

NOUVEL HAY MAGAZINE

SANS FRONTIÈRES

**UGAB Europe : un rapport sera
présenté aux maires des
principales villes d'Europe**

Europeans of Armenian Ancestry
Serve as Eyewitness Observers
of Escalating Humanitarian Crisis
in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh

Brussels, 3 Nov 2020 - In a highly unusual move to raise awareness and sound the alarm of a new humanitarian crisis unfolding at the gates of Europe, a delegation of 20 young Europeans of Armenian ancestry has been dispatched to serve in a five-day mission to Armenia and Artsakh from October 31-November 4. As first-hand observers, they will have the opportunity to witness the grave perils faced by thousands of Armenian civilians and families caught in a full-scale war that erupted when their homeland of Nagorno-Karabakh, aka Artsakh, was attacked by Azerbaijani forces on September 27, 2020.

Given that the Republic of Artsakh is not yet recognized as an independent state by the international community, European diplomats are not authorized to travel to nor meet with officials of Artsakh. This leaves them at a disadvantage in understanding the scope and depth of the issues and humanitarian needs that have already mounted in the first month alone. Yet, with the extraordinary show of support by diasporans behind the cause of Artsakh, as demonstrated by their well-orchestrated mass demonstrations across European cities last month, a delegation representing 15 countries will be the eyes and ears for the European community, under the aegis of the AGBU Europe YERIA Initiative.

The delegation represents Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Switzerland. It is joined by 15 journalists from key-media outlets as well seven public figures: members of Parliament of Spain and The Netherlands; and the Deputy Mayor of Paris.

With Armenian families exposed to the fierce and relentless shelling of civilian settlements near the enemy line of contact, thousands have fled across the border to Armenia with literally just the clothing on their backs, plunging themselves into the great unknown. The most vulnerable, especially the elderly, have stayed behind in Artsakh along with a handful of women insistent upon staying close to their children and spouses fighting on the front lines.

"The goal of the YERIA Initiative is gather the facts on the ground to inform European public opinion and alert the European authorities to the looming humanitarian needs that will only increase in the winter, compounded by the current rise in COVID-19 cases," stated Nadia Gortzounian, the president of AGBU Europe.

During its mission, the delegation will visit newly arrived families in Erevan, Etchmiadzin, and Goris, visit the health infrastructures, including those health professionals exhausted from non-stop procedures to save lives of injured soldiers and civilians—a situation many say is unsustainable without outside assistance and relief. They will also meet with the European ambassadors, the ambassador of the European Union in Armenia, the representative of the UN in Armenia, the Catholicos of All Armenians, the Human Rights Defender of Artsakh, the Foreign Minister of the Foreign Affairs and the president of the Republic of Armenia himself.

This initiative, supported by the Mayor of Paris, will lead to a mission report in the Paris City Hall upon the delegation's return, which will be presented to the mayors of the major European cities and the mayor of Paris in mid November.

"This is an unprecedented experience for the European diaspora and for the delegation of journalists and public figures from all over Europe to understand the collateral impact of war and attach names and faces to the masses who are suffering as well as leaders making life-and-death decisions that could shape the course of events in the region for the unforeseeable future. Their testimony as observers will raise public awareness in Europe," Gortzounian stated.

AGBU Europe (www.agbueurope.eu) coordinates and develops the pan-European activities of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. Established in 1906, AGBU (www.agbu.org) is the world's largest non-profit organization devoted to upholding the Armenian heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs. Each year, AGBU is committed to making a difference in the lives of 500,000 people across Armenia, Artsakh and the Armenian diaspora.

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