

Armenian Community Quarterly Newsletter

**Produced by the Office of the Armenian Representative
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My fellow Armenians and friends

The last three months of the year were marked by a series of successes and positive developments for the Armenian community of Cyprus.

True to my principles of serving the best interests of the Armenian community of Cyprus, I had promised to find a solution to the critical issue of the Old Cemetery near Ledra Palace, whose sad and neglected state had become the subject of media debates in Cyprus and abroad, creating conflicting views within the community.

I was finally informed in October that the Government had approved a grant of CYP 90,000 (EUR 153,765) towards the renovation costs, while a letter from the Ministry of Interior confirmed the decision and stated that the amount would be received in two instalments of CYP 45,000 each.

The second important issue was the increase in the annual state grant to our Prelature from the CYP 25,000 that was first set in 1998, to CYP 35,000 (59,798).

A third issue was the pledge of CYP 5,000 (EUR 8,543) from the Government towards the creation of a multi-lingual and interactive website for the Armenian community of Cyprus.

On the cultural side, the double performances of the 'Arevik' Children's and Youth Song & Dance Ensemble of Armenia - on the 6th and 7th October 2007, organised by the Representative Office Cultural Committee - proved a great success.

With regard to the issue regarding official documents of our compatriots from Armenia currently living in Cyprus, we initiated a series of regular visits in coordination with the Ambassador, Mr. Vahram Gazhoyian, whereby the embassy's Consul will visit Cyprus between January 31st and February 2nd, 2008 and will use the facilities of the Representative's Office.

Finally, on the occasion of the New Year and the Apostolic Christmas, I would like to wish you all well and hope that 2008 will be a year full of health and that your wishes come true, while for our Motherland and our nation, we hope it will be a year of successes, victories and developments.

Vartkes Mahdessian

Armenian Representative in the Cyprus House of Representatives.

THREE-MONTHLY REPORT: Work continued to satisfy the requirements for residence permits and citizenship applications, but, once again, the Office has been overwhelmed with cases in which permit holders failed to reapply for renewal of their documentation within the required time. Those applying for naturalisation, too, are obliged to renew their residency permits, regardless of whether they have a positive or a negative answer to their application, while the residency of those who have been rejected is considered illegal.

Those who have secured their residency by way of an Employment Contract are obliged to reapply for renewal to the Labour Office through their employer at least two months prior to the expiry date of their permit. Following that, they must apply to the Aliens & Immigrations Office to renew their residency.

The Representative continues to deal almost on a weekly basis with cases for naturalisation that have been pending for some time. As a reminder, the procedure for naturalisation takes about 2-3 years.

'AREVIK' ENSEMBLE: The Cultural Committee of the Office of the Armenian Representative successfully organised two performances by the 'Arevik' Children and Youth Song & Dance Ensemble on October 6 and 7 at the Strovolos Municipal Theatre, attended by Armenian and Greek personalities, together with a record audience of 1,200.

'Arevik' Director Armen Divanyan and members of the group were hosted at a reception at Vartkes and Maggie Mahdessian's residence, together with members of the organising committee. The group also visited the Prelature and St. Asdvadzadzin's Church in Nicosia, went on an excursion to Ayia Napa and were guests of the Armenian Club in Larnaca where they met Yiorgos Ioannides (Boyadjian) who represented Cyprus in the Junior Eurovision song contest.

On December 8, the 'Arevik' group finished second in the finals of the Junior Eurovision song contest in Rotterdam.

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS: The Representative's Office organised a breast cancer awareness and prevention seminar on October 14 at the Hilton Park Hotel. Following an introduction by Dr. Eleni Theocharous, a video was shown and the main speaker, Dr. Stella Kyriakides, answered many questions from the ladies who attended the event.

COUNCIL OF ELDERS: Mrs. Anahid Eskidjian and Mrs. Elsie Utudjian, who were appointed by Mr. Mahdessian to the Council of Elders in July, are planning a series of informative public events to be held in 2008 to inform senior members of the community on the rights and state assistance to pensioners.

EUROPEAN ARMENIAN FEDERATION: On October 15-16, Representative Mahdessian attended the 2nd Congress of the European Armenian Federation in Brussels, where he reaffirmed the support of the Armenian community of Cyprus to Armenian and European political and religious leaders in their struggle against Turkey's intransigent policies and efforts for international recognition of the Genocide.

SEMINAR ON MINORITIES: The European University - Cyprus (formerly Cyprus College) organised a two-day forum on "The Minorities of Cyprus" on November 24-25 with the participation of representatives from the Armenian, Maronite and Latin

communities, as well as Cypriot and foreign experts. Aspects of the past and present social and cultural life of the Armenian community of Cyprus were outlined by Prof. Gerard Dedeyan, Dr. Suzanne Pattie, Dr. Sossie Kasbarian and Dr. Vartan Ozinian. In his address, Representative Mahdessian raised the need for an Armenian Chair at the University of Cyprus, the inclusion of Armenian history, culture and religion in Cyprus public school history books and the need for the religious group to be recognised as an ethnic minority.

After the seminar, Vartkes Mahdessian also had a separate meeting with Dr. Vartan Ozinian, of the Pro Edvcatio group, that is campaigning at an international level for the reopening of the Melkonian Educational Institute and in favour of the Western Armenian language.

LETTERS: Letters of congratulation were sent on October 12 to the U.S. Congress Foreign Relations Committee chairman Rep. Tom Lantos and Armenian National Committee of America Executive Director Aram Hamparian for their efforts to bring about the debate and tabling of the Genocide Bill 106.

OFFICIAL MEETINGS: On September 27, Mr. Mahdessian, accompanied by RA Foreign Ministry Administration Dept. Third Secretary Mrs. Liana Krikorian and Public Service Scientific Studies Senior Officer Mr. Kegham Sarkisian, met Finance Ministry Director-General Mr. Yiorgos Papageorghiou as part of efforts to improve relations following the state visit of President Robert Kocharyan in November 2006. Mr. Mahdessian also had the following meetings:

- with the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Ali Reza Bikdeli;
- with Labour Office and Social Insurance Director-General Leandros Nicolaides and First Officer Demetris Michaelides to discuss issues of work permits;
- with Interior Minister Dr. Christos Patsalides and Director-General Dr. Lazaros Savvides regarding the review of naturalisation cases;
- with the Evangelical Church of Turkey's Reverend Krikor Aghabaoghlu, who gave a series of lectures in Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol, accompanied by the Regional Director of the Evangelical Church, Hrayr Jebedjian;
- with AGBU Central Board President Berdj Setrakian and Mr. Benon Sevan to discuss issues of the Armenian community of Cyprus and the Armenian nation;
- with the Mayor of Ayios Dhometios, Dr. Andreas Hadjiloizou, who kindly offered to occasionally undertake the cleaning of the Armenian cemetery in that area;
- with Portuguese Ambassador Antonio De Carvalho to discuss the history and activities of the Armenian community of Cyprus;
- with Mr. Stelios Markides, the Director of the Cyprus Land Development Corporation (KOAY), to discuss applications for new homes to low-income families, which will take about 3-4 years due to the delay in new projects;
- with RA's former Ambassador to Iraq, Mr. Yura Babakhanian, who was in Cyprus representing Armenia at the European Neighbourhood Policy Conference.

OLD CEMETERY AT LEDRA PALACE: Following a year of discussions, Mr. Mahdessian was informed on October 19 that the government had agreed to provide a grant of CYP 90,000 (EUR 153,765) towards the cost of renovation of the old Armenian cemetery. On November 12, a letter from the Ministry of Interior confirmed the official state support. The Representative conveyed his deep appreciation to the government, saying that the Armenian Church and the community

would work to renovate the cemetery and transform it into an historic and architectural monument.

OTHER EVENTS: On September 28, the Armenian Representative attended a gathering organised by the Maronite community, at which he outlined the work done by the European Union's Council for the Preservation of the Identity of National Minorities, and at the same time noted the slow progress in implementing these decisions.

On September 30, Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian attended the Holy Day of Commemoration of the St. Kevork Armenian Church in Limassol.

On December 15, Mr. and Mrs. Mahdessian attended the annual dinner dance organised by the Nor Serount Cultural Society.

CORRESPONDENCE: The Armenian Representative received a letter, dated August 20, from the Chairman of the Melkonian Advisory Committee, Mr. Smpad Devletian, to which a response was sent on October 24.

In order to better inform the community, both letters were sent to the Armenian Cypriot newspapers, both because of their important content and also in line with Mr. Mahdessian's philosophy of transparency. The monthly 'Artsakank' agreed to publish both letters, but 'Azad Tsayn,' for unknown reasons, refused to publish them, despite its stated motto of: "In the name of free thinking and free speech."

CYPRIOT ARMENIAN WEBSITE: After a year of discussions with the government, a decision was reached in November to issue grants of CYP 5,000 (EUR8,543) each to finance the setting up of websites for the three religious minorities. Mr. Mahdessian appointed Dr. Nazaret Armenagian to oversee the project and he has produced a modern site that was launched on Armenian Christmas Day, January 6, 2007, at www.cyprusarmenians.com. which also relayed a live broadcast of the Holy Sermon from the St. Asdvadzadzin Church in Nicosia.

The new website will include the history of the community and information about organisations; political, cultural and sports news, news of the activities of the Armenian Representative and the quarterly 'Lradou' newsletter, Armenian and national issue developments, games for young people and live music. Initially, the website will be in English, but it will later have Greek and Armenian sections.

LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

Securing a Long-Term Residency

After a 10-month delay, the Representative's Office received the conditions and application forms from the Ministry of Interior's Migration and Immigration Department for Long-Term Residence. Those eligible to apply must be citizens of third world countries who:

- have uninterruptedly resided in the Republic of Cyprus for the last five years;
- have a valid residence permit;
- have a passport valid for at least two years;
- have secured an employment contract for the next 18 months;
- have regularly paid their Social Insurance for the past five years;

- have completed their Income Tax forms for the past five years;
- can produce a recent local bank statement;
- have health insurance;
- can secure a Certificate of Good Conduct from the Police.

These conditions do not apply to those who are political refugees, individuals with special status and students.

Applications must be accompanied by CYP 250.00 (EUR 427) in cash and should be handed to the Migration Department, and rejection or acceptance will be notified in 4-6 months. All incomplete applications will be rejected.

Introduction of the Euro

On March 15, 2007, the House of Representatives passed a Bill for the introduction of the euro to replace the Cyprus pound from January 1, 2008.

On July 10, the European Commission approved an official exchange rate of EUR 1 to CYP 0.585274. Thus, the basic conversion rates are as follows:

£ 1.00	€ 1.71	€ 5.00	£ 2.93
£ 5.00	€ 8.54	€ 10.00	£ 5.85
£ 10.00	€ 17.09	€ 20.00	£ 11.71
£ 20.00	€ 34.17	€ 50.00	£ 29.26
		€ 100.00	£ 58.53
		€ 200.00	£ 117.05
		€ 500.00	£ 292.64

The Cyprus pound and the euro will remain in joint circulation until January 31, 2008, during which time payments will be accepted in Cyprus pounds but change will be given in euros, as the Cyprus pound notes and coins are gradually removed. No payment in Cyprus pounds will be valid from February 1, 2008.

Cheques issued in Cyprus pounds will not be valid from January 1, 2008 and these should be replaced with Euro cheques from that date.

Banks will exchange Cyprus pound notes and coins until June 30, 2008 at no charge. After that date exchanges can be made only at the Central Bank. Banks will also transfer all Cyprus pound amounts and balances in accounts into euros at no charge and at the predetermined official exchange rate.

On the occasion of the New Year and Christmas holidays, Vartkes and Maggie Mahdessian wish health and happiness to all the Armenians of Cyprus.

May 2008 be a year of prosperity, continued success and a year in which solutions will be found to our Motherland's many national issues.