And we closed our eyes," he said. "This is the neighborhood we have but how can you tolerate 30 years of doing nothing? Armenia has a war with its eastern neighbor. It's border is shut down. Armenia has a historical problem

with its western neighbor and that border is shut down. Armenia has complex relations with Georgia."

He added, "Even if you take South Caucasus as a system, Armenia is isolated. Georgia has very good relations with Azerbaijan. They have partnerships and business interests." And again, he said, "Armenia is absent."

By not doing anything, he suggested, "the only surprising element in this is that the problem [the war of 2020] didn't happen earlier."

Much rested on wishful thinking.

"The only idea that existed in Yerevan was that the Russians will come," he said. There was never analysis about what would happen if Russia did not behave as expected, even though the signs were there.

"The idea that Russia will come and save us I could have understood in the early 2000s when Robert Kocharyan was president, but even under Serzh Sargsyan, relations were very strained. Serzh Sargsyan tried to create some balance between Russia and the West and he received a slap in the face on every occasion," he added.

Armenia depended too much on Russia in every sector. Thus, he added, "Armenia became a burden for Russia," while being able to offer very little in return for such reliance.

"We can say the same thing for the West," Cheterian noted. "When it comes to hard politics, what kind of role can Armenia play as an important player for the EU, for Germany, the UK, for Italy? Look at how much oil and gas Italy gets from Azerbaijan and how many weapons Italy sells to Azerbaijan. In this kind of balance sheet, where is Armenia? Armenia is absent."

An enclave whose history has been similar to Artsakh and whose fate (so far) has been very different, is Kosovo. When the ethnic Albanians in the Albanian-majority

enclave in the former Yugoslavia voted for self-rule, they got the backing of NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The fate of Kosovo, Cheterian said, was sealed in Washington. "If you can go and negotiate in Washington and say that Karabakh is a special case and come and support our sovereignty, fine," he said. "All these arguments will have no consequence until a major state, like the US, which is ready to support Karabakh being like Kosovo."

Going Forward

Changes need to be made going forward to modernize the state, Cheterian noted, which he characterized as being still ingrained in the Soviet model.

In the first place, he said, "Armenia should realize that the state apparatus that exists in Yerevan is inefficient. We saw this during the war. The military didn't function, the foreign policy didn't function, the strategic thinking element didn't function. This is because the Armenian state was inherited from the administrative structure of the Soviet Union." He added, "This sector is non-functional. And this is why the Soviet Union collapsed."

He added, "The way the Armenian state functions is that there are 4-5 people around the head of the executive., From Levon Ter-Petrosian to Robert Kocharyan to Serzh Sargsyan to Nikol Pashinyan, decisions are taken by the executive and his four or five friends. They are not the ministers. They are the close collaborators of the head of the executive."

Therefore, he said, decisions are not made by the people tasked with creating policy. And now, with the disenchantment within the rank and file, making positive movement is even more difficult.

Second, he said, "The current leadership does not have political capital to do these reforms. To do such a reform, what we need

first, is an internal Armenian dialogue — national reconciliation between different existing forces."

The prime minister, he said, "needs to mobilize new forces. He should articulate ... we need to come around a minimal program between different forces that are contradictory ... in the name of saving the nation, we need to make this initiative."

This expansive approach, he said, has a precedent during the first Karabakh war. "After Azerbaijani attack in summer 1992, most of Karabakh was taken over [by Azerbaijani forces] but then there was a reformulation of the executive in Karabakh. Levon Ter-Petrosian brought his former friend and enemy, Vazgen Manukyan, to assume the leadership of the defense ministry. By creating this kind of large coalition of forces, Armenia might be able to mobilize even larger forces the diaspora," he said.

An evaluation needs to be made, he said: "What is the moral and political limit that we don't cross? If we cross them we stop being a nation."

For the future of Armenia to be better, he said, the diaspora, as well as Armenia and Karabakh, need to be in the mix.

"The diaspora has no leadership, no independent thinking and no independent field of action" so it can be "a political factor" in the greater world, he said.

The diaspora can do more, he said. He suggested "Trying to organize over certain issues, try to create networks," adding "create knowledge, political influence and get results," he said.

Cheterian is the author of two books, *War and Peace in the Caucasus, Russia's Troubled Frontier* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers), and *Open Wounds, Armenians, Turks and a Century of Genocide* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers/New York: Oxford University Press USA).



ARMENIA

Armenian and US Flags Raised at Yeraskh Construction Site as Azerbaijani Forces Continue Firing Across Border

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — The Armenian and US flags have been raised in the territory of a metallurgical plant being built in Armenia's border village of Yeraskh.

The under-construction plant has repeatedly come under Azerbaijani fire since June 13.

Two Indian nationals involved in the construction works of the plant were seriously wounded in a cross-border fire from Azerbaijani positions on June 14.

The GTB Steel LLC, which is constructing the black metal scrap processing plant (smelter) in Yeraskh, is determined to continue the construction despite the Azerbaijani cross-border shootings.

GTB Steel CEO Tiran Hakobyan told reporters after the flag raising ceremony on Tuesday that the flags were not expected to stop Azerbaijani gunfire.

"The decision to hoist the flags was made after long discussions in the Board of Directors. By raising the flags, we record that we will not leave this place and will continue to build the plant," he said.

The Defense Ministry said that Azerbaijani forces opened gunfire on June 20, at 4:30 p.m. at the construction site of the steelworks which is being built by joint Armenian and American investments.

The Azerbaijani armed forces used various caliber small arms in the shooting.

Azerbaijani forces opened fire against the Armenian positions located in Verin Shorzha, Sotk and Nerqin Hand.

On June 18, from 3:20 a.m. to 4:10 a.m., the units of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces opened fire from different caliber small



The raised Armenian and US flags

arms against the Armenian combat positions located in the eastern -Verin Shorzha, Sotk-and southeastern -Nerqin Hand directions of the border. This is reported by the Ministry of Defense of Armenia.

There were no losses from the Armenian side.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met this week with the Ambassador of India to Armenia Nilakshi Saha Sinha.

Ambassador Nilakshi Saha Sinha thanked the government of Armenia for

the attention and care for the health conditions of the two Indian nationals wounded in Yeraskh.

The PM and the Indian ambassador also discussed issues related to the expansion of business ties, IT, tourism, education and culture partnership. Organizing high-level mutual visits and strengthening of the close ties between the two countries was highlighted.

(Stories from Armenpress and news.am

Karabakh Running Out Of Food, Medicine

SHORTAGES, from page 1

Health authorities in Stepanakert said on Monday that local hospitals have suspended non-urgent surgeries due to a resulting shortage of drugs and other medical supplies. According to them, a total of 175 critically ill Karabakh patients and their family members are now awaiting evacuation to hospitals in Armenia.

Such evacuations were carried out for months by the ICRC. They also stopped on Thursday.

"We are monitoring the situation and remain in touch with all decision-makers," Eteri Musayelyan, an ICRC spokeswoman in Stepanakert, told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. "We hope to resume our work as soon as the situation allows."

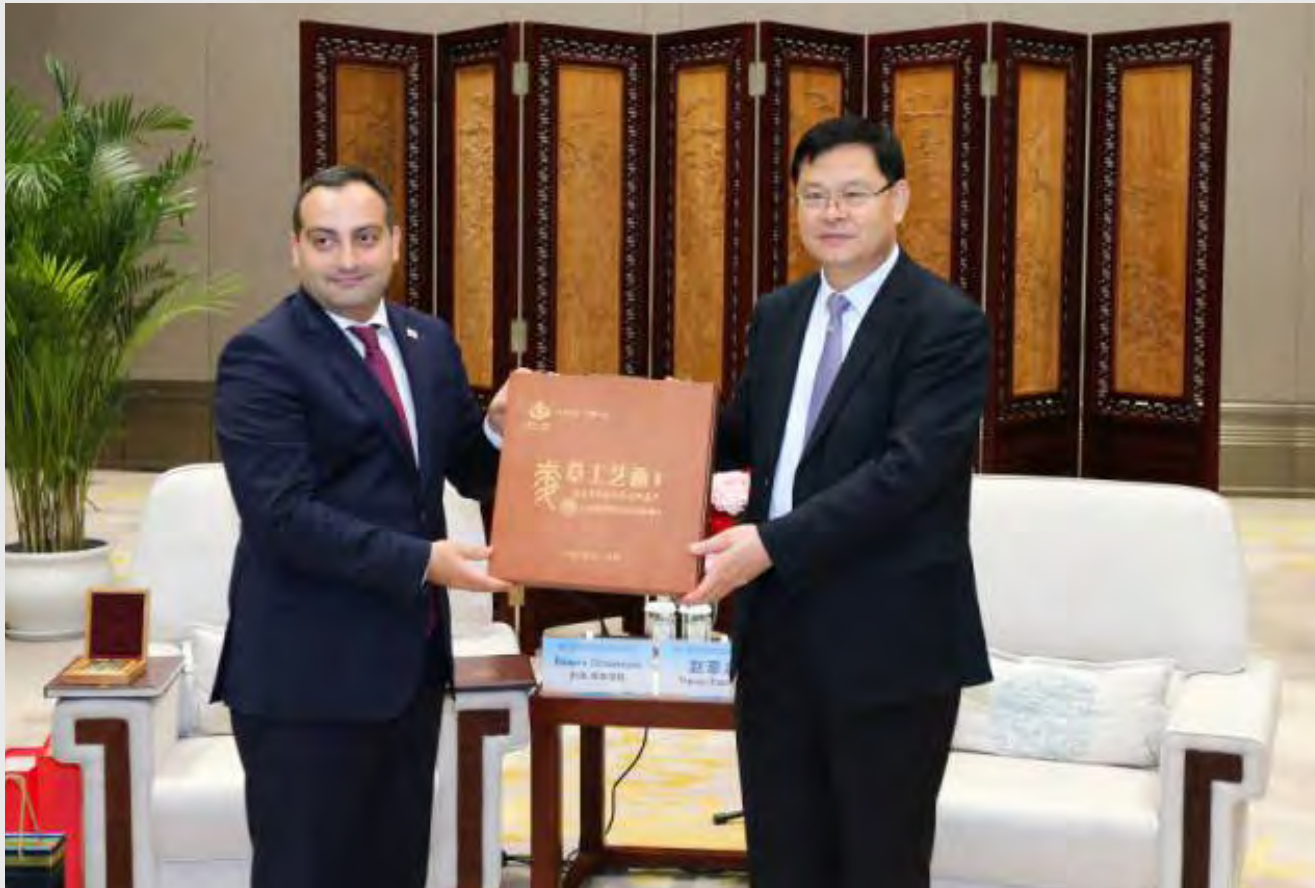
Also, locals said that shops in and outside Stepanakert are running out of imported foodstuffs such as flour, cooking oil and sugar that have been rationed by the authorities since February.

"We have ration coupons but there is little we can buy with them now," complained Arega Ishkhanyan, a Stepanakert resident. She also spoke of an increasingly "visible" shortage of fruits and vegetables.

Artak Beglaryan, a Karabakh official, warned at the weekend that Karabakh will run out of some types of food and medicine within several days if the relief supplies are not restored.

"There is already an acute shortage of quite a few items. medicines, some foodstuffs, gasoline and diesel fuel," he said.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Friday, June 16, condemned the complete blockage of humanitarian traffic through the Lachin corridor, accusing Azerbaijan of continuing its "policy of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh." The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry rejected the accusation. It said Baku will do everything to "integrate" the Karabakh Armenians into Azerbaijan's "political, legal and socioeconomic frameworks."



Yerevan Acting Mayor Levon Hovhannisyanyan, left, and Qingdao Mayor Zhao Haozhi

Yerevan, Qingdao Sign Partnership Agreement

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Yerevan and the Chinese city of Qingdao on June 19 signed a sister city agreement.

The twinning agreement envisages increased partnership in trade, science and technology, as well as the humanitarian sector, connectivity and other areas of urban economy.

The agreement was signed by Yerevan Acting Mayor Levon Hovhannisyanyan and Qingdao Mayor Zhao Haozhi.

Hovhannisyanyan and Haozhi discussed partnership and prospects. "China and Armenia have friendly relations throughout centuries, and today's agreement attests to our mutual desire to maintain and strengthen the centuries-old friendly ties," Hovhannisyanyan said.

Haozhi said that they are ready to share their experience and skills of city management with Yerevan.



INTERNATIONAL

Silent Siege of Nagorno-Karabakh Echoes in the European Parliament

STRASBOURG — On Tuesday June 6, the European Parliament hosted an event on the blockade in Nagorno-Karabakh, sponsored by MEP François-Xavier Bellamy, with young journalist Lika Zakaryan, author of *44 Days: Diary from an Invisible War*, as guest of honor.

Organized in partnership with AGBU Europe and L'œuvre d'Orient, the event brought together some 100 guests, including parliamentary assistants, members of the European Commission, researchers and journalists. In his welcome address, Mr. F-X Bellamy underlined his desire, through this event, to focus on the life stories of the Armenian inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh, starting with that of Lika Zakaryan, who gave a poignant account in her war diary in 2020, adapted for the screen by the documentary, "Invisible Republic," directed by Garin Hovanissian and produced by Creative Armenia.

The screening of excerpts from the film was followed by a discussion with the young journalist. As Lika explained, the aim of the film, produced in 2022, was to raise awareness among a wider audience of the 44-day war, which received little coverage in the international media. "If we continue to want to show it today, it's above all because this misnamed 44-day war isn't over. It continues in various forms," she explains in her exchange with F-X Bellamy.

Zakaryan also spoke of her disappointment at the lack of response from the European Union during the war in 2020. She considered herself to be pro-Western before the war, and was a firm believer in European values, democracy and the rule of law. Her distrust of these "men in suits," as she calls them, who make fine declara-



Lika Zakaryan

tions without any action, grew steadily: "Men in suits make declarations, but when you're in the basement of a building, under the bombs, these declarations don't really warm your heart if no action follows," she concludes. Doubtless, Lika still retained a trace of this mistrust when she arrived in Brussels at the invitation of the MEP. However, she was deeply moved by the sincere and consistent show of support she received during the event.

She ended her speech with heartfelt thanks: "Thank you to everyone who has come here today to share this moment with us. Today, the people of Artsakh really feel abandoned. Knowing that somewhere people are getting together and talking about them, thinking about them, caring about them, means a lot. That's where hope can come.

The second part of the event was devoted to a round-table discussion on the current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, from a geopolitical, legal and humanitarian perspective, and on what sort of actions can be pursued by the European Union.

Gaïdz Minassian, a journalist with *Le Monde* newspaper, researcher and lecturer at Sciences Po Paris, shed geopolitical light on the conflict, pointing out that in 2020 it was not a question of a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but of a war between Nagorno-Karabakh and a coalition led by Azerbaijan, including Turkey and Pakistan. He pointed out that Europe is directly concerned by what is happening in this region of its eastern neighborhood, which can be called "Caucasian Europe," adding that the three countries of the South Caucasus are part of the new European Political Community.

According to Minassian, the EU "seeks to establish peace in this region to make it a true crossroads, a buffer zone that can even participate in Europe's ecological transition, while on the other hand, Russia would like to keep the region in a closed circle, following the 3+3 format (Russia, Turkey, Iran and Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). Unfortunately, according to Minassian, Europe has not understood the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh, nor who it is dealing with in the person of President Aliyev, whose "racist, fascist and terrorist policies" are well documented. Faced with the two opposing approaches to resolving the conflict, Russia's and the West's, he also noted that "the blind spot in these negotiations is Karabakh. Nobody is talking about Karabakh."

see SIEGE, page 8

INTERNATIONAL

Azerbaijan Delegation Efforts Fail at PACE, Lachin Corridor Put on Agenda

STRASBOURG (news.am) — The efforts of the Azerbaijani delegation to defeat the inclusion of the Lachin corridor matter on the agenda of the summer session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) have failed. Vladimir Vardanyan, an MP from the ruling majority Civil Contract Faction of the National Assembly of Armenia, wrote on Facebook on June 19.

"With an overwhelming majority, PACE included this matter on the agenda of the current session. The discussion on the urgent topic will take place this Thursday," the Armenian MP added.

When the aforesaid agenda was being approved, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation to PACE, Samad Seyidov, spoke against it, in an attempt to thwart the PACE debates on this matter. But Ruben Rubinyan, head of the Armenian delegation to PACE, insisted on the necessity of these debates. The matter was put on the agenda by voting: 73 in favor, 15 against, and 6 abstentions.

Lachin corridor will be discussed at the PACE on June 22 (after *Mirror-Spectator* press time).

Russia: Hard to Negotiate Amid Skirmishes on Border

ST. PETERSBURG (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan has no alternative, Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Alexei Overchuk said in an interview with TASS on June 19, on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF).

However, he said, clashes are still happening on the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, people are dying, in such conditions it is difficult to negotiate on unblocking transport links.

"In our case, everyone understands that there is no alternative to peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The best way to achieve peace is to open up the opportunity for people to interact peacefully, build a common road, along which people and goods will then go, normal life, trade, and gradually old grievances will begin. will recede into the background," Overchuk said, commenting on the negotiations on unblocking transport communications between Yerevan and Baku.

According to Overchuk, a unique format of relations has developed in the tripartite working group of vice-premiers.

"It helps a lot that we come from the same big country, studied the same textbooks, watched the same films, understand the same humor and therefore find a common language on a human level. This is the intangible value that creates hope and helps to move forward. Thinking about work of our group, you understand how important it is for peace in our common Eurasian home not to lose this commonality throughout the post-Soviet space and pass it on to the next generations," Overchuk said.

Armenia Says It Is Awaiting Russia's Response Over Incident near Lachin Corridor

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia is waiting for a response from Russia to the latest incident at the entry of the Lachin Corridor, Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Vahan Kostanyan said on Monday, June 19.

Armenian border guards deployed nearby opened fire to stop a group of Azerbaijani servicemen from advancing into Armenian territory and installing an Azerbaijani flag there on Thursday.

A video of the incident shows that the Azerbaijani troops

were escorted by Russian soldiers as they crossed a bridge over the Hakari River in the Lachin Corridor to place the flag.

Russian Ambassador to Armenia Sergei Kopyrkin was summoned to Armenia's Foreign Ministry over the incident.

"A probe into the incident near the Hakari bridge is underway," Kostanyan told reporters in the parliament. "The Armenian Foreign Ministry has voiced its position and concerns over the issue, and we are awaiting an official reaction."





INTERNATIONAL

Russian-Israeli Blogger Lapshin Tours the Americas, Still in Pursuit of Justice

BLOGGER, from page 1

people from visiting Karabakh. Belarus detained him in 2016 upon Azerbaijan's request, and after two months' incarceration, he was extradited to Azerbaijan in February 2017. He was sentenced to three years in prison in July 2017, but was given a pardon that September and flown to Israel after what he describes as an attempt by four masked men in prison on his life. The Azerbaijani government, however, claimed that he had tried to commit suicide.

In 2018, Lapshin filed a case against Azerbaijan in the European Court of Human Rights for attempted murder, torture and illegal imprisonment. Though he won

still alive – ribs broken, but still alive – this is the good news.' I then asked what about the bad news. 'The bad news? Azerbaijan is our ally.'"

They advised him to abandon his case in the European Court of Human Rights against Azerbaijan concerning his treatment there. They also said that it was a really bad idea to apply to the United Nations against Azerbaijan. Lapshin said, he recalled, "No, no way. I will go to the end and I will win." So they declared that they all were Jews in the room, who all served the Israeli army. They had to think about realpolitik.

They told him, Lapshin related, "You

would be better for me, my family and for our safety, to just leave it aside and continue our old life." However, he continued, "I just cannot abandon what I do in favor of Armenia and Artsakh because I have many friends in Armenia. Some of them were killed during the second Karabakh war. I actually love this country, so I feel in Armenia like my second home."

He added, "Look, six million Jews were killed during the Holocaust. A lot of Armenians actually supported Jews and saved their lives. So, I feel the same."

He stressed: "Of course I do not receive any support from the government of Armenia." Furthermore, the fact that Armenia,

and Amnesty International, Lapshin related, whether they had had meetings with Armenian community or governmental representatives, they replied in the negative.

However, it should be noted that a Google search brings up many reports from these organizations covering Artsakh topics, indicating that they are well informed. Consequently, it may be speculated that different divisions of these organizations (often located in different cities and countries) may be the ones specializing on issues concerning Artsakh and Armenia.

When asked about what result he thought his meeting with the New York organizations would have, he said they will prepare a press release about the meeting and put this documentation in their files on the case of Azerbaijan. He said he hoped they would use it in their conferences on human rights and mention his case, as well as the situation in Artsakh.

He added, "I was just happy to bring up Armenian prisoners of war, and just tell them about experiences in Azerbaijani jail, because from the point of view of the human rights organizations, I am the only person who has suffered from Azerbaijan. It is amazing." He said that they had not spoken with any Armenian prisoners of war who had been tortured.

Lapshin related that while he was in the Kurdakhani prison in Azerbaijan, he had an opportunity to speak with the head of the prison, Col. Rashid Safarov. The latter told Lapshin that they kept between 4 and 8 Armenians imprisoned, supposedly because they were terrorists who crossed the border, and secondly, for purposes of exchange with Armenian prisoners. Currently, Lapshin said, according to what some Azerbaijani opposition leaders, mostly Talysh, told him, there are between 40 and 60 Armenian prisoners of war held in the same prison.

While in Armenia, Lapshin met several former prisoners of war who had been raped in that jail and tried to convince them to go with him to the US and Europe to testify about this, but, Lapshin said, they felt uncomfortable about talking about such



Aleksander Lapshin meets with the Armenian community in Toronto, Canada

on May 21, 2021, Azerbaijan has refused to pay the compensation of 30,000 euros or accept the verdict. Meanwhile, the United Nations Human Rights Committee adopted a resolution on July 19, 2022 condemning the Belarusian authorities for illegally arresting Lapshin and extraditing him to Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani government in its turn, according to Lapshin, attempted to again order his arrest while he was visiting the Baltic states in 2019.

Pressure in Israel

Lapshin was born in Russia but moved to Israel when 13. Lapshin's wife is from Moldova and moved to Israel to be with Lapshin 14 years ago. Their 8-year-old daughter was born there and automatically received Israeli citizenship but Lapshin's wife had to apply for it based on marriage to a citizen. She was supposed to receive it in 2017, but when she had to go for her final interview the officer asked where her husband was. Lapshin related that she replied that he was in jail in Azerbaijan. She showed a newspaper with a picture of Lapshin in handcuffs in Azerbaijan, explaining that he was arrested as a journalist, but the government officials denied her interview anyway, saying the reason for his absence did not matter to them. She pointed out that their daughter, then 2-years old, was an Israeli citizen, but the officials only offered two options – leave the country together, or place your daughter into an orphanage here and leave. So, Lapshin concluded, she took their daughter and alternated between Armenia and Georgia, because they had many friends in both countries.

When Lapshin returned from jail, he had broken ribs and fingers, so after four days in a Baku hospital he spent two more weeks in an Israeli hospital. It took two months to bring his wife back to Israel and restart the naturalization procedure. At a certain point, he was invited to the Israel Security Agency, which goes by the acronyms Shin Bet or Shabak, for a discussion. Lapshin said, "They told me, 'first of all, our congratulations that you were released and you are

are still alive just for one reason – because we are protecting you...Furthermore, we have received messages from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. They are kind of nervous about what you continue to do. They said that next time if they catch you, you will die." They then emphasized, "Think about your family. Think about your 2-year-old daughter."

However, when Lapshin said he could not abandon his principles, they told him once again to abandon the Armenian case, and that they hoped that his wife would receive her Israeli citizenship when she applied for it. Lapshin said that this conversation happened four years ago and his wife still has not received her citizenship.

For this reason, he and his family had to go back and forth between Israel and Armenia and traveled to the European Union and now the Americas. Lapshin said, "We are kind of digital gypsies." He is able to work remotely but his work as a travel blogger is limited because there are some 30-35 countries which he cannot visit because of Azerbaijani and Russian influence. Jokingly he said, "Of course I can go to Belarus again and receive a free flight to Azerbaijan."

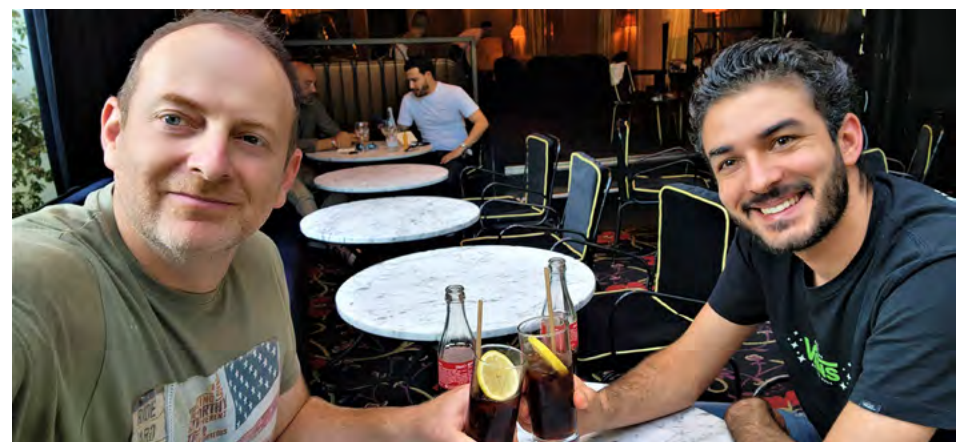
Lapshin also has problems with Russian law enforcement agencies, he said, because he published a number of articles in support of Ukraine and against the current war. For this reason, when his father passed away in Russia this January, Lapshin was unable to go to his funeral for fear that he might be arrested. Similarly his wife could not visit her family in Belarus and Moldova for almost six years, so their daughter has not been able to see her maternal grandparents.

The list of dangerous countries for the Lapshins includes all of the former Soviet Union except Armenia, but after stating this, he hesitated and said, "I just said except Armenia, but who knows? Armenia is under huge Russian influence."

Armenia

Lapshin continues to pursue his own case against Azerbaijan's violations of human rights but is committed also to helping Armenia. He understood, he said, that "it

facing an existential threat, is trying to sign a peace agreement with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, seems to create complicated motivations. Lapshin said, "Even some of the politicians in Armenia tried to convince me to leave it aside, for some political reasons. What I do against Azerbaijan, somehow, in some ways, is against the national interests of the current Armenian government...So I feel a bit alone in this fighting, but this time, fortunately, I have a lot of friends, both Armenian friends, and Amer-



Aleksander Lapshin, left, meets with Azerbaijani opposition journalist Mahammad Mirzali in Paris

ican and European friends, who actually support me."

Human Rights

The human rights organizations in New York and elsewhere already know about Lapshin's personal case and supported him publicly during his arrest. Lapshin said that though they were aware also of issues concerning Azerbaijani opposition leaders and journalists in exile, they did not seem very informed about what was going on inside Azerbaijan, including the deaths and large numbers of refugees caused by the second Karabakh war. He declared, "So I have to explain to them from the zero level about what is going on. I was really surprised that I was the first person – and I am not Armenian – to bring them the point of view of the 120,000 inhabitants of Artsakh."

When he asked Human Rights Watch

experiences openly due to Armenian social norms or culture.

They also said that there were strict warnings from Armenian intelligence services for them not to communicate with journalists or human rights activists. One can speculate that if true, this is due to the precarious current situation of Armenia, which is doing anything in its power to avoid a new war of aggression by Azerbaijan.

Lapshin on his trip is attempting to continue contacts with Azerbaijanis critical of the current regime. He related that on his way to America, he had a stopover in Paris, France, where he met with an Azerbaijani journalist in exile named Mahammad Mirzali. Last year he was stabbed at least 16 times by a number of Azerbaijanis in Nantes, France, but after recovering

continued on next page



INTERNATIONAL

France Honors French Resistance Hero Missak Manouchian

MANOUCHIAN, from page 1

In July 1935, he became an executive member of the Communist International, taking over the management of the newspaper *Zangou*, published by the French section of the Hayastani Ognutean Komite [Committee to Aid Armenia], and then of the Union populaire franco-arménienne [Franco-Armenian People's Union], an intermediary for the Main-d'œuvre immigrée [Immigrant Labor] organization among Armenian workers.

Manouchian's career in France was atypical. He was a member of the Spanish Republican Aid Committee and a delegate for



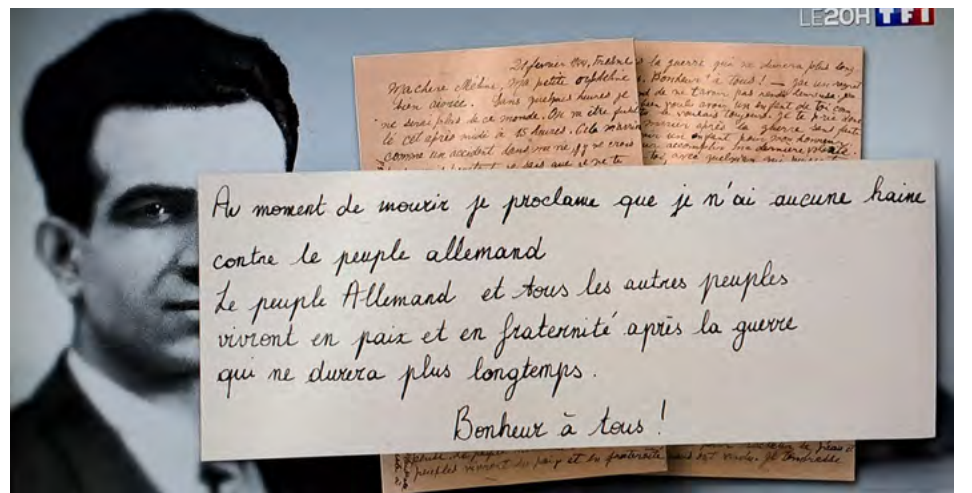
President Emmanuel Macron at the ceremony



The execution by the Nazis

the French Communist Party until 1939. The Communist Party was banned on September 26 of the same year.

In 1942, he joined the resistance against the German invaders in France. In August 1943, he was appointed military commissioner for the Paris region. He command-



Missak Manouchian's letter

ed three detachments comprising a total of some 50 militants, who targeted high-ranking German officers.

Manouchian was arrested by men from the French Intelligence Service on November 16, 1943. His wife, Méliné, was hidden by Charles Aznavour's family, but escaped arrest.

Tortured with 22 of his comrades, he was handed over to the German secret police (Wehrmacht Gestapo) and executed on February 21, 1944, after a summary trial on

February 19.

German propaganda took advantage of the arrests to publish a poster showing some of the "terrorists" of various nationalities.

Before his execution, he left a letter saying: "At the moment of my death I proclaim that I have no hatred against the German people."

Missak Manouchian was stateless at the time of his heroic exploits against the German occupiers.



The Pantheon in Paris

from previous page

continued to publish articles and videos against the regime.

The Americas

In America, Lapshin said he hoped to meet with a formerly extremely wealthy businessman Ilgar Hajiyev, who used to be friends with Ilham Aliyev but now lives in the US as a refugee and struggles for justice against corruption in both Azerbaijan and Russia.

Lapshin said that he keeps in touch with the Jewish community in the United States but they do not support as a group his human rights actions. He said, "Most of the Jews here in New York – I am telling about my friends and people in the human rights field – are somehow a little bit confused with me because most of them tell me, look, we have enough trouble with the Palestinians. Why do you need to deal with Azerbaijan, because Azerbaijan is actually the ally of Israel. Okay, you had a bad experi-

ence with Azerbaijan, but still, you have to think globally. This is realpolitik. What you do against Azerbaijan is against the national interest of Israel."

In fact, he said, "Jews here, all the Jewish organizations in New York and Washington, told me the straight way, you cannot expect support from us if what you do is against our interests, because our interests are the same interests as Israel."

Lapshin, traveling with his wife and daughter, first came to Canada, where he met with human rights organizations and the Armenian community. After going from Toronto to New York, he plans to go to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, Las Vegas, Seattle, Portland, Dallas, Miami, and probably Chicago, as well as Vancouver in Canada.

During these trips, Lapshin said, "When I meet with the Armenian communities here in the United States and Canada, or in any place, I am trying to explain to them that it is very important to be persistent in what you

do." In other words, they should not give up in the Armenian cause. However, Lapshin said that after the second Karabakh war, "I think the Armenian community is so divided and weak." There is mistrust of the Armenian government and each other, he said, and this situation made him feel emotionally depressed.

While he has contacted the Armenian National Committee of America and the Armenian Assembly of America in the past, he said that he has not received any support from them now. Nevertheless, he said that at least half of his meetings in America are organized by local Armenians, while Lapshin himself organizes the other half. He declared, "If someone wants to invite me for meetings, with human rights activists or politicians even on the state level I will be more than happy [to oblige]." His email is puertrto@gmail.com.

Lapshin succinctly summarized the goal of his current trip as follows: "I travel for

the living, for meetings, and for my revenge against the Azerbaijani government." So in addition to calling attention to Azerbaijani human rights abuses and the situation in Artsakh and Armenia through meetings and talks, Lapshin is working as a travel blogger and journalist to support himself. He gave the example of going to the Manhattan Bridge in New York City after his meetings with Amnesty International and Human Rights watch to film a documentary in connection with the movie "Once Upon a Time in America" (featuring Robert De Niro), which itself was filmed in front of that bridge.

In September, the Lapshin family already has tickets booked to go from New York to Israel, where Aleksander's wife can only remain for 90 days at a time. He is planning to go to Armenia after that, but, he said that due to the unstable political situation, "I can never know if I am going to be allowed to enter Armenia."



INTERNATIONAL

Little Singers of Armenia Celebrate Bach Jubilee and Their Own

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LEIPZIG — Germany, known as the land of poets and thinkers, is also the land of musicians — Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, to mention the most famous.

This year, the city of Leipzig paid homage to Johann Sebastian Bach, on the 300th anniversary of his arrival as cantor and music director. In May 1723, at the age of 38, Bach began his activity in Leipzig as choirmaster for the Thomanerchor, that has continued to the present day as a world class boys' choir. During the 27 years he worked there until his death in 1750, Bach composed cantatas, in the first years virtually one per week, to be sung as part of the Sunday mass, as well as numerous other works.

To celebrate the anniversary this year, a Bach festival, "Bach for Future," took place, from June 8 to 18, with 160 events featuring musicians from around the world, and drawing a record crowd of 70,000 guests. Among the celebrated performers were the Little Singers of Armenia, the famous choir directed by Tigran Hekekyan. They offered three concerts: on June 9 in the Old City Hall, they performed works by Armenian composers R. Petrosyan and Komitas, as well as classical German artists Franz Schubert, Georg Händel, J.S. Bach, and modern Americans like George Gershwin.

The following evening, they sang in the Monument to the Battle of the Nations (Völkerschlachtdenkmal), a monument dedicated to the battle in mid-October 1813, which led to the victory of Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Sweden over Napoleon.

Their a cappella concert featured M. Durufle's *Tota pulchra es*, op. 10, Nr. 2, J.S. Bach's *Suscepit Israel* from the Magnificat, and works by Armenian composers. On June 12 they performed in the famous St. Thomas Church (Thomaskirche), which is home of the Thomanerchor, founded in 1212. There they sang a *Matins* with works by N. Shnorhali, M. Mashtots, W. Byrd, J.S. Bach, Komitas, and H. Odznetsi.

All their concerts were greeted with enormous admiration and enthusiasm. Writing in a guest book in German, Armenian, Italian, and English, participants said that they were "overwhelmed by the skill" and could see clearly that the choir members "really enjoy singing." Someone from the municipality of Città Vecchia thought the performance was "virtually perfect," and Hekekyan's conducting "extraordinary." One German, who also sings in a chorus and "can judge



Members of the Little Singers of Armenia

how fantastic" they are, was moved to tears. Another person wrote the experience would "remain with me for the rest of my life," and at the final concert, a few members of the Zürich Bach Choir wrote, "You sound like heavenly angels."

Thirty Years of Making Music

For the Little Singers of Armenia, the opportunity to perform in Leipzig on this momentous occasion must have seemed like another way to honor their own very important milestone: at the end of 2022 they celebrated their 30th anniversary as a choir.

Held on October 17, 2023 at the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall, the gala birthday concert shed light on the past 30 years, highlighting the choir's singular accomplishments and reuniting several generations of choir members. In attendance were alumni from various parts of the world, including France, Germany, Australia, the United States, Ukraine, and several cities in Russia, who traveled to Armenia to take part in the event.

Hripsime Muradyan, Head of Communications of the Little Singers of Armenia, reported that "thanks to the exceptional guest conductors and musicians in attendance,

the concert became a genuine celebration, filled with a festive atmosphere." Among the special guests were Mario Fontana from Switzerland, Alfonsas Vildziunas from Lithuania, Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi from Italy, and Gela Parchukidze with the Tbilisi Children's Capella from Georgia, who felt honored to perform with one of the world's best choirs. A very special touch was added by Argentinian composer Martin Palmeri, who wrote a piece, *Missa Tango Armenia*, especially for the event. The Little Singers of Armenia choir performed it with the bandoneonist Mario Stefano Piedrodarchi, a premiere and unforgettable celebration.

The concert culminated with a moving rendition of *Peace to the World*, a song composed by Marine Margayan, a former singer of the choir. The special significance of this song lies in the fact that it was the concluding piece of every concert during the choir's first-ever tour, which took them through seven countries in Europe and fifteen states in the United States. The jubilee concert has been recorded and will be available later of the choir's social media pages.

In recognition of the remarkable accom-

plishments over the past three decades, the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM), the largest choral organization and a vital platform for choral music, published a lengthy piece in the International Choral Magazine, January 2023 (<https://issuu.com/icbulletin>).

The article celebrates the 30th birthday, reviews the history of the choir, from its founding in 1992 by Hekekyan and its first international concert tour in 1995. It chronicles the many honors bestowed on the group, from invitations to perform for the half-century anniversaries of UNESCO as well as the United Nations Charter, to winning prizes at international choral festivals, to receiving the honorary title of "The Cultural Ambassadors of Europe" by the European Federation of Choirs. It characterizes their vast and varied repertoire, which includes music spanning many cultures and genres, as well as contemporary works. Interspersed throughout the article are quotations from musicians, choir directors, music teachers, orchestra conductors, and former choir members, praising the quality and spirit of the Little Singers of Armenia.

Silent Siege of Nagorno-Karabakh Echoes in the European Parliament

SIEGE, from page 5

Pierre d'Argent, Professor of International Law at the Université Catholique de Louvain, member of the Institute of International Law and Counsel for Armenia before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), then took the floor to present the current case between Armenia and Azerbaijan before the ICJ, highlighting the practice of whataboutism, so dear to Azerbaijan. Indeed, every time Armenia submits a request to the ICJ, Azerbaijan immediately counter-attacks submitting a comparable request of its own. This mirror-effect strategy was also at work at the very moment of the event at the European Parliament, which was hosting the opening of a photo exhibition on "Karabagh after the war," sponsored by the Azerbaijani Embassy. D'Argent explained the orders issued since 2021 in the current case, which notably concerns the unblocking of the La-

chin corridor, emphasizing that these are legally binding orders. While Azerbaijan continues to be in breach of international law by not complying with these orders, the case before the ICJ represents, in his view, a United Nations monitoring body to ensure that what happens there does not take place completely behind a curtain that Azerbaijan would like to be as thick as possible.

Bulgarian MEP Andrey Kovachev, permanent rapporteur on Armenia at the European Parliament, presented the actions taken by the Parliament since the 44-day war in 2020, highlighting among others the urgent resolution on the situation of prisoners of war in May 2021 and the resolution on the blockade of the Latchine corridor in January 2023. He also referred to the two annual reports on the EU's relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan adopted in March of this year, which very clearly called on

Azerbaijan to limit its rhetoric of hatred and called for confidence-building measures in order to be able to engage further in a genuine peace process.

Finally, Monseigneur Pascal Gollnisch, director of Œuvre d'Orient, paid tribute to the Armenian people: we thought that having suffered such massacres and genocide deserved the right to live in respect and peace. What would we say if other genocidal peoples, of which we are aware, were to be attacked again in the same spirit?

Mgr Gollnisch also spoke of the threat to the Armenian cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh, and of the support projects carried out in the region by L'Œuvre d'Orient.

In his concluding remarks, François-Xavier Bellamy spoke of the "false peace negotiations" underway, and reiterated the need for the European Union to impose sanctions on Azerbaijan: "Our

role as Europeans is to ensure that the crime stops, so that negotiations can begin. How can we consider that Armenia is negotiating freely and sovereignly with Azerbaijan when it is today experiencing directly the blackmail of blocking the Latchine corridor? He recalled that Parliament had taken very clear positions since the beginning of the war. Unfortunately, these positions have not been translated either by the Commission, which considers Mr. Aliyev to be a reliable partner, or by the Council, which, despite our appeal, has still not initiated any sanctions procedure."

Indeed, it's hard to look at the giant poster in Ukrainian colors emblazoned with the slogan "No More Gas from Putin," in the agora of the European Parliament in Brussels, without feeling the painful absence of a neighboring poster in Armenian colors proclaiming "No More Gas from Aliyev."



Community News

Rep. Barbara Lee Leads Congressional Call on Biden Administration to End Military Aid to Azerbaijan

WASHINGTON — Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), the powerful Ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operation, is urging her Congressional colleagues to call on the Biden Administration to end all US military aid to Azerbaijan, in light of President Aliyev's ongoing six-month brutal blockade of Artsakh's 120,000 indigenous Armenian Christian population, reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).

She wrote in a letter on June 9, "The Biden-Harris Administration's military aid to Azerbaijan pours fuel on the fire – emboldening its Aliyev regime to further escalate its aggression and tighten its blockade of Artsakh," said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian. "Take a moment today to call, tweet, and write your US Representatives to join with Congresswoman Lee and her colleagues to end all US security and military aid to Baku – then ask your friends and family to do the same."

Lee's Congressional letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, an initiative strongly supported by the ANCA, comes as the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan are scheduled to hold another round of talks in Washington DC soon. The letter stresses that "Azerbaijan's prolonged blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh and its continued occupation of Armenian sovereign territory not only threatens to jeopardize tenuous conflict resolution efforts, but gravely endangers the security and welfare of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian population."

The Congressional letter goes on to express "dismay" at the State Department's reticence to forcefully reject President Aliyev's recent threats against the Artsakh's authorities. "Either they [Artsakh] will bend their necks and come themselves or things will develop differently now. If I say that amnesty can be an option, they should not miss this opportunity. They have missed many opportunities, and each time, as they say, we had to knock them over to bring them to their senses," stated President Aliyev in remarks on May 28th. Instead of condemning the statement, a State Department spokesman "welcomed" President Aliyev's remarks.

Calls on Biden Administration to Enforce Section 907 Sanctions on Azerbaijan

Rep. Lee's congressional letter states, "In the context of this ongoing blockade and President Aliyev's continuing threats, extending the Presidential waiver of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act would send a dangerous message to Azerbaijan's government – that there will be no repercussions for its attempts

see LEE, page 12



The Armenian Law Students Association with Drs. Levon Avdoyan and Khatchig Mouradian

Armenian Law Students Association at George Washington University Marks Active First Year

By Azniv Nalbandian and Shushan Gabrielyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Law Students Association at the George Washington (GW) University Law School in Washington, D.C. was established in the spring of 2022 by Armenian students who were seeking both an affinity group and stronger representation on campus. Its establishment was supported by the GW Law Student Bar Association and Dean Aram A. Gavoor. The 2022-2023 school year marked the Association's inaugural year as a fully-operating student organization.

In the fall, the Association hosted then-Foreign Minister of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh David Babayan. The event drew a diverse audience of students, faculty, and community members. Babayan highlighted the importance of analyzing armed conflict within a historical and geopolitical framework.

Later in the fall, and in partnership with the law school's Student Bar Association, the Association passed a resolution condemning Azerbaijan's unprovoked, premeditated, and offensive attacks on the Republic of Armenia. The Association contested the Lachs Moot Court Competition. Students worked with the GW Law's administration to minimize the school's participation in the Competition's final round, which is set to take place in Baku, Azerbaijan, because of the discriminatory effect it would have on students of Armenian descent. The Association also collaborated extensively with the Armenian Bar Association's D.C. Chapter (ABA) to host a mentorship program for all Armenian law students in the D.C. area.

see STUDENTS, page 12



Dr. Khatchig Mouradian introducing the Library of Congress Armenian Collection to a full audience in the Tasher Great Room at the George Washington University Law School

Knights and Daughters will 'Return to Ararat' For Grand Convocation 2023

By David Medzorian

BOSTON — This city will host more than just fireworks and the Esplanade Pops Concert this July as Knights and Daughters of Vartan from across the country gather for this year's Grand Convocation. The 105th Avak Tahlij and 83rd Kerakouyn Zhoghov will be hosted by Ararat Lodge No. 1, and Arpie Otyag No. 9. Members are invited, as this year's slogan states, to "Return to Ararat," as Ararat Lodge was the very first Knights of Vartan Tahlij, founded in 1916.

For those considering attending, there is still time to register and participate in all the activities and festivities.

This year, the Grand Convocation will last three days, from Thursday, July 6 to Saturday, July 8. However, many choose to arrive earlier in the week or extend their stay after the official events have concluded. The home for this year's Grand Convocation will be the Westin Waltham Hotel, which is only a few miles from downtown Boston. On-site registration for attendees will begin at noon on Wednesday, July 5. Knights and Daughters will also be able to register between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Thursday and between 8 a.m. and noon on Friday and Saturday. Those arriving early can enjoy the Fourth of July celebrations in Boston, including the fireworks over the Charles River and the Boston Pops Holiday Concert at the Esplanade on the banks of the Charles River.

Those arriving before Wednesday afternoon can also ride on one of Boston's famous Duck-Boat Tours. Guests will enjoy a 90-minute tour of some of Boston's best known historical and cultural sites. The vehicle will travel both on land and in the water, making for an exciting trip through the city. On Thursday, July 6, workshops and a meeting of Former Grand Commanders will occupy the daytime hours. The evening will feature the Avak Sbarabed and Avak Dirouhie Reception in the hotel's atrium.

Friday's agenda will begin with official sessions for both the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, followed at noon by the Daughters of Vartan Luncheon. After the afternoon meetings, members and their guests will have time to rest before the evening's "Ararat kNight" dinner and dance." Vocalist Elie Berberyan and his band from Montreal will keep everyone dancing throughout the evening. Following the dinner, the dance will also be open to non-members.

Saturday's calendar will include the final meeting sessions and a presentation to both Knights and Daughters on our projects in Armenia by Liaison Gohar Palyan. The Daughters of Vartan will also install a new Grand Chairwoman to succeed outgoing Avak Dirouhie Gloria Korkoian and a new Avak Khourout

see CONVOCATION, page 11



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian American Pharmacists' Assoc. Holds Summer Mixer

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON — The Armenian American Pharmacists' Association (AAPA) held a summer social event at Anoush'Ella Saj Kitchen in Boston on June 11. Anoush'Ella (<https://www.anoushella.com/>) provided the appetizers while Storica Wines (<https://www.storicawines.com/>) made it possible for the guests to sample four types of Armenian wines. Both were event cosponsors.

Garo Sakaian spoke briefly on behalf of AAPA while Zack Armen, founder of Storica Wines, provided a little background on the mission of his company. Officially founded 4 or 5 years ago, it only made its first hires 2 ½ years ago, and now it is available in 26 different states, and on all 24 of the ships of Carnival Cruise Line's North American fleet.

Simon Baiatian, one of the early hires of Storica Wines, poured wine for guests, including a good mix of students, veteran pharmacists and others in the health care industry, while providing insights into the qualities of the four types of wine available that evening.

Sossy Yogurtian, AAPA president, later declared: "Tonight's event is a start of many ideas that AAPA has to further our vision of using our 42-year-old organiza-



Guests listening to Zack Armen, front right, at the Armenian American Pharmacists' Association mixer (photo Aram Arkun)

tion as a platform to give our health care professionals and students educational, networking and socializing opportunities to meet, interact and help each other. We hope tonight would be the first step in accomplishing that goal." She added that the organization planned to hold such social events quarterly.

Sakaian at the event had also announced that AAPA is planning an educational lecture by Dr. Donna Bartlett, the author of *Med Strong*, for October 5 at the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) center in Watertown. The topic will be better health through deprescribing. More information will be presented at the AAPA website (<https://aapha.org/>) as the time gets closer.

The AAPA committee members responsible for organizing this event included Garo Sakaian, Taline Kebabdjian, Bob Kademian, Sossy Yogurtian, and many others.



Sossy Yogurtian, president of the Armenian American Pharmacists' Association (photo Aram Arkun)



Simon Baiatian (photo Aram Arkun)

Invitation on the Occasion of the 120th Anniversary of the Dikran Yergat Cultural Association & the 50th Anniversary of the Construction of its Center

Dikran Yergat's family, members and friends,

We, the undersigned, former and current Chairpersons and our committee members Invite you to commemorate these two anniversaries with a worldwide Zoom online event, similar to a formal program that would have been initiated to mark such a solemn occasion.

An ad hoc committee comprised of us two Chairpersons and former committee members was formed to best organize this historic event. Mr. Barkev Nazaretian (Montreal, Canada) is in charge of coordinating the event's various activities, and Mr. Hrant Vartzbedian (Los Angeles, California) is the host of the Zoom event and the technical coordinator.

All former members worldwide, as well as the general public, who wish to participate in this historic online event, (final date to be announced soon) are asked to send their email addresses to DikranYergat120@email.com in order to receive an invitation to the zoom event and links to view and participate, as well as to be notified of future details and information.

Looking forward to seeing our global membership virtually gathered on this occasion.

Dikran Yergat 120th virtual Anniversary organizing Committee.

Chairpersons

Bedros Piandarian
(1971 - 1973)

Asdghig Alexanian-Papazian
(2004 -)



COMMUNITY NEWS

TCA New York Chapter Donates \$5,600 to Beirut School

NEW YORK — The continuously growing socio-economic crisis in Lebanon is negatively affecting various Lebanese organizations and ventures, one of them being the Tekeyan Cultural Association’s beloved Vahan Tekeyan Middle School in Beirut.

The Vahan Tekeyan School, which enjoys the privilege of being supported morally and financially by the Tekeyan Cultural Association, continues to navigate in this ever-changing situations. The school is able to maintain its educational activities thanks to dedicated and generous donors.

The administration and the Board of Trustees announced this week that the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York has donated \$5,600 for the continuity of the school and to help sustain its immense needs.

To help with the effort in Beirut, donate at the following link: <https://givebut-ter.com/bXn8Lm>



Students at the Vahan Tekeyan School in Beirut



Knights and Daughters Will ‘Return to Ararat’ for Grand Convocation 2023

CONVOCATION, from page ?
 That evening, the Grand Convocation ends with the Gala in the hotel’s Grand Ballroom. Following a delicious three-course meal and a brief musical interlude, The Knights and Daughters of Vartan will honor their Man and Woman of the Year and our National College Scholarship recipients.

The Grand Convocation Committee has been meeting since last year, planning this year’s event down to the last detail. This year’s gathering will be the third Grand Convocation held in Boston since 2009, with the most recent in 2017. For Information on how to attend this year’s Grand Convocation, go to www.grandconvo.com.



The members of the Grand Convocation Committee

Boutique Senior Living!
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITY

Manoogian Manor, a licensed senior living facility, is seeking qualified candidates for the position of Executive Director of our “boutique residence” location in Livonia, Michigan. This is the top management position in our organization. Assisted by a dedicated management staff, this position is accountable for all aspects of running a successful business including resident care services, financial performance, compliance with local, state and federal safety standards, marketing, food service and property management. The position reports to the Manor’s Board of Directors.

Requirements include a minimum four-year college degree followed by minimum five years’ leadership experience in business, medical, hospitality or other relevant leadership environments. A compassionate, welcoming personality is essential. Conversational Armenian proficiency and a medical background are highly desirable, although not required.

A competitive compensation and benefit package accompanies this position, as well as financial assistance for a successful candidate who must relocate to the metropolitan Detroit area.

For more information about Manoogian Manor, visit: www.manoogianmanor.com. Qualified candidates are encouraged to direct inquiries to David Karapetian at: dkarapetian@comcast.net.

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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.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Law Students at George Washington University Mark Active First Year

STUDENTS, from page 9

In the spring, the Association and the D.C. ABA jointly hosted Dr. Levon Avdoyan and Dr. Khatchig Mouradian for an evening entitled “The Library of Congress’s Armenia Reading Room.” The novel event drew a large audience, including members of the Armenian community, Father Hovsep Karapetyan of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church, Representative of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic in the United States Robert Avetisyan, Director of the Armenian National Institute Dr. Rouben Adalian, and undergraduate and graduate students. Avdoyan and Mouradian discussed the vast collection of Armenian illuminated manuscripts, books, and other rarities housed in the Library of Congress. In highlighting the importance of the Armenian Collection, Dr. Avdoyan astutely remarked that studying Armenian history and antiquities is the optimal path to dispelling disinformation concerning Armenian existence and self-determination.

Later in the spring, the Association hosted a commemorative afternoon at the GW Textile Museum, remembering the Armenian Genocide while memorializing our enduring cultural legacy. The afternoon featured a student-produced documentary highlighting Armenians’ roles and contributions to the Ottoman Empire and personal testimonies from students. The event concluded with musical performances of Komitas music by Alexandra and Lilia Yarialian on the Armenian *qanon* and Olivia



The Armenian Law Students Association with then-Foreign Minister of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh David Babayan.

Jerjian on the mandolin.

Gavor is a nationally recognized scholar in the fields of administrative law, federal courts, and national security law. His work has been published in numerous law journals and cited by the Supreme Court of the United States. Above all, the Asso-

ciation is appreciative of his thoughtful guidance, unwavering support and encouragement during the nascent period of its student organization.

The GW Law Armenian Law Students Association looks forward to another prosperous period during the upcoming 2023-

2024 school year. Those interested may reach the Association at alsa@law.gwu.edu.

(Azniv Nalbandian and Shushan Gabrielyan were copresidents of the GW Law Armenian Law Students Association in 2022-23.)

Barbara Lee Leads Congressional Call on Biden Administration to End Military Aid to Azerbaijan

LEE, from page 9

to impose its will on the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh by intimidation, starvation and deadly force.”

The Biden Administration is currently deciding whether to reauthorize of the Presidential waiver of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act. Enacted in 1992, the law establishes statutory restrictions on US assistance to the Government of Azerbaijan “until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.” Congress included a Section 907 waiver in the FY2002 Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act.

The Section 907 waiver and subsequent extensions require a number of certifications, including that granting the waiver “will not undermine or hamper ongoing efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan or be used for offensive purposes against Armenia.” A US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, issued in 2022, revealed that the State Department consistently failed to inform Congress of the impact of over \$164 million in assistance to Baku on the military balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

US presidents – Republican and Dem-

ocrat – have waived Section 907 annually since 2001, including President Biden, who, as a candidate, called on the Trump Administration to enforce Azerbaijan sanctions and apply the measure.

Lee: A Champion of US Assistance to Artsakh

Rep. Lee’s Congressional letter is a continuation of her leadership of sending expanded aid to Artsakh in the face of increasing Azerbaijani aggression.

With support from the ANCA, Lee was successful late last year in including language in the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L.117-103) directing that the US Department of State and US Agency for International Development provide Congress with an “assistance strategy for addressing humanitarian and recovery needs arising from the [Artsakh] conflict” that identifies the US “resources and programs,” available for this purpose. This Artsakh aid provision, now signed into law, was made possible only because of the determined leadership of Congresswoman Lee – who during the 117th Congress – served as the Chair of the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, which is responsible for foreign aid. The Artsakh provision included a sixty-day timeline for the Biden Administration to report back to Congress – a deadline that must be met by the end of February of 2023. In response to public questioning by

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Robert Menendez (D-NJ), USAID Administrator Power confirmed that they have conducted the Artsakh needs assessments. The State Department has failed to make the review publicly available. No US humanitarian assistance programs have been implemented in Artsakh since President Biden’s election.

Earlier this year, Lee spoke at a Capitol Hill press conference held in the Press Triangle at the foot of the US Capitol Building and called on the Biden Administration to stop US military aid to Azerbaijan and send emergency aid to Artsakh in response to the devastating humanitarian crisis in Artsakh caused by Azerbaijan’s blockade of the Lachin Corridor. “I have long been a strong advocate for humanitarian support and recovery needs arising from the Artsakh conflict,” explained Rep. Lee. “As

we all know, Artsakh is enduring a major and growing humanitarian crisis caused by Azerbaijan’s illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor, Artsakh’s only humanitarian lifeline to Armenia. So yes, like all of you, I strongly condemn Azerbaijan’s blockade of the vital corridor connecting Armenia and Artsakh and call for the immediate opening.” Rep. Lee applauded the leadership of the Armenian American community for working with her committee to include language in the Fiscal Year 2023 Omnibus funding bill calling for a comprehensive strategy to address Artsakh’s humanitarian needs. “I’m looking forward to continuing to work with the Administration to get this done,” stated Rep. Lee

Pro-Artsakh advocates can write, tweet, and call their US Representatives to co-sign Rep. Lee’s letter by visiting anca.org/Lee.

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Arts & Culture

Arzruni Remembers Iconic Armenian Composer Aram Khachaturian, His Music and Life

By Stephan S. Nigohosian

NEW YORK — The dynamic music of venerated Soviet-Armenian composer and conductor Aram Khachaturian was explored at a special screening of “Khachaturian: An Archival Film,” on June 6 at the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Best known for such groundbreaking works in the ballets “Spartacus” and “Gayane,” as well as the *Masquerade Suite*, Khachaturian’s infusion of Armenian-inspired musical tones and arrangements reflected the heritage he so dearly cherished.

The event, sponsored by the Diocese’s Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center, marked the iconic composer’s 120th birthday. It featured introductory remarks and a question-and-answer session by pianist and composer Şahan Arzruni, whose has made it his lifelong work to promote Armenian composers and preserve their musical legacies.

Arzruni’s credentials include a master’s degree from the Juilliard School. His extensive experience and knowledge of music theory, history, and composition enabled him to



Aram Khachaturian

highlight and convey Khachaturian’s brilliance in terms that the audience could understand and appreciate.

Attendees were treated to Arzruni’s personal insight into Khachaturian’s method, which he saw firsthand while collaborating with Khachaturian during one of the composer’s visits to New York City in 1972. One such session involved Arzruni inviting Khachaturian to his apartment to hear him perform his interpretation of the composer’s two albums of children’s music — which had never been recorded.

“I thought it would be a nice opportunity to play those pieces for him in person, so my recordings would be as authentic as possible,” Arzruni recalled. He remembered performing the pieces for Khachaturian, while the maestro gracefully danced as the music washed over him.

“To illustrate the mood that the compositions should elicit, Khachaturian stood up and began ethereally

see TRIBUTE, page 15



Exhibiting the art of Shahen Zarookian and Bernard Djevalikian at the Beacon Hill Art Walk on Sunday, June 4 in Boston

Boston Area ‘Armenian Culture Connection’ Holds Its First Events

BOSTON — The Armenian Culture Connection (ACC) was founded six months ago in Boston.

“Our mission,” says founder Izabella Djevalikian, “is to connect with Armenian and other cultural organizations in Greater Boston to promote Armenian art and culture to the public at large.”

ACC’s first project was its Armenian Youth Chorus, directed by Artur Veranian, the award-winning, internationally acclaimed choral/orchestral conductor. The chorus debuted on May 19, at the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (ACEC) in Watertown, to celebrate the 105th anniversary of the First Armenian Republic’s independence.

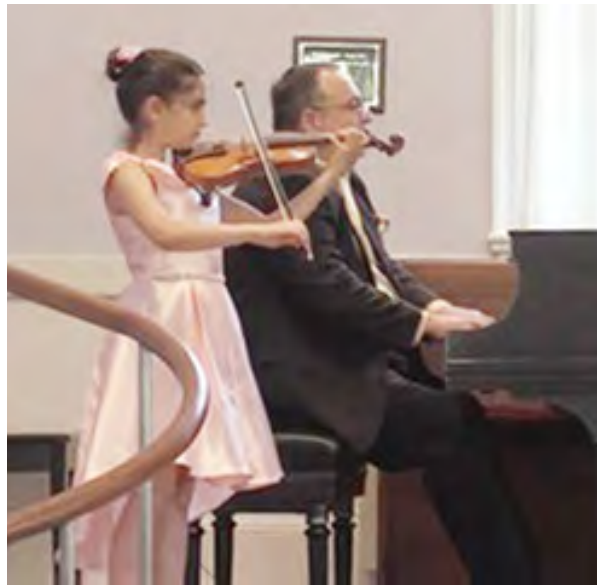
ACC’s next event was the “Our Young Talents” concert on May 21, which was held at the First Parish of Watertown. Well-known pianist and teacher Levon Hovsepien donated his time to serve as the artistic director for the event. Thirty-six children of all ages performed Armenian music and poetry in front of some 180 people. The concert was broadcast by Watertown Cable TV.

“As the concert was a big success,” notes Djevalikian, “we hope to make Our Young Talents an annual spring event.”

Another ACC project was exhibiting the art of Shahen Zarookian and Bernard Djevalikian at the Beacon Hill Art Walk on Sunday, June 4, in Boston. In the near future, ACC is planning to hold exhibitions of various Armenian artists in other Boston area cities.

“Our next event, scheduled for July 1,” says Djevalikian, “is the Armenian Youth Social Night. The goal is to create the opportunity for the young generations to socialize and exchange ideas, while enjoying music and dancing, ethnic food and refreshments.”

The Armenia Culture Connection is actively working on even more programs. “We plan to participate in two international cultural events to be held this fall,” she said. ACC’s website and Facebook page are forthcoming so the public can check for upcoming programs and news.



Levon Hovsepien on piano with a student



Participants in the Our Young Talents concert

Netflix Animation Heads Set Out Their Roadmap at Annecy

By John Hopewell

LOS ANGELES (*Variety*) — Netflix, the world’s preeminent animation producer by production volume, outlay and awards, has set out a roadmap at Annecy for how it is looking to invest in the future of animation.

Sketched by John Derderian and Karen Toliver, Netflix animation heads of series and film respectively, the game plan takes in building on Netflix’s strengths, in adult animation, and genre and anime in series; maintaining a vast diversity of shows and movies; and looking in every project for a creator’s vision which Netflix will seek to connect with the right audience, at the right price.

Derderian and Toliver talked to *Variety* at France’s Annecy Animation Festival in advance of Netflix’s panel on June 14, “From Chicken Run: Dawn of the Nugget to Blue Eye Samurai – See What’s Next @ Netflix.”

As for diversity, the panel looks set to serve as a case in point. Anticipated feature “Nimona,” adapting ND Stevenson’s graphic novel, world premieres on Wednesday. DreamWorks Animation and Netflix announced at Annecy on Tuesday that they are teaming on CG family-targeting fantasy comedy “Orion and the Dark,” written by Charlie Kaufman.

“‘Chicken Run’ and ‘Nimona’ couldn’t be more different,” Toliver told *Variety* at Annecy.

“We just love what that diversity of ‘Blue Eye Samurai’ to ‘Nimona’ to ‘Chicken Run’ really says about Netflix: That this is a place where you should be able to see any kind of animation that you want for kids, for adults, across the board, and we’re very proud of that,” she added.

Netflix is also making a determined play for the kids & family space. Of seven titles bowing (“Nimona”) or sneak peaked at the panel, also taking in “Leo” and “Exploding Kittens,” and Annecy’s WIP strand — which includes Netflix’s “Captain Laserhawk: A Blood Dragon” — kids and family is the demography targeted most consistently of Netflix titles at Annecy.

Again, “Leo,” “could not be more different” to “Orion” and “Chicken Run,” Toliver stressed.

An animated musical comedy, “Leo” could be huge for Netflix in the kids & family space, given Adam Sandler’s fan base. The movie weighs in as a coming-of-age story about the final year of elementary school as seen through the eyes of Leo, the class pet, a doe-eyed 74-year-old pet lizard voiced by Sandler.

For Netflix, however, movies and shows are not just a case of targeting demos but also communicating an excitement about specific visions of creators in unique works.

“The brainchild of Adam Sandler and his Happy Madison crew,” in Toliver’s words, in reference to Happy Madison Productions which Sandler founded in 1998, “Leo” comes from a filmmaker such as Sandler who “knows his audience, this is a musical, and Adam has been doing

see NETFLIX, page 15



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



California Grown: A Unique Recipe For Pistachio and Moscato Bundt Cake

California Grown is about connecting consumers with the dedicated people who grow and produce their food. It really is that simple. Farmers have a lot of stories to tell and want to welcome you into their fields so you can really understand where your food comes from - and how important you are to the process. You may not think of farmers every time you're in the grocery store or market, but they think about you every day. From employing food safety measures that keep your food reliable, to growing varieties they know you will appreciate, and developing creative new packaging solutions that will help get lunch or dinner on the table faster - these details dominate the mind of the farmer.

This Pistachio and Moscato Bundt Cake recipe from California Grown's blogger in residence Meg van der Kruik is unlike any other Bundt cake recipe that you have ever tried. In fact, this just might be the easiest cake recipe you have ever baked. Simply chop, mix, and bake. No need to ice this cake either; you can decorate and serve it with your favorite seasonal fruits and cut flowers. While some cakes require icing or some kind of sweet drizzle before serving, this one does not. The pistachio pudding mix in the batter keeps the cake moist for days without needing any help. Meg's work has been featured in The Huffington Post, Cosmopolitan, the Kitchn, BuzzFeed, and Better Homes & Gardens where she is a "BH&G Stylemaker."

The function of wine in cooking is to intensify, enhance, and accent the flavor and aroma of food - not to mask the flavor of what you are cooking. So, in the case of this cake the Moscato in the batter is noticeable upon the first bite, but it immediately fades and allows the flavor of pistachio to take the lead - leaving you with a flavor profile that is perfectly balanced on the palate.

According to Discover California Wines, the name of this wine comes from the Italian name of the tangy, fruity Muscat grape - Moscato. Muscat comes in a range of styles, from medium-bodied and dry or off-dry, to sparkling, full-bodied, late-harvest, and deliciously sweet. Pair this cake with an effervescent glass of sparkling rose or your favorite sparkling wine from California. In the warm summer months, serve slices of this cake with fresh stone fruit and citrus. But fresh berries would be a delicious accompaniment to a slice of cake, too. Various fresh

and dried citrus wheels and wedges make for a stunning display.

Finding wine from California should be easy, with over 3,900 wineries supplying 61 percent of the country's wine, California wine should be readily available and the origin displayed clearly on the label. There are over 100 grape varieties grown in California, from Zinfandel to Chardonnay to Pinot Noir.

Look for CA GROWN indicators. Legislation passed in 2009 mandating that stores are required to display the country of origin for produce. Look for a shelf card, if you can't find CA GROWN, look for Grown in the USA. California grows over 400 different crops, from berries, to lettuce, grapes, sweet potatoes and more, if it was grown in the U.S., there's a good chance it was grown in the Golden State.

Equipment: 1 Bundt cake pan

INGREDIENTS:

- 3/4 cup pistachios, chopped
- 1 package regular or gluten-free yellow or vanilla cake mix. (You will need the package to be at least 13.5 oz. in weight. Nothing smaller.)
- 1 3.4-oz. package pistachio pudding mix
- 3/4 cup Moscato
- 3/4 cup vegetable oil or melted butter
- 1 teaspoon orange extract
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 4 large eggs
- To decorate or serve:
 - * Yellow peach, donut nectarine, fresh and dried orange wheels, sliced
 - * Basil leaves and blossoms, fresh cut zinnias, and marigold cuttings.
 - * Whole pistachios

PREPARATION:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Generously grease a Bundt pan then scatter 1/4 cup of the chopped pistachios into the bottom of the prepared pan. Set aside.

Combine the remaining chopped pistachios, cake mix, pudding mix, Moscato, vegetable oil, orange extract, cardamom, and eggs in the bowl of a stand mixer and mix thoroughly to combine.

Mix at medium speed for 4-5 minutes then scrape down the sides of the bowl and mix again.

Pour the batter into the prepared Bundt cake pan, then bake for 50-55 minutes or until golden brown and cooked through.

Allow the cake to cool on a wire rack for 5-10 minutes, then immediately turn the cake out of the pan onto a serving plate or cake stand. The cake can be served immediately or garnished as desired with seasonal fruit and cut flowers.

For this recipe, go to:

<https://californiagrown.org/recipes/recipe-for-bundt-cake/#recipe>

For more about California wines, go to:

<https://discovercaliforniawines.com/wine-food/wine-101/#grapes>

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See:

<https://californiagrown.org/about-ca-grown/>

<https://californiagrown.org/blog/>

<https://californiagrown.org/blog/the-central-valley-a-great-place-for-farming-in-california/>

<https://californiagrown.org/meet-our-california-grown-creators/>

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ARTS & CULTURE

Arzruni Remembers Iconic Armenian Composer Aram Khachaturian, His Music and Life

TRIBUTE, from page 13

dancing around the room with incredible movement of his wrists while I performed,” Arzruni said. “It was at that moment that I realized that my interpretation of his music had earned his approval.”

Arzruni also played a role in the making of *Khachaturian: An Archival Film* in 2003, to honor the centennial of the composer’s birth. Having acquired reams of archival film footage of the composer from Alorik Davityan, director of film archives in Yerevan, he faced the task of deciding how best to tell the story.

“I knew nothing about filmmaking, but I had a structure in mind of how I envisioned



Şahan Arzruni, Diocesan Primate Fr. Mesrop Parsamyan, and Zohrab Center director Dr. Jesse Arlen

the film’s arc would unfold,” he said. “I worked closely with an editor here in New York, and we chose the footage we felt was the right length for a documentary, while illustrating Khachaturian’s work and genius.”

Promoting the Luminaries of Armenian Music

In addition to Khachaturian, Arzruni



To honor the 120th anniversary of Aram Khachaturian’s birth on June 6, 2023, the Eastern Diocese’s Zohrab Center held a screening of a film on the composer’s life and works. Master pianist Şahan Arzruni, who produced the film, introduced the film and offered some personal recollections of meeting Khachaturian in the 1970s.

has championed the music of Komitas: the great Armenian composer, arranger, singer, choirmaster and priest.

“Whereas Khachaturian was the ambassador of contemporary Armenian music, Komitas was its founder,” he said. His intimate knowledge of Komitas’ life and work is due, in part, to a post-graduate doctoral thesis he worked on, which involved translating Komitas’ extensive written legacy of articles published in scholarly and popular

journals in the late 19th-early 20th centuries.

Another subject of Arzruni’s efforts is American-Armenian composer Alan Hovhaness, regarded as one of the most prolific 20th-century American composers. “Alan and I became very good friends, and we played and recorded some of his compositions together,” he recalled.

Prior to his death in 2000, Hovhaness gave to Arzruni many of his manuscripts

that had never been printed or performed professionally, with the request that he try to record them. Arzruni ultimately recorded eight of the works: a fitting tribute to his friend and colleague.

Currently, he is working on recording piano compositions that will continue to highlight the valuable contributions of Armenian composers. One greatly anticipated project will be devoted to the works of Armenian women composers.

Netflix Animation Heads Set Out Their Roadmap at Annecy

NETFLIX, from page 13

this for a long time. He’s really built his career off it,” said Toliver.

“This is an opportunity to have an animated movie that really speaks to Adam’s voice as a filmmaker and a comedian in ways that he really hasn’t before, in animation. That’s a very good example of sort of how specific this is, and our making sure that we do something that is in the spirit of his voice,” she added.

“In every project we look for this,” Toliver said. “‘Nimona’ is based on a graphic novel by ND Stevenson. That has a very specific voice and very specific following and fan base. So the movie was really made in the spirit of that, and ND worked very closely with the filmmakers to make sure that there was an authenticity to that movie, and it shows. ND is very proud of this movie and we are too and we think it’s great that these two movies couldn’t be any more different.”

“We’re always trying to attach the vision to the right audience for that show,” Derderian observed. “The goal isn’t just mainstream programming. Sure, we have to entertain a lot of people, but it’s really about finding a show that we really believe can connect with someone. And then our job is to connect to that audience at the right sort of price.”

“We’re as committed as ever [to animation],” said Derderian. “We’re putting a lot



John Derderian of Netflix

of effort into adult comedy right now, adult genre, which is an area we’ve kind of fostered out of the tradition of anime. As we move forward, [one question] is how do we build those areas with great shows,” he added.

Netflix is working with “many of our partners around the world” to replicate its huge success in the U.S. with adult comedy, he said.

“We’re in the U.K., we’re doing that as well now, which is also such a fertile ground to make adult comedies. You have incredible performers and stand up producers and writers. There’s definitely a bigger

opportunity for that around the world,” Derderian said.

In anime, “incredible shows are being made in Japan, and we’re partnering on many of them,” said Derderian.

“Yet there is this other area that is new and fresh, which didn’t really exist before. A lot of our shows are a sort of western genre – action thrillers or dramas,” he added.

“So many great directors and writers are so heavily influenced by anime. But the question is whether we can also create this other zone, which maybe has a L.A. writer and maybe a studio from Japan or not from the U.S. which has an influence of anime in this new form but there are also some unique things that are not really copying,” Derderian explained.

One prime example is Netflix’s “Arcane,” developed and produced by Riot Games in partnership with France’s Fortiche, which made history last year with its Primetime Emmy Award win in Outstanding Animated Program, making Netflix the first streamer to win this category. A stunning mix of 2D animation for backgrounds and texture and 3D for character and action, “Arcane” helped Netflix dominate 2022’s Annie Awards with 20 wins.

At Annecy this year, Netflix hosts a work in progress unveil of “Captain Laserhawk: A Blood Dragon,” from France’s Ubisoft and Indian-American producer Adi Shan-

kar (“Castlevania”) which is described as “an anime love letter to the ‘90s.”

The Netflix panel today also features “Blue Eye Samurai,” which reportedly brings a female sensibility to an action revenge tale set in Japan’s Edo era.

“Blue Eye Samurai” creators, however, are famed U.S. writer-producer Michael Green, a co-scribe on “Blade Runner 2049,” and Amber Noizumi, who serve as showrunners and EPs.

The series is executive produced by U.S.-based Erwin Stoff and Taiwan-born but Los Angeles-raised Jane Wu, who boarded sequences for “Into the Spider-Verse.” Studio work is from France’s Blue Spirit Studio, which can bring a gorgeously textured 2D look to its CGI animation.

“We’re producing a lot in Japan, and we’re excited about France, we’re doing a bunch here. Probably outside of the U.S. these are our biggest markets in terms of production, but Spain is another area that’s fantastic. They are incredible studios we’ve worked with, we want to work more with Rodrigo Blaas. Alberto Mielgo’s working there now, both in Madrid.”

That said, “There’s such a distribution right now of talent around the world,” Derderian concluded. “So we need a lot of creative flexibility. We’re not just one type of studio. Every show has its own demands and needs, and we really cast a very wide net indeed.”

Books

To Be or Not To Be: Zabel Yessayan's *On The Threshold*

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

The relevance of Zabel Yessayan's words to the events unfolding in the homeland today is startling. Indeed, it is impossible to read Yessayan without the painful awareness of the precariousness of the situation of Armenians living in the homeland. The ongoing military operations, the humiliating treaties, the ultimatums and the false promises of peace, the "cleansing" of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh, all point to the closing of doors to the possibility of a peaceful existence for Armenians on their ancestral lands.

In "The New Bride," a short story in *On The Threshold: Key Texts on Armenians and Turks as Ottoman Subjects*, the newly released compilation of a set of Yessayan's "unread, misread or previously unknown" stories, translated and edited with an introduction by Dr. Nanor Kebranian (Gomidas Institute, 2023), Yessayan refers to the Muslim-Turkish murderers of the village population as "a horde of demons . . . of men raging with irreconcilable hatred and howling like beasts." Commenting on the mood of "helplessness" and of "hopelessness" prevalent in Yessayan's writing, "Armenians are and will continue to be perceived and treated as an alien race on their own native soil," writes Kebranian. Indeed, to this day, the demons are running around, bloodier and more murderous than ever.

It is generally the oppressive customs and laws that impede Turkish women's freedom that the stories expose. However, even when they deal with the massacres explicitly, they are, to borrow Kebranian's words, "veiled expressions" of the conditions that deny humanity's inalienable rights and the "many evils" that hinder progress in a despotic state. The Muslim woman is "a metaphor for the status of subjugated Ottoman subjects — notably, Armenians," writes Kebranian.

"Is it possible to say that there is no great difference between the domestic, moral, public, etc., customs of Turkish women a hundred years ago and the ideas and practices of women today?" asks Yessayan in "The Namehram: Life as a Turkish Woman," an essay that was first published in *Azadamard Daily* in Constantinople, in 1914. Yessayan's words of indignation ring true today, more than a hundred years after they were written. They will probably ring true a hundred years from now as well, since the same tactics of terrorizing and of silencing are being implemented to wipe Armenia off the map. What for Yessayan was "a matter of urgency" is for Armenians today an existential threat.

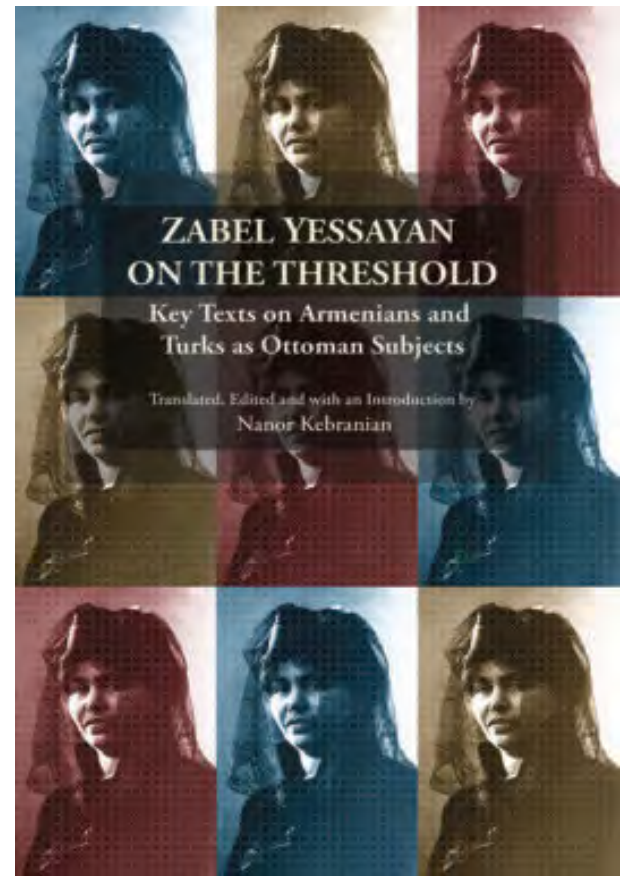
Images of captivity abound in the stories and the essays assembled in the volume. Yessayan writes of "restrictions and torturous laws," of women living in "caged rooms" behind shadows and veils. In "The Wait," Khalideh Hanum, one of the many women who have been released by

their husbands, awaited the return of her beloved "in vain behind the bars of a locked cage . . . as [he] charged care-free through [his] life, encountering new joys along the way." Likewise, Selimeh, "the new bride," "paced around the confining cottage until she collapsed from exhaustion." Her husband "terrifi[ed] her . . . She felt an urge to inflict harm," writes Yessayan. Selimeh refuses to wear the diadem that had belonged to the adolescent Armenian bride her husband had killed, one of the "bleeding victims of those terrible events." "The Turkish woman's domestic life is replete with the most profound and hidden miseries," writes Yessayan in "On The Question of Turkish Women's Emancipation," another essay originally published in 1914. "We must fling open the doors and windows to let the sunlight flood those caged rooms and dispel the remaining shadows and darkness and damp," she adds in "The Namehram: Life as a Turkish Woman."

The collection does in fact reveal Yessayan as a staunch advocate of a woman's emancipation. The two essays cited above, "Namehram: Life as a Turkish Woman" and "On The Question of Turkish Women's Emancipation," read like feminist manifestos. Ironically however, the avid defender of women's rights does not trust "feminism" as an ideology. "That poor word has become so laughable and is labeled with so many contradictory, meaningless, debatable, and, importantly, crude declarations and demands, that it is imperative to clarify just what we mean when we speak of women's emancipation," she writes. While the obvious goal remains the freeing of the female from subordination to the male, it also entails, in Yessayan's words, "a broader social struggle."

Yessayan's is a desire to dismantle a system of domination and subordination that harms both men and women. To paraphrase the words of Virginia Woolf, that other champion of justice for women, if women are locked out, men are locked in. Indeed, Yessayan believes male-female cooperation to be fundamental to women's emancipation. Pitting one sex against the other would only perpetuate the existing hierarchies and exclusions. Her "feminism" transcends all models. A liberated woman herself, she has great respect for a woman's traditional role as a mother, a notion some proponents of equal rights for women do not understand even today. "The great influence of mothers, sisters, and close female relatives enables the race to mold its young into magnanimous, noble and valiant men. It is not a demonstration of strength to trample upon all that is sacred; such a misconception is unique to tyrants," Yessayan states boldly.

With her background in history, literature and law, Kebranian is uniquely positioned to make Yessayan's writing available to us. Her Introduction, as well as the endnotes, make her effort worthwhile. Kebranian evaluates the existing scholarship honestly and fairly. She points out to



winaccuracies and to misrepresentations of Yessayan's work in past studies, without any condescension. She also comments insightfully on Yessayan's "situated feminism," recognizing that every woman's struggle is unique, always local, always contextual. Kebranian's is a voice we learn to trust.

The scholarship will go on and the efforts will be applauded. However, some will say that what we need to combat oppressive conditions is military prowess, not literature. Yessayan herself believed in militant self-defense, but to claim that a literary effort is a luxury we cannot afford, let alone deserve, would be "too dark altogether," to borrow an expression from Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, a novel that also deals with oppressive conditions. The hearts of the "horde of demons . . . [may have] run dry of human feelings," "the wrong they did us" may be "irreparable," "the evil done at their hands, irremediable," yet the memories that they had "all lived like brothers and sisters with their neighbors of a foreign race," cannot go away. It is those memories that the scholarship helps keep alive. As Kebranian notes, it is thanks to the scholarship that Yessayan, the most popular writer of her time, continues to be widely read in intellectual and progressive circles in Turkey and internationally.

The realization that her people are denied their fundamental human rights saddens Yessayan deeply. Her "Where are they now?" sounds like a knell, yet, no matter how "hopeless" the reality she had to confront, the human in her never ceased to oppose and to fight. Publishing stories that plead for justice and equality is a radical political act. It makes us rethink the way we all live together, and opens up the world for renewal — even if we cannot see ourselves, at least not yet, standing "at the threshold of a newly emerging world."

I should add that Yessayan's work has an ominous relevance to the ultranationalism and the authoritarianism prevalent in many countries today.

Zabel Yessayan on the Threshold: Key Texts on Armenians and Turks as Ottoman Subjects was published by the Gomidas Institute in May 2023.

Anoush'ella Named One of '40 Absolute Best' Restaurants in Boston

BOSTON — The Tasting Table (www.tastingtable.com) this week released the names of its 40 "Absolute Best" restaurants in Boston. One of those is anoush'ella, led by Nina Festekjian.

As the article describes it, "Nina Festekjian isn't a professionally trained chef (she learned through experience cooking for her three sons), but you wouldn't suspect it after tasting her food. At anoush'ella, which she co-owns with husband Raffi, Nina serves Lebanese-Armenian dishes that pay homage to her childhood in Lebanon in a sleek, fast-casual space. The shining stars are the wraps, where paper-thin m'anoush — cooked to order on a convex saj griddle — hugs the most flavorful fillings: think tender pulls of za'atar-cloaked chicken, herbaceous salads, and silken hummus. But don't sleep on the sweet-and-savory labneh bar, either."



Nina and Raffi Festekjian



The interior of anoush'ella in Boston



ARTS & CULTURE

Gullans, Babayan Impress with Concert Dedicated to Arsen Sayan in Arlington

By Dr. Jeffrey Howard

ARLINGTON, Mass. — On Sunday, June 11, eager concertgoers enjoyed a lovely program by cellist Christina Gullans and pianist Naira Babayan.

Organized by the Armenian Cultural Foundation (ACF) and co-sponsored by the Amaras Art Alliance, this diverse and inspiring concert was part of the Mirak

cal challenges with ease and clear musical direction. There is indeed a profound and undeniable power in this piece that all were able to appreciate and enjoy.

Gullans displayed a nuanced and sincere understanding of the Armenian folk style throughout the program. She has a true affinity for this music and her interpretations were deeply felt and artistically satisfying. The *Nocturne* by Baghdasarian and the *Im-*



Cellist Christina Gullans and pianist Naira Babayan perform. (David Elizian photo)

Chamber Music Series and was given in tribute to the late Maestro Arsen Sayan (1928-2018), founder of the KNAR intercommunal Armenian Choral Group in Philadelphia and former musical-cultural director and chief producer of the VOA Armenian Service.

Babayan and Gullans brought an interesting and challenging program to the audience this day. After opening remarks by Ara Ghazarians, curator of the ACF, the program began with the *Album Bien Tempéré* by Ghazarossian and continued with works by Sayat-Nova, Hovounts, Komitas, Baghdasarian and Harutyunyan.

The largest work on the program both in length and difficulty was the *Sonata for Cello and Piano* by Avet Terteryan. Written in 1954, this is a complex and demanding work. Energizing and dramatic, this piece demonstrates a huge range of both emotional and technical skills for both instruments.

Gullans produced a wonderfully lyrical sound throughout the piece. The many dramatic and haunting melodies came across with grace and emotional maturity. Ms. Babayan as well handled the many techni-

promptu by Harutyunyan were particularly emotive and enjoyable.

In addition to the duo pieces on the program, Babayan also performed a set of solo piano works all from the rich folk songs originally notated by Komitas. Pieces like *Garuna* and *Krunk* truly pull at the heartstrings of all Armenian people. She performed these pieces with grace, control, and inspiration throughout.

It should be noted that the program also featured the paintings of Ani Babayan, connecting physical artwork with the traditional melodies of Armenian folk music in a most effective manner.

The one encore performed by this duo was the *Ey Dou Jahel* song written originally by Reuben Gregorian. When considered as a whole, this was indeed an exciting afternoon that featured historical references, beautiful artwork, cultural insights, and creative musicianship.

(Dr. Jeffrey Howard is Associate Professor of Violin at Towson University. He is a member of the Baltimore Trio, the Kasian-Howard Duo, and is a regular substitute member of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.)



Cellist Christina Gullans and pianist Naira Babayan after the performance (David Elizian photo)

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MAINE

JULY 30 — 3rd Annual Armenian Picnic, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Searsport Shores Ocean Campground, Rt 1, Searsport Maine, featuring Leo Derderian & Friends. Eat Dance Laugh Play all on cool Penobscot Bay. free admission. For more information: makersguildmaine.org

MASSACHUSETTS

JUNE 28 — Panel discussion on "The Role of Mental Health Awareness in Minority Communities." Organized by the Mental Health Awareness Initiative. Speakers will be Dr. Catherine Vuky of William James College and Dr. Dana Mauch of Massachusetts Association for Mental Health. Facilitator will be Gevorg Gharibyan of the Mental Health Awareness NGO of Armenia. www.mha.am/en. 978-502-7941, laura@em.mha.am. 5.30 to 8.30 p.m., at the NAASR Building, 395 Concord Ave., Belmont.

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.

JULY 31 — Saint James Armenian Church 23rd Annual Harold Partamian Memorial Golf Tournament, on Monday, Oakley Country Club, Watertown. Hosted by the St. James Men's Club, Rain or Shine/ Scramble Format/ Raffle, Silent Auction. Following the tournament-banquet dinner at Oakley Country Club. \$195.00 per player by July 17th/ \$40.00 dinner only. For full details and online registration ,please visit www.stjameswatertown.org/golf. Various sponsorships are available .Contact Robert Berberian, chairman of Men's Club, 339-293-2514.

OCTOBER 14 — The Armenian Friends of America, Inc., presents Hye Kef 5, a five-hour dance featuring Harry Bedrossian, John Berberian, Leon Janikian, Bob Raphaelian and Jason Naroian. Saturday, 6.30 p.m. to midnight, The Armenian Church at Hye Pointe, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. AFA rooms available at Double Tree by Hildong, Andover. Ask for AFA room rates. Ticket prices \$50 for the dance and mezza platters. Coffee and dessert to follow. Cash bar. Tables of 8, \$385. Advance tickets only. No tickets will be sold at the door. Ticket sales final. Online at armenianfriendsofamerica.org or call Lu Sirmaian 978-314-1956 or Mary Ann Janjigian 603-770-3375. Proceeds to benefit The Armenian Churches of Merrimack Valley.

OCTOBER 27-28 — Mark your calendars. Celebrating the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Mirror-Spectator with two spectacular events. First, a panel discussion on Friday, October 27, with renowned journalists including David Ignatius from the Washington Post, Ken Dilanian from NBC News, and Eric Hacopian from CivilNet, at Tufts University. Second, a spectacular gala benefit on Saturday, October 28. The gala, at the Burlington Marriott, will be MC-ed by the irrepressible Sona Movsesian, who calls herself the Worst Assistant in the World, in her capacity as assistant to the one and only Conan O'Brien.

NEW YORK

JULY 2 — A Precarious Armenia: The Third Republic, the Karabakh Conflict, and Genocide Politics, Book Launch, Zoom Event, with Dr. Gerard Libaridian, Sunday, TIME: Yerevan 10.00 pm ; Paris 8.00 pm; London 7.00 pm; New York 2.00 pm ; Los Angeles 11.00 am ZOOM LINK: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9123456789> A presentation followed by a discussion with Dr. Gerard Libaridian, a respected academic, former adviser to the president of Armenia, and chief negotiator during the Karabakh conflict. Hosted by Ara Sarafian (Gomidas Institute). For more details visit <http://gomidas.org/books>

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.

COMMENTARY

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Standoff in Eastern Mediterranean

Erdogan Is Barking up The Wrong Tree

By Robert Ellis

Turkey's newly reelected president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has — on a visit to northern Cyprus — demanded the recognition of the breakaway state as a condition for negotiations on the future of the island. In this case, he is barking up the wrong tree.

Since 1964, when UN peacekeeping forces (UNFICYP) were deployed on the island to prevent fighting between the two population groups — the Greek and Turkish Cypriots — this has developed into one of the world's longest standing conflicts.

In 1974 the conflict escalated when Turkish troops occupied the northern third of the island in accordance with the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee between Cyprus, Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom, which allowed Turkey to intervene to prevent the union of Cyprus with any other state.

In July, the Cypriot president Archbishop Makarios was overthrown in a coup by a former EOKA gunman, Nicos Sampson, who, backed by the military junta in Athens, intended to declare enosis (union) with Greece. However, Turkey's occupation led to partition and finally, in 1983, the unilateral declaration of the TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus), which is only recognized by Turkey.

From 1975, reunification talks began under the aegis of the UN with the declared aim of establishing a bizonal, bicomunal federation. A notable attempt in 2004, based on the Annan Plan for reunification, was accepted by 65% of Turkish Cypriots, but rejected by 76% of the Greek Cypriots. A week later, the rump state, designated as the Republic of Cyprus, found a safe harbor in the European Union.

The latest attempt

The latest attempt, in what UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called "a horizon of endless process without result," foundered at Crans-Montana in Switzerland in 2017. Guterres was undoubtedly correct in his belief that a historic opportunity had been missed, as Ersin Tatar was elected Turkish Cypriot leader instead of the pro-federal Mustaf Akinci in October 2020.

Tatar, a hardliner and backed by Ankara,

goes in for a two-state solution. Failing this, annexation is a third option, which is not unlikely, given that northern Cyprus is de facto Turkey's 82nd province.

However, the game changer was the discovery of vast gas and oil reserves in the Levant Basin in 2010. Cyprus had already delimited its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and concluded agreements with Egypt, Lebanon and Israel. Turkey, which is not a signatory to UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), insists that the extent of its continental shelf and shoreline overrides this principle.

The fact that Cyprus has awarded concessions to foreign companies for hydrocarbon exploration in its EEZ has led to continual conflict with Turkey, not least because it clashes with Turkey's "Blue Homeland" maritime doctrine.

One response has been the trilateral cooperation between Greece, Cyprus and Israel, which has lasted a decade and includes a military dimension.

On another level, Egypt, whose Zohr gas field is the largest in the Mediterranean, in 2019 founded the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, which includes Israel, Cyprus, Greece, France, Italy, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, but not Turkey. The US and the EU are observers.

Erdogan believes he can threaten his way in

ACCORDING TO former US ambassador to Turkey, Eric Edelman, Erdogan believes he can threaten his way in. On the other hand, also in 2019, Congress passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act in support of Greece as a valuable NATO member, Israel as a steadfast ally and Cyprus as a key strategic partner.

In addition, in October 2021 the US amended its MDCA (Mutual Defense and Cooperation Agreement) with Greece to include the port of Alexandroupolis as a key strategic hub.

In 2014, when Turkish professor Ahmet Davutoglu, the architect of Turkey's "neo-Ottoman" foreign policy, was appointed prime minister, he included in his manifesto a vision of Turkey as an energy corridor.

In 2009, the European Commission agreed on the construction of a Southern Gas Corridor to diversify its energy supply

by bringing gas resources from the Caspian Sea to European markets. Commissioned at the end of 2020, it comprises the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) from the Shah Deniz field in Azerbaijan, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) through Turkey and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) to Italy.

Turkey has tried to lure Israel to commit to a pipeline from Israel's Leviathan field to Ceyhan in southern Turkey, but so far Israel has resisted this siren call. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is trying to arrange a meeting with Erdogan, but Erdogan will only meet with him if he delivers news on gas cooperation.

Turkey is also dependent on Russian gas through the Blue Stream and TurkStream pipelines, and Russia has proposed to Turkey that it acts as an energy hub for Russian gas to Europe after the Nord Stream blasts.

In January 2022 a non-paper from the US State Department put the kibosh on Greece, Cyprus and Israel's plans to construct a 1,900 km. EastMed pipeline to transport gas from the Levant Basin via Greece to Europe. One of the reasons given for canceling the project was "creating tensions in the region" i.e. don't upset Turkey.

Against a background of a thaw in relations between Turkey and Egypt, due consideration must be paid to Egypt as a gas hub and the founder of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). For example, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed in June last year between the EU, Egypt and Israel to export Israeli gas to Europe via two Egyptian LNG plants.

By the same token, there is no logical reason why Cyprus should not serve as the conduit for the transport of Eastern Mediterranean gas via Turkey to Europe. As Egypt's ambassador to the United States, Motaz Zahran, has explained — the EMGF is "the perfect example" of a regional approach to address the Israeli-Palestinian issue and regional economic integration.

The same could apply to the Cyprus issue and the standoff in Eastern Med.

In the process, a number of camels will have to be swallowed, but according to Hatem Zadek, a professor at Helwan University, Mediterranean gas can fix what politics has spoiled.

(The writer is an international adviser at RIEAS (Research Institute for European and American Studies) in Athens. This

Azerbaijan's Attack on American Company Should End Sanctions Waiver

By Michael Rubin

For most people, Yeraskh is just a rest stop on the road between Yerevan and southern Armenia. For those who look, however, the signs of conflict in the South Caucasus are evident. Less than 200 yards after the road ends is the border of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani military posts overlook the town. Mount Ararat, long part of Armenia until the Turkish-led Armenian Genocide ethnically cleansed the region, dominates the horizon to the West. The Turkish frontier is just four miles away. Just a mile or so further is Iran's border. Just outside of town, a berm interspersed with bunkers built in the early 1990s rises between the road and the Azerbaijani border to protect drivers from Azerbaijani snipers. A Russian flag flaps in the wind at a memorial just a few hundred feet from the road where, just over two and a half years ago, an Azerbaijani soldier shot down a Russian helicopter on the last day of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.

I drove through Yeraskh just hours after Azerbaijan fired upon a vehicle carrying two Indian employees of a US-funded metallurgy company in the town. The attack was unprovoked.

It also highlights two realities. The first is that, contrary to the State Department's certification that Azerbaijan has foresworn military action to resolve its dispute with Armenia over Na-

gorno-Karabakh, it continues to use its military to terrorize.

The second is that Azerbaijan may use the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute as an excuse, but its target is Armenia proper. Yeraskh is Armenia proper, officially disputed by no other country. I continued along the road to Jermuk, an Armenian spa town dominated by a ski resort and natural spring, whose mineral-rich waters allegedly have healing properties. In September 2022, Azerbaijani forces launched a surprise attack on the town using drones, artillery, and sniper fire. The town is an economic hub, but has no military base nor is it in disputed territory. Despite this, Azerbaijan continues to occupy over 23 square miles on the town's outskirts, putting most townsmen and visitors under imminent threat of sniper fire.

The State Department may tweet that it is "deeply concerned" but its words are meaningless and its actions increasingly in contravention of US law that prohibits allowing military assistance to Azerbaijan so long as Azerbaijan harbors military ambitions.

With Azerbaijan now attacking American interests within the sovereign territory of Armenia, it is now time for the Biden administration to revoke the waiver on Section 907 and immediately cease all military and other non-humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan. Anything less would be an affront to Congress and will suggest President Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken are uninterested in defending American interests, American lives, or abiding by American law. To respond with rhetoric alone would also set back peace by convincing Azerbaijan that it faces no real consequences for continued aggression.

(This commentary was originally posted on the website for American Enterprise on June 15.)



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Prime Minister Pashinyan Disparages Armenia's Coat of Arms & National Anthem

With each passing day, the situation is getting worse in Armenia and Artsakh because of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's endless compromises to Azerbaijan and

Turkey, his defeatist attitude and incompetence.

Coming to power, he misrepresented himself as a democrat, but soon turned out to be a dictator. Five years ago, Pashinyan promised at a huge public rally: "If in the result of the process of [Karabagh] negotiations there will be an option for settlement that I would personally consider to be a good option, let no one think that I will sign any confidential paper or take any secret action. If I see that there is an option that really needs discussing, I will come, stand here and present to you all the details, after which you decide whether to accept that settlement option or not. If you decide to do it, we will do it. If you decide that we are not, we will not do it. You are the supreme authority and you will have the final say. There can be no doubt." However, ever since that solemn pledge in 2018, he has not asked the people to make a single decision on any issue.

Pashinyan:

- Made threatening statements against his political opponents, jailed his party's rivals in local elections, had protesters arrested, and banned prominent Diaspora Armenians from entering Armenia because of their criticism of his regime;

- Divided Armenia's population into two hostile camps and alienated the Diaspora from Armenia;

- Completely mismanaged the 2020 disastrous war resulting in the deaths of thousands of young Armenian soldiers and the loss of most of Artsakh;

- Failed to secure the release of Armenian prisoners of war from Azerbaijan;

- Was unable to protect Armenia's borders from repeated Azeri attacks in the last two years;

- Was unable to open the Lachin Corridor blockaded by Azerbaijan for six months, resulting in the deprivation of 120,000 Artsakhtsis from food and medicines;

- Repeatedly criticized Armenians' yearning for Mount Ararat, saying that it is no longer in Armenia's territory.

- Weakened Armenia's military;

- Dismissed Armenian claims to Western Armenia by announcing that Armenia has no territorial demands from any of its neighbors;

- Traveled to Ankara to attend President Erdogan's inauguration, embarrassing himself and Armenia;

- Gifted Artsakh to Azerbaijan. Contrary to Pashinyan's misrepresentation that Armenia's former leaders have given away Artsakh, Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said last week: "For the first time... Armenia has recognized Karabagh

as part of Azerbaijan."

No wonder, Aliyev and Erdogan are pleased with Pashinyan.

Last week, while addressing the Parliament, Pashinyan made questionable statements about Armenia's coat of arms and national anthem, both of which are enshrined in Armenia's Constitution. In other words, Pashinyan's criticisms were anti-constitutional.

Here is how Pashinyan described Armenia's coat of arms: "What is depicted there? Noah's ark on Mount Ararat; the emblems of the four thrones, dynasties, kingdoms.... Moreover, what has that emblem to do with the state founded in 1991? Looking at the center [of the emblem], Noah's ark is on Mount Ararat; today's territory of Armenia's Republic is under floods; and a lion that has not lived here for a long time under normal conditions." This is "about the duality that exists in each of us, historical Armenia and real Armenia.... Should real Armenia serve historical Armenia or should historical Armenia serve real Armenia? ... After all, six of the 12 capitals of historical Armenia are located in the territory of the Republic of Armenia. And when was the last time you were in those capitals. Did you see their condition? Did you assess their condition? We are talking so much about traditions; we are talking about the values; our capitals. Our historical symbols are in ruins today. Forgive me, this is also not something to say, but certain [historical] capitals located outside Armenia may turn out to be in better condition than those located in the territory of the Republic of Armenia."

Closing his remarks, Pashinyan did not miss the opportunity to also complain about another one of Armenia's state symbols — the national anthem — on the very day that Armenia celebrated the Day of State Symbols. He said: "Today, the official words of our anthem end as follows: it ends in 'sacrifice.' The ideology itself is correct, so I don't have any problem with the text, but it ends with a 'sacrifice' line and 'sacrifice' scene. I've been thinking a lot lately, of course, it may not be easy to implement from a purely esthetic, poetic point of view, but I think it would be very correct from a political point of view for the anthem of the Republic of Armenia to end with the following lines: 'Look at it, our sacred sign in three colors, let it shine against the enemy, let Armenia be always glorious.'"

Pashinyan was suggesting shortening the anthem by cutting its last four lines: "Death is the same everywhere, a man will die but once, but blessed is the one who is sacrificed for the freedom of his nation." This is yet another attempt by Pashinyan to weaken the nationalistic feelings of Armenians to appease Armenia's enemies. The lyrics of the anthem were written by well-known poet Mikayel Nalbandian in 1861. The anthem was adopted by the first Republic of Armenia in 1918. It was readopted by the current Republic of Armenia with minor wording changes.

What will Pashinyan suggest next: Changing Armenia's flag and the country's name? Yet, this is the same man who self-righteously declared: "I can't imagine a man who can love my homeland more than me. Such a thing is not possible. It is out of question." Even the Soviets kept Mount Ararat on Soviet Armenia's coat of arms. How can the Prime Minister of independent Republic of Armenia be less nationalistic than the leaders of Soviet Armenia?

Schedule for Armenia-Azerbaijan Agreement Slipping into the Future

By Joshua Kucera

The schedule for the signing of a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan appears to have again slipped, as Azerbaijan — not long ago regularly complaining about Armenian "delays" in the process — is now expressing a newfound patience for the process to take all the time it needs.

At a May 28 speech in Lachin, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev said that Baku was not in a hurry to sign an agreement. "We are the stronger side, we are the ones who have a strong position at the negotiating table, we are the ones who have a strong position on the border," he said. "Even if the peace treaty is not signed, we will live comfortably and safely."

This was a notable change of tone from Aliyev's usual rhetoric, which regularly featured accusations that Armenia was dragging its feet and veiled threats in case the Armenians did not step it up. Just over three weeks earlier, Aliyev had repeated that warning, arguing that delaying a final resolution of the conflict has been Armenians' long-time practice.

"They can delay; they can use a negotiation format, which already has been established not to come to an agreement, but to make the process endless, waiting for something, waiting for a miracle, waiting for changes. And they will miss the opportunity because almost thirty years of occupation did not give them any advantage," Aliyev said on May 3.

Two key, interrelated changes took place in between those two speeches that changed the Azerbaijani government's approach, said Zaur Shiriyev, a Baku-based ana-

lyst for the think tank Crisis Group.

One, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan won reelection, ensuring that Azerbaijan's key international patron would remain in office for another five-year term. Second, Azerbaijan managed to erect a border post on the Lachin Corridor, the only road connecting Karabakh to Armenia. The post is Azerbaijan's most concrete step yet towards reasserting its control over the territory, which it lost to Armenians in the first war between the two sides in the 1990s.

"Simply put, Baku controls the Lachin road, meaning everything is in their hands, and while it remains a priority, it seems that there is no immediate urgency to reaching a peace agreement," Shiriyev told Eurasianet. Azerbaijan hastened the establishment of the border checkpoint in part because of uncertainty over the election's outcome, he said.

"Had Erdogan not been elected and, hypothetically, if [main opposition candidate Kemal] Kilicdaroglu were in his place, Baku would likely have pressed for a more forceful signing of the peace agreement, considering it a non-negotiable priority," Shiriyev said.

The foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan had been scheduled to meet in Washington starting on June 12, but Azerbaijan postponed the meeting because Erdogan scheduled a trip to Baku for the same time. (Turkish diplomatic tradition has it that a newly elected leader's first foreign trip is to Northern Cyprus and the second is to Azerbaijan.)

That meeting has not been rescheduled, but a State Department spokesperson said on June 13 that "we look forward to rescheduling it as soon as we can."

The postponement of the Washington talks notwithstanding, the pace of diplomacy between the two sides has been brisk. The two foreign ministers met for several days in Washington at the beginning of May; U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said at their conclusion that "an agreement is within reach."

Aliyev met Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

in Moscow on May 25 and in Chisinau on June 1, and ahead of the Moldova meeting there were some expectations that an agreement could be signed there. Asked in parliament a month ahead of the Moldova event about media reports that an agreement could be signed, Pashinyan said he would be happy for it to happen. Less than a week before that meeting, Azerbaijan's ambassador to France said she hoped an agreement would be signed there.

In the end that meeting was short and produced no breakthrough. But the fact that negotiations are being conducted steadily and that progress is being made on an agreement has reinforced Azerbaijan's patience, Shiriyev said.

Baku remains interested in signing a peace agreement as soon as possible, a senior Azerbaijani diplomat told Eurasianet on condition of anonymity. "Azerbaijan is interested in speedy progress" in the various tracks of negotiations including the delimitation of the mutual border, establishment of new transport routes, and the relationship between Baku and Karabakh's Armenian population.

But, the diplomat added, Baku feels that time is on its side: "At the end of the day, in the worst-case scenario Azerbaijan could afford the luxury of keeping everything untouched as it is: lack of land connectivity from the outside to Armenia, impediments for dialogue with the Armenian community in Azerbaijan, undelimited borders, and finally a missed opportunity to sign an overwhelming peace treaty with Azerbaijan."

The history of Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations is littered with expectations for breakthroughs that always broke down before an agreement could be signed.

Low-level fighting has ticked up in recent weeks, and Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned in a June 13 statement that Azerbaijan might be preparing the ground for "another aggressive actions and ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh."

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Schedule for Armenia-Azerbaijan Agreement Slipping into the Future

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But even as the fighting continues, and the diplomatic process has downshifted, both sides are continuing to express optimism that a deal could be signed within months.

In Baku, the expectation is now that an agreement could be signed by August or September, Shiriyeve said.

In Armenia, the expected date is somewhat later. Armen Grigoryan, the chair of Armenia's National Security Council, said on June 4 that "the negotiations are being conducted very intensively. If we are able to maintain this intensity, and there is also strong assistance from the international community, then there is a possibility to reach a peace agreement at the end of the year."

By the end of the year is a "likely" target, said Richard Giragosian, head of the Yerevan think tank Regional Studies Center.

"The outlook for the two sides to conclude a comprehensive peace treaty seems increasingly positive," Giragosian said. "Such optimism does not include any realistic expectation for a sudden mature breakthrough and is based on a more gradual timetable, with a peace treaty likely by the end of 2023, but not sooner, despite the rhetoric."

(Joshua Kucera, a senior correspondent, is Eurasianet's former Turkey/Caucasus editor and has written for the site since 2007. This column originally appeared on www.eurasianet.org on June 15.)

Archbishop Aykazian Leads Reconciliation Efforts in Eritrean Church

CEDAR GROVE, N.J. — This past spring, a sister church in the Oriental Orthodox tradition underwent a remarkable reconciliation and reunification, thanks to the mediation of the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches in the U.S.A.

In a ceremony on April 18, two separated factions of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church were reconciled and restored to full communion. The historic gathering took place at the headquarters of Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese of North America, in Cedar Grove, NJ.

This milestone was the culmination of years of work and dialogue led by the president of the Standing Conference, Bishop David, leader of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of New York and New England, and Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Diocesan Legate and Ecumenical Director of the Eastern Diocese.

The ecclesiastical fracturing in the Eritrean Church originated some 15 years ago, when its lawful patriarch, Abune Antonios I, who has since passed away, was illegally removed from his throne and placed under house arrest by the Eritrean government. As the action was contrary to Orthodox Christian canon law, it was never recognized by any of the Oriental Orthodox churches. From the outset the Standing Conference supported the Eritrean churches that had remained loyal to His Holiness and to the canon law common to all Orthodox jurisdictions.

The unlawful imprisonment of its



From left, Archbishop Aykazian, Bishop Makarios, Bishop Sinoda, and Bishop David, during the April 18 signing ceremony.

patriarch caused great stress in the Eritrean Church, and led to its splintering into factions. However, two large groups within the church, each with strong foundations in the Eritrean diaspora, found common ground in their support of Antonios. They appealed to the Standing Conference to mediate a dialogue between them, and help lead them into communion with each other. Aykazian and David accepted to undertake this weighty task.

A Celebration of Unity

Over the course of the dialogue, Bishop David and Archbishop Aykazian worked with officials of the two Eritrean groups, at first laying groundwork with each side separately, and later entering into combined talks. Eventually, the two groups felt ready to reconcile with one another, and a meeting was arranged to sign an official accord and release a joint public statement together with the

Standing Conference.

At that gathering, the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church Diocese of North America (including its affiliated churches in Europe and the Middle East) was represented by Bishop Makarios. The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Diocese of the Union of the Churches Abroad was represented by Bishop Sinoda. Bishop David and Archbishop Vicken represented the Standing Conference. Together, the four bishops signed a joint statement affirming the unity of the two Eritrean groups, among other matters.

Two weeks later, on April 29, Oriental Orthodox leaders celebrated the reconciliation of the Eritrean Church in America during a special Divine Liturgy at New York's St. Mary Christian Center and Coptic Church. Aykazian, Diocesan Vicar Fr. Simeon Odabashian, and Fr. Hakob Gevorgyan (of Holy Trinity Church, Cheltenham, PA) all took part in the happy occasion.



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