

## **Armenian Community Quarterly Newsletter**

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

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#### ***My fellow Armenians and friends***

My introduction of the previous Lradou was focused on the latest developments regarding the Melkonian Educational Institute and its unclear future. Making specific recommendations, I had appealed to all parties concerned to cooperate as it was still not too late. This is a pan-Armenian issue and its solution lies mainly in the hands of the AGBU Central Board. Despite this, the campaign of the two Alumni associations in cooperation with the Armenian Representative of Cyprus continues at various levels. Any new developments will be conveyed through the Media and the Lradou newsletter.

There is also another unfortunate reality that concerns our community, with a direct impact on our historical and cultural heritage, as well as our national identity, whose fate is directly linked to the outcome of the complexities of the Cyprus problem. This is none other than the deserted Saint Magar monastery (Magaravank) and the threat of its imminent collapse.

Joining us during this year's second pilgrimage to Magaravank was the Swedish ambassador to Cyprus, His Excellency Ingmar Lindahl. Seeing for himself the derelict situation, he suggested placing this issue, through the Armenian Representative's Office, to the special working Committee on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, responsible for the historical monuments in occupied Cyprus, established within the context of the efforts to resolve the Cyprus problem.

Around the end of May, I had a meeting with the Greek Cypriot chairman of the Committee, Takis Hadjidemetriou, whom I presented with a comprehensive dossier containing photographs of the present Magaravank, emphasising its irreplaceable cultural and historical importance to the Armenian Cypriots as well as to Cyprus in general. We all hope that through the good will and understanding of all sides, the Magaravank will be adopted by the Committee and the foundations and walls of our monastery receive the necessary care in order to survive, just as the Armenian nation has survived.

In the beginning of April, the executive manager of the "Hayastan-All Armenia Fund" Ara Vartanian visited Cyprus, accompanied by the Ambassador of Armenia to Greece and Cyprus, H.E. Vahram Kazhoyan. The purpose of the visit was to reactivate the money raising efforts of the Fund under the auspices of the Armenian Representative and the Armenian Prelature of Cyprus. The initial meeting took place at the Prelature's "Utudjian" Hall where Mr Vartanian emphasised the importance of the fund raising efforts within the Armenian communities towards the development of projects and progress of Armenia.

The success of such efforts depends on the close and frank cooperation that should exist between the Armenian Embassy, the community leadership and the Armenian Representative's Office.

On July 5-7, following a special invitation, I accompanied President Demetris Christofias on his official state visit to Armenia, more details of which I will include in the next edition of Lradou.

As I have mentioned before, a special project is underway to produce a booklet on the history of the Armenian nation and the Armenians of Cyprus, in order to introduce our history, culture and religion to all Cyprus school students, who know very little if anything about us. I

am happy to say that the whole project was undertaken by the former principal of Nareg Schools, Mr Vartan Tashdjian, who completed his work in June and it was submitted to the Ministry of Education.

Continuing on the successful tradition of Cyprus-Armenian cultural cooperation, established by my Office, and considering that 2009 is the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our national treasure Gomidas Vartabed, we have invited the famous “Gomidas Quartet” of Armenia to perform in a special performance to be held on October 31 at the Pallas theatre in Nicosia.

I am glad to announce that following the request of some fellow Cypriots, the Ministry of Education and Culture has introduced for the years 2009-2010 adult learning courses for the teaching of Armenian among its foreign languages programme, details of which are included in a separate announcement.

As regards to the Armenian Art School course for dancing, this completed its first year of operation and is expected to resume with the start of the new school year.

To conclude, I wish you all pleasant and relaxing summer holidays.

**Vartkes Mahdessian**

Representative of the Armenian Community of Cyprus

## **QUARTERLY ACTIVITY REPORT**

**CITIZENSHIP AND RESIDENCY:** We continue to report in each edition of Lradou about the tireless and unzealous work done by the Representative’s Office to help fellow Armenian nationals with their residency and work permits, as well as assistance to those applying for citizenship. Therefore, it would be preferable for all those who have received help and assistance, to show their appreciation and understanding by recognising this work, instead of critic this office when they feel the problem is not completely solved. Strictly speaking, the Armenian Representative in Parliament only has an obligation towards the Armenians of Cyprus, but having said this it continues to work in aid of Armenian nationals from elsewhere without any discrimination and financial reward.

Between the months of April and June, two Nicosia families and an underaged person received their Cypriot citizenship.

**INTERVIEW:** Hagop Dunyayian, publisher of the ‘Dzaghigh’ literary weekly newspaper of Lebanon, published an interview with Mr Mahdessian in a special edition dedicated to the 94th anniversary of the Genocide. The interview was reproduced in the April edition of ‘Artsakank’.

**ALL ARMENIA FUND:** Ara Vartanian, the Executive Director of the “Hayastan-All Armenia Fund” with the Fund’s Foreign Relations Officer, Hratch Hovhanisian, visited Cyprus on April 4-5, accompanied by the Armenian Ambassador to Greece and Cyprus, Vahram Gazhoyian, and First Secretary, Serop Bedjanian, as part of the efforts to revive the Fund’s activities in Cyprus. A public meeting took place at the Utudjian Hall on April 5, organised by the Armenian Representative and the Prelature, where the Fund’s Executive Director made a presentation on the activities, which was followed by a lively discussion. Mr Mahdessian called for a closer cooperation between his Office, the Embassy and the Prelature in order to boost efforts to help develop projects in Armenia. In order to set an example, Mr. Mahdessian made a humble donation. The Fund’s news service announced recently that this amount was used to repair the Agnaghyur village school sports ground.

**GENOCIDE MEMORIAL EVENTS:** The commemorative event marking the 94th anniversary of the Genocide took place at the Pasidy Hall in Nicosia, attended by members of the community and a large number of official guests. In his address, Mr Mahdessian highlighted the common struggle of the Armenians and Greeks of Cyprus to demand justice for their causes. The main speaker of the day, House of Representatives President Marios Garoyian, emphasised the need for greater international recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

On Thursday, April 30, the Armenian Representative addressed the House plenary session and reminded the members that the fact that Turkey remains unpunished is a hindrance to humanity and if Turkey does not have the courage to admit its crime, it will never be able to forge a clear future for its people.

On April 22, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Turkey announced they agreed on a “road map”. This news caused a stir among the media in Cyprus and Mr Mahdessian was invited to comment during the main evening news bulletin of Sigma TV. He was also invited to comment on the state broadcaster CyBC.

**LETTER OF CONDOLENCE:** On April 7, the Armenian Representative sent a letter of condolence to the Italian Ambassador, Luigi Napolitano, expressing his and the Armenian community’s grief over the death and destruction following the earthquake in L’Aquila.

**UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE:** On April 10, Mr Mahdessian met with the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative in Cyprus, Alexander Downer, who briefed the Armenian Representative on the latest developments in the Cyprus peace talks. Mr Mahdessian in turn briefed the UN official on the current status of the Armenian community.

**PILGRIMAGE TO MAGARAVANK:** The second pilgrimage to the Magaravank (Saint Magar) monastery took place on May 10, organised by the Armenian Representative’s Office and the Prelature, escorted by the United Nations. Some 200 people, including visitors from Lebanon and the United Kingdom, took part, as did the Swedish Ambassador His Excellency Ingmar Lindahl. The pilgrims gathered in the ruined chapel of the abandoned monastery and headed by Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian and the community’s two reverend fathers, sang the hymns of ‘Hayr Mer’ and ‘Der Voghormya’ as well as ‘Cilicia’, in an atmosphere of strong emotions.

On the same afternoon, the Representative’s Office issued a press release that was sent to all newspapers and broadcasting stations and the news received extensive coverage in the local as well as Turkish Cypriot media.

Following the recommendation of the Swedish Ambassador, a comprehensive dossier containing photographs and other material from the past and present state of the monastery were handed to the Reconstruction Committee of the ongoing talks between the two community leaders of Cyprus.

**NAREG ARMENIAN SCHOOLS:** The governing board of the Nareg Armenian Schools, whose term expires in November 2009, voted by a majority during its regular meeting on April 6 to appoint Mrs Vera Tahmazian as the new Principal, taking into consideration her qualifications and experience which satisfied the conditions required in the invitation for applications published in the local media.

Unfortunately, this decision was unacceptable to the chairman of the board who submitted his written protest to the Ministry of Education.

Due to the discord that this created, the Ministry of Education called the Armenian Representative to a meeting, and having reviewed the whole situation, issued a letter on June 11 endorsing the board’s decision.

Dissatisfied by the Ministry's decision to confirm the appointment, an anonymous group called 'Nareg friends' resorted to a malicious campaign through letters published in the 'Alithia' newspaper on June 20 and July 8 attacking the Armenian Representative and the decision which contained no sense of reality or truth.

It is about time that each individual who truly cares about the future of the Nareg Armenian Schools lends a hand to help with the development of the only Armenian educational establishment. Any success and achievement at the Nareg makes us all proud and helps provide a respectable level of education to our children and grandchildren. Let us not subject this school to the same fate as the Melkonian.

After board chairman Krikor Haroutounian handed in his resignation, Mr Mahdessian recommended to the Ministry of Education with a letter on June 12 proposing Aram (Sebouh) Tavitian as chairman and did not appoint a new member, since a new list of board members will be proposed by him very soon.

On June 15, the Armenian Representative congratulated the newly appointed Principal, saying that he expected Mrs Tahmazian to put to good use her qualifications and experience for the benefit of the Nareg schools, wishing her success in her new responsibilities.

**MILITARY SERVICE:** On June 18, Mr Mahdessian hosted a meeting at the Representative's Office for the eight young recruits and their parents who would be joining the National Guard in July. Also present were Aren Armenagian who was enlisted in the previous call-up, and NG officer Simos Merkouris who gave a general overview about the organisation and practical aspects of serving in the army, as well as their personal experiences and suggestions. Mr Mahdessian briefed them about his own efforts to improve the conditions of Armenian recruits. All those present were briefed about the timeframe of the military service and were given a list of necessary supplies.

We wish all our young military recruits a safe term of duty.

**ANNUAL GRADUATES' RECEPTION:** On June 24, like every year Mr and Mrs Mahdessian hosted more than 60 Armenian graduates from all levels of education at a reception at their residence in Nicosia, which was also attended by Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian, the reverend fathers and teachers of the Nareg schools. All the students had a pleasant time and also had the opportunity to discuss various issues with Mr Mahdessian.

**POOL PARTY:** On June 27, a pool party was organised at the Champs Elysees in Nicosia for all the Armenian youth of Cyprus with more than 70 taking part, celebrating summer and creating new friendships.

**ART SCHOOL:** The dance classes of the Armenian Art School headed by Mrs Armenouhi Mkhitarian, successfully concluded its first term. A good number of young children took part in the programme that culminated in a performance held at the Utudjian Hall on July 3, with all the dances they had learned. Mr Mahdessian thanked all the youngsters for their participation and congratulated the dance teacher for her work.

**CONGRATULATIONS / NOTES OF THANKS:** On May 11, Mr Mahdessian sent a letter of congratulations to Dr Atamyan, president of the AGBU "Ararat" futsal team, and coach Ara Bedrossian, for winning the Cyprus Futsal Cup and wished them every success for the future.

On May 18, the Armenian Representative thanked Smpad Derounian (Devletian) for sending him a copy of his collection of poems entitled "Artsakank yev Tsolk" and congratulated the poet wishing him well.

On May 27, Mr Mahdessian sent a letter of appreciation on his retirement to Vahe Kouyoumdjian acknowledging his long years of service as official notary (moukhtar).

**MEETINGS:** Armenian Representative Vartkes Mahdessian had the following official meetings during the period April – June:

- April 4, with the member of the Social Democrat Hunchag party central committee member and long-time member of the Lebanese assembly, Dr Yeghig Djeredjian, who was in Cyprus for the centennial commemoration of the Adana Massacres;
- April 6, with Defence Minister Costas Papacostas to discuss ways to improve the terms of national service for the Armenian youth and other outstanding issues;
- April 6, with House of Representatives President Marios Garoyian and the Armenian Ambassador to Greece and Cyprus, Vahram Gazhoyan, to review details of the forthcoming visit to Cyprus of Armenian National Assembly Speaker Hovik Aprahamian;
- May 6, with the Political Affairs officer of the US Embassy, John Rattigan, to discuss the European Parliamentary Assembly paper on implementation of the Religious Minorities Rights;
- May 27, with the primate of the Church of Cyprus, Archbishop Chrysostomos II;
- May 29, with the Greek Cypriot member of the Cultural Heritage Protection Working Committee, Takis Hadjidemetriou, to present a comprehensive dossier of historical and present-day photographs and other documents depicting the current state of the Magaravank monastery;
- June 11, with the Minister of Interior, Neoklis Sylikiotis, accompanied with representatives of the Melkonian Alumni Association of Cyprus, to discuss matters related to the Melkonian school.

**EVENTS:** The Armenian Representative and Mrs Mahdessian attended the following community events during the period April – June:

- April 1, the Hamazkayin Cultural Association's "Oshagan" chapter's annual performance with the "Sipan" dance group at the Pallas theatre in Nicosia. The event was held under the auspices of the Armenian Representative.
- April 3, the commemoration event marking the centenary of the Adana Massacres, organised by the Nor Serount Cultural association and held at the Utudjian Hall of the Prelature in Nicosia.
- April 7, the screening of the "Screamers" documentary by director Carla Garabedian, held at the K-Cineplex in Nicosia and organised by the Armenian National Committee of Cyprus.
- April 15, a performance of Komitas music held at the Kasteliotissa Hall in Nicosia, organised by the Armenian Prelature of Cyprus.
- May 3, the theatre performance of the "Timag" group of the Hamazkayin Cultural Association's "Oshagan" chapter, held at the Pasidy Hall, under the auspices of the Armenian Representative.
- May 30, the May 28 celebrations organised by the ARF and sister organisations in Cyprus, held at the Pasidy Hall under the high patronage of the Armenian Representative.
- June 14, the graduation ceremony of the Nareg Schools held at the Nareg elementary school amphitheatre in Nicosia under the auspices of the Armenian Representative. Mr Mahdessian and Archbishop Hergelian presented the graduates with their diplomas and congratulated them, as well as their parents.

## LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

### Assistance to Repatriates

Those citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, who have been out of the country for more than ten years following the Turkish invasion or for work, are considered as “Repatriates” if they wish to resettle in Cyprus.

Their benefits are:

- a duty free car for up to 9 passengers (new purchase after resettling in Cyprus or imported, but not more than 5 years old). When the car is imported from outside the EU, normal taxation applies. For information call 22 601660/661/662.
- house rent allowance for the first year of €14 per month for one or two persons, €38pm for three persons, €62pm for four or five persons and €85pm for families of six or more members. For information call 22 871837/8.
- a school grant of €769 per year when attending a private secondary school. Each year, this grant is given only to the first 150 applicants. For information call 22 800600 or 22 800704.
- an annual subsidy for unmarried children up to 23 or 25 years of age. The age and amount in aid is determined based on the family’s income, educational attendance or military service. For information call 22 804070.

In order to be eligible for such financial assistance, applicants must produce proof of overseas stay for longer than the minimum required period, such as work contract, furniture and used car importation customs documentation, etc.

Further information is available at the Ministry at Foreign Affairs website, [www.mfa.gov.cy](http://www.mfa.gov.cy).

**Due to the summer holidays, the Armenian Representative’s Office in Nicosia will be closed from August 10 to August 23, 2009.**