

Russia Warns of Response to Armenia’s Tilt to West

ANTALYA, Turkey (Azatutyun) — Russia will seriously “reconsider” its relationship with Armenia if Yerevan continues drifting away from Moscow and aligning with the West, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned over the weekend.

Lavrov rejected Armenian leaders’ intensifying criticism of Russia and said they are re-orienting Armenia towards his country’s enemies who “have never brought any benefit to anyone anywhere in the world.”

“The Armenian leadership decided to rely on extra-regional countries courting Yerevan, promising to help it in all its troubles as long as Armenia breaks relations with Russia and the integration structures created in our common region. The West does not hide this,” he told reporters after attending an international security forum held in the Turkish city of Antalya.

“We cannot prohibit them making any statements or announcements regarding our future ties,” he said when asked to comment on Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s threats to pull Armenia out of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). “If this is the opinion of the Armenian people, then let this be the new policy of the Yerevan authorities.

“It takes political courage to say that since 1991, Armenia has taken an entirely wrong course in relations with Russia.

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Luba Aleksanyan with grandchildren Narine (right) and Ani, Ptghni village, Kotayk Province, Armenia (Marut Vanyan photo)

Living in Kotayk, Dreaming of Artsakh

By Marut Vanyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

PTGHNI, Armenia — “Karabakh was sold. I blame the former and current authorities for that, but first of all I blame

so called our ally Russia. They sold Karabakh now they have made Syunik a topic of trade. It was the plan of Putin, Erdogan and Aliyev,” said Sahak Sahakyan, a resident of the village of Ptghni.

He adds, “Let the Russian military base leave Armenia so that we can live peacefully. Let the French come. Pashinyan wants to go to the West that’s why Russia is pushing Aliyev to attack Armenia. Many Karabakh Armenians have come to our village, I know that it is very hard for them to adapt here, but where can they go? They have nowhere to go. They can’t live under Aliyev’s flag. Today, there are no Armenians left in Karabakh, so what are the Russians doing there? Did they remain as guarantors of vacant apartments?”

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Ptghni village, Kotayk Province, Armenia (Marut Vanyan photo)

Artsakh Refugees Miss Home, See The Erasure of a Culture

By Marut Vanyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

ABOVYAN, Armenia — Almost every day, those of us from Artsakh forcibly relocated to Armenia attend a funeral ceremony for the Karabakh Armenians here in Armenia. The pain from this situation is especially difficult for the older refugees.

“One dies from a heart attack, another from a stroke,” said Shoushan Hayrapetyan, 50, who has been displaced for the second time. During the 2020 war Azerbaijanis occupied her husband’s village, Aknaghbyur, in Artsakh and her family moved to the capital, Stepanakert. After the September war in 2023, like all



Shoushan and Vova Hayrapetyan (Marut Vanyan photo)

the Artsakh Armenians, her family found itself living in Armenia.

She continued, “It’s been a year since my mother’s death. She passed away during the Artsakh blockade [December 2022 through the forcible displacement of the Armenians]. Via the Red Cross

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Wolohojian Confirmed For Supreme Judicial Court on 6-1 vote

By Katie Lannan
BOSTON (WGBH) — Appeals Court Judge Gabrielle Wolohojian, Gov. Maura Healey’s former romantic partner, was confirmed on a 6-1 vote Wednesday, February 28, as the newest justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

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Appeals Court Judge Gabrielle Wolohojian addresses the Governor’s Council, February 21, 2024.

Georgia Bishop Concerned About Loss of Identity, Unity

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

TBILISI/WATERTOWN — Bishop Kirakos Davtyan of the Diocese of the Georgian Armenians, based in Tbilisi, declared in a recent interview giving an overview of the current state of the Georgian-Armenian population, “The major issues of the Georgian Armenian community at present are unity and the preservation of Armenian identity.”

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Bishop Kirakos Davtyan, center

Germany Hosts Armenian-Azerbaijan Talks – And Then?



Carl Bazarian Receives Honors From Armenian Church, Government



Heavenly Début of Ruzan Mantashyan At Royal Opera House in London





ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Yerevan to Host 2nd Global Armenian Summit

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Yerevan will host the second Global Armenian Summit September 17-20.

Challenges currently facing Armenia and the Diaspora, opportunities for sustainable development, the most important issues of the present and future will be discussed in various formats of the summit, the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs reports.

From national security to advanced technologies, the summit will bring together around 1,000 representatives of the Diaspora and Armenia.

Marukyan Resigns as Ambassador at Large

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — Edmon Marukyan has submitted his resignation as Ambassador at Large to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Marukyan himself said Thursday, February 29.

“I have assumed this responsibility in a very difficult period for our State and the region in general and have performed my duties in this mission with high sense of responsibility and devotion. However, the difference in our visions regarding a number of fundamental foreign policy issues in the recent months, makes my further involvement impossible in Armenia’s foreign affairs,” Marukyan said. “I assure you that I will continue to serve the state and the people and invest my knowledge, experience and international network in the defense of national interests of the Republic of Armenia.”

He had been appointed to the post in March 2022.

Armenia to Free Azeri Soldier

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — The Armenian authorities said on March 4 that they will free and repatriate an Azerbaijani soldier who crossed into Armenia on February 28.

The soldier, Ruslan Panahov, was detained outside the border village of Togh. Azerbaijan’s Defense Ministry said he had lost his way and went missing due to bad weather.

Armenia’s National Security Service (NSS) said an investigation conducted by another law-enforcement agency found that Panahov crossed the border after fleeing an Azerbaijani army post because of an “incident” between servicemen manning it.

An NSS statement added that Yerevan has decided to hand over Panahov to Azerbaijani authorities “as a manifestation of goodwill” and in compliance with an Armenian-Azerbaijani agreement to swiftly repatriate soldiers straying into each other’s territory. The agreement had been reached “at the highest level,” he said.

A member of Togh’s local council, Argam Hovsepyan, claimed last week that Panahov crossed the border together with another soldier. The latter “ran away” after being spotted by Armenian servicemen, Hovsepyan said. The NSS did not confirm that.

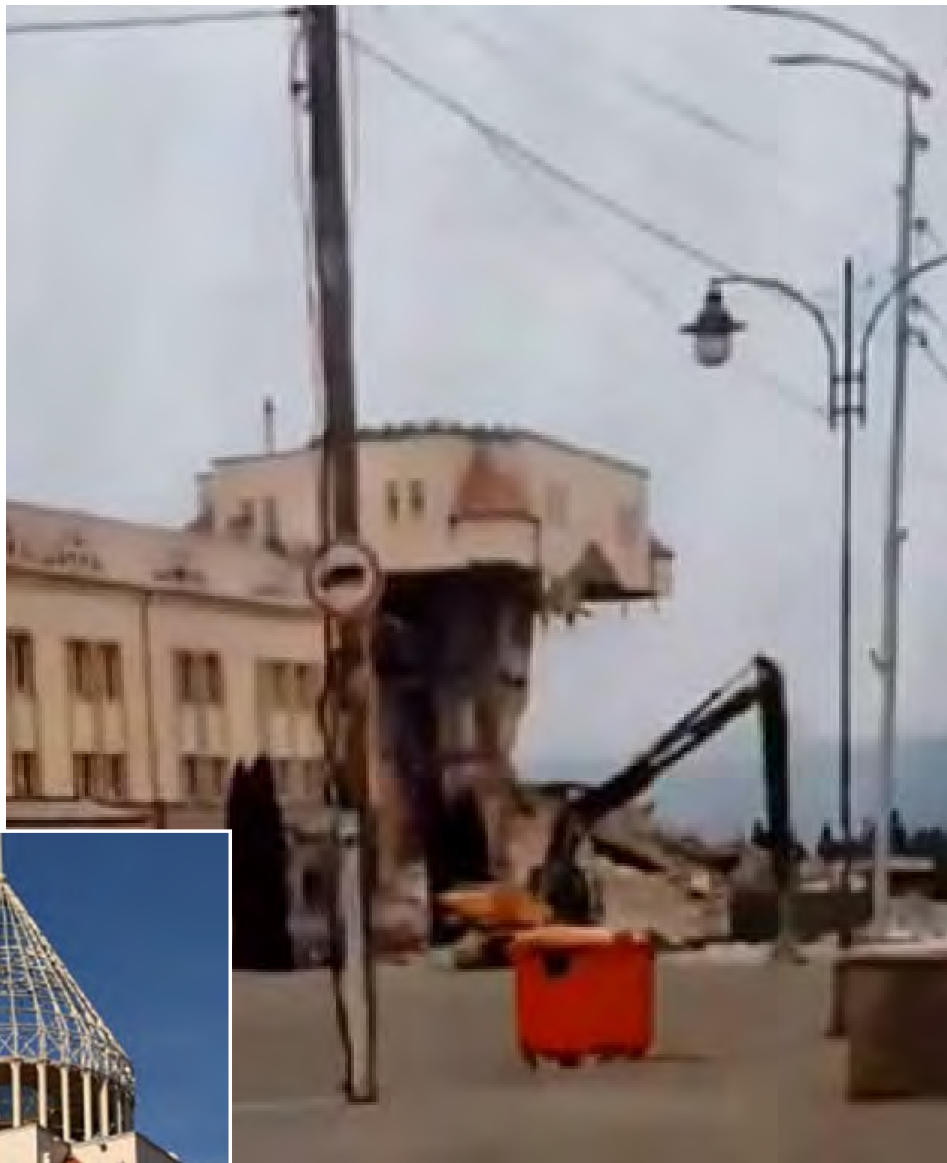
Artsakh Parliament Slams Acts Of Vandalism by Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — The National Assembly of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) on March 5 issued a statement strongly condemning the destruction by Azerbaijan’s regime of the parliament building in Stepanakert.

“After the large-scale war and Artsakh’s complete occupation by Azerbaijan, numerous medieval spiritual centers, educational complexes and memorials, buildings and structures of historical and cultural significance in Artsakh are under threat,” the Artsakh parliament said.

“Despite its resounding statements on peace on various international platforms, Azerbaijan seeks to finalize its plans of genocide against the Armenian people. This is mainly manifested by the desecration and destruction of monuments that stand as symbols of Armenian Christian history and culture, liberation struggle and state building, as well as false statements about their Albanian origin.

“The latest acts of vandalism were the desecration of the Holy Mother of God



The Artsakh parliament building before and now



Cathedral in Stepanakert, the complete destruction of the buildings of the Artsakh Republic National Assembly and the Union of Freedom Fighters,” the statement says.

The Artsakh parliament statement cited Article 4 of the 1954 Hague Convention

for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict which prohibits any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of, and any acts of

vandalism directed against, cultural property.

“Despite UNESCO calls to stop the destruction of Artsakh’s historical and cultural heritage and promised to send a mission to Artsakh, no mission has yet been de-

ployed to Artsakh under the pretext of artificial obstacles created by Azerbaijan. The indifference of the international community has emboldened the aggressor to commit acts of vandalism.

“The National Assembly of the Artsakh Republic condemns the barbaric acts of the Azerbaijani authorities to erase the Armenian traces there and urges human rights organizations and Armenian authorities to submit all evidence of Azerbaijan’s cultural genocide policy to the competent international organizations and instances, giving the problem an international resonance,” reads the statement.

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If this is the assessment of the entire Armenian leadership based on the opinion of the people, then this makes it necessary to reconsider a lot in Russian-Armenian relations. We are waiting for official confirmation of what the final decision [of Yerevan] will be.”

Over the past year, Armenians have boycotted high-level meetings, military exercises and other activities of the CSTO in what Pashinyan described last month as an effective suspension of Armenia’s membership in the military alliance comprising six ex-Soviet states. On February 28, Pashinyan did not rule out Yerevan’s formal exit from the CSTO, saying that the organization is becoming a security threat to his country.

The Armenian premier’s statements followed his visits to Germany and France during which he met with not only the leaders of the two European powers but also US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and British foreign intelligence chief Rich-

ard Moore. A key member of his political team, parliament speaker Alen Simonyan, last week criticized Russia’s military presence in Armenia and accused Moscow of inciting Azerbaijan to start the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Lavrov denounced these “blatant lies” and “ungrateful assessments,” arguing that it was Russia that stopped the six-week war with a ceasefire agreement brokered by President Vladimir Putin.

“It could have been stopped much earlier when the Azerbaijanis had not yet taken [the strategic Karabakh town of] Shusha [Shushi],” he said. “But Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in response to calls from Russian President Vladimir Putin, said then that they will fight to the end.”

Lavrov went on to insist that the CSTO did not ignore Armenia’s appeals for military aid following Azerbaijani military operations launched at the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in 2021 and 2022. He said that in November 2022 Pashinyan vetoed

at the last minute the CSTO member states’ decision to send a “peacekeeping mission of observers” to the border.

The top Russian diplomat did not specify exactly how Moscow would react to the Pashinyan government’s decision to end Armenia’s political and military alliance with Russia.

Pashinyan’s domestic critics fear that the Russians could not only take crippling economic measures against the South Caucasus country but also give the green light for another Azerbaijani attack. They say Pashinyan’s radical foreign policy change is reckless because the West is not ready to give Yerevan any security guarantees or provide it with significant military aid.

Simonyan dismissed such fears when he spoke to reporters last Thursday. “What else could [the Russians] do?” the speaker said, adding that they have already failed to stop Azerbaijan from recapturing Nagorno-Karabakh and occupying Armenian border areas.



ARMENIA

Artsakh Refugees Miss Home, See Erasure of a Culture

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we tried to take her body to Artsakh to bury her next to my father in our native village, Vaghugas, but it didn't work. Seeing how Azerbaijanis destroy the graves of Armenians, in Karabakh we consider ourselves lucky that we buried her here in Armenia. At least we would have a place to go to lay flowers. My mother was an old woman, for better or worse, she lived her life but what about those who lost their 18-20 year-old sons during the war — what will happen to their graves in Artsakh? I can feel their pain, but what can I do?"

A semblance of life goes on. Women hang their laundry to dry in the Hin Parvana hotel in Abovyan, where many forcibly displaced persons from Artsakh live. Each family cooks and sleeps in a single hotel room. The owner of the hotel has assigned each family a room, for which they pay rent each month.

"Arriving in Armenia, we entered a gas station to fill up the car. There were American-Armenian students there, knowing that we are from Artsakh, they asked 'where are you going?' 'We don't know,' I replied, 'we are thinking of spending the night in the car until morning.'

"They helped us to push the car because we ran out of fuel. They called some American-Armenian, Vrezh, then they said we have found accommodation for you in Abovyan. That's how we ended up here. I am so thankful to these students. Anyway, the period of stay in this hotel has passed, but the owner is a kind person, he says he knows that if he were to drive us away in the cold winter, we would have nowhere to go. All the same, we know that we cannot stay here forever," Shoushan said. "I am mom of 4, I had to send the older two to Russia, to relatives, and we live in this one room with my other two children. We have been looking for an apartment for rent for more than a month, but the prices are too high for us. Neither I nor my husband can find a job. I have worked in the medical field in Artsakh for many years, but they don't hire me here, they say we can't hire people over 50."

She continued, "They say you should go to a border village so that the government will support you. I was displaced three times. Firstly when I was 17, during the first Karabakh war I was displaced from Martakert, in 2020 we were displaced from Aknaghbyur, my husband's village and then from Stepanakert, in 2023. That's enough, I'm afraid, I don't want to."

Shoushan's husband, Vova Hayrapetyan, 60, said, "Our future here is very uncertain, if this continues, then our life in Armenia will become impossible, and we will have to think about emigrating. We cannot survive in Armenia with this kind of social support from the Armenian government."

He continued, "We will spread around the world like Diaspora Armenians. We are already separated, but at least we are in Armenia. We won't be able to see each other even on sad occasions. We can hardly keep our identity. Maybe some 20 years, but it will be difficult. After all, we have already scattered all over Armenia. Even if a hundred years pass, I will speak the Artsakh dialect. My daughter is in Russia. When she calls, we always speak our Artsakh dialect and I will always speak our dialect with my grandchildren."

Like Vova and Shoushan, the main reason many Artsakh refugees are considering leaving Armenia is social difficulties.

On February 27, the National Assembly of Artsakh, working in exile in Armenia, issued a statement regarding the proposed support programs for compatriots forcibly

displaced from Artsakh developed by the Armenian government:

"The plan being discussed in connection with the purchase of housing for the people displaced from Artsakh is unacceptable, which, as a result of the comprehensive political and social discussion of the issue, will obviously not meet the minimum expectations and expectations of our forcibly displaced compatriots.

"Making such decisions will lead to the disappointment and dissatisfaction of our compatriots, as a result of which the emigration and the wave of protests will be stimulated," the statement reads

Lusine Gharakhanyan, the former Minister of Education of Artsakh, also believes that it will be difficult for the Artsakh Armenians to keep their identity, dialect, cuisine and culture.

"The large-scale war instigated by Azerbaijan on September 27, 2020 and then on September 19, 2023, the forced displacement of Artsakh residents, was 21st-century genocide, which until today, unfortunately, hasn't received an adequate response," Gharakhanyan said. "Maybe it is also our fault that we are not fighting in the necessary target audiences. How many

pregnant women lost their babies during the [Artsakh] blockade? How many people with diabetes died? There are no statistics on how many children have become mentally ill after being displaced or how many adults have ended up in mental hospitals. We are in a very difficult psychological situation. Sometimes it feels like we've fallen into an abyss," Gharakhanyan tells the Armenian Mirror-Spectator.

She continued, "Along with all these, many other problems arise. For example, the Artsakh dialect. It can only be preserved where it was created, in the landscape where people spoke that dialect. It will not be possible to preserve it in other places, if it is not a settlement where all the Armenians of Artsakh are. It seems that we have adapted [in Armenia], but we are not, we are divided, we are tense. We don't see any possibility and ways to fight for the physical territory of Artsakh, but at least we have to fight for the historical and cultural heritage of Artsakh, no matter how much time it takes."

She lamented that no systematic programs have been put in place to preserve the culture of Artsakh, which has distinct differences from that of Armenia. "We are experiencing

the second stage of ethnocide and genocide. Our children are experiencing the second stage of stress. Thousands of children have suffered psychological shocks and no one is responsible for this. Now those children must find the strength to overcome the dialect barrier here in Armenia, which is also a stress for them. Although we are the same nation, Artsakh had its own peculiarities in terms of traditions and dialect."

For her, there is only one solution. "We must return to our homeland, which has belonged to our ancestors for thousands of years, where we created our customs, our cuisine. We have our mountain mentality and values," Gharakhanyan said. "This is about the tragedy of 140,000 people. Each one is an individual story, an individual tragedy. Each of them is a message to the international community that the 21st century is a destructive one. The civilized world should not tolerate this terror against children. The self-determination of the Artsakh people should be respected. and, parallel to it, the right to preserve the identity of the people. We cannot preserve our identity outside our homeland, it will just be a continuation of the same ethnocide," concluded Gharakhanyan.

Living in Kotayk, Dreaming of Artsakh

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Empty houses and the property of Artsakh Armenians (refugees) is another topic to talk about. Usually, they are pleased to hear that the doors of the apartments are sealed and are under the protection of Russian peacekeepers. But footage regularly appears on Azerbaijani social media, where it is clearly seen how they enter people's houses and throw their belongings on the streets. Moreover, today the news about the demolition of the Artsakh parliament building became known.

Armenia's Parliamentary Speaker, Alen Simonyan, says much the same as Sahak Sahakyan: "It became obvious in more than a dozen episodes that our ally (Russia) is not helping us."

On February 22, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan criticized the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in an interview with France24, saying the organization did not intervene in 2021 nor 2022, and similarly did not prevent Azerbaijan's attacks against Armenia. He concluded that Armenia has "frozen" its participation in the CSTO.

In response, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that it is time for Armenia to decide on its status in the CSTO.

"The statements of the Armenian authorities that it was Russia that provoked Azerbaijan to start a war against Armenia in September 2020, accusing us of everything, including betraying the people of Nagorno-Karabakh — let's call a spade a spade, it's nothing but an outright lie," said Lavrov at the press conference following the Antalya Diplomatic Forum over the weekend.

As for why the CSTO did not intervene to prevent attacks against Armenia, the second president of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, said earlier that it would be naive to think that this structure would intervene, while at the same time, he said he believes that Armenia should remain a member of the CSTO.

"All the CSTO member countries have much better relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, therefore it would be naive to think that the CSTO can intervene when Azerbai-

jan attacks us. It is simply out of the question. The CSTO is not a dead structure; it simply operates where everyone's interests coincide, as we saw in the case of Kazakhstan. Should we stay or not in the CSTO, of course we should. First of all, there is no other structure to replace CSTO. We should remain a member of that structure, but not get our hopes up in terms of security," said Kocharyan.

He added, in the case of Karabakh, the CSTO could not be involved at all, taking into account its status and the Russian contingent stationed there (which is still located there), was considered the guarantor of Karabakh's security.

After the signing of the statement on November 9, 2020, when Russian peacekeeping cotangent were stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh, the locals felt a sense of security and peace. They believed and wished that the Russians would stay in Artsakh, not for five years, as stipulated in the contract, but far longer, to guarantee the security of the Armenian population.

However, the shootings did not stop in Artsakh. As a result of the 2020 war, the Artsakh and Azerbaijani military positions were located very close to each other, and the Azerbaijani military regularly fired at Armenian farmers, preventing them from doing agricultural work. Such incidents usually ended only with statements that the Artsakh authorities had informed the Russian peacekeepers.

On March 24, 2022, when the Azerbaijan is occupied the village of Parukh, which was being protected by the Russian peacekeepers, Artsakh Armenians began to distrust and disillusionment with the Russian peacekeepers. Later when the only vital road connecting Artsakh to Armenia — the Lachin Corridor — was closed by Azerbaijani "eco activists," the distrust of the Artsakh Armenians grew. A group of activists holding posters "We need true peacekeepers" blocked the entrance to the military unit of Russian peacekeepers in Ivanyan (Khojalu).

The desire of the Artsakh Armenians is being fulfilled today, but in a different way. Russian peacekeepers continue to stay in Artsakh, and yet the residents have left. The Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman

Maria Zakharova cynically stated that there is no evidence of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno Karabakh.

"As for the claims about ethnic cleansing in Karabakh, it would be desirable to see evidence. If there is at least a document by any international organization that is considered reputable in Yerevan, for example, the United Nations or any other organization... if there is at least one document or any statement that would testify that such ethnic cleansing took place, please provide us with reference to those documents," Zakharova said in January.

Of course, the proof is that the entire population of Nagorno Karabakh was forced to relocate to the Republic of Armenia. No one leaves their home on a whim.

After the 2020 and 2023 Artsakh wars, Armenia's Kotayk region accepted the most refugees from Nagorno Karabakh. About 20 families from there live in Ptghni village in Kotayk, locals say. Arriving in the village, one immediately notice them. Some are in a ruined church sacrificing and praying, the others buy bread from the store and go their rented home.

Luba Aleksanyan's family is one of them.

"In 1991, our home in the Khandadzor village (Hadrut region, Artsakh) was set on fire because of the war. We came to Hadrut and built a new home from scratch. It seemed that we would finally live in peace, but no, we lost everything again in 2020. My husband and I are disabled people. We cannot build a new home again. We are old, we survive somehow here in Armenia, without any help," said Luba Aleksanyan.

"Every day, every second, I am waiting to return to my beloved Karabakh, if it is possible to live safely there. No matter how hard it was in Karabakh, it was home. Our walls kept us warm, a piece of bread is enough for me, just to be in my home. I don't know if another war starts here in Armenia, I don't know what will happen to us. 1915 (the Genocide) is an example for you. I have a feeling that we are in a pot with a lid on it, surrounded on all sides. I don't know who can guarantee our security. I just want peace. I want to return to my Karabakh," she concluded.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

Mirzoyan Meets with Turkish Counterpart

YEREVAN (Armenpress)

— On March 1, on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan had a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye Hakan Fidan. Special representatives for normalization of relations between the two countries also took part in the meeting, the Armenian foreign ministry said.

According to the source, the interlocutors discussed the normalization process of relations between Armenia and Türkiye and reaffirmed the willingness to reach full normalization of relations. Views were exchanged on possible concrete steps in that direction. Bayramov 3-9

Azeri FM Meets with Lavrov

ANTALYA, Turkey (Armenpress) — During a meeting held in Turkey over the weekend, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov highlighted the importance of the implementation of trilateral agreements between Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

“The need to implement tripartite agreements between the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia from 2020-2022 has been confirmed. The commitment to continue working together within various multilateral formats, including the “Caspian five” and the 3+3 Consultative Regional Platform, was emphasized,” the statement reads.

The parties also discussed bilateral relations and their future development prospects.

The Lavrov-Bayramov meeting took place during the Antalya Diplomacy Forum.

Rubinyan Says Armenia Will Not Give Corridor to Azerbaijan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenia has never agreed to provide extraterritorial corridor to Azerbaijan, the deputy speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia, Ruben Rubinyan said on Friday, March 1 at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Turkey.

“Armenia’s position is that the unblocking of regional communications in the South Caucasus should take place based on the principles of sovereignty, legislation, territorial integrity, equality, and reciprocity.

It’s very simple, we agree to it, the President of Azerbaijan agrees to it, we put it on paper, and we implement it,” said Rubinyan.

The deputy speaker of the National Assembly added that sometimes the terms used reveal the true intentions of those who use them. “For example, why has Armenia decided to call its initiative to unblock communications in the region ‘Crossroads of Peace’? Because we want our region to be a crossroads of peace.

Georgia Bishop Concerned About Loss of Identity, Unity

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He said, “Today, taking into consideration the ease of [various] pleasures, many forget — and this is not only about our Armenians but about our youth in general — their traditions and the importance of family sanctity and the church in their lives. They grow distant from the Armenian identity and church. Today, as it is possible to say about all youth in Georgia, this is the chief problem for our youth.”

The bishop, 41, is a native of Tbilisi who, after graduating a local secondary school, studied at the Gevorgian Theological Seminary of Echmiadzin in Armenia. In 2006, after being ordained a celibate priest, he served in a variety of positions, in Georgia, Australia, Russia and Armenia, before returning to the Georgian diocese as locum tenens in 2019 and then Primate in 2022. He was ordained a bishop in October 2023.

Population

According to the last Georgian census, in 2014, there were 53,409 Armenians in Tbilisi and 168,100 in all of Georgia, making them the second largest ethnic minority after Azerbaijanis. However, Bishop Davtyan declared that these official figures were low, as many cannot participate in the census because their employment is outside the country. He said that there were approximately 250,000 Armenians in the country, the majority living in the Javakhs region, and the rest in the regions of Tbilisi, Batumi, Ajaria and Marneuli. In Tbilisi, he said that though officially there are 38,000 members registered to the Armenian Church, there are about 70,000 Armenians.

The majority of the Armenian men in the Javakhs region are in Russia during much of the year in order to earn their livelihoods and support their families back home. There is a smaller percentage of Armenians who do this in Tbilisi.

The majority of the Armenians of Georgia came to the country after the Armenian Genocide from nearly all the regions of Western Armenia, Bishop Davtyan said, though there are a good number of natives, especially in Tbilisi. He noted that the Armenian population of Georgia has decreased greatly compared to the Soviet period, when there were as many as half a million Armenians. From Tiflis, Davtyan said, Armenians tend to emigrate more to Europe whereas from Javakhs and Batumi, they tend to relocate to Russia. Georgian Armenians also have emigrated to many other places in the West, like the US, France, United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Canada, he added.

In the Marneuli region, which is in southeastern Georgia and borders both Azerbaijan and Armenia, Azeri and Armenian villages are next to each other. Bishop Davtyan said that there are villages sometimes where the population is half Armenian and half Azeri. In some of these villages, there is only one school, which is Armenian, so the Azeri children have to attend this school. He said, “Relations there are normal. There have been, of course, some tensions during the Artsakh war but these did not turn into big fights or enmity. There have been some incidents on both sides, but they have not expanded into greater clashes.”

He also noted that no Artsakh Armenians have come to Georgia after the recent events.

Bishop Davtyan said that Armenian Catholics live primarily in the Javakhs and

Akhaltskha areas, and that he has very good, warm relations with their clergy. He added that there are some Protestant Armenian churches in Georgia with Armenian leadership, but their numbers are very small. There is one in Tbilisi and one in Javakhs.

Javakhs

Unlike the rest of Georgia, Bishop Davtyan said that in Javakhs (Javakheti in Georgian), a region in southern Georgia next to the Armenian border, where Armenians constitute the ethnic majority, 100 percent of the population speaks Armenian and has studied in Armenian-language schools. There are Armenian schools in every village there, and the whole curriculum is in Armenian. The Georgian language and history are also taught.

While the strong Armenian cultural identity in Javakhs is enviable, it also creates a problem. Davtyan said, “Although being a part of Georgia, and Georgian citizens, the

speaking with the government. There are retraining issues. When new teachers are sent to work for a certain amount of time there [to Javakhs], let it be for one or two years, they should be Georgian, so that they can speak Georgian and the student when communicating with his teacher is forced to learn Georgian.”

Educational and Cultural Activity

The Armenian Church plays an important cultural as well as religious role in Georgia. Bishop Davtyan pointed to the loss of identity taking place there, and said, “This is why we attempt more to attract to the church through our activities and our offices, so youth have the opportunity to serve church and through their service and work spread the word to their coevals, preaching church, family, and traditions. Today our concern is to maintain traditions.”

One issue, he said, is simply that due to the decrease in the Georgian-Armenian



Frescos by Hovnatan Hovnatanian adorn the deteriorating interior of the 16th century Surb Astvatsatsin Norashen Church in Tbilisi, July 2023, which is still in a frozen status, though its return is requested by the Armenian Diocese (photo Aram Arkun)

Javakhs Armenians do not speak Georgian. This creates issues with the regime. Imagine that a Javakhs deputy in the Georgian Parliament cannot speak Georgian.”

This has led to campaigns by the Georgian government to encourage learning Georgian, he continued, but there is a second, related issue. If the teacher of Georgian in a Javakhs school was himself born in Javakhs and does not know Georgian well, he cannot teach it well to the students. Davtyan said, “The state must secure good Georgian teachers. I always say this when

population after independence, many intellectuals and artists now live and create abroad, especially in Armenia.

Around half of the Georgian Armenians today speak Armenian, though they do not know how to read and write. Only a small number in Tbilisi can read and write as well as speak Armenian. Most graduated Russian or Georgian-language schools. There are only two Armenian schools in Tbilisi, the bishop said, though 20 years ago there were 11.

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All schools in Georgia are state-run, including the Armenian ones and there are no Armenian universities in Georgia. Those who know the Georgian language better tend to go to various universities in Tbilisi, while those who want to continue their education in Armenian go to Armenia. As Bishop Davtyan declared, “Thank God, Armenia is not very distant.”

Bishop Davtyan said that in the cities where there are Armenian churches, next to each church is what in the US we would call Saturday or Sunday schools. They are primarily for people who have not attended Armenian schools but want to learn Armenian and their history and literature. In



Shamkoretsots Surb Astvatsatsin Church, also known as the Church of the Red Gospel (Karmir Avetaran), in the historically Armenian quarter of Avlabari (Havlabar) lies in ruins (photo Aram Arkun)



Georgia they are called cultural centers.

Davtyan said, “Everywhere in our churches throughout Georgia we teach the Armenian language and literature. We have placed the emphasis more on culture, so that their song, dance, instruments, traditional clothing, and Armenian cuisine (especially for future brides) are studied. There are Armenian festivals concerning different Armenian foods which are conducted throughout Georgia. For example, recently we did the *harissa* festival during Poon Paregentan [“Day of Good Living” feast before the fast of Lent]. We have a *dolma* festival. We have a *ghapama* [stuffed, baked pumpkin] festival [during *michink*, the median day (halfway point) of Lent].”

He explained who the target audience for these festivals is: “These are first of all for our people, so that they learn, especially the young generation, about what historical foods we have, but also, we invite our friend nationalities, whoever wants to come or participate can come. There are also families which want to learn how to make these Armenian dishes, and they participate in the festivals afterwards.”

There are a variety of Armenian cultural organizations in Georgia. Some of them are affiliated with the Diocese and some are not, but most seem to work with it. The Vernatun Union of Armenian Writers of Georgia, for example, cooperates closely with the church. The Armenian Painters Union, Armenian Doctors Union and many other such associations, which often started in the Soviet era, work under the patronage of the Diocese. The Diocese also runs the Hovhannes Tumanyan House-Museum in Tbilisi.

The Petros Atamian Tbilisi State Armenian Drama Theater, founded in the mid-19th century, is being renovated by the Georgian state, Davtyan said, and will reopen this year by the summer or fall at the latest. Internal technical issues like lighting are now being completed. The drama group itself continues its activities in different

parts of Georgia. It has performed several times in the Shota Rustaveli central theater of Tbilisi and the Griboedov Theater, as well in Armenia. The majority of its presentations, Davtyan continued, are in the Armenian language, though sometimes the works of new authors of Tbilisi and Georgia use a mixture of Georgian and Armenian words.

There are two Armenian-language newspapers published in Georgia, and several other periodicals. The Republic of Georgia supports the “official” weekly newspaper called *Vrastan* [Georgia]. Bishop Davtyan observed that there is a general press body belonging to the state Ministry of Culture which oversees its finances as well as that of other newspapers. He said, “It is a completely Armenian newspaper, all written in Armenian, and dealing with Georgian-Armenian issues as well as Armenia. It is possible to say that it is a fully independent newspaper. It has no problem on writing on any issue connected with Armenia and the Armenians.” There is also *Arevik*, a children’s monthly written in the Armenian language, and the Georgian-Armenian Writers Union publishes a yearbook.

There is an active non-governmental organization, *Vrastani Hay Hamaynk* [The Armenian Community of Georgia], which officially was founded in 2008 in Tbilisi but with roots in an earlier organization dating from 2004. Bishop Davtyan said that it publishes its own Armenian-language newspaper, *Miutyun* [Union], which also deals with Armenian issues, concerning Georgia, Armenia and the diaspora. The organization itself carries out various youth and cultural activities. According to its website, its goals are to form an organized and strong community to protect its collective rights, help the Georgian state prosper, and promote friendly and mutually beneficial relations between Georgia and Armenia.

Davtyan said that there are no newspapers in the Georgian language, but there is a Russian-language newspaper concerning minorities living in Georgia, includ-

ing Armenians, called *Kavkaski Vestnik* [Caucasian Bulletin]. He said that there are some Armenians among its editors, along with others. There are also various Internet-based news sites for Georgian Armenians.

Bishop Davtyan pointed out that a number of translations of books of Armenian authors into Georgian have been published recently. At present, there is a project to translate the *David of Sasun* epic into Georgian. He said, “We do all this not for our Armenians to read and understand but to introduce our Armenian [heritage] to Georgians.”

The various schools get textbooks in the Armenian language from Armenia, and teaching of the Armenian language, Davtyan said, is done simply in Armenian. Armenian history and literature at the various cultural centers are usually taught in the Russian or Georgian languages, depending on what is appropriate for the current group of students. Teachers prepare their lectures without a concrete textbook, translating whatever is necessary.

Davtyan noted one important factor which helps in preserving Armenian identity in Georgia. He said, “Maintaining ties with Armenia is not difficult for the youth. Those who desire it can keep relations with Armenia. Youth groups on different occasions always visit Armenia, while various types of groups come here from Armenia... We are adjoining [countries] and can visit Armenia at any time. What is important is the desire.”

Disputes over Control of Churches and Cemeteries

There are only two working Armenian churches today in Tbilisi, St. Echmiadzin and St. Gevorg, which is where the headquarters of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of Georgia is located (many know of it because it is where the tombstone of the famous minstrel Sayat Nova is located).

There were many more Armenian churches in Tbilisi prior to the Soviet period, as the population of the city was majority Armenian. During the Soviet period, the government confiscated most church edifices, Armenian and Georgian, and some were destroyed. At the end of the Soviet period, churches began to be restored to their original owners, but Georgian nationalism led to attempts to take over originally Armenian churches.

The return to Armenians of historically Armenian churches that were made Georgian Orthodox at the end of the Soviet period, Bishop Davtyan said, will be a dif-

ficult thing to achieve. However, there are churches which are called contested. Their status has been frozen by the state. Bishop Davtyan said that their status appears more resolvable at present and the Armenian Church continues to attempt to get them returned.

He said, “We on our part each time, on every appropriate occasion, and through letters and other suitable methods, make reminders about these churches that we as the Armenian community, the Armenian Church, await their return.”

Some of the contested churches whose status is frozen are in a physically precarious state, requiring renovations. For example, Bishop Davtyan said, “As far as the Shamkoretsots Karmir Avetaran [Red Gospel] Church is concerned, this is a half-ruined church. Great efforts are being carried out so that we can, at least in the area adjoining that church, conserve it until there is a decision about transferal, and at that time we can restore it.” Nearby construction projects at present endanger the state of the remaining parts of this church.

The old and extremely large Armenian cemetery of Tbilisi was taken over by the Georgian Church which erected a gigantic new cathedral, the Holy Trinity Cathedral, commonly known as Sameba, on its territory between 1995 and 2004. Only a small portion of the Armenian cemetery remains at Khojavank (or Khojivank). Also known as the Armenian Pantheon, this is where many famous Armenian intellectuals such as the 19th century writers Raffi (Hakob Melik-Hakobian), Grigor Artsruni, and Hovhannes Tumanyan are buried.

Bishop Davtyan said, “At this time, the pantheon is being renovated and this will be completed by next summer.” He noted that when stones with Armenian inscriptions that were not tombstones were found during renovations of various parts of the city, such as at a bridge or school, they were brought to the pantheon, along with a few gravestones.

Message for the World’s Armenians

Bishop Davtyan concluded his interview with a message for all Armenians. He said, “I would like all Armenians to be more united at this time. I would like Armenians to stay at each other’s sides, not divided into various political, and public associations, like Dashnak or Hnchak, but stay Armenian... At this moment, when the homeland is facing such a difficult situation, we outside, in Georgia as the near diaspora, and you there in the distant diaspora, must be much more united.”

INTERNATIONAL

Pashinyan, Mirzoyan Visit Egypt to Bolster Ties

CAIRO (Armenpress/news.am) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan arrived in Egypt for a two-day official visit, on March 5.

Upon arrival at Cairo International Airport, Pashinyan was received by his Egyptian counterpart, Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli.

The day's agenda included an exclusive private between Pashinyan and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, followed by a comprehensive meeting in an extended format.

Al-Sisi said that Pashinyan's visit to Egypt confirms the interest and determination of both sides for the development and strengthening of cooperation. That cooperation will serve the interests of both peoples, also relying on the long-standing historical relations that bind the two countries, he added.

"Thousands of Armenians lived in Egypt and contributed to the development of Egyptian society in various spheres: politics, economy, culture, art. I am happy to note that our today's negotiations confirmed the willingness of both countries to increase the volume of trade, as well as to strengthen the investment component between the two sides, which will correspond to the level of political relations between the two countries. Cooperation can develop in new areas as well, in particular, information technologies, artificial intelligence, food and pharmaceutical industry. Also, during today's discussions, we confirmed the willingness to exchange Egypt's experience in the fields of infrastructure, construction, transport and electricity production. Also, we will benefit from the Armenian experience, specifically from those Armenian companies that stand out in the field of artificial intelligence," al-Sisi added.

During the discussions, the sessions of bilateral commissions for economic and technical cooperation were particularly

emphasized.

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi presented to the Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan the efforts that Egypt is making to achieve a cease-fire in the occupied Gaza Strip, as well as in the West Bank, which will allow for the establishment of an autonomous Palestinian Republic, based on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"It is necessary to establish peace in the region instead of war and destruction. Also, during these negotiations, we confirmed Egypt's support for any initiatives that seek to establish peace and stability in the South Caucasus region. We express our full support to the dialogue and negotiation process that will establish a comprehensive, just peace," al-Sisi said.

Pashinyan noted that Armenia regrets the tens of thousands of innocent casualties as a result of the escalation of military operations in Gaza.

"We [Armenians] ourselves have experienced the disaster of [Azerbaijani] attacks on the civilian population and civilian infrastructure, and we join the calls of the international community for the establishment of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. In this matter, we laud the steps being taken by Egypt to ensure uninterrupted access of humanitarian aid to Gaza, to receive wounded Palestinians, and to evacuate foreigners. We discussed as well, and we need the assistance and advice of our Egyptian partners regarding our delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, and I thank President El-Sisi for his willingness to help in this matter. The foreign ministers will deal with this matter. As for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Armenia has always supported the 'two states' principle adopted by the international community," Pashinyan noted.

During his stay, Pashinyan held bilateral talks with Prime Minister Madbouli, Secretary General of the League of Arab States Ahmed Abdul Gheit, Pope Tawadros II of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and Sheikh



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, left, with Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli

Ahmed Muhammad Al-Tayyib, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.

In addition, Pashinyan met with leaders from the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, who was accompanying Pashinyan, on March 5 met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry.

The two highlighted the role of regular high-level reciprocal visits in expanding the scope of Armenian-Egyptian interaction and further developing cooperation in mutual interest domains. Regional security issues were also discussed during the meeting.

Mirzoyan addressed Armenia's continuous efforts to establish long-term peace and stability in the South Caucasus, presenting to his Egyptian counterpart the recent discussions in the process of regulating Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.

He stressed that Armenia's approaches to key issues are fair and legitimate, based on the need to respect well-known principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and jurisdiction. In the context of unblocking regional infrastructures, Ararat Mirzoyan emphasized Armenia's clearly expressed interest and political will to advance the process based on the principles of reciprocity and equality.

Germany Hosts Armenian-Azerbaijan Talks – And Then?

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN — On February 28-29, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock met with her counterparts from Armenia and Azerbaijan, Ararat Mirzoyan and Jeyhun Bayramov, respectively.

The two-day discussions held in the foreign ministry's guest house, Villa Borsig, in Berlin were characterized in official releases as "negotiations" centered on perspectives of the draft bilateral Agreement on Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between the two nations. Baerbock first held separate talks, then, prior to a trilateral meeting, stated, "We believe that Armenia and Azerbaijan now have an opportunity to achieve an enduring peace after years of painful conflict." She added, "What we're seeing now are courageous steps by both countries to put the past behind and to work toward a durable peace for their people."

In a government press conference held after the talks, press speaker Kathrin Deuschauer was tightlipped about specific results, saying only that it could be gleaned from the participants' statements that "the process would continue." She said that was "already a step that seems slightly optimistic." Both visiting foreign ministers had expressed their "appreciation" for the context offered by Germany and were interested in



From left, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov on February 28 in Berlin.

clarifying open questions together, etc. To this end, they planned to meet again and continue the search for a peace agreement.

That a meeting took place at all, is all to be welcomed. But it was much ado about nothing, or at least as far as we know. Much more could have, and should have taken place.

Prior to the encounter, a joint statement was issued by the Central Council of Ar-

menians in Germany (ZAD), the Working Group Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA), and the Society for Threatened Peoples (GbV), which defined the conditions for progress in such talks. "Anyone who is interested in peace in the South Caucasus must name the perpetrators by name and act accordingly. Azerbaijan's foreign minister," it went on, "represents a dictatorship, that is responsible for the

expulsion of 100,000 Armenians from Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh." That expulsion followed a blockade in violation of international law, characterized by human rights groups and the human rights expert Luis Moreno Ocampo as genocidal.

The ZAD, AGA, and GbV, recalling the continuing violations by Azerbaijan that threaten Armenia's territorial integrity, write that the German government has no right "to continue to support this aggressive and hostile policy of the dictator in Baku and force Armenia to a 'peace' dictated by Azerbaijan." Instead of engaging in such a "farce," the government should "threaten Azerbaijan with effective sanctions, in the event of further acts of military aggression." The statement calls for Berlin to "clearly and publicly condemn the expulsion of the 100,000 Armenians, demand legal prosecution of this crime, and intervene to secure the liberation of the political prisoners, including three former presidents of Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh." The call ends with a condemnation of Azerbaijan's destruction of Armenian cultural heritage and a demand for effective action.

"Direct dialogue like today and tomorrow is the best way to make further progress," Baerbock said in her schoolmarm voice. A solution to the longstanding conflict is not going to come with good wishes and pious suggestions, but with effective political action.



Community News

Zoryan Institute's President Dedicates Order of Canada Recognition to Memory Of Righteous Turk

OTTAWA — On February 22, 60 new members were invested into the Order of Canada at Rideau Hall in Ottawa. The Order of Canada is a Canadian state order and the second-highest honor for merit in the system of order, decorations, and medals in the system of Canada, bestowed on individuals in recognition of their extraordinary contributions to Canada. Among those invested was the co-founder and current president of the Zoryan Institute, K.M. Greg Sarkissian, for his lifelong contributions to the field of genocide and human rights studies.

Sarkissian was recognized and awarded the Order of Canada insignia by Mary Simon, governor general of Canada. He was introduced with the following description:

"A Canadian of Armenian descent, Greg Sarkissian is a well-esteemed community leader and activist. He is the co-founder and main patron of the Zoryan Institute, which strives to promote historically accurate analyses of large-scale traumatic events through multidisciplinary research, publications, and curricula. By establishing a graduate-level university program, he has helped Canada become an international destination for studies in genocide and human rights. Deeply involved with various minority groups and ethnic communities across Canada, he fights against the us-versus-them mentality with a compassionate approach that fuels his international reputation."

When asked about what prompted him to co-found the Zoryan Institute, Sarkissian cited two pivotal incidents which had impacted and inspired him in his endeavor. The first incident was a personal story about a great humanitarian, Haji Khalil, a pious Muslim Turk from Urfa, Turkey, who saved the lives of Sarkissian's grandmother and her children; while the second, was the tragic fate of the 11 members of one family who were all killed in the 1930s in Germany simply for being Jewish. He finished by dedicating the recognition and his investiture into the Order of Canada to the memory of this great Turkish humanitarian and those 11 family members.

Sarkissian's life is marked by his own experience growing up with parents who survived the Armenian Genocide. His personal story tells of a Haji Khalil, his maternal grandfather's Turkish business partner, who had promised to take care of his grandfather's family in case of any misfortune. When Sarkissian's grandfather was subsequently hanged by the Ottoman Turkish authorities and the deportations of the Armenians from their ancestral homeland began, Haji Khalil kept his promise by hiding Greg Sarkissian's pregnant grandmother, her sister and their children in the upper story of his house for 8 months. The logistics involved were extremely burdensome:

see ZORYAN, page 8



From left, Randy Sapah Gulian, Bishop Parsamyan and Carl Bazarian

Carl Bazarian Receives Honors from Armenian Church, Government

NEW YORK — Carl Bazarian, one of the co-founders of the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) and the vice chairman of the FAR Board of Directors, has received distinguished recognition from both the Government of Armenia and the Mother See of Echmiadzin.

Bazarian was bestowed with the Gold Medal of the Government of Armenia, an honor acknowledging his exceptional support for the Armenian people spanning an impressive 35-year period. In addition to this, Catholicos Karekin II conferred upon him the Order of Nerses Shnorhali, an award from the Mother See of Echmiadzin. This recognition underscores Bazarian's service to the Armenian Church and the people of Armenia, including his role in various Armenian Mission Parishes within the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern). Notably, he serves as the Godfather and Founder of the St. Nerses Shnorhali of Jacksonville, Fla., where a new church is slated to be consecrated in March by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, the Primate of the Diocese.

Bazarian's commitment to the Armenian Church and the Armenian people traces back to the mid-1990s during his tenure as the chairman of the Armenian Assembly of America. Even earlier, in 1989, while at the US Treasury, he played a crucial role in supporting a historic airlift, collaborating closely with the White House and DOD, delivering vital humanitarian assistance to the children of Gyumri (then Leninakan) after a devastating earthquake struck the region in December 1988. He was pivotal in spearheading multimillion-dollar assistance to Armenia with US Agency for International Development ID and US Department of Agriculture during the early years of Armenian independence.

In 2003, Bazarian was honored with the Ellis Island Medal of Honor for his accomplishments in emerging markets investment programs and his significant contributions to the humanitarian and economic development of the Republic of Armenia.

While he has always been an active supporter of the Armenian people, his experience as one of the 155 survivors of the "Miracle on the Hudson" plane crash 15 years ago, was a life changing moment that solidified his commitment to helping his fellow brothers and sisters in Armenia and those forcibly displaced from Artsakh.

After landing on the Hudson River, the passengers set out to immediately evacuate via rafts. The river's strong current capsized one of the rafts and began to carry it away, threatening to strand passengers who had evacuated onto the nearest aircraft wing. Bazarian and two other passengers clasped hands to form a human chain, and reached over the water's surface and caught the raft. They flipped it right side up and then began helping women and children aboard first. When a man went into the water, he and another passenger hauled him aboard.

He says that following this life affirming experience he was forced to ask himself, "How am I going to live my life now?" The answer: by dedicating himself to helping those in need and devoting his time and tireless energy to providing exceptional service to the people of Armenia.

Date Set for Memorial Honoring Armenian Assembly's Arpi Vartanian

WASHINGTON — A memorial service and luncheon honoring the life of Arpi Vartanian, the Assembly's Regional Director in Yerevan, Armenia, will take place on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church in Dearborn, Mich.

A longtime staff member of the Assembly, Vartanian served the organization in numerous capacities, both at its headquarters in Washington, D.C., including a stint as Acting Executive Director, and in its regional office in Yerevan, for nearly three decades.

During her tenure with the organization, Vartanian served as the conduit between the homeland and the U.S., helped raise public awareness of Armenian issues with U.S. and other officials, spearheaded educational initiatives, coordinated and participated in meetings with members of government and community leaders, collaborated with national and international organizations, and connected with youth from the Diaspora and Armenia, including leading the Assembly's Yerevan Summer Internship Program, which was established in 1999.

"We deeply miss Arpi's presence as a longtime colleague and friend, and we appreciate the opportunity to



Arpi Vartanian

pay tribute to her at her memorial service and luncheon in her hometown of Detroit at St. Sarkis Armenian Church," said Assembly Executive Director Bryan Ardouny.

In lieu of flowers, the Vartanian Family has asked donations to be made to the Armenian Assembly of America's "Arpi Vartanian Armenia Internship Fund," an endowed fund for the Assembly's Yerevan Internship Program, a program she pioneered and led since its inception in 2007. Gifts can also be mailed to: Armenian Assembly of America, 1032 15th St, NW, Suite 416, Washington, DC 20005.

The Assembly will also honor Arpi's memory by dedicating an office in her name at the Assembly's new headquarters in Washington, D.C.

St. Sarkis is located at 19300 Ford Road, Dearborn. A memorial service will take place in Yerevan, Armenia, later this year.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Zoryan Institute Dedicates Order of Canada Recognition to Memory of Righteous Turk

ZORYAN, from page 7

there were seven people to hide, food for seven extra mouths to be purchased, prepared, and carried up undetected nightly which had to suffice until the following night.

Khalil's consideration was so deep that he even arranged for his own family to be absent from their house at least once a week, taking them to the mosque, so that Greg's grandmother, sister, and their children could bathe. Khalil exposed himself to tremendous risk and his situation was precarious, as even his servants were aware of what was transpiring and they could have easily informed the authorities. Had he been caught sheltering Armenians he would certainly have shared the same fate as the Armenians and faced death. Luckily, his household remained loyal and discreet, and therefore, Sarkissian was one of the very few children of his generation and in his neighborhood to grow up with aunts and uncles, all of whom remembered Haji Khalil, the righteous Turk. The memory of Khalil and his sacrifice, contrasting with the horrors of the genocide perpetrated by Ottoman Turkey, represents an innermost tension which became the motivation of Greg's life and the fight against the "us-versus-them" mentality.

During his university years, Sarkissian had attended a lecture on "Genocide and Media", run by Hilel, a Jewish student association on the campus. The lecturer



Pictured from left to right: ZI President K.M. Greg Sarkissian and Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada (Photo via Office of Governor General)

displayed a major US newspaper from the 1930s, with a man's picture and a front-page article featuring a headline about the man, who had beaten his dog to death, and

his community's uproar for the lack of punishment for such a crime. Several pages later, on page 26, underneath an advertisement about women's swimwear, was

a small caption, in a 1-inch square, about the murder of 11 people belonging to the same Jewish family. This was disturbing for Sarkissian. He described how these two moments became pivotal motivations for his co-founding of Zoryan Institute.

Sarkissian found profound significance in receiving the Order of Canada from Simon, herself, an Indigenous Canadian and descendant of genocide survivors. That, together with Simon's opening remarks in Inuktitut, was viewed by Sarkissian as a symbol of reconciliation between Canada's Indigenous people and its settlers. He then reflected on the closing paragraph of the speech he had given in Yerevan, Armenia in 1995, where he had said:

".....I want to extend my hand to the people of Turkey to ask them to remember that, though, at one time their state was led by mass murders, they also had their Haji Khalil, and that it would honor the memory of the latter, to acknowledge the overwhelming truth of the genocide, to express regrets, so that the healing process may begin between our two people. Because without this healing mass, extermination as a tool of political dominance may become more common in the future. If Armenians and other victims of genocide, do not do everything in their power to pursue the battle against genocide, they would have failed in their responsibility towards future generations.."

Appeals Court Judge Gabrielle Wolohojian, Confirmed For Supreme Judicial Court

WOLOHOJIAN, from page 1

The vote was conducted by the Governor's Council, an elected panel that vets judicial nominees.

While Councilor Tara Jacobs, a North Adams Democrat, said her "no" vote reflected her continued concern "around the process and the implications and the experience that brought us here today," other members asserted they saw the past relationship between Wolohojian and Healey as irrelevant.

"I have never asked a nominee anything about their personal life, and I never will," said Councilor Terry Kennedy of Lynnfield.

Worcester Councilor Paul DePalo tied in the issue of reproductive freedom, saying he'd talked to Wolohojian about the importance of upholding rights and privileges in Massachusetts "that appear to be at risk on the national level."

"That is important to me, because I do not want the government concerning itself with a woman's health care or her bodily autonomy," DePalo said. "And I'll take it a step further. I don't want the government concerning itself with a woman's past — emphasis on past — relationship choices."

Wolohojian has spent 16 years on the Appeals Court bench, where she's written more than 900 decisions. She previously worked at the Boston law firm Hale and Dorr, now known as WilmerHale, and served as independent counsel on the Whitewater investigation involving the Clinton White House.

She is the granddaughter of Armenian immigrants. Her confirmation hearing featured statements of support from members of the local Armenian community.

The vote was not a surprise; several councilors indicated at Wolohojian's hearing last week that they supported her. The almost 4-hour hearing featured little mention of the nominee's past relationship with Healey and no direct questioning around how she planned to handle SJC cases in-

volving the governor's office.

Councilor Marilyn Petitto Devaney, a Watertown Democrat, asked Wolohojian generally if she envisioned needing to recuse herself from any matters before the high court. Wolohojian replied that judges make those decisions on a case-by-case basis.

"I have absolutely no interest and never have in sitting on cases I shouldn't sit on or not sitting in cases I should sit on," Wolohojian said.

Devaney said Wednesday that she was "completely satisfied" with Wolohojian's position on recusals, describing the judge as honest and respectful. She said she couldn't think of anyone more qualified for the role.

During the hearing, Jacobs referred to Wolohojian's ties to Healey as the "elephant in the room," telling the nominee that she was struggling with the optics of Healey's pick. Jacobs said she'd talked with Wolohojian previously "about the recusal question" but did not publicly press her for specifics.

"I wonder if the recusal question ever could pose a challenge at the court, where an otherwise split decision, if you were to recuse yourself, might end up tied and an injustice happened because you weren't participating in a ruling," Jacobs said. "And I really wanted to ask the governor some of these questions, just about the process that she went through."

The Massachusetts Republican Party had urged the Governor's Council, whose members are all Democrats, to reject Wolohojian. Mass. GOP Chair Amy Carnevale called it "highly inappropriate" for Healey to nominate someone with whom she had shared a long-term romantic relationship.

Healey has consistently said her history with Wolohojian shouldn't deprive the court of a talented jurist.

"She was recommended by the prior administration for this position. She was


once again recommended," Healey said on Boston Public Radio on February 27. "I just happen to be the governor. I can't apologize for having had a personal relationship with somebody who is supremely talented."

Healey called Wolohojian's intent to make recusal decisions on a case-by-case

basis the "appropriate answer."


Wolohojian will become the second Healey appointee on the seven-person SJC bench, where the other five justices were all nominated by former Gov. Charlie Baker.

The Governor's Council unanimously confirmed Justice Elizabeth "Bessie" Dewar last month.



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OBITUARY

Dr. Liza Yessayan Dulgarian
Physician, Dedicated to Family, Church

LINCOLN, Mass. — Dr. Liza Yessayan Dulgarian of Lincoln, MA, formerly of Belmont, passed away on February 23, 2024.

She was the wife of the late Harry Dulgarian. She was the mother of Laurel Sarian and her husband Gregory, Gregory Dulgarian and his wife, Rita, Jeffrey Dulgarian and his fiancé, Kelly; grandmother of Elizabeth, Christian and Grace Sarian, and Andrew and Mark Dulgarian; sister of the late Garabed Yessayan and wife Salpi (Nalbandian) Yessayan, Rose (Yessayan) Bazarbashian and late husband Antoine Bazarbashian, and Nazareth Yessayan and wife Alice (Tenkerian) Yessayan; sister-in-law to the late Azad (Dulgarian) Tanielian and her late husband, Harry Tanielian and Virginia (Dulgarian) Harrington and her late husband, Peter Harrington; aunt to Stephanie and Doreen Yessayan, Armen and Vicken Bazarbashian, Melissa and Alex Yessayan, Mary-Jayne and Gregory Tanielian, Lisa (Harrington) Clark and Eric Harrington.

Liza Yessayan Dulgarian was born January 20, 1935, to Leon and Hayganoush Yessayan, both survivors of the Armenian Genocide. She attended and graduated from the American University of Beirut, earning her BS in 1957 and her MD in 1961. Following Medical School, she completed her initial residency at the Children’s Hospital Medical Center in Boston in 1964, followed by fellowships in Neurology at the University of Toronto and Harvard Medical School in Boston. She became an instructor in neurology at the Harvard Medical School in 1969 and then later an assistant professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School in 1972 where she remained on staff until the mid-1990s. She worked as a pediatric neurologist at Children’s Hospital in Boston starting in 1970, retiring from active medical practice in the early 2000s.

Liza met her future husband, Harry Dulgarian, in 1971. Soon after their marriage in 1972, the two set roots in Belmont, where they welcomed their three children: daughter Laurel, and twin sons Gregory and Jeffrey. She and Harry raised their family in Belmont where she lived until Harry’s passing in 2012, after which she relocated to Lincoln. A woman of strong Christian faith, Liza was a long-time

member of the First Armenian Church of Belmont.

She and Harry regularly spent summer weekends at their second home in Moody, Maine, where they enjoyed time at the beach with their family. Over the years, antiquing became a shared hobby for the two, and Saturday mornings before the beach were often occupied by attending auctions, antique halls and yard sales, which they loved to call their “gallivanting,” while every other Saturday evening was spent at the Ogunquit Playhouse, as both had a love of the arts and especially musical theater.

Liza’s greatest joy in life was spending time with her family and watching it grow



with the arrival of her grandchildren. She touched the lives of many through her passionate care of her thousands of patients over forty years of medical practice and her lending ear and positive attitude toward her family, friends, and community.

Memorial Services were held at the First Armenian Church of Belmont, Belmont, on March 2, following a private interment at Highland Meadow Cemetery, Belmont.

Arrangements were by the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to The First Armenian Church of Belmont, 380 Concord Ave, Belmont, MA 02478 and/or the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA Harry & Liza Dulgarian Endowment Fund), 31 West Century Road, Paramus, NJ 07652.



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Arts & Culture

Haig Hovsepien Charms at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church

By Norayr Kherlopian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BELMONT, Mass. — From Boston Symphony Hall to Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church, violinist Haig Hovsepien keeps charming Armenian connoisseurs of classical music at different types of events.

Most recently, Haig and his mother, pianist Ani Hovsepien, presented 12 musical pieces about love for violin and piano at a Valentine Celebration Concert held on February 10, at the Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church. The “genre” and period of the pieces were varied: composers included Edward Elgar, Alfred Schnittke, Faure, Clara Schumann, Fritz Kreisler, George Gershwin, Jascha Heifetz arrangements, Francis Poulenc, Edith Piaf and Sayat Nova/Arno Babajanyan.

Haig’s sensitive interpretation paralleled with great technique satisfied the different cultural moods of the selected music. Ani’s accompaniment was fluent, highly complementary and brilliant.

The evening was an enjoyable spiritual and artistic experience which was highlighted in the closing remarks of Fr. Ghazar Bedrossian. He quoted three great world figures on the importance of love and music, starting with conductor Seiji Ozawa, who had declared, “Music has the



Haig and Ani Hovsepien

power to connect people’s hearts.”

Then he related that opera singer Luciano Pavarotti had said, “For me, music making is the most joyful activity possible, the most perfect expression of any emotion.” Finally, he observed that St. John Paul II has said, “Love causes man to find fulfillment through the sincere gift of self,” and “Love is the explanation of everything.”

After quoting Ennio Morricone’s song *In My Fantasy* from the movie “The Mission,” Fr. Ghazar concluded with the thoughts of the famous German writer Goethe on love: “This is the true measure of love when we believe that we alone can love, that no one could ever have loved so before us, And that no one will ever love in the same way after us.”

In addition to thanking the Hovsepiens, Fr. Ghazar thanked Dikran and Maral Sulahian for the donation of Valentine’s flowers, and the Ladies’ Guild of the church for their preparations.



Ruzan Mantashyan

The Heavenly Début of Ruzan Mantashyan Royal Opera House in London

By Hasmik Seymour

LONDON — On January 24, Armenian soprano Ruzan Mantashyan made her much-anticipated début of at the legendary Royal Opera House in Covent Garden in Puccini’s “La Bohème” (<https://www.roh.org.uk/tickets-and-events/la-boheme-by-richard-jones-details>).

Despite her young age, Mantashyan is already a sought-after soloist across European opera houses, however her London début was delayed for several years due to the COVID outbreak.

“I love the receptiveness of the London audience, and the ovations following my arias are extremely flattering,” Mantashyan said after the February 9 performance.

Mantashyan is the face of the modern-day opera: slender, cool, and unassuming, more reminiscent of a jazz singer than an established opera star. Yet her biography is traditional and comparable to most classical musicians and singers from Armenia shining on the international arena for several decades.

Born in Yerevan, Mantashyan studied piano from age 7, and started voice lessons with Valery Harutyunov at Komitas State Conservatory obtaining her BA degree. She perfected her singing at Mirella freni’s Accademia di Belcanto in Modena (the hometown of opera colossus Luciano Pavarotti), where she also performed in the tribute concert for Pavarotti in 2011. She has performed major roles at prestigious opera houses in Modena, Reggio, Konzerthaus Berlin, Opéra de Paris Bastille, Lille, Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, Seoul and Zurich, Montpellier, and Hamburg, at the Opéra de Paris as well as the Glyndebourne Festival in Great Britain.

Among her more recent roles are Natacha Rostova (“War and Peace”) in Geneva, Tatyana (“Eugene Onegin”) in Liège, Fiordiligi (“Così fan tutte”) in Zurich, Tatyana and Alice Ford (“Falstaff”) at the Komische Oper Berlin and Rachel (“La Juive”) at the Grand Théâtre de Genève. Mantashyan’s Mimi (“La Bohème”) is certainly one of her most acclaimed roles, performed in Geneva, Zurich and London.

Mantashyan was a finalist in the Francisco Vinas International Singing Contest in Barcelona, winning the competition’s Special Prize. She is also the winner of the Italian Toti dal Monte International Singing Competition for her role as Musetta (“La Bohème”).

Currently Mantashyan lives in Germany with her Ukrainian husband, who is also opera singer, and their baby boy, she told me. Curiously, she is not represented by a top agency but by a small Paris-based firm called Masis, yet their collaboration has proved fruitful and mutually rewarding.

“La Bohème,” Puccini’s much-loved opera about friendship, passion, poverty and endurance, is set in the bohemian Latin Quarter of Paris in the 1890s. A group of young artists and intellectuals care more about their artistic integrity and freedom than financial gain, sharing what little they have with one other. The central characters of the libretto, written by playwright Luigi Illica and poet Giuseppe Giacosa, are Rodolpho – a penniless poet — and his young and beautiful neighbor Mimi — a poor seamstress, who suffers from tuberculosis (TB). The opera was first performed in Turin’s Teatro Regio in Italy under the baton of mythical Arturo Toscanini in 1896; a year later it premiered in Covent Garden, in 1897. Since the London inauguration,

see OPERA, page 15

Melissa Bilal Named To New Promise Chair in Armenian Music, Arts, and Culture at UCLA

LOS ANGELES — Melissa Bilal, a leading scholar of Armenians in Turkey and director of UCLA’s Armenian Music Program, has been appointed the inaugural holder of The Promise Chair in Armenian Music, Arts, and Culture at UCLA. Bilal is



Prof. Melissa Bilal

renowned for her work on the history of Armenian music.

The endowed chair, made possible by a gift to The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music, will support scholarly research, undergraduate and graduate courses in Armenian music, and academic conferences on Armenian music and performing arts.

“We are grateful for this investment in our ongoing work to deepen understanding of Armenian culture, which will further UCLA’s position as a leader in Armenian studies,” said UCLA Chancellor Gene Block. “One of our core responsibilities as an academic institution is to foster a sense of global citizenship and cultural understanding, and expanding our faculty and scholarship in this area is one way we are bringing that commitment to life.”

With a legacy of scholarship on Armenia and its diaspora that dates back more than 50 years, UCLA has established itself as one of the largest and most vibrant centers for Armenian studies outside of Armenia. The new Promise Chair, housed in The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music, joins two other endowed chairs at UCLA devoted to the study of Armenia and Armenians. The Narekatsi Chair of Armenian Studies, the oldest endowed chair at UCLA, established in 1969, anchors the program in Armenian language and culture. The Armenian Educational Foundation endowed a chair in the history department in 1987, which in 2011 was renamed the Richard Hovannissian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History.

“UCLA has long been a leading place for Armenian studies, and it is also a great place for collaboration with other artists and scholars,” Bilal said. “The establishment of this chair will allow us to further expand our offerings for undergraduate and graduate students.”

Bilal holds a doctorate in ethnomusicology from the University of Chicago and advanced degrees from Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. She has been a visiting scholar of history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and held a Mellon post-doctoral teaching fellowship at Columbia University.

Over the past two-and-a-half years, she has served as associate director, and then director, of the Armenian Music Program in the School of Music, the only academic program outside Armenia dedicated to the study

see BILAL, page 14



ARTS & CULTURE

Pablo Aharonian

Ballet All Around the World

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN / SANTIAGO, Chile – Ballet dancer, teacher and choreologist Carlos Pablo Aharonian — the only choreologist in Latin America — was born in 1956 in Montevideo, Uruguay. He started his dance career in the Maralik Armenian dance company (led by Rosita Chakidjian) at age 12, followed by classical dance studies at 18 under Raoul Severo. He was a principal with the National Ballet of Uruguay (Sodre), soloist with Teatro alla Scala in Milan, principal with Carla Fracci Ballet Company, Teatro Comunale di Bologna and Ballet Santiago in Chile. As a highly successful ballet dancer and later as a sought-after ballet master, he has left an indelible mark on many ballet companies around the world: Royal Ballet of Flanders, Royal Swedish Ballet, Western Australian Ballet, Korean National Ballet, Czech National Ballet, Staatsballett Berlin, Teatro Argentino de La Plata and Teatro Colon (Argentina), Teatro Municipal de Rio (Brasil). Pablo had the opportunity to work with and danced in choreographies by Marius Petipa, August Bournonville, John Cranko, Nicolas Beriozoff, Jerome Robbins, Glen Tetley, Uwe Scholz and others. His repertoire included “Swan Lake,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Carmen,” “Coppellius the Wizard,” “Firebird,” “Cinderella,” “La Sylphide,” etc.



Aharonian was a guest teacher at many prominent places such as Central School of Ballet in London, San Francisco Ballet School, National Ballet Sodre in Uruguay or New Zealand School of Dance.

At the age of 43 Pablo Aharonian completed his studies in choreology (the Benesh Movement Notation) in London. As choreologist, he uses the Benesh Movement Notation to record choreographies especially by the Brazilian prima ballerina and choreographer Marcia Haydée. He joined the team of Ballet de Santiago in Chile with Ivan Nagy as artistic director. Later when Haydée took over as director, Pablo became “her” choreologist, responsible for staging her various choreographies around the globe. He continues to teach classical dance to this day and is the official re-stager of Marcia Haydée Trust, John Cranko Trust and Ivan Nagy Trust.

Dear Pablo, you have worked in various ballet companies on four continents. What differences have you noticed in approaches to ballet in different countries?

That is true, I have worked in many, many companies through many, many years. And not only dancing or staging ballets, but also working with technicians, lighting, etc. The dances are more or less the same all over the world, because the upbringing is more or less the same for everyone. Since early childhood in the ballet schools you are taught the most important things — the discipline and commitment — so almost most dances are very self-disciplined. In my case I always had a very nice experience with dances because I always go to the studios with my work ready, I never improvise and I always work very clearly with the pianist, the orchestra conductor and dancers. And the differences that you can find, are how the companies are organized, for example, how many hours of rehearsals

they have, how long their trainings are, how long the lunch break is, how many days they work per week, etc. And, of course, how the director runs the company, but as I said, everything more or less is the same.

You have danced with many ballet luminaires — Rudolf Nureyev, Erik Bruhn, Svetlana Beriosova, Ronald Hynd, Ben Stevenson, Natalia Makarova, Marcia Haydée, Richard Cragun, Tamara Grigorieva, Olga Lepeshinskaya. What have you learned from them?

I was lucky to work with all those people. I not only danced with them, but worked, and they were my teachers.

Erik Bruhn was a gentleman, a very kind person, a great classical dancer and an amazing teacher. I worked with him at La Scala, he came as class teacher, and took two classes twice a day and it was amazing. His Danish school was very important, it was an asset.

Svetlana Beriosova was fan-tas-tic! She was the most beautiful dancer, very aristocratic, amazing and kind. I had a feeling I was working with an empress, with a queen. She came to La Scala to teach “Swan Lake” of her father, Nickolas Beriozov. She was beautiful in showing, beautiful in explaining, in everything! We became very good friends, and when I lived in London, I used to go and visit her regularly. I learned a lot from her. The roles I learned from her were quite unique. Her Odette-Odille for me is the best in the 20th century. I have many pictures and many nice memories.

Ronald Hynd was a great theater man, fantastic, you could learn a lot from that great choreographer and great human being with rich experience. He was teaching with enormous generosity. I danced many ballets with his choreography and I have lovely relationship with him too, thank God.

Natalia Makarova was a great star, who came to dance with us, and it was a great experience too. She came to teach us her version of “La Bayadere.” She was very strict, very clear, everything from Vaganova school but with time she became warmer, more communicative with the people.

Marcia Haydée is like family member for me. We have known each other since 1986, when she came to Chile to dance with Richard Cragun as guest stars in “The Taming of the Shrew,” and I danced with them. After that she directed our company twice, and I traveled with her around the world as her official re-stager and choreologist, teaching her ballets and working with her. We have a very dear and close relationship.

The same was with Richard Cragun, an amazing, lovely person and great dancer, with whom I danced in “The Taming of the Shrew” and “The Merry Widow.” Afterwards he became the

coach of several ballet productions in Santiago. It was always pleasure to listen this beautiful person and great professional.

Tamara Grigorieva was a legend, who worked with Ballet Russe of Colonel de Basil. Everything she was speaking, about wonderful people and repertoire was a history of ballet, and she was a part of that history. This fantastic lady was extremely beautiful and with an amazing knowledge of ballet. She came to teach the old Ballet Russe repertoire. Grigorieva fell ill and because my father was a doctor, he examined her and became good friends with her too.

And Olga Lepeshinskaya came to La Scala for three months. She was a very good teacher, but strong and demanding. She was always telling old stories about Bolshoi and talking about big stars like Zhdanov, Ulanova, Plisetskaya, Fedicheev, Maximova, Vasilev.

All my life I was aware that I am meeting amazing personalities. I was very lucky to meet such people and learn a lot from them!

I admire Rudolf Nureyev. Some years ago I read Diane Solway’s voluminous biography of him. Are there any special moments connected to him you would like to share with?

I met Nureyev when I was at La Scala in 1980. I went to take a class there, and once Nureyev came and sat down to watch the class. He asked the director of the company to hire me for “Romeo and Juliet.” I danced the role of Mercutio’s friend. There were parts in choreography that I danced with Nureyev. As you know, he was an amazing personality, he was already in 40s, 43 I think, and he was a very hard-worker, pushing himself endlessly. And he liked me, thank God, because he had a very strong char-

acter. I think he liked me because he realized that I am a hard-worker too and respected me very much. One day I was in a big studio, Cecchetti studio, doing fouetté and sauté. When Nureyev came, I stopped: in those days you froze in front of such personalities. And everybody knew he had a very impulsive character and no one knows how would he react. But he took of his coat and corrected me. He used always to correct little things during our trainings. So, I have very good memories of him. Nureyev was a great example to follow as a hard-worker. His knowledge was immense in history, costumes, you could learn so much only by observing him and listening to him.

I assume for you it was important in 1986 to be praised by Anna Kisselgoff, the severe ballet critic of New York Times.

It was January 1986. Yes, that was wonderful. It was about my role in ballet “Rosalinda” staged by Ronald Hynd with Johann Strauss music. In the third act I had a role with lots of turns and jumps, lots of technique. It was a funny comic role, and of course I was happy to have Kisselgoff’s review. Here another good thing was that a name of an Armenian was highlighted on the pages of *New York Times*.

You were invited as guest principal by the Stuttgart Ballet to dance the role of Offenbach in Maurice Béjart’s “Gaité Parisienne.” Do you know that one of characters of this ballet is Ruzan Sarkisian - Béjart’s beloved teacher?

In those days I did not know, because we called her Madame Ruzan, until later I knew about her origin. I have a big collection of ballet books, so in one of them I learned she was an Armenian. When I met Béjart, he was very sick and aged, he did not speak too much, so I have not asked him about his teacher. But I was honored to act as Offenbach with lots of great dancers with Stuttgart company!

You were born to Astghik Aintablian and Kourken Vahaken Aharonian. How did they end up in Uruguay? Did they expose you to Armenian culture at home?

My paternal grandfather, Hovhannes Aharonyan, after leaving Zeytun first went to Jerusalem, where he was in charge of an orphanage. A part of the family was killed, some were lost, so they decided to move to America. It was incredible that in mid-1950s they found one of my father’s cousins. With his wife, Katarine Bostanian, my grandfather came to Uruguay, which was doing very well economically. Immigrants were very well-received, the climate was great, so they saw the possibility to live in peace in that very cultured country. Five of my grandfather’s sons survived — Arshak, Nubar, Sebu, Aris and my father Kourken. The eldest one, Arshak, lived in United States, and later repatriated to Soviet Armenia, where he passed away. So, our whole family was very Armenian. Every Sunday I used to go to church as an altar boy and *sarkavag*, while my sister was in the choir. We were always speaking Armenian, although I never attended Armenian school. We went to a German school, but we were brought up very Armenian, listening to music on the radio — Aram Khachaturian, Arno Babajanyan, Armenian operas. My father used to read and write perfect Armenian, my eldest cousin too. My maternal grandparents were wonderful people too, Khacher Aintablian and Beatrice Manougian, they came to South America in 1924. My granny taught me how to read and write in Armenian, but I left Uruguay when I was 23 years old, so I never had any chance to use the language. Now in Chile I want to get it back and to find someone who can teach me Armenian again.

I assume you are connected to Uruguayan composer Coriún Aharonián (1940-2017)?

Yes, he was my first cousin, the son of my uncle Nubar. And my cousin Antaram Keghuhi Aharonian was a pianist and a very good friend with Aram Khachaturian. When he came to conduct his piano concert in Montevideo, my family hosted him. In the collection of letters of Aram Khachaturian there are 12 letters addressed to Antaram.

Are you in touch with Armenians in Chile and do you have plans to visit Armenia?

In Chile I am not in touch with many Armenians, but I would love to. I went to the Hye Doun (Armenian House), which is very nice place and very close to where I live. But unfortunately, there are not many Armenians in Chile and very few of them speak Armenian. When I am at home, I think in Armenian, and when some Armenian artistes come to Chile, I do not lose the chance to meet them and talk in Armenian.

And of course, I would love to go to Armenia and to give there whatever I learned all around the world!



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine Vartanian



Lenten Recipe: Red Lentils with Cracked Wheat (Vospov Kofte)

This recipe is courtesy of the St. John Armenian Apostolic Church in San Francisco that was founded in 1924.

The season of Great Lent is a time of renewed devotion as we are called to prayer, fasting and almsgiving (charity). If you’re keeping a strict fast, the St. John Armenian Apostolic Church in San Francisco offers the following Lenten-friendly recipe for family and friends. “Maintain a fast from certain foods, this builds discipline and conscientiousness in your daily life, and promotes health. A strict Lenten fast in the Armenian Church prohibits all animal products, but if your health or circumstances can’t allow for it, start smaller. It shouldn’t become an obsession, but a precursor to spiritual growth.”

Baking teacher, recipe developer, and writer Andrew Janjigian writes, “That’s why we (Armenians) are equally serious about our meatless dishes, which reflect a thriftiness born out of that deep-rooted poverty. They’re also a matter of piety: Historically, the Armenian Apostolic Church restricted meat consumption on many days throughout the year. Though only the most devout among us still regularly abstain, the community’s appreciation for meat-free cooking persists. Consequently, we have elevated vegetarian cooking to something of an art form.”

He adds, “Take vospov kofte. It’s the vegetarian analog of canonical, relatively costly chi kofte, which consists of a mixture of minced raw beef or lamb, bulgur, tomato paste, and spices that is formed into logs or balls, served with a mixture of chopped herbs, and eaten inside a shroud of pita or lavash. Vospov kofte-perhaps the ultimate expression of tensions between scarcity and abundance, restriction and freedom-trades the meat for inexpensive red lentils and bulgur and a good amount of butter or olive oil to mimic its richness (the tomato paste is usually left out), resulting in a dish that is light but satisfying and beloved by Armenians the world over.”

“...It is thanks in large part to these restrictions that Armenians have a ‘general liking for whole grains, beans, lentils, nuts, bread, cheese, yogurt, olives, vegetables, and fruits,’ as Alice Antreassian and Mariam Jebejian note in their book, *Classic Armenian Recipes: Cooking Without Meat* (1981), and that the cuisine is rich with hearty, nutritious meatless dishes such as vospov kofte.”

Regarding his use of Aleppo pepper, Janjigian says, “The moderately spicy, fruity dried red pepper is used extensively in Armenian cooking and is the only spice my grandmother considered essential in her vospov kofte. (Much of Aleppo pepper has been sourced from spice traders outside of Syria-particularly Turkey-since the Syrian civil war began.) I like to use a generous teaspoonful and amplify its warmth and complexity with cumin, black pepper, and allspice.”

A staple in many Armenian homes, this dish always appears at parties and celebrations and never fails to impress guests. Popular throughout the Armenian Diaspora, no two vospov kofte recipes ever seem to match up completely. While you need to invest some time in cooking the lentils and prepping the ingredients - a food processor can make quick work of all the chopping, so long as you don’t overdo it and puree everything - nothing is too difficult to do. It’s vegan, flavorful, healthy and an authentic Armenian dish -- this is meatless cooking at its very best.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/4 cups red lentils, picked over, washed and rinsed
- 3-4 cups water
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup fine bulgur (#1)*
- 3/4 cup olive oil (or part butter)
- 1 large onion, finely chopped (about 1 cup or a little more)
- 1 teaspoon red pepper or Aleppo pepper, to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper or cumin, if desired
- Garnish:
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley, more to taste
- 1/4 cup finely chopped red and green bell pepper
- 1/4 cup finely chopped scallions or onions
- Fresh chopped mint
- Diced or sliced tomatoes
- Paprika

PREPARATION:

Place lentils in a pot, add water and bring to a full boil. Simmer for 5-8 minutes, removing thick foam that rises to the surface.

Add salt and continue simmering, covered, for 40 to 50 minutes, stirring occasionally. When the mixture has cooked to a thick, yellow mass and water is absorbed, remove from heat.

Measure bulgur into a deep bowl and spoon the cooked lentils over it, mixing to blend. Set bowl aside, covered for 10 minutes.

Heat olive oil in a small skillet and add the onions, sautéing them until they are browned but not burned. Add red pepper or Aleppo pepper, black pepper, and cumin (if desired), stir, then add the skillet contents to the bowl and knead or mix thoroughly for a few minutes. Taste to adjust seasoning.

Moisten hands and shape mixture into finger-or sausage-shaped patties: inch off a piece, squeeze it gently in your clenched fist and release it. Arrange patties on a serving platter. Combine garnish greens, sprinkle over patties, and serve. (It helps to dip your fingers in water to keep the mixture moist so it’s easier to form.)

Yield: 6 or more servings

* Fine grind (#1) bulgur is a must in vospov kofte, where the small particles seamlessly bind up the red lentil mixture.

Storage notes: The finished patties can be refrigerated for up to 3 days. Bring to room temperature before serving.

For more Lenten recipes, go to: <https://stjohnarmenianchurch.com/categories/fasting>

Bulgur wheat is a whole grain that has been cracked, cleaned, parboiled, dried and then ground into various size for faster cooking. For order information, recipes and history about bulgur wheat, go to the Sunnyland Farms website in Fresno. Bulgur wheat is a natural whole grain food because no chemicals, additives or artificial ingredients are used in processing the product. Many of bulgur wheat’s naturally occurring vitamins and minerals, including B vitamins, iron, phosphorus and manganese, permeate the kernel during Sunnyland Mills’ finely tuned processing thus maintaining more nutritive content than other forms of processed wheat products. See: <https://sunnylandmills.com/our-products/>

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Melissa Bilal Named to New Promise Chair at UCLA

BILAL, from page 12
and performance of Armenian music. The program offers robust artistic programming through public concerts, community outreach, undergraduate courses on Armenian music and dance, fellowships for students, and support for the VEM Ensemble, founded and directed by violin professor Movses Pogossian and dedicated to Armenian classical music performance.

Under Bilal’s tenure, the program extended its VEM fellowship to enable more students and alumni to study Armenian folk singing as well as traditional Armenian instruments. The program has also embarked on several new research projects, including

one exploring the archive of prominent music scholar and song collector Bedros Alahaidoyan. The program’s upcoming four-CD set, “Serenade With a Dandelion,” will be celebrated with a public concert scheduled for March 4.

Bilal’s activities as chair will also intersect with The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA which was founded in 2019 with a gift from the estate of philanthropist and entrepreneur Kirk Kerkorian. The institute coordinates interdisciplinary research and public programs and serves as a hub for world-class scholarship and teaching, supporting faculty and researchers in fields ranging from the arts and sciences to public

health and medicine.

Dr. Eric Esrailian, co-chair of UCLA’s Second Century Council and a UCLA faculty member, was key to the establishment of The Promise Institute. He believes the chair at the School of Music will strengthen UCLA’s position as a premier site for Armenian cultural studies worldwide. “In her new role, Melissa Bilal will facilitate a close partnership with The Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA to foster collaboration across campus, extend the broadest reach and promote the kind of interdisciplinary scholarship and activities that only the nation’s top public university can achieve,” he said.

Bilal’s scholarly research focuses on Ar-

menian music and experiences in the 19th and 20th centuries. Her most recent book manuscript, “Feminism in Armenian: An Interpretive Anthology,” co-authored with MIT historian Lerna Ekmekcioglu, focuses on 12 Armenian feminist writers born in the Ottoman Empire and active in Constantinople/Istanbul and its post-Armenian Genocide diasporas from the 1860s through the 1960s.

“I’m looking forward to bringing scholars and artists together to discuss the enduring legacy of Armenian musicians in global music history and the significance of diverse repertoires and styles of Armenian music in our lives today,” said Bilal.



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR
OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

- MARCH 10 — The Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter is hosting a Sunday brunch with ful/fava beans and trimmings plus ma'mounieh. Bring your family and friends and let's share stories. 12.30 p.m., Sunday. Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. RSVP to Sossy, 617-281-1647 or syogurtian@comcast.net. <https://facebook.com/TekeyanBoston>. \$25 per person.
- MARCH 21 — Armenian Cooking Demonstration: Kata, by Dr. Knarik Arkun. Learn how to prepare kata/gata/nazouk and afterwards enjoy samples with coffee/tea and socialize. 7 p.m., Thursday. First in a Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter series coordinated by Rita Balyozian. Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Watertown. \$25 per person. RSVP necessary. Sossy, 617-281-1647 or email syogurtian@comcast.net
- APRIL 6 — Concert by Vahan Artsruni (guitar) and Nelly Manukyan (flute). Premiere performance of works inspired by the poetry of Komitas, complemented by arrangements of Sharakans by Mesrop Mashtots, original songs based on the works of renowned poet Razmik Davoyan (1940-2022). Saturday, 4 p.m. Armenian Cultural Foundation, 441 Mystic St., Arlington. Co-sponsored by The Armenian Music Festival of Rhode Island, Amaras Art Alliance. Donation: \$30 through ACF office (781-646-3090) or by visiting amarasonline.com
- APRIL 11 — LET'S PARTY FOR THE PARK! InterContinental Hotel, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Meet & Greet. Enjoy Chef Didier Montarou's Luscious Signature Plates. Tutunjian Family Vineyard Wines & Curated Silent Auction, all whole supporting the Park's care. Advance Reservations only. For link to register, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar
- APRIL 19 — SAVE THE DATE: The 109th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide at the State House in Boston will take place on Friday, April 19, beginning at 10:30 a.m., organized by the greater Boston community's Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee.
- APRIL 21 — SAVE THE DATE: The 109th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide at Boston's Armenian Heritage Park will take place on Sunday, April 21, starting at 4:00 p.m., organized by the Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Greater Boston.
- MARCH 22 — Member Preview of 'Gandzaran! Notable Selections from Our Collection', Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main St., Friday, 6 to 8 p.m. Preview and reception exclusively for members of the Armenian Museum of America. A new exhibit of 40 works of art from our collection curated by Ryann Casey. Some

- of the artists include Minas Avetisyan, Martiros Sarian, Maria Manukyan Batlle, Reuben Nakian, Naomi Pridjian, Jean Jansem, Jean Carzou, Edgar Chahine, Martin Barooshian, and Kevork Mourad. Don't forget to renew your membership or join so you don't miss this special event: <https://www.armenianmuseum.org/membership>. To register, <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/856374558357?aff=oddtcreator>
- APRIL 28 — Nora Armani performs in "Mercedes and Zarouhi" play translated into English, cosponsored by the Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter, Armenian Women's Welfare Association, and Armenian International Women's Association, with the Armenian Cultural Foundation, at 441 Mystic St., Arlington. Tickets \$15 through ACF office (781-646-3090) or email armeniancultural.fdn@gmail.com.
- APRIL 28 — Remembrance of the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide. Divine Liturgy, Reception, and Youth Cultural Program with the participation of the Armenian Churches of the Merrimack Valley. Armenian Church at Hye Pointe, 1280 Boston Rd., Haverhill. Divine Liturgy will begin at 10:00 a.m. Special Sunday School Program for the Youth.
- NOVEMBER 16 — St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School will celebrate with a 40th Anniversary Gala. Saturday, 6.30 p.m., Hyatt Regency Cambridge. Details to follow

RHODE ISLAND

- APRIL 5 — Commemorating the 155th Anniversary of the Birth of Gomidas Vartabed. Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church Cultural Committee, the Armenian Music Festival of RI, Amaras Art Alliance and the Urartu Armenian Association of RI present "Music of Poetry," with singer-songwriter Vahan Artsruni Duo with Nelly Manukyan, on flute. Program to feature St. Mashtots Sharagans Melodies, Songs based on Gomidas Poetry and others. Friday, 7 p.m. Egavian Cultural Center. 70 Jefferson St., Providence. Donation \$20 (\$10 for students). Refreshments
- APRIL 26 — Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church Cultural Committee Armenian Martyrs' Memorial Committee of RI Present Nora Armani in Mono – Theater "Mercedes and Zaruhi," by playwright Anush Aslibekyan, with English adaption by Armani. "Mercedes and Zaruhi" is the story of two sisters from the Diaspora during the post-WW II period of mass migrations (Nerkaght) to Soviet Armenia. Friday, 7.30 p.m., Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson Street, Providence. Donation \$20 (\$10 for students. Refreshments

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.

Heavenly Début of Ruzan Mantashyan Royal Opera House in London

OPERA, from page 12

"La Bohème" has been one of the most beloved operas of London audiences, and the most performed opera at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden.

The current production was the revival of the 2017 version directed by Richard Jones, with three sopranos performing the title role on different dates: Romanian diva Angela Georghiu, Chilean soprano Yarotza Veliz and Ruzan Mantashyan. Nonetheless, the Armenian soprano, performing on opening night, immediately caught the attention of the British critics, while spectators greeted her performances with fervor and excitement.

The British press did not delay praising Mantashyan's début with a rare enthusiasm. Thus, *The Express* (25.01.2024) reviewer stated, "a glorious Covent Garden début for Armenian soprano Ruzan Mantashyan." Meanwhile Stephen Pritchard advised his readers: "choose a night when the Armenian soprano Ruzan Mantashyan is singing Mimi. You won't be disappointed – she's a star. On opening night, making her Royal Opera House début, Mantashyan swept all before her in a delightfully controlled, touching performance, enhanced by a voice that would melt the stoniest of hearts" (<https://bachtrack.com/review-boheme-mantashyan-pirgu-timoshenko-fagan-royal-opera-london-january-2024>).

Another leading British newspaper, *The Guardian*, confirmed: "The Albanian tenor Saimir Pirgu, ardent and bright-toned as Rodolfo, and the Armenian soprano Ruzan Mantashyan, persuasive and warm as Mimì, were convincing lovers" (27.01.2024). The critic of *The Times*, one of the most influential papers, stated: "The gutsy Armenian has a powerful, dark-toned instrument that – thankfully – could keep up with the wall-shaking high notes" (25.01.24).

Following Mimì's aria in the final scene, I was left sobbing in the auditorium for some time, before composing myself and heading backstage to greet the Armenian star. And I was certainly not the only one: numerous admirers of all nationalities had gathered backstage of the Royal Opera House to congratulate Mantashyan.

The schedule of Ruzan Mantashyan's past and future international performances can be found on: <https://www.mantashyan-ruzan.com/>



Ruzan Mantashyan in "La Boheme"



THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
— SINCE 1932 —



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COMMENTARY

Why Does Azerbaijan Force Armenia To Negotiate without Any Mediators?

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

For years, Armenia and Azerbaijan negotiated in the presence of mediators. If we study the Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiation process, we will see that since the beginning of the 1990s, the Europeans, Iranians, Russians and Americans have tried to sit the two states at the negotiating table and act as mediators. However, these negotiations were not particularly successful until the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Minsk Group were established. There have already been dozens of meetings with the participation of the heads of state and foreign ministers to discuss bilateral relations and the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, with the mediation of the three co-chairs of the Minsk Group. It is noteworthy that for years the co-chairs of the Minsk Group had differences, especially the United States and Russia, but it turned out that the Minsk Group was the only format where the co-chairs had a common approach.

Naturally, the involvement of mediators was extremely important during this period. In fact, apart from the mediation mission, the involvement of the superpowers was a sort of straitjacket for the parties, especially Azerbaijan. Before the revolution in Armenia in 2018 and the resulting war in 2020, the situation already changed in favor of Azerbaijan. However, prior to 2018, Armenian diplomacy was able to use the presence of mediators to its advantage. In particular, the involvement of intermediary superpowers allowed the use of certain pressure mechanisms against Azerbaijan.

Although the mediators were impartial and often equalized the parties, this was only in public diplomacy. All parties knew that the situation was escalating, provocations were being made, attempts were being made to subvert the territory of Armenia and Artsakh, and Azerbaijan itself was the party regularly violating the ceasefire regime. The presence of mediators allowed pressure to be applied to Azerbaijan, considering the fact that Azerbaijan could very often not fulfill the agreements reached or partially fulfill them.

The best example of this pressure was the Vienna and St. Pe-

tersburg agreements reached after the April 2016 war, according to which Azerbaijan committed to deploying special mechanisms along the contact line to monitor border incidents. It was crystal clear that these mechanisms were directed against Azerbaijan, because it was Azerbaijan that regularly fired at Armenian positions. It turns out that the presence of mediators significantly strengthened the positions of the Armenian side and is considered an additional security mechanism, especially since all three involved states, Russia, France and the US, were friendly countries for Armenia where Armenia had a powerful lobby and influence. Moreover, Azerbaijani president Aliyev was saying that behind the closed doors there was pressure on him from all the involved parties to recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh and the right of the self-determination of Artsakh people.

Looking at today's negotiations, we see that the parties have started negotiating without any mediator. This puts the Armenian side in an extremely difficult situation, because behind closed doors Armenia is being given destructive conditions that it will have to accept. There are no international guarantees that will restrain Azerbaijan at least a little and give Armenia a chance to maneuver. Armenia made a big mistake when it decided to negotiate with Azerbaijan directly, without mediators.

In fact, this is the biggest failure of Armenian diplomacy in the context of all the failures that happened after the revolution. The result of the same diplomatic failures was the 44-day war, as a result of which Artsakh was partially, and then completely, lost. All preconditions against Armenia, which must be met by Yerevan, will also be a consequence of this. Of course, Armenia could still try to involve the US as a mediator in these negotiations, especially considering the Biden administration's active involvement in the recent processes, but it seems that the Armenian government is comfortable with the one on one format.

(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.)

By Pleasing Foes, Armenia Is Diving Headfirst into the Abyss

By Philippe Raffi Kalfayan

Special to the *Mirror-Spectator*

Over the years, I have regularly warned about the threats to which Armenia was exposed due to the absence of national cohesion and strategy coupled with an exacerbation of internal divisions (see <https://mirrorspectator.com/author/philippe/>). The tragic results of these gross mistakes are known. They are continuing: we witness an uninterrupted process of unilateral concessions to establish peace at all costs with a neighbor that always demands more. How far is the Armenian government willing to go? The attempt to modify the constitution of the Republic of Armenia would be likely to deal a fatal blow if it materializes, because it would undermine the soul of this Republic, its identity, and would sever ties with the diaspora.

I support the need for constitutional reform, but not one that is destructive to the Armenian national identity but on the contrary, one which strengthens it, taking into account the diaspora and not forgetting the right to self-determination of the Armenian population of Artsakh or the history of the Armenian nation.

The Armenian nation-state, the homeland of all Armenians, is the only way to perpetuate the Republic of Armenia. To this end, I call on all components of the Armenian nation to resist the current project.

The Spirit of Resistance

Just recently, France honored the spirit of resistance during World War II by interring the remains of Missak Manouchian, a stateless foreigner and communist who took up arms against the Nazi occupiers of the country, which had refused him citizenship, in the Pantheon, the highest honor the country could bestow. He and his wife, Meline, and the 23 members of their storied Resistance group — all foreigners — were honored.

A sad irony of history, of course, is that the vast majority of Armenians have abandoned any spirit of resistance. The presence at the Manouchian ceremony of the Armenian head of state, who leads a government whose actions are precisely an uninterrupted series of concessions without resistance, was a paradox. Our Turkish and Azerbaijani neighbors will only sign a peace treaty when the Republic of Armenia renounces its national aspirations and its sovereignty.

Artsakh is the first victim of these concessions; it also fell without any resistance. The fall was total, with the Republic of Armenia not even anticipating the attack or offering safe passage to the enclave's leaders, who instead were swiftly rounded up by Azerbaijani forces in gross violation of international law. They remain in prison, in some cases already convicted on a variety of egregious charges.

The consent of the Armenian government regarding the abandonment of Nagorno-Karabakh is no longer in doubt. The way the topic disappeared from its leaders' comments as well as the thinly-veiled threats made against people and groups in Armenia who demand respect for the right to self-determination of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, bear witness to this. More painfully, part of the diaspora also behaves as if the case were closed, while the refugees are still in a state of shock and living in precarious conditions.

The diaspora contributes to this headlong dive into oblivion by averting its eyes from the real problems. Some argue that the diaspora cannot decide for the citizens of Armenia while others, opportunists, blindly follow the government to gain political or personal advantages. Yet a third group is composed of those who refuse defeatism but do not put forward solutions capable of creating a unified national popular movement. As a result, the diaspora retreats into its own usual areas: positioning itself permanently as a victim, warning and lobbying about the external dangers facing the Republic of Armenia, doing humanitarian work, etc. This is laudable and useful in absolute terms, but it is also the mark of a lack of resistance to the Armenian government's reckless trajectory: the destruction of the Nation-State project designed and adopted both by the founders of the First Republic of Armenia (1918) and by those of the Third Republic of Armenia (1991).

We can read opinions calling for the reorganization of the diaspora, or even a "constitution" for the diaspora, to support and promote national ideals independently of the Armenian government. This is unrealistic and ineffective. It should be remembered that

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COMMENTARY

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our countries of residence have no use for our pan-Armenian aspirations. They only pay attention to subject-matters raised by the Armenian state. Two examples support this assertion. The first is over: the diaspora mobilized to defend the criminal conviction of Armenian genocide denial while the Armenian government defended freedom of expression in the antechambers of the European Court of Human Rights in concert with Turkey. The second is current: the diaspora is mobilized to defend the right to self-determination of the Armenians of Karabakh, while the Armenian rulers consider this subject closed. The governments of our countries of residence will always choose the minimalist position defended by the Armenian government.

The external threat, Azerbaijan, exists and poses a serious danger. However, the internal threat is no less dangerous; on the contrary, it is insidious because it emanates from the government of the Republic of Armenia. It could lead to the government reworking the constitution to eliminate all its historical references and national ideals, yet it is presented as a way to adapt to a new geopolitical environment.

Defining Constitution and Its Purpose

Not all states have a constitution in the sense of a single codified text, worded as such. The United States, France, and many other countries have codified constitutions, but the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Israel do not. Instead, they have a set of “fundamental laws” serving as a de facto constitution. The constitution is an essential document for any free nation to determine its social philosophy and translate it into visionary goals. It provides guidance on the functioning of the state in order to protect the rights and interests of its people.

The constitution lies at the intersection of the legal system, the political system and society. It is thus possible to identify two major constitutional archetypes: the procedural constitution and the prescriptive constitution. A procedural constitution defines the structure of public institutions and sets legal limits on government power in order to protect democratic processes and fundamental human rights. It contains little or no explicit mention of the formation of a nation or fundamental philosophical or ideological principles. By contrast, a prescriptive constitution highlights the founding role of the constitution as the “fundamental charter of the identity of the State,” which plays “a key role in the representation of the final objectives and shared values on which a State is established” (Lerner, 2011). It offers a collective vision of a society according to the shared values and aspirations of a homogeneous community. The successful implementation of a prescriptive constitution can positively impact nation-building efforts.

The preamble, which serves as an introduction, is an important part of the constitution because it defines the ideals of the people it represents. It is a statement summing up the primary reasons and objectives for the constitution, and sometimes refers to important historical events, national identity or values.

The founders of the Third Republic of Armenia took care to insert a preamble to the constitution which defines this national vision. The Armenian people take as their basis the fundamental principles and national goals of Armenian sovereignty established in the Declaration of Independence of Armenia. That one (adopted on August 23, 1990) is therefore the circumstantial and visionary basis of the Constitution (adopted on July 5, 1995).

The preamble reads: “Expressing the united will of the Armenian people; Aware of its historic responsibility for the destiny of the Armenian people engaged in the realization of the aspirations of all Armenians and the restoration of historical justice; Proceeding from the principles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the generally recognized norms of international law; Exercising the right of nations to free self-determination; Based on the December 1, 1989, joint decision of the Armenian SSR Supreme Council and the Artsakh National Council on the “Reunification of the Armenian SSR and the Mountainous Region of Karabakh”; Developing the democratic traditions of the independent Republic of Armenia established on May 28, 1918.”

One can observe that all the historical references that define the Armenian nation-state and the aspirations of ALL Armenians are present there as well as the reaffirmation of the right of nations to self-determination. Article 11 of the Declaration adds the need to support efforts for the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide committed in the Ottoman Empire and Western Armenia.

The Armenian Constitution was inspired by the French Constitution of 1958 (French constitutionalists advised on its drafting). The preamble of the latter refers to historical references, that of the principles defined by the Declaration

of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 and that of the preamble of the Constitution of 1946, the principles of which are largely inspired by the program of the National Council of the Resistance on March 15, 1944 (program adopted before the liberation of France during WWII). The Council was headed by Charles de Gaulle, who delivered an inspired and historic speech in Bayeux (Normandy) on June 16, 1946. He outlined the new balance of powers which would be put in place in 1958, defending the existence of a strong and sovereign State (De Gaulle had always resisted bending to the will of United States to impose its views over France), guarantor of national unity, free from the play of political parties which is a source of divisions and paralysis.

The history of the French constitution, therefore, bears a strikingly relevant parallel to the situation in Armenia today, a country which desperately needs this spirit of resistance and of national unity transcending the political parties and outside influence, which currently is seeing the West tries to force Armenia to cut off its long-established and strategic relationship with Russia.

Armenian Constitution and New Geopolitical Circumstances

The government project to modify the constitution was born from demands from Azerbaijan; Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan does not hide it. In fact, the parliamentary system is not called into question. Instead, the reference to the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia is targeted. The very fact that it was Armenia which initiated the debate on this subject is a gross mistake because its adversarial neighbors seized the opportunity to officially and publicly demand this new concession. The prime minister suggests without actually saying it that the signing of a peace treaty with Azerbaijan is conditional on the elimination of this reference in the Declaration of Independence.

It is paradoxical to note that he is the only Armenian leader to have affirmed that Artsakh is Armenia and yet he is now the one who wants to eliminate this ideal for the sake of honoring the hypothetical mutual respect for territorial integrity of with Azerbaijan on the basis of Soviet borders. Azerbaijan is not willing to accept Armenia’s sovereignty on this territorial basis. Today, it has taken over 170 square kilometers of Armenian soil. So, the question is: why abandon this legitimate and even legal objective?

Indeed, the constitutional act of independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan (October 18, 1991) and its diplomatic document to accession to the UN in 1992 go against the reasons put forward by the Armenian government to justify the political abandonment of Nagorno-Karabakh. In its article 2, the Declaration of Independence of Azerbaijan states that the Republic of Azerbaijan is the heir of the first Republic (May 28, 1918 - April 28, 1920). The act of independence does not delimit the territory. Article 3 states that the act annuls the USSR Treaty (December 30, 1922), rejecting by doing so its Soviet heritage, and thus recognizing itself as the heir of the Republic of 1918-1920. The Nagorno-Karabakh region is therefore automatically excluded from Azerbaijan’s territory. On November 30, 1920 the President of the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Soviet Armenia. This was affirmed by the Caucasian Bureau of the Communist Party on July 4, 1921. Since Azerbaijan rejects all the decisions made by the Soviet Power, the decision of the same Caucasian Bureau to attach Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan on July 5, 1921 is null and void.

Hence, by putting forward the Alma-Ata Protocol’s provisions, marking the dissolution of the USSR, the Armenian executive sabotaged itself.

Will Turkey Demand Changes to Armenia’s Constitution?

Tomorrow, Turkey could also officially request from Armenia (some Turkish politicians started to do it), a modification of the RA Constitution because the Declaration of Independence contains a reference to the genocide in Western Armenia (see article 11).

It is useful to recall that the Armenian Constitutional Court ruled on the Armenian-Turkish Protocols signed in Zurich in October 2009. By a decision of January 12, 2010, the court considered that the provisions of the Protocol “on the development of relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey” in the legislation and legal practice of the Republic of Armenia, as well as in interstate relations, cannot be interpreted and applied in a manner that contradicts the provisions of the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia and the Declaration of Independence of Armenia, nor the requirements of Article 11 of the Declaration of Independence.

The Constitutional Court underwent a re-composition of its members as part of a takeover of judicial power by

the ruling party in Armenia. The latest example illustrating the violation of the principle of separation of powers is that of the appointment of Judge Davit Balayan by the General Assembly of Judges to fill a vacant position on the Constitutional Court. Parliament, where the Civil Contract party of Pashinyan has a two-thirds majority, refused this appointment, even though it had been decided by an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly of Judges. It seems, therefore, that the Constitutional Court is being molded to follow the instructions of the Executive.

To Modify the Declaration of Independence Cancels Independence

Since when does a state rewrite its constitution based on the injunctions of its neighbors? Such an operation would be a contrary to the principles of sovereignty and national interests. The very debate around this possible concession can have disastrous consequences on the foreign and judicial policy currently being pursued by the RA ministry for foreign affairs and the Agent of the Government for legal affairs. Both aim to consolidate legally and diplomatically the right of return of the Armenian population of Artsakh to their land. The inconsistency at the top of the State, whether conscious or not, is a national disaster. After the abandonment of Artsakh by coercion, this would be the definitive burial of the right to self-determination of the Armenian people of Artsakh.

A state can be formed on the simple basis of a declaration of independence, and this serves as fundamental law. It is this document which establishes national sovereignty vis-à-vis its former administrators or colonizers. This was the case of the Declaration of Independence of the United States in 1776: “The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America and United States Declaration of Independence” vis-à-vis Great Britain. The United States Constitution was not adopted until 1787.

This is also the case in Israel, where several fundamental laws constituting the State of Israel were adopted. The Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel in 1948 from its British proxy remained the only “constitutional” text until 1958.

Although the author does not subscribe to recent Israeli fundamental laws which are totally contrary to the principles of international law and the resolutions of the United Nations, the fact remains that they illustrate in a relevant manner what is a nation-state independently on the notion of territory.

Most Armenians like to cite Israel as an example of a successful small state. The State of Israel was formed to bring together a nation and represent its ideals. The territory of Israel is not defined in any official document. The only document where it is defined is the Charter of Likud, a right-wing party, heir to the revisionist Zionist party created in 1925 which wants to establish a Jewish state on both banks of the Jordan river, including the former Palestine territory under British Mandate (that includes Gaza), and Jordan (that includes the West Bank and East Jerusalem). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the current leader of Likud, is unveiling this project before our eyes.

In 2018, the *Israel Law, Nation State of the Jewish People* modified the principles of the Declaration of Independence in that it recognizes Israel as a Jewish state and Hebrew as the only official language (an apartheid regime because it establishes a double discrimination based on national and religious differences). As for the rest, it continues the philosophy of the 1948 Declaration, where Israel is defined as the historical homeland of the Jewish people, in which the State of Israel was established. It proclaims that: The State will do everything to ensure the security of members of the Jewish people in danger or in captivity, due to their Jewishness or their citizenship, will act with the Diaspora so as to strengthen the links between the State and the members of the Jewish people; and will act to preserve the cultural, historical and religious heritage of the Jewish people among Jews in the Diaspora. The 1948 Declaration ends with a reference to the “the realization of the age-old dream – the redemption of Israel.” What was utopia has become reality.

It therefore appears from the declarations of independence of both Israel and Azerbaijan that these constitutive acts of the State do not define the territories. Both states have clearly expansionist goals. The Armenian government’s policy of peace-making at any cost with Azerbaijan is unlikely to succeed under these circumstances.

Risk of Exclusion of Diaspora Is High

The most serious consequence of amending the Armenian constitution would be the abandonment of the dreams and goals of the Armenian nation. Purging the constitution of all its historical references which concern the entire nation is to endanger the very existence of Armenia because

see ABYSS, page 20



COMMENTARY

It Is Time to End the 30-Year Holiday of the Armenian Diaspora

By Vahan Zanoian

“When the gods wish to punish us, they answer our prayers.”

—Oscar Wilde

The cataclysmic events of the past four years have transformed the fate and prospects of both the Armenian nation and the Armenian state. The state is too weak to tackle national challenges that transcend the affairs of the republic. The Diaspora must reorganize and relaunch itself in full force and, through uncharacteristic coordination and collaboration, and a dispassionate national vision, assume the guardianship of the nation globally.

When Armenia declared its independence in 1991, a huge sigh of relief reverberated throughout the Armenian world. Part of it was obviously an expression of elation for the end of Soviet rule and finally, after 71 years, the reestablishment of an independent, sovereign Armenian state. But an important part was also due to the relaxation of the heavy burden of responsibility that the Diaspora institutions and families had carried to keep the Armenian culture, language, history, and national heritage alive. Even the campaigns for Genocide recognition, which was another critical mission of the Diaspora worldwide, would have rung hollow if Armenians assimilated and no longer cared about national causes. Political parties as well as significant non-political organizations took it upon themselves to keep, protect and pass on to the next generation the historic legacy of the Armenian nation, in its broadest sense. Substantial investments in time and scarce economic resources were made to build and fund schools, scholarships, churches, cultural and sports clubs, theaters and publishing houses.

It was an uphill struggle. The risk of assimilation in the culture of host countries, or in some broader global trend, was real. As communities grew into their second, third and even fourth generations in a foreign host country, it became increasingly difficult not only to keep their Armenian identity, but also to impart to the new generations a sense of why the historical and cultural legacy of the nation was relevant to their daily lives. But the struggle continued.

The reestablishment of an independent Armenian state thus caused a significant easing of the pressure for national preservation. It was a foregone conclusion that the nation-state would make sure that the Armenian identity and national heritage would never be lost. It would also be the homeland where the culture thrived and evolved on its indigenous path of national self-determination, and, as importantly for many Diasporan communities, it would be the champion to pursue Armenian national historical and legal rights.

This kick-started a holiday from the traditional Diasporan mission. But the holiday was neither productive nor idle; not productive, in the sense that it did not recharge and reinvigorate the Diaspora to reembark on its mission of national preservation. Instead, it led to a complex “mission confusion.” The Diaspora institutions were not sure what their new mission should be. Not idle, in the sense that the first natural impulse was to work to strengthen the state. Harnessing the pan-Armenian human and material resources to the service of the “Motherland” became a call that many heeded, and significant human and financial resources from the Diaspora poured into both Armenia and Artsakh, even though there were no easy and institutionally clear ways of relating to, and engaging in, the newly established Armenian state.

In the early 1990s, soon after Independence, Artsakh became the symbol of pan-national resistance and struggle. The victories of the first Karabakh war were marked with considerable collective effort, combining the forces

and determination of the Republic of Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora. The participation of certain Diasporan organizations was instrumental in the outcome of that war. However, the 26 years between the Bishkek ceasefire protocol of 1994 and the 2020 war turned out to be the most disastrously wasted years in recent Armenian history, when a host of legal, diplomatic, and military opportunities to resolve the status of Artsakh were consistently missed.

The spirit of the Armenian national liberation struggle and resistance was briefly ignited again in Artsakh, especially during the blockade of the Lachin corridor by the Aliyev regime. After the depopulation of Artsakh, that too fizzled away. Now there is a huge vacuum in the space of national preservation and struggle. The government of Armenia, which currently is focused strictly on the defense of its 29,800 square kilometers, is unable and unwilling to fill that vacuum, and the Diaspora still lingers in a state of shock and confusion. The lack of a set of common national objectives remains the critical hurdle for a national regeneration.

An independent Armenian state is an absolute value which should be protected at all cost. It has, nonetheless, exposed the nation to new vulnerabilities and challenges. During the Soviet Union, the Armenian national aspirations were largely sustained by the Diaspora institutions, often in secret collaboration with a patriotic intellectual class in the Armenian SSR. Armenia’s traditional enemies, Turkey and Azerbaijan, while successful in using the Soviet system to extract vast territorial concessions from both east and west of the border of today’s Republic of Armenia, found it next to impossible to kill the broader Armenian struggle for its national historical rights. Without an independent state, the nation was diligent and guarded, and being scattered around the world, it did not offer a clear and identifiable target. An independent state has not only provided the lullaby the enemy hopes would dull the will of the nation to struggle for its rights but has also presented the enemy with a clear and tangible target to focus on. After the 2020 war and the subsequent forced depopulation of Artsakh, facing a weakened government in Yerevan pleading for peace at any cost, Armenia’s enemies are determined to take maximum advantage of the potential to kill those national aspirations at home, through — and within — the very state which is supposed to protect them.

The challenges of the Diaspora have thus multiplied since Armenian Independence. The true game-changer came after the 2020 Artsakh war. Just like the country, the Diaspora found itself in an acute crisis. Having eased, if not totally relinquished its pursuit of national interests worldwide, it was helpless in the face of the most cataclysmic disaster to fall on the Armenian nation since the Genocide. It was then that in the most pressing and consequential issues of national interest, the Diaspora and the state often found each other acting more as distractors than as partners. Often, official state policies and statements were at cross purposes with the Diaspora’s lobbying and advocacy efforts in key Western capitals, such as the government’s unilateral concession of accepting Artsakh as part of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Another celebrated case of this was the Prime Minister’s declaration that “there is no direct threat to the civilian population of Karabakh,” even as his Foreign Minister was trying to warn the UN of Azerbaijani atrocities and various Armenian grassroots advocacy and lobbying efforts were underway to highlight the existential dangers facing the ethnic Armenian population of Artsakh.

The Diaspora has a larger and more difficult mission today than it did prior to 1991. It should continue to support Armenian statehood with all the means available to it (often despite the blunders of the government), but at

the same time it must reorganize itself to become an effective national preservation and resistance force—even more so than what it had evolved into after the Genocide. The threats facing the Armenian nation today are in some ways more dangerous than the ones in the aftermath of the Genocide, because, although imminent, they are more subtle, more indirect, and harder to see, especially for the average Armenian citizen living in Yerevan. Complicating that mission further is the fact that the path of least resistance of concerned citizens and some Diasporan compatriots is to relinquish the responsibility of the challenge to the authorities, even when it has become abundantly clear that the government is neither willing nor able to accept a national challenge that extends beyond the boundaries of today’s republic.

There are some national priorities and challenges which simply cannot and should not be abdicated to the state, especially when it is as weak as it is today, and when the vast majority of the nation’s resources and capabilities lie outside the state. Instead of wasting valuable resources in a futile and counterproductive struggle to change government policies, the Diaspora should focus on reorganizing and redirecting its resources to pursue broad national interests that transcend today’s republic, in effect creating parallel and auxiliary economic, political, and diplomatic capabilities next to those of the state.

The question arises, whether something like that is even theoretically possible. Here, it is worth briefly looking at the experience of the engagement of pan-Armenian human resources in Armenia since independence.

The record of success in engaging pan-Armenian resources in Armenia has been mixed, depending largely on the originator of the initiative and the sphere of activity in Armenia. Private initiatives in non-governmental and non-policy spheres have been by far the most productive, bringing considerable improvement to the capabilities of the country. These have included: Education (AUA, TUMO, COAF Smart Center, Armath, CSIE, Dilijan UWC, Matena, Teach for Armenia, AEF, AVC); Health care (particularly in cardiology, urology, breast cancer surgery, eye care, orthopedic care, dentistry); Science and Technology (UATE, FAST, Digitech, HIVE, ARPA Institute, Energize Global Services, Laser technology, certain military applications); Research and analysis (APRI, ASOF); Tourism (Tatev, Noravanq, Cafesjian Center, Hike Armenia, IA One Armenia, Dilijan); Culture and arts (Hamzakayin, AGBU, Creative Armenia, Tekeyan Center, ReAnimania); Social Services (ARS, Orran, Huso Aygi, Mer Doon, WRC); Other spheres (Tufenkian Foundation, Hovnanian Foundation, CFTJ, Repat Armenia, Birthright Armenia, Aurora Prize, The Future Armenian, Arar Foundation, EVN Report, Civilnet).

While these initiatives, the list of which is by no means exhaustive, have changed the profile of Armenia beyond recognition since Independence, they have generally been less effective in changing the existing systems. Rather, they created substantial capabilities parallel to the existing ones, but did not seek nor were allowed the necessary access to reform what was there. This is particularly true in the education sector, where the new initiatives added considerable quality and weight to Armenia’s education resources as separate islands of excellence but did not improve the local state education system. The same is true albeit to a slightly lesser extent in the healthcare sector. In science and technology, government bureaucracy and incompetence have been the main bottlenecks restricting the practical application of Armenia’s considerable private sector-generated scientific and technological capabilities to national defense.

While private initiatives in non-governmental and non-policy spheres made an impact, private initiatives in governmental and policy spheres were virtually dead upon arrival. As for government initiatives, there is only one institutionalized initiative, the iGorts program, with mixed success. The main impediments to a more meaningful engagement of pan-Armenian resources in Armenia have been analyzed elsewhere and will not be repeated here.

What lessons can be learned from the Diaspora’s engagement in Armenia in the past thirty years that can be extended into the Diaspora’s pursuit of broad national interests outside the scope of government policy in Armenia?

The most important lesson is to leave what’s there and launch a parallel effort, with the aim of creating a parallel reality, just like the private sector did in the many spheres described above. If the private sector had fought the local system instead of building its own islands of

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COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassou-

Turkey Bans Entry of Foreigners Who Criticize President Erdogan

The Turkish government, led by the autocratic leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has banned the entry of over 100,000 foreigners from 150 countries, including journalists and academics, just because they have expressed

views critical of the government.

This is a violation of the most basic principle of democracy — freedom of expression. This is also a violation of the criteria for Turkey's membership in NATO and the Council of Europe which is based on "shared values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law."

Yet, neither NATO nor the Council of Europe criticize Turkey for its multiple and long-standing violations of their lofty principles. Even when the European Court of Human Rights, a part of the Council of Europe, rules that Turkey is guilty of violating such rights, the government of Turkey simply ignores the Court's judgment and refuses to pay the ordered financial penalty, even though abiding by its verdict is mandatory for all members.

Abdullah Bozkurt, the Sweden-based Turkish investigative journalist, exposed the Turkish ban in a Nordic Monitor article titled, "Turkey's Secret Blacklist Targets Foreign Critics with Entry Bans and Deportations."

The Turkish government's secret database designates the banned foreigners with the code G followed by two-digit numbers, describing the specific reasons for restricting their entry to the country.

"The G-87 restriction code is perhaps the most frequently used designation for foreigners, signifying that an individual labeled with this code is deemed to pose a threat to general public safety. The alleged evidence justifying such classification often originates from intelligence sources or the assessment made by the risk group responsible for screening incoming passengers at airports or at border crossing points," Bozkurt revealed.

The unsuspecting foreigners become aware of their ban only after they arrive at a Turkish airport. Some of them are refused entry, while others are arrested. The reason for their ban could be as innocent as posting or liking a message on social media. The restrictive measures are not only a violation of the rights of these individuals, but also a violation of the Turkish constitution, as no laws have been passed authorizing such bans.

The information on the foreigners are collected either by the Security General Directorate (Emniyet) and the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) or diplomats at Turkish Embassies overseas who monitor those who make critical comments about Erdogan's government. To make matters worse, some of these foreigners are described as terrorists, without any evidence,

simply for criticizing Turkey.

In 2019, former Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu publicly warned: "In Europe, especially in Germany, there are people who attend meetings of terrorist organizations and then come to [the resort cities of] Antalya, Bodrum and Mugla for vacation. We have taken precautions now. ...Let them come, see if they can enter the [country] easily. It's not so simple. We will detain them and send them back."

Ironically, the Erdogan government has facilitated the entry into Turkey of real terrorists belonging to ISIS. Bozkurt mentioned that "in 2012, Erdogan personally assisted a one-time al-Qaeda financier to enter Turkey, despite a ban on him imposed by a UN Security Council designation, and secretly met with him in Istanbul and Ankara several times."

Sometimes, the Turkish government detains a completely innocent foreign visitor for the purpose of extorting from another country political favors or the exchange of prisoners. An example of such Turkish blackmail took place when Pres. Erdogan ordered the arrest of American pastor Andrew Brunson and offered to exchange him with Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim cleric who had escaped to the United States from Turkey after being falsely accused of plotting a coup against Erdogan. Pres. Trump refused to exchange Gulen for Brunson and imposed sanctions on Turkey. After serving two years in jail, pastor Brunson was finally released and allowed to return to the United States.

The extensive list of individuals on the Turkish government's blacklist has given rise to a lucrative business for certain law firms who specialize in defending the rights of those banned from entry into the country. Sometimes even after the courts have ordered the government to remove the name of an individual from the black list, the Turkish government has refused to comply, claiming that its evidence cannot be presented in court because it is considered a state secret.

Bozkurt concluded his article: "The blacklist serves as a tool in the Erdogan government's toolbox to perpetuate an intimidation campaign against critics, particularly foreign journalists, activists and human rights defenders. Denying entry or enforcing abrupt deportations, the government has used the blacklist to restrict the reporting activities of foreign journalists on the ground. Over the last decade, numerous foreign journalists have been affected by this practice, facing the repercussions of having their names added to the list. It appears that the blacklist will continue to be maintained by the Erdogan government's repressive rule for the foreseeable future."

A simple solution to this problem is for foreigners not to travel to Turkey, thus protecting themselves from harassment, deportation or arrest. The refusal to go to Turkey would deliver a major blow to the country, as millions of tourists visit Turkey each year, injecting tens of billions of dollars into the bankrupt Turkish economy.

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excellence next to the existing structures, it would not have achieved much, and it would have alienated the establishments in the country.

Granted, there are much more formidable obstacles to doing the same in the pursuit of national interests and causes. Paradoxically, the biggest obstacle is the distinct possibility of having to adopt a different narrative than that of the government. The fact that diplomacy is conducted at a state-to-state level further complicates the Diaspora's task when the state acts at cross purposes to a broader national agenda put forth by the Diaspora. Prior to 1991, Diaspora organizations could find some justification in approaching foreign governments, because there was no independent Armenian state as an official state-level counterpart to them. Today, that is harder to do, especially when the state either does not pursue the same national agenda or contradicts the claims of Diaspora organizations.

But the resources of the Diaspora should not be wasted just because they do not always find traction in the Republic of Armenia. The Diaspora is a legitimate stakeholder in both the Armenian state and in the broader national interests. It has an impressive record of achievements while without a state; it can surely find ways to achieve more, working either with, or, if need be, around official Yerevan. The helplessness of the Armenian government should never be allowed to pass on to the Armenian nation. The Armenian nation has been, and still is, larger and more permanent than the state, let alone today's government.

As long as Azerbaijan has the support of formidable enablers like Turkey, Israel and Russia, no Armenian state in the foreseeable future will be able to defend itself alone. But the resources of the entire Armenian nation can in fact defend the state. The hurdle remains the formality between state and nation, which in the case of Armenia is destructive. The Diaspora must reorganize itself to assume the guardianship of the nation, while the state worries about the formalities of the state. That can be the winning paradigm in the short term, until the state acquires the strength to become a custodian of both the republic and the aspirations of the broader nation. But for now, when the state has already declared the abdication of its

responsibility toward the nation, it remains for the Diaspora to declare the adoption of its responsibility towards both the nation and the state.

To meet this challenge, the Diaspora must somehow acquire uncharacteristic internal cooperation and a dispassionate national vision, which, admittedly, it does not have today. It should also come out of its current doldrums and adopt an entirely new, innovative approach, in line with the new global circumstances and the nation's challenges. This will seem impossible to many. But no consequential human achievement has ever been realized by believing that what seems impossible today will necessarily also be impossible tomorrow.

The challenge involves activities in a minimum of five broad directions:

— A coordinated and collaborative effort to revive and invigorate the Armenian educational institutions throughout the world, where ideally a "common" national Armenian education is taught, in addition to a competitive modern education.

— A coordinated and collaborative effort to create an effective global Armenian business network, with the ultimate objective to have a seat at the table of global economic interests.

— A coordinated and collaborative effort to cultivate entrenched professional and diplomatic relations with key global NGOs and think tanks, to have a say in shaping the policy-making mindset around the world.

— A coordinated and collaborative effort to keep up with and have a presence in the technological and AI developments around the world.

— A coordinated and collaborative effort to launch a professional and consistent information war and projection of soft power of Armenian history and culture worldwide.

The last four points above aim to establish global political leverage on par with the challenges facing the Armenian state. The Armenian side is confronted with the aggressive and well-funded Turkish and Azerbaijani lobbies in Western capitals. The Diaspora's response should be as robust in this political confrontation.

Ideally, it should have been the state to assume responsibility of coordinating an effort of this magnitude, acting as the magnet to draw all the resources of the Diaspora

and harnessing them to a common vision. But all four governments of the Third Republic have proved to be incapable of that task, with the current one refuting even the premise of such a responsibility.

Much more can be said about these five directions and how they can be pursued, but this is not the place for that. Suffice it to say that the 30-year holiday of the Armenian Diaspora has ended. It is time to go to work.

Note on the term "Diaspora": The Armenian Diaspora is diverse. The Diaspora of the descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide is an entirely different entity than the Diaspora of Armenian citizens who migrated from Armenia to Glendale in the past 30 years. Then there are the old Armenian settlements in the US, notably Boston area, and the Russian-Armenian Diaspora, the communities in France, the second wave of migrations from Syrian and Lebanon into the Arabian Gulf countries, the old Iranian Diaspora, and so on. The newest members of the "Diaspora" phenomenon, of which I consider myself a member, are the repatriated Diasporans, who have established residency in Armenia and have become tax-paying citizens of the country but are still by and large considered part of the Diaspora. In this article, when referring to the Diaspora, I primarily have in mind part of the Diaspora that has a direct physical, historical and spiritual connection with Armenia; this includes important elements of the descendants of the survivors of the Genocide, the repatriated Diasporans, as well as recent immigrants from Armenia.

(Vahan Zanoyan is a global energy and security specialist. Over a span of 35 years, he has advised 15 different governments on economic development policy, energy sector strategy, national security, and global competitiveness. He has also served as a consultant to numerous international and national oil companies, banks, and other public and private organizations. Author's Note: This article discusses issues and critiques specific policies of the government of Armenia. It intentionally does not name any Armenian government official, and does not use derogatory adjectives, in order to remain faithful to the recommendations of another [article](#) on literate and consequential public political discourse.)



By Pleasing Foes, Armenia Is Diving Headfirst into the Abyss

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it will limit the definition of the Armenian state to the population residing within the borders of the Republic of Armenia and exclude the rest of the Armenian nation.

Two commentators on this project highlight the inconsistencies and risks of this project. Artak Beglaryan, former state minister of Artsakh, considers it very dangerous because it artificially pits the national interest and the interest of the state, when in reality they are complementary. The state is the core and citadel of the nation. Furthermore, it removes the national responsibility of the state towards the 75 percent of the nation (diaspora and Artsakh) which lies outside the formal borders of the state. The project destroys the ideological principles and symbols which constitute the basis of national identity and it considerably weakens the level of resistance of the nation and even the consolidation of the people. Vahan Zanoian (See “Defining Nation and State,” *Armenian Mirror*, February 1, 2024) traces the historical journey of the Armenian nation and the formation of the State and recalls that the nation had a permanent existence while it is not true for the state. It survived without a state for most of its history. During the centuries when there was no Armenian state, it was the nation, with its unshakable attachment to its culture, language, literature, faith, traditions, historical heritage, collective memory and resolute awareness of its own history, which kept alive the hope and prospect of an eventual state.

Moreover, it is this hope and the ideal of independence that made it possible to resist 70 years of communism and prevent the destruction of national ideology and values.

The abandonment of the nation-state would deal a demographic final blow to an Armenia already plagued by high emigration. The refugees from Artsakh will also

increase the flow of emigration because they are unable to return home. If Armenia no longer represents the aspirations of the entire Armenian nation, what is the point for Armenians in the diaspora to invest in it or settle there? Current citizens and residents of Armenia themselves would have much better options outside the Republic of Armenia. Indeed, if the only goals are peace and economic prosperity, then they can better pursue them in Europe, the United States, Canada or even some Middle Eastern states.

If a state is to be built, it is a nation-state with a strong ideology and identity representative of the aspirations of the entire Armenian nation. The strong trend throughout the world, in the United States as in most European countries, as well as in Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, is rather towards the strengthening of national objectives and identities. The Armenian government project, going against this trend, would announce the self-destruction of the Republic of Armenia.

The prime minister recently discussed the need for state building, claiming that one did not exist today. This state has existed since 1918 but its servants no longer exist. Service to the state must take precedence over political and individual interests and privileges. Armenia has lacked servants and statesmen since gaining independence in 1991. The hopes placed in the new generations have been dashed. On the contrary, those in power seem to be even less capable of serving the state than the former Soviet cadres. The constitutional modification, if it were to take place, would in no way diminish the claims of our warlike neighbors, but would certainly accelerate the loss of a state, the homeland of all Armenians. Losing this nation-state created by the survivors of the genocide would complete it.

The urgency is to resist and fight against

this project, to neutralize it by preventing the political force in power and its “lider maximo” to achieve it. For this, it will be necessary to defeat the referendum for a new Constitution, if it ever takes place, and to develop an alternative project, supported by all the political forces who wish to protect the Armenian dreams and restore national dignity and sovereignty. A Pan-Armenian Council of Resistance with a realis-

tic Charter should be created immediately. I am ready to coordinate and consolidate the efforts in this direction.

(Philippe Raffi Kalfayan, based in Paris, is a lawyer, lecturer in international law and a former secretary general of FIDH (International Federation of Human Rights), who has earned a Ph.D. in international law. He is a regular columnist for the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.)

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