

Backlash in Armenia as EU Backs Nagorno-Karabakh aid Via Azerbaijan

By Ani Avetisyan

Proposals to send humanitarian aid to Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijani-controlled land appear to have been backed by the European Union, causing outrage in Armenia.

Supplies to the region have repeatedly been cut off since the blockade of the Lachin Corridor began in December, with the situation again deteriorating since mid-June.

On Saturday, July 22, EU Council President Charles Michel appeared to back proposals by Azerbaijan to send supplies via Aghdam.

"I emphasized the need to open the Lachin road. I also noted Azerbaijan's willingness to provide humanitarian supplies via Aghdam," Michel said.

His statement came after a round of talks with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev earlier that day.

The Lachin Corridor is the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Azerbaijan set up a checkpoint under its control at the start of the corridor in late April — a move seen as a violation of the November 2020 ceasefire agreement, which states that the Lachin Corridor falls under the control of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh.

As the region grappled with food and energy shortages under blockade, Baku see BACKLASH, page 5



Residents of Stepanakert line up outside to buy bread, July 18, 2023

Armenia Warns of Famine In Blockade-Hit Karabakh

STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Armenia urged the international community on Thursday, July 19, to put stronger pressure on Azerbaijan to reopen the Lachin corridor, saying that Nagorno-Karabakh's population is "on the verge of starvation."

"We are not talking about a looming crisis anymore; we speak about an ongoing humanitarian disaster," Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan told an emergency session of the Vienna-based Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). "The medieval practices should be stopped. This cannot continue if we are serious about values and principles."

"The international community in general and the OSCE in particular cannot remain silent simply because the lives of 120 thousand people are at stake," he said.

Armenia initiated the meeting to draw greater international attention to the seven-month blockade of Karabakh's only

land link with the outside world, which has led to severe shortages of food, medicine, fuel and other essential items in the region.

Azerbaijan has also cut off Armenia's supplies of electricity and natural gas to Karabakh. The humanitarian crisis deteriorated after Baku was blocked on June 15. Relief supplies were carried out, in limited amounts, by Russian peacekeepers and the Red Cross.

"Prior to the blockade, around 90 percent of all consumed food was imported from Armenia, and with every passing day the people of Nagorno-Karabakh do not receive 400 tons of essential goods," said Mirzoyan. "Furthermore, by using force and the threat of force, Azerbaijan continues to obstruct agricultural activities on approximately 10,000 hectares of land adjacent to the line of contact, which constitutes a significant portion of [Karabakh's] total cultivated land."

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Massachusetts Governor Healey to President Biden: Azerbaijan's Actions Cannot Be Tolerated

WASHINGTON — The Armenian Assembly of America (Assembly) welcomed a letter to President Biden by Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey, making clear that Azerbaijan's actions with respect to the ongoing blockade of Artsakh "cannot be tolerated."

She wrote, in part, "On behalf of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as home to the second largest Armenian population in the United States, I wrote to express my deep concern with the months-long Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) to the Republic of Armenia, and the worsening humanitarian crisis that has resulted. This blockade has been devastating to the Armenian population in the region, rendering 120,000 individuals without access to the route that provides much of Artsakh's food, medical supplies and transport, and other essential goods, and depriving them of their right to freedom of movement."



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Armenian Foreign Minister Visits Iran

TEHRAN (Azatutyun) — Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan discussed with Iran's leaders Armenia's ongoing peace talks with Azerbaijan and described the Islamic Republic as his country's "special partner" during a visit to Tehran on Monday, July 24.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry said Mirzoyan briefed Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on the "latest developments in the process of normalization of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations" and reaffirmed the Armenian government's position on the "establishment of lasting peace in the South Caucasus."

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Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi meets Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, Tehran, July 24, 2023



The Armenian Genocide memorial

Memory Culture Under Attack in Cologne

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

COLOGNE — Since 2018, the city of Cologne in the Ruhr region of Germany has been the site of a tug-of-war between the

Armenian community, consisting of about 6,000 people, and a vast coalition of about 50 Turkish associations.

The bone of contention is a 1.5-meter-high stele, a monument to the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. The monument, which bears the words, "This pain affects us all," has been repeatedly erected, and, by order of the city authorities, repeatedly removed. In April of this year, with a special, temporary permit, it was on display for the annual commemorations of the genocide, and afterwards the inner-city district representation passed a resolution calling for it to remain in a prominent location, to be decided later. The city council was to make final plans; but, instead, the conflict escalated. The city administration issued an ultimatum: either the promoters would remove it by July 10, or the city would take it down by force. The obvious question was: had the city authorities been swayed by Turkish lobby groups?

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GYUMRI

ATP Nursery Opens in Gyumri On World Environment Day

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NEW YORK

Cher Is Launching A Gelato Company, And the Name is Spectacular

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NEW JERSEY

Since 1926: Toufayan Bakeries

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NEWS from ARMENIA

Armenians Demand UN Deliver Goods to Karabakh

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Opening, a civil initiative in Yerevan, has been collecting food, medicine and essential goods in front of the UN's Armenia office since July 19 in order to send them to Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh).

The members of the initiative have asked the United Nations to transport the cargo to Artsakh.

According to them, since the UN has a food program and a charter that obliges it to deliver humanitarian aid, it should do so to Artsakh as soon as possible to save 120,000 people from starvation.

In the past several days, food has been collected by ordinary citizens.

Pashinyan: Peace Possible Only if 'Civilized World' Supports Process

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has declared that lasting peace in the South Caucasus is possible, but only with active support of the "civilized world."

"The international community should undertake bold steps to stop the Sarajevo-style siege of Nagorno-Karabakh," Pashinyan said on Twitter on July 25.

Church Commemorates Thaddeus, Sandukht

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The Armenian Apostolic Church commemorated St. Thaddeus, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, and St. Virgin Sandukht on July 22.

St. Thaddeus the Apostle and St. Sandukht the Virgin are two of the most venerated saints in the Armenian Church, as the "Great Conversion" of the Armenian nation to Christianity is significantly connected with their names.

Following the Ascension of Christ, according to the Lord's message: "Go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples..." Thaddeus departed for Edessa. There he preached the Gospel, and among his numerous miracles, also healed the king of Osroene named Abgar. In the year 44 A.D., Thaddeus traveled on to Armenia and entered the domain of the pagan King Sanatrouk. After preaching in various parts of Armenia, St. Thaddeus converts many to Christianity, who become the foundation for the Armenian Church. Apostle Thaddeus, while in the region of Artaz, gains access to the royal palace and converts Princess Sandukht, the daughter of the king, to Christianity.

King Sanatruk exhorted his daughter to return to her heathen religion, but his efforts were in vain. The king imprisoned both Sandukht and St. Thaddeus and subjected them to severe torments. Another effort was made to persuade the Virgin to give up Christianity by the governor of the royal palace, an Armenian prince. This effort only ended with the prince becoming a Christian as well.

They were martyred together in Shavarshan, the summer residence of the royal family.

Former President Serzh Sargsyan Appeals to World Leaders to Help People of Artsakh

(Serzh Sargsyan, who served as president of Armenia from 2008 to 2018, sent a letter to the presidents of the US, Russia and France, Joseph Biden, Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron, respectively, on July 23, to plead for their help in ending the blockade of Artsakh. The letter is reproduced in full below.)

Your Excellencies, Presidents:

A few days ago three-year-old Leo and six-year-old Ghita died of suffocation in one of the villages of Mardakert region, Republic of Artsakh. They went out of home in search of their mother, who had earlier left for the city on foot in search for food.

The siege of Artsakh has been ongoing for seven months. Now it started claiming lives – of both the elderly and children, of common people, whose only guilt is being born on the land of their ancestors and the love for life. We appreciate all those influential states and international organizations who have so far spoken out without ambiguities of the present situation. Such statements are crucial for the people of Artsakh who are fighting for life. However, unfortunately, such statements alone did not save the lives of little Leo and Ghita. It's most appalling that words alone may fail to save the lives of many more children and the elderly – not in the virtual future, but literally next morning.

Today the physical survival of 120,000 Armenians in Artsakh is very literally endangered. With each of you we have had many opportunities in the past to talk about what happened to Armenians in 1915, as well as the very consequences of the Armenian Genocide. Now, 108 years later, we are facing the immediate danger of the repetition of the same gruesome events, albeit carried out in modern methods.

I appeal to you first and foremost as Presidents of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairing countries, as leaders who have first-hand knowledge of where the Nagorno Karabakh peace process has taken us by 2018. It's in that year that our society has made an emotional choice and transferred reins of power to a politician who had no idea of what statehood was. I fully realize that many considered that as opportunity to try and resolve the issue of Artsakh by leveraging on that individual's unreasonable steps that had nothing to do with the real



interests of our country. Yet, as a matter of fact, the conflict has not been resolved, while the associated problems have deepened, whereas that very individual no more has the vote of confidence of our people to recognize Artsakh as part of another state. Neither he has any vote of confidence on behalf of the people of Artsakh to single-handedly decide their destiny.

I am appealing to you as leaders of countries where you have unquestionable institutional memory pertaining to the issue of Artsakh. Today, in contrast to the incumbent Armenian authorities, there are serious professionals and experts about the Nagorno Karabakh peace process in various institutions of your respective countries, who have knowledge about all nuances and are well aware of all prior phases of conflict resolution.

I am appealing to you as your former counterpart, as someone whose objectives and principles are well known to you. I resorted to this genre given my lack of direct access to you. We exchange no official visits or one-on-one formats, channels of communications through political party formats are either weak or missing, since the relevant opposition party officials have been either persecuted or simply jailed in our country.

I am appealing to tell you what has been

happening in Artsakh is a direct route to a terrible catastrophe.

I am appealing to ask you to give a chance to life to the people in Artsakh. It's a great personal tragedy for me that years ago we used to negotiate settlements by which the people of Artsakh would live in their own country in dignity, yet now we are talking about merely giving them a chance to life, asking for their right to live.

We have taken note with sense of appreciation all your efforts aimed at resolving this issue. Yet what is happening these days will not lead to any such settlement that you may quite diligently have envisioned. Direct negotiations between an experienced dictator and someone silly and incapable will simply not reach any reasonable point. Every satisfied demand by the dictating party will lead to new ones, much more difficult to satisfy. This will continue forever and will bring large-scale catastrophes. Keeping silence or failing to devote more time to the issue of Artsakh now means that very soon your countries will be forced to take time to address the "The problem of Armenia". This is a very real scenario given the incompetent negotiator we have, moreover having a sizeable portion of the sovereign territories of the Republic of Armenia under occupation for some time.

I am hereby asking you — before anything else — stop the humanitarian catastrophe in Artsakh. I believe you can do that. Force the dictator to open the "road of life." The fascist, who has made annihilating Armenians his lifestyle, cannot be allowed to continuously disregard clear messages by most serious international organizations and states. Stop the calamity. Please, secure the most basic life conditions for the people of Artsakh. I am asking you to ensure guarantees for this, and only then transition to efforts of finding diplomatic solutions. Or else it may be late tomorrow.

Respectfully,
Serzh Sargsyan

Armenia Can't Protect Karabakh, Says Pashinyan

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Tuesday, July 25, defended his recognition of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and said that Armenia is not in a position to "decide the fate" of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population.

"Our position is that Armenia cannot decide the fate of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and it follows the logic that Nagorno-Karabakh's representatives themselves must be a party to negotiations, dialogue [with Azerbaijan,]" Pashinyan told a news conference.

"This is the agenda that we are furthering, bearing in mind that the rights and security of Nagorno-Karabakh should be discussed with the participation of Nagorno-Karabakh's representatives in the format of a Baku-Stepanakert dialogue and within the framework of an international mechanism. And I think that the people, the representatives, the government of Nagorno-Karabakh will have an opportunity to address all issues preoccupying them within the frame-

work of this formula."

Pashinyan sparked domestic uproar in May when he pledged to recognize Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh through an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. Members of his political team have linked the signing of such a treaty to an internationally mediated dialogue between Baku and Stepanakert on "the rights and security" of the Karabakh Armenians.

Karabakh's leadership and the Armenian opposition have denounced Pashinyan's stance. They say the restoration of Azerbaijani rule would only force the Karabakh Armenians to flee the territory.

Arayik Harutyunyan, the Karabakh president, insisted late on July 24 that Armenia's leaders refrain from making statements recognizing the region as part of Azerbaijan. Pointing to the Azerbaijani blockade of the Lachin corridor and the deepening humanitarian crisis in Karabakh, Harutyunyan said Baku is keen to "get rid of the people of Artsakh" through the blockade and "ethnic

cleansing."

"Saying that the Armenian government must be banned from recognizing Azerbaijan's territorial integrity effectively means banning Azerbaijan from recognizing Armenia's territorial integrity or ... contributing to the Azerbaijani policy of not recognizing Armenia's territorial integrity," Pashinyan countered during his press conference.

"I am the prime minister of 29,800 square kilometers," he said, referring to Armenia's total area.

Speaking after Pashinyan's last meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev hosted by him on July 15, European Council President Charles Michel said the two leaders reaffirmed their earlier "understanding that Armenia's territory covers 29,800 square kilometers and Azerbaijan's 86,600 square kilometers."

Azerbaijan's total Soviet-era area cited by Michel includes Karabakh. Aliyev has not publicly confirmed recognizing Armenia's existing borders.



ARMENIA

President Harutyunyan Appeals for International Help, Calls Republic ‘Disaster

STEPANAKERT — President Arayik Harutyunyan of Artsakh at a press conference on July 24, spoke about the misery that his people were experiencing and appealed to the world community to remedy this unacceptable situation.

He said the 225-day of the illegal blockade and 40 days of total siege show that Azerbaijan does what it pleases. “It is evident that Azerbaijan, under the conditions of international impunity, continuously tightens repressions against the people of Artsakh with the undisguised purpose of ethnic cleansing, driven by a policy of ethnic hatred and discrimination. During this time, the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights have issued legally and politically binding rulings to ensure an unimpeded movement of people, vehicles, and cargo through the Lachin Corridor in both directions. Furthermore, the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, various states’ legislative and executive authorities, and authoritative international human rights organizations have all made clear demands



Artsakh President Arayik Harutyunyan

and appeals to the authorities of Azerbaijan to cease the illegal siege of Artsakh and refrain from using force or threats of its use. However, Azerbaijan has not only disregarded court rulings and the demands of the international community but has also expanded and deepened the blockade and military threats.”

He said that the siege’s aim is to “destroy in whole the entire ethnic Armenian population of Artsakh and forcefully end the conflict by eliminating the people of Artsakh from their land.”

In addition, the medium-term goal of Azerbaijan is “to subjugate the people of Artsakh by force, dismantle the Republic of Artsakh and its resistance systems, force the people of Artsakh to flee, collapse the economy of Artsakh, and gain additional leverage over Armenia, particularly by obtaining an extraterritorial road between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan through Armenian territory.”

He noted that not only is the border blocked, but that through the use of disrupted services such as gas, water or electricity, and through random shooting of agricultural workers, “an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear” has been created.

Harutyunyan continued, “As a result of the blockade, we are currently witnessing a humanitarian disaster that affects all aspects of life, from food and healthcare to agriculture and education. Human lives are at risk, from newborn babies to elderly chronic patients, due to the direct and indirect impacts of the blockade.

“A severe food shortage has emerged since approximately 90 percent of the food consumed in Artsakh was previously imported from Armenia. Over the past 40 days, not a single kilogram of food has entered Artsakh, and the limited local production has been greatly hindered by the lack of fuel and other essential materials.”

In addition, he said the healthcare system is facing a crisis since medicines cannot be imported. “The number of deaths and

complications among unborn and newborn babies has doubled, and anemia among pregnant women has reached a staggering 90 percent. All planned medical examinations and surgeries have been suspended, and hundreds of patients cannot travel to Armenia or abroad for treatment. Essential medical equipment is out of order due to power outages and a lack of necessary maintenance.”

During the blockade, power is out at least six hours daily, resulting in businesses being non-functional.

He added, “In the private sector, all factories and almost all service companies have closed down, leaving over 80 percent of private sector workers unemployed, amounting to more than 15,000 people. The construction of 3,700 apartments intended for families displaced by the war in 2020 has also come to a stop. The direct loss to the economy amounts to about \$430 million, which represents approximately 50 percent of the projected annual GDP.”

These actions by Azerbaijan, Harutyunyan noted, are not only immoral, but illegal under international law and are tantamount to genocide.

“Azerbaijan deliberately inflicts on the people of Artsakh conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part imposes living conditions on the people of Artsakh that aim at the complete or partial destruction of the population. According to international law, such an intent amounts to a genocide, and it obliges all states of the international community to take steps to prevent this crime of genocide,” he said. “Azerbaijan’s claims that the issue of Artsakh is its internal matter are reminiscent of the justifications made by the leadership of Nazi Germany during the Nuremberg trials who attempted to narrate mass murders as internal affairs. The civilized international community did not accept such a defense then and denied the alleged right to carry out massive human rights violations under the pretext of internal affairs now.”

He emphasized that the conflict needs to be resolved by peaceful negotiations.

“The Republic of Artsakh has always been open to engaging in negotiations with Azerbaijan to achieve a balanced, fair, and dignified resolution to the conflict. We believe that negotiations should take place within an agreed international format that has an appropriate mandate, ensuring active participation and legitimacy from the international community in the negotiation process,” he said.

The international community should make sure that Azerbaijan again does not resort to the use of or threat of force.

“Trading in people’s sufferings is unacceptable. The transportation and energy blockade of Artsakh, designed to maximize the distress of its people, must be immediately and unconditionally halted in accordance with the decisions of the International Courts and the principles of justice. Ending the illegal siege and alleviating the suffering of the people will create the necessary minimum prerequisites for initiating negotiations and foster more favorable conditions for meaningful discussions. The negotiation process must be grounded in

international law norms and universal values, such as justice, dignity, and equality. Any artificial boundaries that could predetermine the outcome of negotiations should be excluded,” Harutyunyan said.

The status question of Artsakh also needs to be resolved. “The right to self-determination of our people and the imperative need to prevent genocide form an indisputable basis for recognizing and securing the right to external self-determination, grounded in the concept of ‘remedial secession. This principle was of vital importance in 1991 when the region councils of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and the Shahumyan region proclaimed the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic based on international law and USSR legislation,” he added.

The situation is dire enough, he said, that “I am declaring Artsakh a disaster zone today, urgently seeking a comprehensive international response and in need of security, political, and humanitarian support from the international community, collectively and individually. Artsakh is now the only area in the world facing complete isolation and siege, with no access to humanitarian relief and international presence. If the declaration of a disaster zone does not lead to an immediate international support, Artsakh could be likened to a concentration camp, with all the dire consequences it entails.”

He added, “The time has come to consider unilateral action as a last resort to prevent mass crimes. Our foremost demands are directed towards the parties involved in the Trilateral statement of November 9, 2020, particularly towards Russia as the security guarantor, and Armenia, urging them to fulfill their obligations. We call on Armenia to refrain from making any statements or taking actions to recognize Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan and respect the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination.

“We demand the UN Security Council, within the scope of its mandate and obligations, to take decisive steps to prevent the genocidal policy implemented by Azerbaijan and ensure the implementation of

the decisions of the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights, particularly regarding the opening of the Lachin Corridor.

“In this regard, I urgently request the involvement of the United Nations, its entire system, and specialized agencies mandated specifically to act in situations of humanitarian crises. The international community’s support is crucial to safeguard the lives and rights of the people of Artsakh during these critical times,” Harutyunyan said.

He expressed his readiness to make an online presentation to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

“Additionally, I urge the executive directors of UNICEF, the United Nations World Food Program, and the United Nations Population Fund, along with the Director-General of the World Health Organization, to live up to their mandates and responsibilities, and deliver relief and presence on the ground. I appeal to all actors involved to cease supporting Azerbaijan’s criminal agenda, as it only exacerbates the suffering of innocent people. I call for concrete steps to be taken to ensure a favorable environment for the stable security of the people of Artsakh and a peaceful and just settlement of the conflict. The international community must unite and take decisive action to alleviate the immense hardships faced by the people of Artsakh and work towards a lasting resolution for the benefit of all involved parties,” he noted.

He concluded, “The international community, in the face of the UN Security Council, including three OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] Minsk Group co-chair countries as members, and mandated with primary responsibility for international peace and security and prevention of atrocity crimes, possesses all the necessary tools to stop Azerbaijan’s genocidal policy. The international impunity of Azerbaijan must be put to an end, as failure to hold those responsible accountable will only pave the way for the occurrence of new and even more severe crimes which are about to be committed.”

Armenia Warns of Famine in Blockade-Hit Karabakh

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“As a result, today the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are on the verge of hunger and starvation,” he warned.

The United States, the European Union and Russia have repeatedly called for an end to the blockade. Moscow said late last week that it could have “the most dramatic consequences” for the local population.

Baku has rejected such appeals, denying the humanitarian crisis. It has offered to supply Karabakh with basic necessities from Azerbaijan itself. Karabakh’s leadership has rejected the offer as a cynical ploy designed to facilitate the restoration of Azerbaijani control over the Armenian-populated territory.

Mirzoyan said that the blockade could also “seriously harm” ongoing Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations on a bilateral peace treaty. But he stopped short of threatening to suspend the talks if Baku remains adamant in keeping Karabakh cut off from the outside world.

Mirzoyan also reaffirmed Yerevan’s readiness to recognize Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh through the treaty. “The respect for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan should not and could not be somehow misinterpreted and used as a license for ethnic cleansings in Nagorno-Karabakh,” he added.

Domestic critics of the Armenian government say the recognition openly pledged by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in May only emboldened Baku to tighten the noose around Karabakh. They are also highly skeptical about Yerevan’s insistence on an internationally mediated dialogue between Baku and Stepanakert on “the rights and security” of Karabakh’s population.



ARMENIA

ATP Nursery Opens in Gyumri on World Environment Day

GYUMRI — On June 5, Armenia Tree Project opened a new nursery in Gyumri with the support of the European Union within the framework of the EU4Environment: Green Community-Resilient Future Grant Project and partners Armenian Energy Agency and Jinishian Memorial Foundation. The opening date coincided with World Environment Day, symbolic of the goals and the project's future impact. Representatives from ATP, the EU, the Armenian Energy Agency, the Jinishian Memorial Foundation, Shirak Regional Administration, and Gyumri Breeding Station attended the opening event, congratulating the collaboration and the bright future of the nursery.

Located within the Gyumri Breeding Station, the nursery will serve an essential role in increasing forest cover, which is sparse in the Shirak region. Spanning more than two football fields in size, the nursery hosts a 234-square-meter greenhouse and has the capacity to supply up to 100,000 seedlings per year. Currently, 15 types of seedlings and shrubs are growing in the nursery including pine, birch, pear, apple, ash, maple, oak, forsythia, spirea, dogwood, honey cherry, cypress, oriental arborvitae. The project combines community greening and green economic opportunity. Norik Mkrtchyan, director of the Gyumri Breeding Station, said that they can start selling the nursery plants next year.

Silja Kasmann, deputy head of cooperation from the EU said in regard to the project

“Protection of the environment is at the heart of EU policies. Through the European Green Deal EU aims to be a global leader in the fight against climate change and environmental degradation. The European Union is committed to continue supporting projects in Armenia on biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, renewable energy, and sustainable waste management.”

Armenuhi Vanoyan, grants manager at ATP said, “After working on this project

adapted to their climate. We hope this will lead to people greening their own spaces, creating their own backyard nurseries, and food sources.”

Since March 2021, ATP has worked under the EU4Environment: Green Community-Resilient Future Grant Project in the target regions of Shirak, Lori, and Tavush. Through the project, ATP has planted 100 hectares of forests, greened more than 50 sites including parks, schools, and community forests, provided green governance



At the opening of the ATP nursery in Gyumri

for more than a year, we are so happy to be opening this nursery and to create more opportunities for people in the Shirak region. The surrounding community will be able to purchase plants and seeds that are already

training to 10 village and regional administrators, established 150 backyard nurseries, trained more than 500 children in sustainable practices and topics, and established 15 youth eco clubs.

New School Gym for Students in Nor Ughi

ARARAT, Armenia — On July 13, students, parents and staff at the Nor Ughi Village School welcomed local and regional officials and donors and staff from The Paros Foundation to the gala ribbon cutting of the school's new gym. John and June Mangassarian (RI-USA) spearheaded the

while I was in the village working on a Fuller Center home build, I saw the needs here and knew I wanted to help.” Said John Mangassarian, “today is a great day for June and I to see what our family, friends and supporters accomplished working together with The Paros Foundation.”

his remarks of appreciation along with Mr. Martin Manukyan Head of the Education, Sports and Culture Department of the Ararat Regional Governor's Office. School Principal Mrs. Kristine Tunyan welcomed everyone and expressed her gratitude to both John and June Mangassarian for their generous support and interest in continuing work at the school, and to the Paros Foundation and its work crew for the high-quality renovation of the gym.

“Thanks to the vision and leadership of John Mangassarian and his group of supporters, the students here will be able to enjoy this gym and physical education for years to come,” said Peter Abajian, executive director of The Paros Foundation. “John has expressed interest in continuing work at the school and I look forward to our ongoing partnership for the betterment of conditions within this school.”

The renovation of the gymnasium included the installation of a new ceiling, new electrical system and lighting, new heating piping, new doors, and the installation of new flooring. New safety netting was installed throughout to protect the ceiling and windows from breakage. In addition to the gym itself, the renovation included the gym teacher's office, boys and girls locker rooms and the portion of the hallway leading to the gym.

To learn more about The Paros Foundation, or to support a project, visit www.parosfoundation.org.



Opening celebration at the Nor Ughi School gym

fundraising for this project, matching all contributions to this important project implemented by The Paros Foundation.

“When I first visited this school last year

During the opening celebration, students from the school performed several dances and songs. Head of the consolidated community of Vedi, Garik Sargsyan offered

Dr. Bruce Boghosian Appointed AUA President

YEREVAN — After a meticulous and intensive search process, the American University of Armenia (AUA) is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Bruce Boghosian as the next University President, effective September 1, 2023.

Dr. Bruce Boghosian was selected by the Board of Trustees from a deep pool. Currently a professor in the Department of Mathematics at Tufts University with secondary appointments in the Departments of Computer Science and Physics, he previously served as president of AUA from 2010 to 2014, leading the university through rapid expansion, including the creation of undergraduate programs. He received the “Order of the Republic of Armenia,” awarded by the prime minister, for his service as president and continued to be involved in the AUA community following his departure, including attending graduation ceremonies, and collaborating with faculty on different projects and initiatives.

An award-winning teacher, Boghosian has been a professor at Tufts University since 2000. He has served in a variety of leadership roles at Tufts, including chair of the Department of Mathematics and co-director of the Master of Arts Program in Data Analytics. He was elected to Fellowship in the American Physical Society in 2000 and named a Distinguished Scholar of Tufts University in 2010, a Fellow of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life in 2018, and a Fellow of Tufts' Data Intensive Studies Center in 2019.

Boghosian earned his degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of California, Davis. His research spans the areas of applied dynamical systems, applied probability theory, kinetic theory, mathematical models of the economy, and complex systems science, among others.

Chair of the AUA Board of Trustees Dr. Lawrence Pitts welcomed Dr. Boghosian back to AUA. “The University is expanding its facilities and student body to help Armenia meet its needs for growth and prosperity,” he said. “The AUA Board believes that Dr. Boghosian is ideally suited to help us achieve AUA's expansion and to guide and enhance AUA's excellent education of its students. There is much to do, and Dr. Boghosian's love for and commitment to Armenia and his extensive background in higher education make him the right person for this position.”

Since December, the leadership has been occupied by Interim President Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, who accepted the temporary role following the resignation of Dr. Karin Markides. His prior experience as AUA president from 2014 to 2019 allowed him to steward the university through a critical period of transition.

“The AUA Board of Trustees and indeed the entire AUA community are endlessly grateful to Dr. Der Kiureghian for stepping in again as the University's President on short notice,” said Pitts.



INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Armenian Boxer Beats Azeri Athlete in European Junior Championships

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Armenian athlete Alik Kchoyan (63 kg weight category) secured a victory over Azerbaijani representative Kanan Aslanli at the 2023 European Junior Boxing Championships in Romania on July 24.

In the first round, Aslanli took the lead by 3□2 points, but in the second and third, Kchoyan, changing tactics, began to attack unceasingly, completing two rounds with a total score of 5:0.

Two other Armenian athletes - Tigran Hovsepyan (50 kg) and Rustam Namoyan (80 kg) - won their bouts too.

Illegal Blockade Complicates Peace Negotiations, Mirzoyan Tells Lavrov

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Azerbaijan's illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor and Nagorno Karabakh complicates the negotiation process, Foreign Minister of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan stated on July 25 at the trilateral meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov, which took place in Moscow.

Mirzoyan emphasized that the meetings and negotiations are quite intense. On some issues there are concrete results, on some issues perspectives are visible where the parties can reach a mutual agreement, but there are also problematic issues on which the positions of the two sides are very far from each other.

“We are constructive and conduct negotiations on all platforms and in all directions. Alas, the situation in the world, in particular, Azerbaijan's illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor and Nagorno-Karabakh complicates the negotiation process,” the Armenian foreign minister said.

He emphasized that there is now a serious humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the situation is close to a real humanitarian disaster. “The situation is getting more serious hour by hour. Neither food nor medicine enters Nagorno-Karabakh, the supply of gas and electricity is stopped, and if we do not manage to find a solution and Azerbaijan does not stop the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, the humanitarian disaster will have a negative impact on the overall negotiation process. However, I repeat that the Armenian side is constructive. We will continue the negotiations,” Mirzoyan concluded.

Lavrov said Russia seeks peace and stability in the South Caucasus.

“Our efforts are aimed at stabilizing the situation both on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, as well as solving humanitarian problems, unblocking economic and transport links, developing communication between people, civil societies, experts-political scientists,” he said.



Participants of the workshop

Student-Made Kilims Exhibited at Haigazian University

BEIRUT — On Wednesday, July 19, 2023 the Haigazian University (HU) Arthur Matossian Gallery exhibited the hand-woven kilims of 35 students from different Lebanese Armenian schools. The exhibit was attended by the students and some parents, schoolteachers and principals.

The kilims were the product of a nine-day-long “Weave Your Own Kilim” workshop held at HU organized by the Student Life Office in collaboration with the Hovhannes Sharambeyan Folk Arts Museum in Armenia.

Between July 5 and 18, students from the Armenian Evangelical and United Armenian Colleges, Armenian Evangelical Shamlian-Tatigian, Armenian Evangelical Central High, Armenian Catholic Holy Cross, Armenian General Benevolent Union, and Vahan Tekeyan schools participated in the workshop, where they not only learned the skills of weaving kilims, but actually wove and then exhibited their work.

During the nine three-hour sessions the students wove more than one kilim. Some even started their third kilim, others made their own designs and chose the colors of the Armenia-made wool, while others started to weave their own names. The weaving

process continued after the sessions too, as the students excitedly took their unfinished work to their homes.

In addition to the morning student sessions a five-session-long weaving work-

shop was organized in the afternoons where 13 adults participated. Some of their kilims were also exhibited.

All in all, 75 kilims produced during the workshop were exhibited.



Part of the exhibition

Backlash in Armenia as EU Backs Nagorno-Karabakh Aid Via Azerbaijan

BACKLASH, from page 1

has proposed sending humanitarian aid and supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh through Aghdam.

Stepanakert swiftly rejected Baku's proposal.

Michel's statement was condemned in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, with critics calling for the reopening of the Lachin Corridor instead of the establishment of alternative routes.

Azerbaijan dismisses claims of an ongoing blockade and humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, despite local and international reports indicating food and medicine shortages in the region.

On Tuesday, fifteen Armenian organizations jointly stated that the Lachin Corridor ‘has no alternative’.

“Instead of addressing the root cause of the humanitarian crisis, the discussion of ‘alternative’ routes, such as Aghdam, diverts the attention of the international community from the source of the problem: the illegal blockade of the humanitarian corridor by the Azerbaijani government and the policy

of ethnic cleansing,” read their response to Michel's statement.

Several organizations in Nagorno-Karabakh also issued a more pointed statement on Monday, July 24.

“We emphasize and remind that the support provided at the cost of trampling on the dignity of people in a humanitarian catastrophe cannot be accepted from a country that can offer nothing but hatred, suffering, and pain,” stated the organizations in Nagorno-Karabakh.

David Babayan, adviser to Nagorno-Karabakh's president and a former foreign minister, condemned the EU Council President's statement as “dangerous.”

“There is a decision of the international court [of Justice], which says that the corridor should be [reopened],” Babayan told Armenian media. ‘So where does Aghdam come from?’

Toivo Klaar, the EU's special envoy to the South Caucasus, also backed Baku's proposal to provide Nagorno-Karabakh with humanitarian aid through Aghdam, stating that ‘every offer should also be used, not

as an alternative to Lachin but as a complement to it’.

The humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh has continued to deepen as the region remains under total blockade since mid-June, when Azerbaijan barred Russian peacekeeping forces stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh from using the Lachin Corridor to supply the region.

Currently, only the International Committee of the Red Cross can use the corridor to transfer people requiring medical assistance to Armenia. Despite assistance provided by the Red Cross, local authorities have warned of an increase in mortality rates and miscarriages due to the lack of food and medicine.

In an effort to save energy and food in the region, Stepanakert has introduced rolling blackouts and rationing across Nagorno-Karabakh, in addition to suspending public transport last week.

They have also called for “indefinite rallies” in the hope of attracting international attention, with President Arayik Harutyunyan leading a sit-in protest in central Stepanakert.

INTERNATIONAL

Following Saudi Drone Deal, Turkey's Erdogan Targets \$6B in Defense Sales

By Nazlan Ertan

IZMIR, Turkey (AI-Monitor) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on July 25 that Turkey expected to reach \$6 billion in arms sales in 2023, hoping for a nearly 36.3-percent rise from last year's \$4.4 billion.

"We have already achieved a record export level of \$2.3 billion in the first half of the year," Erdogan said in a video message to the International Defense Industry Fair 2023 (IDEF'23), held in Istanbul between July 25-28.

The Turkish defense and aeronautics sector's export revenues passed the \$4-billion mark in 2022, up from \$3.2 billion in 2021. The sharp defense export rise is attributed mainly to aerospace and the country's popular drones used by more than 30 countries.

Turkey's leading exporter of armed drones, Baykar Technology, clinched two billion-dollar contracts with Saudi Arabia's

Defense Ministry to transfer technology and jointly produce its advanced Akinci drones. Haluk Bayraktar, the chairman of Baykar and an avid Erdogan supporter, said the deal had been in the works for a year. Though Bayraktar called the agreement "the largest one ever made by a Turkish firm," he kept mum about its details, timing and exact amount, keeping defense analysts hedging bets between \$1.5 and \$5 billion.

Finally ending the suspense today, Haluk Gorgun, the newly appointed chairman of Turkey's Defense Industries, told CNN-TURK that the most significant export deal ever made in Turkey — meaning Baykar's Akinci deal — was worth more than \$3.1 billion without elaborating further.

While Saudi Arabia has opted for the high-altitude long-endurance Akinci ("raider") drones, many countries went for the smaller and less expensive Bayraktar TB2s, used by Ukraine in fighting the Russian invasion and by Azerbaijan in reconquering territory around the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave occupied by Armenia in the first war in the 1990s. Inspiring songs and pet names, Bayraktars have since been on the wish list of many countries including NATO members Poland and Romania, Qatar and several African nations such as Nigeria and Niger.

A Drone for All Missions

"While Bayraktar is surely the best-known Turkish drone, there are many different UAVs suitable for different missions produced by Turkish public or private companies. They are either exported or co-produced with allies worldwide," Ozgur Eksi, editor-in-chief of online defense portal TurDef.co, told AI-Monitor. "Kyrgyzstan, for example, bought Bayraktar TB2 drones in 2021. Kazakhstan, the regional powerhouse, opted for the co-producing Anka, a medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle suitable for reconnaissance missions, produced by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TUSAS). Way

before the Turco-Saudi deal on the Akinci drones, two Saudi Arabian manufacturers started co-producing a Karayel-SU, Turkish-made medium-altitude, long-endurance drones, under license from a Turkish defense company Vestel Savunma."

At IDEF'23, Erdogan described Turkey as "one of the top three countries on drone technology" and "one of the 10 countries that make its own warships."

"We are pleased to present our knowledge and experience in the defense industry to the benefit of our friends," the Turkish president added, referring primarily to the Gulf countries last week. "I am convinced we will sign more deals during the fair, too," he said.

"Turkey's developing defense industry draws an ever-increasing number of companies to IDEF," Gorgun, the newish chief of the Defense Industries in Turkey, told CNN-TURK at the fair's opening. "We have more than 81 countries participating this year, 5,000 scheduled meetings and 120 deals in the pipeline which we hope will be signed during the fair."

Half a dozen American companies, including Lockheed Martin, the producer of F-16 Fighting Falcons, are at the IDEF, which held every other year. So is the United Arab Emirates, with which Erdogan inked a new space and defense development deal last week. More than 70 Chinese defense, logistics and information technology companies are also there to buy Turkish companies suitable for their longer-term targets, according to US-based Defense News.

Erdogan said that Turkey was implementing 850 different projects in the defense sector, a reference to several new weapons Turkey is displaying for the first time during IDEF'23. State-run Aselsan will debut its mobile laser weapons system and a new air defense missile system designed to counter the threats of armed and unmanned aerial vehicles, warplanes and helicopters, anti-ship missiles and cruise missiles.

Just Makes Us Stronger

The Turkish president also attacked "international embargoes and arms restrictions" on Turkey. "Despite open or veiled embargoes that we face, Turkey continues to work determinedly in developing its defense industry," he said.

Erdogan uses lifting embargoes and restrictions on arms sales to Turkey as leverage to greenlight Sweden's membership in NATO — a sticky point looming over Ankara's allies in the military alliance. Sweden and Finland said they have no embargo against Turkey, but Erdogan wants other NATO allies — particularly the United States, Canada and the Netherlands — to lift restrictions.

The United States administration says that it supports the sale of F-16s and modernization kits to Turkey but needs buy-in from the top Democrats and Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs and Senate Foreign Relations committees, which have the power to block it.

Erdogan met with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during NATO's Vilnius Summit and reportedly brought up the issue. Canadian news outlets have reported that Ottawa may loosen its arms export restrictions against Turkey as that country moves to strengthen ties with its Western peers.

The Canadian government hasn't confirmed the reports. "The export controls for Turkey were imposed for important reasons. These controls currently remain in place," Alison Murphy, press secretary for the Prime Minister's Office, said in a statement following the summit.

"Canada remains committed to the principle that there should be no restrictions, barriers or sanctions to defense trade and investments among allies," she added.

The Netherlands announced earlier this month that it was lifting its embargoes against Turkey, put in place in 2019 after Turkey's military incursion into Syria.

Armenian Foreign Minister Visits Iran

IRAN, from page 1

The issue also topped the agenda of his separate talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held earlier in the day. Mirzoyan complained about Azerbaijan's continuing blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh's only land link with Armenia, saying that it is hampering a peace deal currently discussed by Baku and Yerevan.

Iran's official IRNA news agency reported that, Mohammad Jamshidi, a top aide to Raisi quoted him as warning against US involvement in Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks.

"These negotiations have to be carried out based on the interests of the [two] nations and without political conspiracies involving America and the Zionist regime [Israel,]" Raisi said, according to Jamshidi.

In recent months, the United States has been at the forefront of international efforts to broker a comprehensive peace treaty between Baku and Yerevan. Mirzoyan and his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov held two rounds of intensive US-mediated talks in May and June.

They were scheduled to meet in Moscow on July 25 for fresh talks that will be hosted by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Russia has been very critical of the US peace efforts, saying that their main goal is to squeeze it out of the region, rather than end the Karabakh conflict.

Raisi was also reported to reaffirm Tehran's strong opposition to any "geopolitical" border changes in the South Caucasus.

Iranian leaders have frequently made such statements in response to Azerbaijan's demands for an extraterritorial corridor to its Nakhichevan exclave that would pass through Syunik, the sole Armenian province bordering Iran. They have warned that the Islamic Republic would not tolerate attempts to strip it of the common border and transport links with Armenia.

Mirzoyan praised Tehran's stance on the "inviolability of our state borders" during a joint news briefing with Amir-Abdollahian.

"For us, Iran has always been and remains and will continue to be a special partner, including in overcoming the challenges in the current difficult conditions," he said.

According to another Iranian news agency, Mehr, the Armenian minister assured Raisi that Armenia "will never become a platform for anti-Iranian actions" and remains committed to deepening Armenian-Iranian ties.

Memory Culture Under Attack in Cologne

MEMORY, from page 1

On the website of the coalition of Turkish-German organizations, the charge was that behind the monument was a "group inside Cologne's Armenian community" that was animated by anti-Turkish sentiments; the "pseudo-genocide monument" aimed at sowing "hatred between the social groups" through commemoration of the "so-called Armenian genocide," according to one press account. Nothing could be farther from the truth, as promoters of the initiative have stressed. Tessa Hofmann, chairwoman of the human rights group Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA), wrote on July 9 in an appeal to the Cologne city authorities, a forced removal of the monument would send "the completely wrong signal, from the political, historical, and memory cultural standpoint, because it would encourage nationalist and anti-Armenian motivated hatred, and discourage the ethnic Turkish initiators of this initiative." In this context she named the late "Cologne author and human rights activist, Dogan Akhanli" who had raised funds for the monument. His example, she wrote, bears "remarkable testimony to civil society cooperation among people of different backgrounds, but with shared ethical convictions."

On July 10 a lively demonstration against the threatened removal took place,

organized by "Remember Genocide," and other civil society groups, under the motto "The Monument Stays!" Local and national press organs, including the national television news, carried objective coverage

Genocide" representative Illias Uyar, a longstanding friend and lawyer for Akhanli, was skeptical. The opposition, which he characterized as made up of "revisionists, nationalists, and denialists," is unlikely



Supporters before the Armenian Genocide memorial

of the event. For the moment, the monument remains. The city authorities have evidently opted for a temporary truce; following the summer break, all sides are to "come together" to deliberate. "Remember

to compromise. To secure a place for the monument and protect the culture of memory, the mobilization will have to continue and expand, not only in Germany, but also internationally.



Community News

AAHPO Honors Four Healthcare Professionals for Outstanding Service During Pandemic

By Stephan S. Nigohosian

The Armenian American Healthcare Professionals Organization (AAHPO) honored four healthcare professionals for demonstrating exceptional leadership and service during the Covid-19 pandemic. The event, held during the organization's Annual Winter Brunch, recognized AAHPO Board of Directors John P. Bilezikian, MD; Kim Hekimian, PhD; and Tsoline Kojaoghlanian, MD; as well as AAHPO Member Mihran Seferian, MD.

During the global pandemic, the four dedicated individuals were located at the epicenter of the overloaded and fatigued healthcare system in the metropolitan New York City region. In March 2020, the gravity of the pandemic became clear when recorded cases of the coronavirus grew exponentially in New York, from one to 89 to 75,795 in just 30 days. "Our region was blessed with countless Healthcare Heroes, including our honorees, who bravely cared for the sickest patients during the COVID-19 pandemic," said AAHPO President Lawrence Najarian, MD. "It is worth noting that within our organization, the actions of these four members in particular distinguished themselves in unique ways during extraordinary circumstances. Their actions benefitted countless numbers of people, including those in and outside of the Armenian community."



From left, AAHPO Vice President Garbis Baydar, MD; John Bilezikian, MD; Tsoline Kojaoghlanian, MD; Mihran Seferian, MD; AAHPO President Lawrence V. Najarian, MD (not pictured: Kim Hekimian, PhD)

Each of the honorees have volunteered their leadership, expertise, and time toward serving the critical healthcare needs of citizens in Armenia and Artsakh, as well as in the United States. Their inspiring commitment, support, and compassion during the Covid-19 pandemic served to demonstrate their dedication to the well-being of others worldwide:

John P. Bilezikian, MD, a leading endocrinologist and medical researcher at New York's Columbia University, was recognized for his contribution to the body of scholarly publications that aided the understanding and treatment of COVID-19 at the beginning of the pandemic.

Kim Hekimian, PhD, a public see HONORS, page 10



ABMDR's Alina Sirunyan & Ani Azaryan

ABMDR Participates in Two Pan-National Medical Conferences in Armenia

LOS ANGELES — In early July, 2023, the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR) took part in two globally-significant medical conferences that took place in Yerevan.

From July 6 through 8, ABMDR participated in the Sixth International Medical Congress of Armenia.

Speaking at the event were ABMDR Executive Director Dr. Sevak Avagyan, Medical Director Dr. Mihran Nazaretyan, and Senior Lab Technician and Database Manager Alina Sirunyan. The speakers highlighted ABMDR's latest achievements, not only in terms of matching donors for bone marrow/stem cell transplantation and research, but also helping patients in Armenia with state-of-the-art molecular testing for diagnosis and treatment.

Main partners of the Sixth International Medical Congress of Armenia included the Armenian Medical International Committee (AMIC) and the Armenian American Medical Society (AAMS). In his presentation, AAMS President Dr. Vicken Sepilian, one of the event's main speakers, stated, "What we're trying to accomplish through this global conference is to bring the very latest achievements of medical science to the Armenian homeland."

ABMDR also participated in the Third Pan-Armenian Hematology satellite Symposium, which was held on July 5 in Yerevan. Representing ABMDR at the event was Dr. Mihran Nazaretyan, who spoke about the organization's various areas of expertise and most recent achievements. During the symposium, a number of potential bone marrow donors joined the Registry. All event participants also received information pamphlets about ABMDR activities.

Commenting on the importance of the two medical conferences in Yerevan, ABMDR President Dr. Frieda Jordan said, "With their focus on scientific and technical progress, these events bring the global Armenian medical community together, for the very noble goal of promoting the health and well-being of our nation. It is an honor to take part in these pan-national events."

About the Armenian Bone Marrow Donor Registry: Established in 1999, ABMDR, a nonprofit organization, helps Armenians and non-Armenians worldwide survive life-threatening blood-related illnesses by recruiting and matching donors to those requiring bone marrow stem cell transplants. To date, the registry has recruited over 33,500 donors in 44 countries across four continents, identified over 9,000 patients, and facilitated 40 bone marrow transplants. For more information, visit abmdr.am.



Dr. Sevak Avagyan (left) and Dr. Vicken Sepilian

Alene Tchekmedyan Receives the LA Press Club's Guardian Award

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles Times' Alene Tchekmedyan was named the Los Angeles Press Club's 2023 Guardian Awardee for Contributions to Press Freedom, in March.

"I'm deeply honored to receive this recognition from the Los Angeles Press Club, an organization that has done so much to lift up local journalists. I am grateful to my editors for their constant guidance, my colleagues who I learn from every day and all of the people willing to share stories of misconduct within the L.A. County Sheriff's Department at great risk to themselves," Tchekmedyan said.



Alene Tchekmedyan

Tchekmedyan covered the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department from 2019 to 2022, focusing on accountability stories and writing about failures by officials to comply with transparency laws. She and her colleagues exposed the cover-up of misconduct by deputies who shared photos of Kobe Bryant's helicopter crash as well as the practice by sheriff's deputies of pulling over bicyclists for minor violations and searching them, which disproportionately impacted Latino riders.

"One of the most important jobs of journalists is to cast a light on those who hold power, and Alene's work is a shining example," said Press Rights Chair Adam Rose. "She's provided Los Angeles with vital coverage of opaque institutions, taken readers inside law enforcement scandals, and helped all journalists by fighting for transparency."

Before joining the *Times* in 2016, Tchekmedyan reported on crime and policing for the Glendale News-Press and Burbank Leader. She grew up in Huntington Beach and graduated from UCLA and Columbia Journalism School.

She is currently an investigative reporter at the *Los Angeles Times*.

The Guardian Award was presented at the 65th SoCal Journalism Awards Gala on June 25 at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles.

In addition to honoring Alene Tchekmedyan, there were four other special awards, the Joseph M. Quinn Lifetime Achievement Award, the President's Award for Impact on Media, the Bill Rosendahl Public Service Award and The Daniel Pearl Award for Courage and Integrity in Journalism.

Just like in 2022, the evening is dedicated to all journalists in Ukraine and independent journalists in Russia, no longer able to do their jobs.

Proceeds from the Gala are the largest source of income for the Los Angeles Press Club, a 501(c) 3 that speaks for journalists across all media platforms. All contributions are tax-deductible.

COMMUNITY NEWS / OBITUARY

Maro Shahinian Appointed Preschool Director of Hovsepian School

PASADENA, Calif. —The Board and the Administration of St. Gregory A. & M. Hovsepian School recently announced the appointment of Maro Shahinian as the new Preschool Director of Hovsepian School.

Shahinian holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in education, with emphasis on early childhood education and development. She has more than 14 years of teaching experience in preschool, and recently she completed her first year of leadership role as Hovsepian Preschool's Interim Director. Shahinian has been married to her husband Anto for 21 years and has three children: Sophie, Sarine, and Kaspar.

"Mrs. Shahinian's many years of experience, dedication, and passion was apparent both as a teacher and an Interim Director. She is well-respected by her colleagues and our community of parents. We are looking forward to working with her and supporting her to materialize her vision as our new Director," said Shahé Mankerian, the principal of Hovsepian School.



Cher Is Launching A Gelato Company, And the Name Is Spectacular

Yes, as Cher Says, "This is real."

By Stacey Leasca

LOS ANGELES (Food and Wine) — Over the weekend, Cher shared (say that 10 times fast) some sweet news with her fans. And it's likely the last thing you'd expect from the 77-year-old musician.

On Saturday, Cher took to her Instagram account to announce to fans that she's launching a new gelato company. And even she acknowledged how out of left field this seems.

"Yep, this is real ... I'm launching my gelato ... Watch out LA! All started five years ago, and now it's finally HAPPENING. More to come," Cher wrote in the caption of the video post.

In the video, we get a glimpse of what looks to be a colorful ice cream truck emblazoned with both the logo "Cherlato," which we can only assume is the name of the brand, along with images of Cher licking a massive scoop of gelato while her hit song "Believe" plays over the post.

Though she didn't confirm any other details about the ven-



ture, fans were quick to jump in the comments with their own theories about what flavors we can expect.

"Featuring such flavors as: Ginseng, Tramps, and Thieves— If I Could Turn Back Lime — Dark Chocolate Lady," one commenter wrote. "Flavors had better be based on song titles! 'I Got Ube Babe, Believe in Life After Rum, If I Could Turn Back Lime, The Scoop Scoop Song (It's in His Hershey's Kiss)'. Best I could come up with at almost 2 a.m.," another added. And one more commenter revised some classic Cher lyrics in their response, adding, "But after all, said and done/ You can have an Ice Cream Cone."

Though Cher has had plenty of other ventures, including a clothing line, perfume, and of course, her beloved film, television, and music career, she, perhaps surprisingly, has never stepped foot in the food world before. Though we're sure her first foray into food will be a delicious one, because, c'mon, it's Cher.

OBITUARY

Rose D. Barsamian

Descendent of Genocide Survivors, Dedicated to Family

LEXINGTON, Mass. — Rose D. Barsamian of Lexington, Falmouth, Acton, and Hingham passed away peacefully on July 15, 2023. She was 91.

Rose was born in Cambridge, MA on

May 24, 1932, to Vartan and Hripsime (Der Hagopian) Zeytoundjian, survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Raised in Brighton, alongside her sister, Theresa, the family owned and operated the very success-



ful Puritan Ice Cream and Candy Shop in Brighton Center for many years, memories and stories of which she shared throughout her entire life.

In early 1952, Rose met the love of her life, Malcolm Barsamian, and married on May 3, 1953. Shortly after, they moved into a home next to Malcolm's parents to start a family and where Rose would eventually take care of her beloved in-laws. During these years, Rose would still manage to find time on the weekends to watch her husband play drums in his Armenian Jazz Band, creating life-long friendships with his bandmates and their wives.

Rose and Malcolm were a team in all aspects of life from raising kids to working together in the family's Oriental Rug business. For several years, Rose commuted to Boylston Street in Boston, working alongside Malcolm — assisting with everything from record keeping, answering the phone, and as a decorator. Rose was fortunate enough to travel the world with Malcolm to help purchase new inventory.

Along the way, they bought a home in Lexington to raise their children, Eddie and Jean, and eventually opened a second location in town. Even in retirement, Rose and Malcolm spent many days at the store to support their son who took over the business and became staple fixtures in Lexing-

ton town center.

As their family continued to grow with the addition of grandchildren, Rose and Malcolm purchased a home in North Falmouth, (the "Armenian Riviera") as a place to gather and spend time at the beach. Eventually, they relocated their permanent residence to Acton, where they moved into an in-law apartment with their daughter and son-in-law. During these years, Rose compassionately took care of Malcolm while he was ill and was by his side every minute until his passing in 2003, after 50 years of marriage.

In her later years, Rose moved to Pennington Hill in Hingham, where she built many bonds in a short period of time. She loved sharing stories of her life, the candy store, and the Armenian culture. She was thrilled to be a great-grandmother to five boys and was energized by their visits.

Rose was a selfless person and devotedly loyal to her family, faith, Armenian heritage, and was a proud American. Rose and Malcolm were very active in the St. James Armenian Church and the larger Armenian community. She will be dearly missed by all the lives she touched.

Rose was the mother to son Edward V. Barsamian and his wife Nancy of Arlington; daughter Jean Barsamian Clark and son-in-law Dana F. Clark. She was also a devoted grandmother to Matthew Barsamian and his wife Kristina, Lauren Barsamian, Dana Clark and his wife Christy, and Evan Clark and his wife Logan. She is also survived by five great-grandsons: William, Griffin, and Brooks Barsamian, Finn Clark, and Hunter Clark. Rose also leaves behind her nephews Robert Nahigian and Victor Nahigian and their families, cousins Jack Hajian, Isabelle Hajian, and many other family members and friends. She was the loving sister to the late Theresa Nahigian.

Funeral service were at the Saint James Armenian Apostolic Church, 465 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, on Thursday, July 20.

Interment was at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Armine Afeyan Rejoins Aurora's Team

YEREVAN — The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative announced that Armine Afeyan has rejoined its team as executive director. Afeyan previously held the role of director of communications for the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity in 2015–2016. In her new role, she will oversee the Initiative's day-to-day activities and strengthen Aurora's ties in North America and Europe.

"It's great to come home to Aurora. I'm proud of how far we've come over the past eight years and excited to contribute to our next stage of growth. Above all else, I'm humbled by the opportunity to share Aurora humanitarians' stories with the world. We hoped this wouldn't be the case at our founding, but the world needs humanitarians now more than ever. The stories of everyday people taking extraordinary action should inspire us all to do our part, whether that's raising our voice against injustice, taking action in our local community or donating to worthy causes – the world needs it all. I couldn't be prouder to put my gratitude into action by rejoining Aurora at this crucial moment," said Armine Afeyan.

A native of Boston, Massachusetts, Armine Afeyan received a BA in Political Science from Yale University, where she studied international relations focusing on the Armenian case. She also holds an MBA from INSEAD. Prior to Aurora, Armine spent the balance of her career in consumer technology companies, most recently serving as a general manager at Wayfair.

In 2023, Aurora celebrates its 8th anniversary. The Initiative has already benefited over 2.7 million people, including more

than 1.1 million individuals affected by war, conflict, displacement, persecution, and other humanitarian issues who have received support through the Aurora Prize. The name of the next Aurora Prize Laureate will be revealed in the spring of 2024. The Laureate will receive a US \$1,000,000 award and a unique opportunity to continue the cycle of giving by supporting the organizations that help people in need.

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is a foundation that seeks to address on-the-ground humanitarian challenges around the world with the focus on helping the most destitute. Its mission is rooted in the Armenian history as the Initiative was founded on behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors and strives to transform this experience into a global movement.

All Aurora's activities are based on the universal concept of Gratitude in Action. It implies that countless people around the world who have received aid in time of crisis can best express their gratitude by offering similar assistance to someone else. By involving Aurora supporters around the world, this will become a global endeavor that will snowball to expand the circle of saviors and most importantly – the number of those saved.

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is the vision of philanthropists Vartan Gregorian, Noubar Afeyan and Ruben Vardanyan who have been joined by thousands of supporters and partners. Vartan Gregorian sadly passed away in 2021. Aurora's Chair, Dr. Tom Catena, draws on his experience as a surgeon,

veteran, humanitarian, and the 2017 Aurora Prize laureate to spread the message of Gratitude in Action to a global audience.

The Aurora Humanitarian Initiative is represented by three organizations – the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Foundation, Inc. (USA), the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Foundation (Switzerland) and the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Charitable Foundation (Armenia).



Armine Afeyan

Massachusetts Governor Healey to President Biden: Azerbaijan's Actions Cannot Be Tolerated

HEALEY, frpm page 1

She continues, "The overall efforts of the United States to support and facilitate a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan are of tantamount importance. Credible news reports, human rights organizations and members of the Armenian American community are sounding the alarm about the risks of another Armenian Genocide. Azerbaijan's actions to further degrade already strained living conditions for the vulnerable Armenians living in Artsakh cannot be tolerated."

"We commend Governor Healey for standing in support of human rights and in support of the Armenian people," stated Assembly Co-Chairs Anthony Barsamian and Van Krikorian. "While we appreciate the active engagement of the Administration, the humanitarian crisis created by Azerbaijan's blockade of Artsakh continues and additional measures are urgently needed to end this inhumane blockade and help prevent another Armenian Genocide," the Co-Chairs emphasized. In her letter to President Biden, Governor Healey stated that "credible news reports, human rights organizations, and members of the Armenian American community are sounding the alarm about the risks of another Armenian Genocide. Azerbaijan's actions to further degrade already strained living conditions for the vulnerable Armenians living in Artsakh cannot be tolerated." The Governor urged the President to "find any avenues possible to support...humanitarian assistance to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, and continue forging ahead in our diplomatic efforts to lift the blockade." Further, the Governor highlighted that the "Commonwealth of Massachusetts has long recognized the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh..."

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Aslikyan, Khosravy and Sahakian Lead US Greco-Roman Team at U17 World Wrestling Championships

By Gary Abbott, USA Wrestling

The United States will look to kick off the 2023 U17 World Championships in Istanbul, Turkey next week with a strong performance in Greco-Roman, the first discipline to hit the mat from July 31 – August 2.

The U.S. team was determined based upon the results of the U17 National Championships held in Las Vegas, Nev. in late April.

Returning to the U17 World Championships in Greco-Roman is California star Arvin Khosravy, who placed fifth at the 2022 U17 World Championships at 71 kg. Khosravy won the U17 National championships at 71 kg for the last two seasons. He also won a 2022 16U Nationals title in Greco-Roman and was third in the 2023 U20 Nationals in Greco-Roman.

Two other members of the 2023 U17 World Team in Greco-Roman recently claimed gold medals at the 2023 Pan American U17 Championships in Mexico City, Mexico in both freestyle and Gre-

co-Roman, Henry Aslikyan of California at 41 kg and Nicholas Sahakian of California at 110 kg.

Aslikyan has some additional international experience, winning gold medals in both styles at the 2022 Pan American U15 Championships in Apartado, Colombia. Sahakian, who was a California state high school champion as a sophomore this year, was also a 2022 16U Nationals champion in Greco-Roman.

Three other 2023 U17 World Team members were double medalists at the 2023 Pan American U17 Championships, Sam Her-



Henry Aslikyan



Nicholas Sahakian secures a front headlock at the 2023 U17 Greco-Roman Nationals in Las Vegas. Photo by Tony Rotundo, Wrestlers Are Warriors.

ring of Pennsylvania at 60 kg, Adam Waters of Pennsylvania at 80 kg and Aiden Cooley of Texas at 92 kg. Herring won a

silver medal in freestyle and a bronze medal in Greco-Roman, while Waters won a gold medal in freestyle and a silver medal in Greco-Roman and Cooley won silver medals in both freestyle and Greco-Roman.

The other four U.S. U17 team members in Greco-Roman have extensive resumes within USA Wrestling, but will represent the USA for the first time internationally. They earned this opportunity with their victories at the 2023 U17 Nationals in Las Vegas.

Ezekiel Witt of Kansas will compete at 48 kg and is coming off a second-place finish at the 16U Nationals in Greco-Roman in Fargo, N.D. this past weekend. Hudson Loges of Nebraska will wrestle at 51 kg and was a 16U Nationals runner-up in Greco-Roman in 2022.

Jordyn Raney of Kentucky, a 2022 16U Nationals Greco-Roman champion, will compete at 55 kg. Billy Greenwood of Colorado, also a 2022 16U Nationals champion in Greco-Roman, is competing at 65 kg.

The USA had an improved performance at the 2022 U17 World Championships in Greco-Roman with an eighth-place team finish, led by World champion Joel Adams and World bronze medalist Cody Merrill. This year's team is looking to build from the momentum of the 2022 U.S. team effort.

The event will be broadcast live by FloWrestling.

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GENATS! MAY YOU DELIGHT IN OUR WINES

AAHPO Honors Four Healthcare Professionals For Outstanding Service During Pandemic

HONORS, from page 7

health specialist and educator at New York's Columbia University, was honored for tirelessly educating the medical community and the public by interpreting COVID-19 data from the U.S. and Armenia.

Tsoline Kojaoghlanian, MD, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at New York's Maimonides Children's Hospital, was honored for tirelessly educating medical and lay communities with the latest COVID-19 information through articles and public webinars.

Mihran Seferian, MD, an infectious disease specialist, was recognized for caring for the sickest patients at Holy Name Hospital (NJ), considered by many to be Ground Zero for COVID-19 during the darkest days of 2020.



COMMUNITY NEWS



THE ARMENIAN
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7:00 – 8:30 PM (Free and open to the public)

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(Washington Post)
Ken Dilanian
(NBC News)
Eric Hacopian
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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2023

Boston Burlington Marriott, Burlington, MA



**KEYNOTE
SPEAKER**

**Robert
Avetisyan**

*Representative of the
Nagorno Karabakh
Republic in the US*



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Arts & Culture

Julia Harley-Green:

*From the UK to Armenia
With Loris Tjeknavorian*

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN-LONDON — Born and educated in Great Britain, writer, journalist Julia Harley-Green began writing professionally in Australia in the 1970s where she became a regular contributor to the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Following her marriage to the Armenian composer/conductor Loris Tjeknavorian, she moved to New York in 1986. Three years later, shortly after the catastrophic earthquake in Armenia, they relocated to Yerevan where she wrote and presented English language programs on local television as well as teaching English.

She returned to the United States in 1992 and was based in Palm Beach, Fla, writing as columnist and contributor to regional newspapers and journals. While there, she also began working as a global volunteer travelling to several countries including Ukraine, Mongolia and Romania.

Her work has appeared variously in newspapers, literary journals and anthologies worldwide. Her short fiction and television scripts have won four awards.

She returned to live in London, England in 2015. Her memoir, "Never in a Fishbowl" was published in Britain in September, 2022 and is available from YPDBooks.com or Amazon Kindle.



Julia jan...

Yes, Artsvi jan...

It is exciting to be doing this interview with you. More than 32 years ago, in April, 1991, when I was just 20 years old, I conducted my very first interview, and that was with you. At that time, I could not imagine that conducting interviews, especially in English, could be something regular in my life. I was thrilled to know that a British author Armenia — which was

see JULIA, page 13



Cinematic Journey Of Filmmaker Vahan Bedelian at Tribeca

By Mélanie Tuysuzian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

NEW YORK — Vahan Bedelian, 31, arrived in New York City from Irvine, Calif., his first visit in 20 years. He was one of the 127 filmmakers attending the Tribeca Film Festival in early June. "The K-Town Killer" is his eighth short film, and the producer has many more projects ongoing.

The Tribeca Film Festival is an annual event founded by actor Robert De Niro in 2002, following the 9/11 attacks, with the aim of helping revitalize the New York City neighborhood. This year, 109 films were screened over 12 days.

When one exits the Canal Street subway station to reach the festival, one is surrounded by noisy buildings, but a short walk brings one to a much quieter area.

Vahan Bedelian, a filmmaker, as well as journalists, actors, and security guards, are bustling through the hallway.

"I've wanted to get into a festival like this for 12 years," Bedelian said in an interview.

Bedelian is reserved, but his smile conveys his emotions. For this independent filmmaker, having his film shown at the Tribeca Film Festival is a significant achievement.

Bedelian was raised in an artistic home and always knew he wanted to be a director, thanks to the support of his musician parents. He has been producing short films for the past 11 years while attending Loyola Marymount University to study film production. After graduating, internships in post-production and production helped him develop his filmmaking skills. According to him, screening his short film at Tribeca requires a precise process: spending money on short films, facing rejections, making another one, facing rejections again, and repeating this process until it finally happens. When he learned about it, "it was the happiest day of his life."

see FILM, page 15



Filmmaker Vahan Bedelian and the cast of "The K-Town Killer"

Books

Shushan Avagyan's *A Book, Untitled: "Just Imagine If They'd Met Each Other"*

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Shushanik Kurghinian, the almost forgotten, revolutionary prose and poetry writer from Alexandrapol (present-day Gyumri, Armenia), according to noted literary critic Marc Nishanian, "one of the greatest writers from the eastern part of the Armenian world," and Zabel Yesayan, the prolific writer from Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, Turkey), accused during Stalin's Great Purge of national activism, imprisoned, and eventually "disappeared," are two early 20th-century voices that have



been largely silenced, at least until recently.

Taking upon herself the task of rectifying this historical injustice, Shushan Avagyan, a radical young writer currently living in the Republic of Armenia, imagines an encounter between the two women whose lives briefly overlapped in the city of Yerevan in the year 1926.

This fictional encounter takes (or doesn't take) place in *Girq-anvernagir* (Yerevan, 2006), an experimental novel Avagyan wrote while working on translating a selection of Kurghinian's poems into English. The novel opens "One day in spring" with a meeting in a cafe on Abovyan Street in Yerevan between the narrator, referred to throughout as "the typist/writer" (Avagyan?) and Lara Aharonian, who in 2008, along with Talin Suciyan, directed and produced the documentary "Finding Zabel Yesayan," just as the historical protagonists might have done "if they'd met each other in 1926, one day in spring." Shushan and Lara had met in the early 2000s and decided to research the lives of Yesayan and Kurghinian together to rediscover the story that "was deliberately made to disappear."

Avagyan was well-aware of the "careful, intentional, and organized" see UNTITLED, page 13



ARTS & CULTURE

Julia Harley-Green: From the UK to Armenia with Loris Tjeknavorian

JULIA, from page 12

still Soviet. For that interview I even specially attended a one-month intensive course of English! I assume you were the only Westerner in Yerevan at that time.

Thank you, Artsvi, for such a kind introduction, but you should know how moved I am to be speaking to you again after so long. Living and working in Armenia following the earthquake was not an easy time, so much pain and anguish, yet the kindness and generosity of Armenians for my wellbeing will stay with me always. Their concern shone through the darkness and nothing, absolutely nothing, was too much trouble if they could look after me.

Some people in Armenia remember you from your TV program. The English language gradually started to spread in Armenia, and you were one of its promoters.

Teaching and presenting English language programs on the local television channel was a new experience for me. I well remember going to the studio and being given a 'test' to see if I was suitable. Soon afterwards I began writing English text for the film sequences and had a young Armenian professor translate my English into Armenian and help me rehearse in both languages. The director at the television station knew no English but before the program was recorded, he learnt one word. From the adjoining room, as the lights flashed and I waited anxiously, he announced loudly: "Smile, Julia, SMILE!"

Today, along with the memories, I have the pleasure of knowing that one young Armenian girl who watched my programs at that time not only speaks fluent English, but is now my (step) daughter-in-law!

In my abovementioned interview, published in *Gegharvest* (Art) newspaper, you spoke about your work-in-progress project – the novel *Hotel Armenia*. I assume, it was not accomplished.

I tried hard to find a publisher for "Hotel Armenia," the novel I wrote while living in Yerevan but it was not to be. However, the manuscript has been useful for information

purposes both for my memoir "Never in a Fishbowl" and also for subsequent articles I have written about Armenia, all published in the United States.

In an interview to women's *Aragast* (Sail) weekly of Yerevan, I was amazed to read your notion, that in Armenia, you were most amazed by women and that the Armenian women exceed the others with their beauty. At that time



Julia Harley-Green, Zareh Tjeknavorian and Loris Tjeknavorian backstage at the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall, Yerevan, 1988.

for a young man like me that "view from the outside" was unusual, but later I saw how right you were, as Armenian female beauty became obvious due to change of generation and improvement of life conditions.

We say here that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' and certainly I found Armenian ladies both stunning to look at and beautiful within. Actually, I believe you cannot have one without the other. Beauty within shines out beside dark hair, dark eyes and a beautiful complexion.

And while we are on the subject of beauty, I have noticed how fashion conscious young Armenian ladies are today. When I was there in 1989, and the country was

under Soviet rule, they never wore trousers but dressed modestly in skirts and sandals. Now they are fashion aficionados, fully conscious of and subscribing to the latest European and American trends!

I remember your talking and reading Armenian a little bit, but now perhaps you have forgotten what you have learned.

Alas, I am no longer able to speak Armenian well. I still have the little red book I carried around with me all those years ago, containing words and phrases in Armenian. Today, before I return to the country, I bring out the book and go through them so that I can at least greet everyone and use an Armenian phrase when the opportunity presents itself.

You should also know that while I write under the name of Julia Harley-Green, I retain the legal name of Julia Tjeknavorian. As I'm sure many Armenians know, several members of my family are distinguished in their fields with my former husband, Loris, a well-known composer and conductor; his elder son Zareh (my stepson) a distinguished film director; and Loris' second son, Emmanuel, an outstanding violinist and young conductor. We live in different countries but when our paths cross, we meet up....

You described about your experience in living in Armenia in your last book with a characteristic title "Never in a Fishbowl." I read that chapter, kindly provided me by Zareh Tjeknavorian. It

was great to know from there you were keeping traveling to Armenia and seeing the changes it has had after early 1990-s.

Yes, I have returned to Armenia several times since leaving in 1991 and I have witnessed amazing change throughout the country. Those towns devastated by the earthquake, including Gyumri, are no longer recognizable from the destruction and desolation I first witnessed.

And as for Yerevan, it has evolved into a modern metropolis. The fountains, coffee shops and flowerbeds have changed the city beyond all recognition. I have seen how the streets have been repaired and noted the countless new hotels and European boutiques.

What kind of reception has your book gotten so far?

All wonderfully positive, thank you. In fact, the book was reprinted less than three months after publication and is selling well in bookshops and On-Line. I have been busy speaking to book clubs and other organizations around London, and most recently received a personal letter from Her Majesty Queen Camilla saying that she is looking forward to reading it.

The Russian writer Andrey Bitov's book on my country is called the *Lessons of Armenia*. What was your lesson?

I always remember how Armenian tradition insists a guest is God's messenger and should be treated accordingly. Living in Armenia all those years ago and being made so welcome, despite the dire circumstances, has instilled in me the importance of this. Life is all about giving and sharing, no matter how little you have. It is this that makes for contentment and returns so much in terms of fulfillment.

Julia jan, I wish you further interesting trips and books! And you, once a daughter-in-law of Armenian people, are always welcome to Armenia again and again!

I will be back Artsvi! Armenia has a huge place in my heart.

Shushan Avagyan's *A Book, Untitled*: 'Just Imagine If They'd Met Each Other'

UNTITLED, from page 12

disavowal" of Kurghinian, to borrow Nishanian's words once again. Indeed, both Yesayan and Kurghinian had been black-listed because they spoke for justice and dared step outside the role prescribed to them, both as women and as citizens of oppressive regimes, the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union respectively. Kurghinian recalls being reproached and belittled "for holding a pen," even as she insists, "break my fingers one-by-one . . . / they weren't created for embroidering." Ironically, when in prison, Yesayan asks her daughter Sophie for embroidery thread. "In 1939 she'd often send us postcards embroidered with red thread," writes Sophie.

As the novel unfolds, the voices of the typist/writer and of Lara and the historical protagonists intermingle. Lines from Kurghinian's poems, interspersed throughout the book with no quotation marks, often make it difficult to know whether the words are Avagyan's or the poet's. What starts off as a story authored by Avagyan ends up being the stories of four women whose lives overlap, "one spring day" in Yerevan. In fact, *A Book, Untitled* (Awst Press, 2023), Deanna Cachoian-Schanz's translation of *Girq-anvernagir*, from the

original Eastern Armenian into English, comes to add a fifth "contributor." While Cachoian-Schanz strives to preserve Avagyan's "unique voice," she also reckons that the translation is always a "recreation" of the original, in her words, "a renewed reading of the primary text." "Dear reader, you are not reading *Girq-anvernagir*. You are reading *A Book, Untitled*. If you want to read *Girq* learn Armenian!" she writes. Her "Note on *Book* and Its Historical Protagonists" and "Translator's Afterword: Deviations" further illuminate the reader and make Cachoian-Schanz, in her own words, "an equal player" in the creation of the "original" text.

Interestingly, rather than disorient and alienate, these deviations from more conventional narrative practices — Avagyan's mixing of multiple voices, her fragmented prose and ongoing reflections on her "experiment," and Cachoian's own "deviations" — keep the reader engaged. Opening up the text to new possibilities makes this postmodern experiment an ally to a more equitable future. The authors' commitment to reversing the injustice by bringing silenced voices back into history, in their words, by "re-remembering the erasure," is extremely appealing. *A Book, Untitled* is a book one does not want to put

down.

What ultimately comes through is the two women's passion for the other two women who sacrificed their families: "You're torturing me," writes Arshak Kurghinian in a letter to his wife, "and perhaps, sitting in the train, [Zabel] was writing about how tears welled up in Hrant [Yesayan]'s bright eyes" — for the "freedom of the soul, an infinite freedom." "Just imagine if they'd met each other in 1926, one day in spring . . . what would they have talked about?" wonders Lara. "Their collision . . . would create a new world, or even worlds: in one of them, Lara and I are sitting in a little cafe, talking to each other, our eyes filling with warm tears," writes Avagyan. Indeed, Lara and Shushan will always "wander back to . . . that familiar, strange city, which you discover every day . . . my Yerevan, the youngest, the saddest, the most beautiful of all Armenian capitals."

Yesayan is widely read today, as Nanor Kebranian avers in her recent compilation of Yesayan's previously unknown stories and essays. Kurghinian is gaining visibility. We may, in fact, be past the typist/writer's, "who reads Yesayan?" Nonetheless, it would be premature to claim that justice has been done. My niece's recent text message to me from Yerevan, "In Yerevan

I am amazed by all the public art and billboards, etc., dedicated to Armenian poets and writers and artists, but they are 99% men," reiterates Lara's astonishment at the absence of Yesayan's bust from among the busts arranged in the lobby of the state university of Yerevan — "But where is she? Why isn't her bust there?" In the words of Virginia Woolf, a woman "has still many ghosts to fight."

Notwithstanding, *A Book, Untitled* brings together two extraordinarily brilliant contemporary voices that make Kurghinian's, "a woman endlessly strives towards the depths of the sea, but something restrains her," almost irrelevant.

Shushan Avagyan wrote *Girq-anvernagir* when she was 30 years old. Deanna Cachoian-Schanz translated Avagyan's novel at 35. There is indeed a whole generation of younger writers full of promise from the Armenian republic. In an article published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* (January 20, 2022), "Generation Independence: Armenia's Literary Superheroes," Christopher Atamian writes of a new generation of "wonderfully vibrant, experimental Armenian writers, now all in their 30s and 40s . . . who successfully play with both form and content . . . with rare stylistic and ideological freedom."



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



Photo of the grandparents, Siranoush and Haroutioun Toufayan taken at their first bakery in West New York in 1968. MITSU YASUKAWA/NORTHJERSEY.COM

Since 1926: Toufayan Bakeries

RIDGEFIELD, NJ — In 2020, Harry Toufayan, founder of Toufayan Bakeries was inducted into the Baking Hall of Fame by the American Society of Baking. Mr. Toufayan has been widely recognized for taking pita and flatbreads of Middle East to mainstream popularity across the U.S, through tireless innovative commercialization in baking and marketing.

“For 2021, the Baking Hall of Fame committee selected innovators who have earned the respect of their customers, suppliers, communities and industry,” said Rowdy Brixey, chair of the A.S.B. Baking Hall of Fame Evaluation Committee and president of Brixey Engineering, Inc., Holt, Mo. “It is our honor, to recognize individuals who have contributed strongly to the industry and gratifying to see consumers drawn to baked goods during these stressful times.”

The Toufayan family has been baking since 1926, initially in Egypt, where the family lived before immigrating to America in the 1960s. Harry and his father began in a bakery below their two-bedroom apartment baking the pitas and other products by hand. One day, while standing in line at a supermarket deli counter in New Jersey, Harry Toufayan realized American consumers might love the pocketed pita bread his family had been making for decades. He packed up some fresh pitas and began the task of introducing deli, supermarket and health food store buyers to stock this new, previously unknown bread, changing the baked breads category in the process. And as demand grew Harry thrived at working with original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to design and build never-before built equipment to automate the process of making bread of his childhood in order to keep up with demand. “We are beyond proud of our father and what he has accomplished,” said Greg, Kristine and Karen Toufayan who head Operations, Finance and Marketing within the organization. “He has taught us the value of hard work, the true meaning of integrity and everything we know and love about bread. Of course, we still have a lot to learn, which is just fine, because Harry is still very much at work every day still striving for perfection in all the products we bake. We are thrilled to celebrate this honor with him, the entire team at Toufayan, and our cherished retail and restaurant partners nationwide.”

Mr. Toufayan built and continues his support for dozens of Armenian institutions in both America and Armenia, such as Armenian schools in NJ and NY, Churches in NJ and NY from both Diocese and prelacy, children’s centers, music schools, and veteran rehab center in Armenia. He is a proud American citizen and philanthropist as well. He regularly supports many local non-profits, schools, and local charities and steps up to help fellow Americans when the need is unexpected. For example, in April 2020, instead of applying for PPP, Toufayan continued

to work, in-person, baking bread along with dedicated staff. He donated \$100,000 to food banks each in NJ and Florida communities where the bakeries are located, as thanks he still had a business and to help those facing job loss and worse during COVID-19.

“The Toufayan family’s been baking breads with quality and care since the beginning. Still family-owned over 90 years later, we’re one of the largest, privately-held specialty bakeries in the United States, filling lunch bags, toasters and tummies with our fresh flatbreads, pitas, bagels and snack-time yummys. Toufayan® Bakeries produces over 100 varieties of baked goods daily, including product options and innovations created to meet a variety of specific consumer needs, such as Low Carb Bagels and Gluten-Free Wraps.”

Toufayan Bakeries was the first company to introduce a Gluten-Free Wrap to the market, and its Smart Pocket is a modern take on its traditional pita breads – it’s got a pocket like a pita, so it’s easy to stuff, but it’s square, so it’ll fit into a sandwich bag. Toufayan also makes bagels as well as flatbreads that predate even pita in the history of Middle Eastern yeast-risen wheat breads. Toufayan Naan breads are offered in Garlic and Plain flavors, and the company also offers a traditional Tandoori bread.

Toufayan’s Mexican Chicken Taco Pinwheels

INGREDIENTS:

- 8 oz. cream cheese, at room temperature
- 1 1/2 cups shredded rotisserie chicken
- 1/2 packet of taco seasoning
- 4 tablespoons chunky salsa of your choice, plus more for garnish
- 2 tablespoons jarred jalapeño peppers, chopped (optional)
- 1 green onion, whites and greens, finely chopped
- Juice of 1/2 lime or lemon
- 4 Toufayan Wraps
- Crushed corn tortilla chips
- Chopped cilantro or chives, for garnish

PREPARATION:

In a large bowl or mixer bowl add the first 7 ingredients. Use the paddle attachment of your mixer or a handheld mixer to blend all of the ingredients together until smooth. Taste to adjust seasoning and add more taco seasoning if needed.

Lay out your tortilla onto a cutting board and use a spatula to evenly disperse the mixture throughout each tortilla, including the edges. Sprinkle with crushed tortilla chips and roll tightly into a tube. Trim both ends of the wrap and cut it into four equal pieces. Use your fingers to shape each pinwheel into a circle if needed.

Repeat with the rest of the tortillas. If you have any left-over filling use it to make more. Serve on a platter and garnish with extra salsa and chopped cilantro or chives.

Serves 4 as appetizer.

Microwave: On a microwave-safe plate, layer the wraps between moist paper towels and heat on high for 20-40 seconds (microwaves vary in power).

Stovetop: Place a wrap in a heated skillet or pan that is lightly coated with butter or oil. Cook each side for about 30 seconds or until warm throughout.



Mexican Chicken Taco Pinwheels (Photos and recipe courtesy Toufayan Bakeries)

For a list of Toufayan products, go to: <https://toufayan.com/products/>

For Toufayan products on Amazon, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/page/ADA899D6-6116-482C-9295-948D35B25EE0?channel=website>

Based in Ridgefield, N.J. with bakeries in Orlando and Plant City, Florida, the third generation of Toufayans oversees the entire process from ingredient sourcing and production to distribution. While trends come and go, high quality, fresh and authentic products are always in demand. The Toufayan family is committed to quality you can taste. Find Toufayan at www.toufayan.com and www.facebook.com/toufayan.

The Toufayan family is proud to make the finest tasting and healthiest breads for your family. They are always glad to hear from you, so if you have a moment, drop them a line at info@toufayan.com.

See: “Family Tradition Drives Toufayan Bakeries Through Pandemic,” at: <https://www.gourmetnews.com/family-tradition-drives-toufayan-bakeries-through-pandemic/>

Go behind the scenes with Chef George to take a look inside the Toufayan factory and see how Toufayan Wraps are made at: <https://toufayan.com/how-toufayan-wraps-are-made/>

See: “Toufayan Bakeries Deliciously Satisfies Keto Cravings, Expands Availability in Major Retailers Nationwide,” at: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/toufayan-bakeries-deliciously-satisfies-keto-cravings-expands-availability-in-major-retailers-nationwide-301878423.html>

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ARTS & CULTURE

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

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.

AUGUST 6 — Saints Vartanantz Armenian Church will hold its annual picnic, featuring music by Jason Naroian Ensemble. Sunday, 12 noon to 5 p.m. Admission \$1. Shish kebob, losh kabob, chicken kabob, khyema, rice pilaf, salad, pastries, beverages. 50/50 raffle. Children's activities. Please bring your own lawn chair but no alcohol. In the event of rain, picnic will be held in the Kazanjian Memorial Ballroom. Church is located at 180 Old Westford Road, Chelmsford. www.stsvartanantz.com.

AUGUST 13 — Sunday, 7:30 p.m., UNDER THE AUGUST MOON. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston, Featuring Black Sea Salsa Ensemble. Meet & Greet. Walk the Labyrinth. Refreshments. RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

AUGUST 16 — Wednesday, 4 p.m., TEA & TRANQUILITY. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston, Meet & Greet. Walk the Labyrinth. Marvel at Abstract Sculpture. Write a Wish on a Ribbon for The Wishing Tree. Refreshments. RSVP appreciated hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

SEPTEMBER 9 — Saturday, at 11am, LET'S MEET AT THE PARK! FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS IN BOSTON & BEYOND. Meet & Greet. Eat & Enjoy. Welcome at 11am. Walk the Labyrinth. Write a Wish on a ribbon for The Wishing Tree. To receive the e-invite, please email first and last name of the student(s), college each attending, year graduating and email to hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org. We will ask they invite their roommate(s) to join us, too.

SEPTEMBER 29 — Save the date! City of Smile-USA will host "A Tribute to Coco Chanel Who Loved Pearls." Friday, 11.30 a.m., Oakley Country Club, Watertown. Pearl jewelry raffle fundraiser and shopping the world's largest collection of pearl jewelry designs at incredible direct-from-producer savings. City of Smile-USA is dedicated to treating the children of Armenia who have cancer.

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 Hacoopian 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, and feature as keynote Speaker Artsakh's Representative to the US Robert Avetisyan.

NEW YORK

NOVEMBER 4 — SAVE THE DATE! 12 Vocations: The Ongoing Promise of St. Nersess Seminary. Help us celebrate the vocations of the next 12 priests and lay ministers who studied at St. Nersess and St. Vladimir's Seminaries. Details, invitations, and booklet donations can be found on www.stnerssess.edu.

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.

Cinematic Journey of Filmmaker Vahan Bedelian at Tribeca

FILM, from page 12

"The K-Town Killer" is Bedelian's ninth short film. It is the story of a professional female fighter who is defending her mother from an abusive landlord. The film

also emphasized in the film. The mother of the female fighter is unaware of her daughter's situation. Bedelian drew inspiration from his personal past for this story: "I used to train in kickboxing, and my

works, including "Jacob + Malika," a 2017 film that follows the journey of a Muslim girl who moves to the United States and falls in love with her American neighbor. The movie aimed to share compassion and cultural understanding, earning Bedelian the award of "Best Cinematography and Outstanding Writing." Four years later, Bedelian released the short film, "Summer 16," which captures nostalgia as it portrays a gamer's quest for Pokémon intertwined with real-life troubles. This movie received the "Outstanding Fan Fiction" award at the Cleveland Short Sweet Film Festival. Additionally, "Fitz," which is expected to be released in 2023, depicts the story of a self-driving car navigating Downtown Los Angeles' complex parking issue while avoiding thieves attempting to hijack it.

An Armenian Heirloom to Explore

Bedelian's father is a Cypriot Armenian who arrived in California in the 1980s. Bedelian, who grew up in Irvine, a mere 40 miles from Los Angeles, home to the largest Armenian community in the United States, and found inspiration in his surroundings.

"Martial arts are a significant aspect of Armenian culture, and I began my videography career by filming fight promotions in Southern California, where the Armenian community is huge. The reason I became interested in martial arts was because of the Armenian people I knew," he said. His works have also portrayed violence, and according to Bedelian, no

one understands violence better than Armenians. Although Bedelian hasn't yet featured Armenia in one of his films, he states that it is a future goal, once he will mark his path in the film industry.

Bedelian's main story inspiration for a movie stems from his personal family story. He shares his name with his great-grandfather, who was renowned in Cyprus where he arrived after he managed to escape the Genocide in a remarkable manner: "He saved his family's lives by playing the violin." In 1915, Vahan Bedelian was living in Adana, Turkey, when he and his family were sent to Aleppo. There, they were on the brink of being deported to the desert, when he was hired to perform violin at a concert venue. Upon hearing his music, a Turkish official asked about the musician. They engaged in conversation, during which his great-grandfather explained the situation his family was facing. "The Turkish official said to him "No, you can't go there. With your talent, you need to stay to play and teach violin", Bedelian added. Vahan Bedelian and his family eventually moved to the island of Cyprus afterwards, in 1921. Although he never had the opportunity to meet his ancestor, Bedelian ensured his presence has remained alive in his family through storytelling throughout his life. "Something like that stays with you forever," he concluded.

"The K-Town Killer" is available to watch on Apple TV, Roku, Fire TV and web browsers on iOS and Android devices. Visit [Vahan Bedelian's](http://VahanBedelian.com) website to learn more about his movies.



Poster for "The K-Town Killer"

was co-directed by producer Haylin Kwon and Bedelian. Bedelian explained their choice to make the film's lead character Korean-American: "It's a story about the Asian-American experience, where a person defends their parent, which was a significant concern for us due to the numerous horrific stories about Asian-Americans being attacked in California, particularly in 2020, especially the elderly."

Honesty and being true to oneself are

mom was very concerned. She would say, 'Oh, you're just going to exercise, right? You won't actually get hit in the head?' And I would say, 'Of course, I won't get hit in the head.' And then, of course, I would go and get hit in the head." When Bedelian shared this with his coach, the coach responded that no mother would want to see their child with a head injury. And that was how the story began.

Bedelian's portfolio features several

COMMENTARY

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**MIRROR
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Geopolitical Competition for Artsakh

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The situation around Artsakh remains extremely difficult. On the one hand, Artsakh is under the blockade implemented by Azerbaijan, but contrary to Aliyev's calculations, the Artsakh Armenians have not given up and continue to fight even under these conditions. On the other hand, Artsakh cannot have any hope of support from Armenia, as the Armenian authorities have absolutely no desire to protect the rights of Artsakh Armenians, including their right to self-determination. And finally, Artsakh has become a battlefield of geopolitical competition.

There have been many active developments in recent weeks in the negotiation process. First, Nikol Pashinyan and Ilham Aliyev met in Brussels and, according to the statement of European Council President Charles Michel, who initiated the meeting, the parties discussed the following issues: "1. Sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders once again fully reconfirmed their respect for the other country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Based on the understanding that Armenia's territory covers 29,800 km² and Azerbaijan's 86,600 km². 2. Border delimitation. Both leaders reconfirmed their unequivocal commitment to the 1991 Almaty Declaration as a political framework for the delimitation. 3. Connectivity. On connectivity, the sides have also made clear progress over the past two months in their discussions aimed at unblocking transport and economic links in the region. 4. Humanitarian supplies. Parties discussed the situation of the Karabakh Armenian population and the situation around the Lachin corridor. The current state of affairs is clearly not sustainable and is in no one's interest. 5. Rights and security. The population on the ground needs reassurances, first and foremost regarding their rights and security. In this context, I expressed the EU's encouragement for direct dialogue between Baku and representatives of Armenians living in the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. This dialogue should provide much-needed confidence for all those involved. 6. Detainees. We also discussed the issue of detainees. The leaders reconfirmed their commitment to the gentlemen's understanding that the release of soldiers who inadvertently cross to the other side would be facilitated."

From this text, it becomes clear that Armenia does not even talk about Artsakh's right to self-determination, which is a principle of international law equal in significance to that of territorial integrity. There is generally no mention of the existence of that right at all. It is becoming clear that the issues of border demarcation and delimitation continue to be Europe's political priority for now. It is also obvious that the Lachin Corridor, no matter how much the Europeans or the international institutions talk about it, will not be opened by Azerbaijan. It is also mentioned that Europe promotes the right to security and free movement of Artsakh Armenians which is also nonsense, taking into consideration the realities on

the ground. As for the prisoners of war, Aliyev does not want to make any concessions either. It becomes clear from all this that the only option proposed by Europe for the resolution of the Artsakh problem is the complete and final handover of Artsakh to Azerbaijan, which will lead to ethnic cleansing or a second Armenian Genocide.

While Pashinyan and Aliyev were negotiating in Brussels, yet another interesting statement came from Moscow, a geopolitical rival of the West. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement directly blaming the Armenian authorities for such a situation on the ground: "In October 2022 and May 2023, at the summits under the auspices of the European Union, Armenia recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the territory of Azerbaijan. We respect the sovereign decision of the Armenian leadership; however, this radically changed the fundamental conditions under which the Statement of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia of November 9, 2020, was signed, as well as the position of the Russian peacekeeping contingent deployed in the region. We believe that under these conditions, responsibility for the fate of the Armenian population of Karabakh should not be shifted to third countries. It is necessary to immediately start preparing a peace treaty between Baku and Yerevan, based on the previously reached agreements. We proceed from the fact that an integral part of this agreement should be reliable and clear guarantees of the rights and security of the Armenians of Karabakh, as well as the strict implementation of the entire set of trilateral agreements between Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, including the unblocking of transport communications and the launch of the process of delimitation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border."

Certainly, Artsakh has become an object of geopolitical competition and Europe's haste here is understandable. As long as Russia has serious problems in Ukraine, it is necessary to invest maximum efforts to enable the problem to be solved quickly, which will inevitably lead to the reduction of Russia's role and importance in the entire South Caucasus. This is a geopolitical rivalry that has existed between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War and will most probably not have any solution. As for Russia, Moscow is trying to delay the settlement of the issue until the end of its mandate in Nagorno-Karabakh or the end of the Ukrainian war, so that it can concentrate new resources to continue maintaining its role and influence in the South Caucasus. It is clear that the settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani problems will lead to reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey which will request additional efforts to justify why the Russian military base is needed in Armenia.

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

Greece Must Support Armenia

By Theodore Karakostas

Greece and Cyprus have very few friends in the world. The Hellenic world's closest friends are unquestionably the Armenians. Greeks and Armenians died together in the Turkish orchestrated genocide of 1914 to 1923. Greek and Armenian Christians were hunted down by the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal in Smyrna to be murdered. Greece, Cyprus, and Armenia are out of favor with the powerful of the world.

Armenia faces an existential threat. For thirty years, Armenia ruled the liberated territories of Azerbaijan. In 2020, the government in Baku backed by Ankara launched a bloody war of aggression and committed war crimes and crimes against humanity against Armenian civilians. The so called 'free' world stood aside and did nothing, just as the Russians did nothing. America and Europe espouse democracy and Russia espouses Christianity but here is an Islamic dictatorship attempting to eradicate a Christian democracy and no one lifts a finger.

The horrors of 9/11 have been forgotten. Azerbaijan and Turkey have assisted and been assisted by Syrian elements that were part of Al Qaida. Does anyone remember those bloodthirsty terrorists? One hundred

years after the culmination of the mass exterminations of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks by the Turks, the prospect of renewed genocide remains a horrific reality.

The threat that Armenia faces is shared by Greece and Cyprus. The Turkish elections brought to the forefront two evil and derailed psychopaths who were competing for the Turkish Presidency. President Erdogan's extreme threats to shoot missiles into Athens and to seize the Greek islands are well known. His challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu accused Erdogan of tolerating Greek 'occupation' of the islands. Turkish leaders vary in their ideology but not on eternal hatred of Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, and Kurds.

Greece is a member of the European Union and NATO. For the most part, this has not done Greece any good as the west supports Turkey uncritically. The Greek government has attempted to follow the western line on Ukraine in a failed attempt to curry favor with the west. Greece should be paying more attention to the Armenians. What happens to Greece and Cyprus will depend heavily on what happens to Armenia. If Armenia falls to the combined evil of Azerbaijan and Turkey, Greece and Cyprus will be next.

Athens must champion the Armenian

cause in Europe and NATO and must use any leverage it can muster to back all Armenian rights. The Armenian cause is the Greek cause. It is a morally righteous cause in a fight for survival. Greece has placed way too much confidence in the western world. At this late date, not much can be done about that, but Greece must work to support the Armenians who need as much diplomatic support as possible.

International pressure is being imposed on Armenia to make concessions to the regime in Baku. This is similar to the pressure that was exerted on Greece in 1922 to give up its rights on Constantinople and Asia Minor. It is similar to the pressure the west tries time and again to pressure Greece to make concessions on Cyprus.

Greece's relationship with Armenia is not artificial like those with its 'allies' in NATO. This is a real friendship that was solidified in blood.

Greece must stand firmly with the Armenians.

(This article was first published in the Greek-American publication the *National Herald* on July 13, 2023. Theodore G. Karakostas is the author of the books *In the Shadow of Hagia Sophia* and *With This Sign Conquer*.)



COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Armenians Shouldn't Alienate Foreigners And Complain that 'No One Cares about Us'

As the publisher of a newspaper, I frequently receive what is supposed to be factual “news,” but, after doing some checking, I find out that most of what I was told is baseless rumor.

A good example of gossip mongering happened last week when Israeli travel blogger and journalist Alexander Lapshin arrived in Los Angeles. His visit generated rumors and hateful words by some Armenians.

For those who are not familiar with Lapshin, he visited Armenia on several occasions and went to Artsakh in 2011 and 2012. Azerbaijan blacklisted him, considering his visit to Artsakh illegal. President Aliyev then asked Belarus in 2016 to arrest and extradite Lapshin to Azerbaijan. After being held in a Belarus jail for two months, Lapshin was sent to Baku on Feb. 7, 2017, on the personal airplane of President Aliyev, where he was put through a sham trial and sentenced to three years in jail. On September 11, 2017, Lapshin was attacked in his prison cell by four masked Azeri agents who broke his jaw, ribs and arm, partially paralyzing him. He spent three days in the intensive care unit of a Baku hospital, after which President Aliyev issued him a pardon and expelled him to Israel, where he spent another two weeks in a hospital. Azeri officials falsely claimed that Lapshin had tried to commit suicide which he strongly denied. Several independent medical examiners confirmed that there was an attempt on Lapshin's life in Baku.

Ever since his release from jail, Lapshin has toured dozens of countries exposing Azerbaijan's dictatorial regime and its human rights violations against its own citizens and Armenians in Artsakh.

Contrary to the unfounded rumor that he is an Israeli agent, Lapshin has had a major conflict with the Israeli authorities who repeatedly warned him that if he knows what's good for him and his family, he should stop criticizing Azerbaijan. Israeli officials described Azerbaijan as ‘an ally of Israel’ and told him that his actions were contrary to Israel's interests. Lapshin was given the same negative message when he met with American Jewish organizations. Israel also warned Lapshin that his Moldovan wife would not be granted Israeli citizenship unless he stops vilifying Azerbaijan.

Lapshin is currently on a tour of Canada, the United States and Mexico

where he is meeting with human rights organizations and elected officials to expose Azerbaijan's brutal violations and defend the interests of Artsakh Armenians.

My source for this information is neither Lapshin nor his critics. There are two official documents — the European Court of Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Committee — which independently verified the information submitted by both Lapshin and Azerbaijan's government.

Lapshin filed a complaint against Azerbaijan to the European Court of Human Rights in 2018. The Court, in a 32-page decision in 2021, found credible that Azerbaijan had attempted to murder him and ordered Azerbaijan to pay Lapshin 30,000 euros in compensation, which Azerbaijan has refused to do.

In 2022, the UN Human Rights Committee, in a 10-page report, recognized that Belarus violated several articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by arresting and extraditing Lapshin to Azerbaijan, thus putting his life at risk.

Here are some interesting facts from the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on the case of Lapshin vs. Azerbaijan.

The Government of Azerbaijan falsely told the European Court that Lapshin had written two letters from his Baku hospital allegedly thanking President Aliyev for pardoning him and stating that the prison guards saved his life. Lapshin denied that he wrote these letters. The European Court concluded that Azerbaijan's allegation is “particularly hard to believe in view of the difficulties which the applicant [Lapshin] had with his writing arm.” Yet there are some Armenians who rather believe Azerbaijan's lies and forged letters than the European Court's ruling that there was no reason to doubt Lapshin's word. The Court also found Lapshin's assertion ‘plausible’ that there was an attempt to murder him in his Baku prison cell.

The Azeri Judge Latif Huseynov, who was a member of the seven judges assigned to the Lapshin vs. Azerbaijan case, refused to participate. He was replaced by another Azeri Judge, Ceyhun Qaracayev, who voted with the rest of the judges unanimously “in favor of a finding of a violation of Article 2,” which is the ‘Right to Life’ of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In conclusion, those who accuse Lapshin of being a spy without any evidence are alienating a supportive non-Armenian who has risked his life to defend the rights of Artsakh Armenians. This is contrary to the constant Armenian complaint that no one in the world cares about Armenia's and Artsakh's destitute situation.

Erdogan's Foul Play: Turkey Is Teaming up with Azerbaijan to Punish Armenia

By Sam Brownback and Michael Rubin

As President Recep Tayyip Erdogan begins his third decade in power, he has solidified his place as Turkey's second-most consequential leader after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who founded the republic a century ago.

With the opposition disempowered if not in disarray, Mr. Erdogan now seeks to fulfill his lifelong ambition: the complete and permanent reversal of Atatürk's legacy of modern reforms.

American and European officials who believe, with the election in the rearview mirror, that they can return to business as usual with Turkey are dangerously mistaken. The issues that concern Mr. Erdogan most are neither interest rates at home nor Swedish NATO accession abroad, but rather laying the groundwork for the renewal of an Islamic state if not formal caliphate.

Just as Russian President Vladimir Putin considers the downfall of the Soviet Union the 20th century's greatest “geopolitical catastrophe,” Mr. Erdogan believes it was the Ottoman Empire's collapse.

None of this is idle speculation. Mr. Erdogan has said exactly what he wants.

He has described himself as the “imam of Istanbul” and as “servant of Sharia.” He declared that his goal is “to raise a religious generation.” He has described Turkish forces invading Syria as the “Army of Muhammad.” The reconversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque did not occur in isolation.

The latest foul play by Mr. Erdogan involves Armenia, the world's oldest Christian nation. As Mr. Erdogan seeks to extend the reach of the Turkic and Islamic world from Turkey's border with Greece and Bulgaria to China,

Armenia, a country just slightly larger than Maryland, stands in his way.

Today, Mr. Erdogan believes he has found his moment to reverse this geopolitical inconvenience. The Turks tried more than a century ago, wiping away more than a million Armenians in a genocide Adolf Hitler cited as an inspiration for the Holocaust.

Armenians say it was no coincidence that Turkey's chief ally, Azerbaijan, used Turkish-piloted, U.S.-provided F-16s while operating alongside Turkish special forces to launch a surprise attack in September 2020 on the Armenian-populated enclave Nagorno-Karabakh.

The attack came on the 100th anniversary of the Ottoman invasion of newly independent Armenia.

That the two countries act in conjunction is no surprise. Both leaders often describe their relationship as “one nation, two states.” Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev today is to Mr. Erdogan what Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is to Mr. Putin. Mr. Aliyev is essentially Mr. Erdogan's Mini-Me.

AS MR. ERDOGAN SEEKS TO EXTEND THE REACH OF THE TURKIC AND ISLAMIC WORLD FROM TURKEY'S BORDER WITH GREECE AND BULGARIA TO CHINA, ARMENIA, A COUNTRY JUST SLIGHTLY LARGER THAN MARYLAND, STANDS IN HIS WAY.

Today, Russia plays a cynical game. Traditionally, it guaranteed Armenia's security. But in 2018, Armenia committed what Mr. Putin considers an unforgivable sin: choosing democracy. Today, Mr. Putin sides with Messrs. Erdogan and Aliyev to punish Armenia's transgression.

The situation now comes to a head. As the Biden administration seeks to negotiate peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Mr. Aliyev demands the 120,000 Christians of Nagorno-Karabakh become sacrificial lambs.

Azerbaijan has blocked the Lachin Corridor that allows the free flow of aid and people in and out of the Christian enclave. Russia had been the guarantor, but now it looks away.

Messrs. Erdogan and Aliyev are sophisticated. Genocide occurs best in the dark, so he bans journalists and diplomats from Nagorno-Karabakh, so that his propa-

ganda need not confront truth.

After the Holocaust, the world said, “Never again.” Fifty years later, after the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica despite supposed international protection, diplomats swore again, “Never again.”

Today, Nagorno-Karabakh's regional capital, Stepanakert, is becoming the new Srebrenica. The region's Christians need action, not empty rhetoric.

The Biden administration seeks to broker peace, but lasting peace rests on values. If democracy will triumph and Nagorno-Karabakh Christians are to survive on land they have lived on for millenniums, the West needs more than words.

Fortunately, Congress already has the necessary policy arrows in its quiver.

Rather than look the other way or waive Section 907 restrictions on providing Azerbaijan military equipment it uses against Armenians, it is time to stop subsidizing slaughter. Azerbaijan's promises to help Ukraine are as irrelevant as they are cynical.

Like Turkey, Azerbaijan plays both sides of the issue and today serves as a hub for Russian gas exports.

The Safeguarding Humanitarian Corridors Act has no waiver. If Azerbaijan blocks U.S. humanitarian assistance, it must face severe sanctions. Azerbaijan is also ripe for Magnitsky Act sanctions, including those that enable corruption or bless human rights violations.

To act against Azerbaijan but ignore Turkey is akin to treating the symptom but ignoring the disease. It is time to declare Mr. Erdogan's ambition as incompatible with Western democracy and cooperation. If Lachin remains closed, Turkish steel and aluminum should face American tariffs.

The U.S. presence at Turkey's Incirlik Air Base should not be a “get out of jail free” card for Mr. Erdogan. Alternatives exist in Romania and Greece. It is time to pull the plug on Incirlik.

Most importantly, the United States must focus on the forest and not the trees. Religious freedom and democracy are not chits to negotiate away to win an agreement that will not last a month.

Standing on principle is not diplomatic inconvenience; sometimes, it is the wisest diplomacy of all.

(Sam Brownback is a former U.S. senator, governor, and ambassador at large for International Religious Freedom. Michael Rubin is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. This opinion piece appeared in the *Washington Times* last week.)

Remembering Professor Richard Hovannisian

By Beka Kobakhidze

The greatest historian of the Caucasus, the founding father of the historiography of the first republics of Transcaucasia, Richard Hovannisian, has passed away. He was a professor emeritus at the University of California Los Angeles.

His grandfather, Hovannis Gavroyan of the village of Bazmashen, Kharpert vilayet, died in the genocide in 1915. His 13-14-year-old father, Kaspar Gavroyan, managed to escape and made a long journey to California. Arriving in America, he changed his last name to Hovannisian in honor of his tragically deceased father. Richard was born in 1932 and grew up in a farming area near Tulare, California. He entered the faculty of history. He did not know Armenian. This is how he remembered this period: “at the end of every book, I opened the index pages and looked for Armenia if it was mentioned, but I couldn’t find it anywhere; I barely saw ten books where my historical homeland was mentioned. I had a dream that Armenia would become independent and I would be its foreign minister. When I was in New York, I used to go to the UN headquarters and dreamed of seeing the Armenian flag there.” Therefore, he decided to write his doctoral dissertation on the foreign policy of the first Republic of Armenia. For this he needed to learn Armenian. He moved to live in Beirut, Lebanon, where the Armenian political emigration took refuge. He studied Armenian and talked every day with Simon Vratsyan, the last prime minister of the first Republic of Armenia, the commander-in-chief of the Armenian army Drastamak Kanayan (General Dro) and other emigrants.

His love for the Armenian republic was growing, but while writing his dissertation, he realized that not only could he not include the history of two years of independence in one book, but he could not even reach the declaration of independence. Therefore, the title of his dissertation and the first book published in 1967 became *Armenia on Road to Independence*, which covered the period until May 1918. After that, he researched the history of the republic for another 30 years and published the four-volume set of *The Republic of Armenia*. He was joking about himself: “I was studying two years of independence during 35 years.” When he was doing this project, he visited several continents, dozens of countries and even more archives. He also learned new languages for the same purpose. At the end of this long journey the USSR collapsed and he was admitted to the Soviet archives.

He did not become the foreign minister, but he still fulfilled his dream – his son, the first foreign minister of independent Armenia, Raffi Hovannisian, raised the flag of independent Armenia at the UN headquarters in New York.

In addition to researching the Republic, Richard took advantage of his American citizenship and traveled throughout Turkey, describing the Armenian footprint in every important city and region, while it still existed. Thus, he published 16 volumes on “Turkish Armenia.”

One may think that 90 years is a long-enough life, but for Professor Hovannisian, 120 years would be too little, because he never retired. He wrote and researched until the end of his life. In 2021, *Armenian Communities of Persia/Iran* was published under his editorship. A two-volume textbook *The Armenian People from Ancient Times to Modern Times* was published under his editorship, which my students know well, because I use it as a textbook for the history of the Caucasus.

And those handful of ten books which Richard mentioned when talking about the beginning of his career turned into hundreds of monographs. During my scholarly journeys to the United States, I met Richard’s students and disciples, now over 70 years old, who have staffed the best universities in America. They have become professors, and they have written a good number of books. His legacy is limitless. Now the number of books written about Armenia in Western historiography is comparable to that of great nations.

His research style was encyclopedic and thoroughly precise. One of his friends joked, while editing the monograph, that Richard argued for half an hour about one of the commas, whether it should be put there or not. He wrote with a broad regional and transnational context. Therefore, he wrote about the foreign policy of the first Republic of Georgia much more than Georgian historians had done until very recently. Although he was a patriot of Armenia, his judgments were balanced not only about Georgia, but also about the first Republic of Azerbaijan. He honestly wrote about the arguments of the Georgians during the Armenian-Georgian war and about the arguments of the Azerbaijanis in relation to Karabakh; but he himself, of course, was a patriot of Armenia. He taught me about this: “patriotism is good, but you should also always present the arguments of the other side.”

With his entire career, writing style, and scholarly interests, Richard was, is, and will

remain a role model for me. Last year, in one of the interviews, he mentioned that a generation of historians is growing in Georgia, who will become “Georgia’s Richard Hovannisians.” When I heard that, I walked around with a shining face for a week. Yes, we the Georgian historians have to travel Richard’s way. We are decades late, but we need a similar school of historiography which Richard founded for Armenians and our students should publish their books at Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard and Berkeley, like Richard’s students have already done.

I met Professor Hovannisian in 2013. That year we won a summer school grant and held a one-week summer school, “The First Republic of Georgia,” at the National Archives of Georgia. At that time, my young friends and I were generally unknown people, but we managed to invite important international guests. The main one was Richard Hovannisian. We became friends and after that he stood by my side like a grandfather to a grandson. We have exchanged hundreds of letters, and when I was going somewhere abroad, he would send a letter to his academic friends at one or another university to the effect that “my boy is coming and you should see him.”

In 2018, I invited him to Georgia two more times. On May 29, an event dedicated to the centennial of the republics was held in Ilia State University. The speakers were Richard Hovannisian and Stephen Jones (currently Director of Georgian Program at Harvard), and I was privileged to be moderating a discussion between the two major scholars of the South Caucasus republics. Richard did not hesitate to come from California to Tbilisi again in just three weeks for the conference and summer school dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the republics. Based on the reports of this forum, a comprehensive collected volume was published, authored by Steven Jones, Ronald Suny, Winfried Baumgart, Charlotte Alston, Irada Bagirova, Eric Lee, Andrew Andersen, Haji Murad Danogo, Adrian Brisku and Georgian historians of the first Republic (old and new generation). Richard wrote the foreword for this book and entitled it *Unfinished Symphony*. So far, it is his only – and worth reading – Georgian publication.

In 2019, I was at the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) conference in San Francisco. He told me that I should go to Los Angeles, UCLA would purchase tickets for me, I would be accommodated at the UCLA guest house, and I would be paid a honorarium for delivering a lecture at UCLA. It so happened that the only possible time to deliver a lecture was a day before Thanksgiving Day. He told me that from the Los Angeles airport I should go straight to his place to attend his family dinner. Due to Thanksgiving, the airport was completely paralyzed and the taxi did not come to pick me up for three hours. Meanwhile, it was 11 p.m., and I

had to go straight to the hotel. Then an 87-year-old man came to see me with food and drink at almost midnight. He told me “you must be hungry now, and where would you buy food here?” Those little things are very telling and revealing of Professor Hovannisian’s personality as to how a legendary man treated a young and unknown scholar.

Anyone who knows America will know that Thanksgiving is a holiday of similar importance to Christmas and New Year. It is simply impossible to bring someone to a university and especially to listen to a lecture a day before Thanksgiving, but who could stand against Richard’s request?! He gathered the Dean, administration leadership, students, and he himself came with his family and made those poor people listen to me. Then he asked his friends to show me Los Angeles and at the end of the day he took me out to dinner with his



young students.

That is where I saw his personality once again. Richard’s wife, the late Vartiter Kotcholosian, had dementia. In the past, she was a doctor of medical sciences, a well-known doctor, but dementia turns a person into a small child. Richard took her everywhere we went and I will never forget how he took care of her, talked to her all the time and looked at her with loving eyes. Last year, after the death of Vartiter, he kept repeating to me that he could not accept and would never accept the fact that she was no longer alive.

Richard left not only books, but also his family. His children and grandchildren are all successful people: writers, directors, politicians, attorneys and so on.

While I was in America, I called him every week and “reported” to him on my work in progress, shared with him my impressions, and asked for his counsel. I will always regret the fact that he did not see my book published on the foreign policy of the first Republic of Georgia; a book that he had been supporting for 10 years and which I wrote guided by his books and through his invaluable counsel. It will be published next year, but Richard will not see it. I also regret that I could not introduce this epochal person to my students.

He lived a glorious and impressive life, but he refused to write memoirs. He claimed that he felt uncomfortable with writing about himself but instead others should speak about him. That is why I decided to write this text, because everyone should write their share about Richard Hovannisian at length.

Every nation would be proud of and rich to have Richard Hovannisian. I express my most sincere condolences to the Hovannisian family, Armenian community of America and the whole Armenian nation.

This heavy loss is shared by my and Richard’s common academic friends from Georgia and they join me in expressing condolences: Stephen Jones, Dimitri Silakadze, Adrian Brisku, Alexander Mikaberidze, Giorgi Astamadze, Irakli Khvadagiani, David Khvadagiani, Sarah Slye, Lasha Bakradze, Dimitri Shvelidze, Otari Janelidze, Mikheil Bakhtadze.

(Beka Kobakhidze is Co-chair of the MA Program in Modern History of Georgia at Ilia State University, and Professor and Georgian Studies Fellow at Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies.)



COMMENTARY



Nune Arakelyan at Artsakh State University in 2018 (Artsakhpress.am photo)

One Day of Life During the Blockade

By Nune Arakelyan

Residents of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) have experienced so many days of blockade that choosing one of these days and describing it is a relatively complex task.

One day at the beginning of the blockade, together with other city residents, you frantically stormed supermarkets and stocked up on provisions. Another day in the middle of the blockade, the Red Cross started delivering food and medicine through the blocked Lachin corridor, and the authorities introduced a rationing system, and life began to take on relatively bearable contours. And now, there is one day, when the blockade has taken on a total and exhausting character — these are completely different days. One day during winter, the relentless pursuit of essential goods is coupled with the tormenting effort to heat homes in the absence of gas and regular electricity blackouts. The threat of hunger gives way to the threat of being left without warmth and light. And another day during summer, it's warm and sunny, and the soul longs for fruits and vegetables, but their delivery to the city has become nearly impossible due to the lack of fuel — this is also a different day.

Despite the differences between these various days of the blockade, there is a common thread for people of my generation and older. It's the persistent feeling of déjà vu because this is already the second blockade we have experienced. The first blockade began in the late 1980s and ended in the early 1990s.

When discussing those days with colleagues, neighbors, and relatives, and comparing the previous blockade to the current one, we constantly use the question: "Do you remember?" And we admit that back then, things were worse because regular shelling and airstrikes were added to complete isolation, the absence of food, water, gas, and electricity.

What is a typical day of the blockade? Probably, for more than 120,000 Armenians who remain living in Artsakh, each day is different. For those who have chronically ill or young children in their families, it is undoubtedly more challenging.

My day begins with gratitude to the Lord for the fact that despite the hardships and trials, the war and the blockade, the night passed relatively peacefully, and I woke up not in a basement where we hid from bombings, not abroad, but at home in my own bed. And I am also grateful that my loved ones are alive.

If there is electricity, I brew myself some black coffee (without sugar, as sugar has been unavailable for a long time), which I stocked up on during the early days of the blockade, and then I boil hot water for my family in a thermos. But electricity has become a luxury in recent times, and there has been no gas for a long time. So, more often than not, I go to work without having my favorite coffee, comforting myself with the thought that I'll have it with my colleagues during a break. But even at work, there is often no electricity. Never mind the coffee, the absence of electricity during classes means a return to the classical teaching methods of our ancestors

when the word of the teacher became paramount again. And it's crucial that this word be the right one. No matter how difficult it may be for a teacher or lecturer, students should hear words of hope and faith in their speech, not despair and melancholy.

I return home from work on foot since there's no point in waiting for a minibus. Due to the lack of fuel, minibuses are infrequent, and taxis are also scarce. In general, I enjoy walking through our cozy city, but not in the snow or heavy rain, and this year the rains have been plentiful. They say it's good because it supports our small dying power plant, which has become our sole source of light and warmth.

On my way home, I try to do some shopping, to buy whatever products are still available in stores. The most common question among my fellow citizens, when they enter grocery stores, is: "Do you have anything left in terms of food?" And lately, more and more often, the answer from the sellers is negative, and the forgotten Soviet word "to obtain" has quickly replaced the word "to buy" in our blockade vocabulary. Stores open out of habit, just so that the population can purchase bread, which is available but with interruptions. Before, there used to be dairy products, but for over a week now, they are gone, packaging has run out, and there is no fuel to deliver goods to different locations.

My route back home often takes me by meat shops. There are many people in the city who ask for leftover meat, and the butchers know them by face; they know they are the dog owners. Even the four-legged residents of Artsakh bear the hardships of the blockade. However, I don't have a dog, I am simply a volunteer, helping with other city residents at the first shelter for stray animals, which was opened shortly before the blockade. Thanks to financial aid from our friends in the diaspora and beyond, the shelter is still holding up. Many people in the city don't understand us. They reproach us for thinking about animals instead of focusing on people in our difficult situation. How can I explain to them that we are precisely thinking about people and trying to preserve their humanity?

Returning home, I try not to encounter familiar faces, because every conversation about everyday matters will inevitably be followed by the question: "What do you think will happen to us next?" Well, how can I know the answer to that question? But overall, I like how our people are holding on, trying not to despair, and even making jokes about our strange situation.

In the evenings, I've grown afraid of phone calls, as each call could contain information that someone close to me is seriously ill, and due to the lack of proper medications in Artsakh, it will be impossible to treat them, and getting them to Armenia is not an option as the blockade has fully isolated us from the rest of the world. It could also be a call about shooting at the border, a drone dropping a bomb, and someone's son losing their life. Oh Lord, how I fear these calls...

Sometimes, the ladies from our animal protection organization can call with messages that the animals in the

shelter are hungry, and urgent action is needed. But what can we do? Even if we find food, how can we transport it when the shelter is outside the city, and hardly anyone has fuel, not even the taxi drivers?

What strange turns fate takes! From my youth, I loved Tendryakov's story "Bread for a Dog." And who could have thought that many years later, I would find myself almost living in that story? "It's a kind of payment, and for me, it was enough that I fed someone, supported someone's life, meaning I had the right to eat and live too. It wasn't a starving dog that I fed with pieces of bread, it was my conscience."

In the evenings, there's often no electricity, no chance to read, no way to get warm if it's cold, and no possibility to watch a film. Thankfully, we have mobile internet, which saves us from the oppressive silence of the dark apartment. Reading stories about other people's lives, looking at photos of traveling friends, somehow soothes me. There is normal life somewhere out there, it turns out, and there is hope that it will return to us someday. Maybe... Someday...

Although friends and acquaintances from beyond Artsakh seem more interested in what we eat during the blockade, whether we can get groceries, etc. Sometimes it's not easy for us to explain to them that we knew what we were getting into when we decided to stay in Artsakh, that food is not our most significant problem, and that something worse than hunger, cold, and isolation can threaten us — the loss of our Homeland. And every night, we go to sleep, thanking the Lord that another day has passed, and we survived and continue to live on the land of our ancestors. We are alive, we are still here, and we are holding on...

Since the writing of this article, about a month has passed. Since then, the situation in the blockaded Nagorno-Karabakh has become critical: due to the lack of electricity and fuel, water supply has been disrupted, and garbage collection has stopped. Ahead lie hordes of rats and epidemics. And all this is happening amidst the absence of medicines and the onset of complete famine. Pregnant women are collapsing from hunger, as even bread is no longer available. The number of miscarriages has tripled. People are dying without receiving medical assistance. The situation at the moment is catastrophic.

This is genocide! Genocide happening in the 21st century, genocide in real-time, an apocalyptic "reality show" orchestrated by the Azerbaijani oil dictator in a self-proclaimed democratic republic that he wants to engulf. This is genocide against a people who first fell victim to Stalinist and Soviet policies of territorial divisions and deportations, and later to Azerbaijani policies of ethnic cleansing and destruction of cultural heritage.

"The world is a dangerous place, not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who watch and do nothing." Albert Einstein

(Nune Arakelyan is a lecturer at Artsakh State University.)



‘We Must Live in Reality without Losing Our Own Fairy Tale,’ Says ‘Avtona’ Film Director Ani Grigoryan

By **Maydaa Nadar**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

ISMAILIA, Egypt — In one of Armenia’s villages, Avtona, there resides a young Yezidi boy. His name is Suko and he is around 12. He lives in two worlds, one imaginary and the other real. Armenian documentary filmmaker Ani Grigoryan, in the film “Avtona,” depicted Suko’s feelings and thoughts as he finds himself moving between these two contrasting worlds. She was motivated by several goals, including depicting Armenia’s rich cultural diversity and presenting the Yezidis as an integrated community, which together with other communities gives richness to Armenian society as a whole.

Grigoryan attended the 24th Ismailia International Film Festival for Documentaries and Shorts, held in Egypt, and showed her film. The director talked with the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* about her participation in this and other festivals, as well as about her profession and academic work.

She said that working as an administrator in two programs with the Public Television of Armenia was a useful experience. She considers herself lucky since the team she worked with brought together wonderful people. Also, this job opened many doors for her. For instance, she attended many shootings and went on trips to the beautiful cities of Armenia.

However, what was most important for her was to understand the structure of the program and become involved in the actual process. She commented: “It’s one thing to relate in words and another when you yourself form a part of the work. I learnt that the director is not a person who only develops and follows the process of the film, but also that he must know the working methods of everyone in his team. In this sense, working in television further strengthened my knowledge in a practical way and enriched me with self-confidence.”

Grigoryan has directed three documentaries: “Against the Cold,” “Vera” and “Avtona.” She was only 19 when she directed the first one, which focuses on 90-year-old Epraşia, who lives on her own. However in the winter, when it gets cold outside, she needs to leave her lovely house, hoping to come back in spring. “Against the Cold” won the Audience Award at the International Kin (Woman) Film Festival in Armenia. It was also shown in the Italian Cefalu Film Festival and had an online screening.

In “Vera,” she focuses on an orphaned young lady who works for the sake of her freedom. The documentary won many prizes not only in Armenia, but in different European countries as well. Both films were exhibited in 16 countries.

Ani likes attending festivals because, she explained, “The most interesting part is getting to know new directors and creators. Over the course of a few days, you have the opportunity to watch many films from different countries. New thoughts and ideas are born, which help in



Suko

further professional and creative work.”

The young Yezidi Suko in “Avtona” was the protagonist of her graduation project. When she was asked about her choice of subject, she answered: “During my years of study, I always wanted to make a film about the minority peoples living in Armenia. Thus, I devoted my graduation year to make this idea into a reality. I really wanted the

hero of the film to be a child, because children have more sincerity and simplicity in life. For about two months, I traveled around different Yezidi villages across Armenia to find the hero. Finding the ideal person for my story was not an easy task. Then accidentally, from inside the car, I saw a small boy who was whistling and walking behind a herd. At that very moment I shouted, ‘Stop the car! I found the hero of the documentary.’ This is how I met Suko, who lives in the village of Avtona.”

While getting to know Suko, she realized that he is not like other children of his age. He is more self-confident, quiet and thoughtful. He lives in his own world, unknown to everyone, so it took her a lot of effort to get to know him. Ani utilized the boy’s unusual character and decided to make a script. She asked his teacher to assign to the children a creative exercise with the theme of a fairy tale. Suko’s own tale was mixed with what Ani had in mind and the film was created.

She built the boy’s imaginary world in parallel to his real surroundings. In this regard, she explained: “Since life is not always like a fairy tale, it was necessary to show the protagonist’s fictional world accompanied by the existing circumstances, which is hard, because in his case, reality is a synonym of conflict.”

Yet, does only Suko reflect such a contrast? Her answer to this question is: “This contradiction is also expressed in our own lives. Sometimes we are locked into the world we have built and we don’t want to see beyond it. Nevertheless, there comes a moment when you have to try to see it all. This is the time when it is possible to distinguish between a fairy tale and the truth.” She added, “at the end of the day, we must live in reality without losing our own fairy tale.”

Speaking about the documentary’s principal character led to the topic of the Yezidis in Armenia. About 35 thousand Yezidis live in Armenia. She said they mainly live in mountainous regions and are engaged in animal husbandry and farming. The Yezidi community is of great importance for the Armenian people and culture, Ani remarks. She said, “Yezidis live very peacefully with Armenians. Suko says in the film that he goes to an Armenian school and has many Armenian friends. I believe the brotherhood between Armenians and Yezidis will last long.”

Grigoryan was not the sole director of “Avtona.” Additionally, she was the script writer and participated in the editing. “The documentary genre is one of the most interesting and flexible genres in cinema, allowing your creativity to shine. The most important aspect is the editing, a role I really enjoyed in ‘Avtona.’ Doing it, you seem to give up your initial idea and start assembling the film anew from the start. Unfortunately, the institute where I study does not have a separate faculty for film editing and we, the directors, have to edit our films. For documentary filmmakers, it’s a heavenly process, but for feature films, it’s a bit tricky.”

Participating with “Avtona” in the Ismailia Documentary Film Festival led to her first visit to an Arab country and her first long trip outside Armenia. Ani felt glad about her participation and she mentions: “The festival was very colorful. Every film was better than the other. I discovered numerous things related to technical issues and the plot of works, which I will definitely utilize in the future. Such a gathering creates a great opportunity to meet new people. Sometimes they become the beginning of great collaborations.” She added that “we were warmly received by the people responsible for the festival and nicely treated by everyone there. From the very first day, we got close to the

volunteers who revealed Ismailia to all the participants. Whenever we had a little free time, we walked around the city. People were friendly and when they found out that I came from Armenia, they tried to remember something pertaining to this country. Undoubtedly, with such nice impressions and longing, I will return again to discover more of Egypt and its original culture.”

This is the second consecutive time Armenia has been part of the festival. Last year, the Armenian director Garush Ghazaryan took part with “My Black Heart.” “Garush is one of my friends. Thanks to his advice I joined the events. We study at the same institute and he shared with me very positive opinions about the festival. I am very happy I also became a part of it,” she said. About the significance of Armenian participation in the Ismailia festival, she said: “This time, my work was a documentary, while last year, Garush’s was a feature film. I highly appreciate the efforts made by creative young



Ani Grigoryan

people in Armenia to present their films to various public audiences and in different countries. I hope for the presence of Armenian films to continue in the Ismailia annual celebration.” (See my article in <https://mirrorspectator.com/2022/05/05/ghazaryan-accompanies-film-my-black-heart-to-egypts-ismailia-international-film-festival/>.)

Ani is pleased to see the documentary genre developing in Armenia and the endeavors of the new generation in this field. She sees it is important, taking into consideration that this category of films presents the Armenian nation to the world, and says that the more such films are made, the richer will be culture [in general]. She also emphasizes that “We should recognize and protect the people living in our country, including the Yezidi community. One of the means to do so is documentaries and this highly encouraged me to work on the film ‘Avtona.’”

Passionate about her work, yet also about her studies, Ani decided to obtain a master’s degree majoring in feature directing from the Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinema. This graduate study is supervised by Edgar Bagdasaryan. She thinks that simultaneously with constant immersion in the creative process, she needs additional knowledge. “Each of us is learning until the end of our life. Since my undergraduate years, I made up my mind that I would continue for a master’s degree. Knowledge acquired academically plus practical work gives rise to thoughts consonant with the times, and also to innovative ideas for new films.”

She received much help at the Yerevan Institute from colleagues, and in particular from her professor Ruben Grigoryan, on “Avtona,” because it was a film that was part of her coursework. She said: “It provided support through its facilities and filming equipment. Studying here is pleasant and we are given the right orientation, which is the most important thing.”

At the same time, she observes, “Self-education is also very important. There are many very famous directors who did not receive a higher education, but they shot fantastic works.”