

"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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Issue No. 3, April 2007

The issue of the military service of the members of the minority communities was raised unexpectedly in January and following consultation with the members of the Advisory Council, Mr Vartkes Mahdessian gave a positive response to the authorities, raising, however, a number of concerns involving the young Armenians of Cyprus.

A new heritage preservation order was re-issued on March 2, 2007 on a large part of the Melkonian Educational Institute grounds, while the issue of rescuing the priceless library has also been raised.

Meetings continued to take place with local and government officials, political party representatives, diplomats and other visiting dignitaries to help improve the wellbeing of the community and short-term visitors.

As regards those who have remained in Cyprus and exhausted the duration of their 5-year residency permit and have secured a work permit for the 18 months following January 23rd 2006, may apply for a permanent residency and work permit.

3-MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT – Due to regular visits by Mr. Mahdessian's representative to Migration and Immigration Dept. offices, various residency and work permits have been processed and secured, while some of the applicants for political asylum have been granted hospital permits.

- Jobs were secured for two young people who applied to the Representative Office.
- Four applicants for citizenship received their final papers.
- A Syrian Armenian who had remained on the island with a valid work permit for a long period was jailed for failing to secure the necessary permit for the last year. After being remanded for two days, Mr. Mahdessian secured his release on the third day and through the kind intervention of the Minister of Interior, Mr. Neoclis Sylikiotis, has been granted a year's work and residency permit.
- Mr Mahdessian secured 75% grants for two Melkonian graduates to study at Americanos College.
- Mr. and Mrs. Vartkes Mahdessian, accompanied by Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian, visited the Kalaydjian Rest Home at noon on New Year's Eve and gave presents to the community's senior members wishing them well.
- Representative Mahdessian congratulated Mr. Haig Utudjian and Mrs. Sona Gargaloyian on the occasion of their very successful concerts.
- Mr. Mahdessian congratulated Education and Culture Minister Akis Cleanthous on his appointment and expressed his support.
- The Armenian Representative sent letters of condolences to the Patriarch of Bolis, Archbishop Mesrob Mutafyan, the editorial staff of the 'Agos' weekly newspaper, condemning the murder of Hrant Dink and saying that the voice of truth will never be silenced.

- Mr. Mahdessian sent a letter of condolences to the President of the Republic of Armenia, Mr. Robert Kocharyan, after the untimely death of Prime Minister Antranik Markarian.
- A letter was sent to the Foreign Ministry Director General Alexandros Zenon requesting that necessary measures be taken to ensure the first pilgrimage to the Magaravank Armenian Monastery in the occupied north on May 6 is concluded smoothly.
- A letter was sent to Interior Ministry Director General Dr. Lazaros Savvides raising the issue of the welfare of the minority cemeteries.
- Mr. Mahdessian congratulated Dr. Vahakn Atamyian, President of the AGBU Cyprus "Ararat" futsal team on the occasion of their winning the championship.
- Mr. Mahdessian attended the annual "Saint Maron" celebrations of the Maronite community and had a separate meeting with Archbishop Boutros Gemayel.
- Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian attended the social events organised by the Limassol Armenian Club, the AYMA food bazaar, the Armenian Relief Society's fund-raising dinner and the concert of the Hamazkayin 'Gargach' children's choir from Lebanon.

MELKONIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE – Following the success of the Armenian General Benevolent Union's Central Board in the United States to overturn two court cases in December, a public briefing was organised by the local Alumni Association on January 14, 2007, after the memorial service for the founders Krikor and Garabed Melkonian. Two weeks later, a second meeting took place at the Armenian Prelature with the participation of representatives from the community's political parties, clubs and associations. The meeting was chaired by the Armenian Representative and Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian and it was decided that protest letters would be sent to the Attorney General, Mr. Petros Clerides, Interior Minister, Mr. Neoclis Sylikiotis, the President of the Supreme Court and Greek Cypriot political party leaders. The result was regarded a success as the community was acting in one unified voice to demand its rights.

Representative Mahdessian personally called and congratulated the Interior Minister for his support and his Ministry's actions that saw the reinstatement of the heritage preservation order.

The local media also gave extensive coverage and Mr. Mahdessian reiterated the community's satisfaction of the government's decision.

Several congratulatory calls and messages were received from individuals and organisations from within and outside Cyprus and Mr. Mahdessian once again repeated his determination that the Melkonian is a priceless reality for the Diaspora and all efforts will be exhausted for its preservation.

In a letter sent to AGBU Central Board President Berj Setrakian, Mr. Mahdessian proposed the temporary relocation of the school's priceless and historic library to the University of Cyprus, in order to save the books from destruction. He also said that as advised by the University officials, the books would be catalogued and posted on the Internet until such time that the AGBU decides on their fate.

NATIONAL SERVICE – On January 9, 2007, the Representatives of the Armenian, Maronite and Latin communities had a meeting with the Director General of the Ministry of Defence who explained that as, in accordance with European Union laws, minorities enjoy equal rights, therefore national service is necessary for all citizens.

Mr. Mahdessian expressed the community's positive stance towards this issue, however, after consulting with the Advisory Council sent a letter to the President of

the Republic, Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos expressing a number of concerns and requests.

Following these developments, Representative Mahdessian took part in a radio discussion on the state CyBC's 'Trito' channel and also gave a number of interviews to Greek and English-language newspapers to explain the community's willingness to accept the re-introduction of conscription but in parallel the request for certain measures which should accompany this decision.

COMMITTEES – The Representative's various committees had a number of regular meetings and proceeded with the implementation of certain plans. The Advisory Council discussed the matter of national service and the campaign to save the Melkonian. The Cultural Committee reviewed the prospects of a site for a future Community Centre, and the Youth Committee discussed future activities. The Welfare Committee had its first meeting and looked into related matters.

OFFICIAL AND OTHER MEETINGS – The Armenian Representative also had meetings with the following public and other officials:

- the Social Democrat Hunchak Party to discuss community affairs;
- Government Planning Bureau Director General, Mr. Andreas Moleskis, to discuss various projects;
- courtesy visit to Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, accompanied by Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian;
- Mr. Vartan Malian and CyBC producer Mr. Takis Elia to discuss cultural, community and other programmes;
- Mr. Achilleas Kentonis, Director of the Artos Foundation to discuss the possibility of securing European funds for cultural projects;
- Mr. Christos Christodoulou, Deputy Manager of the Land Development Corporation (KOAF) to discuss housing for low-income families;
- Dr. Stavros Zenios, Rector of the University of Cyprus, to discuss Armenians attending the University and relocation of the Melkonian library;
- Mrs. Kyoko Shiotani of the United Nations to discuss the pilgrimage to the Magaravank Monastery in the occupied north and the visits to the Armenian Cemetery on the Green Line in Ayios Dhometios.
- Officials of the Cyprus Anti Drugs Council;
- Mr. Gregory Makris of the American Embassy;
- Israeli Ambassador Mr. Abraham Haddad;
- Mrs. Laura Lecharpentier and Mrs. Rebecca Violaris of the French Embassy;
- Ambassador of the Netherlands, Mr. Jean Erik van den Berg.

Representative Mahdessian also attended the assemblies of the European Party, Democratic Rally and Socialist Edek.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL – A multi-cultural celebration took place at the Laniteio Lyceum B school of Limassol on February 7 attended by Bishop Athanassios of Limassol, Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian, the Turkish Cypriot Imam, the Maronite and Latin pastors, the Latin Representative and officials from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Dr. Antranik Ashdjian on behalf of the Armenian Community presented the origins, history and faith of the Armenian Cypriot Community.

MINORITIES' WEBPAGE – The Representative's Press Officer, Dr. Antranik Ashdjian, took part in several meetings in March with Interior Ministry Director

General, Dr. Lazaros Savvides, to discuss the creation of a common webpage for all religious groups, where each community would be responsible for its own contents. Dr. Ashdjian and Mr. Kevork Zeytountsian will compile the historical contents of the Armenian page.

(The Office of the Armenian Representative has already had a dedicated website, <http://www.armenianmp.com>, hosted by WebNaz creations since February 2006)

PATRICK DEVEDJIAN IN CYPRUS – The French Armenian Representative in the National Assembly, Mr. Patrick Devedjian, visited Cyprus on February 23, 2007, when he was presented with the “Grand Cross of the Order of Archbishop Makarios III” by President Tassos Papadopoulos for his services as Chairman of the France-Cyprus Parliamentary Committee. Also present at the ceremony was Mr. Mahdessian, who the same day hosted a lunch at his residence in honour of Mr. and Mrs. Devedjian. Other guests included Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian, political party leaders and press officers of the Armenian community.

PILGRIMAGE TO MAGARAVANK – The Representative Office and the Armenian Prelature of Cyprus are jointly organising the first pilgrimage to the St. Magar Monastery (Magaravank) that will take place on Sunday, May 6, 2007. The trip, the first in 33 years after the Turkish invasion and occupation, will be co-ordinated by the local office of the United Nations.

LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS – The 3rd edition of the Newsletter translated into Armenian the relevant regulations and information about the University of Cyprus in relation with the three religious groups. The Newsletter also had information about the Telecare service for senior citizens, provided privately in co-ordination with the Welfare Office.