

California Assembly Member Adrin Nazarian Shares Vision of Armenians In a New California, Aims For LA City Council

By **Aram Arkun**
Mirror-Spectator Staff

TOLUCA LAKE, Calif. — Adrin Nazarian has served continuously as a representative in the California State Assembly for the 46th district in the central San Fernando Valley from 2012, and he could have served for one more two-year term before reaching the lifetime maximum allowed by law in this legislature. He is the only Armenian-American elected to serve on the state level in California at present. However, he declined this year to run for reelection. Nazarian explained



why and discussed various issues important to him, as well as to Armenians, over the last several years.

Quo Vadis?

In December 2021, an independent Californian electoral commission drew new borders for electoral districts as part of the decennial effort to make sure all districts have the same number of people. California lawmakers are required to live in the districts they represent, and after the redistricting, Nazarian and two other incumbents, Laura Friedman and Luz Rivas, found themselves, all Democrats, located in the same newly redrawn 44th Assembly district, which includes the areas of Sunland-Tujunga, La Crescenta, Burbank and the northern part of Glendale. Rivas chose to see CALIFORNIA, page 8



A SpaceX Falcon 9 lifts off May 25 carrying the Armenian satellite

First Armenian Satellite Launched

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — The first ever Armenian satellite has been launched into the Earth's orbit, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced at the Cabinet meeting on May 26.

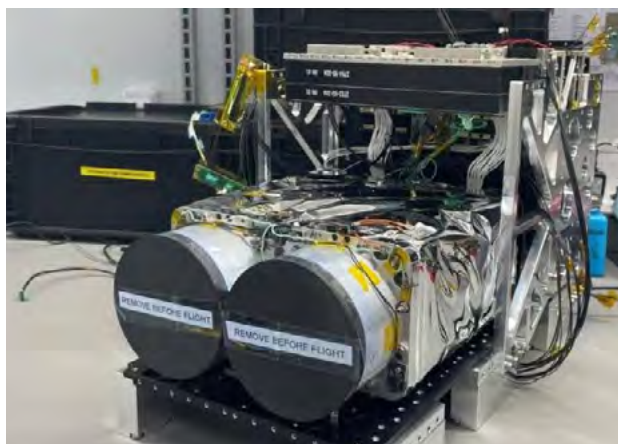
"On May 25, 2022, at 22:35 Yerevan time, Armenia's first space satellite was launched into the Earth's orbit on a SpaceX rocket from Cape Canaveral in the United States," Pashinyan said.

Pashinyan added that the satellite was launched into space as a result of cooperation between the Armenian state company Geocosmos and the Spanish company Satlantis.

"We can't overestimate the significance of this, with this Armenia is embarking into the era of space activities and we hope that our rich traditions in this area will be restored. I am speaking about the space scientific-production area which existed in Armenia for many years. In this context I'd like to

stress that one of our priorities is the localization of space technologies in Armenia, as well as organizing the production of space equipment," Pashinyan said.

The Armenian satellite, which was launched into the orbit from Cape Canav-



The Armenian satellite

eral Space Force Station in Florida, United States, on board the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, is an Earth Observation Satellite.

Armenia will have a satellite control center and downlink facility by 2023, the PM added.

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Armenia Calls for Investigation of Azeri Provocation that Saw Soldier Killed

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has strongly condemned the gross violation of the ceasefire by the Azerbaijani armed forces in the south-eastern direction of the Armenian border on May 28, as a result of which private Davit Vahani Vardanyan, a serviceman of the Armenian Armed Forces, was killed.

Expressing condolences to the soldier's family and friends, the Ministry stressed that "the provocation was preceded by destructive, belligerent and superstitious statements by the President of Azerbaijan on May 27, which included claims on the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia.



Davit Vartanyan (News.am photo)

The Ministry reminded that since May 2021, units of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan have illegally invaded the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia in the Sotk-Khoznavar section, occupying an area of more than 45 square kilometers.

"The incident of May 28 and similar provocations, regular ceasefire violations once again justify the need for a mirror withdrawal of troops from the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and the deployment of an observation mission on the border, which has been repeatedly raised by the Armenian side," the Ministry said in a statement.

"Taking into account that the Commission on Border Delimitation and Security between Armenia and Azerbaijan has already started its work, this incident should be investigated and assessed by the commission," the statement reads.

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Balakian Brings New Poetry to the Boston Area and Dialogues with Writer Askold Melnyczuk

By **Aram Arkun**
Mirror-Spectator Staff

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Peter Balakian is one of the most masterful English-language poets Armenians have as a voice in the contemporary world. The Boston area had a rare opportunity on May 17 to hear him recite some of his newest works and engage in a dialogue with multitalented writer Askold Melnyczuk. The literary evening was hybrid in nature, allowing a broader audience on Zoom. However, people who came in person had the extra benefit of enjoying the refined atmosphere of a historic Victorian mansion, the home of Marceline Donaldson and Rev. Dr. Robert Bennett, in Cambridge, Mass.

The event was cosponsored by the Grolier Poetry Book Shop and the Harvard Square Business Association.

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(PHOTO ARAM ARKUN)

Peter Balakian reading his poetry

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ARMENIA

NEWS from ARMENIA

Judge Denies Request To Release Oppositionist Chalabyan

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Judge Armen Danielyan of the Yerevan Court of Criminal Appeals on May 31 refused to release activist Avetik Chalabyan from prison, upholding a lower court ruling.

Chalabyan was arrested on May 12 for allegedly trying to pay students of the Armenian National Agrarian University to participate in ongoing anti-government protests in Yerevan. He has denied the charges as politically motivated.

Chalabyan is a co-founder of Arar Foundation, a charity supporting the Armenian army as well as border villages in Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh).

The Artsakh president, parliament speaker, MPs and religious leader have called for his release.

Foreign Ministry Discusses Heritage Protection in Artsakh

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan received on May 26 Executive Director of the International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH) Valéry Freland, the Foreign Ministry said in a news release.

Mirzoyan said that the preservation of the Armenian cultural and religious heritage in the territories under the Azerbaijani control is one of the priority issues of Armenia.

It was stated that more than 2,000 Armenian cultural monuments and 21,000 museum exhibits face a very serious threat of complete elimination.

The Armenian side said that the immediate intervention and engagement of the international community, particularly UNESCO, becomes more urgent in such situation, in order to preserve the Armenian monuments of Nagorno Karabakh that are part of the world cultural heritage and prevent the continuous cases of vandalism.

Pashinyan Accused of Understating POW Number

YEREVAN (Azatutyun) — A human rights lawyer on May 26, accused Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of understating the number of Armenian prisoners of war and other captives in Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan put the “confirmed” total number of captives at 39 when he spoke the previous day about Armenian efforts to secure their release.

Siranush Sahakyan, representing Armenian POWs in the European Court of Human Rights, said she is taking at face value the number of prisoners acknowledged by Baku.

“Data and evidence possessed by our organization show that apart from these 39 prisoners the Azerbaijani armed forces also captured 80 other individuals who now have a status of the forcibly disappeared,” she said.

Sahakyan charged that the Armenian government is effectively washing its hands of the 80 detainees and reducing chances of their quick repatriation.

Convicted Sasna Tsrer Militants Sent Back to Jail

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Key members of an armed anti-government group that seized a police base in Yerevan in July 2016 were sent back to jail over the weekend after Armenia’s highest court upheld prison sentences handed down to them.

The seven men and two dozen other gunmen stormed the base to demand that then President Serzh Sargsyan free Zhirayr Sefilyan, the jailed leader of their radical opposition movement, and step down.

The gunmen, who took police officers and medical personnel hostage, laid down their weapons after a two-week standoff with security forces which left three police officers dead.

All but two members of the armed group called Sasna Tsrer were released from custody shortly after Sargsyan was toppled in the 2018 “velvet revolution” led by Nikol Pashinyan.

The two other members remained behind bars because of facing murder charges denied by them. A district court in Yerevan sentenced one of them to 25 years in prison in February 2021. The other, Armen Bilyan, was given the same jail term by the Court of Appeals in December.

The court also upheld prison sentences of between six and eight years given to the seven other defendants. They continued to deny any wrongdoing, appealing to the Court of Cassation, Armenia’s highest body of criminal justice.

The Court of Cassation rejected the appeals, a decision which judicial authorities announced only after the seven men, in-

cluding Sasna Tsrer leader Varuzhan Avetisyan, were arrested and transported to jail on Saturday, May 28. One of their lawyers, Arayik Papikyan, condemned the “political decision.”

Tepanosyan’s wife and Mkrtychyan’s mother insisted on Saturday that all members of the armed group should have been sentenced to life imprisonment.

Avetisyan has also faced in recent months



Varuzhan Avetisyan (L), the leader of an armed opposition group that seized a police station in July 2016, at the start of his trial in Yerevan, 8Jun2017.

Avetisyan, who was sentenced to seven years in prison, has repeatedly defended the armed attack on the police facility located in Yerevan’s southern Erebuni district. But he has denied responsibility for the killing of the three police officers: Colonel Artur Vanoyan and Warrant Officers Yuri Tepanosyan and Gagik Mkrtychyan.

Relatives of the slain officers are also unhappy with the guilty verdicts in the case.

embarrassing accusations from Bilyan, the man convicted of committing one of the three murders. He claimed that the Sasna Tsrer leader as well as Sefilyan knew that he did not kill the policeman but still helped to jail him as part of a secret deal with the Armenian authorities.

Avetisyan categorically denied the allegations, arguing that he and Sefilyan are also in opposition to the current government.

Parliament Majority to Block Opposition Resolution on Karabakh

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — Parliament speaker Alen Simonyan reaffirmed on May 31 the ruling Civil Contract party’s plans to block an opposition resolution rejecting any peace accord that would restore Azerbaijan’s control over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia’s leading opposition forces drafted the parliamentary resolution last week as they continued daily demonstrations in Yerevan demanding Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s resignation. They will try to push it through the National Assembly at an emergency session scheduled for Friday.

Simonyan confirmed that parliament’s pro-government majority will thwart the session by boycotting it.

Like other Pashinyan allies, Simonyan accused the opposition Hayastan and Pativ Unem blocs of exploiting the Karabakh conflict for political purposes. He also said that the draft resolution is aimed at reinvigorating what he described as a failed opposition campaign for Pashinyan’s resignation.

“That [opposition] initiative is yet another attempt to find some way out of the situation,” Simonyan told reporters.

The speaker, who is a senior member of Civil Contract, insisted that Pashinyan’s government will not cut any peace deals with Azerbaijan that will “not take into account the opinion of Artsakh and Armenia’s citizens.” But he stopped short of ruling out Yerevan’s recognition of Azerbaijani sovereignty over Karabakh.

“They are afraid of doing that because they have given [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev promises,” said Ishkhan Saghatlyan, an opposition leader and parliament vice-speaker. “They are afraid because one and a half years after the war

[in Karabakh] they have only increased the number of police and internal troops, while the army has been downsized.”

The opposition accused Pashinyan of planning to place Karabakh back under Azerbaijani rule when it launched the street protests in Yerevan on May 1.

The parliamentary resolution proposed by it not only rejects such an option but also says Pashinyan’s government cannot make any territorial concessions to Azerbaijan as a result of a planned demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. It further says that the demarcation process must start only after Baku frees all Armenian prisoners and withdraws Azerbaijani troops from Armenian border areas occupied last year.

The protests continued on Tuesday, with hundreds of people led by Saghatlyan and other opposition lawmakers marching to a government building that houses three Armenian ministries. The lawmakers tried unsuccessfully to meet with the ministers of foreign affairs, education and justice and hear their opinion about Karabakh’s status. They did not attempt to force their way into the building heavily guarded by riot police.

The oppositionists’ attempt to break through a similar police cordon on Monday triggered clashes between their supporters and security forces outside the common building of four other government ministries. More than a hundred protesters were detained as a result.

Nine of them remained under arrest on Tuesday. Law-enforcement authorities said they could be prosecuted for participating in “mass disturbances.”

Saghatlyan claimed that the authorities are “fabricating” such criminal cases in a

bid to suppress the opposition movement. “In this way they are trying to isolate participants of the movement and intimidate other citizens,” he said.

Armenia Calls for Investigation of Azeri Provocation that Saw Soldier Killed

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At the same time, the Foreign Ministry reminds that the consequences of the previous gross violation of the ceasefire established by the November 9, 2020 statement, as a result of which the Azerbaijani Armed Forces invaded the village of Parukh in Nagorno Karabakh, which is under the responsibility of the Russian peacekeeping troops, are yet to be eliminated.

“We consider it important that the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] Minsk Group Co-Chairs, the CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organization], the European Union and the entire international community give a proper and targeted assessment of Azerbaijan’s provocative actions and statements, aggressive rhetoric aimed at undermining peace efforts in the South Caucasus,” the Ministry stated.

It called on the Azerbaijani leadership to refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric, fulfill the trilateral statements, and commit to establishing stability and security in the region as a result of the Brussels meetings.



ARMENIA

Robohood in Armenia and the US — Everyone Can Paint

YEREVAN — Robohood Inc. is a company that developed robotic painting technology. The goal of the project is to combine the capabilities of a robot and a human, shortening the path between the idea and its implementation.

In general, the process looks like this: based on the original image — a photo or an image — you can customize the style of painting, preview the visualization and start drawing in “three clicks.” Then the robot independently paints a picture on canvas with brush and oil or acrylic paints.

The difference between Robohood technology and other robo-painting projects is that Robohood is realistic. In the painting you see recognizable objects defined by the original image, not only beautiful abstractions. Robohood is easy to use, as no manual processing of each image is required — everything happens in a special interface. The software is easy even for a child to use.

Finally, it is accurate. The strokes are based on the shape and texture of the image. The final picture differs from the original picture, just as an artist’s painting differs from a photograph.

Implementing this project, it is necessary to solve different tasks: to turn a bitmap image into a vector image, taking into account the chosen style of painting — neural networks and other ML techniques are used for this; to mix paints to get the right color — this process has its own characteristics, due to different paints having different properties depending on the color and manufacturer, and their properties change during operation (in this case, computer



vision is used to correct and refine colors); to convert the finished coordinates of the brushstroke into the robot’s movements so that it puts the brushstroke gently, at the right angle and at the right speed — as artists do.

Painting with the robot is a new direction in art. If earlier an artist could only be someone who has been learning to draw all of his life, now the opportunity to translate one’s idea into a finished picture becomes

available to everyone. Robots help people who do not have sufficient skills to create a real work of art.

According to a survey, about 80% of the people in the world feel like artists, but only 3% of them are able to literally make some art. The robot artist proves that everyone can paint!

It can also be interesting for professional artists who are looking for new ways of self-expression. A robot that can paint will expand the tools and opportunities for creativity.

The idea to create robotic painting technology came to the mind of Robohood’s CMO (who is a great amateur painter by the way) when he was giving master classes to less skilled friends. He said, “We came up with the separation of creativity and skill. A person gives creativity and a

In 2022 the development team joined forces with another team who had more advanced technology and formed Robohood INC. Now Robohood is the largest team in the world that is working on the robotization of painting. These are engineers, marketers, programmers, roboticists, artists, IT specialists and scientists.

Technical specialists are working on the development of AI and painting algorithms. Artists and laboratory technicians conduct experiments, evaluate the results obtained and give recommendations for improving the technology. The robot’s capabilities and the number of painting techniques are constantly increasing. At the moment, this is the largest project of its kind.

Now the company is ready to present the unique product as the intersection of



Hovhannes Bachkov back in Gyumri

European Boxing Champion Hovhannes Bachkov Receives Hero’s Welcome

YEREVAN (Public Radio of Armenia) — European boxing champion Hovhannes Bachkov returned to his hometown of Gyumri to hero’s welcome.

Upon arrival he was welcomed by representatives of local authorities, sport-lovers and sportsmen.

In the 63.5 kg final in Yerevan, Bachkov scored a fantastic 5-0 victory over France’s Lounes Hamraoui with a clear advantage in all three rounds.

Armenian athletes also won two silver medals and a bronze at the European Boxing Championship held in Yerevan.

The boxer thanked everyone for support, noting that “without that support, this victory might not have happened.



robot donates a skill.”

Robohood’s founder is Vladimir Tsimberg, with Vladimir Suvorov as team leader and Anna Mischenko and Nikolay Gavrilin as robotics group leaders.

technology and art — robot and artist. You may buy it on its website. Today Robohood INC. is shipping robots to US and EU customers and already has several labs in Yerevan and the US.



INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Turkey's Airspace 'Reopened' to Armenian Airline

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) — An Armenian airline announced on May 30, that Turkish authorities have allowed it to resume regular flights to Europe through Turkey's airspace.

The private carrier, FlyOne Armenia, cancelled the flights to Paris and another French city, Lyon, about a month ago, saying that its aircraft were banned from flying over Turkey without any explanation. The continuing war in Ukraine left it without alternative, commercially viable overflight routes.

In a statement, FlyOne Armenia said both twice-weekly flight services will resume on June 17. The company did not say whether it has taken any action in response to the Turkish ban.

The airline earlier asked the Armenian passage Civil Aviation Committee to help lift the ban. Citing the absence of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey, the committee in turn appealed to the Armenian foreign ministry and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to deal with the issue.

The ban did not apply to FlyOne Armenia Yerevan-Istanbul flights that were launched in February.

Turkey had banned all Armenian aircraft from its airspace in September 2020 three weeks before the outbreak of the Armenian-Azerbaijani war over Nagorno-Karabakh. FlyOne Armenia was set up last year by Armenian and Moldovan investors.

Karabakh Leaders Slam EU's Michel

STEPANAKERT (Azatutyun) — Nagorno-Karabakh's leadership has accused European Council President Charles Michel of undermining the Karabakh Armenians' right to self-determination after the latest Armenian-Azerbaijani summit hosted by him in Brussels.

Michel said early on May 23, that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev agreed to "advance discussions" on a comprehensive peace treaty between their countries. He said he told them that it is "necessary that the rights and security of the ethnic Armenian population in Karabakh be addressed."

Arayik Harutiunyan, the Karabakh president, on May 25 described Michel's remarks as "extremely unacceptable." He said they are at odds with the "demands and aspirations of the Armenians of Artsakh (Karabakh)" based on their right to self-determination.

Four of the five political groups represented in the Karabakh parliament, including Harutiunyan's party, also denounced Michel in a joint statement. They said the European Union's top official effectively portrayed Karabakh's population as an ethnic minority not eligible for independent statehood.

Pashinyan downplayed Michel's remark on Wednesday, saying that the EU leader simply chose wording which he thought will satisfy both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

First Armenian Satellite Launched

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The National Academy of Sciences of Armenia (NAS) praised the move which will enable to use leading knowledge, train qualified experts and lay the foundation for new developments and technologies.

"In this context the implementation of scientific research in several areas is especially important – data processing, geolocation, image recognition and others. By involving the scientists of NAS and universities in these works, significant fundamental and applied development programs can be assigned. In the past, Armenian scientists have had great contribution in space exploration: Viktor Hambardzumyan, Artem and Abraham Alikhanyans, who conducted research in astrophysics and cosmic rays physics, Grigor Gurzadyan, who participated in the creation of the Orion-1 and Orion-2 astrophysical observatories and were engaged in planetary nebula studies. A number of important researches are being conducted in our scientific-research

institutes today as well, for example the processing of data received from satellites, the issue of monitoring and neutralizing space debris etc.," their statement said, in part.

The images made by the Armenian satellite will be used for various purposes, such as border surveillance. "The images made by the satellite will be used in Armenia for border control, prevention and management of emergency situations, preservation of the environment, including monitoring of climate change, urban development, road construction, geology and other areas," Pashinyan said.

The launch of the first space satellite of the Republic of Armenia into the orbit of the planet Earth is an important infrastructure for the development of the sphere in the country, Deputy Minister of High-Tech Industry Davit Sahakyan told journalists.

"This process started a long time ago, but was most active in 2022. It is a powerful infrastructure for building a space ecosystem in the country. During the

Soviet years, Armenian scientists made great achievements in this field, now, taking into account the previous experience, we try to restore the success of the past. The ecosystem is multi-layered, it involves the production of space equipment, software development, etc. Armenia has that potential," said Sahakyan, adding that the goal is to promote the activation and development of enterprises operating in the sphere.

An important component in the development of the sector is the establishment of a satellite control center and receiving station. The Deputy Minister noted that numerous events are planned in a number of directions for the activation and development of the sphere in Armenia. There are already companies in the field that have registered results in terms of attracting tangible financial resources. They are successful not only in the Armenian market but also abroad.

He noted that the satellite will remain in the orbit of the planet for at least 4 years.

By Signing November 9 Agreement, Azerbaijan Acknowledges Existence of Nagorno Karabakh, Says FM Mirzoyan

YEREVAN (Armenpress) — Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan on May 28 referred to the statement of Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev that there is no Nagorno Karabakh, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is resolved, and there is no Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group.

Answering the questions from Armenpress, the Armenian foreign minister emphasized that they can show a document signed by Azerbaijani president that is still in force, which says that there is Nagorno Karabakh, and that is the trilateral declaration signed on November 9, 2020. Ararat Mirzoyan emphasizes that by signing the document, the president of Azerbaijan acknowledged the existence of Nagorno Karabakh, and this is an irreversible fact.

The Armenian foreign minister also referred to Aliyev's statement that an agreement had been reached in Brussels that a corridor linking Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan will pass through Meghri.

Question: Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated on May 27 that there is no Nagorno Karabakh, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is resolved, and there is no OSCE Minsk Group. What can you say about this?

Answer: We can show a document signed by Azerbaijani president that is still in force, which says that there is Nagorno Karabakh, and that is the trilateral declaration signed on November 9, 2020.

Ararat Mirzoyan emphasized that by signing the document, the president of Azerbaijan acknowledged the existence of Nagorno Karabakh, and this is an irreversible fact. He said, "We can show the official statements made by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, where they reaffirm their commitment as Co-Chairs. The United States and France made such statements only in the last week. The Prime Minister of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation also emphasized the role of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs in their joint statement on April 19. At the December 2021 summit of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Stockholm, the foreign ministers of dozens of countries stressed the exclusive role of the OSCE Minsk

Group Co-chairs in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "The OSCE Minsk Group was not created by Azerbaijan, but by the international community, so Azerbaijan cannot dissolve it or consider its mission over. The same international community states today that the OSCE MG exists. As I mentioned, it also states that there is a Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that needs to be resolved. This is stated in the above-mentioned statement of the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation. The US Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia stated this quite recently, expressing the official position of the US.

"Moreover, in the same statement, it was emphasized that the issue of NK status is on the agenda, the right of Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh to self-determination is also on the agenda. By the way, Armenia has never had territorial claims from Azerbaijan. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a matter of right and is perceived by the international community as so. And that is evidenced from the meeting in Brussels.

We have stated that the page of the war is closed for us, there is a problem that must be solved through political and diplomatic means."

Question: Ilham Aliyev also stated that an agreement had been reached in Brussels about a corridor connecting Nakhichevan to Azerbaijan through Meghri.

Answer: We have continuously recorded Armenia's position. But let us repeat it again. The existence of any corridor in the territory of Armenia is ruled out. This is not even a matter of debate. Our discussions are exclusively about opening roads, transport and economic communications, unblocking them. As for the routes, we said that before clarifying the routes, we must first agree on the legal regulations for the passage of Azerbaijani citizens and cargo through our territory and the passage of Armenian citizens and cargo through Azerbaijan (including Nakhichevan). However, it is obvious that one branch of the railway will pass through Meghri, Ordubad, Julfa, Yeraskh. There is no agreement on the route of the highways at the moment.

Swiss Project to Reach Most Remote Farmers in Armenia

YEREVAN — On May 27, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC approved a grant worth \$12.5 million for an economic development intervention in Armenia and launched an international tender process to identify an implementing partner. Titled "Sustainable and Inclusive Growth in Mountainous Armenia" SIGMA, this new SDC project will aim to reduce poverty in mountainous areas of Armenia in an inclusive, innovative and climate-aware manner.

SIGMA will launch and establish cooperation between the drivers of rural growth, which the project defines as "catalysts", and the rest of mainly small businesses and farmers. "Catalysts" are rural entrepreneurs who are ready to take additional risks for profit but eventually in favor of local economic growth as such. Those can be investors, buyers, big-

ger farmers, suppliers of agricultural inputs, or tourism-related enterprises. Through the project, small businesses and farms will improve their services and products, offering those for a higher value to the "catalysts" to be sold to new and expanded markets.

Working at an altitude of more than 1,500 meters, the project will aim at leveraging growth in niche areas where mountainous regions have a comparative advantage. Sectors such as rural agriculture, wild botanicals, rural tourism, agricultural technologies, which do not harm the environment and contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation, will be consistently pursued.

The project's geographic focus will prioritize the poorest regions in northern Armenia, namely Tavush, Gegharkunik, Lori, and Shirak.

Community News

Noor Lima Boudakian Appointed New School University Trustee

NEW YORK — The Board of Trustees of the New School on May 5, 2021, voted to appoint Noor Lima Boudakian to a one-year term as a member of the board. Lima Boudakian is completing her third year at the university. The board appoints two student trustees every year on the recommendation of the president of the university.

Lima Boudakian, 21, is completing a bachelor's degree in economics and global studies at the university's Eugene Lang College along with a master's degree in economics at the New School for Social Research, the university's graduate faculty. In addition to being on the Dean's List every semester, Noor has been an award-winning participant in the university's policy debate team; with her teammate Katrina Butler, she won a coveted place at the National Debate Tournament this year. She was recognized with the Max Adler Award for Leadership in Debate.

The trustees govern the university, charting a course for its future, overseeing investments, outlays, faculty appointments, and the work of the university leadership team.

With her appointment as trustee, Noor will continue providing a voice to students and serving as a student leader in the university. First elected as a member of the University Student Senate in 2020, in the most difficult days of the pandemic, she was



Noor Lima Boudakian speaking on behalf of students at the investiture of Dwight A. McBride as ninth president of The New School, October 7, 2021. She has since been appointed to a one-year term as a member of the university's Board of Trustees. Photo courtesy of The New School.

reelected and served as the chair of the senate for the 2021–22 academic year. In this capacity she oversaw the activities of the 22-member body and spoke for students with the administration and faculty of the university.

Noor's focus as University Student Senate chair was to ensure that students' pressing concerns were heard and addressed even as the university and the world navigated the health, financial, and emotional challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. Among her achievements was the establishment of a permanent student-administration committee to review financial policy.

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Anush Gharibyan-O'Connor, executive director of GiniFest, with Robert Hayk, the cofounder of Grapes and Barley Imports

GiniFest Setting New Records, Going International

By Ani Duzdabanyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Stepan Partamian and wine specialist and sommelier Anush Gharibyan-O'Connor set five years ago, when they founded the festival. GiniFest unites winemakers who repatriated to Armenia in the last fifteen years and those who immigrated to the United States starting in the early 1900s and continued the traditions of their ancestors interrupted by the Armenian Genocide and the Soviet Union's industrialization.

On Sunday, May 22, GiniFest hosted thirty wineries who presented their wines to more than 1300 guests. Gharibyan-O'Connor is convinced that the festival is making an impact on the industry by creating the right place for new winemakers to thrive and the old ones to grow. "We have a local winemaker from LA – Kassabian Vineyard. They grow their grapes in the Calabasas area, Hidden Hills. The best part of it is that because of the GiniFest, they are excited to make this an even a bigger project. So for example, Kassabian Vineyard was only making one type of wine. Now, because of the festival they source a Sauvignon Blanc from Northern California to increase their portfolio," said Gharibyan-O'Connor.

Besides wineries, six spirits companies and forty other vendors offered their ideas, services, products and visions in one way or another connected with the Armenian heritage. The high percentage of non-Armenian attendees indicates the growing interest in the Armenian wine industry.

Encouraged by the success of GiniFest, Partamian and Gharibyan-O'Connor decided to expand the festival and transform it into an international wine festival which will represent less known winemaking countries like Greece, Croatia, Israel, Moldova, Georgia and Bulgaria. In fact, Bulgarian wines were at the GiniFest, foreshadowing this upcoming event in November.

BURBANK, Calif. — This year GiniFest, the Armenian Wine and Spirits Festival, lived up to so many of the expectations that philanthropist



Andrea and Diko Kassabian of Kassabian Vineyard (photo Frederick Melikian)



Lusine Simonyan, founder of Miray Collections (photo Frederick Melikian)

Anoush Baghdassarian Receives Harvard's 2022 Andrew L. Kaufman Pro Bono Award

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Anoush Baghdassarian is the recipient of the 2022 Andrew L. Kaufman Pro Bono Award. Graduating with an unprecedented 4,000 pro bono hours during her time at Harvard Law School, Baghdassarian is a stand-out student in the clinical and pro bono community, according to Harvard's official website.



Having participated in a variety of clinics spanning international human rights to government lawyering, Baghdassarian's résumé is a model of devotion to knowledge, advocacy, and selflessness.

The Andrew L. Kaufman Pro Bono Award is granted each year in honor of Professor Andrew Kaufman '54, who has been instrumental in creating and supporting the Pro Bono Service Program at Harvard Law School. The award is given to a J.D. student in the graduating class who exemplifies the pro bono public spirit and an extraordinary commitment to improving and delivering high quality volunteer legal services to disadvantaged communities.

Anoush's personal drive began long before arriving at Harvard Law; growing up, Baghdassarian's connection to her Armenian heritage sparked her mission to address and prevent human rights violations. She founded [Rerooted Archive](#), an archive collecting the testimonies of Syrian-Armenians to document the Armenian community of Syria before, during, and after the Syrian conflict.

"It has been a 100-year open wound that I felt so intensely that I began doing what I could to close it, and importantly, what I could to prevent other communities from suffering from the same affliction, the same impunity, the same ethical loneliness," says Baghdassarian. "The intrinsic motivation to help heal these wounds has been my guiding star in each endeavor I have undertaken."

After graduation, Baghdassarian will work at the International Criminal Court as a visiting professional through the support of the International Legal Studies fellowship.

Mississippi Becomes 50th US State to Recognize Armenian Genocide

JACKSON — Mississippi became the 50th US state to recognize the Armenian Genocide, with Governor Tate Reeve's proclamation marking April as Genocide Awareness and Prevention Month.

"I've proclaimed April as Genocide Awareness and Prevention Month," Governor Reeve said in a Twitter post.

"The systematic destruction of lives has spanned areas and cultures from Armenia to Darfur, the Holodomor to the Holocaust," he added.

"Genocide has no place in society, and we must do everything we can to prevent it," the governor said.



OBITUARY

Irma Der Stepanian

Businesswoman and Armenian Democratic Liberal Party Leader

CLIFFSIDE PARK, N.J. — Businesswoman and Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL) leader Helen Irma Der Stepanian passed away on May 26 in New Jersey. She worked for many years as head of Marketing and Business Development at BNP Paribas in New York City.

Der Stepanian was born in Damascus on June 10, 1936, the daughter of noted ADL leader Mihran Der Stepanian and his wife Alice. Mihran was a well-known writer and journalist originally from Dortyol, Cilicia.

The Der Stepanian family moved from Syria to Lebanon, where Irma received her higher education in the University of Saint Joseph, a French university. In addition to a bachelor's degree in philosophy, she earned master's degrees in international economy, political science, international law, public law, international economy, and French literature and history.

In the 1970s the family moved to New Jersey. Der Stepanian continued her education in New York, taking courses in banking studies at American Bankruptcy Institute (ABI) and the New School, and even later took courses towards a doctorate in Middle Eastern politics.

Der Stepanian was a volunteer throughout her life, primarily for Armenian organizations. She noted in a resume that her

training for volunteer work started at the age of five, visiting poor families and old people with her mother, father and other relatives. In Damascus while in school she was the member of a youth committee of the Armenian General Benevolent Union and the Armenian Church. In Beirut, she started the Health Program in the Tekeyan Armenian School there, helped the Armenian Red Cross to carry out their health program, helped Lebanese political prisoners and their families, and served as a member of the Cultural Committee of the local AGBU.

In the United States, Der Stepanian served as an active member of the ADL District Committee of the US and Canada. With the late Dr. Haroutiun Arzoumanian, she revised the by-laws of the ADL and was the keynote speaker in 1990 in a fundraising event for the *Baikar Weekly* in Boston. She was also a member of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada.

Since 1986, she was an active member of board of the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations (NECO), which annually presented the Ellis Island Medal of Honor to worthy recipients, including many Armenian Americans. She initiated and monitored the adoption of two schools in

Harlem by BNP Paribas and monitored the fundraising activity. She initiated and monitored the sponsorship of the Summer Program in France of the West Point Military Academy by her company. She also was the editor of the magazine of BNP New York.

She served on the board of many Armenian organizations, including as USA Committee member of the AGBU, and member of the Cultural Committee of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), where she directed the week-long events of the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. She also initiated the creation of the Cultural Center of the aforementioned diocese.

She was vice president of the Howard Karagheusian Commemorative Corporation.

Funeral services will be held on Saturday, June 4 at 10:30 a.m. at St. Thomas



Armenian Church of Tenafly, N.J., with subsequent burial at George Washington Cemetery. She leaves behind her sister, Sylva Der Stepanian, and cousins Shoghig Chalian Tarpinian (married to Dr. Vaghinag Tarpinian), and Hovsep Chalian.

Dr. Vartan (Van) Ghugasian

Descendent of Genocide Survivors Believed in Paying in Forward

ARLINGTON, Mass. — Dr. Vartan (Van) Ghugasian, DMD of Arlington, formerly of Watertown, passed away unexpectedly on May 23, 2022.

He was the brother of the late Armen Ghugasian, son of the late Jack and Takuhe (Seferian) Ghugasian, cousin of Paul Seferian and his wife Penny of Medway, Diane Sheperd and her husband Ed of Arizona, Charles Seferian of Medford, Liz (Karian) Gardner of Maine and Sarah Karaian of Lexington. He is also survived by many loving relatives of the Seferian, Minakyan, Candan, Giritlian, and Karaian families.

Ghugasian completed his undergraduate studies at Tufts University and his professional studies at the Tufts School of Dental Medicine and went on to open a private prosthodontist practice on Boylston Street, moving to the Fresh Pond area in Cambridge in later years. Van and Armen were a popular pair, lending entertainment, current events, and comradery to all who walked through the door. Patients turned into friends and friends turned into life-long friends. Vartan's reputation preceded him as he built a thriving practice one block at a time of quality, compassion, and integrity. His constant drive to help others led to treating many of Boston's homeless population.

He gave generously to many causes near and dear over the years; one of them being the Perkins School for the Blind, from which he never forgot stealing an apple as



a little boy.

Vartan became involved in humanitarian activities in Armenia starting in the 1990s. He and his colleague, Dr. Myron Allukian Jr., helped establish a state-of-the-art free dental clinic for the Karagheusian Foundation in Nork (ultimately expanding to 5 locations). Vartan personally provided free dental care to children for one month every year for over a decade. They hosted and trained Armenian dentists in the US so that they could bring their training back to other dentists in the homeland.

The Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and the government awarded the Medal of St. Nersess Shnorhali to Vartan on December 30, 2007 in recognition of his humanitarian actions for the homeland.

Vartan was bestowed with an honorary fellowship on November 9, 2020 from the American Academy of Dental Science (the first and oldest honor society for the field in the world) for his years of service to the organization. He has affectionately been referred to as the "patriarch" of the group and a member for over four decades.

He was a founding member and past president of the Armenian Dental Society, fellow of the International College of Dentists, American College of Dentists, and the Pierre Fauchard Academy as well as other dental societies. He remained active in teaching at the Harvard and Tufts Schools of Dental Medicine for the remainder of his profession.

Vartan was a longtime member of the St. James Armenian Apostolic Church Men's club and former member of the St. James Choir and Executive Committee.

He was loved by his family for his keen sense of humor, loyalty, wit and wry smile. He was a good listener and a compassionate human being who appreciated life's simple pleasures such as a homegrown tomato, springtime flowers, and a long country drive. He enjoyed traveling, gardening, and his brother Armen's wonderful cooking. He could be fierce in his convictions, had a penchant for telling a side-splitting joke, and a passion for collecting the finer things.

His life was forever touched by the Armenian Genocide and he dedicated his to paying it forward by advancing the health of others. He had a soft spot for the underdog, the less advantaged, and the suffering.

Arrangements were by the Aram Bedrosian Funeral Home, Watertown. Funeral Service was at St. James Armenian Church, Watertown, on May 31. Interment followed at Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Mooradian to Seek New York State Assembly Seat in 145th District

NIAGRA FALLS, N.Y. — For the first time since 2016, residents of the 145th District (Western New York) will have a choice when they go to vote in November for New York State Assembly, as Doug Mooradian announced he will run on the Democratic ballot.

“Starting with my great grandparents, each generation of our family has served this community in some form or fashion and I have always strived to do the same,” he explained. “This district is among one of the most unique in all of New York State, which can create both challenges and opportunities, so I look forward to meeting with residents and hearing more about their needs and concerns.”

A press announcement stated, “Over the past 20 years, Mooradian has come to be known as a trusted business adviser in the complex world of health care and also a determined community volunteer, leading fundraising efforts at both Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center and the Niagara Falls Boys & Girls Club. As a result, he was presented the Emerging Leader Alumni Award by the Niagara Falls Education Foundation and also named to the prestigious Buffalo Business First ‘40 Under 40’ list.”

Mooradian said his professional experience will serve him well as an Assembly member.

“In elections, just like in business, competition is a good



Doug Mooradian with his family

thing, and I firmly believe that it is time for our district to have a new voice going forward in Albany,” he said. “People deserve a representative who can work with majority leadership and who gives us a fighting chance at securing the funds we so desperately need, but so often miss out on.”

Mooradian is a well-known local business professional who was born and raised in Niagara Falls. His father, Carl, held the distinction as the city’s longest-serving corporation counsel, while his mother, Kathy, was a teacher with the Niagara Falls School District. He is a proud family man who now resides in Wheatfield with his wife, Jennifer, and their two young sons.

To learn more about Mooradian and his campaign, visit www.MooradianForAssembly.com.

Lory Tatoulian to Serve as Mistress Of Ceremonies for Debutante Ball

LOS ANGELES — The Ladies Auxiliary of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church announced that noted comedian, actress and writer Lory Tatoulian will serve as the Mistress of Ceremonies for the 46th Annual Debutante Ball to be held on June 12 2022 at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. Cindy Norian, Chair of the Ladies Auxiliary, stated that Tatoulian is the perfect choice to highlight this traditional event and to recognize her distinguished career.

Since 2009, Tatoulian has created, written and produced 10 different installments of “The Big Bad Armo Show,” which has toured nationwide, including three sold-out runs Off-Broadway in New York’s Symphony Space, the Cowell Theatre in San Francisco, San Diego Repertory Theatre



Lory Tatoulian

and the Colony Theatre in Los Angeles.

Currently, the show is featured in the new PBS Documentary, “What Will Become Of Us.”

She has also written and performed in two award winning solo shows: “Sitting Twisted, Talking Straight” and “Autosapiens,” which debuted at the San Diego Repertory Theatre. Most recently, Tatoulian has been hired as writer for the feature animation films including Warner Brother’s “Smallfoot” and Sony Pictures “Surf’s Up.” Her comedic chronicles can be read on NPR’s “Multi-American” blog.

She has been awarded a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts for her work in the theater and received three proclamations from the City of Los Angeles and the State of California.

She is a theater consultant with Pasadena Unified School District, an alumni of San Diego State Theater Department, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and the world famous Groundlings Theatre, where she also teaches improv and sketch comedy. She is back on the stage, performing live theater and currently working on a televised sketch show “stay tuned.”

Tatoulian is married to the former Mayor of Montebello, Jack Hadjinian. Lory attributes her passion for the arts and community to her parents, Archpriest Datev and Araxy Tatoulian, whose partnership she states has always been upon the sacred calling of community building and fostering a cultural and spiritual life. As long as she can remember Lory has been active in the essential programs of the Western Diocese: a camper and volunteer at the Hye Camp, A.C.Y.O. Sports Weekend and Conventions, as well as attending church. She states that the Armenian Church and faith have always been the foundation of who she is and where she belongs.

The 46th Annual Debutante Ball will be held on June 12 at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, 9500 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills. The evening will begin with a Cocktail Reception at 5 p.m., the presentation of the debutantes at 6 p.m., followed by dinner and dancing at 7 p.m.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

California Assembly Member Adrin Nazarian Shares Vision of

CALIFORNIA, from page 1

move to the newly redrawn 43rd district and run for that seat, leaving the other two as contenders for the 44th district.

On February 28, 2022, Nazarian bowed out of the race, noting that although he seemed to have a “clear road to victory,” it would come at the expense of “extreme divisiveness that would have torn our communities apart at a time when we need unity and healing rather than division.” Instead, he announced that he would run in the March 2024 election for Los Angeles City Council District 2, now represented by Paul Krekorian, as the latter will by then have reached the legal limit of three terms in office.

Nazarian explained that this new position was a good fit for him at this time in his family life with children, unlike other offices which would require much more travel. Furthermore, unlike other large American cities, in Los Angeles, there are only 15 council members and one mayor, so that the legislative and executive powers become somewhat equal. He said, “The accountability becomes all the more of an opportunity for each council member to accomplish a lot in his or her district. Plus, it is a fulltime position with fulltime professional staff, which allows you to walk in with a certain vision of how you want to see an area improve or change and be able to implement that in a certain period of time.”

In the state legislature, he said that you dealt with many different issue areas but in the council, you deal with very localized matters like land use, zoning, and constituent ser-

into the public sector. It is a revolving door. I think that it not only sends the wrong connotations, but if you want to do anything meaningfully, you need to be in a place for a substantial period of time.” Teaching or a government-related appointed position are possibilities, he stated.

Redistricting’s Effect on Armenian Political Influence

The redistricting split, among other things, the city of Glendale, a hub of Armenian population, along the 134 freeway, between two electoral districts. Nazarian estimates that around 46,000 registered Armenian voters will be situated in the newly created 44th district. The southern part of Glendale has over 10,000 Armenian voters. The Armenian National Committee of America’s Western District office argued in a December 2021 press release that this split along with other electoral districting changes will “undermine the cohesion of the local community and dilute the voice” of this community, placing at risk various services and support.

Nazarian pointed out that Armenians are not a federally protected community, and though it is also not necessarily a protected community on the state level either in California, “what it can benefit from is advocacy. If there are enough people making enough noise, advocating, then this could help foster [electoral] lines to be drawn in a certain way.”

Meanwhile, he pointed out, Armenian voting influence remains substantial in both of the districts containing parts

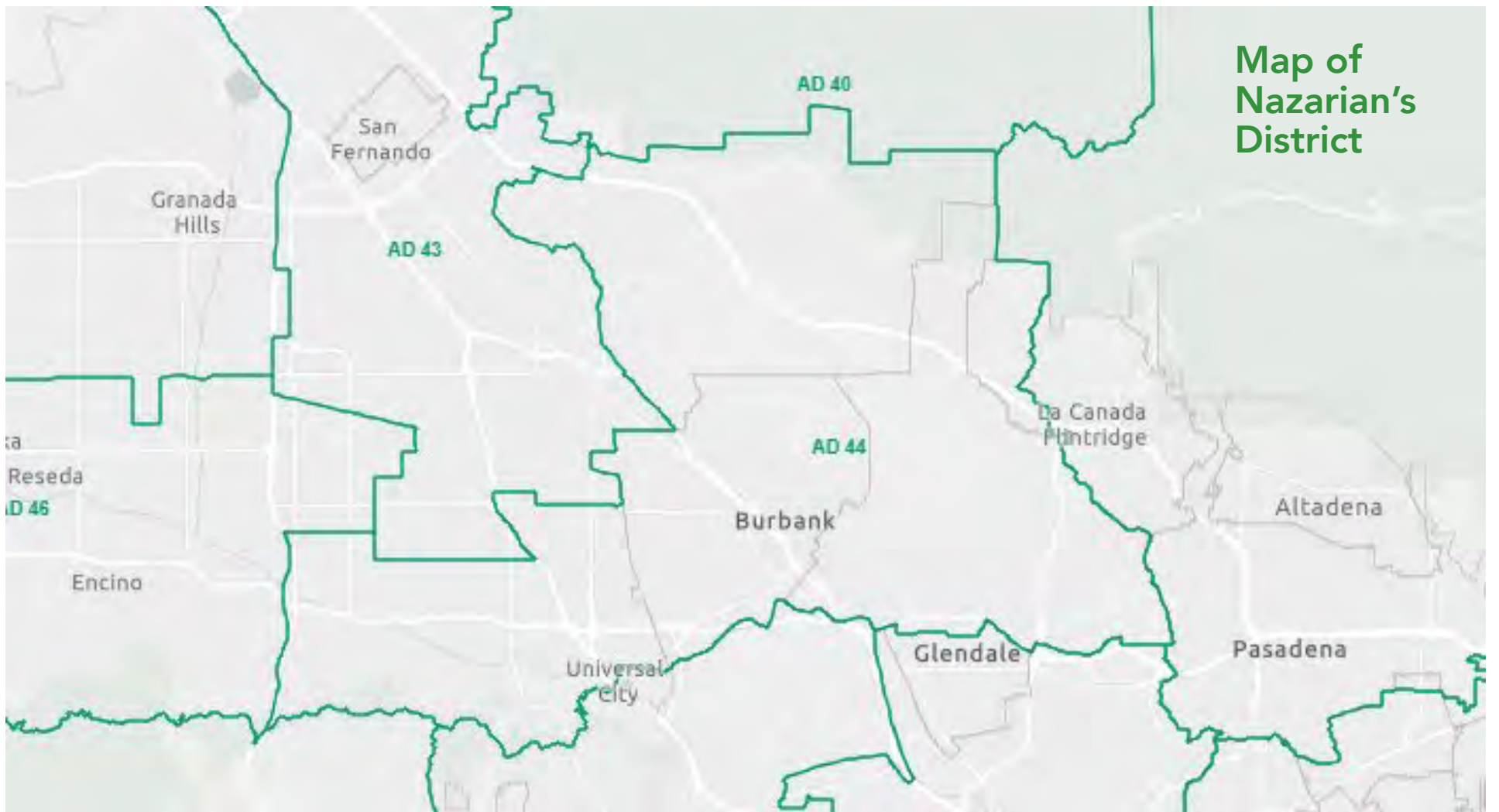
of the community, and also what it has learned from its past [historical] experiences and its past traumas to the attention of its elected officials.”

More specifically, as far as the newly created 44th district goes, incumbent Laura Friedman has three more terms she can run for Assembly, and usually incumbents have a decided advantage in such races. After this, the district seat will open up again and present an opportunity for an Armenian, Nazarian remarked.

Legislation

Nazarian is known for his legislative efforts concerning issues of equity, infrastructure and the elder community. Over his ten years in office, Nazarian estimates that he has offered somewhere between 50 and 60 bills that have been signed into law, and probably authored around 200 bills in all. Of the latter figure, some were duplicates that he reintroduced one or more times if they did not pass initially.

He also noted, “Sometimes what ends up happening is a bill might not pass because of certain types of opposition or the timing is not right, but then you are able to succeed in the budget. For example, my children’s savings program – the CalKids program, where every child born in California is going to have a savings plan to their name for college or some kind of educational enhancement program, was a bill that I wrote in 2018 that became part of the budget. It wasn’t until last year that Governor Newsom put \$2 billion into it onetime to fully finance it on an ongoing basis, with 180 million dollars annually.” The legislation for this pro-



vices. Therefore, he said, “The issues are much more contained and you have greater time and opportunity to focus on them. This allows you to make a meaningful impact.”

Nazarian said that he made his decision “with mixed emotions,” and had several major considerations. Given that he would run in 2024 for a new position, he would be working on two races back-to-back due to the closeness of the timing, which would be possible but difficult. However, he said, “the question will constantly come up: why even run for this when you are going to be running for City Council.” Winning a tough Assembly race would not necessarily help in the Council contest.

Consequently, he said, “Instead of staying in the [Assembly] race, and causing too much dissension, I thought, let me take some time off and focus on the City Council race.” While in the legislature, Nazarian was traveling eight months out of the year, and missing out on family life. With two children still at home, he said, “My kids are young so I can enjoy this time with them, as well as make sure that my last year in the state legislature is effective.”

After his term in the Assembly finishes at the end of this year, he said his preference would be to continue somehow in the realm of public service over the following year to year-and-a-half. He declared, “I am not crazy about going from the public sector into the private sector and then back

of Glendale and an Armenian candidate can be successful in the future even in this circumstance. However, he said, “I think it is going to be critical for Armenian community organizations that they reannex the southern Glendale portion to this district in the future to make sure that there is a cohesive community with an Armenian constituency that is connected.”

He opined that Armenian candidates should not remain insular and base themselves only on Armenian numbers. When he first ran for his district in the Valley, he won it with less than two percent Armenian voter registration numbers. Nazarian said it is possible for Armenians to be successful if they have put in the work, become known as activists on specific issues, have been involved in local community organizations and local political party bodies, and served on local boards: “When you do all of these things over time, you can be a candidate in your own right and you just happen to now benefit also from the various bases of constituencies that you have.”

He also noted a benefit of not having all Armenians concentrated in one place. He said, “It is good to have pockets of Armenian communities scattered in different places too, because it is important for the Armenian community to have a strong dialogue with various different representatives [of varied backgrounds], and bring the issues im-

portant to the community, and also what it has learned from its past [historical] experiences and its past traumas to the attention of its elected officials.”

Furthermore, it seems that many ideas for legislation are recycled over the years. Nazarian said, “I had to burst the bubble of the legislators and my colleagues, but of the 2,000 bills we introduce annually, 95 percent have been attempted in the past. Some of them are really horrible ideas that keep being defeated, while some are really good ideas that keep being defeated as current entrenched lobbying efforts don’t allow them to prevail. However, when you start a certain conversation it is hard for it not to be revisited.”

He gave the example of his work on seismic resiliency. He said, “Some of the bills have not been successful because it is not a sexy topic right now, but I know that when there is a major seismic event, there is going to be at least six or seven of my colleagues or future colleagues quickly dusting off those bills and trying to pass them as quickly as possible so that we appropriately react to the event in the future. What is unfortunate is that we always react instead of taking steps early enough to address some of these issues.”



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenians in a New California, Aims For LA City Council

Artsakh

Like many other Armenians, Nazarian was profoundly affected by the 2020 Artsakh war. He said, "It was 44 days of devastation and seeing almost no coverage of the disastrous human, environmental and historical impacts. Not only were people being maimed and butchered, killed in the most ugly ways, with video footage of heads being cut off, of elderly civilians – and I say this very graphically and specifically, because it is very tormenting to anyone who knows how our politics and media work. It was very crippling to watch this unfold in front of us when there was a great deal of evidence. What really bothered me was the cry for help from the Armenian community and the blank stares from the rest of the world."

On October 5, 2020 he and a number of his fellow California legislators held a press conference condemning the Azerbaijani attack. He said he was grateful that many colleagues, including Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon participated. However, with hindsight, he said, "As much as I appreciate what my colleagues did, what we learned from that experience, and what we are learning now, and what validates what we learned two years ago, is that the press has a big role and the levers of media attention are invaluable." At the same time, he continued, "Unfortunately, politics is an arena where there is just so much you can pay attention to, and then you have to move on to the next issue because your constituents demand it. Whereas Paul Krekorian and I were focused on this, I cannot blame many of my colleagues for wanting to shift their focus to something else."

As many others have observed, Nazarian stressed that even before a single bullet was fired in Ukraine, there were several weeks of news articles propelling the issues in that conflict. "It just calls into question," he said, "why is it that what happened to Armenia did not get that attention. Why, when Artsakh was being devastated? If you are not going to value human life, what about the phosphorus burning the natural forests? There are so many angles of what happened there that are so vile and wrong, and for it not to have received anywhere near adequate coverage is devastating, personally, but also, it is a significant setback for humanity."

At present, he said, "There is no mechanism of accountability of the press really, except for economic impact. We have learned some valuable lessons. Now it is up to us to figure out how we put those to use."

Cultural Heritage

Nazarian tried to legislatively deal with the impact of the Artsakh war and Azerbaijan's attempt, he said, "to cleanse a land not only of its people but of any cultural heritage artifacts that put into the ground and into the soil the existence, the tenured existence, of a group of people." He discussed it first with attorneys in Armenia and his political consultant, "pondering," he said, "what meaning step can we take in California that will also have a resonating impact in other states and other countries, of how to hold to account countries like Azerbaijan."

He explained to political colleagues that during any trip across Armenia you could randomly encounter cross-stones, hundreds of years old, and sometimes older than a millennium, and "that is the beauty of places like Armenia and Artsakh, where you see the immediate intertwinedness of the residents and the history and culture of that land."

He ended up introducing a cultural heritage preservation bill (Assembly Bill 1815), which asks public museums in California not to exhibit anything that is state-sponsored by countries that have desecrated or decimated other cultures' historical or heritage-related artifacts. In order not to burden the state to create an agency or department to figure out who is doing what, Nazarian said that the bill specifically prescribes that if a country is found guilty in the International Court of Justice, this conviction can be used to establish the guideline of not working with that country. However, he said, in order to not restrict freedom of art or expression, and dissidents in such a country, it is specific to state-sponsored exhibitions, though the museum is also able to insure that such states are not attempting to use third parties to avoid this ban.

A second component of the bill, Nazarian explained, is to ask and encourage the various state universities of California to be very careful in their exchanges with such countries. He added, "It starts with permissive language so it sets a certain thinking and tone and could be treated as guidance, once it is in statute. Then future generations of political leaders can take the next steps in moving this forward."

Part of the background to Nazarian's thinking, he said,

is the attempt by the Republic of Turkey around a quarter-century ago to buy an endowed history chair at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). While this was defeated, Turkey today is much more powerful and influential. Nazarian said, "It is critical that we are taking steps to make sure that these sorts of things do not happen, and not just at UCLA but at any institution."

The bill is in the committee level of consideration at the Assembly at present. An earlier version from 2021 (Bill 1544) did not pass but Nazarian was hopeful for this bill.

Armenian Genocide Commemoration through State Holiday, Monument

The Armenian Genocide is commemorated in many parts of the United States, even by official government bodies, but it is not an official public holiday anywhere. Nazarian introduced Assembly Bill 1801 this year to make April 24 "Armenian Genocide Awareness Day," a state holiday on which public schools, banks and state government offices would be closed. He said that California "has attracted so many different communities of survivors of mass trauma, whether it is Jewish, Ukrainian, Armenian, Cambodian or Rwandan, that almost any community that over the last 100 years has been impacted by some form of genocide or mass murder attempt has significant numbers in California – sometimes to the point of being the second largest community outside of its respective country of origin."

The bill had unanimously passed on May 19, with no votes against it, and is in California Senate now. If it becomes a law, Nazarian said it will carry a big price tag. If all state employees get a day off, that alone will cost hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Nazarian had in 2016 gotten another Assembly bill, number 2790, passed into law that gave the capitol park committee that oversees the park area around the state capitol of Sacramento five years to come up with a master plan to determine where they see fit to build a genocide memorial monument in this park. The bill specifically noted, Nazarian explained, that after five years, if the park's overall master plan has still not been adopted, and the Joint Rules Committee of the state legislature supports the memorial concept, the Department of General Services will initiate this action.

After five years came and went, as of January 2021, Nazarian decided to follow up with a request for several million dollars from the California state budget in order to move forward with identifying a specific location and developing that monument. Nazarian said, "Now we are working with the Department of General Services with the support of the Joint Rules Committee chair."

If the funding request does not get accepted, Nazarian said, "I would have to then go to the community and say that we have to do this on a public-private basis and raise money." The cost of this may seem reasonable at less than a quarter of a million dollars, he added, but you would be amazed at how the price could easily rack up to a few million dollars very quickly.

The bill initially had the Armenian Genocide as a major component, while listing several other genocides, but, Nazarian said, "We took a lot of the specifics out and made it about genocide awareness in general." At some point, he said, he would be very open to placing back some of the specific communities impacted.

Armenians Among Underrepresented Communities?

Assembly Bill 979, enacted as law in 2020, requires publicly held domestic or foreign corporations whose principal executive office is in California to have a certain minimum numbers of directors from "underrepresented communities" in order to increase diversity on their boards. Nazarian attempted this year through bill 1840 to add Armenians, along with Assyrians, Greeks, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and individuals with disabilities, to the list of underrepresented groups which the initial bill listed as Black, African American, Hispanic, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, or gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

This bill is at the Assembly's Appropriations Committee. However, Nazarian observed, "That bill is going to have a very tough time because the initial legislation that it is hinged upon, AB 979, was struck down by a California Superior Court. This is going to most likely be appealed if it has not already been appealed. However, given the tenuousness of the situation, I don't know if this bill [1840] is going to be able to move forward. What I am trying to do is to see if we can at least have it continue to be part of the conversation."

Bringing TUMO to LA, Supporting Armenian Culture

In 2021, Nazarian helped secure state funding for three Armenian arts and educational institutions: \$1 million each to the oral history program of the University of Southern California (USC) Institute of Armenian Studies and to the Lark Musical Society, and \$9 million to establish a TUMO Center for Creative Technologies in the southeast San Fernando Valley in partnership with the City of Los Angeles and the USC Institute of Armenian Studies.

Nazarian explained: "For me, TUMO represented two things. Not only is it an Armenian innovation which contributes to everybody else, regardless of where you are from, but in a place like Los Angeles, it allows a lot of youth from different backgrounds to socioeconomically succeed together. What is better than to have thirteen-year-olds from the Armenian and Latino communities coming together and learning for their future benefit and empowerment later on?"

He first encountered TUMO in 2013 when he took the first California delegation trip to Armenia with his colleagues. He said, "It blew me away, and I wondered why we don't have a place like that in California when we are the innovators of the world when it comes to technology." Later, he spoke with one of his friends, benefactor and community activist Charles Ghailian, who also is chairman of the Leadership Council of the USC Institute of Armenian Studies. Out of their conversation, said Nazarian, was born the idea of doing something in Los Angeles with TUMO. The TUMO Foundation itself had already been established as a nonprofit in Texas by Sam and Sylvia Simonian.

California Armenians

Nazarian saw two key issues for the California Armenian community, "to see our future generations thrive as well as through rising here to raise the standard of the community not only here but also abroad." He said that despite some problems such as rising costs for middle class families, "California is an amazing and evolving space."

Armenian Americans, and Armenians in California in particular, are no longer the poverty-stricken community struggling to survive of a century ago. Nazarian said, "I think in California in particular we have such a wonderful opportunity, given the talent we have in various arenas – in the arts, medicine, sciences, agriculture and even in politics to a lesser extent – to try to take advantage of this and make sure that Armenia looks at how it could benefit from the intelligence and experience that has been cultivated here over the course of a century."

What remains is to establish better and more forums for connections. He said, "It is critical for the Armenian community in California to figure out exactly how it wants to play a role... Let us learn the rules of the international 'games' and make sure that we play them well."

Although Nazarian is the only Armenian American in the state legislature, and he is leaving this body, he is optimistic that there is a new generation of Armenian Americans who will run for such offices soon. He said that he and Paul Krekorian have had many of them as interns over the past ten years and it is just a matter of time before some of them revisit the idea of serving in public office.

Meanwhile, California has become a very diverse place, where the Latino Central American and the Asian and Pacific Islander communities have been growing rapidly, respectively upwards of 50 percent and 22 percent. Nazarian pointed out: "I think it is going to be critical for the Armenian community, and for other smaller communities, to figure out how they are going to continue to be politically engaged and have a seat at the table of decision-making. I think it is going to be important for California overall to figure out as well, because it is that very diversity and the diverse voices that have helped enhance California and become what it has become."

An important related point he made is that "No one person's suffering should be seen as greater than the other's. If we can relate to our African-American brothers and sisters and establish a common denominator, they will better respect our plight and they will want to learn more about our plight. If we do the same with our Latin and Central American brothers and sisters, and with Asian and Pacific Islanders, the more we establish common denominators of what trauma means for different communities, different tribes of people, this will allow others to better associate with you and understand where you come from. They will also remember to bring you up in their future conversations."



COMMUNITY NEWS

Armenian Assembly Honors Gail Talanian O'Reilly at Cambridge Tribute

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — The Armenian Assembly of America honored Gail Talanian O'Reilly on May 19 at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Cambridge, Mass., where O'Reilly received the organization's Distinguished Humanitarian Award. Despite all the trepidations associated with in-person events during the era of the Covid pandemic, a large crowd filled the hotel. In fact, for many, it was the first time in two years that they attended such an event. It felt in some ways like long-lost family members seeing one another.

The program itself was well run and fast moving, which is not always the case



Gail Talanian O'Reilly receives the Armenian Assembly's Distinguished Humanitarian Award.



Gail Talanian O'Reilly coming to the podium

for Armenian banquets. Peter Koutoujian, Sheriff of Middlesex County, Mass., who is a former member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, served as master of ceremonies with his usual aplomb and humor. He praised O'Reilly, with her charm, kindness, and caring, as steady and strong in her leadership over many years. "There are people in all of our lives, and

Gala co-chair, board member and life trustee of the Armenian Assembly of America Lu Ann Ohanian then welcomed guests on behalf of the Assembly's board of trustees. Ohanian explained that not only were she and O'Reilly related through marriage, but their families went back for years before that. O'Reilly and her husband Richard went to Armenia for the first time

in 1991 as part of an Armenian Assembly trip, and Ohanian declared that they were immediately drawn to the country. They became lifetime trustees of the Armenian Assembly of America, but "took it to another level," Ohanian continued. O'Reilly founded Made in Armenia Direct (MIAD) in 2002, which hired creators of handmade crafts to preserve artistic traditions and provide jobs. These

artisans sold their goods to America. Ohanian concluded, "She has never forgotten who she is, where she came from and what she does. She is a true Armenian, and she

gives to other organizations as well."

The accomplished Judge Gabrielle Wolohojian, Associate Justice on the Massachusetts Appeals court, was the next speaker. In her remarks, she wondered where are the Armenians in public service, exclaiming, "We don't have enough." She speculated that it came from the effects of Armenian history, leaving Armenians without long experience of self-government. The Armenian Assembly, she said, taught her, when she had the opportunity to participate in its Washington D. C. summer internship program years ago, that Armenian Americans must become involved. It allowed her to see how government agencies actually work, and in particular she studied how the Turkish government derailed the initial Hollywood film version of Franz Werfel's novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*.

Fr. Vasken Kouzouian of Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge, Mass., gave the invocation, and after dinner, keynote speaker Anthony Barsamian, co-chair of the Assembly Board of Trustees, took to the podium. Barsamian congratulated the Armenian community on its work towards achieving the US recognition of the Armenian Genocide, which in part was a reflection of the growth and progress of the community itself and its influence in Washington. He recalled one indication of this, when the Rules Committee Chairman James McGovern of the US House of Representatives, a longtime friend, strategized a win in the House together with the leadership.

Aside from recognizing special guests in the audience, Barsamian pointed out the Armenian Assembly staff who traveled

from Washington, DC and New York City to be at the banquet. He spoke about the foundation and history of the Armenian Assembly and the way it is working on behalf of Armenia and Armenians to this day. He stressed that "our job is to be the center of the community at all times," and called on



Anthony Barsamian

the community to think about where it was going and how we need to set strategy to get there.

Barsamian recalled his first encounter with the Talanian family, which exemplified their kindness and hospitality towards fellow Armenians. As a student, he came to Boston looking for an apartment but had no luck until he saw the Talanian name at the entrance to a realty office. He explained his situation to Gail O'Reilly's father, who immediately turned to his son Charles to bring him an apartment on Marlborough Street, demonstrating the connections we have throughout our communities.

Barsamian called Assembly Board of Trustees President Carolyn Mugar, Co-Chair Van Krikorian, and Assembly Exec-



Carolyn Mugar

there are people in my life, even as a public leader – and Gail is one of these – and there are only a handful in my life, that when they take a position on an issue,



COMMUNITY NEWS

utive Director Bryan Ardouny to the stage to present the Distinguished Humanitarian Award to O'Reilly.

Krikorian concurred in all the high words of praise said in the program so far on O'Reilly and thanked her for all that she

has accomplished. Mugar then reminisced about the closeness of her family and the Talanians. In fact, her father was born in Nevart Talanian's father Nishan Semonian's house in Kharpert and to the end of his life felt very close to the latter.

Speaking then about O'Reilly herself, Mugar exclaimed: "Look, this is what Gail really is. Gail has a lot of guts. She will get something done. If she has to do something, she will ask the hard questions of someone and she will make sure that it happens. I have a huge amount of respect for Gail." She concluded by saying warmly, "I love you a lot Gail, and you know it."

O'Reilly then was called to the podium. She declared that she truly appreciated the honor of the award and the audience for its support of the Armenian Assembly. She acknowledged all the people around her starting with her husband Richard, who helped make her achievements possible.

O'Reilly related that years ago, when she was very involved as a Winchester Town Hall member and as the Membership Chair of the Massachusetts League of Women Voters, her father asked her why she did not help her own people, but she had no answer. She didn't know how she could help Armenia, until her 1991 trip to Armenia with the Assembly. This trip truly changed her life, she said, and gave her the vision to



Lu Ann Ohanian



Sheriff Peter Koutoujian



Van Krikorian at podium, with Anthony Barsamian and Carolyn Mugar

help Armenia. She always wanted to have a thriving homeland, with Armenians able to succeed there.

The Vernissage, the open-air market in Yerevan, had attracted her with the creatively crafted products found there, and this gave her the idea for Made in Armenia Direct. Many of her friends helped her both transport products from Armenia to the US and tools back to Armenia. O'Reilly concluded by announcing that there now is a female owner, named Hamaspiur, of MIAD, which has over thirty craftsmen who have been working with it for close to twenty years.



The Honoree

O'Reilly was born in the Boston neighborhood of Dorchester to Nevart and Charles Talanian, while her grandparents originated in the Kharpert and Husenig regions of Western Armenia. After public school, Gail graduated from Colby Junior College and Tufts University to become a kindergarten teacher. Many years later she entered her family's real estate business. She became actively involved with the Winchester League of Women Voters and later the Massachusetts League of Women Voters as a statewide leader, working to build membership, activism and financial stability.

She recognized the humanitarian crisis created by the Armenian earthquake of 1988, and after her first 1991 trip to Armenia she went on to take many more trips, as well as to visit her grandparents' ancestral regions. To help Armenian artisans, she founded Made in Armenia Direct (MIAD) in 2002. Gail and her husband were also early supporters of the Armenian Tree Project founded by Carolyn Mugar in 1994 to reforest Armenia and in the process also create countless jobs.

She is a Life Trustee of the Assembly and has served in various positions on its Board, including as Vice Chair, Treasurer, Development Chair and Endowment Chair. Gail received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2011 in recognition of her decades of service to the Armenia people.

One thoughtful touch at the end of the banquet was that in addition to an informative banquet booklet, each guest received a Made in Armenia (MIAD) favor donated by O'Reilly and her husband. The guests also enjoyed music during the pre-banquet reception by oud virtuoso Mal Barsamian and Bruce Gigarjian on guitar.



Judge Gabrielle Wolohojian



Fr. Vasken Kouzouian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Remembering a Special Hotel that Made Armenian-American Travelers Feel at Home in Plymouth, Mass.

By Stephen Kurkjian

MANOMET BLUFFS, Mass. — In late 1940, Michael Saraf and Elmas Saraf, an Armenian couple from Wellesley who dabbled in real estate, purchased a lot of land on Manomet Bluffs in Plymouth and turned it into the Idlewild Hotel. For decades, the hotel remained a vacation draw for Armenian families, many of whom were survivors of the Genocide of 1915, all of them working hard to make it in America.

Even though the dozen or more rooms in the wood-framed, three-story buildings may have been small, no one minded the close quarters — the hotel offered three full meals a day rich with Armenian specialties, a Saturday dance with Armenian music playing loudly into the night, an extraordinary view that had attracted people as far back as the Pilgrims sailing towards Plymouth Rock, and as beautiful beach as any in nearby Cape Cod.

And it didn't matter if the beach was accessible only by a long flight of stairs, more than 100 in number, the structure was safely maintained and the several rest stops along the way allowed travelers to catch their breath or even look for that night's meal — vines rich with grapes leaves perfect for making Armenian favorite dishes of yalanche and sarma miraculously lined both sides of the stairs.



A postcard from the Idlewild Hotel

And it was along that long flight of steps as much as on our blankets on the beach below, that we would mingle with the numerous odar families from the neighborhood and share stories about how cold the water was, which stretch of the beach was best to fish and where to go digging for the mussels that would make for that night's midia dolma.

The Idlewild was one of several that attracted Armenian families throughout New England and as far as District of Columbia to Boston's South Shore for summer vacations in during the mid-20th century. If you want to appreciate the remarkable story of the assimilation of the Armenian people into American life, it would be interesting to understand why those early generations sought the welcome



Some of the 162 steps linking the Idlewild Hotel to the beach

of such hotels. And then realize that at some point the next generation no longer needed to seek out such vacation sites.

The Idlewild closed as a hotel catering to Armenian families in the 1970s and now operates as a functions center. But there are still families like mine, the Asadoorians and the Kalajians who live here full-time or during the summer. Over the years, I have found countless others who when they learn where I now live remember summering at the Idlewild and ask me if the stairs are still there.

Well, climate change has brought on many punishing storms that have taken its toll on our flight of stairs as well as the several others that line the sandy bluffs along a three-mile stretch of Manomet Beach. But I am pleased report that through the leadership of brothers Mal and Richard Asadoorian, the Idlewild Beach Association has raised sufficient funds both to rebuild the steps and secure our beach with a stone seawall which should stave off further

erosion of the sandy bluffs for at least a few more years. I am also proud to report that in spirit of neighborliness, the carpentry that went into the stairs was done by Rob and Glenn MacGregor, whose family now owns the Idlewild.

There may be a few more steps to get to the beach — 162 by my count — and the water may be as cold as ever. But the vista is as stunning and, you would see if you returned for a visit, the memories are as fulfilling and important as ever.

Mail comments or requests for more information to Idlewild Beach Association, PO Box 322, Manomet, Ma. 02345.

(Stephen Kurkjian, whose family has summered in Manomet Beach since 1948 and is now a full-time resident, is an acclaimed reporter and editor for The Boston Globe. He will be honored in September at a gala celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Armenian Heritage Park.)

Sheriff Koutoujian meets with Attorney General Garland, Federal Law Enforcement Leaders

MEDFORD, Mass. — Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian was recently in Washington, D.C. where he participated in meetings with top federal officials regarding critical issues facing law enforcement across the country.

Sheriff Koutoujian — who is Immediate Past President of the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA) — joined a select group of national law enforcement leaders for meetings with Attorney General Merrick Garland, FBI Director Christopher Wray, DEA Administrator Anne Milgram and the heads of the ATF and U.S. Marshals Service. Local and county law enforcement leaders were invited to speak with federal officials about a range of issues including police and corrections reform; officer health and wellness; recruitment and retention; and gun violence.

"I was honored to be among this small group of law enforcement executives invited to meet with Attorney General Garland and our federal partners. It was a tremendous opportunity to share what we are seeing and doing here in Middlesex County," said Koutoujian. "These conversations and relationships are crucial to identifying best practices, formulating policy, directing resources and enhancing public safety in communities across the United States. I look forward to continuing our close collaboration with our federal partners both in Washington and right here in Massachusetts."



Sheriff Peter Koutoujian with US Attorney General Merrick Garland

Noor Lima Boudakian Appointed Trustee

TRUSTEE, from page 5

Noor has also served as the student member of the search committee for the dean of Eugene Lang College, as a Civic Liberal Arts teaching fellow, and a participant in the Dean's Honor Symposium, which displays outstanding student research work.

Noor has strong connections to Armenia and the Armenian community. She lived in Armenia from 2006 to 2010 and has returned frequently; most recently, she was there in March on a research grant, the Eugene Lang Opportunity Award. Noor has been translating news from Armenian to English for the Hamazkayin Central Executive Board since 2018. She interned in Armenia with the Gomidas Institute in 2018.

Noor Lima Boudakian is daughter of Martha Boudakian, a midwife, and Vincent Lima, a psychometrician who served as editor of the Armenian Reporter and Armenian Forum. Noor's father is an alumnus of the New School; her grandfather, Gregory Lima, was a graduate student at the New School in the 1950s and returned to receive his master's degree there in 1982.



Arts & Culture

Chris Potter With Antwerp Jazz Orchestra

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

ANTWERP — The Royal Conservatoire in Antwerp, Belgium recently organized an exciting project allowing many of its students to study and perform with world class jazz musicians. Among the students was Alex Baboian, a guitarist and composer originally from the Boston area, who is spending this year at the conservatory. The special guest was a jazz saxophonist, in Baboian's words, the "incomparable Chris Potter from New York," performing with the Antwerp Jazz Orchestra led by teacher and trumpet player Bert Joris. Following intensive rehearsals in late April, Baboian and colleagues performed a program composed entirely of Potter's tunes arranged especially for the project by students in the orchestra. Baboian, who wrote the arrangement for the Jazz Orchestra (his first for Big Band), said "the challenge was a uniquely humbling experience I will not soon forget, and the talented group of musicians (consisting of students from conservatories in Belgium, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, along with Chris Potter) gave the music a life far more colorful than I could have imagined." Performances were held at venues De Singel (Antwerp), CC Muze (Heusden-Zolder), and the legendary Bimhuis (Amsterdam).

New Book Takes Look at Vardan Mamikonian

Vardan Mamikonian was the commander of the Armenian forces from 432 to 451 AD, when Armenia was partitioned between the Byzantine and Persian Empires. The nobility, also divided into two political camps, pro-Byzantine and pro-Persian, competed for absolute power.

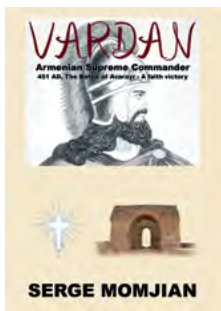
Vardan led the rebellion against the Sasanian overlords, and their attempt to force Armenian Christians to convert back to Zoroastrianism. He and his army of 60,000 soldiers confronted the

Persian army of 260,000 at the Battle of Avarayr.

Serge Momjian splendidly recaptures the horror of the Christian persecutions and martyrs of the

past and the spirit of Vardan, who, along with the Armenian people, defended their principles during a turbulent period of their history in the book, *Vardan, Armenian Supreme Commander: 451 Ad, the Battle of Avarayr- A Faith Victory*. The book offers fresh and captivating insights into the battle, as well as crucial events during the dominant reigns of Persian kings and Roman emperors over Armenia.

The book, released in May, is available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Ingram Spark and many online retailers.



Tenny Arlen Remembered As Trailblazer for Armenian Poetry in America

By Harry Kezelian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

LOS ANGELES — On Friday, May 20, the UCLA Armenian Studies Department in conjunction with the Promise Institute, presented the long-awaited publication of the first volume poetry written in the Armenian language by an American-born writer, the late Tenny Arlen of California.

The event, which was attended by teachers, faculty, students, friends and family was also broadcast over Zoom.

Numerous speakers stressed the landmark historical character of this event, as in the over 125 years of development of the Armenian community in the United States, this is the first time a volume of creative writing (poetry or prose fiction) written in the Armenian language by a US-born author has been published.

Those knowledgeable of Armenian-American community history will recall that the William Saroyan was the first American-born Armenian writer to gain widespread recognition. Although Saroyan was born to immigrant parents from the Ottoman Empire and was fluent in conversational Armenian, apparently his writing and reading skills were weak or nonexistent. (He did once write an entire play in spoken Armenian using Latin script, but this has never been published.)

Master of Ceremonies was Prof. Hagop Kouloujian, lecturer at UCLA who teaches the beginning and intermediate courses in Western Armenian.

Tenny Arlen, who was raised in San Luis Obispo, far from the sizeable Armenian centers in the state, came to UCLA in 2011 with practically no prior knowledge of the Armenian language and began to study the "mother tongue" under Kouloujian. By the second year of language instruction, Arlen began to compose the poetry which has now been collected in the volume, *Girkov useloo, inchoo hos em?* [To Say With Passion, Why Am I Here?], and published by ARI Literature Foundation in Yerevan with the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The question in the title refers to the Armenian language itself, asking why it should exist in the Diaspora.

(The Arlen family's surname was originally Arakelian and has no connection to the Armenian-British writers Michael Arlen Sr. and Jr., whose family name was originally Kouyoumdjian.)

After studying Armenian and French literature at UCLA and also in France, she was accepted to the PhD program in comparative literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Tragically, Arlen was killed in a car accident in the summer of 2015 just before she was to start at Michigan. She was 25.

Despite this, at no time did the family members, teachers or friends who spoke during Friday's event spend time lamenting this tragedy. Instead, the entire evening took on the character of a celebration of Arlen's life and work, reflection on its historic importance and its role as a source of inspiration to the next generation.

see ARLEN, page 16

Cal State Fresno Releases New Memoir by Dennis Papazian

FRESNO — The Armenian Series of The Press at California State University, Fresno announces the publication of its fifteenth volume, *From My Life and Thought: Reflections on an Armenian-American Journey*, a memoir by Dennis R. Papazian, a well-known community leader, Professor Emeritus of History, and founding Director of the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan, Dearborn.

Writer Michael Bobelian, who provides the foreword to the volume, describes the post-genocide twentieth century Armenian-American experience as one that witnessed the transformation of the community from one of "widows and orphans" with "little economic or political clout" to a community able to come together in pursuit of more ambitious goals of genocide recognition, political advocacy, academic excellence, and success in business and the professions.

"Born in 1931," Bobelian writes, "Dennis's life spanned this epoch, a crucial time in Armenian-American history that has long been overlooked by Armenians who have otherwise dedicated immense resources to preserving their culture. In fact, other than the late Vartan Gregorian, none of Dennis's peers have produced an account of this time period."

According to Bobelian, "this memoir provides readers with a much-needed front-row seat of this transformative era. Dennis's account of the changes endured by the Armenian-American community offers a behind-the-scenes look at some of the leading institutions and individuals of his generation: Alex Manoogian, William Saroyan, and the Catholicos all make appearances in these pages. What makes Dennis so atypical is the different hats he wore. As a scholar, community leader, and spokesperson, Dennis served the Armenian-American community in myriad ways: participating in academic organizations, speaking to the press, lobbying politicians, delivering speeches, doling out grants, and so much more."

In *From My Life and Thought: Reflections on an Armenian-American Journey*, Dennis Papazian shares his reflections on a quintessentially twentieth-century American life shaped by the challenges of the immigrant experience, his family's struggle to create a life in a new land, and his determined efforts to secure an education that would ensure a life of security and the promise of the American dream.

Born ninety years ago in the pre-World War II, pre-civil rights American South of Armenian immigrant parents from Istanbul, Turkey, Papazian pursued a PhD in Russian history, becoming one of the first American students to study in the then-Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War. Not only did this experience open the world to him, it

see MEMOIR, page 16



ARTS & CULTURE

Recipe Corner



by Christine
Vartanian



Gayane (left) and Varty Yahjian make vospov kofte. Photo courtesy of Varty Yahjian

A Love Letter to Vospov Kofte:

How My Mother and I Quashed Our Beef and Swapped it With Lentils

Varty Yahjian first wrote about this mouthwatering dish at *Cooks Without Borders* on March 24, 2021. Armenian cuisine features many delicious vegetarian and vegan dishes. Vospov kofte is a traditional (and beloved) vegan dish prepared in Armenian and Middle Eastern households at Lent (or any time of year) as part of a light lunch, dinner, or mezza. It's not only easy to make, but fresh and delicious especially when topped with colorful chopped salad.

Cooks Without Borders editor-in-chief Leslie Brenner was inspired by a recipe given to her by Varty, with ideas culled from others, including <https://slow-foodbeirut.com/armenian-lentil-kibbeh-vospov-kofte/> Kamal Mouzawak,* Lebanon's Celebrated Restaurateur-Hotelier-Humanitarian, and founder of <http://www.soukeltayeb.com/> Souk el Tayeb, Lebanon's first farmers market. Varty and her mother Gayane Yahjian prepared this recipe in their kitchen and gave it their stamp of approval.

Here's the essay by Varty Yahjian:

My mother and I see eye to eye on exactly three things: inappropriate humor, dangly earrings and eating with our hands. (Vehement approval!) Oh, and we both sleep in on the weekends and cancel plans before noon.

Aside from these, it's hard to find common ground between us, and we widen that distance in the kitchen. There, we disagree about it all. She doesn't salt food while it cooks, while I think it's a mistake to wait till the end; I like caramelizing onions, while she thinks it is a waste of time. We do, however, have a common food heritage, one that spans the 36 years between us: We both grew up eating food native to the Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

Our family tree is ethnically Armenian, but for the three generations preceding me, we have had Bulgarian nationality. In the early twentieth century, my paternal great-grandparents escaped ethnic cleansing in Anatolia and settled in Sofia, Bulgaria - where my father was born, and where my parents would eventually meet in the 1970s. My mother's great-great-grandparents left Anatolia for the same reason even earlier, sticking to the Black Sea's coast following their voyages as refugees. The result of these migrations is our family's tradition, a fabulous mix of Armenian, Bulgarian, and now with me, American sensibilities.

As with most immigrant families, my mother is the sovereign of the stove. To her it's an indisputable reign, making for a tumultuous dinnertime environment because over the years, I've relied less on her recipes as I create my own. For instance, I use stewed tomatoes and a lot of dill in our flu-season chicken soup in

lieu of her usual celery and bell peppers. Like a true monarch, she loathes these types of rebellions, announcing "I'm sorry, but no, this is not how you do it!" before storming off.

When we were all younger, my mother fed the whole family, of course. I don't know how she did it, because after working a ten-hour workday and pulling dinner together, she had to deal with my ruthlessly picky palate. Until I was in middle school, I rarely ate anything that wasn't potatoes, rice or macaroni. Mushrooms were smelly and pretended to be meat; buckwheat tasted like aluminum foil (yes, I said that exactly); and romaine lettuce, my final boss of hated foods, was unbearably bitter.

Regardless of protest, my mom always made sure my plate left the table clean; if not, "mekhke" — it's a shame, as she would say — because those last few bites were my good luck charms. Thankfully my taste buds evolved in tweendom. Perhaps it was the feeling of unsupervised freedom after being dropped off at the mall that led me towards the food court's salmon nigiri and fried chicken with waffles.

Or maybe my budding womanhood began to recognize how incredible it was that my mother managed to feed us every single night. I owed it to her to honor her food, especially because at this point, she was also working on the weekends. Looking back, I see that my mother's cooking was a love-language, and I understand now why she'd get so upset when I brought back full Tupperware of food from school.

But part of my coming around could also just be that at some point, I saw how unbelievably lame it was to be so stubborn about food.

In seventh grade I started watching Food Network, and my mother took note. Encouraging my growing curiosity, she bought me a copy of *Cooking Rocks!*: Rachael Ray 30-Minute Meals for Kids, and in her typical compliment-and-command delivery, inscribed on the first page, "To my cute Varty to cook some meals!"

And cook some meals I did, starting with Ray's Tomato, Basil and Cheese Baked Pasta recipe, which I've since memorized and still make, with some grown-up additions. My parents loved it, and I was immediately validated - a powerful feeling for anyone, and especially a Green Day-listening, greasy-haired thirteen-year-old. In high school, armed with my new driver's license in our family's Volvo wagon, I began tearing through Los Angeles' incredible culinary jungle — thrilled by the star anise and coriander at our local pho shop and tacos de lengua in Cypress Park.

At home, I started carefully watching my mother because those smells of toasted butter, tomato sauce, and allspice had begun to signal more than just "dinner's ready." They were re-introducing me to flavors of my heritage — a connection to my great-grandparents I now feel so grateful for. I slowly learned the basics of our household standards: pilaf with vermicelli noodles, Bulgarian meatball soup, moussaka and dolma. I mostly observed and tried not to intervene because the few times I did, I slowed my mom down and got in the way. I watched how she used her hands to scoop roughly chopped onions into a pool of olive oil with a slice of butter for taste, and then liberally season them with paprika and chubritsa, a dried herb and one of the most widely used and the oldest spices in Bulgarian cuisine. Forward to 2021, and we're back in the same kitchen. My mother and I don't really cook together; typically, it's only one of us preparing dinner for the family at a time.

Except this time we've decided to collaborate - on a popular Western Armenian dish, *vospov kofte*, red lentil "meatballs."

Neither word necessarily explains where the dish originates from. Lest we forget, the majority of the Middle East and all of Anatolia — where my great-grandparents are from — were under Ottoman rule for centuries. Present-day Armenia and Turkey share a border, and given their history, attributing food to either one is fertile ground for an argument in the comments section.

Typically the dish is served as part of the cold mezza on Western Armenian dining tables. It's popular during Lent, when animal products are shunned in observance of Jesus Christ's forty days resisting the devil's temptation. As such, many Armenians during Lent have become very creative over the last two thousand years in reworking dishes to meet the orthodoxy's expectations. *Vospov kofte* is one of these remixes, where beef or lamb is swapped with red lentils and bulgur to make for a lighter, all-vegan version that pleases God and mortals alike. It's so delicious that in our family, we enjoy this recipe year-round.

Basically, red or yellow lentils are cooked until they're a thick paste, then bulgur wheat, onions, parsley and spices are added - which is accomplished by kneading it all together with your hands, as the mixture is too thick to stir; ideally it's about as thick as Tollhouse cookie dough. The mixture is cooled and then rolled into either elongated thumb-shaped forms, or balls, then garnished and eaten without further cooking (they're not fried or baked after that).

You will want to cook the lentils in a saucepan that's larger than you might think you'd need, as they'll bubble up and splatter, and a too-small-pot means they'll be all over the stove.

Given our foundational cooking disagreements, the idea of my mom and I preparing these *vospov koftes* together is a big deal. We begin by bickering over which saucepan to use, a common pre-cooking ritual for us. I prefer to use a smaller pot, but my mother insists (and I'll now admit rightfully so) that we'll need the larger one to contain the lava-like bubbles red lentils make when they simmer into a thick paste.

After enough shuffling around one another in near-silence, the tension finally breaks as we laugh about how the measuring cup could have disappeared into thin air. We measure out and soak bulgur, which will get stirred into the thick lentil paste along with parsley, spices, scallions and sautéed onions, discuss the supremacy of Italian parsley over curly-leaf as we chop, and compare the ways we've failed at trying to cut onions without crying. We learn that neither of us is the timer-setting type, and our bulgur probably spends a bit too long soaking. Not a big deal, though.

We hand-knead everything together with great conviction, and slowly it turns into an aromatic paste, sticking to our fingers. After scraping as much of it off our



ARTS & CULTURE



palms into the bowl as we can, we set aside a little bowl of water, dip our fingers in, and start shaping the *kofte* into its characteristic, oval shape, lengthened on the ends and slightly flattened in the middle.

We arrange our *koftes* in a wreath design, decorate it with chopped parsley, and then finally face the truth: It is extremely rare to find us in the kitchen together. Why is that? “Because you always tell me what to do for no reason,” I say with a touch of shade. My mom pauses, and for a millisecond drops eye contact before returning with the smile of someone who’s seen me spit out celery and start fights over cilantro: “You have a great taste, and everything you make is very yummy. Let’s cook together more.”

And because she wouldn’t be my mother without giving me a task, she hugs me and says, “Just you need to do clean up after you cook.”

I’ll heed her words, because she’s right: The countertop is a cacophony of utensils, parsley stems and spilled cumin. But for once, this mother and daughter are totally, deliciously, in sync.

Vospov Kofte (Armenian Lentil Meatballs)

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup red lentils, rinsed and drained
- 1/2 cup fine bulgur
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 medium red onion, finely chopped (5 ounces/140 g)
- 2 scallions, finely chopped (white and green parts)
- 4 ounces Italian parsley, finely chopped (a little more than half a medium bunch)
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Salad Garnish:

- 2 Persian cucumbers, cut into 1/4-inch dice (or 1 English cucumber, peeled, cut in half lengthwise, watery seeds scooped out with a spoon and cut into 1/4-inch dice)
- 1 small green bell pepper, cut into 1/4-inch dice
- 2 scallions, sliced (green and white parts)
- 2/3 cup diced tomato (1 medium tomato, about 5 ounces)
- Leaves from 1/4 bunch parsley (about 1 1/2 ounces before stems are removed)
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sumac
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- Marash or Aleppo pepper to taste (optional)

To Finish:

- Finely chopped parsley

PREPARATION:

Place the lentils in a medium-large saucepan with 2 cups of water and bring it to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer. Skim the surface to remove any scum, and continue simmering for 30 minutes - stirring vigorously between occasionally and frequently to encourage the lentils to break down and to prevent the mixture from sticking to the pan and scorching on the bottom. The mixture should be a thick paste. If it isn’t yet, simmer up to ten minutes more, stirring in a splash of water if necessary to keep it stirrable. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool a bit.

While the lentils are cooking, place the bulgur in a small bowl, cover with 1 cup

hot water and soak 10 minutes. Don’t over-soak, or the bulgur will get mushy; you want a bit of texture. Drain well and set aside.

Also while the lentils are cooking, heat the oil in a medium sauté pan or skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add the chopped red onion, reduce the heat to medium-low, and cook them just past the soft-and-translucent stage, until they’re starting to turn golden on the edges. Remove from the heat and set aside.

Scrape the cooked lentils into a large mixing bowl. Add bulgur, red onions, scallions, parsley, cumin, salt, paprika and cayenne and use your hands to combine the ingredients thoroughly. Taste and adjust the seasoning, adding salt and/or cayenne as you like. Set the mixture aside while you prepare the salad garnish.

For the salad garnish, combine the cucumber, bell pepper, sliced scallions, diced tomato, parsley leaves, lemon juice, salt, sumac and cumin in a medium bowl. Taste and adjust the seasoning, adding salt, lemon juice, and/or cumin as desired.

Form *kofte*: Check the lentil-bulgur mixture for consistency: You want it to be stiff enough to be moldable, but not dry or crumbly. It should be about as thick as Tollhouse cookie dough. If it’s too dry, you can add a little water (knead in well to combine). If it’s too sticky, let it sit a few more minutes to dry out. Wet your hands, and form the mixture either into balls (about 1 ounce/28 g each, about the size of ping-pong balls) or into long,

thumb-shaped forms. Arrange them on a platter with the salad garnish in a small bowl in the center. Scatter chopped parsley over *kofte* and either serve immediately or later at room temperature.

Varty Yahjian lives, works and cooks in La Cañada, California. She also writes at the Occidental Weekly at: <https://muckrack.com/varty-yahjian/articles>. This is her first story for Cooks Without Borders. Connect with her at: v.yahjian@gmail.com



About Cooks Without Borders

Cooks Without Borders’ mission is to make your life more delightful and delicious by exploring food and food culture from around the world – and bringing you the best of it. The site, which consists of stories, recipes, cookbook reviews, video interviews with fascinating people in the food world and more, was founded in 2016 by Leslie Brenner, Cooks Without Borders’ editor in chief: “What interests us is the story behind the dish, or the ingredient, or the technique. We mine origins and dive into traditions, and then use what we learn to find or develop the best possible expression of the dishes that captivate us. As a result, and because our recipe testing and development is so rigorous, you can be sure that the recipes you’ll find at Cooks Without Borders are outstanding - and that they work brilliantly.”

Want Cooks Without Borders to email free recipes to your in-box? Go to: <https://cookswithoutborders.com/sign-me-up>

Check Cooks Without Borders on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5SZ-qKKtWF7EsFY98XfLLw>

*Kamal Mouzawak didn’t set out to transform Lebanon’s culinary scene. But with the creation of the country’s first farmers market, as well as several restaurants that promote and preserve regional food traditions, an organic produce shop and traditional guest homes, he has protected the diversity of Lebanese culinary heritage and united its people in the process. He was honored with the <<https://www.theworlds50best.com/mena/en/awards/icon-award.html>> Foodics Icon Award for <<https://www.theworlds50best.com/mena/en/>> Middle East and North Africa’s 50 Best Restaurants 2022. Souk El Tayeb, Lebanon’s first farmers market, was created by Mouzawak in 2004, soon followed by many other projects aimed at promoting sustainable agriculture, supporting rural producers, preserving the country’s rich and diverse culinary culture and, most of all, uniting people around gastronomy. Today, he oversees a small empire of ventures, taking in everything from restaurants to guest homes, product shops to regional food festivals, educational programs and community kitchens.

For more information:

<https://cookswithoutborders.com>

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

<https://www.synergos.org/our-network/bio/kamal-mouzawak>

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ARTS & CULTURE

Tenny Arlen Remembered as Trailblazer for Armenian Poetry in America

ARLEN, from page 13

Speakers Pay Tribute

The speakers' presentations in Armenian and English reflected the dual linguistic background of the audience and of Arlen herself.

The first speaker, Prof. Peter Cowe, the Narekatsi Professor of Armenian Studies at UCLA, spoke in Armenian about Arlen's student days when he was one of her teachers. He mentioned her interest in Armenian symbolist poetry including those by Medzarents, Siamanto, Indra and others, as well as her interest in French literature and symbolist poetry, which had influenced the Armenian. Cowe mentioned that like Zahrad and Zareh Khrahkouni, two mid-20th century Armenian poets from Istanbul, Arlen was a trailblazer (in Armenian, rahvira) who forged a new path forward for literature in the Western Armenian language.

Despite an atmosphere of malaise in which Western Armenian has been considered an endangered language only utilized in conversation and community life in the Middle East, its literature all but dead, Arlen's work is a sign in the opposite direction. For someone who, like many or perhaps most Armenian-American young people today, did not speak the language growing up, Arlen serves as a role model for others to follow, Cowe said.

Prof. Sebouh Aslanian, who holds the Richard Hovannisian Chair in Armenian History, spoke next, describing in English the "extraordinary and ephemeral life and works of Tenny Arlen." Aslanian mentioned that Arlen was one of his first students when he began teaching at UCLA, noting that she was "mature and sophisticated well beyond her youthful years," and also noted that her brother, "the formidable Prof. Jesse Arlen" was also a testament to the extraordinary upbringing both received from their parents.

Aslanian went on to note the importance of UCLA in the world of Armenian Studies, saying that it is the only place in the Western Hemisphere where one can take introductory and advanced classes in East-

ern, Western, and Classical Armenian. He gave credit to Kouloujian for transforming Western Armenian from an "endangered relic of the past" into a living language for a new generation of heritage speakers. Aslanian expressed hope for the future, referring to Arlen's many talented peers and friends, stating that what the Armenian Studies field and the Armenian community needs is "a new generation of critical thinkers" who "bring their cohort's perspective into the Armenian past and present."

The next speaker was Anoush Suni, who appeared virtually. Suni, who took the same introductory Armenian classes as Arlen, reminisced about their student days at UCLA. She humorously recalled how she was at first happy to see another American-Armenian young woman in the class who, like her, did not speak Armenian growing up; she had looked forward to "struggling together to learn the language." Instead, what happened was that Arlen completely outstripped Suni in her linguistic and literary proficiency.

The next speaker was Kouloujian, who spoke in Armenian while projecting the typed English version of his speech on a screen. He discussed his teaching Armenian to Arlen, and her love of the language. Inspired by "bonds of love" (a phrase from Narekatsi) for the Armenian literature of figures like Narekatsi, Medzarents, Varouzhan, Beledian, Sarafian and Vahe Oshagan, Arlen began writing poetry in Armenian even before she had mastered the language. Kouloujian also noted the historical circumstances and importance of Arlen's writing as the first published author in the Armenian language who was born in the United States, as well as discussing the history of the Armenian linguistic question in this country.

The next presenters were two students, Elena Ismailyan, who recited some of Arlen's poetry in Armenian, and Arpine Kilinyan, who spoke on behalf of the UCLA Armenian Students' Association on the importance of keeping the Armenian language alive.

Alexia Hatun, a student at UCLA who

was the next speaker, is "the closest we may get to Tenny's ideals," according to Kouloujian. Hatun, like Arlen, learned Armenian at the university and has started writing herself as well. Her goal is seeing that the language becomes accessible to more people. She spoke in Armenian about how inspiring Tenny's writing was for her, including her deep philosophical ideals. She then read two poems from the new book.

Finally, Kouloujian introduced the last speaker, the late poet's brother, Dr. Jesse Arlen. Jesse Arlen has his PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from UCLA and is the director of the Zohrab Information Center at the Eastern Diocese in New York.

Opening his discourse in English and Armenian with the words, "my dream of seven years came true today," Jesse Arlen discussed his view of his sister's life and poetry. He pointed out that she cared to spend her time in her college years reading literature and writing poetry, rather than partying. Reading some of the poems in Armenian and then in English, Jesse Arlen explained that although some of these have a sad tone, they show that Tenny had experienced the most extreme emotions of life (abandonment, isolation, loneliness, sadness, betrayal, disillusionment with the world, and so on) and "by facing them head on, got to the end of them." Jesse Arlen also shared family reminiscences including about his and Tenny's relationship with their older sister Faith, who inspired much of their inclination to art and creativity and is personified in some of Tenny's poems as a muse-like figure. Jesse Arlen thanked the group closed with the poem "Endless Beginning" which ponders the thought that death is not the end, since everything we do influences and inspires other people who remain when we are gone.

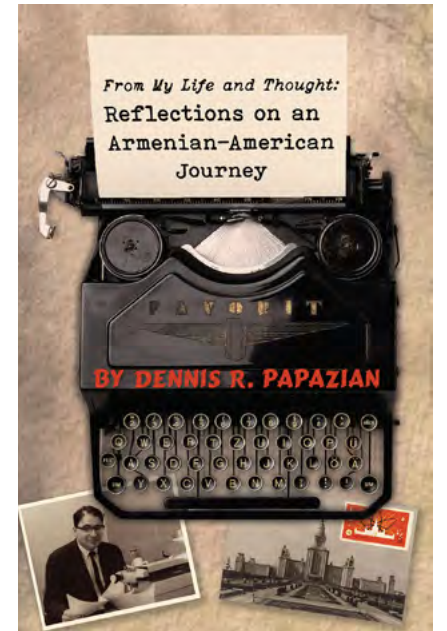
To obtain a copy of Tenny Arlen's book of Armenian poetry, *Կիրքով ըսելու ինչ ու հոս էմ* (To Say With Passion: Why Am I Here?), contact Dr. Jesse Arlen at the Zohrab Information Center, 630 Second Avenue, New York, NY.

Cal State Fresno Releases New Memoir by Papazian

MEMOIR, from page 13

also placed him in the center of major geo-political events, teaching him nuance and perspective that would lead him to become a highly sought analyst as the Soviet Union broke apart decades later.

Upon his return to Michigan, Papazian went on to live a life of contribution and service as he engaged in a decades-long career in higher education as an educator, scholar, and administrator. During this period, he also became a key leader in the emergence of an Armenian-American community just find-



ing its footing fifty years after the 1915 Armenian Genocide, where he made significant contributions to multiple Armenian community, religious, academic and political institutions.

"Alongside Dennis's exploration of Armenian-American life," Bobelian writes, "there is plenty of adventure within these pages. His time as a graduate student in Moscow at the height of the Cold War reads—at times—like a lighthearted John le Carré novel. Papazian barely survived a plane crash and had face-to-face interactions with Eleanor Roosevelt, John Kennedy, and Dwight Eisenhower along the way." And while Dennis's life placed him in the center of the rebirth of the Armenian community in America, it also is a classic American immigrant tale, one in which, according to Bobelian, "he regularly navigated life as a hyphenated American, shuffling—as many Armenians do—between various cultures and multiple identities."

In *From My Life and Thought*, Papazian shares his resilience, keen sense of perception, and vision, as well as the memorable characters he meets along the way, as he reflects on his consequential, eventful, and at times surprising life. Through it all, he writes with humor and wit, as he tells a story that will inspire readers of all generations and backgrounds and give hope to all who join him on his journey.

The Armenian Series at California State University, Fresno was established through the support of the M. Victoria Karagozian Kazan and Henry S. Khanzadian Kazan Endowment. Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian is the general editor of the series.

From My Life and Thought: Reflections on an Armenian-American Journey is available through Abril Books at <http://www.abrilbooks.com/from-my-life-and-thought.html> or through the NAASR bookstore at https://naasr.org/products/from-my-life-and-thought-reflections-on-an-armenian-american-journey?_pos=1&_sid=fbbc43237&_ss=r.

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ARTS & CULTURE

CALENDAR

OF EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CALIFORNIA

JUNE 5 — Save the date. The Armenian Assembly of America will mark its 50th anniversary with a program on Sunday, at 5.30 p.m., at the Jonathan Club. This special event will highlight five decades of the Assembly's influential achievements in advocacy, education, and awareness on Armenian issues. For more information visit <https://www.armenian-assembly.org/assemblyevents>

MASSACHUSETTS

JUNE 4 — Armenian Church at Hye Pointe Spring Food Festival, Saturday, 1280 Boston Road, Haverhill. 12 to 6 pm. Losk kebab, Chicken Kebab, Kheyra Dinners. Jinglyov Hatz. Armenian Pastries. For Information www.hypeointearmenianchurch.org or call (978) 372-9227

JUNE 4 — The Daughters Of Vartan Santoukht Otyag No.5 is presenting **HYELIGHTS 2022**, an Armenian Cultural Show Highlighting the Performing Arts on Saturday, First Baptist Church Gordon Hall, 111 Park Avenue, Worcester. An Armenian Buffet following the show is included. Call 978-537-2752 for Reservations: \$15 per Adult, \$8 per Child ages 5-12, Children under are Free. The event is open to the public.

JUNE 8 — Armenian Night at the Pops will feature violinist Diana Adamyan as the featured soloist with the Boston Pops Orchestra, Keith Lockhart conducting. Wednesday, 8 p.m. Symphony Hall, Boston. Presented by the Friends of Armenian Culture Society. Details to follow.

JUNE 16 — Opening of "On the Edge: Los Angeles Art 1970s - 1990s from the Joan and Jack Quinn Family Collection" and "Discovering Takouhi: Portraits of Joan Agajanian Quinn." 75+ artists including John Altoon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Frank Gehry, Helmut Newton, Ed Ruscha, and Aram Saroyan. Members Reception 5:00, Non-Members Preview 7:00. Armenian Museum of America, 65 Main Street, Watertown, MA.

JUNE 24 — Sayat Nova Dance Company will celebrate its 35th anniversary with a Wine Soiree. Experience a summer's night under the stars in the company of friends, indulging in an array of Armenian wines. Friday, Gore Place, Waltham. Donation \$100. Purchase deadline June 25. Purchase tickets at Sayatnova.com/35th-anniversary.

SEPTEMBER 9 — Tekeyan Cultural Association Boston Chapter invites everyone to a cultural event honoring author, editor, philologist, educator and public figure, Jirair Tanielian from Beirut, Lebanon, for his 60 years of service and dedication to Armenian culture and the community. Friday, 7 p.m., Baikar Building, 755 Mt. Auburn, Watertown. Details to follow. For more information, please contact us at bostontca@gmail.com

SEPTEMBER 21 — Gala Benefit Celebrating Contributions of Our Nation's Immigrants. InterContinental Hotel, Boston. 6pm Honoring Stephen Kurkjian, Distinguished Citizen, Leader, Pulitzer Prize Journalist and Author, and Recognizing Organizations Serving Immigrants and Refugees. Funds raised support the Legacy Fund, endowed fund to care for and maintain the Park year-round. Advance Reservations only. To receive the invitation, please send name and address to hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

NEW JERSEY

JUNE 17 — Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group in association with Huyser Music Ensemble presents "Huyser and Friends Project: Harmony," an open-air concert dedicated to the 75th Anniversary of Tekeyan Cultural Association. Featuring Gohar Hovhannisyan & Band from Armenia. Friday, 7:30 p.m. at St. Thomas Armenian Church, 174 Essex Dr. Tenafly, NJ. Donation \$60, includes Aran Wines from Artsakh. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. For tickets call Marie: 201-745-8850 or Talar: 201-240-8541 or visit: www.itsmyseat.com/harmony

OCTOBER 15 — Save the date! The Tekeyan Cultural Association of Greater New York Chapter is celebrating the diamond anniversary of the Tekeyan Cultural Association with a gala. Details to follow.

WISCONSIN

JUNE 26 — St. Hagop Armenian Church Annual Madagh 2022 Picnic, Racine, Sunday. On the Johnson Park grounds. Open to the community/public with free admission, offering traditional Armenian food for purchase. For information, contact Zohrab Khaligian @ (262) 818-6437 or khaligian@netzero.net or https://www.facebook.com/Armenian-Madagh-Picnic-St-Hagop-Church-Racine-Wisconsin-250610052493495/?tn-str=k*F

Balakian Brings New Poetry to the Boston Area and Dialogues with Writer Askold Melnyczuk

POETRY, from page 1

Melnyczuk introduced the Pulitzer-prize-winning poet and as he pointed out important aspects of Balakian's work in his witty and pithy manner, Melnyczuk also guided listeners to the essence of what makes a poet significant, defining Balakian as "someone whose work both fully inhabits and yet transcends its moment, becoming what Pound described as the news that stays news." Moreover, Melnyczuk pointed out the "signature sound" and an aspect to the method of Balakian's work, declaring: "Hovering, densely allusive, and darting — is how a characteristic Balakian poem proceeds."

Readers, Melnyczuk continued, "can zip from reflections on Hegel's time sense to licking 'the sweet brown hoisin' sauce on their lips, to an oblique reference to Delmore Schwartz's classic story 'In Dreams

Begin Responsibilities' to a memory of the Syrian grocers who knew his grandparents. The startling juxtapositions have an uncanny rightness: 'Sylvia Plath was molten ore pouring from the hot pot/sizzling with pods and smashed heads of prawn.' The similes aim to convey the most nuanced and refined sensations, so reading Mandelstam is 'like reading the wings of a viceroy on blue stone.' Their effect is to quicken our own responses, to summon us to attention, to, in short make us try to be smarter."

Balakian uses a layering process, Melnyczuk proclaimed, even "a kind of sedimentary poetics."

After this introduction, which itself approached poetry in its phrasings and language, prepped the audience, Balakian proceeded to read a selection of poems from his newest volume. Many of the poems had Armenian connections or reverberations, ranging from the experiences of Balakian's grandmother Nafina, who continues to inspire Balakian even from the other world, and his great-uncle Krikoris Balakian, to his own childhood memories and meditations on fruits and vegetables.

For the first time, Balakian read in public from the eponymous multi-sectioned long poem "No Sign" from his new book, a wide-ranging dialogue between a couple, a man and woman, speaking on big themes. Melnyczuk noted the use of quick cuts and cinematic quality to the poem in the dialogue between the two writers that followed Balakian's readings. Balakian noted that he incorporated his dramaturgical sense of form into the poem, and that drama and poetry are close in their approach to language because they are "spare, stripped and naked" unlike fiction. He added that he is interested in cre-



Askold Melnyczuk, left, in a discussion with Peter Balakian (photo Aram Arkun)

ating sequencing in the poem's structure and weaving in disparate threads.

The two writers touched on many topics, such as the role of poetry in the time of war (Balakian quoted Osip Mandelstam about the power of poetry), and its ability to reach dimensions of being that conventional usage cannot reach (Balakian observed that the lyric poem has an archetypal potential power similar to chant, song and prayer).

Balakian said he did painting when he was younger and want to go back to it eventually, as he "inhabits" the visual arts in his life and his poems, many of which are ekphrastic in nature. He also told Melnyczuk that in the American scene, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickson remain foundational ge-

niuses for him in their approaches to poetry---form and language. Hart Crane and T. S. Eliot were important for Balakian, along with Theodore Roethke and Sylvia Plath.

Balakian responded to some questions from the audience on issues like his attitude toward Surrealism or literary imagination's engagement with history. Human beings transform the raw data of their experience, Balakian said, with 'the cement mixer of the imagination' (a phrase borrowed from poet Richard Hugo), which enables one to probe the meanings of things more deeply. Melnyczuk proposed that evil is a failure of imagination, which is the source of all our hope. The conversations continued during the ensuing reception.



Askold Melnyczuk (photo Aram Arkun)

COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN
**MIRROR
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SINCE 1932



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EDITORIAL

Erdogan the Bully



By Edmond Y. Azadian

Turkey's authoritarian president, who plays hardball in domestic and regional politics, has decided to use the same tactics against its Western allies.

Turkey has accumulated various grievances against its NATO allies and has chosen the applications of Sweden and Finland to join the alliance as the proper opportunity to hold all the allies hostage. In addition, only last week Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said that the Greek Premier Kyriakos Mitsotakis is dead to him as the latter had lobbied for the US not to sell F-16 jets to Turkey.

Russia's war against Ukraine has scared its Nordic neighbors who now seek refuge and security with NATO, allowing Erdogan to extract concessions from those two countries and the US in return for its consent to lift its objection against the admission of those two countries into the alliance.

NATO does not have a mechanism to expel a member – which some US legislators would have liked to have used against Turkey, but it has rules in place to obstruct the entry of aspiring members. According to the NATO manifesto, all the members have to give their consent for a new member to join.

A delegation from the foreign ministries of Sweden and Finland traveled last week to Ankara to hold a five-hour meeting with Turkey's Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin, with no apparent result. Incidentally, in recent months, Kalin's image has been enhanced in foreign policy formulation to the point of overshadowing Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavusoglu.

Before going into the details of the standoff between those two countries and Turkey, we need to pause for a moment to question the wisdom of their application to join NATO.

Finland has an almost 800-mile border with Russia. Throughout the Cold War era, and even after the fall of the Soviet Union, those two countries' neutrality has not been threatened. By this move, what they have done is tempt the devil. Although Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov seemed indifferent to the initiative, President Vladimir Putin stated that Russia will take appropriate measures, meaning perhaps, that he will order the moving of Russia's nuclear arsenal closer to that border.

By the end of June, NATO will be holding its conference in Madrid and its secretary general, Jens Stolberg, anticipates seeing those two countries inducted into the alliance, pending Mr. Erdogan's permission.

Although Erdogan's objection hinges on a single issue, deep down he has a range of other issues to be settled. Erdogan accuses Finland and Sweden of harboring the adherent of exiled Turkish cleric Fetullah Gülen as well as the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) sympathizers, and has handed a list with the names of 35 suspects to be extradited to Turkey to stand trial. This demand is a way of expanding Turkey's authoritarian rule into Europe. The issue is on the top of a laundry list that Turkey has presented to those two countries, which will need find a way to accommodate Turkey's demands without compromising their democratic values.

But Erdogan has further expectations from a host of other allies. He wants Finland and Sweden to lift the arms embargo which those two have instituted against Turkey, when the latter invaded Syria in 2019, slaughtering Syrian Kurds, who were sympathetic to the US. Erdogan also believes this expansion offers an opportunity for the US to reconsider Turkey's admission into the F-35 fighter jet program. Next on the list is Ankara's planned incursion into Syria to once again fight the Syrian Kurds.

As the drumbeats of war are sounding louder and louder on the Syrian border, the US State Department turned the tables and issued a warning to Turkey. The day after Erdogan announced plans for a new incursion there, Ned Price, the US State Department spokesperson said, "We expect Turkey to live up to the October 2019 joint statement, including to halt offensive operations in northeast Syria, and we recognize Turkey's legitimate security concerns on Turkey's southern border. But any new offensive would further undermine regional stability and put at risk US forces in the coalition's campaign

against ISIS."

If Ankara ignores Washington's warning, there is no one to hold Erdogan's hand, as Russia is bogged down in Ukraine and besides, turmoil caused in NATO ranks is an indirect help to Moscow.

Although there is no mention of the Armenian-Turkish negotiations, that could also be impacted because they were initiated upon the demand of President Joe Biden. When we see the toughening of Turkey's bargaining position, we will know where Ankara is coming from.

When asked on May 18 how he would convince President Erdogan to drop his objection against Finland and Sweden joining NATO, President Biden answered, "I'm not going to Turkey, but I think we're going to be OK."

But it looks like everything will not be okay, because among other things, Erdogan savors public attention and wants to be treated by all US officials like he was treated in the Trump era. Erdogan has even complained to reporters that he and President Biden don't have the kind of relationship he had with Presidents Trump and Obama. "Of course, there are some meetings from time to time, but they should have been more advanced," he said.



Erdogan would like to get away with murder, in view of the West's economic sanctions against Russia. Indeed, Turkey's business community is hard at work at this time negotiating trade deals with their Russian counterparts to replace Western companies, which have severed their relations with Russia.

Erdogan's macho stand against the West will garner the most dividends on the domestic front. He needed this confrontation to boost his sagging popularity at home in time for the 2023 elections, where his prospects of winning are dimming in light of the runaway inflation.

Mr. Erdogan fails to see the negative, bullying image that he is projecting to the West. Even if he is cognizant of that less-than-complimentary image, he seems not to care.

In an opinion piece written by Joseph Lieberman, the former US Senator from Connecticut, he argues that Mr. Erdogan's Turkey would flunk the alliance's standards for democratic governance sought in prospective new member states. The essay, which was published in the *Wall Street Journal*, warned that Ankara's policies, including coziness with Putin, had undermined NATO's interests and the alliance should explore ways of ejecting Turkey.

Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in 2019, after Turkey's incursion into Syria, "Turkey under Erdogan should not and cannot be seen as an ally."

Despite those characterizations, Ankara has been selling a bill of goods to the Europeans, extending its repressive rule to that continent.

During Erdogan's rule, Turkey has carried out political activities in Germany and the Netherlands, trying to politicize and mobilize Turkish minorities living in those two countries, over the objections of the respective governments of those countries. It had extended the bloody hands of the deep state

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COMMENTARY

MY TURN



by Harut Sassounian

Erdogan Hires his Cousin as Lobbyist to Obtain Votes of Turkish Americans

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been president since 2014, is planning to run for reelection in 2023.

He previously served as Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014. Before that, he was elected Mayor of Istanbul in 1994 as a candidate from the Islamist Welfare Party. However, he was forced out of office in 1998, banned from holding political office, and imprisoned for four months after reciting a poem which was viewed as an incitement to violence, religious or racial hatred. Here is an ominous line from that poem: “The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers.” In 2001, he co-founded the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Hence, Erdogan has been a continuous presence at the highest echelons of Turkish government for almost 30 years.

President Erdogan has now enlisted the help of his U.S.-based cousin, Dr. Halil Mutlu, a citizen of Turkey, to obtain the votes of Turkish citizens living in the United States during the 2023 presidential election, to boost his slim chances for reelection.

According to the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) filings of the U.S. Department of Justice, Dr. Mutlu registered as a political lobbyist on May 11, 2022, on behalf of the Turkish ruling party (AKP) in the United States, as its sole representative. Dr. Mutlu is a resident of Windsor, Connecticut. The AKP representation office, officially registered as a U.S. corporation on May 2, 2022, is headquartered in Washington, D.C.

The FARA registration, signed by Mutlu, states that the “AK Party representation to the United States represents the Justice and Development Party of Turkey in the United States. Its responsibilities include organizing political, social and cultural activities among the Turkish citizens in the United States. It also aims to contribute to furthering the cooperation and historical friendship between the United States and Turkey...” The FARA registration form reveals the true aim of this elaborate lobbying scheme: “It will also prepare and disseminate AK Party material in the United States for the political support of the Turkish citizens during elections.”

The FARA registration indicates that the U.S. office of AKP represents the AKP’s principal office located at President Erdogan’s presidential palace in

Cankaya, Ankara, Turkey. It is stated that AKP’s U.S. office “does not have a budget established or a specified sum of money allocated” to finance its activities. Dr. Mutlu is said to work without any pay.

The completed FARA registration application also states that AKP’s U.S. office will disseminate information through magazines, newspapers, advertising campaigns, press releases, pamphlets, other publications, lectures, speeches, radio and TV broadcasts, motion picture films, letters, telegrams, email, websites, and social media.

The U.S. office of the AKP stated that it will publicize the above mentioned information to public officials, civic groups, associations, legislators, libraries, government agencies, educational groups, newspapers, and nationality groups.

It is not credible that Dr. Mutlu will be able to carry out such an enormous amount of work “on a part time basis,” without any staff and without pay. I hope the U.S. Justice Department will keep a close eye on the trail of funds used for such massive expenditures.

The Turkish government has permitted its citizens who live outside the country to vote in domestic elections ever since 2014. The vote of Turkish citizens in the Diaspora is important because around 1.5 million or over 50 percent of Turks residing abroad voted in the 2018 presidential election, including 811,000 in Germany, 186,000 in France, 145,000 in the Netherlands, 60,000 in Austria, and 46,000 in the United States. Erdogan received close to 60 percent of all votes cast abroad.

The U.S.-based AL-MONITOR news website, reported that “Turkish opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu has explosively claimed that millions of dollars have been siphoned off to allow President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to flee the country if he loses the upcoming election.... Kilicdaroglu said the equivalent of \$61 million was being transferred ‘all of a sudden,’ to the United States through education foundations close to the President.” The New York-based Turken Foundation’s 2017 tax return shows that its assets were over \$43 million. Erdogan’s two children, son Bilal and daughter Esra, served on the Foundation’s board. In 2014, Halil Mutlu was appointed chairman of the Turken Foundation. He was also a board member of the Washington-based Turkish American National Steering Committee, until his wife, Lynn Mutlu, replaced him on the board.

It remains to be seen if Dr. Mutlu will be able to persuade a large number of Turkish Americans to vote for Erdogan in next year’s election. More importantly, should Erdogan not be reelected and stays in Turkey, what legal troubles await him for violating a myriad of Turkish laws for several decades.

Erdogan the Bully

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and the dreaded secret service, MIT, to commit high-profile political assassinations of female Kurdish leaders in Paris in 2013.

Despite such criminal conduct being launched by Turkey in Europe, Mr. Erdogan has issued this admonishment: “Let me underscore it once again hereby. Those who back and provide every kind of support to terrorist organizations that pose a threat to Turkey should first of all abandon their unlawful, insincere and arrogant attitude towards us. May no one have any doubts whatsoever that we as Turkey will do our part once we see concrete practices indicating such a change.”

Turkey itself is a terrorist state and because of political expediency, has convinced European Union countries to place the PKK on their list of terrorists. Twenty-five percent of Turkey’s population consists of Kurds who have been denied their basic human rights; they have been systematically slaughtered by successive Turkish administrations. Article 64 of the Sevres Treaty (August 10, 1920) promised a homeland to the Kurds within the current territory of Turkey; that pledge has not been fulfilled yet. The Kurds have been subjected to mass murder from the Ataturk era to Erdogan’s administration. The most atrocious mass murders took place in the 1930s in Dersim.

Erdogan himself duped the Kurdish minority by feigning to hold negotiations to observe their human rights and as soon as he was elected with the support of Kurdish voters, he suspended the negotiations and resorted back to the persecution of the Kurdish minority. He even stripped the parliamentary immunity of members including Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag and jailed them. And today, with a straight face, he is accusing Europeans of harboring Kurdish terrorists.

With heavy-handed tactics, Erdogan has intimidated political leaders both in Europe and Russia and has been able to push his expansionist policies.

While Erdogan is playing hardball with the major powers, hopefully he won’t focus on Armenia, which is not in the same league as the latter.

US, Kurdish Officials Call Turkish Threats Of Military Operation in Syria ‘Serious’

By Amberin Zaman and Jared Szuba

ISTANBUL (AI Monitor) — Turkey’s National Security Council said on May 26 that Turkey’s “existing and future military operations” along its southern borders were necessary for the country’s security but that they did not target the sovereignty of its neighbors. The ambiguously worded statement left open the possibility that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will make good on threats he made May 23 to launch a new offensive targeting US-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria.

US and Syrian Kurdish officials told AI-Monitor that Turkish threats of intervention to establish a 30-kilometer-deep safe zone were being treated as “serious.”

“The main target of these operations will be areas which are centers of attacks to our country and safe zones,” Erdogan said earlier this week, without providing any details.

Turkey’s pro-government news channels are already beating the war drums. Ahaber showed footage today of Syrian National Army fighters armed and trained by the Turkish military carrying out what the broadcaster claimed were exercises in preparation for the new operation.

Turkey’s threats come amid a spat with its NATO allies over Finland and Sweden’s request to join the Western alliance in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Erdogan says Turkey will block their membership until the Nordic states address Ankara’s “legitimate security concerns” over their support for Kurdish groups.

Swedish and Finnish delegations earlier this week left Ankara empty-handed. The conventional wisdom is that the Ukraine conflict has created fresh space for Turkey to engage in bazaar tactics, bargaining with its Western partners for a laundry list of demands. These include easing US military sanctions over Turkey’s purchase of Russian S400s, and providing upgrades for its aging fleet of F-16 fighter jets. Ankara is demanding that Sweden ease its military sanctions over Turkey’s 2019 invasion of northeast Syria and end all dealings with the Syrian Kurds.

However, concessions from the West are but one element of Erdogan’s calculations which are mainly about his own political survival. The Turkish economy is in crisis.

The lira is continuing its downward spiral, not least due to Erdogan’s stubborn refusal to raise interest rates. Prices are skyrocketing. Anti-immigrant hysteria is rising in parallel.

A steady trickle of Turkish soldiers coming back in coffins from Iraqi Kurdistan — where the Turkish military’s latest offensive against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is grinding on — is sharpening nationalist feelings.

Pro-government channels have been airing more tear-jerking footage of soldiers of late, along with jingoistic commentary predicting imminent victory. The battle against the PKK is in its 36th year.

Grabbing more Syrian territory from the Kurds to make room for the unwanted millions of Syrian refugees in Turkey, and pushing back “Kurdish terrorists” in the process, will likely play well across ideological lines. This may explain why the main opposition Republican People’s Party has said little of Erdogan’s plans, while the main nationalist opposition Iyi Party has even cheered him on.

A war against the Syrian Kurds will force the opposition to rally around the flag and into reverting to the sort of hawkish rhetoric that will likely alienate Kurdish voters, another win for Erdogan, amid mounting speculation of snap polls in November. The Kurds are an important swing vote bloc, as dramatically revealed by Istanbul’s redo elections in 2019. Should they spurn the ballot box in a collective fit of disgust, this would give Erdogan a big advantage.

Turkey has launched three major operations in northern Syria since 2016 to torpedo the Syrian Kurds’ efforts to build an autonomous administration uniting Arabs, Kurds and Christians.

Turkey justifies its attacks on the grounds that the administration and its armed wings are part of the PKK and therefore pose an existential threat to Turkey’s security. Mazlum Kobani, the commander in chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces, the US-led coalition’s top ally against IS, has repeatedly said he wants peace with Turkey. But his calls have cut no ice with Ankara. It keeps reminding Washington that Kobani and many of his colleagues rose through the ranks of the PKK.

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US, Kurdish Officials Call Turkish Threats Of Military Operation in Syria ‘Serious’

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Ilham Ahmed, the president of the executive committee of the Syrian Democratic Council, one of the main arms of the Kurdish administration in northeast Syria, summed up Turkey's tactics in a WhatsApp interview with Al-Monitor. "Erdogan is trying to take advantage of the Ukrainian war by provoking all sides to get concessions from them. For example, Turkey seeks to please Russia by making the PKK issue an obstacle to Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO. It provokes the Europeans with the refugee issue to obtain approval for the security zone [in northeast Syria]."

Fawza al-Yusuf, another top ranking Syrian Kurdish official, said a new Turkish assault would provoke a humanitarian tragedy, uprooting hundreds of thousands of people. "It will also give succor to the Islamic State," Yusuf told Al-Monitor.

Like Ahmed, she reckons the risk of a Turkish attack is real. Erdogan is "ready to do anything to secure his seat." However, she added, attacking her people would be "a big mistake" and "cause immense damage" to Turkey. "Turkey cannot stake its own survival on the destruction of the Kurds."

Should Turkey do so, "it will be because either Russia or the United States failed to stop Erdogan," Yusuf contended.

But can they?

Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Turkey's security establishment has viewed Kurdish gains in Syria as an existential threat. American support for the Syrian Kurds has amplified long-running paranoia over supposed Western plans to carve up Turkey and to establish an independent Kurdish state with bits of Iraq and Syria thrown in.

The prevailing sentiment was best summed up by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu today when

he said, "The Americans say they understand our concerns but they don't do anything to address them."

Erdogan has been testing the waters for some time to bite into further chunks of northern Syria. Until recently Russia was believed to have opposed any such moves. The United States has been more explicit. This week, State Department spokesman Ned Price said the United States was "deeply concerned about reports and discussions of potential increased military activity in northern Syria and in particular its impact there" including on US Special Operation Forces deployed in northeast Syria.

Price added that Washington expected Turkey to abide by a 2019 agreement to halt its military operations in the Kurdish-controlled zone, saying that maintaining the ceasefire lines was "crucial for Syria's stability."

There's been no clear indication as to where Turkey may focus an attack, whether around Tal Rifaat, Ayn Issa, Kobani or elsewhere, a Biden administration official told Al-Monitor on the condition of anonymity. But the White House is treating Erdogan's threat as serious, the official said.

Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby on Thursday echoed the State Department's concern about Ankara's intentions, but said he was not aware of any senior-level military dialogue with the Turkish armed forces over the issue.

Kirby said US military officials are in daily contact with Kurdish-led forces in Syria. Ahmed, however, told Al-Monitor that as of Thursday morning, neither US nor Russian officials had offered assurances of security in response to Turkey's threats.

Ankara, she said, "is talking about a security zone that endangers the lives of millions of people and would cause another humanitarian disaster."

"Turkey is talking about a distance of 30 km, which

includes areas that contain prisons holding thousands of ISIS members," she told Al-Monitor. Ahmed noted the risk of a potential "catastrophe for international security" should any those prisons again be breached.

It remains to be seen whether US troops will defend their areas of operation if they are encroached upon by Turkish forces or their proxies. A spokesperson for the US-led military coalition declined to comment on the matter.

James Jeffrey, a former US ambassador to Turkey and the Trump Administration's top Syria envoy, noted that Turkey already controls large swathes of Syrian territory along its border. Connecting those territories to create an expanded "safe zone" in which to dump Syrian refugees would require taking Russian-controlled areas, such as Kobani and Manbij.

In the October 2019 Sochi agreement, Russia agreed to have the Syrian Kurdish forces leave those zones. However, there is "no evidence that they did so or that Russia even tried," Jeffrey said. "So my question is whether Turkey is dealing with Russia on this. An incursion into areas where Russian forces are does not sound smart," he told Al-Monitor.

However, PKK sources speculate that both Kobani and Manbij may prove irresistible. Kobani is where the United States and the Syrian Kurds first forged their alliance against IS in a battle that caught the world's imagination. Manbij is where Washington failed to keep its promise to Ankara to eject Syrian Kurdish-led forces once the city was freed from IS.

Control of both cities would ease Turkey's plans to connect areas it controls in the Euphrates Shield zone with those that it invaded in October 2019. Wherever Turkey points its guns, said Yusuf, "we have taken all necessary precautions. We are ready to defend ourselves."



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