

"LRADOU"

Armenian Community Quarterly Newsletter

**Produced by the Office of the Armenian Representative
in the House of Parliament of Cyprus, Mr Vartkes Mahdessian**

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On May 21, 2007, Mr. Vartkes Mahdessian completed his first year of the five-year term of the Armenian Representative in parliament. The Advisory Council reviewed the year that had passed and made constructive suggestions.

However, the turnout during the events commemorating the April 24th Genocide anniversary was disappointing, despite the significant presence of Cypriot politicians and other diplomats. The local media gave good coverage of the events in remembrance of the first genocide of the 20th century.

One of the most important events of the last three months was the pilgrimage to the Magaravank Armenian monastery on May 6. After 33 years, a large number of pilgrims visited the site that received wide coverage in the local and international, as well as Turkish media.

In June, the Council of Ministers once again raised the issue of conscription and decided that as of 2008, all young men aged 18 years old will serve their national service prior to starting their university education. As reported in the previous edition of the "Lradou", the Advisory Council had unanimously agreed to support the decision, but a letter was sent to the President of the Republic raising some concerns.

The Representative Office continued to provide service to individuals seeking assistance with their residency and work permits, or other documentation for public services. It is the only Representative Office in the Diaspora that deals with such issues and has also been under extreme pressure as it also deals with issues of political asylum.

As regards those seeking political asylum, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of rejections by the state authorities that have introduced stricter procedures. Unfortunately, there are still people who have not realized this development and continue to hire lawyers, even though their applications are very often rejected, as they are not genuine political asylum seekers but have sought refuge here for other purposes.

The state security services have started reviewing old cases of people overstaying their permits and many are being deported. The Office tries to assist those who have remained on the island for 5-7 years and abided to most laws and regulations of the Immigration Authorities.

The Representative intervened in the case of one particular Iraqi Armenian who had escaped persecution, and after consulting with the Cyprus state security services, a residency and work permit was granted.

**MAIN ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF MR. VARTKES
MAHDESSIAN'S FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE AS ARMENIAN COMMUNITY
REPRESENTATIVE IN THE CYPRUS HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT
FROM JUNE 1, 2006 TO JUNE 1, 2007.**

- Complete transparency in official and community activities, through the publication and free distribution of the quarterly “**Lradou**” newsletter
- Establishment of a fully equipped modern office with permanent staff
- Pilgrimage to Magaravank monastery after 33 years
- Initiative to establish the “Arev” community charitable trust
- Full grants for former students of the Melkonian Education Institute
- After a delay of many years, the election of a new Church Council with a unified list
- Increase the frequency of visits to the Ayios Dometios cemetery on a weekly basis
- Presentation of proposals for three major community projects to the government’s Government Planning Bureau
- Efforts to secure suitable housing for special cases
- Providing services and assistance for residency and citizenship applications
- Solution of serious residency and citizenship cases, such as release from prison due to residency and work permit problems, special treatment of a political asylee etc.
- Securing several grants and scholarships to Armenian students in colleges
- Annual gathering and reception for all Armenian graduates from Cypriot schools

Details of the Armenian Representative’s activities are published in detail in the quarterly “**Lradou**”. A summary in English of the “**Lradou**” issues No. 1,2,3 and 4 are available for download from the website www.armenianmp.com and those wishing a hard copy or electronic version of the English translation may do so by contacting the Representative Office on **22 45 45 40** (office hours) or by sending an e-mail to office@armenianmp.com .

3-MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT – Representative Mahdessian coordinated efforts with other community groups and secured overseas medical treatment for a lady from Limassol.

Half-way through the 2007 academic year, an unexpected number of applications were received seeking grants or aid, most of which were satisfied. However, with all applications, students should bear in mind that in order to be eligible for scholarships or grants, they must record very high grades.

- Mrs. Chrysoulla (Vosgi) Chorbadjian was appointed member of the cultural heritage protection committee of the Ministry of Education and Culture and UNESCO.

- The Ministry of Education has confirmed the appointment of Mr. Sebouh Tavitian to the Nareg Armenian Schools Committee, as proposed by Mr. Mahdessian, to replace Mr. Aram Tavitian who resigned recently from his post.
- The elections for the Church Committee took place on May 26 and a unified list was voted after hard work by Representative Mahdessian and Archbishop Hergelian. Despite some late misunderstandings, the whole list was finally elected.

PILGRIMAGE TO MAGARAVANK – The Representative’s Office and the Armenian Prelature organised a pilgrimage to the Magaravank monastery in the occupied north on May 6 that took place under the auspices of the United Nations. Nearly 300 people departed after the annual blessing services at the Sourp Asdvadzadzin church in Nicosia, accompanied by Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian and Father Momig and arrived at the nearly-destroyed monastery that had been abandoned after 33 years of Turkish occupation, where prayers were said amid mixed feelings for the hopeful reconstruction of the monastery. Architect John Guevherian noted that if repair work is not conducted, the monastery is in danger of collapsing altogether.

The Patriarch of Bolis, Archbishop Mesrob Mutafyan, had called Representative Mahdessian to express his wish to attend the service at Magaravank, but did not succeed for reasons beyond his control.

The pilgrims pledged to meet again in a year’s time and to have the traditional blessing and the ‘harissa’ at the monastery, as it used to over 33 years ago.

The only unfortunate clash of events was the ‘harissa’ banquet organised on the same day by the Ladies Guild of the Armenian General Benevolent Union of Nicosia, despite the pilgrimage being announced several months in advance and the final date confirmed two months earlier by the organizers of the pilgrimage to cultivate harmony and cooperation within the community.

MELKONIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE – On June 11, Representative Mahdessian and a small delegation had a meeting with Attorney General Petros Clerides to review the situation regarding the Melkonian Educational Institute. The Attorney General said that the Ministry of Education informed him that the school’s grounds would be offered free of charge for use by the Aghlandjia Gymnasium for up to two years, due to emergency construction work at the Greek Cypriot school. Therefore, he said that his office would not pursue any legal action against the AGBU during this period.

(Note: Mr. Mahdessian had supported the Ministry’s request for temporary use of the school grounds when this was first requested of him by the Minister of Education, Mr. Akis Cleanthous, on April 25, 2007.)

Mr. Mahdessian declared that it would have been better if the responsible people in charge of the Melkonian estate had worked with transparency and respected the presence of the Representative’s Office. Instead, by working in an obscure manner and by laying down conditions to the Attorney General that he back down from taking any legal measures against the AGBU, proves once again the ulterior motives of the AGBU, that were, after all, the reasons for the closure of the Melkonian school and the future plans that are to the detriment of the Armenian nation.

NATIONAL SERVICE – The Council of Ministers reconfirmed the mandatory conscription for young men from the minority groups. As of 2008, all young men born after January 1, 1990 who have completed their secondary education must serve

their national service. Also, all boys aged 16 must secure an exit permit from the Ministry of Defence before any overseas travel. These issues were discussed during a meeting of the three Community Representatives soon after Mr. Christodoulos Pashiardis' appointment as Minister of Defence.

COMMITTEES – The Youth Committee organized a public gathering of 40 young community members who discussed many youth-related issues and made suggestions how these could be utilized.

The Cyprus Armenia Committee decided to establish contact with those from Armenian who live in Cyprus to see how to improve relations between the countries.

The Cultural Committee invited Mrs. Janna Tahmizian and discussed the prospects of inviting leading groups from Armenia to visit Cyprus and to encourage organising cultural events with the participation of community members.

Congratulatory notes were sent to the following:

- The editor of “Aztag” daily, Mr. Shahan Kandaharian, marking the newspaper’s 80th anniversary;
- Mr. Christodoulos Pashiardis on his appointment as Minister of Defence;
- Mr. Georges der Parthogh who was honoured by the Mass Media Institute of the Intercollege for his long service to the media;
- Hovig Nassanian and Daniel Chorbadjian for their high-quality production of the musical “Esther”, where both Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian were present;

OFFICIAL AND OTHER MEETINGS – During the months of April, May and June, Mr. Mahdessian had the following meetings:

- with Justice and Public Order Minister, Mr. Sophocles Sophocleous;
- with members of the Council of Europe for the Protection of the Identity of National Minorities to brief them about the Armenian community of Cyprus;
- with University of Cyprus Administration and Finance Director, Dr. Andreas Christofides and Student Affairs Director, Mr. Philippos Pandouras;
- with Ministry of Education Secondary Education Inspectors Dionysiou and Kitromilides to discuss replacing the Religious Studies classes at secondary schools with Armenian language and Armenian History, as the Armenian Church already provides religious teaching once a week. In a letter sent to Secondary Education Director, Mrs. Zena Poulli, this matter and the issue of preparing of new modern books was raised;
- with the Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. Akis Cleanthous;
- with the Director General of the Ministry of Interior, Dr. Lazaros Savvides;
- with the President of the House, Mr. Demetris Christofias, accompanying the President of the Journalists Union of Armenia, Mrs. Asdghig Kevorkian and “Azg” daily Chief Editor Hagop Avedikian, and the President of the Cyprus Journalists Union, Mr. Andreas Kannaouros. Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian later hosted Armenian media representatives at their residence in honour of the two visitors;
- with Nicosia Mayor Eleni Mavrou to discuss progress on the Old Cemetery and to request aid for the Nicosia team taking part in the Pan-Armenian Games in Armenia on August 18-26;
- with newly appointed Political Affairs Director at the American Embassy, Mrs. Amy Dahm, to discuss the pilgrimage to Magaravank within the context of the U.S. State Department report on religious freedom;

- with Italian Ambassador Luigi Napolitano who presented Mr. Mahdessian with a copy of the 14th century Armenian manuscript “History of Alexander of Macedonia” the original of which is at the San Lazaro Armenian Catholic Monastery in Venice. Representative Mahdessian later handed the book to the Armenian Prelature.

During the past three months the Armenian Representative in Parliament, Mr. Vartkes Mahdessian, attended the following events:

- the inauguration of the European Union Cyprus Information Centre by the President of the Republic, Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos;
- Representative and Mrs. Mahdessian attended the 92nd Anniversary Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, organized by the three Armenian political parties, that took place at the International Conference Centre in Nicosia on April 25. The main address was given by the former Speaker of the Greek Parliament, Mr. Apostolos Kaklamanis, followed by an address by Mr. Vartkes Mahdessian who recalled the international efforts for Genocide recognition and added that Hrant Dink’s murder will not prevent the Armenian people from continuing their struggle;
- on Thursday, April 26, the House of Representatives plenary session paid respect to the 1,5 million victims of the Genocide with a minute’s silence, after which the House members gave the floor to Representative Mahdessian for his address;
- Mr. Mahdessian represented the community at the Greens party 6th convention;
- the Armenian Representative was invited by the Melkonian students who were graduating from the American Academy and attended the solemn service and placed flowers at the memorial of the founders Krikor and Garabed Melkonian;
- Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian attended the joint graduation ceremony of the Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol Nareg elementary schools on June 20, where the Armenian Representative and Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian took turns to hand out the diplomas. Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian later attended the reception party hosted by the Parents Association in honour of the Nareg graduates and Mrs. Alice Tavitian who was honoured for her long service as teacher. They also attended the Larnaca Nareg end-of-year performance where veteran teacher Thalia Papantoniou was honoured for her 40-year teaching service.

Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian also attended the following events:

- the Hamazkayin “Oshagan” dance performance;
- a lecture organized by the Evangelical Church on “The Role of the Haygazian University and the Challenges for the Diaspora”;
- the closing celebrations of the AYMA – HMEM sports games;
- the ARF 117th anniversary event at the Pasydy Hall;
- the Genocide commemoration event organised by the Evangelical Church;
- the inauguration of the SDHP ‘Nor Serount’ community club in Nicosia;
- the Sports Day at the Nareg elementary school in Nicosia;
- the comedy staged by the ‘Timag’ group of the Oshagan Cultural Association;
- the performance of the ‘Angelic Voices’ choir in Larnaca directed by Mrs. Sylva Makamian.

G HARAPAGH ORPHANS’ VISIT – A group of young orphans from Gharapagh (Artsakh) arrived in Cyprus on June 13 for a brief visit and holiday. Representative Mahdessian informed the AYMA, AGBU and SDHP organizations and asked that they also contribute towards entertaining the children. The AYMA and SDHP

responded favourably and hosted the children at their clubs in Nicosia on two successive evenings. Mr. Mahdessian also arranged that the children visit the Ocean Aquarium in Paralimni, as well as the Sourp Asdvadzadzin church in Nicosia, the Prelature and the Nareg school.

RECEPTION FOR ARMENIAN GRADUATES – Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian hosted a reception at their residence in honour of all the Armenian graduates of the Nareg elementary school, as well as other secondary schools and colleges. Also present were the Headmaster and teachers of Nareg and Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian.

OFFICIAL VISIT TO ARMENIA – The Representative accompanied Justice and Public Order Minister, Mr. Socphocles Sophocleous, on a three-day official visit to Armenia on June 28, where the Cyprus Minister was received by the Justice Minister of Armenia, Mr. Kevork Tanielyan, the Chief of Police of the Republic of Armenia, Mr. Haig Haroutiounyan and the Attorney General of Armenia, Mr. Hovsepian. After the conclusion of the official meetings, Mr. Sophocleous visited the memorial Dzidzernagapert where he laid a wreath in honour of the 1,5 million Armenians who perished during the 1915 Genocide.

Upon the Minister's return to Cyprus, Mr. Mahdessian's Office circulated a press announcement detailing Mr. Sophocleous' visit and meetings, which were unfortunately cut short due to the Minister's return home to help coordinate the devastating fires that raged in the Troodos and Saittas areas.

FUTURE EVENTS – The Representative's Office would like to inform the community of the following upcoming events:

Saturday-Sunday, October 6-7, 2007 – "Arevik" Ensemble of Armenia;

Sunday, October 14, 2007 – Breast Cancer Awareness