

## Armenian Community Quarterly Newsletter

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#### *My fellow Armenians and friends*

On May 21 I completed the second year of my five year term and remain fully committed to working with transparency and with all my abilities to serve the interests of the Armenian community of Cyprus.

I can assure you that the results achieved so far have been productive, justifying the conclusion of complex and difficult issues.

I have been prompt to brief you about the financial aid secured from the government for the repair of the Old Cemetery and am pleased to inform you that work is already underway. This, I believe, is the biggest achievement of my second year in office because it has put an end to criticism and displeasure within the community, avoiding further harm to be inflicted on the Armenian Church.

Also, the state funding to the Church, that had remained unchanged for the past ten years, has been significantly increased to 60,000 euros.

As regards the Armenian community website, this has created excitement among the community's youth who are waiting impatiently for the new games to be posted there. Greek or other visitors, intellectuals and journalists who seek information about the community's history and its structure, also benefit from our updated website, saying this is probably the only organised religious minority group on the island.

Work is also underway to record the history of the Armenian community of Cyprus within a book dedicated to the minorities that will be funded and published by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Hopefully this should have a tangible result within the next year thanks to the dedication and hard work of a certain individual.

Within the scope of relations between Cyprus and Armenia, the agreement signed by the Rector of the State University of Yerevan, Professor Aram Simonian, with the University of Cyprus was an historical event. The Representative's Office will have a significant role to play within this cooperation with the hope that some day it will lead to the establishment of a Chair of Armenian Studies.

This edition of *Lradou* also contains a special guide for senior citizens which was prepared by our representatives at the Senior Assembly, Mrs Anahid Eskidjian and Mrs Elsie Utidjian. Aris Utidjian also assisted with the translation. Towards the end of the year a special event will be held at the Utudjian Hall with the participation of experts who will give valuable information to our pensioners about matters that interest them and their rights.

The Youth Community organised a number of events during May and June, with reports appearing in the following pages.

A special circular was distributed to the whole community regarding the Genocide memorial that was erected on the Larnaca seafront on May 28 and the dissatisfaction

that the matter caused. However, as the community has been well briefed about all the developments surrounding the matter and can judge for themselves, I believe there is no need to continue discussing the matter further.

On June 4, the Armenian Embassy in Greece sent all the documentation regarding issues related to dual nationality. Those interested should contact the Representative's Office.

Finally, His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, will be visiting Cyprus on July 22. I have arranged for several meetings with the President of the Republic, Demetris Christofias, the President of the House of Representatives, Marios Garoyian, His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos II of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus and others. Details will be published in the next issue of *Lradou*. I wish you all a pleasant and unforgettable summer vacation.

***Vartkes Mahdessian***

*Armenian Representative in the Cyprus House of Representatives.*

**3-MONTHLY REPORT:** The Representative's Office continued to assist individuals to process their residency or work permits. A number of cases that were outstanding since 2005 were finally resolved thanks to the intervention of the Minister of Interior, Mr Neoclis Sylikiotis. Following Mr. Mahdessian's intervention, the residency permit for an individual in Nicosia was secured for the fifth consecutive year, despite previous rejections.

The requirements for residency and work permits in Cyprus have been stricter since May, requiring more documentation and evidence. A bank guarantee and health insurance are now mandatory, unless the foreign national is married to a Cypriot. The home address in Cyprus and/or a rental agreement, as well as another Cypriot's guarantee is also necessary. A visitor's permit (visa) is issued only for up to six months, at the expiry of which the visitor must return to his/her home country and reapply for entry once again to Cyprus.

- Two persons with Cypriot parents received their citizenship in April.
- A child that needed urgent medical care in May was sent to Israel for immediate treatment following Mr Mahdessian's personal involvement.

**UNIVERSITY VISIT:** The Rector of the State University of Yerevan, Prof. Aram Simonian visited the island at the invitation of the University of Cyprus. The purpose of the visit was to sign a 5-year cooperation protocol for the exchange of students and academics, as well as to initiate joint research projects and to organise seminars and conferences. The protocol was signed on April 15 with the Rector of the University of Cyprus, Prof. Stavros Zenios, in the presence of the Armenian Representative and other University officials.

In the future, this cooperation could develop to the creation of a Chair of Armenian Studies at the University of Cyprus, as already proposed by Mr. Mahdessian to the Rector of the University during a meeting March 2007.

Prof. Simonian also visited the Armenian Prelature in Nicosia and had a meeting with Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian, as well as Church Council president Sebouh Tavitian. He also visited the three Nareg schools in all towns and attended special events, leaving Cyprus with many good impressions.

**APRIL 24:** On April 17, the Armenian Representative took the floor during the plenary session of parliament to express his gratitude to the government of Cyprus which was the first nation in Europe to recognise the Armenian Genocide and condemn the Turkish state's acts and continued denial.

On April 23, Mr. Mahdessian addressed the Armenian Genocide Remembrance held at the Pasydy theatre, where he emphasised the demand for justice by the Armenian people and the struggle for genocide recognition. The next day, he was interviewed on the same subject by state broadcaster CyBC's First Channel radio.

**CONGRATULATIONS:** On June 3, the Armenian Representative sent a congratulatory note to the team, trainers and chairman of the AGBU Ararad futsal team that won the Cyprus futsal cup.

On June 26, Mr Mahdessian congratulated the Chairman of the Pharos Trust, Mr Garo Keheyian, on the occasion of the foundation's tenth anniversary that saw great successes in the arts and cultural scene of Cyprus.

**PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT:** On May 28, the Armenian Representative issued a press release thanking the government of Cyprus for its financial contribution towards the Genocide Memorial erected on the Larnaca seafront. On May 29, Mr Mahdessian sent out a circular to the Armenian community expressing his dissatisfaction at the unfair way the whole project was presented, as the Armenian Prelature and the community in general were completely disregarded in the process. He said it was reprehensible that the government's generous contribution for the project was used this way, as were the ambitions of one family to prevail over the whole project, adding that the memorial's historical suffering belongs to the whole nation.

**MEETINGS / VISITS:** On April 2, Mr. Mahdessian had a meeting with the Director General of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation and discussed ways to improve the Armenian radio programme. The Armenian Representative also had the following meetings:

- On April 9 and 15, with the newly appointed Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, Mr Antonis Paschalides and the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance, Mrs Sotiroula Charalambous, to discuss issues related to the Armenian community.
- On May 9, accompanied by Nareg Schools Committee Chairman Krikor Haroutiounian and board member Sebouh Tavitian, he had a meeting with the Ministry of Education's Director General, Mrs Olympia Stylianou, to discuss issues related to the schools.
- On May 20, the Armenian Representative, as well as the representatives of the Maronite and Latin communities, had a meeting with House President Marios Garoyian to discuss issues related to the religious group minorities.
- On May 21, a meeting with Israeli Ambassador Avraam Haddad.
- On May 26, accompanied by the Church Council president Sebouh Tavitian and Executive Committee president Dr. Antranig Ashdjian, he had a meeting with Larnaca Mayor Andreas Moyseos to discuss the issue of the Genocide Memorial on the town's seafront.

- On June 13, with Defence Minister Costas Papacostas to discuss the matter of the Armenian recruits in the National Guard starting from the call-up for 2008.
- On June 30, he presented Interior Minister Neoclis Sylikiotis with a short list of applicants for naturalisation and other issues.

**EVENTS:** During the months of April, May and June, Mr and Mrs Mahdessian attended several community and cultural events:

- On April 5, the annual performance of the Hamazkayin Oshagan Chapter's 'Sipan' dance group, held at the Strovolos municipal theatre under the auspices of President Demetris Christofias. Also present were House President Marios Garoyian and Hamazkayin's Central Committee member from Beirut, Megerditch Megerditchian.
- On May 28, the unveiling ceremony of the Genocide Memorial in Larnaca.
- On May 30, the event organised by the Nor Serount Cultural Association dedicated to the heroes of the battle of Sardarabad and the liberation of Shoushi. The main speaker was Mr Avedis Poshoghlian.
- On June 8, the celebration marking the May 28 national day, organised by the ARF Cyprus Committee and held at the Pasydy theatre, followed by a banquet at the Cleopatra Hotel.
- On June 18, the end-of-year graduation ceremony of the Nareg schools. The diplomas were presented by the Armenian Representative and the Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian.

On May 14, Mr and Mrs Mahdessian hosted a reception at their house for the AYA London football team, invited to Cyprus by the AYMA-HMEM football team and committee members.

On May 24, Mr and Mrs Mahdessian, in keeping with their tradition, hosted 60 young Armenians who graduated from the Nareg elementary schools and gymnasium, from other secondary schools, colleges and universities. Also present were Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian, the clergy and the Nareg teachers.

**COMMITTEES:** On May 9 and 16, the Representative's Committee for Youth organised two successive seminars on road safety awareness, held at the Bank of Cyprus Solon Triantafyllides hall in Nicosia. A large number of young people turned up to hear the personal stories of seven accident victims and their parents who showed an information video and answered questions from the public. The second part included a presentation by road safety expert and retired traffic police officer Andreas Papas who showed a video and interacted with the audience to discuss ways to drive safely and prevent accidents.

The Youth Committee organised a boat party on June 28 to promote fellowship with more than 100 young people from all towns taking part. Bus transport arrangements had been made for safe driving and the youth enjoyed an evening with fun, food, music and dance. More such events are being planned for the future.

The Representative's Committee for Cyprus-Armenia relations held several meetings where a number of initiatives were proposed and decisions made regarding the issues and problems raised by citizens from Armenia who live in Cyprus and how to resolve education and religious matters, in particular in Paphos.

The Representative's Advisory Committee reviewed the proposal to be tabled to the House Education Committee for the creation of an 'Armenian Cultural Centre' which will have an effective role on the Armenian Community's efforts to maintain national heritage, identity, language and culture.

**The Armenian Representative's Office will be closed for the Summer Holidays between July 28 and August 22, both dates inclusive.**

**Due to the insertion of the information booklet for senior citizens, the regular column on Laws of the Republic of Cyprus will continue in the next issue of *Lradou*.**