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NEWS IN BRIEF



SHANT PARSEGHIAN

Knights of Vartan Ararat Lodge Donates Computers to Armenian Sisters' Academy

LEXINGTON, Mass. – It has been a tradition for the Knights of Vartan Ararat Lodge to organize activities every year to raise funds for Armenian day schools here. This year, the lodge organized a Surf and Turf Night and raised funds for both St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School and the Armenian Sisters' Academy (ASA).

On Sunday, October 20, members of the lodge, with their Commander Jirair Demirdjian, visited the ASA and welcomed Sister Yevtoksia Keshishian, Mother Superior of the sisterhood, above, seated in black, who is visiting the US from the headquarters in Rome. Surrounded by all the sisters of the school, including Sister Emma Mousaian, director of the Philadelphia ASA, staff and members of the school board, Keshishian received from Demirdjian the donation of a dozen computers, which will replace the computers currently at the school. The computers are used for a variety of subjects, including learning the Armenian language.

Keshishian thanked the Knights for their donation and promised that as long as the community is behind the school, the school will keep its doors open.

A breakfast reception followed hosted by Najeeb Diarbekerly.

Uttering the Unutterable: Prose about Genocide

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN – How can you express “the unspeakable” in writing? Is it at all possible? The unspeakable or indescribable, in this case, being the atrocities of mass murder, in the Armenian genocide of 1915, the suffering of the Greek victims of the massacres and deportations in 1922-3, the elimination of European Jews in the Holocaust. Those courageous few, whether survivors of the catastrophic events, or their offspring, or contemporary witnesses, who put down their recollections and reflections in writing, have given birth to a vast literature, the literature of memory, of genocide.

Leading protagonists in this literary process gathered from October 11-13, under the auspices of the Evangelical Academy in Berlin. Co-sponsors of the conference were the Working Group for Recognition – Against Genocide, for International Understanding (AGA) and the German-Armenian Society, Frankfurt. Peter Balakian, who had travelled from the US to participate in the conference, noted that being there Schwanenwerder so near the Wannsee was “heavy;” after all, it was there at the conference bearing its name that the Nazi leadership met in January 1942 to map out the “final solution to the Jewish problem,” what was to go down in history as the Holocaust.

In her opening welcome, Dr. Tessa Hofmann, founding member of the AGA and one of the first in Germany to spread knowledge of the Armenian Genocide, quoted Theodor W. Adorno's famous 1951 remark, “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” and noted that long before that, in 1920, author Zepel Esayan from Constantinople had questioned whether or not one could express the indescribable in literature: “It is definitely possible to relate see UNUTTERABLE, page 7

EU Maintains Interest in Armenian Cooperation

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – The decision of Armenia to join the Russia-led Customs Union has brought a new dimension to cooperation negotiations with the European Union (EU), according to the head of the EU delegation in Armenia Traian Hristea. He made the comments on October 22 at the presentation of the European Integration Index 2013 for Eastern Partnership countries.

Hristea noted that in this stage the relations with Armenia are important for the EU.

“Certainly the decision of Armenia to join the Customs Union emerged corresponding consequences, which are directed to change the circles of our bilateral relations,” Hristea. He added that the resources provided by the European Union for the cooperation development should be reevaluated. “Today we need to review and study all the planned programs for Armenia. Especially those programs, which concern to the creation of the deep and comprehensive free trade zone,” Hristea said.

Actor Vardan Petrosyan In Serious Accident

YEREVAN (ArmeniaNow) – Actor Vardan Petrosyan was taken to the hospital and operated on after surviving a car accident late last week.

According to the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the accident took place on the second kilometer of the Yeghvard-Yerevan highway. A report said rescuers helped take Petrosyan out of his BMW and also rescued the driver from other vehicle. Both were first transferred to the Yeghvard hospital and then to the Erebuni medical center in Yerevan.

According to the preliminary report, Petrosyan's condition was assessed as serious. Media reports later said that the actor had undergone a surgery and was at the Erebuni medical center's intensive care unit and is said to have stabilized.

Armenia National Team Coach Bids Farewell

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Armenia's national soccer team's coach and squad manager Vardan Minasyan announced this week he will not coach the national squad in the new qualification stage. “Today I met with FFA (Football Federation of Armenia) President Ruben Hayrapetyan, and we discussed several matters linked to the national team. I prefer another continuation to my [coaching] career. There are several offers, specifically from abroad, and I want to discuss them,” said Minasyan.

“It is a great honor for every coach to be the manager of a national squad. I also would like to thank our football fans. I also would like to thank the media representatives. I have always been honest with them,” Minasyan added.

Pan-Armenian Journalists' Group Convenes, Awards Mirror-Spectator Annual Prize

YEREVAN – On October 9, the sixth Pan-Armenian Journalists' Coordinating Committee convened here, under the auspices of Diaspora Minister Hranush Hakobyan and the Armenian Journalists' Union.

Hakobyan thanked those assembled for raising the issues that Armenians in the diaspora face, and also help shed light on solutions to those issues. She also presented a report on the Diaspora Ministry's five years of activities.

The committee congratulated the Diaspora Ministry on its fifth anniversary.

She said, in turn, “Without the diaspora, there would be no Diaspora Ministry. Without a diaspora, our programs would not be realized.”

The group is co-chaired by the editor of Aztag newspaper in Lebanon, Shahan

Kandaharian, and ADL Press Committee co-chairman, Hagop Vartivarian. Both spoke and praised the efforts of the Diaspora Ministry.

In addition, Vartivarian thanked her for awarding the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* with the newspaper of the year award, which the ministry hands out annually, in conjunction with the Armenian Journalists' Union.

“Thank you to the ministry and to Astghik Gevorkyan [of the Journalists' Union], for recognizing our ADL publication in Massachusetts, which strives to bring news from Armenia to their brothers and sisters in the US, and also inform our fellow Armenians in the Homeland about the lives of American-Americans,” Vartivarian said.

Koutoujian Looks Back on Campaign, Hopes Community Activism Continues

By Alin K. Gregorian
Mirror-Spectator Staff

BOSTON – It was a primary campaign that was launched when Sen. John Kerry was named secretary of state by Present Barack Obama and then Rep. Edward Markey won the special election in June to become the state's junior senator.

On October 15, the intense campaign by seven Democrats and three Republicans seeking to win the special primary in their respective parties to replace Markey ended, and state Sen. Katherine Clark of Melrose



Sheriff Peter Koutoujian

topped the Democratic side with 32 percent of the votes in the 24 cities and towns making up the Fifth Congressional District.

In second place was Middlesex County

Sheriff Peter Koutoujian with 22 percent of the vote. He won Watertown and Waltham handily.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Uttering the Unutterable: Prose about Genocide

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single episodes from this huge martyrdom, yet no human language can give an account of this dreadful thing in its totality, namely to eliminate a whole race."

What emerged from the intensive, emotional discussion was that although it is impossible to replicate the catastrophe, writers have succeeded in transmitting its essence. Here it is particularly fiction, Hofmann said, that "assumes the task that journalism or scientific literature cannot or will not cover." The reason lies in the poetical character of fictional literature, which, as the German word for poetry – *Dichtung* – expresses, condenses reality in images which transmit a deeper reality than that contained in the chronicle of events.

So, for example, Elias Venezis depicted the case of the forced transfer of Greeks from Smyrna after its occupation by Turkish military in 1922. Dr. Michaela Prinzing spoke on "Elias Venezis: Growing Up under the Risk of Death." As a child he lived through the horrors of the Greek-Turkish war, and recalled how his grandfather grabbed a handful of earth to taken with



Elias Venezis

him, a symbol of his lost homeland. Venezis wrote also of his arrest in 1922 and his suffering as a forced laborer in his book, *Number 31328*. Prinzing showed several clips from a film based on the book and titled *1922*. In it director Nikos Koundouros summarized the tragedy of an entire people in the story of three individuals, one the young boy Elias, another, a young woman, one of the many who were raped, who goes insane.



Peter Balakian

Dr. Magdalena Marszałek, a professor from Potsdam university, spoke on "Concentration Camp Literature: Early Polish Contributions." Although this genre includes works on experiences in the Soviet Gulags, she concentrated on those dealing with the Nazi concentration camps, specifically Tadeus Borowski and Zofia Nalkowska, two non-Jewish writers. She cited Holocaust survivor Henryk Grynberg to the effect that Polish literature had a special responsibility to treat this, since it was "in the epicenter of the crime" – most of the Nazi extermination camps (like Treblinka, Majdanek, Belzec and Sobibór) were located in fact on Polish territory, whether occupied or annexed, and half of the 6 million Jews killed were Poles. Marszałek distinguished between the position of the victims and that of the non-Jewish eyewitnesses, and made this important point: "In order for eyewitnesses



Fethiye Çetin

to become witnesses, an act of speech is required, in which the witness speaks for the others and to others. Without such an act of speech, the eyewitnesses remain imprisoned in the 'grey zone' of onlookers...." One Polish literature expert contrasted the "eloquence" of the victims' testimonies to the "aphasia" (speech disorder) of the eyewitness literature. The roots of the problem lie in the complex situation whereby Polish Christians tended to focus on their own suffering under Nazi occupation. The two communities prior to the war had been divided by religion and language, anti-Semitism was widespread, and this "not only hindered empathy but led not seldom to collaboration ... and complicity in murder." In this context, the work of Borowski and Nalkowska takes on greater significance. Borowski, who survived Auschwitz but committed suicide in 1951, "presented mercilessly how the perfidious camp system – without exception – dehumanized" its victims. Nalkowska adopted a style in which she "let her protagonists speak ... without her commenting or interpreting," thus achieving an "aesthetic and intellectual distance" which "recognizes the obscenity of the claim that one can understand what has occurred."

Coming to the case of the Armenian Genocide, Hofmann stressed the role of the literature of the survivors' children, among them Vartan Hartunian and David Kherdian, as well as the grandchildren, two of whom Peter Balakian and Fethiye Çetin were on hand in Berlin. In his *Black Dog of Fate*, Balakian addresses the transmission of trauma across generations, relating how his grandmother Nafina, in bits and pieces, shared episodes from the Genocide with him as a young boy. The stories would come out in coded words, he said, hieroglyphic and highly symbolic and constituted one part of the process through which he learned about the past, both his family's experience and the broader Armenian tragedy. His book, Balakian explained, is also a development novel, in which he conveys what it was like for an Armenian to grow up in a modern American setting in New Jersey.

Çetin's book, *My Grandmother*, signaled a breakthrough when it appeared in 2004. Although she was not the first Turkish author to approach the taboo theme (Hofmann recalled the works of Ayla Kutlu, for example), Çetin struck a deep chord in the Turkish population, particularly members of her generation who began to raise questions about their own family histories reaching back to 1915. The book recounts how her grandmother Seher, shortly before her death, reveals to her, bit by bit, what she went through as an Armenian child during the genocide, how she was adopted by a Turkish family, and kept her secret for sixty years. Çetin's slim volume, which has gone through several reprints and has been translated in many languages, weaves the threads of the grandmother's personal story together with the historical documentation of the genocide.

Both Balakian and Çetin read selections of their works in the original, and translators followed with the corresponding passages in German. Asked by Dr. Raffi Kantian, publisher of *ADK* (Armenian-German Correspondence magazine), about reports that the Turkish Cultural Ministry had supported her book, she explained that it had initially been neither supported nor attacked (as had works by Taner Akçam and Hrant Dink, for instance) but that when an Italian publisher planned an edition, it sought assistance and received it. The point she underlined in her remarks was the importance of remembering; although girls who had been taken from their families were told to observe silence, many did not forget their estranged rela-



Dr. Magdalena Marszałek

tives and cherished their names.

Balakian, asked to explain how young Armenian Americans are dealing with their distant past, contrasted the current generation with his own; whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, the pressure to Americanize was strong, now American culture has become more open to other cultures and histories; the Genocide has gained interest also as a part of the human rights issue.

As a counterpoint, Dr. Bernhard Malkmus, a professor of German at Ohio State University, spoke about the Armenians' destiny as seen through the eyes of two Jewish authors, Franz Werfel and Edgar Hilsenrath. Unlike Werfel's epic account of *The 40 Days of Musa Dagh*, the work of Hilsenrath, a Holocaust survivor, is not a historical novel, but a fantastic work in the form of a fairy tale. *The Story of the Last Thought* unfolds as the history of the Khatisian family told with the help of a story-teller Meddah as the last thought of the dying Thovma. It is the tale of a founding taken in by a Turkish family and left with no information about its own relatives. Malkmus interprets the deathbed wish of Thovma as a metaphor for the Armenian people's yearning for recognition and reconciliation, and the life story as a metaphor for lives which might have been, those of the unborn, or perhaps someone born in 1915.

It was only fitting that among the three workshops offered during the conference, one was led by Dogan Akhanli, whose best known novel, *The Judges of the Last Judgment*, was inspired by Hilsenrath's book and shares its fairytale-like quality. Akhanli spoke at length about how his experience with arbitrary violence, having been subjected to torture in Turkey as a youth and jailed as an activist, led him as a refugee in Germany to research the history of the Holocaust and other genocides. His and other workshops, by Kantian and Wilfried Eggers, who wrote on the genocide in the form of a thriller, provided the rare opportunity to learn how creative writers tackle the challenge of composing works whose subject is thought to be unspeakable.

(Muriel Mirak-Weissbach is the author of *Through the Wall of Fire: Armenia – Iraq – Palestine: From Wrath to Reconciliation* and can be reached at mirak.weissbach@googlemail.com)

Sts. Vartanantz Celebrates Milestone

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Kayajanian and Sandra Boroyan. The afternoon also included musical performances by parishioners.

"For the past 35 years, our church has attended to the spiritual needs of our church family, providing an inspirational place of worship, religious education for our children, a place to celebrate, nurture, and experience our Armenian Christian heritage, and a haven to bring hope and comfort to parishioners who seek relief from the many trials and tribulations of everyday life," Kesablyan said. "I am truly inspired by and proud of our parish."

The original Sts. Vartanantz Church was consecrated in 1916, in Lowell, Mass. As the community grew in the decades following World War II, plans were made to relocate the parish to a larger house of worship. Under the leadership of its former pastor, the late Rev. Ghevont Samoorian, the parish purchased a property in Chelmsford and in 1978 the present church was consecrated.

Also during Sunday's banquet, the parish honored longtime members Patricia Amboian and George Simonian with the "St. Vartan Award."

Amboian has taught the parish Sunday School, chaired the parish council and assisted with other church organizations. She currently serves on the Women's Guild and is a member of the church choir.

Simonian is a veteran of the Korean War and a longtime public school educator. At Sts. Vartanantz Church, he chaired the

parish council, led the church's building memorial committee and launched its endowment fund.

"Both Pat and George, through their model of love, faith, and devotion, have been inspirations not only to our parishioners but also to me personally," Kesablyan said.

Archbishop Barsamian closed the program with a message and benediction. He expressed his gratitude to Amboian and Simonian for their dedication, and thanked the entire parish for their commitment to the mission of the Armenian Church.

"Throughout our history, the Armenian people have been building churches wherever they went. They have been raising up beautiful houses of worship where they have



Jeremy Oldham is ordained to the sub-diaconate.

gathered to rejoice, to pray, and to strengthen their faith. And Sts. Vartanantz Church is no exception," Barsamian said.

"The spirit of the living Gospel has been exemplified by the people of this parish, through your service on the altar, your efforts in parish organizations, your outreach to the community, and your ministry to each other. As you embark on the next chapter of your history, I pray that you continue on this journey and inspire others to join you in your service."

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