

Armenian Community Quarterly Newsletter

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

9 B&C Kastorias Str., Ayia Paraskevi, 2002 Strovolos
Tel. 22 454540, Fax. 22 424642, e-mail: office@armenianmp.com

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My fellow Armenians and friends

During my nearly three years in office, I have kept you informed, through the quarterly editions of the “Lradou”, about the issues that concern our community, as well as all my activities in a clear and transparent way.

However, in this issue I feel obliged to share with you my concerns about a crucial matter, because its present situation and unclear future concerns not only the Armenians of Cyprus but the whole of our nation. Obviously I am referring to the Melkonian Educational Institute and the latest developments.

As you all know, on January 22, the president of the AGBU Central Committee had a meeting with President Demetris Christofias, in the presence of other individuals in order to discuss the fate of the Melkonian property and to present to the government new plans and proposals.

A meeting took place at a state level about a very sensitive subject that interests this community, and the Representative of the Armenian Community was ignored, who should have been the first to be invited to such a meeting. The Representative’s presence should be considered as vital by all concerned because after all, he represents the voice of the Armenian community of Cyprus. Within the Representative’s responsibilities lies very much the future of the Melkonian Educational Institute.

After the abovementioned meeting, protest notes were issued by the Melkonian alumni associations of Cyprus and California, as well as Dr. Vartan Ozinian, addressed to President Christofias, making specific reference to the absence of the Armenian Representative. I had the opportunity of having a warm discussion with the President in February and also sent him a letter stressing that the lack of information about the discussions of the meeting, did not allow me to update my community properly. President Christofias duly responded with a letter stating that in any future meetings of this nature, the Ministers of Education and Interior, as well as the Armenian Representative will be fully informed.

I do not wish to go into extensive analyses or guesswork, nor do I plan to question the future plans of the AGBU Central Board. There is one common factor that concerns every Armenian and the Diaspora. The only way to defend ourselves against the ‘white genocide’ and fears of assimilation is the Armenian school and Armenian education. The Western Armenian dialect is in gradual demise and with the closure of the Melkonian the Diaspora Armenians and in particular the Armenians of Cyprus have been deprived of their national symbol and the only educational institution that ensured survival. As the Representative of the Armenian Community of Cyprus, I inherited this heavy burden for the solution of which there is a need for cooperation and unity. This period bears much more weight on us than the global financial crisis. In a few years, it will be possible to rebuild the world economy, but creating a Melkonian again will be impossible. I will not spare any effort to mediate between all

interested parties and I appeal to all to cooperate before it is too late. I suggest that petty excuses and politics are put aside and we all cooperate without bias, for the benefit of the survival of the next generations and the preservation of our national identity.

As regards to the forthcoming pilgrimage to Magaravank, details are published on a special leaflet. We plan to visit our occupied monastery for the second time on May 10 and hope that a large number will take part in this second pilgrimage.

On the occasion of the Holy Week commemorated by the Armenian Apostolic Church, I wish you all a Happy Easter.

*“Christ has risen,
Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ”*

Vartkes Mahdessian

Armenian Representative in the Cyprus House of Representatives

3-MONTHLY REPORT: The Office continued to deal with issues related to work and residency permits, and provided assistance to applicants for citizenship.

As regards the consular services of the Embassy of Armenia, citizens of Armenia are advised to renew their passports at least two months prior to expiry and not the last minute, which causes great problems. Many only realise that their documents are not valid when they apply to the Aliens and Immigration Department to renew their stay. Between January and March, four people received Cypriot citizenship, two of whom on the ground that they are married to Cypriot citizens.

VISIT TO THE KALAYDJIAN OLD PEOPLE’S HOME: Mr and Mrs Vartkes Mahdessian, accompanied by Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian, visited the “Kalaydjian” Old People’s Home on Armenian Christmas and handed gifts to the senior citizens there, wishing them well.

NOTES OF THANKS AND CONGRATULATION: On March 3, Mr Vartkes Mahdessian thanked the Director General of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (RIK), Themis Themistocleous, as well as the News Editor, Yiannis Kareklas, for broadcasting Armenian news from the Armenian radio programmes on a daily basis from March 9, 2009.

On March 6, the Representative sent a letter of congratulation to 12-year-old Agnessa Hovhannisyan for her victory in the Cyprus Karate championship.

On March 20, Mr Mahdessian sent letters of congratulation to Mano and Yianno Koyoundjian who won the Under 14 and Under 16 trophies in the Cyprus downhill skiing competition.

The Representative also thanked Consul Lilit Sarkisian at the Armenian Embassy in Greece for her support and cooperation to facilitate the documentation work for Armenian citizens living and working in Cyprus. As of March 20, the new Consul at the Armenian Embassy, with accreditation to Greece and Cyprus, is Mrs Liana Krikorian.

OFFICIAL MEETINGS: On December 21, 2008, Mr Mahdessian attended the ordination of the new Archbishop of the Maronites, Yusef Antoine Suefi, that took place at the Maronite church in Nicosia and also the banquet that followed.

On January 20, the Armenian Representative accompanied the Director of the Armenian Evangelical Church, Mr Hrayr Jebedjian, to a meeting with the President of the House of Representatives, Mr Marios Garoyian.

On January 23, Defence Minister Costas Papacostas had a meeting with the Representatives of the three religious groups to inform them of future developments in the national service.

On February 2, Mr Mahdessian attended a special cocktail ceremony and congratulated the newly elected secretary General of the Akel party, Mr Andros Kyprianou.

On March 9, the Armenian Representative had a meeting with the U.S. Ambassador to Cyprus, Mr Frank Urbancic and Political Affairs Officer John Ratigan.

APPOINTMENT: On December 30, Mr Mahdessian proposed to the Ministry of Education the appointment of Mr Avedis Chouldjian to the Armenian School Committee, replacing Mrs Vera Tahmazian who resigned.

OTHER EVENTS: Mr and Mrs Vartkes Mahdessian attended the following events:

- on January 6, Armenian Christmas Day, banquet organised by the Armenian Club of Larnaca;
- on January 28, the art exhibition of “Armenian and Russian artists” at the d/p art gallery in Limassol, inauguration by House President Marios Garoyian;
- on January 29, the projection at the AYMA club in Nicosia of the documentary “Heart of Two Nations” by Nouritsa Matossian on the first anniversary of the assassination of Hrant Dink;
- on February 2, the art exhibition of painter John Guevherian at Apocalypse Gallery in Nicosia, inauguration by Health Minister Christos Patsalides;
- on February 4, the performance of Lebanese Armenian comedian Pierre Shammasian, organised by the Hamazkayin Oshagan chapter at the Utudjian Hall of the Prelature in Nicosia;
- on February 18, the public discussion on “The Armenian Individual and Community Life” at the Nor Serount Cultural Centre in Nicosia;
- on March 6, the art exhibition of Cyprus Armenian artists organised by the Hamazkayin Oshagan chapter at the Utudjian Hall of the Prelature in Nicosia, held under the auspices of the Armenian Representative;
- on March 11, the art exhibition of young Cypriot Armenian artist Sevan Malikian entitled “The start of my journey”, held at the Aspelia Gallery in Larnaca. Inaugurating the exhibition, Mr Mahdessian praised the artist’s clear portrayal of his roots and expressions related to his birthplace;
- on March 24, the fund-raising concert by popular singer Tata Simonian at the Pavillion centre. Also present was House president Marios Garoyian.

OLD ARMENIAN CEMETERY: On March 22, Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian and Rev. Fr. Momig Habeshian officiated reburial of the remains which were exhumed previously and kept in the St. Boghos chapel since April 2005, following the renovation work at the Old Cemetery. This project remained among the main priorities of the Armenian Representative, who had presented a detailed budget and the architectural plans by “4arc+” firm to Interior Minister Neoklis Sylikiotis on October 27, 2006.

On November 12, 2007, the Minister informed the Armenian Representative about the government’s contribution of CYP 90,000 (EUR 154,000) for the completion of the project.

LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

Mandatory National Service

Under the Council of Ministers decision No. 65.732, dated June 19, 2007, all young men aged 18 belonging to Religious Minorities of Cyprus, who have completed their secondary education and were born after 01.01.1990, are obliged to serve in the National Guard.

The national service presently is for 25 months, despite reports of reducing this term. Cypriot citizens who have lived abroad for more than 10 years and wish to return to Cyprus must join the army, for a reduced period:

- 3 months, for those aged 26-49 upon their return
- 6 months, for those aged 18-26
- 12 months, for those aged 13-18
- 18 months, for those aged 10-13

Further information is available from the following telephone numbers:-

Ministry of Defence : 22 807525
Nicosia recruitment office : 22 515238
Larnaca recruitment office : 24 411300
Limassol recruitment office : 25 369850
Paphos recruitment office : 26 933270

**On the occasion of the Holy Resurrection of Christ
Vartkes and Maggie Mahdessian
congratulate all Armenians in Cyprus
wishing them Health and Happiness**

***“Christ has risen,
Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ”***
