

Armenian Protesters Freed without Charge

By Naira Bughadarian, Gayane Saribekian and Artak Khulian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Twenty-seven supporters of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan were set free on Monday, June 3, three days after being arrested during an anti-government demonstration in Yerevan that ended in scuffles with riot police. They and hundreds of other demonstrators demanding Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s resignation rallied outside the Armenian Foreign Ministry to demand a meeting with Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan or other senior diplomats. Galstanyan said the ministry must explain its failure to respond to “humiliating” anti-Armenian statements made by Azerbaijan’s leaders. Tensions at the scene rose after the top diplomats refused to receive Galstanyan and opposition lawmakers accompanying him, with security forces trying to push the crowd back from the ministry building. The



Supporters of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan demonstrate outside the Investigative Committee headquarters, Yerevan, June 3, 2024

protesters resisted, jostling with the policemen. Twenty-eight of them, including two other clergymen, were detained as a result. One of them, Deacon Daniel Grevor-

gyan, was injured in the melee and taken to the hospital from a police station hours later. He said officers of a special police insulted and beat him before arresting him. “They hit wherever they could,” Grevor-gyan told reporters outside the Yerevan headquarters of Armenia’s Investigative Committee picketed by Galstanyan and his supporters on Monday morning. The protest leader demanded that the committee free the 27 other protesters remaining in detention and risking criminal charges. In a statement issued on the night of May 31, the law-enforcement agency described the incident outside the Foreign Ministry as “mass disturbances,” saying that protesters pelted the police with bottles, stones and other objects and called on the crowd to storm the building. But it eventually refrained from indicting any of the detained protesters, paving the way for their release. Arsen Babayan, a lawyer collaborating with Galstanyan’s protest movement, said this fact “completely disproves” the investigators’ and Pashinyan allies’ claims about the violent behavior of the detainees.

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Armenia: Feud with Russia Experiences Another Spike

By Ani Avetisyan

Armenian-Russian relations are experiencing another spike in tension. The Armenian government briefly pulled the plug on a major Russian propaganda platform, and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has accused two unnamed member states of a Moscow-led security alliance of conspiring to help Azerbaijan to reconquer Nagorno Karabakh. Once strategic partners, Armenia and Russia have fallen out amid accusations by Yerevan that the Kremlin did not fulfill its obligations to defend Armenian security interests during the Second Karabakh War. The fighting ended in the fall of 2023, when Azerbaijani forces drove an estimated 100,000 Karabakh Armenians residents from the territory. Since then, Pashinyan’s government has downgraded relations with Russia, while forging stronger ties with the United States and European Union. Officials in Yerevan announced May 29 the suspension of broadcasts by Russia’s state-owned broadcaster, Channel One, ostensibly citing unpaid debts to the Armenian agency that controls digital frequencies. But the move appeared to have a political connection too. The suspension followed Channel One’s broadcast of a talk show featuring fierce criticism of Pashinyan’s leadership. Russian lawmakers during the program accused Pashinyan of undermining the Russian-Armenian alliance and of making excessive concessions to Azerbaijan that weakened Armenia’s national security. Channel One broadcasts resumed in Armenia, according to multiple media reports on May 31, after Russia covered its payment arrears. Days before the ban was announced, Pashinyan accused “two” members of the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) of supporting Baku’s war efforts. Armenia is also a CSTO partner, but as part of the chill that has engulfed bilateral relations with Moscow, Yerevan has frozen its active participation in the alliance.

“I know at least two CSTO member countries that participated in the preparation of the war against us. These countries may have created an illusion that they wanted to help us,” Pashinyan said on May 22. “The aim of this war was the non-existence of an independent Armenian state”.

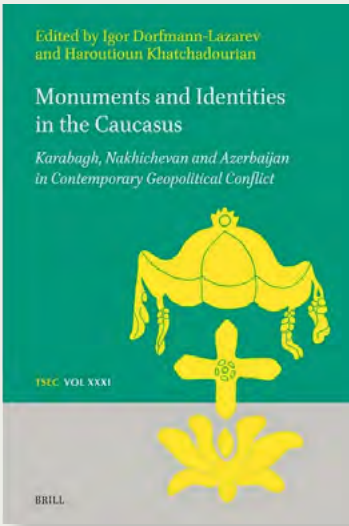
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Paylan, Other Parliamentarians in Turkey Under Indictment

ANKARA (Rudaw) — On May 28, an indictment was prepared by the government against 5 former members of parliament from the HDP Kurdish majority party, who were investigated due to the Kobani demonstrations in 2014. An indictment was filed against former HDP MPs Hüda Kaya, Serpil Kemalbay, Fatma Kurtulan, Garo Paylan and Pero Dunder, who were investigated by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office. In the indictment sent to Ankara 22nd High Criminal Court, which recently decided the case against 108 defendants regarding the Kobani events, former HDP MPs Hüda Kaya, Serpil Kemalbay, Garo Paylan, Fatma Kurtulan and Pero Dunder were listed as “suspects.”



see PAYLAN, page 5 Garo Paylan



New Book Brings Multidisciplinary Focus to Azerbaijan’s Distortion of History, Destruction of Monuments

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BELMONT, Mass. — The possible — and even highly probable — destruction of all the irreplaceable Armenian moments in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), now under Azerbaijani rule, the reasons why monuments matter as well as why they are targeted for destruction, are covered in a new book, *Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus: Karabagh, Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan in Contemporary Geopolitical Conflict* (Brill, 2023).

The book’s two co-editors and a contributor, Dr. Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, who teaches at Sofia University, in Bulgaria; Haroutioun Khatchadourian, an independent researcher in France and Dr. Marcello Flores, formerly of Università di Siena in Italy, participated in an online discussion hosted by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research on April 26. Dr. Sebouh D. Aslanian of the University of California, Los Angeles, offered introductory remarks at the discussion.

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TURKEY
500-year-old Armenian Church In Diyarbekir to Be Renovated

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WASHINGTON, DC
More than 2,000 Attend Washington Armenian Food Festival

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MIRROR-SPECTATOR ANNUAL SUMMER VACATION
The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* will close for its annual two-week vacation in early July. The last issue before the vacation will be that of June 29. The first issue back will be that of July 20. Enjoy a safe and healthy summer.



ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Pashinyan Speaks with Finnish President

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had a telephone conversation with the President of the Republic of Finland Alexander Stubb, reported the Information and Public Relations Department of the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, on June 3.

The two leaders discussed issues of further development and expansion of relations between Armenia and Finland, especially expanding economic cooperation.

Pashinyan and Stubb touched upon the deepening of cooperation between Armenia and the EU, the democratic reforms implemented in the country, as well as issues related to the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process and regional security.

First Truck from China Through Crossroads of Peace Program

YEREVAN (news.am) — Though the Crossroads of Peace project launched by the Armenian government, the first truck from Shanghai, China arrived in Yerevan on May 31, via Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran.

Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Armenia Bolat Imanbaev, Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Armenia Muhammetnyyaz Mashalov, and Ambassador of Armenia to Uzbekistan Aram Grigoryan were on hand at the official welcome.

“The government of the Republic of Armenia has always underscored the efforts being made in the direction of the implementation of transport interconnections and regional infrastructure projects,” the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of Armenia said regarding this event.

Russia Offers Help with Flood Damage

MOSCOW (Public Radio of Armenia) — Russia is ready to help Armenia in restoring flood-affected areas, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova told reporters at a briefing this week.

“We saw a positive reaction and reiterate that all the proposals that were made are relevant. And as allies, we are always ready to lend a shoulder, based on the needs of Yerevan,” Zakharova said.

She recalled that the Russian-Armenian Center for Humanitarian Response immediately jumped in to help the Armenian authorities.

The Russian Ministry of Defense expressed its readiness to help with the forces and resources of the 102nd military base. The issue of providing assistance is also being considered by a number of Russian companies operating in Armenia.

According to her, various specialists have been sent to the site.

“Once again we express our condolences to the families and friends of those killed as a result of the rampant disaster and wish a speedy recovery to those injured. We will also provide all necessary assistance to restore normal life in the regions affected by the flood,” Zakharova noted.

Pashinyan Defends Police Action Against Armenian Catholicos

By Susan Badalian, Gayane Saribekian and Shoghik Galstian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan defended on Wednesday, May 29, police officers who tried to physically stop Catholicos Karekin II, the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, from visiting a key national memorial on Tuesday.

Karekin and senior clergymen accompanying him had to break through three police cordons to lay flowers and pray at the Sardarapat memorial on the 106th anniversary of the proclamation of the first independent Armenian republic. Pashinyan led an official ceremony there 30 minutes later, at around 3 p.m.

dioceses as well as opposition leaders and other critics of the Armenian government.

Pashinyan claimed that police officials at the scene “tried to clarify whether His Holiness has come to continue disruptive and provocative actions, initiated by his political supporters and the [protest] movement led by him, or for another purpose.” He said they let Karekin through after receiving assurances that Karekin’s visit to Sardarapat “only has a ceremonial purpose.”

Videos of the incident show no such conversation between the officials and Karekin or his entourage.

“The police did not give explanations or try to clarify anything,” insisted Rev. Yesayi Arsenyan, head of the Mother See’s press office. “They just blocked the alley

the Interior Ministry building in Yerevan on Wednesday morning. They also protested against what they called instances of police brutality against participants of ongoing Galstanyan-led protests aimed at forcing Pashinyan to resign.

Galstanyan demanded that Interior Minister Vahe Ghazaryan come out of the building and talk to him publicly. Ghazaryan said through aides that he is only ready to receive the outspoken archbishop in his office. The latter refused the offer. The crowd led by Galstanyan left the scene after blocking entrances to the ministry building for nearly five hours.

The protest appeared to prevent Ghazaryan from presenting an annual report to members of the Armenian parliament committee on defense and security. He sent one of his deputies, Arpine Sargsyan, instead.

Sargsyan refused to comment on the minister’s absence when she appeared before the committee. Opposition members of the panel denounced the no-show, provoking a shouting match with their pro-government colleagues.

“Is Vahe Ghazaryan afraid of coming to the committee meeting?” said Gegham Manukyan of the opposition Hayastan alliance.

“No, nobody is scared of you,” countered the committee chairman, Andranik Kocharyan.

The Armenian Church officially voiced support for Galstanyan and his supporters on May 7 as they marched from the Tavush province to Yerevan to protest against Pashinyan’s territorial concessions to Azerbaijan. Karekin’s office announced on Monday that Galstanyan has been relieved of his “ecclesiastical and administrative” duties at his own request. The 53-year-old archbishop, who until then headed the church’s Tavush Diocese, retained his episcopal rank.



Catholicos Karekin II and other clergymen break through a police cordon at the Sardarapat memorial, May 28, 2024.

The ceremony was scheduled to take place in the morning. Pashinyan was thought to have canceled it after hundreds of anti-government protesters led by Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan gathered at the memorial late on Monday and spent the night there. But the premier unexpectedly arrived at Sardarapat in the afternoon.

The unprecedented police actions were strongly condemned by the church’s Echmiadzin-based Mother See and Diaspora

and wouldn’t let us through.”

Artenyan also told RFE/RL’s Armenian Service that Karekin’s office had notified Pashinyan’s protocol service in advance that the Catholicos will visit the memorial in the afternoon. The service confirmed, for its part, that Pashinyan will go there in the morning, he said.

Meanwhile, Galstanyan described the police actions as “blasphemous” as hundreds of people led by him rallied outside

Armenian Protesters Freed without Charge

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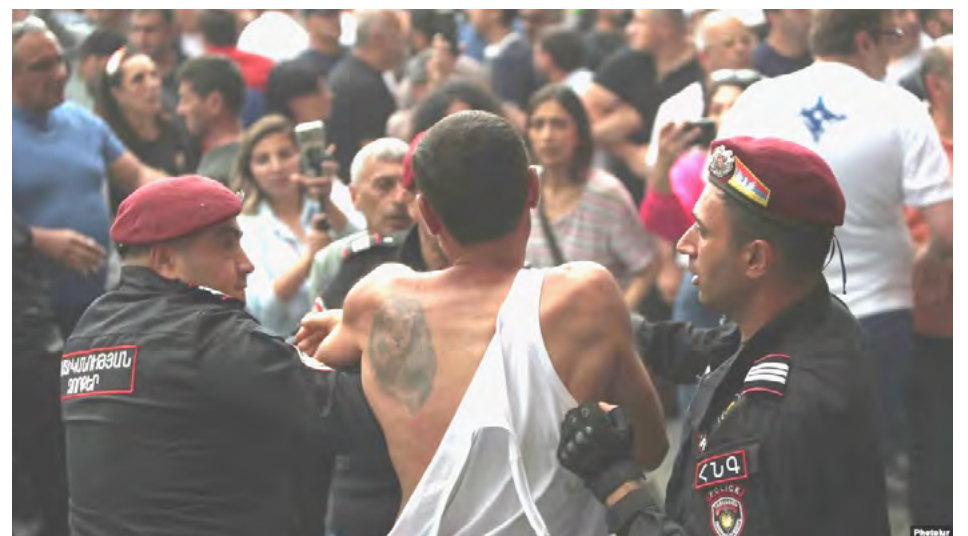
Galstanyan also demanded that the Investigative Committee prosecute police officers who he said assaulted and injured peaceful participants of his campaign for Pashinyan’s resignation.

Several policemen were caught on camera punching, kicking and swearing at an opposition lawmaker, Ashot Simonian, during anti-government protests on May 27. One of the officers was suspended as a result.

The Office of the Prosecutor-General said on Monday, June 3, that a criminal case has been opened in connection with that incident. Nobody has been indicted so far.

No Armenian law-enforcement officers are known to have been prosecuted in recent years for using excessive force against anti-Pashinyan protesters. Authorities have only brought such charges stemming from police actions during the 2018 mass protests that brought Pashinyan to power.

Levon Yeranossyan, who was the commander of Armenian interior troops at the time, was sentenced on Monday to four



Riot police detain a protester outside the Armenian Foreign Ministry building, May 31, 2024.

years in prison for what a Yerevan court deemed an unauthorized and dangerous use of stun grenades against Pashinyan-led protesters. One of those protesters was seriously injured by a grenade explosion.

Yeranossyan, who denies any wrongdoing, will not go to prison because of a general amnesty declared in 2019. The police general refused to comment after the court ruling.



ARMENIA



A bridge near the town of Akhtala destroyed by floods, May 30, 2024

Armenia to Seek Foreign Aid for Post-Flood Reconstruction

YEREVAN (Azatutyun.am) — The government indicated on Thursday, May 30, that it will ask foreign states and international donors to help it rebuild roads, bridges and other infrastructure in Armenia’s northern regions devastated by weekend floods.

Rivers flowing through the Tavush and Lori provinces burst their banks early on Sunday, May 25, killing four people, flooding towns and villages located along them and severely damaging local infrastructure. It was the country’s worst flooding in decades.

“The scale of the disaster is huge,” Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures Gnel Sanosyan said during a cabinet meeting in Yerevan.

Sanosyan, who heads a government task force dealing with the aftermath of the disaster, said the resulting material damage is so extensive that authorities are still calculating it. He singled out the full or partial destruction of about 20 bridges located in the area.

“I think that we should ask our [interna-

tional] partners to provide concrete assistance, especially in the field of bridge construction,” Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan noted in response.

Both Pashinyan and Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan said that some of those partners have already expressed readiness to assist Armenia in the post-flood reconstruction.

“We need to clarify as quickly as possible what exactly we expect from international partners,” Mirzoyan said, urging Sanosyan’s ministry to come up with relevant proposals.

Two of the destroyed bridges connected the Lori town of Akhtala and six nearby villages to the rest of the country. Those communities remained largely cut off from the outside world on Thursday. Rescue workers supplied their residents with food and other basic necessities through a local forest.

The floods also seriously damaged many sections of the two national highways leading to Armenia’s main border crossing with Georgia. In Sanosyan’s words, both roads



A road in Lori damaged by floods, May 27, 2024

are now barely passable after emergency repairs carried out in recent days.

The damage was particularly severe to the M6 highway that runs parallel to the sole railway connecting Armenia to Georgia. More than two kilometers of rail track

there was reportedly washed away by flood waters. According to Pashinyan, Russia’s national railway company, which manages the Armenian railway network, has promised to rebuild the damaged sections “in the shortest possible time.”

Church in Armenia to Face Higher Taxes

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s political team announced on May 31 plans to impose more taxes on the Armenian Apostolic Church amid continuing anti-government protests in Yerevan led by a senior clergyman.

The church officially voiced support for Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and his supporters on May 7 as they marched to Yerevan to demand Pashinyan’s resignation over his controversial territorial concessions to Azerbaijan. Pashinyan’s political allies accused him of meddling in politics. One of them, parliament speaker Alen Simonian, said on May 21 the church should be taxed like Armenian businesses. Pashinyan hinted that such measures are imminent.

The church currently pays income tax and customs duties on goods and raw materials imported by it. It is exempt from property tax. Tsovinar Vartanyan, the chairwoman of the Armenian parliament committee on finance and budgetary affairs, said she and her pro-government colleagues want to scrap this exemption.

“At the moment, we are looking into thousands of properties managed by the church,” she said. “I’m not talking about monasteries, but commercial space, public space, manufacturing premises, many residential houses. This is being examined, and I think that this initiative will eventually have a logical outcome and we will have a bill.”

For his part, Rustam Badasyan, Pashinyan’s former personal lawyer currently heading the State Revenue Committee,

backed the idea of collecting a 20 percent value-added tax from candles sold to and lit by worshipers in just about every church in Armenia. Candle sales are a major source of income for the 1,700-year-old religious institution which suffered serious human and material losses in Soviet times.

Vartanyan claimed that the plans for the new taxes are not connected with recent political developments. However, both Pashinyan and Simonian signaled them in the context of their strong criticism of the Galstanyan-led protests.

Artsvik Minasyan, an opposition lawmaker involved in the protests, denounced the government plans. He pointed to an article of the Armenian constitution that acknowledges the ancient church’s “exceptional role” in the country’s history and

social life.

There was no immediate reaction from the church’s Mother See in Echmiadzin, a historic town 20 kilometers west of Yerevan. Responding to Simonian last week, Archbishop Galstanyan argued that the church never requested or received any government compensation for the Soviet-era destruction or confiscation of most of its worship sites and other property.

Pashinyan’s relationship with the church and its supreme head, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, in particular has steadily deteriorated during his six-year rule. Tensions between them rose further last October when Karekin blamed Pashinyan for Azerbaijan’s recapture of Nagorno-Karabakh and the resulting mass exodus of the region’s ethnic Armenian population.



ARMENIA



A newly constructed solar power plant in Talin, in 2017.

Armenian Solar Power Project in Limbo

By Nane Sahakian

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — An Abu Dhabi-based company appears to have put on hold plans to build Armenia's first massive solar power plant.

The Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company, also known as Masdar, won in 2021 an

international tender for the construction of the 200-megawatt plant near Talin, a small town 67 kilometers outside of Yerevan.

Masdar pledged to invest \$174 million in the plant, 85 percent of which it would own. The Armenian National Interests Fund (ANIF), a government agency tasked with attracting foreign investment, was due

to control the remaining minority stake.

The facility was initially expected to be built by the end of 2023 and ANIF said it was expected to start generating electricity in 2025.

No signs of construction or preparations for it are now visible on the 500 hectares of land set aside for the solar power plant.

Commenting on the delay, ANIF said late last week that "processes preceding the construction" are ongoing. A construction company capable of implementing the

by the collapse of another Armenian-Emirati joint venture. An airline set up by the United Arab Emirates-based carrier Air Arabia and ANIF in 2021 was stripped of its Armenian operating license in March two months after discontinuing all commercial flights to and from Yerevan.

Although Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan claims to have eliminated "systemic" corruption and created a level playing field for all businesses, virtually no large-scale Western investment projects have been

World Bank Approves \$40 Million to Support Armenia's Transition to Clean Energy

YEREVAN — The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved \$40 million in support of the Enabling the Energy Transition project for Armenia, which will assist the implementation of the Energy Sector Development Strategy to 2040 of the Republic of Armenia. The investments will focus on the rehabilitation of power transmission substations, the adoption of reforms to allow the transmission company to access private financing, and the promotion of energy sector modernization as well as regional energy cooperation among emerging and developing economies in the Europe and Central Asia region.

Armenia's power sector is heavily dependent on imported fuels, especially natural gas, which creates significant energy security risks, compounded by the global energy crisis. Attracting private investment is essential to fund the large-scale projects needed in the sector. In 2021, 62 percent of Armenia's total energy supply came from natural gas, followed by oil (16 percent), nuclear (14 percent), and hydro (5 percent), whereas the share of nontraditional renewable energy sources (wind and solar) was only about 1 percent.

"To ensure affordable, reliable, and clean electricity supply for consumers, Armenia needs continued investments in modernizing the power transmission network and improving the commercial

viability of the High-voltage Electric Networks of Armenia JSC, the transmission company. Moreover, we expect this project to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions — crucial for mitigating climate change," said Carolin Geginat, World Bank Country Manager for Armenia.

The project aims to facilitate the integration of an estimated 1.1 GW of renewable energy generation capacity into the transmission grid by 2032, which is enough to power over 690,000 households. This will reduce the annual emissions of net greenhouse gas (GHG) by 540,000 tons. Additionally, it seeks to attract private investment totaling \$550 million, upgrade all transmission substations with automated control and digital protection systems, and increase the total capacity of transmission substations from 2,711 megavolt-amperes (MVA) to 3,109 MVA. These efforts are part of a comprehensive strategy to enhance renewable energy adoption, minimize environmental impact, and modernize the grid for increased efficiency and reliability.

The project is part of the Europe and Central Asia Renewable Energy Scale-Up Multiphase Programmatic Approach (ECARES MPA) Program, with an overall financing envelope of \$2 billion equivalent, which was approved by the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors on March 28.



A Fly Arna plane lands at Zvartnots airport on an inaugural flight, June 10

project has still not been chosen, it told RFE/RL's Armenian Service.

"The program will not be suspended," insisted the Armenian Ministry of Economy. It gave no reason for the delay, saying vaguely that "the remaining issues are under discussion."

The solar energy project was by far the biggest foreign investment attracted by ANIF since its creation in May 2019. Unimpressed by its track record, the Armenian government initiated an ANIF management overhaul in January this year before deciding to liquidate the fund altogether.

The decision was clearly also influenced

launched in Armenia during his rule.

In 2018, Pashinyan's newly installed government helped to effectively disrupt a multimillion-dollar gold mining project launched by a British-American company and strongly opposed by local environmentalists. In 2022, it controversially rejected a \$300 million bid by a consortium of French companies to build a big ski resort on the slopes of Armenia's highest mountain, Aragats. The government approved instead a more modest project proposed by an obscure Russian-Armenian businessman for the same location. That project is also reportedly in limbo now.



INTERNATIONAL

Australian Lawmakers Unanimously Slam Azerbaijan, Call for Pro-Armenian Measures

CANBERRA — On Monday, June 3, members from the Australian House of Representatives debated a historic first-ever motion on the Republic of Artsakh, and the MPs unanimously slammed Azerbaijan’s 24-hour military attack against Artsakh and called on Azerbaijan to implement several pro-Armenian measures, reported the Armenian National Committee of Australia (ANC-AU).

The motion, championed by Member for Bradfield and Co-Chair of the Australia-Armenia Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Hon. Paul Fletcher MP, was debated in the Australian Parliament’s Federation Chamber with four speakers, including Member for Bennelong Jerome Laxale MP, Member for Beam David Smith MP, and Member for Mackellar, Dr. Sophie Scamps. All speakers supported the motion.

All four speakers spoke in favor of the motion during the 20-minute debate, unequivocally calling out Azerbaijan’s 24-hour military assault and urging Azerbaijan to release all Armenian political prisoners, allow the right of return for Armenian refugees to Artsakh under international guarantees, to protect Armenian cultural heritage, and for Azerbaijan to withdraw from the sovereign

borders of the Republic of Armenia.

In commencing the debate, Fletcher said, “I rise to express my support for the rights to self-determination of the Armenian people in Nagorno Karabakh and the Republic of Artsakh. I condemn the unconscionable attack by Azerbaijan in September 2022, which has caused untold misery and has driven almost all Armenians who formerly lived in Nagorno-Karabakh from their homes.”

Fletcher called on Australia to take a firmer stance to “call for the removal of Azerbaijani troops from the sovereign borders of Armenia, the right of return for Armenians to Artsakh, the right of return of all Armenian citizens and for Azerbaijan to cease its erasure of the Armenian presence in the region”.

Jerome Laxale, who seconded the motion and is representative of the largest Armenian-Australian community in the country, spoke strongly in support of the motion and said: “The actions of Azerbaijan are ongoing, senseless and unprovoked. They have and continue to cause immense suffering and displacement, and they need to know the world is watching.”

He added, “Political prisoners need to be

released, internationally recognized border must be respected, and ancient cultural sites must be preserved. These are not unreasonable asks.”

Dr. Scamps, who called the actions of Azerbaijan “ethnic cleansing”, referenced the work of scholars, experts in genocide prevention and human rights advocates to make her case and said: “The inaugural prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has labelled the ethnic cleansing of the Artsakh Armenians as the second Armenian Genocide, encouraged by the inaction of the international community.”

The final speaker, David Smith, who spoke about the issue of Artsakh on the floor of Parliament for the first time, said, “Azerbaijan willfully ignored their obligation to ensure the population of Nagorno Karabakh was denied food and other essential medications” when discussing the blockade.

Smith importantly acknowledged the work of the Australian Government, which has rightfully called out Azerbaijan on two separate occasions. Smith said, “For the second time now, an Australian Government has recognized Azerbaijan’s belligerent actions first in November 2022, acknowledging Azerbaijan as the responsible party for a specific series of crimes against Armenian prisoners of war and the desecration of Armenian cultural and religious sites and secondly as the instigator of an illegal blockade in violation of international law.”

ANC-AU Executive Director, Michael Kolokossian praised the historic motion and thanked all speakers for their support in debating this issue.

“It is only fitting that the first Federal parliamentarian to speak about the rights of the people of Artsakh back in 2010, Paul Fletcher, championed the first ever motion and debate in the Federal Australian Parliament, slamming Azerbaijan and calling on Azerbaijan to implement several pro-Armenian measures that would ensure the rights and security of Armenians,” Kolokossian said.

“We thank all speakers in this debate who unanimously endorsed the motion, which signaled a clear rejection of Azerbaijan’s genocidal policies against Armenians,” he added. “This motion clearly articulates that Australia and our Parliament stand with Armenian-Australians and the Republic of Armenia in calling out Azerbaijan’s ongoing belligerent actions.”

Armenia: Feud with Russia Experiences Another Spike

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Pashinyan later mentioned comments by Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko made during his mid-May visit to Azerbaijan. The implication of Pashinyan’s assessment was that Belarus was one of the unnamed co-conspirators.

The first country to react to Pashinyan’s accusation was Russia. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova challenged the Armenian prime minister to name names.

“I wonder which countries the Armenian prime minister was talking about. Should we all guess, or will they tell us later?” Zakharova told a news briefing in Moscow.

Zakharova claimed that Russia had done its utmost to ensure that Armenia ‘did not feel abandoned and forgotten’ during the six-week war with Azerbaijan. Zakharova noted that Russia brokered a ceasefire agreement in October 2020, which Pashinyan initially rejected, resulting in further territorial losses for Armenia, before agreeing to another Russian-brokered ceasefire two weeks later.

On May 24, Russia recalled its ambassador to Armenia, Sergei Kopyrkin, for consultations amid ongoing diplomatic tensions. Zakharova announced the move, but gave no explanation. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also offered no reason for the move, saying only that “ambassadors come regularly for consultations.”

(This article originally appeared on May 31 on www.eurasianet.org.)

Paylan, Other Parliamentarians Under Indictment in Turkey

PAYLAN, from page 1

The indictment alleged that Kaya, Kemalbay and Paylan, who were deputies at the time of the events, and Kurtulan and Dundar, who were deputies in their 27th term, were in unity of opinion and action with 108 people who were tried on the same grounds before the Ankara 22nd High Criminal Court, in initiating and carrying out the events of October 6-8, 2014.

In September of that year, Islamic State forces had attacked the city of Kobani, Syria, on the border with Turkey. Many of the residents fled across the border into Turkey. The Turkish government did not allow Kurdish volunteers to help their brethren across the border, and also used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the demonstrators.

The indictment stated that for these rea-

sons, the people mentioned “should be responsible for the crimes committed as a result of the calls to action made as announced by the HDP Headquarters.”



The five parliamentarians against whom charges are leveled

INTERNATIONAL

Yerevan to Host Next Eurasian Council Meeting

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The next meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council will take place in Yerevan, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission Bakytzhan Sagintayev said on June 4.

“The next meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council will take place in Yerevan at the end of September or early October,” he said at an expanded meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council in the Belarusian city of Nesvizh in the Minsk region.

The Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, which includes the heads of government of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states, ensures the implementation and control of the implementation of decisions of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council composed of the leaders of the of the member states. Eurasian Intergovernmental Council meets twice a year.

French-Armenian Journalist Leaves

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) — French-Armenian journalist Leo Nicolian, who was on a hunger strike at Yerevan’s Zvartnots airport for 41 days after he was denied entry to the country, returned to France on June 3.

Nicolian announced on social media on Sunday, June 2 that he needed to improve his health in order to “continue the fight.” The journalist noted he had lost 19 kilograms.

Armenia Parliament Speaker Visits Slovenia

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — On June 3, a delegation led by the President of the Armenian National Assembly, Alen Simonyan, who was in Ljubljana on an official visit, participated in the event dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Slovenia.

Armenian National Assembly Speaker Alen Simonyan and the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, Urska Klakocar Zupancic, made opening speeches at the event.

“The partners congratulated each other on this symbolic anniversary for both countries and emphasized the strong friendly relations established over three decades. Alen Simonyan noted in his speech that a high-level political dialogue and strong inter-parliamentary relations have been formed between Armenia and Slovenia,” the press service of Armenia’s Parliament said in a readout.

Simonyan added, “I strongly believe that our relationship has great potential for development. As the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, I express my full readiness to further promote the relations between the two countries for the benefit of our peoples.”



INTERNATIONAL

Chahan Minassian Takes Over the Secretive Fortuny Headquarters

By Sofia Celeste

MILAN (*Women’s Wear Daily*) — Armenian Lebanese interior designer Chahan Minassian has a flair for enhancing Venetian jewels. The founder of Chahan Gallery in Paris is known around the canals for transforming the Abbazia San Gregorio, a former Benedictine abbey, into a 21st-century home brimming with curiosity and art. Since then, he has also put his touch on iconic Venetian Palazzos such as Contarini-Michieli, Corner Spinelli and Palazzo Brandolini-Giustinian, infusing them with his vision of contemporary living.

For the occasion of the Venice Art Biennale, which runs from late April to November 24, Minassian was tapped to reenvision the historic Fortuny headquarters and former home of Countess Gozzi into a gallery showcase of contemporary design, open to the broader design community for the very first time. This is the first of a roster of new projects for the heritage brand, the company said in a statement previewed by WWD.

“It’s a gallery with the vision of the new Venetian interiors, complementing new curations and Chahan design to historical interiors. The property reveals our Murano glass custom collections, the Canal Grande

signature tables, and Emilio Martinez’s paintings,” Minassian told WWD, adding that their shared vision intertwines diverse heritages, resulting in a captivating narrative. A curation of pieces on display by artists and designers represented by Minassian are available for purchase.

Minassian, who made Venice his home six years ago, represents the ongoing cultural wave, ushering in new international residents to Venice’s shores, repopulating the tourist city with a dynamic residential cultural fabric. The partnership between Fortuny and Chahan “signifies Venice’s legacy as a center of cultural exchange,” the company said.

Visitors are welcome to discover evolving displays highlighting the integration of Fortuny’s craftsmanship with Chahan’s curation, in a rare opportunity to experience art, design and culture in one of the world’s most unique and beloved cities, according to the company.

Fortuny, whose iconic dresses like the Delphos were coveted by yesteryear icons like Isadora Duncan and Oona Chaplin, was founded in 1921 by artist and inventor Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo. His label continues to resonate worldwide for its innovative textiles and timeless designs that



The Fortuny headquarters in Venice

have been integrated into the collections of modern day designers like Rick Owens. Its legacy was revitalized by brothers Mickey and Maury Riad, the firm’s creative director and chief executive officer respectively, who inherited the company from their father Maged Riad, in 1998. The latter had bought it from Countess Gozzi, Elsie McNeill Lee, the American interior designer who Mariano Fortuny had designated as his single representative in the U.S. McNeill Lee was the wife of Count Alvise Go-

zzi. She died in 1994.

Built on the grounds of an ancient convent, the company insists that the inner workings of the factory remain secret. According to the company, Fortuny y Madrazo’s will states that the techniques used to create the iconic fabrics would never be revealed publicly.

The historic Fortuny headquarters are located on the island of Giudecca in Venice and sits adjacent to the iconic Fortuny Factory facing the Giudecca Canal.

Swiss Armenians Rally Around Their Umbrella Organization

TROINEX, Switzerland — On May 7, the Armenian and Armenophile organizations of Switzerland held the constituent General Assembly of CAAS (Council of Armenian and Armenophile Organiza-

tions of Switzerland/Conseil des associations arméniennes et arménophiles de Suisse), whose aim is to represent and coordinate the Armenian organizations of Switzerland in a unified manner, to focus

on the issue of Armenian identity in Switzerland, and to carry out political, media and humanitarian projects to preserve the security of the Armenian state, promoting the rights of Armenians, wherever they

may be, and their cultural heritage. The promotion of justice for the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh remains central.

The Council is the fruit of a long process that began during the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in autumn 2020. The need to speak with one voice to international public opinion soon emerged. The CAAS currently brings together 13 organizations, to which others will soon be added. The Board, whose members are Lerna Bagdikian (AGBU Young Professionals-YP Geneva), Vicken Bayramian (Armenian General Benevolent Union-AGBU Switzerland), Caroline Babayéguidian (AGBU Young Professionals-YP Zurich) and Alain Navarra de Borgia (Hystart), will be chaired by Sarkis Shahinian (Association Suisse-Arménie, GSA).

The constitution of the CAAS, whose management is intended to be cyclical and collegial, will enable all member associations to assume the responsibilities of the Council. Three commissions (Policy, Media and Advocacy and Cultural Heritage) will support the work of the Board.

“We are aware of the importance of our role for Armenians in Switzerland as well as around the world, particularly in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Our actions will be guided solely by the demands, tenacity and interests of the Armenian people; they will be both ambitious and realistic, and will be discussed, approved and carried out in a collegial manner. We will also be guided by the values of the Armenian diaspora and of Switzerland. Our actions will be dedicated to youth development and the future, without forgetting our cultural heritage, of which we are the attentive guardians,” emphasized CAAS President Sarkis Shahinian.

The constituent associations of CAAS are: AGBU Young Professionals Geneva, AGBU Young Professionals Zurich, Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) - Switzerland, Armenischer Verein Zürich (AVZ), Artzakank-Echo, Association Avertis, Association Santé Arménie Suisse, Association Suisse-Arménie (GSA), Ecole Arménienne de Lausanne, Hystart, Komitas Action Suisse-Arménie (KASA), Miasine, Union Arménienne de Suisse (UAS).



500-Year-Old Armenian Church in Diyarbakir to Be Renovated

ISTANBUL (Public Radio of Armenia) — The 500-year-old Surp Sarkis Armenian Church in Diyarbakir will soon undergo major renovations, Anadolu Agency reported on June 4.

One of the historical Armenian churches in Diyarbakir, it is located in the Sur district and is owned by the Surp Giragos Armenian Church Foundation. It had fallen into disrepair due to a lack of a congregation and sustained damage during the twin earthquakes on Feb. 6, 2023.

The renovation project, approved and funded by the Turkish Culture and Tourism Ministry, aims to revive the church and will officially begin this month.

Speaking to Anadolu, Cemil Koc, head of the Culture Ministry’s Directorate of Surveying and Monuments in Diyarbakir, said the church is classified as a first-class monumental structure.

It is the second-largest Armenian church in Diyarbakir, after

the Surp Giragos Armenian Church, Koc added.

“The structure consists of five naves parallel to the apse, featuring wide arches and a wooden-beam, earth-covered roof. The women’s gallery, known as the last congregation area, has suffered damage to its columns and arches due to recent earthquakes and human factors.”

“Our renovation work aims to revive the church and contribute to the tourism of our region and country,” Koc said.

He added that the renovation project began in 2021, with comprehensive surveys, renovation, structural, mechanical, and electrical plans approved by the conservation board in 2022.

However, after the earthquakes, the church was found to have sustained severe damage, Koc said.

The ministry, he said, provided a grant 5 million Turkish lira (\$154,000) for this year to initiate the renovation process.



Community News

Prosecutors Say Messages between Sen. Menendez, Wife Reveal Details Of Egypt-Focused Scheme

By Dana Difilippo

NEW YORK (*New Jersey Monitor*) — In texts, emails, and voice-mails, Nadine Arslanian gushed like a smitten teenager soon after she began dating Sen. Bob Menendez in 2018, addressing him as “mon amour,” “love of my life,” and “my very handsome senator.”

She followed those sweet nothings with requests that ran far outside the normal romantic chitchat of new relationships, asking the senator to set up unofficial meetings with Egyptian military leaders to discuss security issues, divulge details about staffing at the U.S. embassy in Cairo, and share information about U.S. military aid temporarily withheld from Egypt over human rights abuses.

The third week of [Menendez’s bribery trial](#) began in Manhattan on Tuesday, May 28, with prosecutor Paul Monteleoni and FBI Special Agent Michael Coughlin painstakingly presenting almost four hours of messages to show how Nadine, who married the senator in October 2020, served as an intermediary in schemes that prompted prosecutors to indict Menendez for acting as a foreign agent. In one voicemail Monteleoni played for jurors, she asked the senator to meet an Egyptian official at his embassy.

“Hi, it’s me, calling my very handsome senator,” Nadine crooned. “I have a thing to ask you.”

Menendez served as ranking member and then chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee until he gave up his leadership role on the committee shortly after his indictment.

In many instances, after communicating with Menendez, Nadine passed along his responses — often verbatim and within minutes — to her longtime friend Wael Hana, the Egyptian-American businessman who prosecutors say fed the information to Egyptian officials in a ploy to [secure a monopoly on halal meat exports there](#).

In one text exchange, Nadine handed her phone to attorney Andy Aslanian, who worked for Egypt’s ministry of defense in Washington, D.C., so that he could text directly with Menendez to arrange a meeting. Other texts show communications to set up meetings between Menendez and Egyptian Major General Khaled Ahmed Shawky Osman, defense, army, naval, and air force attache to the U.S. and Canada.

Another email from Menendez’s personal Gmail showed a ghost-written letter — with the opening and closing salutations left blank — that prosecutors say Menendez drafted for Egyptian officials. The missive was meant to persuade American senators who were concerned about Egypt’s worsening human rights

see MENENDEZ, page 8



Medical staff in Armenia uses cutting-edge equipment to diagnose diabetes-related eye disease

AECP Receives \$780,000 Grant From World Diabetes Foundation For Efforts in Armenia

One decade ago, there were no comprehensive programs in Armenia for the prevention and early intervention of diabetes and its many negative consequences despite the large number of diabetics among the country’s population. Vision loss or blindness as one of the major complications for diabetes was especially concerning for the Armenian EyeCare Project (AECP), given its mission to eliminate preventable blindness in Armenia.

This changed when AECP began its work with the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF) to develop a diabetes program in Armenia that would use a more systemic approach to management of the disease and focus on reducing the rate of blindness and vision impairment.

Now the World Diabetes Foundation is extending its support of AECP’s Diabetes Program and its accomplishments by funding a \$780,000 grant so that the organization may continue its sight-saving work in this sector. The grant will provide the resources to AECP and the Republic of Armenia to carry on and further develop the revolutionary program over the course of the next three years.

News of this grant was announced in May during a visit to Armenia by WDF. From May 13 to 17, representatives from the Denmark-based foundation, visited various provinces throughout Armenia alongside AECP and Armenia’s Ministry of Health.

While in Armavir, they visited AECP’s recently-developed diagnostic eye clinic, the Don H. and Vardi Vanitzian Diagnostic Eye Clinic, which includes the capacity to diagnose potentially blinding eye diseases. WDF representatives were able to witness in-depth eye examinations and see how diagnostics are carried out in the facility using artificial intelligence (AI) to diagnose diabetic retinopathy as a complication of diabetes.

Additionally, representatives observed how AECP practices diabetes management techniques among patients with the use of glycosylated hemoglobin tests. The group also visited the AECP Mobile Eye Hospital to see the further steps of detailed examinations and treatment. In some cases, patients learned about their diabetes only through these screenings.

In the villages of Gegharkunik province, WDF was able to observe eye and diabetes screenings in action and had the opportunity to discuss the work of AECP, Armenia’s Ministry of Health and WDF with local physicians and people with diabetes.

see AECP, page 8



WDF representatives visit an eye clinic in Armenia alongside AECP and medical staff

Fresno Genocide Commemorative Committee, School District Collaborate to Educate Teachers on Genocide Awareness

FRESNO — The Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee of Fresno (AGCC) announced recently its recent educational outreach efforts with the Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) in conjunction with the Genocide Education Project. The purpose of these efforts was to advance genocide awareness and the teaching of genocide for educators and students in the Fresno community.

From April 2 to 4, the AGCC and the Genocide Education Project facilitated a series of educational workshops tailored for social studies and English Language Arts teachers from grades 3 to 12. These workshops served as vital platforms for teachers to deepen their understanding of Armenian history, culture, and the events of the Armenian

Genocide, providing insight on the historical factors and contextual elements. The workshops engaged the teachers by incorporating personal stories, local connections, and art, offering ideas for how teachers could transfer the knowledge to their students.

Each workshop was designed to meet the diverse needs of educators across grade levels. On April 2 and April 4, sessions were tailored for teachers from grades 7 to 12, where topics of resistance, agency, and empowerment were discussed. April 3 was dedicated to teachers from grades 3 to 6, and focused more on exploring the Armenian culture and history with a “Bird Letters” Letter Art lesson-activity. This lesson introduces students to the Armenian culture through the Armenian alphabet and examples of illuminated manuscripts. The material delivered to the teachers was designed to be age-appropriate and relevant to state standards. Participants of the workshop were provided with the necessary resources to effectively integrate Armenian Genocide education into their curriculum.

Across the span of three workshop days, over 25 educators from FUSD participated and deepened their knowledge in Armenian history. “Workshops such as these empower educators to navigate the topic of the Genocide with depth and accuracy. By transferring this knowledge to their students, they activate a ripple effect that helps shape students to be empathetic and informed global citizens,” stated AGCC, Fresno Chairperson Marine Vardanyan Peters.

The Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee of Fresno looks forward to continuing its partnership with the Fresno Unified School District and the Genocide Education Project in its ongoing mission to promote genocide awareness and education.

For more information about the Armenian Genocide Commemorative Committee of Fresno, visit agccfresno.com or email at agccfresno@gmail.com.



COMMUNITY NEWS

AECP Receives Grant from World Diabetes Foundation for Efforts in Armenia

AECP, from page 7

“This program is a continuation of the cooperation started in 2017,” AECP Country Director Nune Yeghiazaryan said. “The program has expanded over the years, increasing the scope of care for patients as well as working toward improving Armenia’s healthcare policy and strengthening local capacities both through training and provision of equipment.”

Yeghiazaryan also elaborated on the in-

“This joint initiative is the result of eight years of cooperation in Armenia, the aim of which is to support the implementation of a comprehensive diabetes strategy and transform diabetes care delivery in the country,” Kirza Buch Kristensen, head of Strategy and Business Development at the World Diabetes Foundation, said. “The previous projects achieved notable success, surpassing targets and contributing to the improvement of diabetes service deliv-

nia’s Ministry of Health. “It was especially important that we created a National Diabetes Strategy and action plan. With this new program, we will be able to implement a number of key measures together.”

In the span of the three-year grant, from 2024 to 2027, eye examinations of more than 40,000 residents in Armenia, including those forcibly displaced from Artsakh, will be performed; laser eye treatments and surgeries will be performed on thousands of patients throughout the country; a diabetic foot screening program will be conducted for the first time in Armenia; 60 regional medical facilities in the country will be strengthened through updated equipment and tools to detect and treat diabetes and diabetes-related eye disease; training for approximately 1,500 medical workers in the country will be organized including guidelines and protocols related to diabetes management and its complications; and

several diabetes schools will be established in the provinces of Armenia.

The AECP will work closely with the Ministry of Health to update the country’s current National Diabetes Strategy and develop a roadmap for the future.

The AECP, together with WDF, has been implementing diabetes and diabetes complications prevention programs since 2017. During this period, about 30,000 people with diabetes have undergone eye examinations, of which more than 10,000 were diagnosed as having diabetic retinopathy or another diabetic eye disease; more than 3,000 Armenians have received eye surgery in relation to their condition; thousands of healthcare workers in the country have been trained; and medical centers have been outfitted with equipment, data collection and analysis systems, professional and public education trilingual online platforms and many educational materials.



Some of the cutting-edge equipment available thanks to the grant

novative ways in which AECP has implemented its Diabetes Program in Armenia. “Starting this year, widespread diabetic foot screening will be implemented for the first time in Armenia,” Yeghiazaryan added. “As well, an institutionalized approach to the development of a diabetes school will be introduced, as part of Armenia’s National Diabetes Strategy, which was also developed thanks to this cooperation.”

ery in Armenia. With a strong foundation in place, we are committed to continuing the program nationally and continuing to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those affected by diabetes.”

Armenia’s Ministry of Health also acknowledges the great benefit that this diabetes program has provided. “This cooperation is very effective,” said Nora Pahlevanyan, a representative from Arme-

Messages between Sen. Menendez, Wife Reveal Details of Egypt-Focused Scheme

MENENDEZ, from page 7

record to lift a hold on U.S. military aid to Egypt.

Most of the messaging unfolded in secret — on the couple’s private Gmail accounts and encrypted apps like Viber and WhatsApp.

But Menendez sometimes looped in his Senate staff, asking one to find out how many Americans and Egyptians worked at the U.S. embassy in Cairo. At least one exchange hinted the staff had qualms about the query.

“Any idea how many Americans are posted to the embassy? Don’t ask why I’m asking...,” a Senate staffer wrote to a Department of State employee.

The Egypt allegations are arguably the most seismic of federal prosecutors’ accusations in a wide-ranging indictment

Sidney H. Stein Tuesday that they are “slightly behind schedule” on a trial expected to last until July.

Tuesday got off to a bad start, with Stein booting testimony back to early afternoon because one juror — recovering from a weekend injury — couldn’t get to the Daniel Patrick Moynihan federal courthouse until then.

Stein did not rule on a request prosecutors filed over the weekend asking him to reconsider his decision late Friday that bars them from introducing texts they say most explicitly show the “corrupt expectations” that Hana, Nadine, and Egyptian officials had.

In one, Nadine sent Hana an article about pending arms sales and wrote: “Bob had to sign off on this.” In another, an Egyptian official asked Hana if



Nadine Arslanian Menendez heading to court (New Jersey Monitor photo)

filed last fall against Sen. Menendez, Nadine Menendez, Hana, and businessmen Fred Daibes and Jose Uribe. Hana, Daibes, and Uribe are accused of [plying New Jersey’s senior senator and his wife with gold bars](#), almost \$500,000 in cash, a Mercedes-Benz convertible, and other bribes for various favors. Menendez, a Democrat who has held the Senate seat since 2006, has denied wrongdoing and said he stashed cash to cope with the traumas of his father’s suicide and his family’s experience as refugees forced to flee Cuba with nothing.

Uribe pleaded guilty in March and is expected to testify against the couple. Nadine’s trial has been postponed until at least July as she battles breast cancer.

Behind Schedule

Prosecutors told U.S. District Judge

Menendez held up \$1 billion of U.S. aid to Egypt.

Defense attorneys had argued such communications should be excluded because they pertain to official legislative acts, and the Constitution’s speech and debate clause protects legislators from being held liable for their official legislative actions.

But during an argument last Tuesday after Stein had dismissed jurors for the holiday break, Monteleoni countered the clause “is also not designed to make members of Congress super-citizens immune from all criminal responsibility.” The messages also were sent and received by third parties communicating about their “corrupt agreement,” rather than the senator’s acts themselves, he added.

THE ARMENIAN MIRROR SPECTATOR

Armenian Mirror-Spectator Seeks Summer Intern

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* is seeking an intern for a six-week program this summer (mid-July through August).

The intern will receive a \$150 weekly stipend provided through the Armenian Students’ Association of America’s Internship Program.

The intern should be in college or graduate school and does not necessarily have to be studying journalism. Most likely, the internship will be done long distance, via electronic communications, therefore location is not an issue (but native speaker knowledge of English remains important). Main tasks will be writing and working on the *Mirror* website, but they could also take part in marketing campaigns and work to increase digital advertising.

The *Mirror* also is looking for interns during the regular year.

If interested, please email a resume and cover letter to either tcadirector@aol.com and alin.gregorian@gmail.com.



OBITUARY

Cecile Keshishian

Dedicated to Community Activism

LOS ANGELES — Cecile Keshishian, known for her passion and activism for both the Armenian community and those less fortunate, died from pneumonia on May 27, 2024 in Los Angeles.

Keshishian, née Simonian, was born on April 30, 1934 in Antioch, Turkey, and grew up in Beirut, Lebanon. Her parents were both survivors of the Armenian Genocide. She was the second of their four children.

The family planned to relocate to Armenia after World War II. But the transport ship sank before arriving in Beirut, so the family stayed in Lebanon.

For her secondary education, Cecile attended the Melkonian Educational Institute, a boarding school in Cyprus. She was a star basketball player, a medical volunteer, a student leader and one of four teenagers chosen to represent Cyprus at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in England in 1953.

After graduating from Melkonian, she returned to Beirut and began work as an executive assistant at Canada Dry International at a time when the company was expanding into the Middle East. In her spare time, she was a founder and early leader of the Girl Scouts movement in Beirut. During this same time, she met and became engaged to Dr. Kevork Keshishian. They married on October 1, 1960.

Both of the couple's children, Alek and

Aleen, were born in Beirut. In 1968, the young family moved to the United States, settling first in Brookline, Mass., and later in Manchester, NH, where Dr. Keshishian worked as a board-certified radiologist.

In Manchester, Cecile completed her college education at Notre Dame College, graduating magna cum laude with a double degree in business and American history.

She served as president of the volunteer organization Catholic Medical Center Hospital Associates, which had 600 members. Later she served as president of the New Hampshire Medical Auxiliary. She was a founder of the New Hampshire Good Samaritans Suicide Prevention Hotline and a board member of the American Children's Theatre.

Dr. and Mrs. Keshishian regularly opened their Manchester home to friends, relatives, and newly arrived immigrants for months at a time. Cecile helped find lodging, furniture, jobs and schools for immigrants she knew and for some she was meeting for the first time. She also taught Armenian language and history to her own children and to other young Armenians in New England.

She was fluent in five languages — Armenian, French, Arabic, Turkish and English.

In 2005, Cecile received the Ellis Island



Medal of Honor, which celebrates American citizens who distinguish themselves and make a profound impact in the lives of others. Past honorees have included Ronald Reagan, Muhammad Ali, Sandra Day O'Connor, Rosa Parks, and Hillary Clinton.

Throughout their 58-year marriage, Cecile and her husband were leaders in Armenian-American organizations and causes, including the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA), among others. They helped fund a student center at the American University of Armenia. The facility was named in their honor. On the occasion of its opening, Cecile Keshishian told students: "Take advantage of your incredible blessings and get the most

out of your education, both inside and outside the classroom. I am 88 years old and still continue to learn something new daily — learning keeps one young. Knowledge is power."

In 2000, she and her husband moved to Los Angeles to be closer to their children, filmmaker Alek and talent manager Aleen; their attorney son-in-law Kit Troyer; and their grandchildren Lulu and Jesse Troyer. Cecile was enormously proud of them for their character and accomplishments, especially that all five were graduates or current students at Harvard University.

Cecile's beloved husband died in 2018. She is survived by her brother Dr. Simon Simonian, sisters Rita Balian and Annie Totah, her nieces and nephews along with their spouses and children, her son Alek Keshishian and daughter Aleen Keshishian, her son-in-law Kit Troyer, and her granddaughter Lulu Troyer and grandson Jesse Troyer.

The memorial service in her honor was held on Tuesday, June 4, at St. Leon Armenian Cathedral, 3325 N. Glenoaks Blvd., Burbank. The service will be immediately followed by a reception at the same location.

In lieu of flowers, the family has established a memorial fund in her name at the Armenian General Benevolent Union. Contributions may be made at agbu.org/memory-cecile-keshishian or mailed to: AGBU, 55 East 59th St., New York, NY 10022, with "Cecile Keshishian" on the check's memo line.

George Maksian

Longtime Entertainment Reporter

ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, N.J. — George Maksian, 94, passed away peacefully surrounded by family on May 23, 2024.

He was the uncle to Robert (Donna) Maksian, Carol Maksian, David Gadarian (Natalie Hutton), Daniel Gadarian, Kap (Christine) Maksian, and Linda (Allan) Tossoonian. And many grand and great-grand nephews and nieces.

He was the son of the late Krikor and Esgoohe Maksian. He was predeceased by his



siblings Anna Maksian, Robert Maksian and Aza Gadarian, and nephew Richard Maksian.

George Maksian's father and mother, Krikor and Esgoohe, were married in Armenia and his father immigrated to the

United States in 1909 as a teenager leaving his wife and family behind temporarily. Krikor enlisted in the US Army, thereby gaining citizenship. In 1915, during the Armenian Genocide and World War I interruption, his parents were separated as his mother fled Armenia to escape the genocide. Through the assistance from the American Red Cross, his father was able to track his mother and brought her to New York in 1921.

Krikor and Esgoohe settled in New York City. The family consisted of four children, all born and raised in New York in the neighborhood then known as Hell's Kitchen. George was born in 1929. He grew up and helped in his parents' grocery store business and sang in the choir at St. Illuminator's Armenian Cathedral.

After graduating from Manhattan's High School of Commerce, George obtained a job at the *New York Daily News*, the largest circulated newspaper in the country, as a copy boy when he was 17 years old.

George continued his education, studying at City College and New York University. George moved to Englewood Cliffs in 1967.

He worked his way up to becoming a TV and radio columnist, covering the stars of film and television, and his colorful columns would be nationally syndicated. He was regularly featured on a radio program at WOR. He interviewed celebrities in-

cluding Ed Sullivan, Mark Simone, Howard Stern, Johnny Carson, Danny Aiello, Barbara Walters, David Letterman, Bette Midler, etc. George also got to know many famous Armenians, including William Saroyan, Charles Aznavour, Anita Darian, Lucine Amara, Loren Toolajian, Mike Connors, etc.

He often supported the Armenian community, notably the AGBU, the Antranig Ensemble Dance Group and various Armenian newspapers. In 1974, George participated in the news announcement about the Armenian State Dance Ensemble from the Soviet Union for its first tour of the United States at Carnegie Hall. Its outstanding performance was reported in the *New York Times*.

George was known as a tireless supporter of many important Armenian causes. He had an ability to proudly promote Armenian American artists using his vast network throughout the arts, culture, and entertainment world.

He had a great affinity for travel and

photography, and would always return with fascinating stories, gifts, and photos from his journeys around the world.

George retired in 1992 after 44 years with the *New York Daily News*. His passion for the entertainment world continued long after his retirement.

He volunteered and did sold-out shows for two years for the Eastern Diocese. In 1993, he staged a performance called "Live at the Diocese" in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of Saint Vartan Cathedral.

George loved to write letters to all his family and friends, keeping in touch with them and sharing interesting stories and pictures.

The funeral was held at Saint Thomas Armenian Church of Tenaflly on Thursday, June 6. Interment followed at Ferncliff Cemetery in Hartsdale, New York. For condolences, visit www.frankpatti.com. In Lieu of flowers donations may be made to either St. Thomas Armenian Church of Tenaflly or The Eastern Diocese Armenian Cathedral Restoration

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COMMUNITY NEWS

More than 2,000 Attend Washington Armenian Food Festival

By Haykaram Nahapetyan
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

WASHINGTON — More than 2,000 individuals, including a significant number of non-Armenians, flocked to the Armenian Food Festival at Saint Mary Armenian Church. Among them was reporter Jennifer Delgado from Fox TV, who conducted several live connections with her studio from the hall of events of the sanctuary. “We will worry about the diet another day,” noted the reporter, sampling the traditional baklava and other sweets. “Talking and eating is my gift,” added Delgado, while her colleagues from the studio asked her to save some baklavas for them. Delgado interviewed parishioner Shoghik Missirian-Sahakyan. So did the *Mirror-Spectator*.

“This is the 15th annual Armenian Food Festival. It is a significant event for our community, as it introduces our food and our culture to the visitors,” remarked Missirian-Sahakyan.

Arts and crafts at the gift shop offered Armenian souvenirs and bottles of cognac and wine. People donate things to the church that are sold at the so-called White Elephant Corner. The bi-annual Armenian bazaars are one of the main ways to raise funds for the church, which, besides religious tasks, also had to assume cultural, educational, and other community functions.



From a numerical standpoint, the Armenian community of Washington and its surroundings is far smaller than the extensive number of Armenian-Americans in Glendale, Fresno or Boston. Therefore,



there is only a small number of Armenian shops or restaurants in the area. “This is one of the opportunities to fill that gap and serve Armenian food and offer handmade Armenian gifts,” noted Missirian-Sahakyan.

Two Ethiopian sisters I met at the cafeteria section noted that they came because they were intrigued by the rich Armenian culture and the historical ties between the Armenian and Ethiopian Christian churches. They also spotted similarities between the two cuisines of the two friendly nations. “We call this sambusa,” said the sisters, pointing to a flaky triangle pastry baked by the Women’s Guild. “The festival is a vital celebration of our Armenian culture, heritage, and traditions. It offers a platform for our community to showcase our rich history through food, music, dance, and crafts,” noted Fr. Hovsep Kar-

apetyan, the pastor of St. Mary Armenian Church.

An accompanying video segment at mirrorspectator.com includes interviews with visitors and volunteers of the Armenian church.



Fox TV's Jennifer Delgado covering the Armenian fair (photo courtesy of Fox 5 D.C.)



A young volunteer

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Chicago Hosts 2024 ACYOA Assembly And Sports Weekend

CHICAGO — Over the Memorial Day holiday, some 300 Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA) Seniors and Armenian young adults from across the Eastern Diocese gathered for the 2024 ACYOA General Assembly and Sports Weekend, hosted by the ACYOA Seniors of St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Chicago.

Presiding over the General Assembly and witnessing the whole weekend of spirited fellowship was the Primate of the Eastern Diocese, Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan.

The weekend kicked off on Friday, May 24 with the 2024 ACYOA General Assembly, where 60 ACYOA chapter delegates representing 18 parishes, plus observers

Central Council are Dn. Garen Megrdechian (secretary), Mara Najarian (communications), Alisha Panthier (ministries and outreach), Sarah Tavitian (ministries and outreach), and Anastasia Bohajian (alternate). Remaining on the Central Council are Ani Misirliyan (chair), Jackie Russell (vice chair), and Andrew Yenicag (treasurer).

The ACYOA Central Council extended its heartfelt gratitude to outgoing members Mardig Klachian, Madeline Ovassapian, Yn. Lucine Sabounjian, and Michael Sarafian for their dedicated and passionate service to the ACYOA and Armenian Church.

In addition to Bishop Mesrop and host parish pastor Fr. Andreas Garabedian, clergy attending the General Assembly and

Sports Weekend included Fr. Tavit Boyajian (Sts. Joachim and Anne, Palos Heights, IL), Fr. Mardiros Chevian (St. Nersess Seminary), Fr. Avedis Kalayjian (St. Mesrob, Racine, WI), Fr. Hovhan Khoja-Eynatyan (St. James, Evanston, IL), Fr. Yeprem Kelegian (retired), Fr. Krikor Sabounjian (Holy Translators, Framingham, MA), and Fr. Hratch Sargsyan (St. Gregory of Narek, Richmond Heights, OH).

The ACYOA thanked all of the clergy leaders for their ongoing support of the organization and its youth, as well as Diocesan Council members Lisa Essayian and Mona Karoghlanian for attending to support the young adult leaders of the Eastern Diocese.

During the General Assembly's Primate's Luncheon, ACYOA Central Council presented its annual awards to individuals and



Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan with the winning co-ed volleyball team from the host city (Photo by Mano Baghjajian)

chapters for their service and dedication to the organization and Armenian Church.

Windy City Social Events

On Friday evening, weekend attendees gathered at Millenium Hall to spend the evening reuniting with old friends and meeting new ones.

Saturday was an action-packed day of sports as teams representing ACYOA chapters across the Diocese competed in Co-Ed Volleyball, Women's Basketball, Men's Basketball, Backgammon, Chess, and Mario Kart. Crowds gathered to witness the spirited competition at Whitney M. Young High School with the championship games on Sunday.

On Saturday evening, participants danced to Armenian and American music by DJ M-Kay at the VU Rooftop Bar: a venue 22 stories above street level, offering breathtaking views of Chicago.

On Sunday, Parsamyan celebrated the Divine Liturgy at Chicago's St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, with many of the weekend attendees participating on the altar, choir, and congregation. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, the new ACYOA Central Council members were installed, and outgoing members received a gold ACYOA pin in gratitude for their service.

Following badarak, attendees mingled with parishioners of the Chicago community during fellowship hour, then headed over to the gym to watch the championship games.

The weekend concluded with the Sunday evening gala banquet. After an inspiring message from Bishop Mesrop, host pastor Fr. Andreas Garabedian was joined by

weekend chair Alisha Panthier and committee members to distribute sports trophies.

The Siragan Armenian Dance Company of Chicago then took center stage, kicking off the night with an energetic performance, before participants danced to the musical entertainment of singer Shant Massoyan, keyboardist Raffi Massoyan, and disc jockey M-Kay.

2024 ACYOA AWARDS

ACYOA Seniors Chapter "A" Award: Holy Resurrection Church, New Britain, CT

Sam Nersesian Service Award: Greg Marifian, Holy Shoghaghat Church, Belleville, IL and Cindy Panthier, St. Gregory the Illuminator Church Chicago, IL

Gregory Arpajian Leadership Award: Vinney Moushigian, St. James Church, Watertown, MA

Very Rev. Fr. Haigazoun Melkonian Award: Rev. Fr. Vart Gyozyan, Hye Pointe Church, Haverhill, MA

Rev. Fr. Haroutiun and Yn. Patricia Dagley Award: Dn. Daron Bolat, St. Sarkis Church, Dallas, TX

2024 ACYOA SPORTS COMPETITION: FIRST PLACE TROPHIES

Co-Ed Volleyball: Chicagoland ACYOA

Women's Basketball: Chicagoland ACYOA

Men's Basketball: Chicagoland ACYOA

Backgammon: Andrew Yenicag, Holy Martyrs Church, Bayside, NY

Chess: Michael Sarafian, St. Hagop Church, Pinellas Park, FL

Mario Kart: Brandon Simon, St. James of Nisibis Church, Evanston, IL



Participants in the ACYOA weekend (Photo by Mano Baghjajian)

and clergy, came together to conduct the business of the ACYOA, reflect on the past year of ministries, hold elections, and engage in meaningful discussions.

Additionally, a presentation was made to discuss the importance of recruitment and the many opportunities for young adults to explore educational opportunities at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary.

ACYOA Central Council Elections

Newly elected to the 2024-2025 ACYOA



Participants in the ACYOA weekend (Photo by Mano Baghjajian)



Arts & Culture

Books

Shattered Lives: Another Siran Seza Discovery

By Arpi Sarafian

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

A sense of doom almost governs the lives of the characters in Siran Seza’s *Shattered Lives* (Yearbook, Inc. 2015), a novel set in the Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) during World War I.

“The tears that secretly shed in the dark,” “the crown of thorns” and “the huge wooden cross” of the dedication “To My Armenian Sisters” set the tone. The Armenian word *djagadakir*, which may sound more ominous than fate, its English counterpart, is repeatedly evoked. The love of the protagonist Alina Martenian, the delicate “little girl” with “a pair of melancholic eyes above pale cheeks,” for the aspiring teacher Ared Vartian ends tragically. Two young lives are shattered because Alina’s father would not allow his daughter, used to the social advantages and the privileges that come with being born into an affluent family, to marry a “poor man.”

“My life will remain shattered forever,” confides Alina to her diary.

There is, nonetheless, the goodness and the beauty of the souls that provide balm for the characters’ misery. The kind family doctor nurses the fragile youngster back to life, several times. Alina’s cousin, Arsham, supports the devastated girl for whom he cares for deeply.

A key ingredient of the novel is Alina’s endless pondering over the misery of life. Why don’t adults want youngsters to be happy, she wonders. And if, as she believes, it is “so much easier to love than to hate,” why do people choose to hate? Is it destiny or society and its restrictions that causes the misery? The outspoken protagonist questions the unfair laws that govern the behavior of men and women. Her musings inevitably bring to mind the young author who, years later, would publish the pioneering literary journal *The Young Armenian Woman* to advocate for a woman’s rights and her independence. Why should a woman always be dependent on a father or a brother, asks Alina. Can a woman divorce and restart her life just as a man can? Yet, “I do not like feminism,” asserts the gentle girl. “For me a woman is always the same soft and gentle sensitive being.”

Thus, the novel does not exhort a specific ideology.

Seza yearns for a world that can accommodate the sincerity, purity and innocence of Alina and her peers. Hers is a vision of a world with its own spiritual energy and moral laws that transcend “the evil laws of men,” to borrow Alina’s words.

Shattered Lives pleads for a world without the bargains and the hypocrisies of a society where women “sell themselves” in marriage. Alina loves

see SHATTERED LIVES, page 16



Peter Balakian reading at University of Madrid (photo Jorge Rosenvinge)

Balakian Reads in Madrid and Barcelona for Spanish Edition of *Black Dog of Fate*

MADRID/BARCELONA, Spain — The recent publication of *Black Dog of Fate* – *Los Perros Negro del Destino*, published in Spanish by Berg Institute Press in Madrid, was the occasion of Pulitzer Prize winning poet Peter Balakian’s recent reading tour in Madrid and Barcelona. On May 8 Balakian read at the University of Madrid; on May 10 at a well-known center city bookstore, La Buena Vida-Café del Libro; and on May 14 at the University of Barcelona Law School. In Madrid, he was hosted by his publisher Joaquin Gonzalez Ibanez and his translator Professor Rosa Bautista Cordero, and in Barcelona by Professor Rosanna Alija, who teaches at Barcelona University Law School, and attorney and community leader Emma Hagopian.

A feature story by Andrea Aguilar on Balakian was published in Spain’s leading newspaper *El Pais* on May 14 and gave Balakian an opportunity to discuss the modern history of Armenia and the impact of the Armenian Genocide on twentieth century history, as well as on his own work as poet and non-fiction writer. Balakian told Aguilar “the history of Armenia has played an important role in my work, and I haven’t avoided writing about trauma or violence.”

Winner of the 1998 PEN/Albrand Award for Memoir, and a *New York Times* Notable Book, *Black Dog of Fate* has been in continuous publication since its publication in 1997 and has gone through dozens of printings. The Spanish edition of *Black Dog of Fate* adds to the list of translations of Balakian’s memoir that include German, French, Dutch, Greek, Armenian, Turkish and others. A Tamil translation will appear in India next year.

IMAGINING THE PAST
ATROCITY, TRAUMA, AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE
Audiobook
PETER BALAKIAN

Peter Balakian reading at University of Barcelona with Professor of Law Rosanna Alija, University of Barcelona

Alexey Narutto

Eight Times in Armenia
With Contemporary Dance



By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN — Moscow-based dancer Alexey Narutto, 35, has graced Yerevan’s stages on numerous occasions. Hailing from Krasnoyarsk in Siberia, he obtained his degree in choreography from the Academy of Theater Arts for Adults in Moscow. From 2013 to 2022, Alexey was a member of the Ballet Moscow theater company, collaborating with esteemed choreographers from around the globe. He has imparted his expertise at esteemed institutions such as the “Tsekh” Center for Contemporary Dance, GOGOL-school, PART Academy, GITIS, and the Moscow Art Theatre Studio School, among others.

Additionally, he has pursued independent creative ventures, co-founding the Narushenki contemporary dance company alongside his wife, dancer Olga Timoshenko. Together, their collaborative productions have graced various festivals and esteemed institutions, including the Tretyakov Gallery, the VAC Foundation and the Lumiere Brothers Gallery of Photography in Moscow.

Their remarkable works have garnered repeated nominations for the prestigious Golden Mask Russian national theater award across diverse categories.

Narutto, both individually and in tandem with Timoshenko, has crafted a number of captivating plays, performances, movie dances, and dramatic productions.

Alexey, I believe Narutto is a stage name. Are you a manga fan?

Actually this is my real surname, inherited from my great-great-grandfather, who was exiled to Siberia. He was Polish or Lithuanian, we do not know exactly.

I saw you for the first time two years ago, within the framework of the “Summit” Yerevan International Festival of Contemporary Dance, where you and Olga

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ARTS & CULTURE

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performed the duet “40.” The performance was a bit heavy, but mesmerizing. Since then you have appeared on Yerevan stages several times. Is this how your cooperation with Armenia began?

Actually, I first attended the inaugural “Summit” in 2021 as a member of the Ballet Moscow company, performing “All Roads Lead to the North.” Since then, I’ve returned to Armenia seven more times. I genuinely enjoy it here; it’s a fantastic place. Exploring the culture, meeting the people, and soaking in the atmosphere are always fascinating. As a passionate sea enthusiast, I often joke that if Armenia had a coastline, I would stay there permanently! (*laughs*).

I suppose you are already familiar with Armenian contemporary choreography.

I think I know it somewhat, but I can say that Armenian contemporary choreography has an interesting path. I think, Armenians are a mixture of flexibility, bodily adaptability, a sort of combination of softness and fire. I had students from art college: it seemed to me that, if taken spontaneously, it is a combination of opposites, a mixture of fire and water. If they don’t get lost and grow together, it would be an amazing style. As for choreographers, I remember Rima Pipoyan and Valeria Kasparova.

In 2022 at the Martiros Saryan House-Museum you presented “Testament” dedicated to the poet Yeghishe Charents. How did that come about?

It was during the book festival. A producer suggested that I create a performance based on this famous conceptual poem by Charents. I was deeply inspired by the idea of a poem that encoded a call, a covenant of unification for Armenians; I began searching for information about Charents himself and analyzing his work. It struck me that



Alexey Narutto performing with his wife Olga Timoshenko

there are similarities with Mandelstam and how the fates of people who fight for freedom, art, and life are repeated across different countries, and how authorities begin to crush and destroy them.

Working with a figure like Charents was fascinating to me. Another intriguing aspect was the Armenian alphabet. If you look at it, it’s very malleable, so we focused solely on interpreting this verse through dance. We depicted what was written in quatrains with the body. Conceptually, we created this verse in space through movement, which would appear and disappear later on.

Additionally, what was also very interesting was that we had a mixed cast: two Russian-speaking guys and two Armenian young women. The women understood exactly what was going on, while the men were partially aware of the content. It was an intriguing decision for me because for some people, the text was very close and touching, while for others, there was some distance.

I believe the work was engaging: as we moved through the Saryan Museum, different rooms featured different quatrains, and it all culminated in the part of the museum where the artist’s belongings were. For me, this summarized the story: the verse represents unification, laid down together, where a person has left his belongings, and people come together there to unite with that place.

How did you conceptualize through choreography Charents’ message that the only salvation of the Armenian nation is in its united strength?

The culmination of the performance featured the Armenian girl’s poignant solo, serving as a symbol of resilience and longing for home. As the solo drew to a close, all performers approached her with deliberate slowness, enveloping her in a collective embrace, forming a symbolic dome of unity. In this moment, the theme of home emerged prominently. The act of leaving home, a recurring experience for Armenians and many others, resonates deeply with the nature of human existence. There’s a pervasive sense that we often lose and rediscover our sense of home, only for it to elude us once more. As the girl emerges from the embrace and gazes back at the dome and the house from an external vantage point, a profound reflection on the concept of home unfolds. When the girl comes out of this composition, sits on the side, it is as if she starts a new spiral in which we have to create our home again. It seems to me that our life is a constant re-creation of our home.

In 2022, you participated in a project by a very interesting Russian thinker and director now living in Yerevan, Peter Nemoy.

The title was “It’s Happening.” We were referring to the culture of happenings and performances, which have no clear design. But there are people who live creating what happens on stage, as if from their own selves, living that time with the audience. There were five of us, and we improvised, everything that happened was random. It’s a very important genre where you’re simply creating something in the moment, immersed in some kind of flow. It’s a manifestation of you as an artist, of your stage and life experience, of your essence, because you are guided by what you make decisions and start to act based on them, as if playing out life. In life, you assess circumstances and decide what to do. The same thing happens on stage. It’s such a fleeting, elusive, but important art.

Was your other performance at the Hay-Art Cultural Center also improvisation?

The eco-performance, “Black Sky,” served as a poignant exploration of ecological themes within the framework of documentary theater. It epitomized a synthetic

approach, offering a blend of structure and artistic freedom that lent an improvisational feel to the production. Rooted in the environmental crisis unfolding in Krasnoyarsk, my hometown, the performance delved into the visceral experiences of its residents amidst the pervasive dense smog. We did interviews with the city residents about how they experienced it and based on those answers, together with playwright Andrei Zhiganov, we made an audio play, which I turned into a physical demonstration about the ecology of my hometown.

Please describe your collaboration with Yerevan’s “Novents-school.”

The head of Novents-school, Mariam Kazanchyan, invited me to conduct a training on physical theater with a colleague. We established a theater laboratory, where both emigrants from Russia and locals participated. We explored again the theme of home. Following this theme, we applied it to “Romeo and Juliet,” contextualizing the conflicts of the two houses. From this story, we extracted the opinions of the artists themselves, through physical and textual statements, on how they view this myth of the Verona lovers. We presented the production titled “Romeo and Juliet. Witnesses” on the stage of the Paronyan Musical Comedy Theater in Yerevan, and it turned out to be quite an interesting performance.

You were also the choreographer of the opening and closing ceremonies of the World Sambo Championship, which took place last year in Yerevan. Sport and contemporary art — there are points of convergence, right?

I agree! Performativity is close to both choreography and sport. Rudolf Nureyev remembered that when he met a cosmonaut, who told him: “What you do on stage is approximately what happens to me when I fly into space.” Indeed, the bodily overload of a ballet dancer resembles that of high sports and cosmonautics; all of them take the body to the limits of endurance. Contemporary dance and contact improvisation are very much inspired by sports, especially martial arts. Two people, two bodies collide; it’s somehow dangerous. You have to have a certain courage and skills for such a collision. So, sport is close to dance, and they are two related worlds that complement each other.

By the way, in the production for the sambo championship, I was inspired by the Armenian military dance *yarkhusha*. We created some parts based on it. In Russia, folk dances never inspired me, but after my experience in Armenia, I started to be interested in them from an anthropological point of view: I began to look at them differently, as a kind of human code that creates the character, history, and symbolism of a people and a place through plasticity.

Do you have any other projects related to Armenia?

I arrived to work on a new project: choreographing a production based on Remarque’s “Three Comrades” at the Yerevan Drama Theater. The performance will feature both modern dance and text. I’m hopeful that this won’t be my last project in Armenia; I plan to continue creating here at the intersection of cultures and perspectives. I find great inspiration in the fact that despite not fully understanding the language, many aspects of my work take root and evolve in the Armenian soil. My vision and contributions undergo a transformation, adapting and resonating in their own unique way within this cultural context. This dynamic creates a powerful synergy between two distinct peoples. It’s fascinating to witness how the experiences of individuals from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities intersect, merge, and forge new paths forward, discovering fresh points of connection along the way.

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BAR-B-Q

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ARTS & CULTURE

New Book Brings Focus to Azerbaijan's Distortion of History

DISTORTIONS, from page 1

The book is the first multidisciplinary volume about Armenian monuments in historic Armenian lands, now under Azerbaijani rule. Much of the work, as well as the NASSR discussion, focused on not only the destruction of those monuments, but also the roots of disinformation campaign by the Azerbaijani government regarding the history of those monuments.

Aslanian started the talk by detailing the century-long efforts by successive Azerbaijani governments of deleting Armenianness from its lands. He ascribed the penchant for a revisionist history in Azerbaijan to Turkey, where dating back to the late Ottoman days, many people in power — seldom historians — wrote history books deleting Armenians from their historic lands.

One such person he cited as an example was Riza Nur, an Ottoman official. “In 1918, an Ottoman Turkish official, Riza Nur, who five years later would become an important representative of the Turkish del-



Dr. Sebouh Aslanian

egation at Lausanne, wrote a one-volume history,” Aslanian said, “in which he drew from the depths of the collective Pan-Turanist” imagination to present an alternate history. In his book, Aslanian said, Nur wrote that “for 4,000 years or since at least since 2000 BC, the true autochthonous (indigenous) population in central and eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus and the territory of what is the Caucasus are the Turanians.”

Of course, that is not true.

“Our lineage lived in Armenia since 4,700 years,” Aslanian said.

Nur and the Pan-Turanists are important because they seem to have founded the invented history tradition, which a century later the Azerbaijani government put into use while conducting the ethnic cleansing of Armenians of Karabakh. (The enclave, in the book title, is spelled Karabagh, whereas the *Mirror-Spectator* uses the spelling Karabakh.)

“One of the chief architects of Azeri revisionism,” whose work goes back to the 1990s, was Farida Mammedova.

“To Mammedova, the Armenians are a people without land,” he said. Her work has been debunked by respectable historians, yet the Azerbaijani government still relies on her narrative. It was she who championed the narrative of Caucasus Albanians being the creators of all the Armenian monuments in Artsakh.

Aslanian asked, “what does wading through the underbelly of Azeri revisions tell us about the present?” He replied that among the various phases of Azerbaijani nationalism and its subsequent historiography, one needs to consider “the Stalinist primordialism of the late 1930s, tying in back to the Young Turk” attitudes.

Quoting Eric Hobbs, he said, “‘historians,’ including those who are medical doctors, engineers, etc., are to nationalism what poppy growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts. They supply the raw material for the market, that is the past, or an invented version of it that can be weaponized to

incite genocide and pave the way for the bulldozing of other people’s history and monuments.”

Flores, the author of the introduction of this volume, spoke about the recent public hearings at the International Court of Justice during which Azerbaijan had asked the court to toss out Armenia’s case accusing Azerbaijan of committing ethnic cleansing and inciting ethnic hatred in Artsakh in 2020, since, Azerbaijan claimed, the court did not have jurisdiction in the issue. Included in the Karabakh representative’s case was the wanton destruction of Armenian monuments.

Importance of Monuments

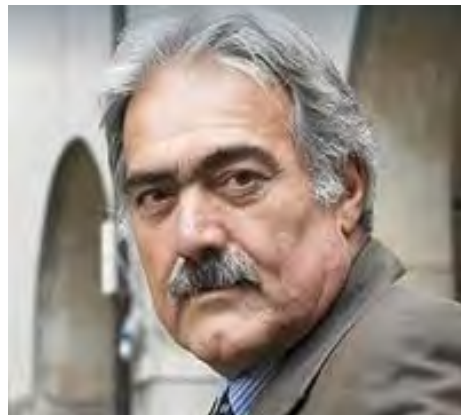
Next, Flores quoted Farida Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, and her statement on the importance of the relationship between cultural heritage and cultural rights, “in the right to take part in cultural life, the right of members of minorities to enjoy their culture and the rights of indigenous people for self-determination and to maintain control, protect and develop a cultural heritage.”

Cultural heritage is central to dignity, he said. “Culture is central to man and that without it, no rights are possible, since it is the matrix from which all else must spring,” he said, according to UNESCO.

He said it is vital that Karabakh remain under surveillance by the international community so as to prevent more malfeasance and destruction by Azerbaijan.

“The volume you are discussing today focuses precisely on the destruction of Armenian monumental patrimony by Azerbaijan, which found a new impetus in the aftermath of the 2020 war,” he said.

Khatchadourian, the next speaker, dis-



Dr. Marcello Flores

cussed his two sections in the book, one about “Cultural heritage as a Political Tool,” and second, an inventory of 686 Armenian religious monuments, namely churches and monasteries in Nakhichevan and Karabakh.

Again referring to Azerbaijani disinformation, he said the government often provides contradictory figures for the number of mosques it alleges were destroyed in Karabakh when it was reclaimed by Armenia, changing the numbers from 61 to 9, at one point.

“There is very bad data,” Khatchadourian said, and the inventory is far from exact.

“For Azerbaijan, the [creation of the] inventory gives an opportunity to generate fake information,” he said.

Azerbaijan, he said, routinely creates its own statistics, which differ from those of everyone else. He cited as an example the Wikipedia page of Echmiadzin Cathedral. The page in English, Armenian, French and all other languages, contains the same information, but the Azerbaijani version is different.

“When we open the translation of Azerbaijani transition of Echmiadzin Cathedral, we see fake information,” he said, which classifies it as “a Turkish temple.”

According to studies, he said, a total of 696 churches and monasteries have been destroyed in Nakhichevan and the Azerbaijani authorities have embarked on the same path in Artsakh.

He also called out UNESCO for the weaknesses built into its system, rendering it toothless, as well as their website’s dearth of information regarding Armenian monuments.

When you look at “Julfa [in Nakhichevan] there is no information about its destruction. The same goes for the Armenian Church in the old city of Baku. The old city of Baku is in the UNESCO list,” he said. Yet, the Armenian Holy Mother of God there, which was destroyed by the authorities, is not mentioned, he said.

“The first risk [to the monuments] is the physical risks such as the total destruction of monuments, like in Nakhichevan. Or their transformation, such as changing churches to houses or libraries, and finally keeping them as a religious monument but transforming the architecture to a mosque or deleting the inscription and saying it is an Albanian church,” Khatchadourian said.

He concluded “we have to alert, inform and question about the falsification of history. I think this book will go in this direction.”

The final speaker, a co-editor of the book, Dorfmann-Lazarev offered an overview.

He said, “This book analyzes the ways in which the architectural and cultural landscape of the South Caucasus correlates with its national identities, the older and the younger ones.”

“The continuous Armenian presence in both these regions [Artsakh and Nakhichevan] over two millennia is attested to by chronicles and several monuments,” he said.

Those monuments, he said, “have served as points of convergence for the Armenians.”

“The book aims to awaken the world to the danger that today is threatening the architectural and artistic heritage of Karabakh,” he said. “The novelty of our approach to the study of the rich cultural legacy of Karabakh, Nakhichevan and the adjoining regions consists of combining diverse disciplinary persecutes. The volume is the fruit of collaboration between historians, archeologists, historians of art, cultural anthropologists, sociologists and specialists in the protection of cultural heritage and experts in international law.”

Dorfmann-Lazarev touched upon the deliberate destruction of monuments as part of creating a new identity in Azerbaijan. From the 1930s to 1950s, the government issued a new “ethnogenetic mythology.” One of the actions the government took toward that end was the 1938 state-mandated suppression of teaching the minority languages of Kurdish, Talish and Lezgi, among others, by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan Jafar Bagirov, who cited that these ethnic groups were in fact all Azerbaijani, therefore there was no need for the languages.

Dorfmann-Lazarev continued that the approach is one that the Azerbaijani Republic continues to lean into.

“This approach still remains valid in Azerbaijan today. It underlies the complete disappearance of the Armenians and their cultural from Azerbaijan,” he said.

He then spoke about the heroic work of Argam Ayvazyan, a Nakhichevan-born historian who covertly documented many of the monuments of the now-Azerbaijani exclave between the mid-1960s and late 1980s. (There is a chapter by him in the book.) Nakhichevan was closed to everyone and those entering it risked arrest.

Dorfmann-Lazarev said that Ayvazyan,

who was taking pictures illegally, he was arrested in the mid-1960s. He was interrogated by Heydar Aliyev, then head of the KGB in Nakhichevan. Of course, the latter rose steadily in the ranks until he became the leader of Azerbaijan SSR, and later its president after independence. He was succeeded by his son, the current Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

“Aliyev urged Ayvazyan to forget there were any Armenian monuments or Armenians in Nakhichevan. Many of the steles, churches and monuments are only known to us thanks to Argam’s photographs and descriptions,” he noted.

Dorfmann-Lazarev explained that the idea of the book came together right after the war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh in 2020 and the “disastrous truce signed in November of the same year.”

“Since the early 19th century, the Armenian arts have attracted the attention of Russia, French, English, German and Italian scholars,” he said. He then quoted Raphael Lemkin, who coined the word Geno-



Dr. Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev

cide. The chapter on him is covered by Marcello Flores. He continued that Lemkin defined nations as “a human group capable of making original creative contribution to the world.”

“In other words,” he continued, “in order to remain capable of creative work, every nation has the task of protecting its cultural landscape. The apprehension that has accompanied us throughout various stages of editing was that the progressive loss of historical monuments in Baku, on the southern slopes of greater Caucasus, in Nakhichevan, in the region of Ganja (Ganzak), and in Karabakh, endangers the very existence of the Armenians.”

The moderator was Marc Mamigonian, who tied the event to the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.

In answering a question after the talk, Flores said, “The focus of this book is probably the most important link with the destruction of Armenian life in 1915. The deduction of the cultural heritage is something that was something that was at the core of the genocide.”

Other contributors to the book include Prof. Stephan Astourian of the University of California, Berkeley, Prof. Patrick Donabedian, professor emeritus of Armenian Studies and history of art at Aix-Marseille University, Prof. Anna Leyloyan-Yekmalyan, who teaches the mediaeval art of the Christian Caucasus at INALCO, Paris and Prof. Claude Mutafian, who has written volumes on histories of Armenia and Karabakh.

The program was co-sponsored by the Association Internationale des Etudes Arméniennes (AIEA), Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies at Harvard University, NAASR, Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA, Richard Hovannisian Chair in Modern Armenian History at UCLA and Society for Armenian Studies (SAS).

Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus is available now.



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian Datian



Chemen – It's Not Just for Basterma

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. — “In our family, chemen (or chaimen) was used to flavor more foods than just basterma (or basturma),” said Nancy Horasanian Kazarian. Her family recipe for chemen was passed down from her beloved grandmother, Haiganoush Baylerian Sarkisian. Nancy grew up in her “maireeg’s” house in Highland Park, Mich., “She insisted I watch while she made many traditional Armenian foods and baked goods for our family dinners. Maireeg was Sepastatzi, and she taught me how to make sou beoreg, katah (which she called teroun pagharch), and all sorts of Armenian delicacies.”

According to producer and director, Nigol Bezjian, Armenians who survived the 1915 Genocide brought basturma with them to the Middle East. Bezjian recalls his grandmother used to prepare “basturma omelets fried in olive oil with pieces of lavash bread.” He notes that Armenians from Kayseri were particularly renowned basturma producers. In Palestine, where Armenians have lived for 2,000 years, Armenian families gather on New Year’s Eve and eat traditional foods including basturma, çig köfte and a traditional Anatolian confection called *kaghtsr sujukh* (քաղցր սուճուխ). Basturma-topped pizza is served in many Armenian-owned pizzerias in the Baltic capitals, in Yerevan, Los Angeles, or Boston. Basturma sandwiches are common in many cities around the world. And you can find it sold whole or thinly sliced in Armenian-owned grocery stores in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Sidney, Tehran, Moscow, and far beyond. “Fenugreek seeds are one of the ingredients used by the Armenian Church to make Muron (Chrism) since 301 AD,” he adds.

An aromatic spice blend from Armenia, chemen is a mix of fenugreek, paprika, cumin, salt, cayenne pepper, and garlic. It is often used with cured meats such as basterma. Basterma is best served as part of a mezze platter with pita triangles, grape leaves, Armenian string cheese, cured olives, slices of ripe tomatoes and cold crisp cucumbers. It is delicious diced and mixed into scrambled eggs or left in strips and served in place of bacon or ham.

Nancy’s family used this chemen recipe when they made basterma at home, but they also enjoyed it in other ways. “We added chemen to our lamb stew with green beans, and to dolma for a different flavor. For a treat, we’d spread it on our homemade lavash.” Her mother, Rose Sarkisian Mardossian, even created a katah appetizer by sprinkling chopped basterma over the rolled-out dough, then shaping and cutting into small rolls to be served as part of a mezze.

Nancy married Sam Kazarian, an Air Force pilot, and they lived in Holland and Germany. When they returned stateside and settled in Sam’s hometown of Racine, Wisconsin, she became a proficient Armenian cook and baker. Making chemen brought back fond memories of being in the kitchen with her mother and grandmother who, sadly, passed away while Nancy and Sam were overseas.

At almost 90 years of age, Nancy continues to make Armenian foods and baked goods, “As she was about to sail to America, my grandmother made a promise to her father-in-law that she would not lose touch with her Armenian customs and faith. She was determined to raise her children, grandchildren and all who came after with the knowledge of Armenian traditions and pride in their heritage, especially their religion.” Today, there are 87 young and old family members



Dolly Matoian and Nancy
Kazarian

who remain close to each other and celebrate their Armenian culture instilled by Haiganoush Sarkisian.

Nancy and her cousin Dolly Matoian contributed many family recipes to St. John’s Armenian Church Women’s Guild’s cookbook, *Armenian Cuisine: Preserving Our Heritage*, including this recipe.

Basterma Katah

By Nancy Kazarian and Dolly Matoian

INGREDIENTS

Dough:

- 12 oz. whole milk
- 1/4 lb. butter, melted
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/4 cup warm water
- 2 1/4 teaspoons active dry yeast (1 envelope)
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 5 - 6+ cups flour, enough for a medium dough
- 1 egg for egg wash
- Sesame seeds

Filling:

- 1/2 lb. butter, melted
- 1 cup chemen (see recipe below)
- 8 oz. basterma, sliced thin and chopped

PREPARATION:

In a large mixing bowl or bowl of a mixer, combine the milk, water, melted butter, eggs, and oil. Meanwhile, combine yeast into warm water, and add 1/2 teaspoon sugar, mix to dissolve, and cover with plastic wrap. Allow it to proof, then add it to the liquid mixture.

Combine the baking powder, salt, and flour and add this little by little to the mixer ingredients. Knead the dough well, cover with a tea towel or plastic wrap and allow to rest for 1 hour. When dough has proofed to slightly doubled in size and soft-to-the-touch, divide it into balls slightly larger than an orange or approximately 5 oz.

Roll out each ball to approximately 8” x 7” rectangle. Add the filling ingredients in this order: brush the surface of the dough with melted butter, spread 2 tablespoons of chemen thinly over the butter, then sprinkle 1–2 tablespoons chopped pieces of basterma over the surface. Begin rolling from short end, as in a jelly roll, tucking ends under. Slice 1” thick and place on a parchment-lined tray. Using 2 fingers, press down on each roll so each is approximately 1/2” in height, and space them 1” apart on the tray.

Brush tops with egg wash and place in a preheated 375°F oven for about 10 minutes. Turn tray, reduce heat to 350°F and bake another 7 to 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Serve warm.

Chemen:

- 3/4 cup ground fenugreek (bought in most Middle Eastern stores)
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 3/4 cup paprika
- 2 tablespoons cumin (kimion)
- 1 teaspoon cayenne
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 3-4 medium cloves of garlic, crushed
- 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 cups water

Whisk all ingredients except garlic and water in a medium bowl. Add the crushed garlic to your taste. Begin adding water, a little at a time, to a wet consistency to spread. Store in a tight-fitting jar in the refrigerator or freezer.

Note: This mixture can be used in various geragoors (dinners) with spinach, lamb, etc., or in Armenian hamburgers, or even in pastry dough for mezze. It can be kept in a plastic bag or bottle in the freezer to be used as needed. This recipe may be doubled or tripled.

Women’s Guild of St. John Armenian Church:

Armenian Cuisine: Preserving Our Heritage Cookbook

Over 450 tested recipes from the Detroit metropolitan Armenian community, updated using modern techniques and equipment. Detailed description of cooking and baking methods including tips for preparation. The cookbook has a wipe-clean cover that lays flat when opened. This cookbook is made to last and will be a treasured addition to your collection. \$35 with free shipping. To order, go to: <https://stjohn-womensguild.square.site/>

Pomegranate Apron

With 2 handy pockets and adjustable straps. Great for the kitchen, garage, or garden. \$20 with free shipping.

Consider a donation to support the mission of the Women’s Guild of St. John Armenian Church. Women’s Guild strives to nurture fellowship and service to our Church and community through a variety of activities and events. Your funds will help us continue outreach activities in Armenia such as sponsoring orphans and supporting Mer Doon, which provides young women with a safe home and instructs them in life skills.

For information, contact:

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mailto: sjacwg@gmail.com
<https://stjohnwomensguild.square.site/>



ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR
OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

MASSACHUSETTS

JUNE 8 — The performance reading of a new play with music, “The Four Mrs. Hemingways” by Robert Pushkar, presented by Paul T. Boghosian/Harborside Films, in association with the Belmont Media Center. Belmont Town Hall Auditorium, Belmont, Saturday, 2-5 p.m. Suggestion donation, \$25. To reserve a ticket, call (617) 484-9539 and leave your name, phone number and numbers attending. Tickets also sold at the door. For more information, visit www.harborsidefilmsboston.com

JUNE 9 — Father’s Day Dinner open to the community at Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church. Catered by Vico Italian Restaurant. Sunday, at 5 PM, with live entertainment by Luigi Grasso and Dj Ryno, Tickets: \$85 Adults, \$50 Youth/Children, for reservations call Sonia 617-875-1107 or Parish office 617-489-2280, at Nishan and Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont, MA 02478.

JUNE 9 — St. James Armenian Festival – Annual Picnic! Delicious Armenian food, Live Armenian music, children’s activities with moon bounce, face painting, and more! Rain or shine. Noon-5 p.m. St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown. For more info visit www.stjameswatertown.org/festival or call 617.923.8860.

JUNE 9 — Armenian Cultural Foundation: Mirak Chamber Music Series Presents Alan Hovhaness Tribute Concert, 3 p.m., Arlington Town Hall, 730 Mass. Ave., Arlington. Works by Hindemith, Hovhaness, Khachaturian, Tassone. Performers: Wei Zhao, Yelena Beriyeve, Knarik Nerkararian, Jing-Huey Wei, Sylvie Zakarian, Aaron Larget-Caplan, Michael Peipman, Arlington-Belmont Chamber Chorus, The Menotomy Chamber Orchestra. More details to follow.

JUNE 13 — Under the Strawberry Moon. Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston at 8:15 p.m. Meet & Greet. Chocolate Dipped Strawberries hosted by Ovenbird Cafe. RSVP hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org Armenian Heritage Park ongoing Programs: MOVEMENT & WALKING MEDITATION. LABYRINTH WELLNESS WALKS TOGETHER through October. Tuesdays at 5:30 p.m. Series is offered in collaboration with the Boston Health Commission and The Greenway Conservancy Fitness program. For details, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar

CELEBRATING WHAT UNITES US! Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston Each month highlights the country of origin of many living and working in the City of Boston and beyond. Series is offered in collaboration with Age-Friendly Boston. For dates and details, ArmenianHeritagePark.org/Calendar

JUNE 16 — Boston Tekeyan Cultural Association is hosting a Father’s Day Bar-B-Q. Sunday, 2 p.m. at the Baikar Building, 755 Mount Auburn St., Wa-

tertown (Use Norseman Street side door). \$40/adult, \$25/student, under 12 years old free. Khorovadz, pilaf, salad and more. Special raffle. RSVP bostontca@gmail.com or call Sossy at 617-281-1647.

JUNE 21 — Holy Cross Armenian Catholic Church invites the community to celebrate World Music Day Under the Patronage of His Excellency the Most Reverend Mikael Mouradian, Bishop Of the Armenian Catholic Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in the USA and Canada. The event will feature performances by Rev. Fr. Ghazar Bedrossian, the Meghedi Children’s Vocal Ensemble and students of Do RE Me Music School, Artistic Director Marina Margarian. Friday, 6:30 p.m . Free Entry, a reception will follow the program, Nishan & Margrit Atinizian Hall, 200 Lexington Street, Belmont.

OCTOBER 25-27 — Save the date! Sanctuary consecration of the Armenian Apostolic Church at Hye Pointe. Presided over by Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern). 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. Details to follow.

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.

MICHIGAN

JULY 20 — Save the date! Armenia Fest 16! At the Royal Oak Farmers Market. Celebrate 16 years of getting together and showcasing our rich Armenian heritage with music, vendors, food and dance! Friday, 5 to 10 p.m. The Royal Oak Farmer’s Market will once again be transformed to a wonderful “little Yerevan” with vendors selling Armenian food, folk goods, jewelry and desserts; live band “The Armenia Fest Allstars” with celebrated musicians under the direction of Vaughn Masropian; Hamazkayin Arax Dance Troupe, and a vast array of Armenian taste treats. Special fun in mind for the little ones with Mr. Mouse and his balloon magic and face painting. Armenian food rovided by original Armenia Fest caterer, Gary Reizian and his crew from Uptown Catering. Don’t miss our annual Choereg Contest! To set up a stall, contact Vendor Chair, Noreen Masropian at nmas@comcast.net. Reserve your space now. \$60 for a Vendor table. To date our Fest has donated \$70K+ to these worthwhile endeavors.

NEW YORK

SEPTEMBER 15 — Parish Council members and friends of St. Paul Armenian Church, Syracuse, will host its Annual Shish Kebab Picnic. Great food, games, prizes, etc., on scenic, sheltered, private grounds at Ryder Park. Serving starts at 1 p.m. The entire community is invited.

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.

Shattered Lives: Another Siran Seza Discovery

SHATTERED LIVES, from page 12

Ared with the “undeniable eternal law of love.” Even if the purity of her feelings destines her to suffering and to pain, and traditions ultimately win, her “I want to love” is what makes life desirable. Seza creates enormous sympathy for her protagonist, who may sometimes be spoiled and capricious, yet is never mean or condescending. Alina is all goodness and kindness. “My good Anna,” whispers “the little girl” to the overjoyed maid as she impulsively hugs her and kisses her “dark cheeks.”

This world of integrity the novel evokes is inextricably connected to Seza’s passion for everything Armenian. Her heroine is ready to sacrifice all she has for a free homeland. Deep in her heart, Alina knows that her people will reemerge from the ashes. The orphans she volunteers to teach “promised an amazing new generation. . . The Turks had not been able to kill their spirit.”

Yet the pain lingers. In a city evoked throughout as “the most beautiful corner of the world,” nature is mournful in its beauty. The bright sunshine is short-lived. The glorious sunset of Scutari is Alina’s connection with her absent loved ones. “The mournful whistle of the steamship” transporting soldiers to the Black Sea and “the melancholy call of the Muezzin” sadden the feeble girl. Chopin, George Sand, Alfred de Musset and *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Goethe are ever-present. Yet the world of the novel is not a depressing or a disheartening world. Indeed, *Shattered Lives* gives us a glimpse into a world where the possibility of happiness exists, even if the inhabitants of its fictional world do not have it. Paradoxically, dreams bring back the desire to live, just as life destroys those dreams. Alina will never cease to believe in “the mir-

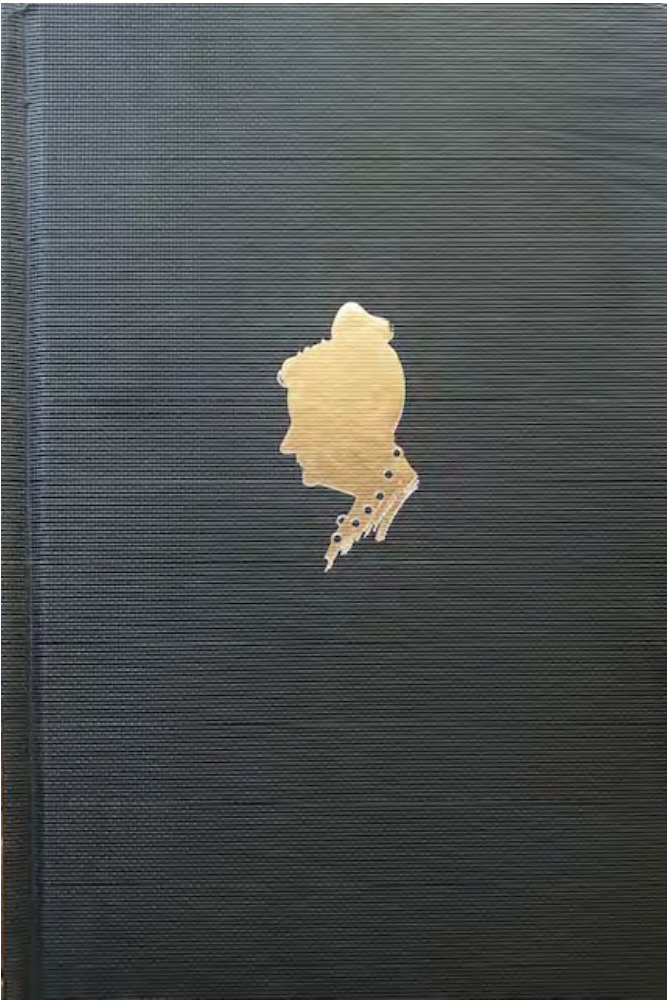
acle of love.”

With remarkable skill Seza depicts war in all of its destructiveness. In elegant naturally flowing prose, she gives expression to the despondency over an endless war. With her portrayal of the Martenian family’s 1917 New Year’s Eve she contrasts a whole past of abundance, of joy and of family closeness with a present full of disruptions. Alina mourns the plight of her people and weeps for the Armenian soldiers who have to fight for the glory of bloodthirsty sultans. The massacres are always in the background. The oversensitive girl cries for absent loved ones. With her vivid images Seza reveals a whole inner world of feelings. The spark of Ared and Alina’s fingers touching and separating is palpable.

An interesting strategy is the interweaving of entries from Alina’s diary into the narrative. Even if these at times create some repetition, as when Alina recalls a scene that has already been described in the narrative, they provide much insight into the sensitive girl’s innermost feelings.

Seza wrote the novel in 1924 when she was only 21, but it was not published during her life. *Shattered Lives* was published in 2015, in Los Angeles. In 2014, another of her novels, *The Book of Genesis*, which she had written later in life, was published. These publications, along with the ongoing publication of her Letters, are part of a project to bring out Seza’s rich literary legacy, still in manuscript form.

Finally, a tidbit I would like to share: Recently, and quite accidentally, I came across the poem “To the Little, Pretty Girl” written by Seza’s real-life brother, the poet Mateos Zarifian. The sorrowful tone of the poem evoked for me the melancholic “little girl” of the novel.



Shattered Lives with cover image designed by Ani Kupelian.



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**MIRROR
SPECTATOR**
SINCE 1932



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COMMENTARY

Armenia's Leaders Need to Uphold the Historical Truth in the Face of Intimidation

By Marc A. Mamigonian and Bedross Der Matossian

As scholars focused on the Armenian Genocide — its causes, implementation, repercussions, and its denial — and with Armenian Studies more generally, we feel compelled to express our concerns about aspects of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's April 24, 2024, message on the occasion of the 109th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

We want to make it clear here that we do not represent any political groups nor take sides in the current contentious political climate in Armenia. We are writing as individuals with an interest in upholding the historical record and not on behalf of any institutions; the views presented here are our own.

We will refer to and quote from the official English translation of this message posted online on the prime ministerial website: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2024/04/24/Nikol-Pashinyan-April-24/>.

Readers can compare the 2024 message with those of 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023. While we duly recognize that the message begins by stating the Prime Minister's intention to "commemorate the memory of 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide," the aspects that are most concerning to us are the absence of any identification of the perpetrator of the Armenian Genocide; language that echoes long-standing denialist rhetoric implying that the victims of the Genocide were responsible for their deaths; and the implication that a collective post-genocidal "mental trauma" prevents Armenia or Armenians from perceiving reality.

It is important to note that Mr. Pashinyan's message does not exist in a vacuum. It needs to be read within a larger context that includes the ethnic cleansing of all Armenians from Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 (called genocidal by various analysts), following the 2020 44-Day War launched by Azerbaijan with the entire military and logistical support of Turkey, and the 2022-2023 illegal blockade of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh imposed by Azerbaijan with, again, the support of Turkey.

In short, at no time in recent history has the Armenian government been in a position of greater powerlessness vis-à-vis Turkey and Azerbaijan, "one nation, two states" who aggressively deploy denial of the Armenian Genocide and of other historical facts about Armenia and the region as part of their political arsenal. When Turkey and Azerbaijan are seeking to dictate Armenia's future, it is no less important to them to dictate the past as well. The Armenian Prime Minister and other government leaders cannot acquiesce to Turkey and Azerbaijan's false historical narratives, which are aimed at the elimination of Armenia as such.

Mr. Pashinyan's 2024 commemoration message seems to mark a sea-change in terms of language and rhetoric and the advent of a disturbing self-censorship mode when it comes to naming the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide.

In 2019, Mr. Pashinyan mentioned that "[o]ne of the peculiarities of the Armenian Genocide is that the people subjected to the genocide were not only physically destroyed, but also deprived of the right to live in their homeland ... the land on which Armenian culture and Armenian identity were formed and developed over thousands of years.

In 2020, Mr. Pashinyan identified "Ottoman Turkey's long-standing policy of Armenophobia [that] culminated in 1915 during the Young Turk government," when "[d]ue to the Genocide that had been perpetrated at a state level for many years, Western Armenia was completely emptied of Armenians," who were "deprived of the right to live in their historical homeland."

In 2021, Mr. Pashinyan stated that "the first genocide of the 20th century was perpetrated by the Young Turk government in the Ottoman Empire. What happened in those days was described by the great powers as a crime against mankind and human civilization."

In 2022, Mr. Pashinyan declared that "107 years ago, the Armenian people faced a ruthless tragedy, the genocide. The goal of Ottoman Turkey was to exterminate our ancestors."

In 2023, Mr. Pashinyan "commemorate[d] the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide carried out by the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century."

In contrast, in 2024, there is no reference to a perpetrator. Instead, he states that "we commemorate the memory of 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide, the *Meds Yeghern*, who were put to the sword in the Ottoman Empire since 1915 for being Armenians."

In all statements from 2019-2023, he explicitly referred to the Armenian Genocide (Հայոց ցեղասպանություն) or *Meds Yeghern* (Մեծ եղեռն) as a "crime." This is, of course, entirely appropriate since genocide is a crime and the Armenian term *Meds Yeghern* means "Great Crime."

In contrast, in 2024, the word "crime" seems to have been replaced with the word "tragedy." A crime requires a perpetrator; a tragedy does not. Rhetorically, then, responsibility for the Armenian Genocide is shifted. But shifted to where?

It is worth remembering that today, even Turkey acknowledges the deaths of large numbers of Armenians during World War I. However, it refuses to assign responsibility to the Ottoman authorities who planned the genocide and implemented it. Instead, the Turkish government and others who disseminate its denialist counterfactuals blame Armenians themselves for "rebellion" or "plotting with foreign powers" even as they pay lip service to the "tragic" consequences. These are key elements of the denial of the Armenian Genocide.

Mr. Pashinyan echoes this rhetoric, asserting that "[t]his large-scale tragedy took place during the years of the World War I, and the Armenian people, who had no statehood, had lost their statehood centuries ago, and essentially had forgotten the tradition of statehood, became victims of geopolitical intrigues and false promises, lacking first of all a political mind capable of making the world and its rules understandable."

While it is true that Armenians had lacked a state of their own since the 14th century, this is hardly the same as stating that all Armenians everywhere "had forgotten the tradition of statehood" or that they lacked "a political mind capable of making the world and its rules understandable."

Moreover, responsibility for Armenian deaths does not lie with "geopolitical intrigues and false promises." The responsibility lies with the Ottoman government. Armenians were not victimized because they were ignorant; they were victimized because they lacked power relative to an Ottoman state that planned their elimination.

Finally, while no one denies that the Armenian Genocide was an event that traumatized its survivors and, in widely varying ways, many of the descendants of those survivors, it is infantilizing and insulting to state that, as a result of the "mental trauma" of the genocide, "we cannot correctly distinguish the realities and factors, historical processes and projected horizons." Furthermore, if Armenians as a whole cannot distinguish political realities, is Mr. Pashinyan himself somehow exempt from this dubious condition?

If it is the belief at the highest levels of the government in Yerevan that the real threats posed by Turkey and Azerbaijan to Armenia's existence can be diminished by incrementally incorporating aspects of denialist rhetoric (whether consciously, unconsciously, on under the pressure of third parties) into even an April 24 commemoration message, we assert that this is both incompatible with the historical record as well as short-sighted politically. We urge Mr. Pashinyan and all of Armenia's leadership to be strong in upholding the fundamental historical facts of the Armenian Genocide and to resist any efforts to employ language that suggests the guilt of the victims rather than the responsibility of the perpetrators.

(**Marc A. Mamigonian** is the Director of Academic Affairs of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), based in Belmont, MA. He is the co-author of *Annotations to James Joyce's Ulysses* (Oxford University Press, 2022; with John N. Turner and Sam Slote), editor of the volume *The Armenians of New England* (2004), and co-editor with Mary Jane Rein and Thomas Kuehne of *Documenting the Armenian Genocide: Essays in Honor of Taner Akçam* (2024). **Bedross Der Matossian** is a professor of Modern Middle East history and the Hymen Rosenberg Professor in Judaic Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is the author, editor, and co-editor of seven books. His latest edited volume on *Denial of Genocides in the Twentieth Century* was published by the University of Nebraska Press (UNP) in 2023.)

AT NO TIME IN RECENT HISTORY HAS
THE ARMENIAN GOVERNMENT BEEN IN
A POSITION OF GREATER POWERLESSNESS
VIS-À-VIS TURKEY AND AZERBAIJAN,
"ONE NATION, TWO STATES" WHO
AGGRESSIVELY DEPLOY DENIAL OF THE
ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AND OF OTHER
HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT ARMENIA
AND THE REGION AS PART OF THEIR
POLITICAL ARSENAL.



COMMENTARY

Embrace Your Mission Impossible

Noubar Afeyan, Flagship Pioneering founder and CEO, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) PhD '87, addressed the students, faculty, and families who gathered to celebrate the 2024 MIT Commencement. The text of his speech follows, while its video may be found at mirrorspectator.com.



By Noubar Afeyan

President Kornbluth, trustees and faculty, students and families, guests, and members of this remarkable community of scholars and solvers: It's a special honor to be with you today.

Graduates, I once sat where you now sit, brimming with excitement and the sense of accomplishment that comes with a hard-won MIT diploma. Congratulations!

Families, as the father of two MIT alums, I know firsthand the pride and emotion you feel today.

Faculty members, as a senior lecturer here for 16 years, I saw up close how well you prepare these graduates for what lies ahead.

And fellow trustees, it is a great privilege to serve alongside you.

I spent my childhood in Beirut, Lebanon. Three generations of my proud Armenian family shared an apartment on the ninth floor of our building. The window in the bedroom I shared with my great aunt looked out over the red-tiled roofs of Roman, Ottoman, and Byzantine buildings and beyond to the Mediterranean Sea.

When civil war erupted in 1975 and the government imposed strict curfews, the state broadcaster often shifted from airing three hours of TV a day to offering round-the-clock programming of mostly American television shows, a diversion for my brothers and me when we were forced to stay inside.

One show in particular had me captivated. Just hearing the theme song would set my heart racing – perhaps you know it, too.

That's right... *Mission Impossible!*

Even if you never saw the TV show, you likely know the movies with Tom Cruise as agent Ethan Hunt.

The encoded self-destructing message to the agent always began the same way: "Your mission, should you choose to accept it..."

No matter how long the odds, or how great the risk, the agents always took the assignment.

In the fifty years since, I have been consistently drawn to impossible missions, and today I hope to convince each and every one of you that you should be too.

Class of 2024, one incredibly challenging mission is already under your belt: You were given the assignment to begin your studies at MIT... without *being* at MIT. Going to college, without *going* to college, was not a mission you'd signed up for, but it is what you got. A handful of you did move to campus, but even for you, masking, testing, social distancing, and virtual classes meant orienting to a foreign land. You even learned a new language, as terms like "Q-week" and "SCUFFY" entered your MIT lexicon. No one knew what would happen next, or when it would all end.

And yet, you found ways to thrive. You dove into your coursework and started to build mostly virtual friendships. In the words of your classmate Amber Velez, who rented a Cambridge apartment with three MIT roommates, you "patched together a little lifeboat in this vast sea of students, spread out over the world."

Earlier that year, just up the road in Kendall Square, my colleagues and I at Moderna had received another mission that seemed impossible: Develop a safe and effective vaccine that could save lives, restart the economy, and do so in less than a year. Oh, and while you are at it, get a billion doses manufactured, distributed, and into the arms of people around the world.

It was clear that if we accepted this challenge, it would take everything we had. We would have to slow 20 ongoing drug-development programs and focus on solving COVID.

We embraced the mission!

Just 48 hours after Moderna obtained the sequence for

the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, we deployed our mRNA technology to produce a potent vaccine. Less than two months later, we enrolled our first patient in a clinical trial, and on November 16th, the vaccine was determined to be 94.5% effective against COVID-19. By some estimates, Moderna's vaccine saved over 2 million lives during the pandemic.

How did we do it? That's another speech for another day.

But what I *do* want to talk about is what it takes to accept your *own* impossible missions and why you, as graduates of MIT, are uniquely prepared to do so.

Uniquely prepared – and also obligated.

At a time when the world is beset by crises, your mission is nothing less than to salvage what seems lost, reverse what seems inevitable, and save the planet.

And just like the agents in the movies, you need to accept the mission – even if it seems impossible. I know the odds don't appear to be in your favor. But this age of polycrisis is also a moment of poly-opportunity, fueled by artificial intelligence, machine learning, quantum computing, and other modern technologies that are changing the world faster than people believe is possible.

Now, you are uniquely equipped to turn science fiction into science reality.

With the right mindsets, "Mission Impossible" can become "Mission Improbable" – as you overcome obstacles and seemingly long odds by imagining and innovating your way to novel solutions.

So: How do you go about that? How do you become the agents the world needs you to be?

You already have a head start, quite a significant one. You graduate today from MIT, and that says volumes about your knowledge, talent, vision, passion, and perseverance – all essential attributes of the elite 21st century agent. Oh, and I forgot to mention our relaxed uncompetitive nature, outstanding social skills, and the overall coolness that characterizes us MIT grads.

More seriously, you are trained in science, mathematics, engineering, and technology – fields that, when properly harnessed and supported, can be deployed against almost any seemingly impossible challenge.

You may not realize it yet, but your MIT education has given you a superpower – like X-ray vision – that lets you see through the illusion of impossibility and surface the blueprints for solutions.

And as of today, you even have a secret decoder ring, better known as the Brass Rat!

MIT's history underscores these special powers. The telephone, digital circuits, radar, email, Internet, the Human Genome Project, controlled drug delivery, magnetic confinement fusion energy, artificial intelligence and all it is enabling – these and many more breakthroughs emerged from the work of extraordinary change agents tied to MIT.

Now let me ask you a question: Aside from MIT, what do such agents have in common? What equips them to accomplish seemingly impossible missions?

I'd argue that they do three things that make big leaps possible. They *imagine*, they *innovate*, and they *immigrate*.

And now, it's *your* turn.

Start by unleashing your imagination.

People often see imagination as the exclusive province of the arts: of movie making, literature, painting.

I think that's nonsense. Imagination, to my mind, is the foundational building block of breakthrough science.

I am not making an argument against reason. Reason has a role to play, but in accomplishing impossible missions, it's the servant, not the master. You can't expect reasoning to do the work of imagination. At its best, scientific research is a profoundly creative endeavor.

You have mastered proofs, and problem sets, and design projects, but in the words of mathematician and author Lewis Carroll: "Imagination is the only weapon in the war with reality."

To the great Irish writer George Bernard Shaw, its role is even more fundamental. As he put it:

"Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine and at last you create what you will."

It is also your turn to innovate. Think of innovation as imagination in action. Or, perhaps, *mens et manus*, or "mind and hand," but I hear that line is taken.

MIT did not prepare you to shy away from the unknown, quite the contrary. You are now prepared to leap

for the stars, sometimes quite literally – just ask the more than 40 NASA astronauts with MIT degrees.

Leaps often involve unreasonable or even seemingly crazy ideas. Ordinary innovations are often judged by how reasonable the idea is as an extension of what already exists, and how reasonable the person proposing it is.

But ask yourself: Why do we expect extraordinary results from reasonable people doing reasonable things?

As you've probably guessed by now, I am utterly unreasonable, and an eternal optimist. As a lifelong entrepreneur and innovator, I have to be.

But I've always practiced a special kind of optimism – I call it *paranoid optimism*. This means toggling back and forth between extreme optimism and deep-seated doubt.

The kind of paranoid optimism needed to make scientific or technological leaps often starts with an act of faith. By that, I mean belief without facts – the very definition of faith.

I know faith is generally associated with religion. But interestingly, in my experience, pioneering science also starts with faith. You take leaps of faith and then you do experiments.

On rare occasions, the experiments work, converting your leap of faith into scientific reality.

What a *thrill* when that happens!

On your innovation journey, beyond optimism and faith, you will also need the courage of your convictions. Make no mistake, you leave MIT as special agents in demand. As you consider your many options, I urge you to think hard about what legacy you want to leave – and to do this periodically throughout your life.

Not every mission you are qualified for is a mission worth accepting. You are far more than a technologist – you are a moral actor. The choice to maximize solely for profits and power will in the end leave you hollow.

To forget this is to fail the world – and ultimately to fail yourself.

I know many of you here – and some in the Class of 2024 not with us here today – are deeply troubled by the conflicts and tragedies we are witnessing. As an Armenian, descended from genocide survivors, and co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, I feel deeply the wounds of these conflicts.

I wish I had answers for all of us, but of course, I don't.

But I do know this: having conviction should not be confused with having all the answers. Over my many years engaged in entrepreneurship and humanitarian philanthropy, I have learned that there is enormous benefit in questioning what you think you know, listening to people who think differently, and seeking common ground.

As you grapple with today's hard choices – and the many that lie ahead – rely again on your imagination. Imagine the world you want to create and work backwards from there. Be open to the many paths that could carry you towards this goal and let the journey inform which ones will succeed.

I've urged you to imagine, and to innovate. The last thing I want to leave you with is the need to immigrate.

I'll say more about what I mean by "immigrate" in a second, but first I want to give a shout-out to others who, like me, have left their homelands.

For those of you who have emigrated here from far away, or whose parents did, or whose grandparents did, please stand.

I applaud you.

It may often feel like a disadvantage, but you will soon learn it is quite the opposite.

When I first arrived at MIT, I worried I did not belong here: I spoke with an accent, my pastime wasn't hockey or lacrosse, but Armenian folk dance.

Then one afternoon, late in my first year here, I was walking down the infinite corridor when a poster caught my eye. Staring back from the poster was a Native American chief in full headdress, eyes defiant, finger pointed, seemingly right at me. The poster read: *Who Are You Calling Immigrant, Pilgrim??*

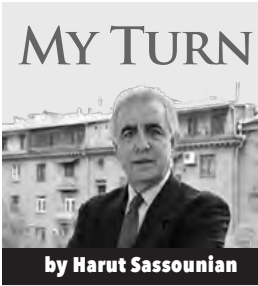
I can't tell you what an impact that had on me. Aside from Native Americans, we all, at some point, come from somewhere else. It helped me realize I belonged here – at MIT, in the United States. And graduates, families, YOU. DO. TOO.

But here's the really interesting thing I've learned over the years: You don't need to be from elsewhere to immigrate.

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COMMENTARY



Pashinyan Turned Armenia Into A Police State

The Armenian government had two options to resolve peacefully the popular uprising against the regime:

1) Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan could have resigned, turning over the reins of power to a coalition

government which in six months would hold new parliamentary elections and choose a new Prime Minister;

2) Pashinyan could have accepted the offer of the new leader of the opposition, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, to sit down with him and discuss a negotiated solution to the current political crisis.

Regrettably, Pashinyan chose neither one of the above options. He chose to attack the opposition by having his “well-fed” police beat and arrest a large number of protesters, including journalists and even clergymen, some of whom are in a hospital recovering from injuries they suffered at the hands of the police. The prime minister has secured the blind loyalty of the police officers by increasing their salaries several times and giving them constant bonuses. It is said that there are more policemen in the streets of Armenian cities than soldiers protecting the country’s borders.

This is not surprising since Pashinyan, as an incompetent and inexperienced leader has mismanaged just about every decision he has made in the past six years. He is stubbornly clinging to his seat of power, dealing a mortal blow to the survival of the country.

After initially calling his takeover of power a “velvet revolution,” Pashinyan quickly switched to what he described as a “steel revolution.” Incredibly, he campaigned during the parliamentary elections of 2021, holding a hammer in his hand and promising to bash the heads of his domestic opponents. He also threatened to slam them into the wall and flatten them on the asphalt. Furthermore, Pashinyan boasted that no judge would dare to deviate from his orders. Even though the prime minister claims to be a democrat, his behavior is more like that of a dictator. Pashinyan came to power in 2018 closing down the streets of Yerevan, ordering his followers to block the entrances of the Parliament and courthouses, smashing the doors of the State Radio station, and violating many other laws. However, when the opposition is now peacefully walking in the streets or even on the sidewalks, they are brutally attacked, punched and arrested by the ever-present police.

Not surprisingly, the heads of Azerbaijan and Turkey have expressed their concern about Pashinyan remaining in power. Some Azeri and Turkish analysts even suggested that their countries dispatch armed troops to Armenia to protect Pashinyan, so he can continue making concessions.

Another indication that Pashinyan is working against the interests of Armenia is the support he is getting from the West because he is doing what they are telling him to do which is in their interest, but contrary to the national interests of Armenia.

Western countries only pay lip service to human rights, but maintain good relations with even the most dictatorial regimes in the world. That is the reason why not one critical word has been said by any Western state while Pashinyan’s police is brutalizing Armenia’s citizens.

Fortunately, several non-governmental international organizations have condemned the lack of human rights in Armenia and criticized police brutality.

On May 28, five major non-governmental organizations issued a joint statement against “mass detention” of protesters, “violence against some participants” and physical assault against a member of the Armenian Parliament which is a violation of Armenia law. The five organizations are: Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly Vanadzor Office, Transparency International Anticorruption Center, Protection of Rights without Borders NGO, Law Development and Protection Foundation, and Democracy Development Foundation.

The joint statement deplored that Armenian law enforcement officers “continue to engage in unlawful and disproportionate use of force, illegal detentions, and violations of the right to liberty during the exercise of the right to freedom of assembly. The use of such methods by the police is the result of a longstanding policy of impunity within the system, leading to the use of violent force becoming the main tool of the police.”

The joint statement further said that citizens have the freedom for peaceful assembly and the right to express their opinions freely “without fear of police violence.”

Reporters Without Borders issued a separate statement calling “for an end to deliberate police violence against reporters.” At least five journalists were targeted by the police.

The US Freedom House also issued a statement saying: “We are concerned by mounting reports of police violence in Armenia. We urge Armenian authorities to investigate this pattern of excessive force and inhumane treatment and work with civil society to foster and implement meaningful reform.”

The most shameful behavior was Pashinyan’s order to obstruct the entry of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II into the Sardarapat Memorial on May 28, Armenia’s Independence Day. To make matters worse, the Prime Minister lied when he was asked why the Catholicos and his entourage of clergy were hindered from placing a wreath at the Memorial, is a public venue.

All police officers and government officials must be aware that after Pashinyan is gone they will be held responsible for their illegal and anti-Armenian actions.

from previous page

If the immigrant experience can be described as leaving familiar circumstances and being dropped into unknown territory, I would argue that every one of you also arrived at MIT as an immigrant, no matter where you grew up.

And as MIT immigrants, you are all at an advantage when it comes to impossible missions. You’ve left your comfort zone, you’ve entered uncharted territory, you’ve foregone the safety of the familiar. Yet, you persist and survive. You figure out how to accomplish your mission.

Like elite agents, immigrants are the ultimate innovators, equipped to navigate obstacles, to never say never. In fact, I often describe innovation as intellectual immigration. Just like those of us who emigrate from other countries, innovators pioneer new environments seeking a better future – not just for themselves but also for the larger world. So, whether you grew up in Cambodia, or in California, or right here in Cambridge, you can immigrate – and you need to *keep* immigrating. You need to leave your comfort zone, to think in new ways, to acclimate to the unfamiliar and embrace uncertainty.

If you imagine, innovate, and immigrate, you are destined to a life of uncertainty. Being surrounded by uncertainty can be unnerving, but it’s where you need to be. This is where the treasure lies. It’s Ground Zero for breakthroughs.

Don’t conflate uncertainty and risk – or think of it as extreme risk. Uncertainty isn’t high risk; it’s *unknown* risk. It is, in essence, opportunity.

I began with a TV show; I’ll end with a movie – the most recent *Mission Impossible* film released just last summer.

The film is a daunting reminder of all that your generation is up against: complicated geopolitics, climate threats and technological pressures, and AI tools that will both simplify and complicate our world.

But graduates, as I look at all of you, I see a large team of agents who are entirely capable of completing your missions. I see agents for good, agents for change.

MIT has prepared you to tackle impossible missions.

To harness the future and bend it toward the light.

My wish for you, my fervent hope, is that you not only choose to accept impossible missions, you *embrace* them. Welcome long odds. Embrace uncertainty, and lead with imagination.

Approach the unknown with the courage, the confidence, and the curiosity of an immigrant. With paranoia *and* optimism.

And always remember the strength of working in teams. Show the world why Mission-Impossible-Team inevitably shorthands to M – I – T.

Graduates, set forth on your impossible missions. Accept them. Embrace them. The world needs you, and it’s your turn to star in the action-adventure called *your life*.

US Elections and Armenian Votes

By Suren Sargsyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

The forthcoming US presidential election is poised to be challenging due to existing tensions, public discord, and legal actions against ex-President Donald Trump. These factors suggest that both parties will vigorously pursue every voter’s vote, ensuring that each ballot is duly counted. In this context, Armenian votes are significant, spread across different states.

While votes in California and Massachusetts may not sway the outcome much due to their usual blue state status, Armenian votes in swing states like Nevada, Michigan, and Wisconsin can hold substantial importance during the pre-election period. In this regard, the Armenian votes in these states are vital for both Republicans and Democrats, making it essential to grasp the stance of the Armenian community on these elections.

Certainly, there is no clear answer as to whom Armenian voters will choose, as they weigh Armenia’s priorities alongside their own visions for the future in the US. It is evident that Armenian votes will be split between Republicans and Democrats.

Despite this, the Armenian community and numerous organizations have taken a clear stance. Following the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh, they have intensified their criticism of the Biden administration, arguing that Biden failed to adequately support Armenia and Artsakh, hold Aliyev accountable, and refrain from arming Azerbaijan. In addition to the administration in general, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and USAID director Samantha Power are subject to serious criticism. However, this does not imply that Armenian votes will simply go to Trump, as there is also the opinion

in the Armenian diaspora that Trump was too occupied with his pre-election campaign before the 2020 elections to pay sufficient attention to the Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh in September of 2020. He did not take any significant steps to protect Armenian interests before handing over the position to Biden in January 2021, which is certainly, a valid perspective existing within the Armenian community.

Simultaneously, there’s a viewpoint advocating for participation in elections and backing an independent candidate like Robert Kennedy, well-versed in Armenian matters and holding a strong pro-Armenian stance. While his chances of winning may be slim, an independent candidate could significantly disrupt the frontrunners like the Independent Ross Perot did in 1992 during the George H. Bush vs. Bill Clinton election.

To ascertain the Armenian diaspora’s voting inclinations in the United States, delving into their priorities, their outlook on Armenia’s future, and their engagement in American political spheres is imperative. Certainly, there is no definitive answer regarding the voting preferences of the Armenian diaspora in the US due to its diverse nature and historical evolution. The diaspora’s composition spans various periods, from pre-Genocide formations to post-genocide migrations, Soviet-era influxes, and continuous arrivals post-Armenian independence. This community includes individuals from Armenia, survivors of the Baku pogroms, Armenians from Syria, Lebanon, Russia, Iran, Turkey and other regions.

Consequently, predicting their electoral choices remains complex. Nevertheless, it is evident that Armenian-American voters prioritize their views on Armenia and US policy towards the country in their final decision-making process.

Genocide Allegations Are Not a Political Football

By Stephan Pechdimaldji

Turkey’s recent effort to join South Africa’s genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over Israel’s conduct in the Gaza Strip highlights a double standard that is all too common when it comes to the politics of genocide.

The Turkish state has little credibility being an arbiter of what constitutes genocide when it has spent the last 100 years denying the role of the Ottoman Empire in the 1915-16 Armenian genocide, during which more than 1 million Armenians were killed or died of starvation or disease, according to genocide scholars, as they were pushed by the Ottoman Turks out of Anatolia. Turkey refuses to acknowledge or apologize for these events to this day, despite recognition of the genocide by countries such as the United States, France, and Germany.

Ankara’s participation undermines the intent and moral seriousness of South Africa’s charges and highlights the unfettered hypocrisy that characterizes genocide allegations made by many governments. Turkey formally denies that the events of 1915-16 constitute genocide; its participation in many ways weakens the current ICJ case by giving Israel an opening to question the legitimacy of the charges.

For far too long, various governments, from the United States to Turkey to Israel, have leveled (or downplayed) genocide allegations in pursuit of various political objectives. But genocide is not a political football to be tossed around. It is a serious allegation that should never be used for political expediency. But sadly, that is what it has become.

Since the founding of NATO, Turkey has exploited its membership in the alliance to both curry favor with the West and avoid any culpability for its actions. It has used its crucial role within NATO as a bargaining chip to its advantage.

It is one of the reasons why U.S. presidents from both political parties have turned a blind eye to Turkey’s denial of the Armenian genocide by arguing that the country’s proximity to the Soviet Union was strategically valuable to

the national interests of the United States. When the Cold War ended, the argument turned to Turkey’s importance as a “free” and “democratic” society in a sea of Islamic fundamentalists.

And over the last 20 years, U.S. presidents have largely overlooked Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s rising authoritarianism and egregious regional behavior on the grounds that having Ankara as an ally is strategically important for Washington. This type of transactional diplomacy not only is dangerous but also gives cover to leaders like Erdogan, who feel that they can say or do whatever they want with impunity.

It is unconscionable that Israel, a country founded in the wake of genocide, would deny the Armenian genocide. But that is largely what Israel has done for years—and it is politically motivated. Despite maintaining extensive ties with Turkey, until recently when trade between the countries was suspended, Israel has used the Armenian genocide to needle Ankara when they clash, as they are now over the conflict in Gaza.

Opportunistically referencing a genocide to shame a rival—as Israeli officials did for the first time regarding the Armenian genocide after Turkey decided to support the ICJ case—has no place in international relations. Governments either support a policy of denial or oppose it. There should be no equivocation.

Cherry-picking what represents genocide also sends the wrong message to would-be aggressors who see such vacillation as a green light to act with impunity and evade legal accountability.

It is how former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir was able to direct the killings of hundreds of thousands of people in the Darfur region in the early 2000s and escape justice—despite being indicted and wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for committing crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide. Because various governments did not recognize his acts as genocidal or failed to abide by the ICC indictment, Bashir was for years able to travel freely around the world to visit countries including China, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia as well as Rome Statute

signatories such as Jordan, Kenya, Nigeria and, most notably, South Africa—all of which failed to arrest him.

It is how China continues to persecute Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang with few repercussions, even from many Muslim-majority nations, such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates—all of which have rejected a U.N. motion to hold a debate about China’s human rights abuses for political and economic reasons.

And it is how Azerbaijan, one of Turkey’s staunchest allies, has brazenly followed Ankara’s lead in denying the Armenian genocide while seeking to ethnically cleanse Armenians today following its 2023 military offensive in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Taking a page out of the Turkish playbook, Azerbaijan has been able to leverage political expediency to its benefit by using its vast natural resource wealth, namely oil and gas, to essentially buy a seat at the world’s table as it did when it was named the host country for this year’s U.N. Climate Change Conference.

It is also one of the reasons why Azerbaijan has been able to avoid any punishment from the international community for its mistreatment of ethnic Armenians in Karabakh. While Turkey has deftly used the cover of geopolitics to hide from its genocidal past, Azerbaijan is using global energy demand to obfuscate its own crimes today.

This lack of accountability gives authoritarian leaders and bad actors the wherewithal to ignore international organizations and human rights groups seeking to hold criminals accountable and prevent these types of crimes from happening in the future.

Playing politics with genocide sets a dangerous precedent. It denies victims justice and distracts from the actual merits of the crime. If the international community wants to take genocide seriously, then it must be consistent in its application of the law and its meaning.

(Stephan Pechdimaldji is a communications strategist who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is a first-generation Armenian American and grandson to survivors of the Armenian genocide. This commentary originally appeared in Foreign Policy on May 16.)



Tekeyan Cultural Association

Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia

Since its inception in 2001, the Tekeyan Cultural Association (TCA) Sponsor a Teacher Program has raised 838,700 dollars and reached out to 7,386 teachers and school staff in Armenia and Artsakh. This year the program continues to support school teachers in Tekeyan Schools in Armenia, as well as teachers who had to flee Artsakh but continue teaching in Armenia’s schools, as they educate new generations of children, our future leaders.



YES, I would like to sponsor TCA school teacher(s) in Armenia, as well as teachers who fled Artsakh and continue teaching in Armenia schools, in order to continue helping them work and educate the children, our future leaders. I would like to have the sponsored teacher/s’ name(s) and address(es).

☐ \$240 ☐ \$480 ☐ \$700 ☐ other _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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Make check payable to: Tekeyan Cultural Association
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