



Kaloustian School in Cairo

other Christian minorities, such as the Copts or Levantines. So far, few have been bold enough to cross religious lines and marry from the majority Muslim population at the risk of being ostracized.

Social integration has been accompanied with some cultural integration as well. Perhaps the music of popular singer Anoushka is a reflection of the Egyptian Armenian soul in mainstream Egyptian culture. Her musical style mixing Arabic lyrics with traditional Armenian tunes and a western beat earned her the hearts of Egyptian pop listeners.

Alternatively, Cairo's artists, intellectuals and expatriate community members continue to be drawn by the musical inspiration of instrumentalist George Kazazian. Starting off as a classical oriental instrumentalist, his music has evolved to weave oriental and Indian musical concepts using traditional instruments such as mizmar, a flute; oud and Indian tabla.

Community members, on the other hand, get their daily dose of Armenian culture through the one-hour long Armenian Radio broadcast. Wholly financed by the Egyptian state to serve as a cultural bridge between the community and its ethnic heritage. "At the beginning of every year, we secure approval from the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (the state media regulatory body) for program content that would suit the diverse taste of our listeners," says program coordinator Aida Devletian. Working along with a team of five dedicated colleagues, "we present programs on Egyptian social issues, comparative literature, Armenian culture and music to name a few," she explains. "The elderly

prefer the classical tunes of Gomidas, in contrast to the younger generation which finds mainstream popular singers, such as Paul Baghdadlian, closer to their hearts," continues Devletian.

After almost five decades of change and transformation, the life of the Armenian community of Egypt now focuses on the Armenian Embassy in Cairo, which has become a "home" for every Egyptian Armenian.

This new spirit and vigor in the community is best described by Archbishop Chinchinian when he declared: "Seventy years after the Genocide, our national group has performed in Ewert Memorial Hall of the American University in Cairo located at the heart of the Middle East... we, descendants of the Armenian Genocide, can no longer be an audience. We have to take an active role in the reconstruction of Armenia." He was speaking to an auditorium full of Egyptian Armenians hauled-up to catch a glimpse of his Holiness Catholicos Karekin I of All Armenians on the eve of his first ever visit to the Egyptian capital in January 1998.

The first pontifical visit, the KALNOBO reunion, and several visits by high-ranking Armenian government officials signal a revival of the Egyptian Armenian community's historic role in nurturing ties between Egypt and their secondary country of migration—be it the US, Europe or Australia—as well as between Egypt and the Republic of Armenia. ■

Rafy Kourouian is business editor of the Middle East Times.

THE ARM



Ambassador Edward Nalbandian goes to Paris with acclamation

By HRATCH TCHILINGIRIAN

Unlike countries with decades-old (even centuries-old) state apparatus and experience in diplomatic relations, the "first generation" diplomats of virtually all newly independent countries carry enormous responsibilities and challenges. In addition to representing political and economic interests of their respective countries, diplomats of new states bear the responsibility of creating new diplomatic infrastructures in their host countries with virtually no (or at best very little) state budgets. From finding, acquiring and maintaining decent embassy buildings to obtaining cars, computers, faxes and staff, the first few years for a "new diplomat" are most challenging.

One of the 30 plus ambassadors representing Armenia around the world, Ambassador Edward Nalbandian, 43, of Egypt has created an "ideal" Armenian mission in Cairo. After six years as head of Armenia's mission in Cairo, he recently became Armenia's Ambassador to France.

After obtaining a doctorate degree in

ARMENIAN MISSION IN EGYPT



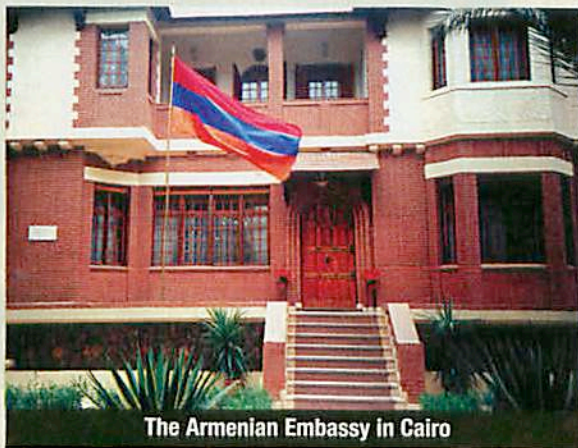
Armenian and Egyptian delegations, headed by Foreign Ministers Vartan Oskanian (fourth from left) and Amr Mussa (third from right), meeting in Cairo

political science from the prestigious Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Nalbandian was sent first to Lebanon in 1978 as a diplomat and then, in 1986, appointed First Secretary of the USSR Embassy in Egypt. In 1982, Nalbandian was the youngest diplomat in the Soviet Union who was rewarded the highest diplomatic medal for his service—the People's Friendship Medal—USSR's third highest honor. When Armenia became independent, Nalbandian was invited to become Armenia's representative in Egypt in mid-1992. By October 1992, Nalbandian had established an embassy in Cairo—one of the first embassies Armenia opened.

Egypt was also the first Middle Eastern country to be visited by the first President of Armenia, Levon Ter Petrossian, in May 1992, and one of his first foreign trips. This visit, "created a solid basis for the renewal of Armenian-Egyptian relations," says Ambassador Nalbandian. "I am saying renewal because Armenian-Egyptian ties and traditional friendship date back to ancient times. We have shared much during the long course of history. In the difficult times of our history, we felt the unprejudiced support of the Egyptian people,"

affirms Nalbandian.

Among the three countries with Armenian embassies in the Middle East (Syria and Lebanon are the other two), Egypt is considered the most powerful Arab state and a leader in the Arab world. Nalbandian points out that Egypt "enjoys an undeniable influence and authority on the international scene, in the United Nations,



The Armenian Embassy in Cairo

the Organization of African Unity, the Arab League, the Islamic Conference, the non-aligned movement, and other multinational organizations. That is why Egypt was one of the first countries where Armenia opened an embassy."

Indeed, one of the first high-ranking

visits by foreign officials to Armenia after independence was by an Egyptian delegation, in January 1992, headed by then Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Ganzouri. "Armenia places great political and economic importance on the development of cooperation with Egypt," says Nalbandian.

In turn, Egypt considers Armenia an important crossroads lending access to the neighboring regions. "They also very much value the political, economic, cultural and other bilateral ties with Armenia. The existence of well-organized and well-to-do Armenian [diaspora] communities in these countries is an additional impetus for enhancing more dynamic relations with Armenia. Many high ranking governmental officials in Arab countries consider Armenia as an excellent transit route and business environment for developing links with other CIS countries," explains Nalbandian.

The diplomatic mission and work of the Armenian Embassy in Egypt spreads to a number of multinational and regional organizations as well, such as the Cairo-based Arab League, the Islamic Conference, and the Organization of African Unity.

Multilingual Nalbandian, who is fluent in Arabic, represented Armenia's interests in a dozen other countries also, including Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Ethiopia, Israel, South Africa and Pakistan.

The attractive embassy mansion—located in the prestigious and exclusive Zamalek district of Cairo on the banks of the Nile and originally owned by the AGBU—is a "monument" to the collective work of Ambassador Nalbandian and the Egyptian Armenian community. "The whole community—all sides without exception—was involved, hand in hand, in building this beautiful edifice," says Nalbandian. "This is the home of every Armenian," he continues, "We are not here to serve the local community, but we are here, together with the local Armenian community, to address the issues facing Armenia and we are here to pursue the interests of Armenia and the Armenian nation." ■