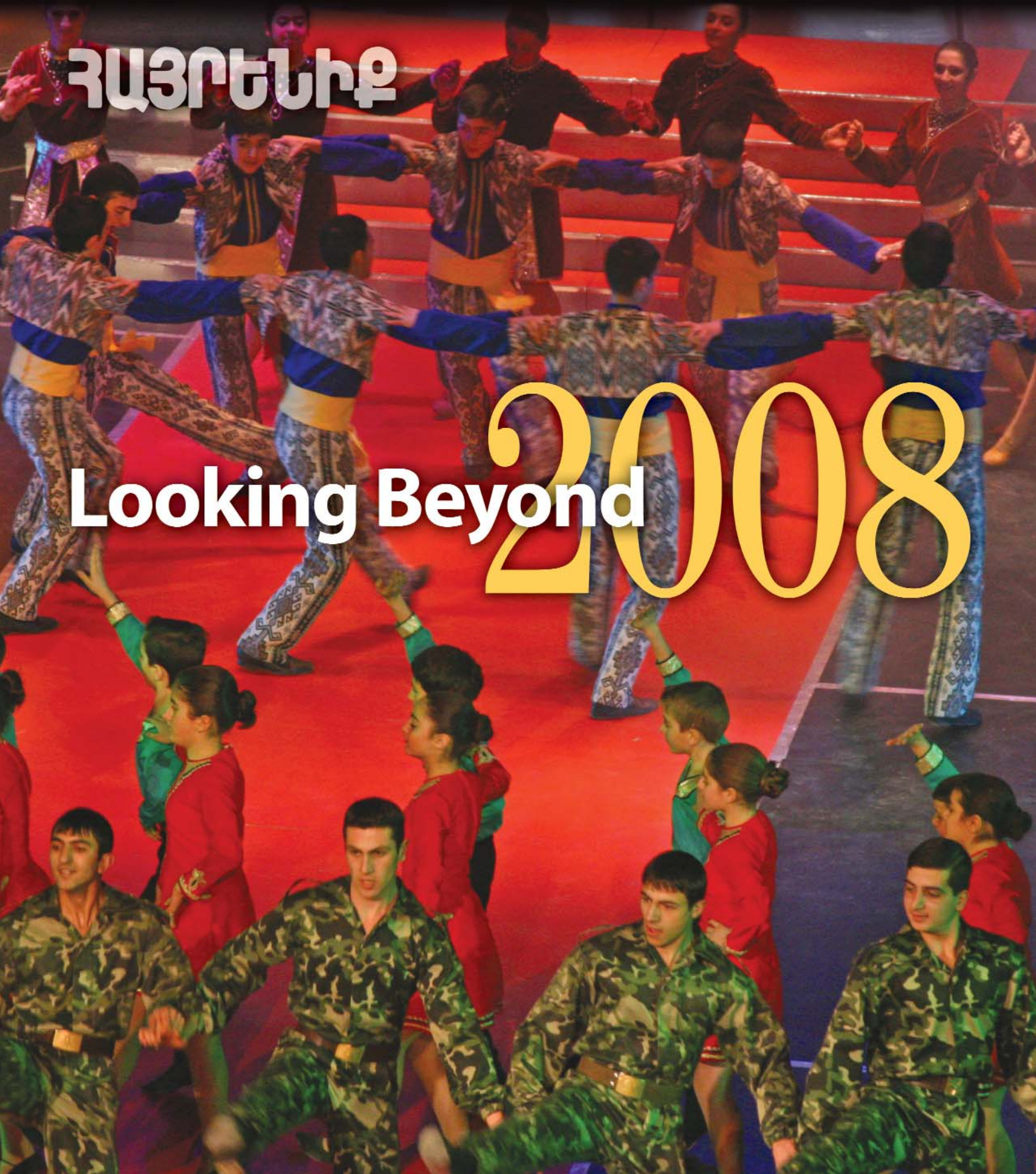


# The Armenian Weekly

DECEMBER 27, 2008

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Looking Beyond 2008





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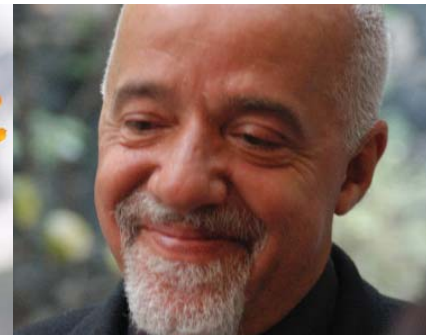
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# The Armenian Weekly



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ON THE COVER Photo by Inna Mkhitarian

## The Armenian Weekly

Looking Beyond 2008

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December 27, 2008



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# 2008 and Beyond...

We bid farewell to one year and usher in another with the realization that 2008 will be remembered as the prelude to change on many levels. The election of a new U.S. president—whose candidacy was wholeheartedly supported by the ANCA and the Armenian community in general—is one powerful indication of the changes that 2009 might bring.

There were considerable changes on the other side of the Atlantic as well. In August 2008, a resurgent Russia redefined its role in the Caucasus and sent a powerful signal that it means business. **Ronald Grigor Suny's** and **Asbed Kotchikian's** commentaries in this magazine discuss the Russia-Georgia war and its implications.

Turkey-Armenia relations received new impetus from what became known as “soccer diplomacy.” The pitfalls and possibilities those relations face will continue making headlines in 2009. We expect that the eye be kept on the ball of truth and justice during the process of normalization. History—both ancient and recent—has taught us that protracted conflicts cannot be resolved without addressing the root causes and taking into account the power asymmetries. **Christian Garbis** and **Ayse Gunaysu** look back at 2008 and discuss the developments in Armenia and Turkey respectively.

2008 was also a year of anniversaries for the Armenian community. To name a few, our sister publication *Asbarez* celebrated its 100th, AYF celebrated its 75th, and the Armenian Prelacy its 50th. We wish them all continued success.

2009 marks the 75th anniversary of the Armenian Weekly and the 110th anniversary of the *Hairenik*. **Tom Vartabedian's** piece on his “50 Year Love Affair” with the Weekly, **Tatul Sonentz-Papazian's** “Hairy Neck Chronicles” and the **Hacob Karapent's** “Conspiracy” are a celebration of the profound impact the *Hairenik* publications have had on generations of Armenians.

2008 was a year of change for the Armenian Weekly as well. In April, we published a special magazine issue, titled



“Commemorating Genocide,” which featured both leading and up and coming scholars, commentators, and photographers dealing with issues related to genocide and its aftermath. The positive feedback we received from both the Armenian community and academic circles encouraged us to continue publishing similar magazines.

Also in 2008, the Weekly started featuring a bi-weekly column by Turkish journalist and human rights activist Ayse Gunaysu, titled “Letters from Istanbul.” A column by a Turkish writer was unprecedented in the Armenian media and the level of interest it generated is a powerful indication that the Armenian community is for *meaningful* dialogue between Turks and Armenians.

The Weekly was also the only Armenian newspaper that was present at both the Democratic and Republican Conventions in 2008 and provided detailed coverage from the Conventions both online—through a blog updated several times a day—and in print.

Throughout the year, we featured Armenian NGOs and paid special attention to environmental challenges facing Armenia. In this magazine, **Knarik Meneshian** talks about both the doers and the swindlers among Armenian NGOs, while **Jason Sohigian** talks about the environmental challenges. In turn, **Jirair Ratevosian** reminds us of the importance of dealing with the problems by thinking globally.

The magazine also features stories by **Khatchig Mouradian** and **Tom Vartabedian**, as well as poetry by **Knarik Meneshian**, **Diana Der-Hovanessian**, **Roni Margulies** and **Lola Koundakjian**.

This magazine issue would not have been possible without the help of our readers. We thank all the businesses, organizations, Churches and individuals who supported this project.

A Merry Christmas and a happy and productive New Year to all our readers!



## We would like to thank

Mr. and Mrs. Avik and Haykouhi Deirmenjian; Mr. and Mrs. George and Joyce Aghjayan; the Sourp Khach Armenian Apostolic Church in Washington, DC; Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church in Worcester, Mass.; The Armenian Cultural Association (Providence Chapter); Mr. and Mrs. Levon and Tania Baghdasarian; Mrs. Lilian Maroukhian; Mouradian Jewelry; the St Mary Armenian Apostolic Church, Washington, DC; Mr. And Mrs. Chuck and Gina Bedirian; and Serjeo ([www.serjeo.com](http://www.serjeo.com)) for their generous support.



# Contributors



**Mujgan Arpat** is a photographer of German-Turkish parentage whose photographs have been published in various magazines and newspapers in Germany and the web sites of a number of news agencies. An exhibition of her photographs was organized in Berlin

under the title “Racism in Germany.” Her photographs have also been published in various dailies and magazines in Turkey such as *Gundem*, *Birgun*, *Postespress*, *Agos* and *Amargi*. She is one of the photographers whose work has been featured in the album “We are all Hrant Dink,” published after the assassination of Dink. She currently works at a German TV channel as a reporter in Istanbul. Her exhibition, titled “Gavur Mahallesi: Gidenler, Kalanlar” (The Giavour Neighborhood: Those who left and those who stayed) about the old Armenian quarter Hancepek in Diyarbakir was held both in Istanbul and in Diyarbakir in 2008.

**Diana Der-Hovanesian** was twice a Fulbright professor of American Poetry and is the author of more than 23 books of poetry and translations, including, most recently, *The Other Voice* and *The Second Question*. She has awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Poetry Society of America, PEN/Columbia Translation Center, National Writers Union, Armenian Writers Union, Paterson Poetry Center, Prairie Schooner, American Scholar, and the Armenian Ministry of Culture. Her poems have appeared in *Agni*, *American Poetry Review*, *Ararat*, *CSM*, *Poetry*, *Partisan*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Nation*, etc., and in anthologies such as *Against Forgetting*, *Women on War*, *On Prejudice*, *Finding Home*, *Leading Contemporary Poets*, *Orpheus and Company*, *Identity Lessons*, *Voices of Conscience*, *Two Worlds Walking*, etc. She works as a visiting poet and guest lecturer on American poetry, Armenian poetry in translation, and the literature of human rights at various universities in the U.S. and abroad. She serves as president of the New England Poetry Club.



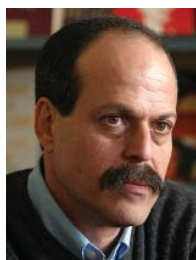
**Christian Garbis** is a freelance writer based in Yerevan, where he has been living for four years. He has been a regular contributor to the *Armenian Weekly* since 1994. He has served as an assistant editor for the paper as well as in several other capacities. Christian has also written articles for *Hetq Online*. Accounts of his personal experiences and social critiques of life in Armenia can be read on his blog *Notes From Hairenik* <http://noteshairenik.blogspot.com>.

**Ayse Gunaysu** is a professional translator, human rights advocate, and feminist. She has been a member of the Committee Against Racism and Discrimination of the Human Rights Association of Turkey (Istanbul branch) since 1995, and was a columnist in a pro-Kurdish daily from 2005–07.



**Asbed Kotchikian** Asbed Kotchikian is a lecturer in political science and international relations at Bentley University. His area of research includes the foreign policies of small states; the modern political history of the post-Soviet South Caucasus; and issues of national identity.

**Lola Koundakjian** started writing science-fiction and poetry at an early age. Several of her poems have appeared online in *The Literary Groong*, and the now defunct website *The Modern Story*. She has contributed science and technology pieces to the *Armenian International Magazine (AIM)* in the early 90s; served on the editorial board of the *Ararat Quarterly*; interviewed poets, visual artists and musicians for the *Armenian Reporter* and the *Armenian Weekly*. Koundakjian runs the *Dead Armenian Poets' Society*, which meets on a quarterly basis, and the *Armenian Poetry Project*, a blog containing text and audio clips. She is currently working on her first manuscript, a bilingual poetry book.



**Roni Margulies** was born in Istanbul in 1955. Paternal grandparents, Joseph and Fanny Margulies, moved to Turkey in 1925 from Poland. Maternal grandparents, Moiz and Hilda Danon, are Sephardic Jews from Izmir. Has published seven volumes of poetry, a childhood memoir, a long essay on the Jewish community of Istanbul, and two books of collected literary and political essays and journalism. Margulies won the prestigious Yunus Nadi Poetry Award in 2002 with his book of poems, *Saat Fark* (Time Difference). Has published selected translations of the poetry of Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin and Yehuda Amichai in Turkish, as well as Hughes' *Birthday Letters*. Margulies has contributed regularly to numerous publications of the left and has translated Tony Cliff's *State Capitalism in Russia* into Turkish. He was editor of the 'Guidebooks for the Anti-capitalist Movement' published by Metis Publishers, and was editor of the features page of the daily *Birgun* in 2006–2007.

**Knarik O. Meneshian** was born in Austria. She received her degree in literature and secondary education in Chicago, Ill. In 1988, she served on the Selection Committee of the McDougal, Littell “Young Writers” Collection—Grades 1–8, an anthology of exemplary writing by students across the country.” She is married and lives in Glenview, Ill., with her family. In 1991, Knarik taught English in the earthquake devastated village of Jrashen (Spitak Region), Armenia. In 2002–2003, she and her husband lived and worked as volunteers in Armenia for a year teaching English and computer courses in Gyumri



and Tsaghgadzor. Meneshian's works have been published in *Teachers As Writers*, *American Poetry Anthology* and other American publications. She has authored a book of poems titled *Reflections*, and translated from Armenian to English Reverend D. Antreassian's book titled *The Banishment of Zeitoun and Suedia's Revolt*.

**Inna Mkhitarian** is a freelance photographer based in Yerevan. Her photographs appear regularly in *Tesaket* magazine, *Forum* magazine, *Armenia Now*, *New Mag*, *National Geographic Traveller Armenia*, *Newsweek*, *Horizon*, *Hayrenik Weekly* and the *Armenian Weekly*. Mkhitarian is a graduate of the Yerevan State Pedagogical University (department of TV journalism). She has also attended CMI (Caucasus Media Institute), World Press Photo seminars on photojournalism. In 2008, two exhibitions of her photographs were held in Armenia.



**Khatchig Mouradian** is a journalist, writer and translator. He was an editor of the Lebanese-Armenian *Aztag Daily* from 2000 to 2007, when he moved to Boston and became the editor of the *Armenian Weekly*. Mouradian holds a B.S. in biology and has studied towards a graduate degree in clinical psychology. He is currently pursuing graduate work in dispute resolution. Mouradian's articles, interviews and poems have appeared in many publications worldwide. Many of his writings have been translated into more than 10 languages. He contributes regularly to a number of U.S. and European publications. His translations include Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* (Hamazkayin, 2004). Mouradian has lectured extensively and participated in conferences in Armenia, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Austria, Switzerland, Norway and the U.S. He has presented papers on genocide and the media at several academic conferences such as the 5th and 6th Workshops on Armenian-Turkish Scholarship, held at NYU in 2006 and at the Graduate Institute in Geneva in 2008.

**Jirair Ratevosian** is the U.S. Field Coordinator for the Health ActionAIDS Campaign at Physicians for Human Rights. He is also the director of event planning at the Massachusetts Coalition to Save Darfur. Ratevosian has a Masters degree in Public Health from Boston University School of Public Health and is chair-elect of the International Health Section's Advocacy Committee at the American Public Health Association. He is a human rights activist with a specialization in building strategic coalitions and implementing grassroots and advocacy strategies.



**Jason A. Sohigian** is the Deputy Director of Armenia Tree Project. His primary role in the organization is communication of program goals and achievements among funders, the media, and

the environmental community through publications, press releases, direct mail, and events. Jason is pursuing a Master's Degree in Environmental Management at Harvard University with a focus on Sustainable Development. His undergraduate degree is in the Environment, Technology, and Society Program at Clark University with a concentration in Physics, and his 1993 capstone thesis was on energy interdependence in the former Soviet Union. He is a member of a number of organizations including the Armenian Environmental Network, Association of Fundraising Professionals, Earthwatch Institute, Harvard Environment Club, Net Impact Boston, Trees for Watertown, Union of Concerned Scientists, and Watertown Citizens for Environmental Safety. From 1999 to 2004, Jason was Editor of the *Armenian Weekly*.



**Tatul Sonentz-Papazian** Tatul Sonentz-Papazian is a former editor of the *Armenian Review* and director of the ARF and 1st Republic of Armenia Archives, Watertown, Mass. He has been a contributor to the *Armenian Weekly* for over fifty years. Presently he directs the Publications Department of the Armenian Relief Society.

**Ronald Grigor Suny** is professor of social and political history at the University of Michigan and professor emeritus of political science and history at the University of Chicago. He is the author of *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1972); *Armenia in the Twentieth Century* (Scholars Press, 1983); *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Indiana University Press, 1988, 1994); *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Indiana University Press, 1993); *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press, 1993); and *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (Oxford University Press, 1998). Suny has written for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Nation*, *New Left Review*, *Dissent*, and other newspapers and journals.



**Tom Vartabedian** is a retired journalist with the *Haverhill Gazette*, where he spent 40 years as an award-winning writer and photographer. He has volunteered his services for the past 46 years as a columnist and correspondent with the *Armenian Weekly*, where his pet project was the publication of a special issue of the AYF Olympics each September. He resides with his wife Nancy, a retired schoolteacher. They are parents of three AYF children: Sonya, Ara, and Raffi.



# YEAR IN REVIEW

# ARMENIA 2008

This article discusses some of the most significant political and social events that impacted Armenia in 2008

By Christian Garbis



## ARMENIA VOTES

**A**fter the dawn of a new year, Armenian citizens prepared to cast their ballot for president. Although the elections were not held until Feb. 19, there was already widespread belief in the press and amongst the general public that Prime Minister Serge Sarkisian would undoubtedly win. Others staunchly opposed to the ruling regime pined for the return of Armenian Pan-National Movement co-founder Levon Ter-Petrosian, looking to him as the restorer of hope, who would put to an end the reign of the “Karabagh Clan.” Using his oratory skills he was able to attract tens of thousands of supporters to his cause. Many who did not necessary expect significant changes in the rule of law and the upholding of justice under a possible Ter-Petrosian administra-

tion nevertheless hoped for a change from the status quo. The Republican Party, on the other hand, was confident that their candidate and high-ranking party member, Sarkisian, would win by a landslide victory.

Their confidence was justified. Sarkisian won with 53 percent of the vote, followed by Ter-Petrosian with 21 percent, and Orinats Yerkir leader Artur Baghdasarian with 17 percent. ARF candidate Vahan Hovannisian, despite a proactive, glossy campaign, earned only 6 percent of the vote. He promptly resigned from his position as vice-speaker of the National Assembly but held on to his parliamentary seat. The opposition immediately cried foul, with reports accumulating of ballot buying, miscounted ballots, and

proxies being beaten at polling stations. Some proxies supporting Ter-Petrosian were even arrested and convicted. Ter-Petrosian nevertheless celebrated victory anyway on Feb. 20 at the first of several rallies that would last for days on end.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) initially reported favorable settings at election polls with few harrowing irregularities in the voting process. However, weeks later, after all collected data nationwide was carefully examined, the organization determined that considerable election fraud had indeed taken place. Commensurate with steady criticism voiced by the West, President George Bush refrained from congratulating President-Elect Sarkisian on his victory.

The Ter-Petrosian camp, refusing to accept its categorical defeat, began a sit-in protest at Liberty Square, which partially

wraps around the Opera House. The leadership refused to leave the area, attracting sympathizers and critics round the clock. When Armenian pop songs were not blaring from speakers, various opposition figures, including Ter-Petrosian himself who slept in his own Lincoln Town Car, made uplifting speeches to rally the crowds. The protests continued for 11 days unfettered before mayhem was finally unleashed.

### POST ELECTION CHAOS

**E**arly morning, just before dawn on March 1, approximately 2,000 sit-in protesters camped in Liberty Square were violently uprooted by police forces. Countless numbers received blows to the head and body. Many of those injured were refused treatment at hospital. The police claimed that firearms and grenades were found amongst the protesters, yet opposition supporters insisted that the weapons were planted. By mid-morning, the entire perimeter of the block on which the Opera House is situated was secured by riot police, batons and shields in hand.

As a result of the melee, tens of thousands converged upon Miasnikyan Square, a strategic crossroads intersection where City Hall and the Italian and French embassies are located. At 2 p.m., protesters clashed with police forces, which withdrew after realizing that they could not control the crowds. Protesters barricaded themselves within the square with hijacked buses and trolleys. The crowd was mainly comprised of the middle-aged people. During the course of the afternoon, others arrived there, many of them youth, collecting various metal rods and sticks in anticipation of another clash with the police. Although opposition leaders Aram Sargsyan and Stepan Demirchian appeared on the scene to soothe the crowd, many refused to leave the area where they remained peacefully. Shortly after 8 p.m., a wall of riot police descended Italy Street from Republic Square. For nearly one hour, the firing of tracer bullets was noticeably audible in downtown Yerevan. A riot subsequently ensued with the destruction of sev-



President Kocharian (above) and Armenian citizens vote.



eral stores and vehicles along Mashdots Avenue. According to eyewitness accounts, the looting and vandalism was conducted by petty criminals who had no obvious affiliation with the opposition or its cause. In the aftermath of the chaos, 10 people were dead including two police officers, and countless others were wounded. By midnight, President Robert Kocharian ordered a 20-day state of emergency, thereby silencing the opposition and its supporters.

Opposition figures Nikol Pashinian, the editor of Haykakan Zhamanak daily newspaper, and business tycoon Khatchig (a.k.a., Grzo) Sukiasyan went underground. Levon Ter-Petrosian remained under a self-imposed "house arrest," forbidden to enjoy the protection of the state secret service in public.

Despite the heavy military presence in the city capital and checkpoints along all

major routes entering the city, it was business as usual with no interruption in provided services.

The press, however, endured severe censorship. Several online news services including A1 Plus and ArmeniaLiberty.org were not accessible within Armenia. As a provision of the state of emergency, news outlets were not allowed to broadcast any news other than official announcements made by the government. Newspapers and other publications were likewise limited in the information that could print, and thus some suspended operations altogether.

International organizations such as the Council of Europe, United Nations, Human Rights Watch and others were quick to condemn the

government crackdown and called for immediate investigations into the cause and nature of the attacks. The U.S. State Department in particular conveyed dissatisfaction in a statement by spokesman Sean McCormack. "The U.S. deeply regrets today's unrest in Yerevan, and calls on all sides to avoid further violence, act fully within the law, exercise maximum restraint, and resume political dialogue," he said just hours after the melee. President Kocharian was dealt strong criticism for the day's tragic events.

### RETURN OF THE OPPOSITION

**O**n April 19, nearly a month after the state of emergency was lifted, opposition rallies resumed with thousands of people showing their support despite a ban on mass public gatherings. The rally was conducted by the wives of jailed oppositionists. They demanded the release of their husbands. Sporadic rallies were held in subsequent months led by Levon Ter-Petrosian in front of the Matenadaran, as Liberty Square was designated off limits by



authorities. Access to the square was closed off by riot police at every staged rally.

Dozens of oppositionists and those related by association who were arrested after March 1 remain in jail, although several have been released. Among the prisoners was former prime minister and Ter-Petrosian loyalist Alexander Arzumanyan. A leader of Aram Sargsyan's Republic party, Suren Surenians, who was actually arrested in late February, was released in mid-April mainly due to health problems related to a hunger strike. Another prominent oppositionist, Armenian Pan-National Movement chairman Ararat Zurabian, was released on July 29, also after suffering from ill health. Of the 100 plus people who were apprehended, over 70 remain jailed while other arrests continued. Some have been formally convicted—most recently Smbat Ayvazian, another Republic party member and former government official, who was charged with resisting arrest and was sentenced to two years in prison on Nov. 19.

Authorities deny that any of the jailed oppositionists are political prisoners.

In mid-October at a rally held before a more modest crowd of supporters compared with previous months, Ter-Petrosian, having failed to introduce a modus operandi for enacting the change he preached in Armenian society, announced a break in activities. The opposition leader cited the perceived imminent signing of a peace deal over Nagorno-Karabagh as the reason for ceasing anti-government protests.

### A NEW ERA

**S**erge Sarkisian was sworn in as president on April 9, during a solemn ceremony held at the Opera House. A military parade was held in his honor on Liberty Square. The area, with a buffer zone spanning several blocks, was completely inaccessible to the public.

The new president buckled down to work rather quickly. He appointed the chairman of the Central Bank, Tigran Sarkisian, as Prime Minister. Sarkisian, who has no party affiliation, was thus viewed as a neutral political figure with no baggage to

weigh him down in the public eye. Former opposition presidential candidate Artur Baghdasarian was rewarded the post of National Security Council Secretary, having thrown his support to his main rival. Baghdasarian was perceived as being a traitor by some of his own supporters and oppositionists alike for switching sides.

During his campaign and even his inauguration speech President Sarkisian made several pledges to work towards eradicating government-level corruption. The words were taken at face value until it is revealed that the head of the police-operated passport control agency (OVIR), the notoriously corrupt Alvina Zakarian, was fired in July.

The head of the State Customs Committee, Armen Avetisian, was also tossed out, but was replaced by his underling Gagik Khachatryan. He was considered to be an even worse offender in the agency and was publically accused of corruption by two businessmen owning the coffee importing company Royal Armenia who were eventually sentenced to prison for tax evasion, then released by a court order on the grounds that the initial charges were baseless, before being jailed again. News sources form a consensus that with the new appointments the president was aiming to distance himself from the negative stigma of his predecessor Robert Kocharian by replacing the heads of powerful governmental agencies with his own loyalists.

The police department also was affected by Sarkisian's sweeping personal changes. Lieutenant-General Ararat Mahtesian, who was connected to the March 1 events, was sacked in June. His removal came nearly a week after the national head of the police, Hayk Harutiunian, was fired. They were replaced by police chief Armen Yeritsian and former policeman turned regional governor Alik Sargsian, respectively.

Perhaps the most controversial power seat switch was the placement of Hovik



**Serge Sarkisian,  
sworn in as new  
president**

Abrahamyan as Speaker of the National Assembly. Tigran Torosyan, a founding member of the Republican party, was under strong pressure to step down despite his tireless refusal, but he finally gave in and subsequently resigned from his own party. Abrahamyan, a high-ranking Republican, is also known by his nickname "Moog," and has both economic and social control of most of the Syunik region. He is yet

another in a long list of men who are widely suspected of owning multimillion dollar businesses and who use their wealth, not to mention stronghold tactics, to obtain seats in government, a fact that is resented by many citizens. Government officials and members of parliament continue to enjoy immunity from prosecution, with carte blanche to engage in any kind of perceived corrupt or opaque business activities.

The ARF kept its three allocated government seats but replaced its ministers after they resigned. Arsen Hambartsumian became the new Labor and Social Affairs Minister, with Spartak Seyranian as the Education Minister and Aramayis Grigorian as the Minister of Agriculture. The three previous ministers, Aghvan Vartanian, Levon Mkrtchian, and David Lokian, were elected to the ARF Bureau.

### FREE SPEECH UNDER ATTACK

**O**n the evening of Nov. 17 prominent investigative journalist Edik Baghdasaryan, the editor of Hetq Online, was attacked while walking to his car as he left work. Although he was able to defend himself against his two attackers, a third landed a blow to the back of his head with an unidentified object. Baghdasaryan was subsequently hospitalized. Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian, who visited the journalist in the hospital, told the press that steps had been underway to apprehend the perpetrators of the violence.

The case marked the seventh time that a journalist was beaten in 2008 alone, with no headway made in any of the investigations.

In September, a prominent radio and TV journalist named Artur Sahakian fled his own café just before two of his friends were severely beaten by several assailants. The perpetrators were believed to be the bodyguards of Republican parliamentarian Levon Sargsian and were apparently after Sahakian. One of the victims later died in hospital. Sargsian, who apparently had a personal vendetta against the journalist and is widely believed to be linked to criminal activities, was not charged, but the assailants were arrested.

The head of RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau, Hrach Melkumian, was beaten in an unprovoked attack on Aug. 18 and sustained minor injuries. President Sarkisian ordered that an investigative probe get underway to solve the crime.

In the same month a reporter for Haykakan Zhamanak named Lusine Barseghian was assaulted by several men after a series of articles were printed exposing the business activities of some government officials. The same journalist was purportedly attacked on the presidential election day at a voting precinct.

**NEW STEPS TOWARDS PEACE**

In June, President Serge Sarkisian met for the first time with his Azerbaijani counterpart, President Ilham Aliyev. Their meeting took place in St. Petersburg on the sidelines of a summit of former Soviet republics, with the participation of Minsk Group mediators as well as the foreign ministers from both countries. They pledged their willingness to continue forward in peace negotiations to end the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict based on what are known as the Madrid proposals, a framework which was devised in November 2007 by the mediators.

A landmark opportunity towards normalizing diplomatic relations with Turkey



Photos from the Turkey-Armenia soccer match in Yerevan



was taken in September, on the occasion of a World Cup qualifying soccer game between Armenia and its historic foe. Turkish President Abdullah Gul visited Yerevan at the invitation of President Sarkisian, amidst criticism by the opposition and the ARF, which launched a protest offensive. It was the first time that a high-level Turkish official visited the republic since its independence, and the initiative was highly praised by the European Union as well as the U.S.

The meeting fueled expectations of a potential restoration of an existing railway link between Kars and Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city and historic regional commerce center. The railway would facilitate an alternative trade route to the Black

Sea. Such a link would thereby lower trade transportation costs as Armenia's dependence on Georgia's ports would be decreased, a welcome transition considering the Georgian-Russian war that transpired in August which crippled food and fuel imports for several weeks. A few days later, Gul

flew to Baku where he discussed the outcome of the meeting with Aliyev. Meanwhile, the foreign ministers of Turkey and Armenia, Ali Babacan and Edward Nalbandian respectively, continued periodic discussions. A follow-up meeting was held between them on Nov. 24 in Istanbul.

In October, during his inauguration speech, Azerbaijan's newly reelected President Aliyev renewed his rhetoric that Nagorno-Karabagh's cessation from Azerbaijan would never be recognized. But he stopped short of threatening military aggression to win back the territory, instead suggesting that the region would be suppressed economically.

Despite his confidence, the Azerbaijani leader agreed to meet with President Sarkisian again in Moscow at the invitation of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Nov.

2. The three signed a document confirming their willingness to continue peace negotiations based on the Madrid proposals under the auspices of the Minsk Group, which Russia co-chairs along with the US and France. The declaration encouraged expectations that a peace agreement would be signed by the end of the year with the active diligence of the Minsk Group, which had been proactive since January to find a solution.

Later in the month, the Minsk Group co-chairs, Matthew Bryza, Yuri Merzlyako, and Bernard Fassinier of the U.S., Russia, and France respectively, toured the region, making diplomatic visits to both Baku and Yerevan. They admitted at a press conference on Nov. 17 in Yerevan that the two sides were "not there yet"

regarding a peace deal, and that the resolution to the conflict would unlikely be reached by the end of the year. Bryza especially was very confident of an eventual breakthrough acceptable to both sides.

In a separate setting, President Sarkisian told the press that Armenia must share a land border with Nagorno-Karabagh and that Baku must recognize the self-determination of its people. Stepanakert remained excluded from all peace talks, despite President Bako Sahakian's adamant insistence that Nagorno-Karabagh authorities participate.

Although the details of the proposals for peace were not made public, they generally called for a phased solution, with the demilitarization and return of the seven Armenian-

administrations also attended, including Anahit Bakhshian of the Heritage party, the National Self-Determination Union's Paruyr Hayrikian, and former prime minister Vazken Manukian. Members of the Armenian National Congress, a confederation of various opposition parties favoring Ter-Petrosian, did not attend. Although the meeting was perceived as constructive, it remained unclear as to what was actually accomplished there. President Sarkisian promised that a favorable peace proposal would be presented to the Armenian people.

The historic meeting between the Turkish and Armenian leaders bore fruit sooner than anticipated. On Nov. 24, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

tiques and expensive automobiles abound in the capital.

Due to stepped-up collection efforts, tax revenues increased 33 percent for the first nine months of 2008 compared with the same period last year, with over \$1.2 billion collected, according to the Finance Ministry.

Despite the global economic crisis that was ravaging across the United States, Europe, and Asia, Prime Minister Sarkisian claimed that the Armenian banking system was stable and secure. However, in mid-November the prime minister voiced concerns related to potential decreased investment in the country for 2009.

A large part of the economy continued to be fueled by money being pumped in from abroad. Remittances for the first half of 2008 were approximately \$668.6 million, a 57 percent increase from the same period last year. There were already fears of a slowdown due to the economic crisis in Russia especially, where an estimate 2 million Armenians live and work.

## Despite the global economic crisis that was ravaging across the United States, Europe, and Asia, Prime Minister Sarkisian claimed that the Armenian banking system was stable and secure.

controlled territories to Azerbaijan, an ambiguous status for Nagorno-Karabagh that would nevertheless be protected by strong international guarantees for maintaining peace, and a land corridor connecting Armenia to the region, presumably the one that already exists in Berdzor. Supposedly, Yerevan had already agreed to many of the proposals but such sentiments remain unconfirmed. The opposition, with the resounding no-confidence call from Ter-Petrosian, remained firmly against the negotiations. Simultaneously, the ARF threatened to quit the governing coalition if a stipulation for the return of any of territories would be included in a final peace proposal.

On Nov. 20, President Sarkisian hosted a closed-door summit between various political party leaders to discuss possible avenues for enabling peace. Representatives from smaller parties critical of both the former and current admin-

Armen Movsisian revealed that Armenia would sell electricity to Turkey, most likely as early as March 2009. Initially, 1.5 billion kilowatts per hour of electricity will be supplied for the first year with possible increases in subsequent years.

### ECONOMY CONTINUES TO BOOM

On Oct. 31, the National Statistical Service revealed that construction was indeed the most influential factor on the growth of the Armenian economy. From January through September, an estimated \$2 billion was spent on building costs, or about 23 percent of the gross domestic product. Real estate prices have skyrocketed since 2007, although prices were said to begin to decline in recent months. The going price for a three-room apartment in central Yerevan is about \$230,000. Luxury European clothing bou-

### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS RISE

With a thriving economy comes the devastation of Armenia's pristine natural habitats. The Armenian Copper Program in cooperation with the Vallex Company took steps to begin copper exploration excavations in Teghut, an area of northern Lori, where hundreds of acres of forest thrive. Since the beginning of the year approximately 22 hectares of forest was cut, but 350 hectares are expected to be cleared by the time the excavations are complete in the coming years. Although the overall worldwide demand for copper has slowed due to the global economic crisis, it has yet to be seen whether the copper mining efforts will be negatively affected. The area has been fraught with other environmental problems related to factories continuing to dump waste in the Debed River.

In Southern Armenia, uranium mining efforts have been renewed in Syunik where about 30,000 tons are believed to exist. The initiative was approved by the Ministry of Nature Protection last February. □

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## YEAR IN REVIEW

# TURKEY 2008

## A Very Personal Overview

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By Ayse Gunaysu

*It is true that social phenomena are very complicated everywhere, but not as much as in Turkey. Paradoxes are inherent in all social phenomena, but not as sharp as those encountered in this country. No doubt that the lines between political fronts are sometimes blurred everywhere, but not in a manner as shocking as one can see here. Yes, 2008 could have been a gloomy year in many countries, but I hope it was not as depressive as it was for the progressive people here in Turkey.*

ALL PHOTOS IN THIS ARTICLE BY MUJGAN ARPAT



After the dust settled and the smoke cleared away, it became obvious that the ruling AK party, an outsider—rejected by the deeply rooted authoritarian secular nationalist establishment—had transformed into an insider, an integral part of the system. Moderate liberal Islamist columnist Fehmi Koru’s comment aptly described the situation: “Erdogan, an Obama when he first came to power, has turned into Bush now.”

Turkey has now left behind the exhilarating days of EU reforms in 2005—days that were full of hope and joy for a more

Prosecutor against AK Party, demanding its closure. Moreover, the Court could have banned 71 AKP officials, including the Prime Minister and the President, from politics. The closure case triggered the revival of the battle between Turkey’s secularist establishment and the AK Party, which is, in fact, a coalition of a wide range of religious Muslims from moderate and liberal Islamists to the members of the infamous Turkish-Islamist synthesis sect embracing the ideology of the Grey Wolves.

Everybody was holding their breath and waiting for the court ruling. Finally, the Constitutional Court decided on July 30, 2008 not to close down the party but to

DTP was based on the accusation that “the speeches and actions by party leaders have proven that the party has become a focal point of activities against the sovereignty of the state and the indivisible unity of the country and the nation,” as the chief prosecutor had put it. The two closure cases meant two of the four parties represented in the parliament were being declared a threat to the establishment and at least half of the voters in Turkey were believed to be the supporters of the enemies of the system.

After AK Party stopped being a “victim” of the system and became part of the system, it was obvious that the Kurdish political movement, DTP, would be left alone in their



Kurdish women protesting

democratic, more participatory and inclusive Turkey—and has entered once again a gloomy period.

The previous period of hope had reminded me of a similar period of great hopes of equality, justice and fraternity: the 1908 reforms—which were, incidentally, followed by unimaginable horrors. The thought that after a century, events now could follow a similar pattern was sending shivers down my spine. When Hrant Dink was assassinated, the horrible feeling that my worst fears had become true accompanied the deep pain for his loss. The land here, I felt, was incapable of bearing fruits of democracy and a better life for all.

AK Party’s change of course had come after a meandering road with sharp turns and steep slopes. Along this road, there was the Constitutional Court’s unanimous decision to hear a case brought by the Chief

deprive it of the financial assistance that it would receive from the state.

#### KURDS A TARGET, AGAIN

Looking at what happened afterwards, one can easily imagine that at that very critical point, the establishment and the AK Party made a secret deal involving mutual compromises. In return for not closing down the party, the establishment was promised that the AK Party would stick to the traditional hard-line policies in key matters such as the Kurdish issue, democracy, and freedoms. The EU reforms that had already slowed down came to a halt. The biggest U-turn was to be in the Kurdish issue—a key problem related to democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms.

A closure case against the Kurdish DTP was already under way. The case against

struggle for survival. Already excluded from official ceremonies, declared traitors by means of numerous legal cases under way against dozens of DTP mayors, party officials and executives, and attacked by the press (even the mainstream media) every day, DTP was now fair game.

#### ERGENEKON: A STEP FORWARD OR COSMETICS?

The Ergenekon case was yet another development strengthening the hypothesis of a compromise deal between the establishment and AK Party, with the so-called “deep state” agreeing to sacrifice some of the high-profile members who had already become impossible to hide. Such a deal was possible because the traditional deployment of forces in Turkey had disintegrated when a considerable part of the

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non-Islamic democracy forces had rallied behind the AK Party against the hardliner authoritarian secularists who took sides with the military and the establishment in general. What was known as the left in Turkey had become the active supporter of the old authoritarian nationalistic ways, and what was known as the right had become the champion of change, of integration with EU and the world, and democracy. So, the Ergenekon case—with the arrest of Dogu Perincek (one of the leaders of the anti-Armenian campaign) and retired generals

offered by the Ergenekon case to the disorganized and uncoordinated democracy forces in Turkey could not be used, despite individual efforts of some civil initiatives and columnists in dailies like Taraf.

**THE MILITARY IN A BATTLE WITH THE PRESS**

The Taraf newspaper deserves to be dealt with under a separate headline. The daily did something unheard of so far. It challenged the military openly to

solidarity messages is a morale-booster for both the readers and the newspaper.

**HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD**

The 2008 EU Progress Report for Turkey sums up the human rights situation in the country. Pointing out to the fact that armed forces continued “to exercise significant political influence via formal and informal mechanisms,” the report gives a list of major human rights concerns. This includes Turkey’s insistence on avoiding the



who were in the 1990’s accused by human rights activists of being behind unsolved murder cases—on the one hand had a potential to become a step towards democracy, but also gave rise to an even stronger resistance from the authoritarian secularist front and caused new divisions in the already fragmented political arena. Due to some unconvincing, arbitrary-looking arrests, the sincere secularists who were suspicious of the government’s motivations thought that the Ergenekon case was a maneuver to strengthen AK party’s position. On the other hand, some socialists believed this was a battle of elephants where the grass, as always, would suffer. Kurds demanded going all the way and uncovering all that was hidden during the dirty war going on for more than 20 years now against them, but their voice was muffled by cries of increasing hatred towards Kurds as the armed attacks by the PKK escalated in the south-east and heart rending funerals of dead soldiers appeared in greater number everyday on TV screens and in newspapers. So, an important opportunity

account for the death of 17 soldiers in Hakkari in an attack by PKK. Satellite photographs and confidential correspondence appeared in the newspapers indicating that the looming attack was in fact reported in advance to the relevant units of the army. The military’s response was menacing. The Chief of General Staff openly threatened to interfere and accused Taraf, without mentioning its name, of siding with the “terrorists.”

Erdogan chose to side with the military in this battle against Taraf, which had until then been harshly criticized by certain “leftist” circles for supporting the AK Party against the hard-liner secularists and the military. When Taraf criticized Erdogan, the already scarce financial resources of the newspaper were altogether cut by the banks and the public advertising agencies. Taraf was facing financial collapse when its readers took the initiative and made donations by means of personal advertisements containing words of solidarity. Although it is clear that this will not be enough for the survival of the newspaper, simply seeing a full page of

ratification of international human rights instruments, human rights defenders facing criminal proceedings, impunity of security forces that commit human rights violations, limited efforts to prevent torture, ongoing prosecutions under the infamous Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, attacks against non-Muslim clergy and places of worship, and the portrayal of missionaries as a threat to the integrity of the country and the Muslim religion.

**DIALECTICS OF LIFE AT WORK**

Regarding the Armenian issue, Turkey’s official position continued to be hostile to any reference to the Armenian Genocide, continued to deny the Armenian heritage of Anatolia by making every effort to make it invisible, and to intimidate Turkey’s “own Armenians” (meaning the so-called “good” Armenians living in Turkey vs. those living in the Diaspora) whenever they made “unwelcome” comments.

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However, there were undercurrents that were in contradiction with the general pattern. For example, for the first time in Turkey, April 24 was publicly commemorated as the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide with a panel discussion with the participation of Ara Sarafian, the editor of the critical uncensored edition of the Blue Book. April 24 has been commemorated since 2005, the 90th anniversary of the genocide. But the first three of the anniversaries were observed by a press conference at the Human Rights Association's office in

panelists, but the discussion was quite civilized and polite. This may be attributed to the Ergenekon case and the fact that most prominent anti-Armenian organizers were in prison. It might be naive, however, to confidently assume that ultra-nationalists in Turkey suffer from a shortage of human resources. Therefore, the freedom enjoyed by the Human Rights Association (HRA) could also be attributed to a possible decision by some figures within the deep state to make use of an HRA meeting to portray Turkey as a democratic country where even

genocide scholar—and finding themselves in the difficult position of having to answer his questions, is something unimaginable. Despite pleasant stories of opening up to the world and the fast modernization process, Turkey is an extremely introverted place where convictions are reproduced everyday through a circulation of ideas and opinions within a closed circuit system with little contact with the outside world. So I can imagine the museum officials' frustration while trying to answer Sarafian. Reading Sarafian's words, and remembering his participation



... armed forces continued “to exercise significant political influence via formal and informal mechanisms...”

Istanbul, with limited participation. This time, the commemoration was held in Bilgi University, and there were around 250–300 participants from all segments of the society, including Turkish-Armenians. During the panel discussion, Ara Sarafian talked about Genocide. “Given the presence of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, when we talk about the Armenian Genocide, we refer to the destruction of over 2,000 Armenian communities—through the expulsion and killing of people, the ruin of communal infrastructure such as schools, libraries, and churches, as well as the loss of private property. If one were to go to the provinces of modern Turkey today—where most Armenians in the world lived before WWI—practically nothing can be seen or is acknowledged of the historic Armenian presence there,” he said.

Unlike other events related to the Armenian issue in Turkey, there were no violent demonstrations outside the building or within the conference hall. There were several people who disagreed with the

genocide could be publicly discussed. In any case, this was an opening for those who strived for greater freedom of expression and for challenging the official thesis.

#### INCREASING CONTACTS WITH THE DIASPORA

In the Armenian Reporter's Nov. 22, 2008 issue, Sarafian tells the story of his visits to the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara and the Archaeological Museums in Erzurum, Van, and Kars to observe personally how Armenia and Armenians were represented in Turkish museums today. Sarafian talked to the officials of these museums, asking them why, alongside other ancient civilizations, there was no mention of Armenians. From the answers they gave, it's easy to see how unprepared they are for such an encounter. It may not be that obvious to the readers of the Armenian Reporter, but those who live in Turkey know that, for local government officials, coming into direct contact with a Diaspora Armenian—let alone a

alongside Yusuf Halacoglu and Sukru Elekdag in the conference organized by the Istanbul University in 2006 on the Armenian question made me think: what if more and more Armenian scholars from the Diaspora came to Turkey to speak at public events, conferences, panel discussions? Why not?

#### AN ARMENIAN SCHOLAR OF SOCIOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY IN ISTANBUL

In 2009, other Armenian scholars from the Diaspora also visited Turkey and took part in public events. One of them was Armen Gakavian, an academic from the Sydney University, Australia. A scholar of sociology and Christian spirituality, he is also a founding director of the Armenian Genocide Research Unit of the Center for Comparative Genocide Studies at Macquarie University (now the Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at UNSW). “My own grandparents were survivors of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

*This page is sponsored by Mr. And Mrs. Noubar and Meline Karakashian*

My paternal grandparents from Urfa, and my maternal grandfather from the west coast of Turkey, were deported with their families through the desert, with the majority dying en route,” he said, referring to his roots in Turkey. He gave a lecture at the private Koc University in Istanbul, on the fate of Armenians in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. “We enjoyed a relatively open and frank discussion about one of the last taboos in Turkish society—what happened to the Armenians in 1915-23,” he recalled. Istanbul was his maternal grandmother’s hometown. Wandering through the streets of Istanbul, he began to imagine the kind of house his ancestors might have lived in and questions came one after another: “What shops did they frequent? When they escaped (they were the lucky ones), where did they board their ship? Who were their neighbors and friends? What did they say and do? Who were the perpetrators; who were the rescuers? Were they the grandparents of the lady next to me on the minibus with her baby, who helped me find my way with a gentle smile and warm hand gestures?” His concluding remarks were: “I have found justice and mercy to be a complex balancing act, but one that has been made easier, more recently, by my newfound Turkish friends. It seems the timing was just right. I have never before been so ready to engage open-mindedly with Turks, and to see them not as the ‘other’ but as just like me. It has been a long hard, road. I still get a chill down my spine when I see images of Turkish national day gatherings, with the Turkish flag and photo of Kemal Ataturk in the background; but then so do some of my Turkish friends. It seems that nationalism, hatred and fear are our common enemies. Our greatest mistake is to let these things poison our minds against the other.”

**AN ARMENIAN DIRECTOR IN SEARCH OF HIS ROOTS**

In 2008, Serge Avedikian was in Istanbul for the second time for the screening of his film “Nous Avons Bu La Meme Eau” (We Drank the Same Water) during the 11th International 1001 Documentary Film

Festival. There were two screenings of his film, the English version on Nov. 14 at the French Cultural Institute, and the Turkish version on Nov. 18 at the Nazim Hikmet Cultural Center. On both days, the theatres were full to capacity. The film was about Avedikian’s visit to Soloz, about 170 km south of Istanbul, which was the hometown of his grandparents, and his interviews with the inhabitants of the town, ethnic Turks, who were settled 1920’s as part of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey involving nearly 2 million people. In the film, we see Avedikian uncovering traces of ancient Armenian presence, tombstones now used as steps, the foundation of the old church, etc. Addressing the audience, Avedikian said, “Let us give back to the past generations what belonged to them. Once and for all let us name and relinquish to the old Ottoman Empire in truth and in dignity, all the horrors and crimes that belong to them. Our generations and that of our children, both Armenians and Turks of today, wherever they are, want something else other than hatred, shame or resentment. For us, for them, and most of all to be able to share our memories, including those of the horrors committed here or elsewhere, we should relearn how to be with one another. The times of hatred or scorn, of rancor even if unconscious, should be abandoned from our lives giving way to respect, recognition and openness.”

**CALLS OF RECOGNITION AND RESPECT, ANSWERS OF HATRED**

In 2008, despite initiatives from both Turkish and Armenian sides for steps towards recognition and respect, the traditional official discourse in Turkey from time to time went so far as to praise ethnic cleansing.

And this was even done by a member of the cabinet.

During a ceremony at the Turkish Embassy in Brussels on Nov. 10, the Turkish Defense Minister asked, “If the Greeks continued existing in the Aegean Region today, or if the Armenians continued existing in many parts of Turkey today, do you think we could have a nation state?” He reminded

that “...before the republic, Ankara was composed of four sectors: Jewish, Muslim, Armenian, and Greek... When I was governor at Izmir I realized that the Izmir Chamber of Commerce had been founded by non-Muslims. There was not even one Turk among them.” He also hinted that Armenia is supporting the PKK.

These words were harshly criticized by human rights organizations and initiatives against racism in Turkey. But it was the answer given to him by Hrant Dink’s son, Arat Dink, living in Istanbul with his family, that was the most powerful. Here are excerpts from his “open letter to Defense Minister” to conclude this article on the status of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms in Turkey in 2008:

“Let us answer his question in the right way. ‘No, it wouldn’t be the same. It would be superbly better....If nothing else, at least all those non-existing people would have continued living here with us. If nothing else, someone like you would not have become Defense Minister. Even if you had become the Minister, you wouldn’t have dared thinking like this. Even if you had dared thinking so, you wouldn’t have dared speaking like this. Even if you had spoken so, you wouldn’t stay as Minister the next day.

“I have a serious suggestion. As you know, every Monday morning we assemble all our children in concrete schoolyards, before they enter the classrooms to be channeled into narrow pipes, to be indoctrinated with the ‘one nation’ identity. As you know, we make the children pledge: ‘Let my existence be a gift to the Turkish nation!’ In the minority schools, I suggest that the problem would be solved if we make the children pledge: ‘Let my non-existence be a gift to the Turkish nation!’

“Then send us away, brother. Our spirit is sent away, anyway. Send us away from our world to which we are still attached with some damned instinct, where we cannot even look at our forefathers’ or grandchildren’s face because of shame, where we put up with truckloads of insults. Send us away. But I cannot swallow these words any more.” □





PHOTO: INNA MKHITARYAN

# We Are NEW PEOPLE

By Jirair Ratevosian

This year marks the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. The context of “freedom from want and freedom from fear” animated this fundamental document that realizes the “inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

However, in spite of such noble commitments, millions of people across the world have no hope. Their sense of purpose and happiness is blurred by helplessness to overcome inequality, fear, poverty and disease.

In 2007, an estimated 420,000 children were newly infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. According to the World Health Organization, 90 percent of these infections occurred in

Africa where AIDS is beginning to reverse decades of steady progress in child survival. In a slum in Nairobi where I visited two years ago, nearly 25 out of every 100 die before their 5th birthday. In countries where medical services are available, the transmission of HIV from mother to child is almost entirely preventable. However the medical coverage levels are remarkably low in most resource-limited countries. In the US and other high-income countries, mother-to-child transmission has been virtually eliminated thanks to effective voluntary testing and counseling, access to antiretroviral therapy, safe delivery practices, and the widespread availability and safe use of breast-milk substitutes.

In Haiti, child mortality is the highest in the Western Hemisphere. According to Partners In Health, 8 children out of every 100 die before their 5th birthday, mainly for lack of food, clean water, and access to health services. Each year, over 22,000

children under 5 die from preventable causes including malnutrition, pneumonia, diarrhea, and malaria.

Likewise, the health situation in Zimbabwe, which has been declining for years, is now untenable. Just over the last two weeks, a complete collapse of the health system and sanitation infrastructure has given way to a major cholera epidemic spreading throughout the country, and a breakdown in delivery of medications for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and chronic illness. The government's obstruction of food and critical aid to millions is speeding up the massive loss of life.

In Darfur, the violence and bloodshed continues more than four years after the US Congress took unprecedented steps to recognize the ongoing atrocities as genocide. In 2008 alone, at least 300,000 people have been displaced and there have been 43 reported aerial attacks by the Government of Sudan. Darfur peace initiatives have failed and the current peacekeeping mission is still largely ineffective.

The list of inequality is long. Millions of people across this world are unable to exert any level of change over their circumstances.

This era of increasing global connectivity is enabling each of us to reach around the world farther, faster and cheaper than ever before. We are one people—global citizens sharing a common generation and a common Earth. We are bound by a common goal to live life with purpose and happiness. As responsible global citizens, we cannot ignore these things we would rather forget. If there is a child in Uganda who is HIV infected, that matters to me, even if it's not my child. It matters to me because simple interventions could save the lives of thousands of children each year.

Why should each of us be responsible global citizens? The answer is *hope*. Hope is as vital to life as the very oxygen that we breathe. Hope helps people to live longer and gives us all a greater quality of life. Working to equalizing individual life opportunities of our brothers and sisters worldwide honors the resilience and ingenuity of the human spirit and brings hope to those who have nothing else.

As Armenians, and members of the Diaspora, our responsibility is twofold. Not only should we be responsible global citizens, but we also have to work hard to end genocide denial and secure unequivocal U.S. reaffirmation of the Armenian Genocide. We must not think of these two things as mutually exclusive.

We must never tire to create hope. Robert Kennedy eloquently stated over forty years ago, "These imperfections of human justice and inadequacy of human compassion mark the limit of our ability to use knowledge for the well-being of our fellow human beings

**We are one people—  
global citizens sharing  
a common generation  
and a common Earth.  
We are bound by a common  
goal to live life with  
purpose and happiness.**

throughout the world. And therefore they call upon common qualities of conscience and indignation, a shared determination to wipe away the unnecessary sufferings of our fellow human beings at home and around the world."

So this New Year, as we resolve to better ourselves through diet and exercise, we should also resolve to be better global citizens. Here are some suggestions:

***Be a learner.*** Keep informed of what is happening to fellow citizens so that we can educate and spread awareness to others about the issues that affect our brothers and sisters abroad. Set your

Internet browser's homepage to BBC, attend lectures and talks about issues that are happening around the world. If you're a student, spend a semester studying abroad; consider a life-changing, alternative spring break vacation to better the lives of others.

***Be a giver.*** Donating to good causes and organizations doing work on the ground in communities (such as Médecins Sans Frontières) can be a very effective way of meeting your responsibility as a global citizen. With the Against Malaria Foundation, you can buy mosquito nets to stop children from dying of malaria every 30 seconds. The United Nations Children's Fund allows you to buy high energy biscuits which prevent malnutrition, bicycles for health workers to reach children in remote villages or a water pump for a community to prevent thousands of children from dying every day from diseases related to unsafe water. If you're a shopaholic, buy "product red" merchandise to help stop the spread HIV worldwide.

***Be a doer.*** As responsible global citizens we have a responsibility to be a voice for the voiceless. Sign up to receive action alerts from organizations that advocate for better U.S. policies and greater accountability (such as ONE Campaign or Physicians for Human Rights). Call (202) 224-3121 day or night to leave a message for your elected Member of Congress. Write to the President-Elect Obama's team about what matters most to you by visiting: [www.change.gov](http://www.change.gov)

Our action takes on critical importance at a time of global financial crisis and competing interests for very limited resources. These times can bring us closer—not to grieve about our losses but to acknowledge the abundance so many of us enjoy and to accept the responsibility of sharing it.

As we work to meet our obligation to this global society, we must remember that our hard work and shared dedication is only strengthened when we work together. Our voices are louder when we speak together and the hope that we can create is greater when we create it together. □

# Memo to President Obama

By Ronald Grigor Suny

**A**t first glance Russia may not be the most urgent problem for the new president. The collapse of the international financial order, the approaching melt-down of the American economy, the quagmire of Iraq, and the looming disasters in Afghanistan and Pakistan are more immediate concerns.

But late last summer, when the world's attention was turned to the opening of the Beijing Olympics, an obscure conflict in a dimly understood corner of the Caucasus suddenly and dramatically changed the nature of the global equilibrium. The unipolar dominance of the United States, the most powerful nation in history, whose reach extended to all continents and oceans, and even into former Soviet territories in Central Asia and Caucasia, was challenged by a resurgent Russia determined to put down its marker and insist on recognition of what it considered its own regional interests close to home. No NATO in Georgia or Ukraine, the Kremlin insisted, and when given the opportunity by Georgian president Mikael Saakashvili, Russia invaded South Ossetia and recognized the independence of that defiant enclave as well as that of its sister "republic," Abkhazia.

The Putin-Medvedev regime has been frank, open, and blunt in its explanations of where it is going and what it is demanding of the international community. Interpretations of its ambitions differ, but a close reading of their statements and practices indicates that Moscow is pursuing neither a Soviet-style imperial policy toward its neighbors nor an ideologically-driven expansion of its limited influence. Rather these Russians seem to have borrowed pages from the standard textbooks of IR realism and imbibed the notions that the world is governed by power politics and that each state must help itself to gain advantage vis-à-vis others to guarantee and enhance its own security. Russia has shown that it is ready to play hardball, to use its natural resources and its regional military strength to obtain what

it could not get through persuasion or negotiation. The strengthening of the Russian state at home, its firmer hold on the energy industries, and the domestic popularity of the government have given Putin and Medvedev the capacity to act in ways that Yeltsin could not. For the first time since the collapse of the USSR, Russia stood up to and forced an

ally of the United States to stand down.

The short war in August 2008 not only defeated the Georgians but humiliated their American backers as well. Europe protested and threatened the Kremlin, but in the end its own material interests and doubts about Georgia's innocence in the outbreak of war led it to seek an accommodation with Russia.

What does Russia want? First, it wants respect, both for its own path to its future ("don't lecture us on democracy") and for its security interests, particularly in the so-called Near Abroad. That means: no more NATO expansion beyond where the alliance is now. Second, it wants a reform of the international security architecture toward less unilateralism by the United States, greater American consultation with other powers, more reliance on the United Nations rather than NATO, and the abrogation of plans to place American radar and rockets in Poland and the Czech Republic. Third, Russia wants to be recognized as having legitimate security interests in the Near Abroad; that is, it wants to be a regional hegemon—not an empire controlling domestic and foreign affairs of its neighbors as the USSR was. A hegemon (think of the Monroe Doctrine) has paramount influence in a region, is deferred to by other powers, and is most interested in maintaining a sphere of influence and interest in which other regional players recognize that they must coordinate their policies with the local Great Power.

The United States, at least since the Second World War, has often displayed a far grander and much more ambitious foreign policy. It has strived to be more than a regional hegemon. While

*This page is sponsored by Dr. Raffi and Vartouhi Nersesian*

forsaking old fashioned imperialism, the USA has at times, particularly in the Bush II years, frankly proclaimed its aim to be a global hegemon, that is, to have no regional rivals or spheres of influence that would thwart its reach into any part of the planet. American leaders have assumed that American interests and the interests of all other nations, at least those of good will, are magically consonant. Democracy and freedom, capitalism and free trade, liberal values of tolerance and diversity are assumed to be values that are so uniquely transhistorical and above culture that they can be propagated, exported, or imposed on others by force of arms. America is an exceptional country, and that exceptionalism justifies its special role in the world, a role that no other nation in the post-imperial age dares to claim. The American civilizational mission, its particular burden, is not merely to police the

Democratic nominee Barak Obama did not give in immediately to the normal reaction of Americans. As a serious, deliberate thinker, he does not react instinctively but thinks things through. With the right advice and by moving beyond clichés and stereotypes, there is a possibility of fresh imagining of what links and divides Russia and the United States.

What Russia wants is not necessarily what it is able to get, but its desires have to be recognized and taken seriously. Regional hegemony contains within it a sense of insecurity and entitlement. Both Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union feel insecure and entitled: Russia believes it is entitled to dominate; the non-Russian republics feel they are entitled to be fully sovereign and determine their own security

## A Russian-American condominium in the Near Abroad aimed at reducing conflict but not at integrating any of these states into a military bloc favoring one or the other power could be a giant step toward rethinking the security architecture of the rest of the world.

world, to protect its own democracy and economy, but to bring its benefits to the benighted peoples of the rest of the world.

The essence of the Russian-American conflict, so starkly revealed in South Ossetia, is that it is a struggle between a relatively weak state with regional ambitions and a superpower with a global vision. Russia's military budget is about seven percent of the American budget. It is not able to stand up to the USA either economically or militarily, but it is strong compared to its immediate neighbors and must be reckoned with by them. It also has oil and gas resources essential to the Europeans. Like Saudi Arabia, its influence in the world stems from its natural resources.

Just as the international balance of power shifted in August 2008, so the next month did it shift once again. With the collapse of the financial system and the precipitous fall in oil prices, Russia's influence in world affairs suffered a body blow. Both the Russians and the Americans suddenly faced unprecedented limitations on their power. As sobering as these new calamities might be, they also bring with them important opportunities to rethink the future.

What should Obama do?

Start slow, be calm, and be wary of old formulations and images. Scholars have shown in dozens of monographs and articles how the images of an essentially expansionist Russia was constructed over the centuries and most immediately in the years of the Cold War. Those images are powerful, perhaps indelible, but not immutable. When confronted by a crisis with Russia in August,

interests. And the United States has repeatedly declared that it will defend the right of those states to their independence.

In order to transform the dominant position of Russia into as benign a relationship as possible, the United States must first shift its attitude toward NATO expansion. One way to do that is to link the extension of the alliance to Ukraine and Georgia (and even further to Armenia and Azerbaijan) to two other goals: the inclusion of Russia into the alliance as a full member, thus turning a defensive alliance (against whom one has to wonder?) into a collective security pact guaranteeing the security of all its members and forestalling aggression by any member against another. The second goal is to make membership of Ukraine and the South Caucasian states contingent on the resolution of their ethno-territorial conflicts (Transneistria, Karabagh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia). Here Russian and American goals are truly in harmony. Neither power has an interest in an unstable zone around Russia. A Russian-American condominium in the Near Abroad aimed at reducing conflict but not at integrating any of these states into a military bloc favoring one or the other power could be a giant step toward rethinking the security architecture of the rest of the world.

The problem with Russia may not be on the hottest front burner right now, but unlike Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel/Palestine, or the financial crisis, it is much more likely to be soluble in the short run. Why not start in the Caucasus, the very place where a short war forced reconsideration of the global balance of power? Yesterday, South Ossetia, today Karabagh, tomorrow the world. □

*This page is sponsored by the St. Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church in Racine, Wisc.*

# Armenian NGOs: To Serve or Swindle?

To hear and read about those Armenian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are merely personal businesses operating under the guise of organizations entrusted by donors and grant-givers to serve and assist the public is difficult and disheartening to believe.

By Knarik O. Meneshian

Unfortunately, among the nearly 5,000 (according to latest data) registered NGOs in Armenia, only a small number—“several dozen”—are engaged in work as described in their mission statements, while the others do no work at all, and their mission statements described on paper remain on paper. Adept at applying for grants, these NGO owners “receive grants and vanish,” according to a long-time humanitarian worker in Gyumri. And, as one local professional in Yerevan explained, “As for NGOs, there are so many of them that it is hard to tell which ones are only names. I am sure many of those NGOs were organized to support someone’s business.” According to recently published information, in addition to NGOs, there are also “Government NGOs (GONGOs) or NGOs created by government officials, their relatives and friends, and serve the distinct purposes of supporting their protectors or laundering government money intended for civil society.”

To hear an NGO owner boast of his or her organization’s great work and then see with one’s own eyes the reality of those claims is both shocking and astonishing. One Gyumri NGO, which was started after the 1988 earthquake, is such an example. In 2002, I had the opportunity to visit this particular NGO, as well as others in the city. The claims, so eloquently and enthusiastically described by the NGO owner, were that through the organization’s efforts as many as 300 underprivileged children in the vicinity were being offered, free of charge, a variety of courses such as English, singing



Children from the ARS Soseh kindergartens singing

and dancing, arts and crafts, various trades such as electronics and electrician training, computer skills, even the study of Human Rights. In addition, a bathing facility (a cold, dim, and mostly inoperable facility) was available to the elderly with the presentation of bathing coupons given to them by charitable organizations.

As I entered the NGO establishment, once the owner’s home, located on a street lined with small, dilapidated houses, I noticed the “computer class” and wondered when, if ever, lessons were held in such a dusty, clothes-strewn, and cluttered area of the house. It appeared to be nothing more than a storage room with a few computers barely visible in all the mess. There was no evidence of any electronics or electrician training classes. The only kind of activities going on during hours when the place supposedly was bustling with

its various educational activities and building “career skills for at-risk youth” was the owner and another person chatting and drinking coffee at a desk. An open box of chocolates lay near them. After the NGO owner expressed gratitude for the generous donation (approximately \$150,000) made by a wealthy Armenian Diasporan for the purpose of constructing a “center for the education of orphans and children of socially vulnerable families,” the NGO owner said, “Come, let me show you where our new center will soon be!” We made our way to a nearby lot where the foundation of a building had been set. Beaming, the NGO owner explained, “Since it is winter now, construction will resume in the spring, and finally my dream of a center for the children will be realized...”

Today, the site remains exactly as I first saw it in 2002. As for the NGO owner’s claimed activities at the house-turned-center for the education of children, people in the neighborhood state that “there is nothing going on there,” and that “the NGO owner is a shrewd person who is capable of gathering some one hundred children in an hour...” This same NGO owner classifies

... one winter evening in 2003, there was a knock at our apartment door. A woman in her late 30s greeted us... “I have come to ask you for \$25,000 in order to start an NGO... I would like to open a massage center for handicapped children.”

in several other categories such as “Dissemination of Facts for Life,” “Human Rights,” “Limitations on Cigarette Usage,” thus resulting in additional funds. As for the study of Human Rights, the owner’s nieces and nephews attend (all expenses paid) Human Rights conferences in various countries. This NGO’s name pops up on a number of web sites, even those remotely

associated with an NGO category.

Another Gyumri NGO I visited was located in what appeared to be a small abandoned factory. It was a cold, damp, and very dim place. A few drawings by school children decorated the dark walls. Seated at a table were two women chatting and sipping coffee. What was done at this NGO facility was never clearly explained. At yet another NGO facility, which was cheerful and bright, and where neighborhood children were offered free computer, language, arts and crafts classes, as well as after-school tutoring, I did see that the children were occupied with the various activities described in the organization’s mission statement, but the number of students that actually attended the facility was greatly exaggerated. The small staff, however, ate and drank and celebrated a lot.

## NGOs in Gyumri

In 2002, there were 133 NGOs in Gyumri according to the list provided by the Gyumri NGO Center. Some of the NGOs listed (in no particular order) were:

- International Federation of Taecvando
- Intelligentsia of Shirak
- “Faeton” Greek Union
- “Russian” Charity Organization
- Lord Byron
- Association of Women with University Education
- Human Rights Protection Center
- Shirak Region Greek-Roman Free Style Wrestlers
- “H. Gregoryan” Accountants Club
- H. Gregoryan Foundation
- Gyumri Fund of Art and Culture Development (H. Gregoryan)
- Karate-Do Gyumri National Federation
- “Aikido” Sports Union
- Vo-Vietnam Art Federation
- “Ukrain” Charity Fund
- “Flora” Ecological NGO
- Association of Internet Users of Shirak Region
- Dinamo Sports Union
- New Generation
- Union of Photo Fans and Journalists
- Third Nature
- “Israel Militosyan” Sports NGO
- “Maecenas” Charity NGO
- “New Native Hearth”
- Charity For Family
- Bravo Baby Charity Fund
- “Arch of Hope” of Gyulibulagh
- Belief and Light
- Center of Support and Assistance
- Disabled Women’s “Belief” NGO
- Arena of Education
- Shirak Marz Branch of Body Building Federation
- “Miss and Mr. Wonderchild”
- “Eskada” Social-Cultural NGO
- “Temple of Gratitude”

*This page is sponsored ADCO Diamonds—Boston, Mass.—Arslanian Family*

## NGO Mission Statement

For illustrative purposes, the following is an example of an NGO's mission statement along with its accomplishment status as published by the Professionals For Civil Society (PFCS) Armenian NGO web site:

### Temple of Gratitude NGO

**Mission:** Formation of the Earth Gratitude symbol in Gyumri; Raise of Dignity of Armenian nation and the state; Revival of the constant call of duty of Diasporan Armenians towards their Motherland; To further the solution of various socio-economic and moral-psychological issues, preservation of national values and the genofund; To organize international festivals, exhibitions, and conferences in the Temple of Gratitude in future.

### Projects implemented by the NGO:

No information in database.

**Success Stories:** No story associated with this NGO.

**News from NGO:** No news associated with this NGO.

During my husband's and my yearlong volunteer service in Gyumri, one winter evening in 2003, there was a knock at our apartment door. A woman in her late 30s greeted us and then entered with a folder in her hand. "I have come to ask you for \$25,000 in order to start an NGO. I would like to open a massage center for handicapped children. Here, this is my proposal..." We told her that we could not help her with such a project.

According to a later list of Gyumri NGOs, the number had dropped to 79. Along with some new NGOs, many of those that were on the 2002 list were still listed on the later list, but with some slight name changes. For example, "Miss and Mr. Wonderchild," became "Miss and Mister Charitable Fund, Gyumri Branch." Its mission statement is: "To contribute to the integration of both good-natured people and their material and mental abilities; To promote the development and strengthening of "Miss and Mister" festival; To turn "Miss and Mister" festival into a grand festive show to rejoice children of the world."

The accomplishment status of a great many of the NGOs listed on the PFCS Armenian NGO web site revealed the same results as that of the Temple of Gratitude NGO—*nothing*. Only a handful of the NGOs on the list described their projects and included the dates projects were implemented, some of which were in the late 1990s, others during the years 2000–2003, but nothing afterwards. Additionally, the web sites of some Armenian NGOs often showed the permanent messages, "The web page cannot be found," or "Under construction."

A common thread that runs through a great many of the Armenian NGO mission statements contain the buzz words: social, youth, children, women, vulnerable group, legal, democracy, educational, human rights. Some use all of these terms, and many claim "development of civil society." As for the PFCS Armenian NGO web site, a USAID funded project, as are many NGOs, several e-mails sent to the two addresses listed on their web site were "undeliverable."

During a meeting of the various NGOs my husband and I attended in Gyumri in 2003, one of the participants, a local man and the owner of two NGOs (both of which are defunct now without showing any results, even during their existence), who traveled around the world with donated funds to attend various conferences, stated that during his most recent trip overseas to attend a conference in a Southeast Asian country, he was greatly impressed with the words spoken by one of the speakers and, directing the quote to us, stated: "If you have come to help, we do not need your help, but if you have come to share, you are welcome."

Although, the number of owners of Armenian NGOs that somehow manage to obtain funds and grants for their various "projects" but do nothing for their society is numerous, there are those that do much for their people and country. When one looks at the web sites of those Armenian NGOs, information is provided about their past and current projects and accomplishments. A few of those NGOs are: Shen, Mission Armenia, Bridge of Hope, and Armenian Caritas (a part of Caritas International, a charitable organization), whose mission "follows the example of Christ: 'I have come not to be served but to serve.'"

A few of the many Armenian Diasporan NGOs that have and continue to do exemplary work in Armenia are: Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), Armenian Relief Society (ARS), Armenia Tree Project (ATP), and Fund For Armenian Relief (FAR). The U.S. based NGO Warm Hearth, an organization established by a (non-Armenian) former American Peace Corps volunteer, who had been stationed in Kapan, Armenia, and lived and worked in an orphanage there, is the "...first long-term group home (located on the outskirts of Yerevan) in the Republic of Armenia, opened in January of 2006 and provides long-term rehabilitative care to orphaned individuals with disabilities or mental illness who have outgrown the orphanages."

The scale and scope of work non-Armenian and Diasporan Armenian NGOs perform in Armenia cannot be compared, with the exception of a few. Perhaps in time, as the country's NGOs begin to better understand the importance of their role and work in Armenian society, and as they begin to embrace the concepts of volunteerism and service to their community and nation, while following the "Code of Standards for Armenian Non-Commercial Organizations," the wheels of progress will turn more smoothly and swiftly. □

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1. "Kobair Monastery" by Jirair Hovsepian was photographed in May 2006. Kobair Monastery, built in the latter part of the 13th century, is located near the town of Tumanyan, high above the Debed River that is in the Lori region, on the way to Vanadzor. It was an important cultural center for manuscript writing. The frescoes are on the Southwestern wall of the main church that are clear and distinctive examples of Armenia's mastery of medieval art. It was photographed to show its beauty and how they have amazingly survived time under severe climatic conditions and the urgent need to save this irreplaceable treasure.
2. "Loving Couple" by Karen Harutyunyan. The photograph was taken in April 2008 in the Surenavan village of Ararat Valley.
3. "Debed River Bridge" by Ara Meshkanbarian
4. "The Rock" by Khachatur Agazarian was photographed in Garni.
5. "Sevan Umbrella" by Matthew Karanian was photographed in 2005. An old umbrella marks the diminish-



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ing beach along Lake Sevan. The lake's water level has been rising over the past several years, allowing the water to encroach on many developed beach properties.

6. "You Must See" by Vahan Abrahamyan was photographed in Gegharquniq.
7. "Alpine Wildflowers" by Vahé Peroomian was photographed in May 2006 in the Selim Highlands
8. "The Nature Loves You So Much!" by Anush Seyranyan was photographed from the plateau next to Tatev Monastery in August 2007.



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## ALMA: an Armenian Home for Armenian Treasures

The Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA) in Watertown, Mass. has become an important cornerstone for preserving Armenian culture since its inception 37 years ago. ALMA is a vibrant cultural institution where people of all ethnic backgrounds can see how the story of the Armenian people plays a vital role within the rich cultural symphony that is America.

The Library now holds over 27,000 titles, including rare books, historical and literary publications. The Museum has amassed over 20,000 artifacts. An expansive treasure trove of inscribed Armenian rugs and textiles, ceramics, metalware, Urartian objects, medieval illuminations, ancient and medieval Armenian coins, and various other creations by the Armenian people are among the incredible items in ALMA's collections.

In addition to cultural exhibits, ALMA hosts contemporary art exhibits in support of the visual arts and artists of Armenian descent. In spring 2008, ALMA approached Armenia Tree Project (ATP) with a proposal to organize a photography exhibit featuring Armenia's natural landscape. By partnering with ATP, ALMA aimed to attract larger audiences to images of Armenia's natural treasures rarely seen by most Diasporans and to encourage respect and concern for the fate of Armenia's environment.

The joint exhibit, titled "A Photographic Journey of Armenia's Natural Treasures," attracted an overwhelming interest by both photographers, during the submission phase, and by audiences during the month-long display period. Overall, 42 photographers from six different countries submitted over 600 entries to the exhibit. Honorary juror Judy Goldman, owner of the Judy Ann Goldman Fine Art Gallery in Boston, helped ALMA and ATP jurors narrow down the entries to 93 photographs. The jury carefully selected images that differed from the usual images of popular tourist destinations in Armenia. The approved entries

ranged from majestic landscape and stunning nature shots to ones that illustrate Armenia's biodiversity and environmental challenges.

This unique exhibition (photos from which are featured on these pages) not only gave emerging and established photographers a stage to display their work, it also took visitors on a photographic survey educating them about Armenia's ecological heritage and evolving environmental issues. Some of the photographs are still available for sale on ALMA's website as part of ALMA's "Gift of Art" holiday art sale.

This exhibition is one of ALMA's several projects aimed at raising awareness about Armenia and Armenian heritage. ALMA's exhibit "Who Are the Armenians?" is a comprehensive exhibit that covers three thousand years of Armenian heritage and briefly touches on present day Armenia. ALMA's traveling exhibit, "Légion Arménienne: The Armenian Legion and Its Heroism in the Middle," was created in an effort to make the public aware of this little-known episode in Middle Eastern history. It was recently completed and will be on the road starting in spring 2009.

For more information about ALMA's exhibits and programs, visit [www.almainc.org](http://www.almainc.org) or call (617) 926-ALMA.

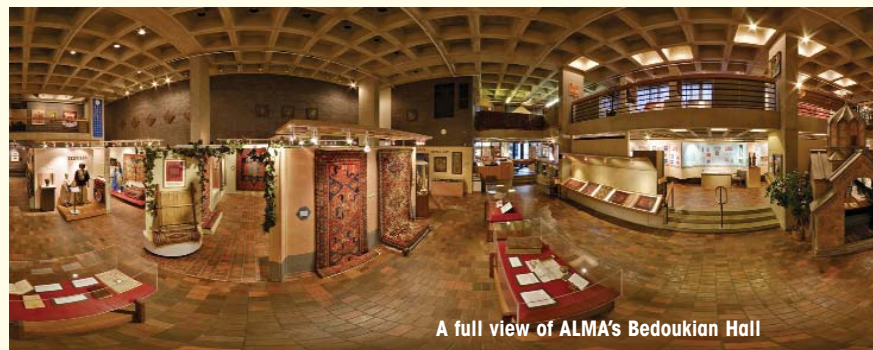




PHOTO: HAWK KHACHERIAN

# Towards a NEW ETHIC

## Sustainable Development and Armenia's Environment

By Jason Sohigian

“The moral argument is that we have a duty to preserve irreplaceable gifts of creation, whereas we have no comparable duty toward transient commercial goods. The economic argument is that any society that depletes its natural capital is bound to become impoverished over time.”

—PETER BARNES (*CAPITALISM 3.0*)

The journalist and entrepreneur Peter Barnes rightfully notes that each generation has a contract with the next to pass on the gifts it has jointly inherited, and that these gifts fall into three categories: nature, community, and culture. He points out that the United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005 warns of

unsustainable use of the ecosystems that support life on earth, which will increase the likelihood that abrupt changes such as floods, drought, heat waves, fishery collapse, and new diseases will seriously affect human well-being.

In *Capitalism 3.0: A Guide to Reclaiming the Commons*, Mr. Barnes concludes that trustees of common property should be

legally accountable to future generations, and when faced with a conflict between short-term gain and long-term preservation, they should be required to choose the latter.

### THE CURRENT SITUATION

Reports in recent years by the Association of Investigative Journalists and others about destructive mining and logging operations in Armenia raise serious concerns about these industries and practices since they pose a threat to the environment and affect the well-being of the most vulnerable segments of the population. It is especially problematic when these commercial projects lead to deforestation or other negative impacts on water supplies and wildlife habitats—or have an effect on public health.

Conservationists have organized public hearings and participated in site visits with some of the companies operating in Armenia to urge them to prepare environmental impact statements in accordance with Armenian law and present them in an honest and sincere manner to the government and especially the communities where they are planning to invest.

It must then be expected that the government and other stakeholders consider the long-term environmental costs of resource use and deforestation, which will eventually have to be paid by the government and future generations of Armenians. The remediation costs and financial losses caused by environmental degradation must be factored into any assessment, and any licenses or fees must take into account the economic value of the “environmental services” provided by natural resources such as forests and watersheds.

### THE VALUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

To put the value of forests in perspective, a new study commissioned by the European Union and headed by Pavan Sukhdev of Deutsche Bank has documented that the economy is losing more money worldwide from the disappearance of forests than from the current banking crisis. “Whereas Wall Street by various calculations has to date lost \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion within the financial sector, the reality is that we are losing natural capital at a rate of between \$2 trillion to \$5 trillion every year,” Mr. Sukhdev told the BBC on the sidelines of the IUCN World Conservation Congress in October.

The figure comes from adding the value of the various services performed by the world’s forests, such as groundwater recharge and carbon sequestration. The report, “The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity,” highlights that the costs of deforestation fall disproportionately on the poor since a greater part of their livelihood depends directly on forests, and this reality is observed in rural Armenia and other developing nations.

### WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

In 1987, the United Nations expressed concern about the accelerating deterioration of the human environment and natural

resources and the consequences of that deterioration for economic and social development. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development—also known as the Brundtland Commission—stated that sustainable development, which implies “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” should become a central guiding principle.

Practitioners in the field of sustainable development have pointed to three integral components: an economic approach that maximizes income while maintaining constant or increasing stock of capital, an ecological approach that maintains the resilience and robustness of biological and physical systems, and a socio-cultural approach that maintains the stability of social and cultural systems (Peter P. Rogers et al, *An Introduction to Sustainable Development*, 2007).

### LAND DEGRADATION IN ARMENIA

Armenia has 1.2 million acres (486,000 hectares) of available arable land, or about 16 percent of the country’s total area, according to data cited by the Library of Congress. With an estimated population of three million, this amounts to a critically low figure of 0.4 acres per capita (0.16 hectares per capita) of arable land. For a landlocked nation such as Armenia, a shortage of farmland can threaten livelihoods and survival itself as competition can intensify for limited resources.

This strategic land resource can be protected by forests and their natural ability to recharge groundwater supplies and protect topsoil from desertification, flooding, and erosion. Desertification is of great concern since it includes all the processes that degrade productive land, writes James Gustave Speth in *The Bridge at the End of the World*.

Speth is dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and he points out that among the many consequences of desertification are large losses in food production, greater vulnerability to drought and famine, loss of biodiversity, the creation of ecological refugees, and social unrest.

Yet Armenia’s forest cover is currently only 8 percent of the country’s total area, down from 18 percent in the 18th century, according to a 2005 study published in “International Forestry Review” by Rafael Moreno-Sanchez from the University of Colorado and Hovik Sayadyan of Armenia’s Agricultural Academy.

### INVESTING IN ARMENIA’S FUTURE

To counter this trend, diasporan Armenians have invested development funds in the Getik River Valley and other regions of the country where the population lives on the fringes of society and have few opportunities to work in fields that improve the lives of their communities and the nation as a whole. These programs are implemented with the understanding that “sustainability” has an economic, an environmental, and a social component.

# Those who claim we can't afford to make environmental issues a high priority in the country's strategic development agenda are sacrificing the well-being of present and future generations of Armenians.

Planting programs initiated by Armenia Tree Project (ATP), for example, have provided jobs that have a measurable positive impact on Armenia's future. The organization's backyard nursery micro-enterprise program employs hundreds of rural families annually, who have cultivated hundreds of thousands of seedlings for planting in the degraded hillsides around their villages.

These new forests are adding value to the economy and to the local ecosystem, since the trees will offset the impacts of landslides, drought, and erosion that were having a detrimental on life in these villages. They are also enhancing wildlife habitats that will protect Armenia's unique biodiversity.

## INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

In May 2008, ATP's backyard nursery micro-enterprise program was selected as the National Winner for Armenia of the Energy Globe Award for Sustainability at the European Parliament in Brussels. An international jury selected ATP along with innovative programs from over 100 countries, from alternative energy projects in Bangladesh, Georgia, and Kenya to forestry projects in Argentina and Honduras.

ATP is planning to expand these programs with the support of others in the private and public sector in an endeavor to create a sustainable society and a sustainable economy in Armenia. To cite another example, the United Nations Global Compact has been operating in Armenia since 2006, and it has already enlisted more than 30 business and organizations committed to aligning their operations and strategies with universally accepted principles in the areas of environmental protection and other social issues.

Companies doing business in Armenia such as HSBC Bank, Synopsys, and Viva Cell have been acknowledged recently for their investment in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs that have positive environmental and social impacts. In fact, all three have partnered with ATP to support the urban tree-planting program as part of their CSR initiatives.

## TOWARD A NEW ETHIC?

We can only hope the people of Armenia and the Diaspora will continue to support these principles and defend what remains of our historic lands from any further exploitation. It may require a shift in our consciousness, toward a new ethic about sustainable

development, but we are at a critical crossroad and the situation has an urgency that cannot be avoided.

There are always institutions and individuals who try to portray development as an issue of "the economy versus the environment," but in Armenia's case this view cannot sustain the country into the future. Those who claim we can't afford to make environmental issues a high priority in the country's strategic development agenda are sacrificing the well-being of present and future generations of Armenians.

## WHY DOES IT ALL MATTER?

To conclude, the following are some of the key issues identified relative to sustainable development, Armenia's environment, and the very future of the nation itself. First, the preservation of what little remains of our existing lands must be a major priority. The protection of agricultural lands from loss of topsoil caused by deforestation and erosion must be prevented. The preservation of land quality for subsistence farming must be ensured, especially given Armenia's geographic isolation.

Desertification must be avoided because it is irreversible and fatal. This was documented by Pulitzer Prize winning writer Jared Diamond in his landmark book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, where he described several ancient civilizations that exploited their land beyond its carrying capacity. In most cases the demise of these civilizations began when people decimated their own forests. "Deforestation was a or the major factor in all the collapses of past societies described in this book," warns Diamond.

Finally, positive and proactive strategic decisions and actions taken today can prevent potential resource wars both within Armenia and with Armenia's neighbors. These are just some of the reasons why we must take extra care to ensure that "sustainable development" is not only about the economy, but it also includes protection of the environment for future generations of Armenians.

In short, we need to find a more sustainable path to development and it must be an intentional and fully integrated part of all of our organizational and political strategies. In order to optimize the contribution of a program to Armenia's long-term development, it will need to have a positive impact on the three interrelated components—economic, environmental, and socio-cultural—that contribute to the new triple-bottom line. □

# The AUGUST WAR and Domestic Political Realignment in Georgia

By Asbed Kotchikian

**I**n August 2008, while the world's attention was focused on the opening ceremonies of the Olympics in Beijing, the South Caucasus witnessed a bloody thaw when Georgian troops engaged South Ossetian militias, eventually absorbing Russia into the conflict.

While South Ossetia had constantly witnessed skirmishes in the previous months and years, the confrontation of August 2008 went beyond the parameters of a simple engagement and was escalated to an all out war and invasion of Georgia proper by Russian troops.

The August war between Georgia and Russia has been exhaustively analyzed from a geopolitical perspective. However, little attention has been given to Georgia's domestic political dynamics, which led to the conflict and the political realignment that Tbilisi witnessed in the aftermath of the war.

Immediately after the Rose Revolution of 2003, the new leadership in Georgia managed to reclaim control of Ajaria, which was under the fiefdom of Aslan Abashidze since 1991 and managed to keep a large amount of autonomy from Tbilisi. The new Georgian

leadership gained control of Ajaria riding on the high tide of nationalist popularity that the new leadership (represented by President Mikhail Saakashvili, the late PM Zurab Zhvania and the then speaker of the parliament Nino Burjanadze) enjoyed.

However, since the death of Zhvania in 2005, a discord started

developing in the leadership of the Rose Revolution. By mid-2006, Saakashvili's approval rating was down to about 35 percent (compared to 96 percent in 2004) and there were many political parties which were challenging him, especially on his foreign policy. By November 2007, Tbilisi witnessed mass demonstrations demanding Saakashvili's resignation, to which the government responded by declaring a state of emergency and calling for early presidential elections which Saakashvili won with about 54 percent of the votes. Soon after, in May 2008, Nino Burjanadze declared that she would resign from her position as Speaker of the House and, after the August war in South Ossetia, she announced the formation of an opposition party called Democratic Movement-United Georgia.

**It is quite conceivable** that Saakashvili, because of his declining popularity, aimed at scoring points on the foreign policy front by trying to regain his credentials as a nationalist and populist leader.

Assessing the internal political dynamics in Georgia could lead to several conclusions about the outbreak of the August war. First, it is quite conceivable that Saakashvili, because of his declining popularity, aimed at scoring points on the foreign policy front by trying to regain his credentials as a nationalist and populist leader. Even when the war escalated to a level that Tbilisi was not expecting, domestic political discord was put on the back burner and political parties and leaders rallied behind Saakashvili. Finally, a parallel could also be drawn to 2004 when, immediately after his election as president, Saakashvili utilized his electoral mandate to bring Ajaria back into Tbilisi's fold. By the same token, Saakashvili might have attempted to use the 2008 presidential elections to do the same with South Ossetia.

Saakashvili's tenure as Georgia's leader has striking similarities with the tenure of Georgia's first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991–92). Thus, both presidents were elected with a large national and popular mandate with Gamsakhurdia receiving about 87 percent of the votes in 1991 and Saakashvili receiving 96 percent in 2004. Both presidents came to office with a wide circle of advisors and associates and both managed to eventually alienate them. In the case of Gamsakhurdia, the alienation process eventually led to self-isolation and a civil war—along with the start of the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia—and in the case of Saakashvili, the potential isolation might have led him to start a war in South Ossetia with dire consequences. Both presidents utilized nationalism to rally support for their policies and both antagonized Russia with their policies. Perhaps it was not a coincidence that in March 2007, the remains of Gamsakhurdia were brought back from its burial place and reinterred at the Mtatsminda Pantheon of distinguished Georgian public figures in Tbilisi with state ceremonies.

The similarities between 1991 and 2008 seem to unravel even more with the increases isolation and criticism of Saakashvili by his former associates. Thus, Burjanadze and former Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli—who is setting up his own political party—are both adamant and insisting that new presidential and parliamentary elections be held by mid-2009. Burjanadze even went further and criticized Saakashvili by citing the costs of the August war, which according to her include: the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia, NATO membership being deferred because of the war and the shying away of foreign investments.

Despite the changing nature of Georgian domestic politics, Saakashvili—while still remaining less popular than before—is safe from his political opposition, since the latter does not have a united front, nor do the various factions of the opposition agree on the path to follow in the event that new presidential and parliamentary elections are held. This could provide only a temporary relief for Saakashvili, who needs to build his political credentials after the disastrous August war and focus on reconstruction of Northern Georgia and the improvement of the socio-economic situation of the country.

The main challenge for Georgia is not improving relations with Russia, nor integration into NATO. The challenge is to find peaceful means for political transition in the country. □



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# A 50-year Love Affair with The Armenian Weekly

By Tom Vartabedian

**T**RUTH BE TOLD, I never wanted to become a writer. In high school, I gravitated toward chemistry. I relished my lab time, until one day when the wrong chemicals infiltrated my test tube and an explosion followed.

My teacher commiserated with me. “Perhaps you should find another area of interest,” he suggested.

Hey, I wasn’t half bad at accounting, either, until the more advanced stuff boggled my mind and sent me into a delirium. So much for the world of debits and credits.

A family friend suggested I take a battery of tests to find out what I would be best suited to pursue. After an hour of punching holes in a multiple-choice survey, I got my answer. The counselor sat me down and gave it to me straight.

“We checked your results and you’d be pleased to know that all signs point to a particular destination,” he said. “You’re best suited to become an undertaker.”

I was ready to be embalmed. My parents operated a “mom and pop” luncheonette in Somerville for 30 years and were willing to hand me over the venture.

“You’ll never starve to death in this business,” they agreed. “People gotta eat. Give them a good sandwich and a home-cooked stew and they’ll keep coming back.”

I couldn’t see spending the rest of my life behind a counter with a white apron and flipping burgers. As genocide survivors with an

After 50 years, my life as a journalist isn’t ending. In fact, it’s just beginning and to each of you who’ve made that milestone possible, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.



old-school mentality, they worked hard to eke out a living and put my brother and me through school. No way would I become enslaved by my profession.

But I did anyway. I became a journalist after all else failed and spent 40 hard but enjoyable years cranking out stories and taking photos for one publication—The Haverhill Gazette.

My 50 years as a correspondent with The Hairenik Weekly and later The Armenian Weekly was strictly passion, the way it should be with ethnic publications. The fact the Armenian Weekly has survived 75 years is somewhat of a minor miracle these days when you consider the tenuous newspaper syndrome and the advancing world of computers.

I started writing for the publication back in high school when I joined the Somerville “Nejdeh” AYF. The chapter needed a scribe. I would report on every little iota of activity, be it basketball games or chapter socials. Conceited as it may sound, I began hearing my own voice in the paper and took great respect over a by-line.

My name on a story became my most sacred possession and I took great pride in this arena of creativity. The Weekly became my panacea, much the same way it did for William Saroyan and other prominent journalists and writers like Mitch Kehtian.

My editors at the time were Jimmy Tashjian and Jimmy Mandalian, two peas in the same pod when it came to nurturing young writers, giving them credibility and boosting their morale with confidence.

**M**ore than anything, I enjoyed climbing those creaky stairs of the old Hairenik Building at 212 Stuart Street in Boston with story in hand. No matter how busy the two Jimmys were in putting out their papers and writing their books, they always found time for this cub reporter.

Their wisdom became contagious. The more they talked, the better I listened. Their advice was well taken.

“If you don’t have something good to write, son, don’t write anything at all,” they would say. “This is a people business and human interest is our cover. Nobody remembers what you wrote yesterday. Make your next story the best.”

I remember one Saturday climbing those stairs to Tashjian’s office and finding another person sitting behind the desk. It was none other than Saroyan himself and he was pantless. He appeared startled by the intrusion.

I introduced myself, awkward as the situation appeared. The greatest Armenian writer in history was in his underwear, trying to hide his embarrassment. A simple explanation followed.

Seems he was in Boston to give a speech at some writer’s convention and the zipper in his fly got stuck. So he went to see his good friend Tashjian and ask about a tailor. No problem.

Saroyan removed his pants and was waiting for “a quick fix.” Jimmy’s office was certainly remote and this being Saturday, visitors weren’t expected, until I ambled along.

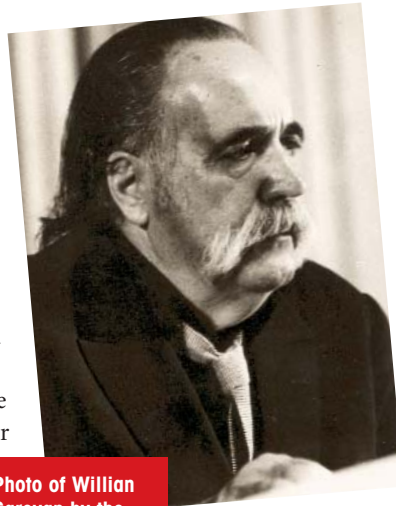


Photo of William Saroyan by the author

Armenian education with the Mekhitarist Fathers in Vienna, Austria.

It marked the first time any American student spent a year at this monastery with some of the greatest scholars in our society. The opportunity was one in a lifetime and the Hairenik editors knew it.

“How would you like to run a series of articles on your experiences?” Tashjian brought out.

The offer was well taken and in the weeks and months that followed, columns on these erudite Catholic Fathers found their way to publication in the Hairenik for all to read. I was informing the outside world of a relatively clandestine society.

Here I was 19, away from home for the first time, brushing up on my Armenian skills and writing a series for others to read. The world became my oyster.

After leaving the monastery, I applied for a newspaper job and listed the Hairenik as a reference for all the good it might do. The experience factor paid off and I landed the Gazette job for what seemed like an eternity.

#### THE POOR TOM’S ALMANAC

**T**he Poor Tom’s Almanac column was launched in 1970 and approaching its fourth decade. It’s been a similar tenure with the AYF Olympics issue dating back to 1968 when I offered my help to Tashjian. We were partners. He did the track and swimming while I handled the golf and tennis. We had the issue out that week.

After his retirement, I carried the tradition forth in his name.

Of all the teachers I’ve had in journalism school, no one compared to my Weekly editors. This was an education in progress, practical yet unique. And when they died, each of them—Tashjian and Mandalian—left an insurmountable void that was never filled.

I also recall once in the early 1980s when the Hairenik was going through a transition phase and an editor was needed. Much as I was gainfully employed and had a family role to play, I couldn’t let the paper down. I agreed to serve in the interim.

A week led to two and finally a year as the copy would be dropped off at my home in Haverhill and the paper composed nights and weekends. It was labor intensified but I benefited greatly from it, seeing the product go from its seedling stages each week to fruition. After all these years, the novelty still hasn’t worn off.

After retiring from The Gazette two years ago, I finally left journalism, some 20,000 stories and 2,000 columns to the good.

But journalism didn’t leave me. In fact, it’s grown more productive, given the dire role of ethnic publications in the Diaspora.

**I remember one Saturday climbing those stairs to Tashjian’s office and finding another person sitting behind the desk. It was none other than Saroyan himself and he was pantless.**

“You’ve always inspired me, Mr. Saroyan,” I told him. “I read many of your books. You write with some authority.”

It was then that he gave me a piece of advice which stuck.

“Write like you talk and keep it simple,” he suggested. “Make it sound like a conversation.”

Later when Tashjian arrived, the pants were returned, Saroyan was on his way, and we had a hearty laugh over the escapade. It’s stories like these, which are priceless and motivational.

A year or two later, I took a sabbatical from my studies at Boston University and accepted an invitation to pursue an

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No paper can succeed without its correspondents or its subscribers. No journal can survive without a continuity of good personnel and production people. At a time when newspapers are vulnerable, the availability of dedicated writers and subscribers becomes all the more imperative.

In my superficial retirement, I look at the industry with rose-colored glasses. The more I persist, the more I see stories unfold.

I see an Armenian Genocide survivor winning a gold medal in the senior Olympics, despite being well into his 90s. I see one family's 50th wedding anniversary being celebrated before the twin peaks of Mount Ararat with 19 members in tow.

This morning's Boston paper had a small story about some fellow from Nantucket (Mass.) named Eric Takakjian who happens to be a deep-sea diver and had uncovered a British steamship that had sunk 120 years ago. Who is this guy? The fact he's Armenian and of human interest makes him a worthy subject in our ethnic press.

Every day, I run across stories about unsung Armenian heroes in the outside media and I think about how they should be expounded and shared with those in The Armenian Weekly.

I encounter mountain climbers who've scaled the greatest peaks, athletes however prominent or obscure, people with dis-

More often than not, the best stories are found in our own back yards, not necessarily the outside. Every community is an abundant resource and every newspaper is a window to the universe.

abilities who are shining examples of inspiration, AYFers who are born leaders and musicians looking to be discovered.

More often than not, the best stories are found in our own back yards, not necessarily the outside. Every community is an abundant resource and every newspaper is a window to the universe.

I say to myself that anyone with an "ian" after their name has a story worth telling and that The Armenian Weekly is beckoning.

After 50 years, my life as a journalist isn't ending. In fact, it's just beginning and to each of you who've made that milestone possible, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. □

**Happy holidays to all!**

*And best wishes for the New Year!*



From the AYF-YOARF Central Executive of the Eastern Region



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# An Alchemist's Pilgrimage

Best-Selling Author Paulo Coelho's Journey  
Among the Armenians



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By Khatchig Mouradian

“This book, telling the story of a shepherd boy named Santiago, is about following your dreams,” said my Chinese friend. “Its message is powerful and simple: If you really believe in something, the whole universe conspires with you to achieve it. Take it to Beirut with you and read it,” she continued.

Thousands of miles away from home, I was being offered a book I had on my own bookshelf, but had never read. Thus, on September 10, 2000, in Shenyang, China, my story with *The Alchemist* had begun.

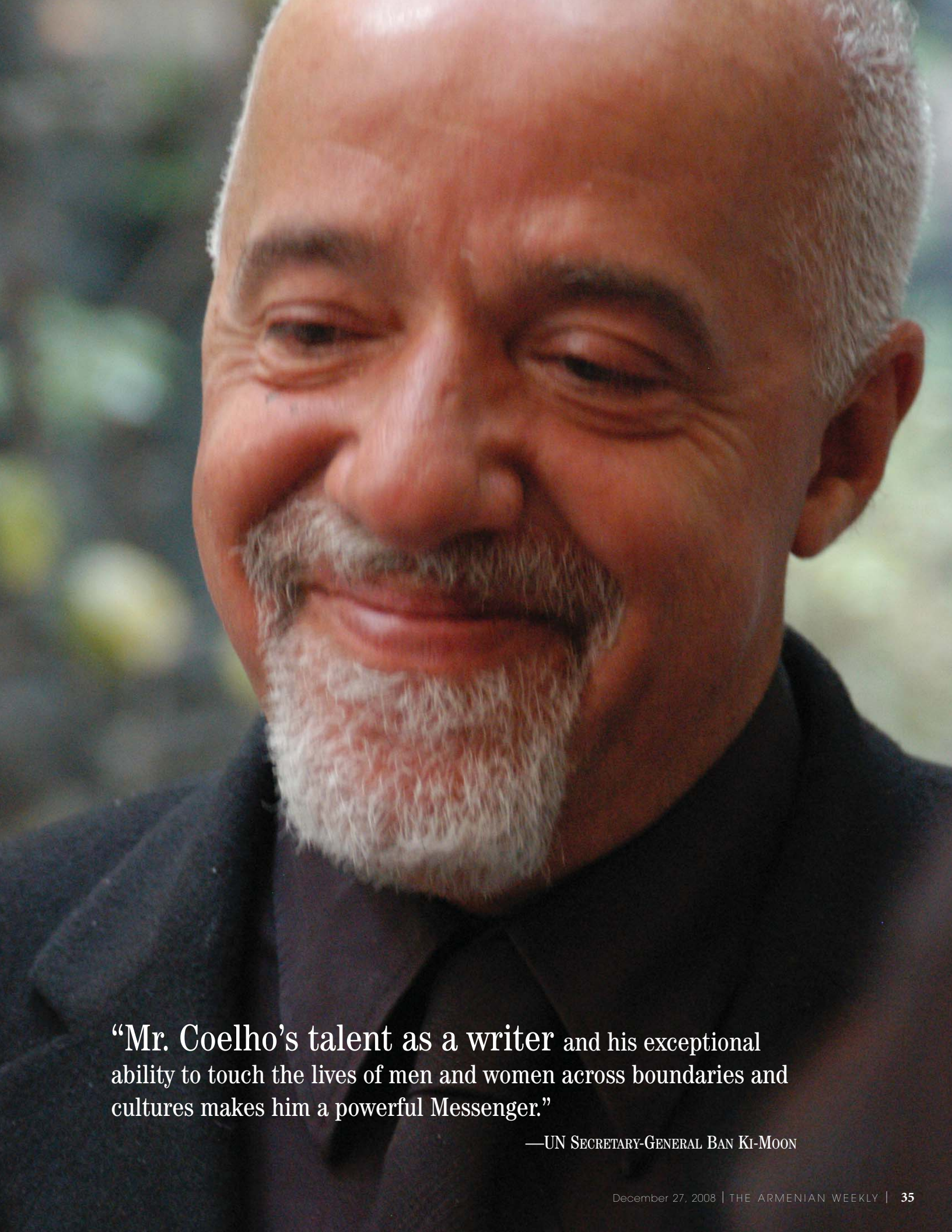
As I was reading the book on the plane on my way back, I felt I could easily relate to the message of the novel: We had to go to far away lands, sometimes, to find treasures hidden in our backyard.

“I will translate this book to Armenian one day,” I thought, as the captain was announcing our arrival at the Beirut International Airport.

In October 2003, I started interviewing writers, artists and academics from around the world for the Lebanese-Armenian daily newspaper *Aztag*. “My first interviewee ought to be the author of *The Alchemist*,” I thought.

I emailed the author’s literary agency requesting an interview and, much to my surprise, I received a positive response. One of the top best-selling authors of the world had agreed to share his thoughts with a small community newspaper in Beirut.

The last question I asked Paulo Coelho was whether there were plans to translate his book, *The Alchemist*, to Armenian. Back then, the book was already translated into 54 languages. I felt it was time Armenians read the book in their mother tongue. He expressed hope that a publishing house would be interested in such an endeavor.



“Mr. Coelho’s talent as a writer and his exceptional ability to touch the lives of men and women across boundaries and cultures makes him a powerful Messenger.”

—UN SECRETARY-GENERAL BAN KI-MOON

On Oct. 30, the interview appeared in Aztag. A few days later, I received a phone call from the Hamazkayin publishing house in Beirut. “We would love to have *The Alchemist* translated to Armenian. Would you be interested in translating it?” asked the voice on the other side of the phone.

I remembered my Chinese friend, Paulo Coelho’s quote about wanting something, and the wish I had expressed on my flight to Beirut. When we obtained the rights from Coelho’s literary agency, the shepherd boy Santiago in me was thrilled.

A year later, I was holding the first copy of my translation of *The Alchemist*. I flipped to page five where the “Translator’s Foreword” appeared, titled “the 55th [translation].” There, I had told my story with the book, without knowing it was not yet over. In a few hours, I had a plane to catch to Yerevan, where I would be joined by Paulo Coelho himself for a series of book events.

A large crowd of journalist, photographers and cameramen had gathered right outside the VIP Lounge at the Zvartnots Airport in Yerevan. “Where is Khatchig?” asked the man in dark clothes coming out of the VIP room. As I approached and we embraced, he made his first statement to the media: “He is too young to be a translator.”

“The Pilgrim has arrived to the land of Pilgrimages: to yerkir Hayastan,” wrote the daily Hayastani Hanrapetutyun a few days later.

As Armenia was bracing for the greatest literary events in its history, Coelho was busy discovering a country he had heard so much about. He had an Armenian driver, he went to Armenian restaurants in Paris, and had met many Armenians in the Diaspora and heard so much about their heritage and their country, and now, he was on a pilgrimage to discover both, first-hand.

We strolled in the streets of Yerevan that night. The following day, when he was asked about his impressions of the city, he said that the buildings and streets are almost the same everywhere around the world. “It is the people that make the difference, and my best impression was the people,” he added.



Weeks before his arrival, as we were preparing the program of his week-long visit, Coelho’s literary agency stressed that the author wanted to spend time with the people, with his readers, and that official meetings had to be minimal. We ended up including lunch with the president of Armenia Robert Kocharian at the Parajanov Museum, a visit to the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II at Etchmiadzin, and a meeting with the Minister of Culture Hovig Hoveyan in the program.

On Oct. 6, 2004, the book-launching event dedicated to the translation into Armenian of *The Alchemist* took place at the Writers’ Union Great Hall. Organized by Hamazkayin and the Writers’ Union of Armenia, the event was a huge success. The hall

## “The Pilgrim has arrived to the land of Pilgrimages: to yerkir Hayastan”

The Daily Hayastani Hanrapetudyun



was packed with people hours before the event, and hundreds of latecomers waited outside, pushing at the gates that were closed because the hall couldn’t handle any more people.

In my introductory speech, I told my story with *The Alchemist*, beginning, as always, in China. I said, “Just like Paulo, I, too, believe that we have to go to far away lands, sometimes, to find treasures hidden in our backyard. And for us, Diaspora Armenians, whose grandparents had to walk through deserts in much harsher conditions than Santiago did in his quest, the real treasures are hidden here, in Armenia, whether we realize it or not.”

In his speech, Coelho, whom Publishing Trends had declared the number one best-selling author a year before, also alluded to the Armenian Diaspora. He said he believed that one day, Diaspora Armenians would return, like rain, to the land of their ancestors, bringing with them all that they have learned and accomplished.

“At the Writers’ Union Hall there was no room to cast a needle,” wrote the weekly Yerkir in its



Paulo Coelho in Etchmiadzin and Oshagan during his visit to Armenia in October, 2004

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Paulo Coelho planting a tree at the memorial garden in Dzidzernagapert

coverage of the event. “We cannot recall any other time when that hall was packed like that.” In its history, the Writers’ Union had witnessed such an event only once, and that was during the visit of William Saroyan to Yerevan, wrote Grakan Tert.

Coelho’s second meeting with Armenian readers came two days later at Yerevan State University. Some 900 people packed the hall, with many sitting on the floor or leaning against the walls. Coelho said he did not want to give a speech and, instead, invited 10 students to the podium and gave them each a chance to ask a question.

I was translating Paulo’s answers to Armenian. At one point, replying to a question on his most recent novel *Eleven Minutes*, Paulo started talking about sex. While I was having difficulty translating words like “masturbation,” “orgasm,” “penis,” and “vagina,” and blushing every now and then, the audience was having a blast. Rarely, if ever, had a speaker talked so openly about sex on that podium.

Asked whether at some point he would write a novel on Armenia, Coelho said he never plans in advance what to write about. He compared himself to a sailor who sets out without having a specific destination. “I do not know if I will write a novel about Armenia,” he said. “But Armenia wrote a novel in my heart.”

“I do not know if I will write a novel about Armenia, but Armenia wrote a novel in my heart.”

A day later, the daily *Azg* wrote: “From the meetings of Paulo Coelho with the public in Yerevan, it became clear that it is not true to say the Armenian reader has become indifferent to literature.”

In the following days, Coelho lay wreaths at the Armenian Genocide memorial, visited the Genocide Museum, and planted a tree at the memorial garden in Dzidzernagapert. He also went to Oshagan on Holy Translators’ Day, and lay a flower on the tomb of Mesrob Mashdots, the creator of the Armenian alphabet.

He was particularly impressed by the fact that the Armenians sanctified their translators, who enlightened their people after the alphabet was discovered. He said he had toured the world and had never encountered such a practice. Coelho later wrote an article, syndicated in newspapers around the world, on his visit to Armenia and specifically his impressions from the Holy Translators’ Day. The article later appeared in one of Coelho’s books, *Like the Flowing River*. Recounting his experiences on Oshagan, Coelho wrote:

Today is 9 October, 2004. The town is called Oshakan, and Armenia, as far as I know, is the only place in the world that has declared the day of the Holy Translator, St. Mesrob, a

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Coelho dedicates a copy of the Armenian translation of *The Alchemist* to the Armenian President and First Lady.

“Tell the world we love life, and we will prevail in the face of economic and political difficulties.”

national holiday and where they celebrate it in style. As well as creating the Armenian alphabet (the language already existed, but only in spoken form). St Mesrob devoted his life to translating into his mother tongue the most important texts of the period, which were written in Greek, Persian or Cyrillic. He and his disciples devoted themselves to the enormous task of translating the Bible and the main literary classics of the time. From that moment on, the country’s culture gained its own identity, which it has maintained to this day.

The Holy Translator. I hold the flower in my hands and think of all the people I have never met, and perhaps may never have the opportunity to meet, but who, at this moment, have my books in their hands, and are doing their best to remain faithful to what I have tried to share with my readers. I think, above all, of my father-in-law, Christiano Monteiro Oiticica (profession: translator), who is today in the company of angels and of St. Mesrob, watching this scene. I remember seeing him hunched over his old typewriter, often complaining about how badly paid translation was (and, alas, still is). He would immediately go on, though, to explain that the real reason he translated was because he wanted to share a knowledge, which, but for translators, would never reach his own people.

I say a silent prayer for him, for all those who have helped me with my books, and for those who have allowed me to read books to

which I would never otherwise have had access, thus helping—anonously—to shape my life and my character. When I leave the church, I see some children writing the alphabet with sweets in the shape of letters and with flowers and more flowers.

When man grew ambitious, God destroyed the Tower of Babel, and everyone began to speak different tongues. However, in His infinite grace, he also created people to rebuild those bridges, to enable dialogue and the diffusion of human thought. This person, whose name we rarely take the trouble to notice when we open a foreign book, is the translator.

It was impossible to walk even a few steps on the streets in Yerevan without encountering an admirer of Coelho’s work asking for an autograph. He patiently autographed books for everyone. The utmost respect and love he showed to each and every reader was heartwarming indeed.

Once, when we were visiting the Vernissage, the open-air art market in Yerevan, a painter in his 70s approached and hugged the author, giving him a painting as a gift. “Tell the world we love life, and we will prevail in the face of economic and political difficulties,” said the painter. His words, full of determination, reminded me of Paulo’s literary style: simple, but powerful, inspiring and heartwarming.

Before we knew it, we were at the Zvartnots Airport again. “Partir, c’est mourir un peu” (Leaving is a bit like dying), say the French. “*Heratsman mech el ga mi veratarts*” (There is a return in every departure), says an Armenian song. I believe in the latter.

Today, Paulo Coelho’s novels have sold 100 million copies in 67 languages in 150 countries. Earlier this year, I conducted a second interview with Coelho, which was published in the March 25 issue of *Jewcy Magazine*. I asked about his literary success. He said, “I can’t explain why people feel the way they do after reading my books. It’s personal to them. What I can say is that all my characters are mirrors of my own soul. I’m constantly trying to understand my place in the world and I have found that literature is the best way to see myself.”

*A shorter version of this article appeared in the Oct. 28, 2006 issue of the Armenian Weekly.*

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# Armenian Genocide Survivor as Olympic Gold Medalist

By Tom Vartabedian

*In 1915, Joseph Manjikian faced the ultimate challenge—to survive brutality from the Ottoman Turk during the genocide.*

Today, at a spry age 98, the challenge is somewhat different, to remain a “poster child” for people of his generation and continue winning gold medals in the Senior Olympics.

Manjikian is a power weightlifter, a pretty good one at that. He usually wins by default when no others in his age category show up. He lifts the mandatory 45 pounds and secures the gold.

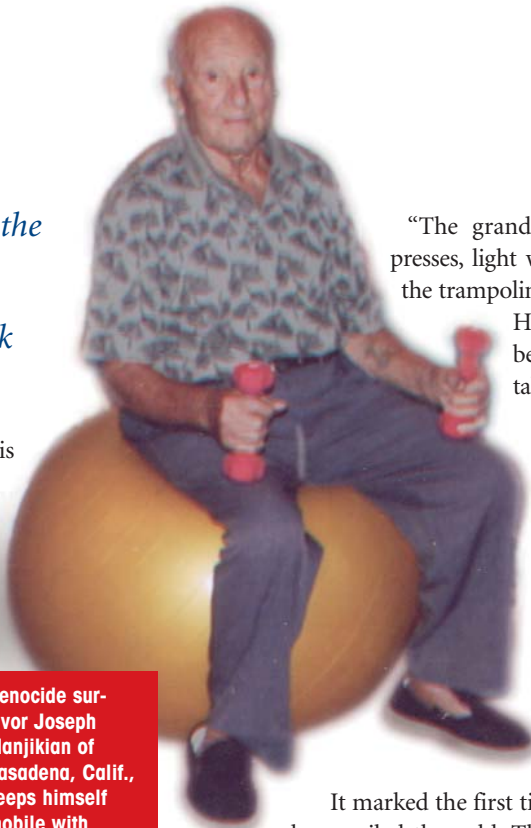
As easy as that? Not so fast.

It takes a steady ritual of exercise and self-control to maintain that level of fitness. While most in his category are relegated to nursing homes or the cemetery, Manjikian gives old age a refreshing shot of adrenaline.

His home is like a gym with weights, exercise equipment and loads of encouragement from his grandchildren and great-grandchildren who stop by. They’re not surprised by his prodigious spirit, not in the least.

As a routine, Manjikian would not only work on his yard and fruit trees, but also do the same for his son. If fatigue sets in, it’s nothing that a good game of tennis wouldn’t cure.

**Genocide survivor Joseph Manjikian of Pasadena, Calif., keeps himself mobile with regular exercise.**



“The grandkids would watch ‘bebo’ doing bench presses, light weights, pull-ups, ball exercises, yoga and the trampoline and it would inspire them,” said his son Haig, a physician and trainer. “You have to be a role model for your family and walk the talk. My father is an amazing individual.”

Together as father-son, they both came away with a gold medal in bench press. Although records may be sketchy, it might very well be the first time any son and genocide-surviving father accomplished such a feat in this country.

A copy of “Powerlifting USA” magazine, a resource for muscle-bulging lifters, shows a photo of Manjikian with his gold medal standing beside California Senior Olympics Director Dr. Harry Sneider.

It marked the first time anyone that age entered the event, let alone nailed the gold. The Senior Olympics is a rapidly growing organization with over 600,000 athletes participating throughout the United States.

Power-lifting is a very popular event in Southern California. Manjikian prides himself in being a power-lifter. He handled the bench press competition with such relative ease that even Sneider was amazed.

“If you work on tilling the soil and pruning your fruit trees, you will get the same benefit as Joe and have something back in return,” he points out. “The fitness end will be complemented by good crops and a nice garden.”

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Manjikian hails from the village of Kessab where he survived the turmoil of 1915. He lives independently, does his own shopping and house-cleaning. Come weekends, he'll stay with his son and do gardening with his great-grandchildren.

Grafting fruit trees is a workout in itself. He's an expert at that, too. Except for a slight hearing impediment, Joe is mentally and physically very sharp and alert.

"Having good genes helps but being a non-smoker and working as an auto mechanic with gardening as a hobby has been a complete lifestyle for my dad," says the son.

"His family means the world to him—and quite the reverse. We continue to work out regularly for one hour as a family."

The younger Manjikian is quick to maintain that physical activities and the right diet are conducive to a long and healthy life, even trying to keep up with your grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Joe Manjikian continues to follow that path, regardless of his age and history. He has acquired not only self-esteem but personal growth, development and efficient time management as a productive senior athlete.

A gold medal puts this genocide survivor into another special category.

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"The grandkids would watch 'bebo' doing bench presses, light weights, pull-ups, ball exercises, yoga and the trampoline and it would inspire them," said his son Haig, a physician and trainer. "You have to be a role model for your family and walk the talk. My father is an amazing individual."

Together as father-son, they both came away with a gold medal in bench press. Although records may be sketchy, it might very well be the first time any son and genocide-surviving father accomplished such a feat in this country.

A copy of "Powerlifting USA" magazine, a resource for muscle-bulging lifters, shows a photo of Manjikian with his gold medal

**It takes a steady ritual of exercise and self-control to maintain that level of fitness.**



standing beside California Senior Olympics Director Dr. Harry Sneider.

It marked the first time anyone that age entered the event, let alone nailed the gold. The Senior Olympics is a rapidly growing organization with over 600,000 athletes participating throughout the United States.

Power-lifting is a very popular event in Southern California. Manjikian prides himself in being a power-lifter. He handled the bench press competition with such relative ease that even Sneider was amazed.

"If you work on tilling the soil and pruning your fruit trees, you will get the same benefit as Joe and have something back in return," he points out. "The fitness end will be complemented by good crops and a nice garden."

Manjikian hails from the village of Kessab where he survived the turmoil of 1915. He lives independently, does his own shopping and house-cleaning. Come weekends, he'll stay with his son and do gardening with his great-grandchildren.

Grafting fruit trees is a workout in itself. He's an expert at that, too. Except for a slight hearing impediment, Joe is mentally and physically very sharp and alert.

"Having good genes helps but being a non-smoker and working as an auto mechanic with gardening as a hobby has been a complete lifestyle for my dad," says the son. "His family means the world to him—and quite the reverse. We continue to work out regularly for one hour as a family."

The younger Manjikian is quick to maintain that physical activities and the right diet are conducive to a long and healthy life, even trying to keep up with your grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Joe Manjikian continues to follow that path, regardless of his age and history. He has acquired not only self-esteem but personal growth, development and efficient time management as a productive senior athlete.

A gold medal puts this genocide survivor into another special category. □

*This page is sponsored by Dr. and Mrs. Levon and Shirley Saryan*



# CONSPIRACY

By Hacob Karapents

**I**t seemed to him, that since his arrival in Boston, someone had been following him. Right at Logan Airport, just as he had come out of the movable square-shaped tunnel into the Delta Airlines' terminal, a middle-aged man of medium height, wearing dark glasses cut in front of him, bent his shoulders politely and asked:

"Are you Minas Minasian?"

"Yes," answered Minas Minasian.

"Was the Los Angeles-Boston flight a comfortable one?"

"Yes, but why? Who are you?"

"I've been assigned to make sure that you have a pleasant stay in Boston."

At that moment, the stream of travelers started moving forward from the left and right glass-paneled enclosures. Minas Minasian bent down to push his two bags out of the way. When he raised his head, the stranger had vanished.

He was now standing in front of the squarish, four-story building on Stuart Street, and he couldn't believe his eyes. There, where the "Hairenik" publications used to be housed, stood a restaurant, a Japanese restaurant, "Santori," with heavy iron doors and hermetic curtains. Right in that corner used to be Rouben Darbinian's "cell," next to it, near the door, his own office, when he was a student and the world was an endless ladder towards unknown adventures. And the strange thing was, that this cube-shaped building had maintained its independence amidst the multi-storied towers rising impudently around it. They had cleaned up the walls, given a modern aura to the roof, stylized the windows and yet, somehow, the structure had

preserved its Armenian character. It seemed, any minute, the brown entrance door would open and the sidewalk would echo the voices of Simon Vratsian, Malkhas, Hamastegh, followed by Gourgen Mkhitarian, Merouzhn Ozanian, Vardges Aharonian and other elder and younger editors...

"Come on in," invites the gentle, modulated voice of the pale Japanese host.

"I'm here just..."

"We were expecting you." The same stiff politeness.

"I've worked here, long ago."

"We know about you. Your presence is a great honor to us."

Minas Minasian was close to feeling faint. It seemed to him that he was transported to some kind of Shintoist temple. The soft lights bathed his face. The smell of a nameless incense gave him an unusual sense of serenity. The dining hall was full of guests and yet one could hear only the subdued murmur of their conversation. The atmosphere was damp with the smell of the sea. He searched for the other smells, of ink, paper, of books and Armenian bodies, the smells of breathing and speech that had plastered the smoke-stained walls. In those days, Boston was the center of the Armenian intellect. The "Hairenik" was the shining beacon on the shore of the Atlantic. From Boston, light spread over the world. On the nearby Shawmut street was the "Baikar" editorial office, which he visited once in a while, drank a cup of coffee and rejoiced, that they were all Armenians, wrote in Armenian and kept the faith in Armenia's future unshaken.

"Are you Armenian or American?" spoke a smooth-cheeked, neatly dressed man, who seemed to be the restaurant manager.

"I'm Armenian and American," answered Minas Minasian.

"Are you able to maintain both identities?"

"Yes, one is the extension of the other."

"How so...?"

"One is the completion of the other. Together, we achieve totality."

After Los Angeles, Boston was an old revolutionary. This is where America's history and experimentation with democracy had started. In truth, this is where the concept of a United States was born. This is where the American Revolution had exploded. Nevertheless, Boston was the most European of American cities, European not only in form and structure, but more so with lifestyle and inclination. Boston is a wonderland of contradictions. It is both conservative and liberal. It is both introspective and outgoing. After Los Angeles, Boston is a self-contained fort. That doesn't mean, however, that Los Angeles lacks character. It is so vast and so venturesome that it has not yet managed to organize and acquire a particular identity. Los Angeles is the extension of the Great American Dream.

**H**e couldn't tell, was it him that had changed, or the city? Things like this happened to Minas Minasian quite often. He was happy that the city of his youth had progressed and become beautiful, but at the same time, he felt sadness at the sight of deformations affecting familiar buildings, squares and streets. For days, he'd been wandering around in vain, looking for the narrow, crowded stores and restaurants of Washington Street, where in his student days, he had worked as a cook, making coffee and hamburgers. Nothing was left of the notorious Sculley Square. It was at that exotic quarter of cabarets and nightlife that he had for the first time seen a naked woman on stage and remained shaken with excitement till daylight. Sometimes, on weekends, he and a few friends went to that former red-light district, and like famished wolves, inhaled the women. Sculley Square. The shortest route from university to life. But, how to explain this dark and complicated complex, that since childhood has nestled in my soul, destroying my life? When I have a child, I will bring him up in such a way, that he will be immune to all those social and psychological ailments that have restricted my life and happiness. Let him be free and independent. Let him be natural as nature and shame-free as God. It would have been better still, if I had given birth to myself and started all from the beginning. Maybe that way, I would have spared myself the nightmare of loneliness.

He took Arlington Street, crossed Boylston, entered the Public Garden, stood on the edge of the bridge spanning the pond and

Boston is a wonderland of contradictions. It is both conservative and liberal. It is both introspective and outgoing. After Los Angeles, Boston is a self-contained fort.

watched the shimmering water. He felt a touch on his shoulder. He turned around. It was a woman with fine features and big dark eyes. He hesitated a moment. The woman was so youthful, he felt the proximity of death the mad rush of his years towards termination.

"I knew you'd come," spoke the woman, pouring her unabashed affection on him and the city.

Minas Minasian hesitated. The woman's eyes reflected the allure of the Garden and Boston.

"I am Nadia, your neighbor and admirer, when you were a student of architecture."

What's being staged must be the theater of the absurd. He has no knowledge of such a woman, particularly when she could be his daughter. He prepared for

non-existence.

"I have waited, and still wait for you," said the woman.

"Excuse me, but you're mistaking me for someone else," said Minas Minasian, feeling the stiffening of his countenance.

"Minas," gushed the woman like a fountain, "it's me, Nadia! What's happened to you?"

"I'm meeting you for the first time!"

"But, the telegram..." bubbled the woman again.

"What telegram?"

"The telegram you sent," continued the woman.

**A**n undescrivable sadness blanketed Minas Minasian, a sadness that momentarily turned into panic. Instinctively, he touched his forehead furrowed with creases. Wasn't it better never to have been born? I am the hostage of my own life.

"You know, Minas," continued the woman, "I was hardly ten, when I wanted to conceive your baby?"

"You must be mistaking me for someone else..."

"Even now, I want to be impregnated by you," the woman went on, approaching, reaching, caressing his genitals.

Boston's soot covered brick buildings, left over from the close of the 19th century, reminded him of Dublin, the bridges over the Charles River, Amsterdam, while the array of austere buildings rising on Beacon Hill, Athens. City is constant history, he thought, and I, a mere blink in that history. His favorites were the old quarters, particularly the Irish inhabited Roxbury, Dorchester, South Boston and Charlestown areas. He loved the Irish. Like Armenians, they were emotional, fatalistic, stubborn and somberly romantic. They drank well and wrote ferocious poetry. In Boston, he felt Armenian, Irish, international. But all of that was an excuse. Minas Minasian had come to find his past, to reconstruct, to complete.

*This page is sponsored by Tom Vartabedian*

And that's why, every day he went and stood in front of the 212 Stuart Street building and waited for the arrival of the old and the new monks. It was the Diasporan Armenians' embassy in the New World. Everyone who came to America had to pass through Boston. Those people...typesetter, editor, field worker or book-keeper—the chosen few of Parnasus, toiling and sweating all day long, created Armenian newspapers and books with their life blood. In fact, they created something out of nothing. Those people...Those impractical, helpless idealists, shut away in stuffy cubicles, kept alive the faith in Armenians and Armenia by putting one word upon another. And many other things...

That wasn't the issue, but the fact that Minas Minasian now clearly saw how his familiar world turned upon itself and enveloping time and space in its carpet-like, endless bedsheet, threw it, so to speak, into the lap of history. Entire generations were lost forever within the folds of that carpet. Some, by luck or by willfulness, remained hanging by the threads of that universal carpet, then came down tumbling into the colorless net of our times, stunned and demented. And they remained, just so.

**N**ow he was standing on the squares of the city they had built, not recognizing anyone. New people had come, had destroyed the old people's houses and built glass towers in their places. Yesterday's people weren't around. They were gone, they were all gone and the city was empty of dream and meaning. And the yearning that he felt was the yearning of familiar faces, darkened walls and the Old World accents still heard in the New World. The call and laughter of the loud, Stuart Street Armenians were not there. The Solar System had played some amazing games and all of a sudden the aspect of the world had changed.

As if that weren't enough, now, day and night he was being hounded by that ultimate woman's love, which at this point had turned into a chronic pain, and as distance increased, she became more immutable a presence. Minas Minasian decided not to love any more, because one love was enough for eternity, after that, God willing, something will come up when nothing happens. At that moment, when the seashells of Boston Bay soared towards Chelsea, Revere and Winthrop, he noticed that he was alone in the harbor's asphalt whiteness. Not only that, he also noticed a dark shadow between the pillars of the wharf. Every time he looked back, the shadow would have advanced behind another pillar. In life, sometimes an interlude comes about when men, disregarding all danger and threat, throws himself into the jaws of the unknown. Who are you? Yelled Minas Minasian, what do you want? He then surged and reached the pillar, there was no one behind it, he proceeded to the hall, rushed out of the hall, looked all around, couldn't find anyone, turned back, just as he was setting foot on the pier, a dagger pierced the wall an inch above his head.

He couldn't remember where he had parked the car. He couldn't recall his state registration number. He knew it was light blue, with some rust spots. Giving up, he got on the subway Green Line at the

Symphony station, changed to the Red Line at Park Street. The train came out into the daylight, crossed the Longfellow Bridge, for a moment filled its metallic lungs with sunshine and rushed on, this time through the entrails of Cambridge, dusky and humid.

"Go away, while you have time!"

"Are you talking to me?" inquired Minas Minasian.

"Leave everything and go away!"

"Who are you," shot back Minas Minasian, scrutinizing the bony features of the tall, black-suited man standing beside him. He was also swaying with the motions of the moving train.

"It's not important," continued the man, "each minute may be crucial."

"But this is my home, my city! Why this warning? What do you want from me?" he said, feeling the gradual numbness of his senses. What's happening with this city? What's happening with me? If it's time to leave, I'm the one who decides when!

"I don't understand you at all!" continued Minas Minasian, "And I find your interference preposterous."

"Please, don't ask questions, since there's no time," spoke the stranger with the same urgency in his voice.

"I don't even know you!" He said.

"Don't go home. Get off at the next station and hurry to the airport!"

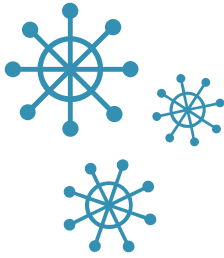
"I've never met you in my life!" He spoke almost to himself.

Approaching the Harvard Square Station, for a brief moment the subway lights went out. There was a muffled commotion. It seemed to Minas Minasian that the curtain was down, and on the stage, in the dark, the experienced actors were rearranging the furnishings and scenery of the new act. He felt the weight of a heavy heel on his left foot, than he heard a choking sound, followed by the flapping of giant bat-wings. When the lights came back, screams of terror exploded in the car. The tall man in black was spread on the floor, stabbed and near death.

Talaat has reached his goal. A whole nation, hitting the streets of the world, is searching for its past, forgetting the present which—deprived of life—cannot become the past. Now the yearnings have hardened so much that the Armenians are standing at the crossroads staring at the tips of their shoes. They don't know whether they've arrived or they're on their way. More and more, Minas Minasian was convinced that he was going insane. It seemed to him, that every day his soul was flowing out of his body, pouring into the Charles River, and on to be mixed with the waters of the ocean. And the waters of the sea never reach Armenia. He was now looking for the traces of his past in the winding streets of Boston, who had shut away their secrets and thrown the key into the sewer. In fact, he was facing a city that no longer recognized him. The steamroller had come and flattened everything. History had exploded long ago and the dust was just settling. Minas Minasian had changed so many homes that he no longer knew the address of his house. He proceeded along the riverbank, walking westward towards land's end. □

*Boston, December, 1991*

—TRANSLATED BY TATUL SONENTZ



## Winter Poem

My grandmother was sand;  
my grandfather snow  
keeping Mt. Ararat intact  
on its plateau.

My grandfather was fire;  
my grandmother the stones  
of our oven baking, giving  
the house its glow.

My grandmother a memory  
and grandfather is gone.  
Still like the old stove they  
keep the house warm.

ASHOD SEVOYAN

*Translated from Armenian by  
Diana Der-Hovanesian*

## Vor

Through the summer months in Yesilkoy  
we used to play basketball ceaselessly,  
my cousin Michel and I, Agop, Ara and Aret  
in the grounds of the old Greek school.

“Vor to you,” Michel and I would respond  
when the three met us with a hearty “Vor,”  
and we’d all five fall about in wild laughter.  
We knew: it meant “arse” in Armenian.

Agop’s family had a huge green garden  
(large enough for three later buildings):  
we’d pick figs off the trees at one end,  
and kick a ball around at the other.

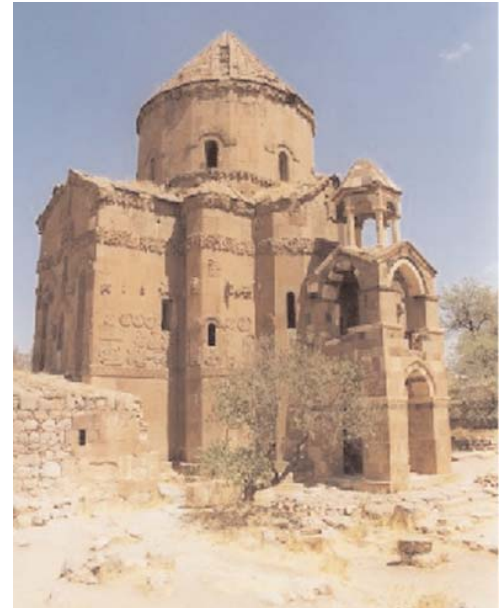
Then Aret and Agop left for America.  
I for London. We have no news of Ara.

Only Michel remains still in Istanbul.  
From five to one in twenty short years.

A city where no one says vor any more  
cannot be Istanbul, cannot be my town.  
It cannot be where I became what I am.  
I ache for what it once was, I dream of it,  
I sing of it.

BY RONI MARGULIES

*Translated by the poet*



## AGHTAMAR

*“Every sorrow can be borne  
if it is put into a story.”*

—ISAAC DINESEN

How can we put this in a story so  
we can bear the irony and the loss  
of knowing Van’s Holy Cross church  
is rebuilt without its cross?

How shall we make this a poem  
about Aghtamar’s arches inside,  
all stolen from those who worshiped  
or describe how the worshippers died?

The Church of the Holy Cross in ruins  
rebuilt now by those causing its fall,  
in Van now called Turkey. Rebuilt  
without cross or people. Almost all

refurbished because restorers know  
tourists will come, cross or no cross,  
descendants of survivors spending money  
looking for what they have lost.

DIANA DER-HOVANESSIAN



## Christmas

It begins in mystery  
with a journey  
by starlight.

It begins with  
wise men looking  
for the greatest  
story of all time

and finding  
only a child.

It is the story  
of innocence  
found again.

It is the celebration  
of hope

by wise men  
finding the word  
made flesh.

DIANA DER-HOVANESSIAN



## Prayer Instead of a Greeting

Let there be holy peace  
in all lands of the East.

Let kindness flow and bless  
all lands in the West.

Let the flow and flood  
be stopped of sweat and blood.

And let only calm and love  
be shed from stars above.

DANIEL VAROUJAN\*

*Translated by  
Diana Der-Hovanesian*

*\* Varoujan was among the 250 intellectuals executed in 1915 before the genocide of the Armenians by the Ottoman Turks in 1915.*



## Visa Application

*"I have come to Jerusalem  
because I have a right to."*

—STANLEY MOSS

I have come to Yerevan;  
my father earned for me  
the right.  
My father earned more than  
the right.  
He shed his blood  
and spent his life  
wanting to return to Yerevan.

In the battle where General  
Murad died  
my father, also left for dead,  
rose with a bullet in his head  
that like this ache always  
remained.  
I have inherited his pain.

I have inherited his claim.  
I have inherited his fight.  
I have inherited his right  
to return to Yerevan.

DIANA DER-HOVANESSIAN





## My new bookcases will arrive in a week

I empty the old ones  
and find among deposits  
of fine dust,  
Layers of me at twenty,  
at twenty-five...

A copy of *100 Years of Solitude* in French,  
A collection of science-fiction entrenched  
around copies of Voltaire.

Then notes in old  
travel books.  
Some souvenirs bought  
or found.

Cookbooks with recipes  
of curry, *hamam meshwi*,  
Grandmother's lentil  
soup and Mum's  
*mujjadarah*,

As I meander through  
them, I smile at my  
Present,  
knowing that it and the  
Future have a solid Past.

—BY LOLA KOUNDAKJIAN  
Dec. 23, 2007



## Like the Mountain Flower

She treads softly on the parched earth.  
He steps stoically on the rocky soil.  
The river Arax shimmers in the distance  
And age-old mountains called Zangezur stand  
watching.

The couple passes the wishing tree  
Where strips of fabric hang,  
But they wish for nothing anymore  
And brush past tattered bits of dreams and  
faded shades of hope,  
Murmuring, "Wishes do not come true."

Down in the orchard  
Where fruit trees drink  
Murky water—  
Runoff from the mine—  
And piles of debris decay  
Near butterflies, shanties, and tumbleweed,  
Large, sugary pomegranates—crimson and  
yellow—lie on the ground  
Spilling liquid ruby and gold.

On the hillside,  
Lush grapevines hang full and heavy—waiting,  
Finally offering the earth their grapes, raisins,  
and wine.  
"What use is our labor?" the two of them  
ask the wind  
As they pass by.

Feeling the earth at their feet  
And the wind at their back,  
They inhale the sweetness of their birthplace,  
They recall the prophesies  
Of the ancient plane tree—the Sosie—  
Still rustling in the wind  
As they walk away  
Down the dusty, winding road,  
Whispering, "If only wishes could come true!"

Glancing back one more time  
At the mountains and the river,  
At the fields, the trees, and home—  
All spread before them  
Like fine crystal and china  
On a silk, embroidered tablecloth,  
Something stirs in them—  
And like the mountain flower  
They remain.

BY KNARIK O. MENESHIAN  
March, 2008



This page is sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Toros and Suzan Vosbigian



# From the ‘Hairy Neck’ Chronicles...

By Tatul Sonentz-Papazian

**R**ecently, as I went through a large cardboard box in the basement full of old magazines and newspapers, out came a stack of old Hairenik Weeklies and Armenian Reviews. The newsprint of the Weeklies had turned a dull yellow and brittle at the darker edges. The Reviews, printed on better quality stock, had weathered the time—around half a century—better than expected. As I skimmed through them, I came across a poem of mine that the editor, James Mandalian, in a moment of generosity, had agreed to publish in the Review. It was a short poem; it went like this:

Sometimes,  
Sleepless in the night,  
I wonder if the birds  
Will make their flight.  
With open eyes  
I keep wondering  
If the sun will rise  
In the morning...

It went on like that for a couple more stanzas, indicating a time of youthful doubts and self-involvement induced by the turbulent times of the 50s in the Middle East and the seemingly unattainable dreams of a young man in his early twenties, employed as an art director at the Publications Dept. of the United States Information Agency (USIA) in Cairo, Egypt.

Alone in that basement, I held that issue of the Review as one holds on to the brighter moments of one’s past, not just with my hands, but with my entire being, lest all that was connected with it, the time, the faces, the sounds—now come alive—suddenly disappear forever, leaving behind mere printed pages...And it all came back, with its laughter, humor, now—as memory fades—misty in a heart breaking aura of nostalgia for a time long past, for faces and voices, tastes and smells all couched in just a few crumbling mementos in a musty cellar...

It was a bright spring morning, clear skies and the Egyptian sun almost at its zenith, bathing everything around the Embassy compound in its unblinking light. I was busy at my drawing board when the publications officer, Al Malchow, a tall, relaxed veteran of the Depression, Prohibition and World War II, walked in holding a bulky envelope in his hand:

“Hi, Tat,” he said, “you have mail from the States.”

“Really?” I said, my eyes fixed on the pen and ink illustration I was finishing for the Arabic language “American Quarterly” USIA/Cairo published in those days. “Who is it from?”

“Some publishing house in Boston, Massachusetts,” he said, “called ‘Hairy Neck,’ I think...no, I think it’s ‘Hairy Nick.’ Why would any one call a Boston publishing house by that name...?” he mumbled almost to himself as he handed over the envelope.

Why indeed. I took the envelope and thanked him as he walked out the door, shaking his head. I put the envelope on the drawing board unopened. I kept looking at it the way one looks at a mirage in the desert, with disbelief and a slightly racing heart. I realized I had been waiting for this moment since I had received Mandalian’s letter on a Hairenik Publishing letterhead emblazoned with the Hairenik building logo, received months earlier, informing me that my poem would be published in the next issue of the Armenian Review and welcoming me into the Hairenik Family, as he put it.

That evening, right after work, I rushed to the ARF “Navasard” club not far from the famous “Shepherd’s” Hotel, with the green covered Review under my arm, proud as can be, to receive the kudos of my comrades, friends and particularly one dark-eyed young beauty, whose admiration, at the time, meant more to me than all the rest put together. I managed to maneuver her to a corner, away from the others and gave her the Review. With a devastating smile, she took it and took her time turning the pages and reading the titles, stopping here and there to read a paragraph or two. Finally she turned to the page where my poem appeared. After what seemed an eternity, she looked up with a bland look. My heart stopped. “Well?” I said, “What do you think?”

She stared at me and said, “I don’t see me in there...” □