

ARMENO-TURKISH DIALOGUE MUST CONTINUE

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By **Raffi Bedrosyan**, Toronto, 27 March 2014

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The deep state leaders and their backers emerged as the elite of the society, aptly named as the nationalist White Turks, who basically inherited and further developed a state built on the economic foundations of plundered and confiscated Armenian and Greek wealth and assets. The masses in Anatolia were mainly utilized as free bodies for the military elite, as cheap labour for the industrial elite, or remembered only at election time to vote for the political elite. Pious Sunni Moslem majority in Anatolia was condescended by the White Turks and defined by the term 'takunyali - clog wearers'. The disappearance of the Armenians and Greeks from these lands was fiercely denied. The

existence of other ethnic people in Turkey, such as Kurds, was also denied. Turkey is only for Turks was their motto; accordingly, since Armenians and Greeks were already wiped out, all the other ethnic groups were told that they are now Turks, or else.

The supremacy of the White Turks ended in 2003, with the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his moderately Islam party. Despite all attempts of the deep state to topple him, he outmaneuvered the White Turks, thanks to the religious Sunni Moslem masses of Anatolia and the recent arrival of underprivileged masses from Anatolia to the big cities. The provincial and religious Turks quickly secured and strengthened their grip on power. Influential fundamentalist religious leader Fethullah Gulen, who had had to leave Turkey during the previous nationalist secular regimes, cooperated with Erdogan and his followers quickly filled the cadres of bureaucracy, including key posts in the police, security, judiciary and academic fields. Based on charges of attempted coup d'etat against the government, hundreds of deep state leaders and elite White Turks in the military, media and academia were arrested and jailed. Although less intolerant toward minorities than the White Turks, the attitude of the new leaders toward the minorities and the Kurds did not change much. Many White Turks started leaving the country.

The alliance and cooperation of Erdogan and Gulen ended recently in late 2013, when Erdogan felt secure enough to discard Gulen, and decided to shut down the numerous supplementary educational facilities controlled by Gulen. As the education system in the state high schools is not sufficient to secure admission to state universities, most parents in Turkey depended on these facilities for the advancement of their children. These facilities were used as a power base by Gulen, a major source of income as well as recruitment for new followers. Soon after Erdogan announced the intention to close these facilities, state prosecutors and police controlled by Gulen revealed uncovering a major corruption scandal against four of Erdogan's ministers, involving hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes, with all the juicy details of money counting machines and millions stashed in shoe boxes in ministers' homes.

Erdogan counter attacked by removing, replacing and firing thousands of state prosecutors, judges and police officers deemed to be followers of the Gulen movement. In the last few weeks, at least ten taped telephone conversations were leaked on the internet involving Erdogan, where Erdogan directs his son to get rid of hundreds of millions of cash in Euro and dollars from the family homes, orders several businessmen to pay \$100 million each toward buying a media empire that he wants controlled. Erdogan demands another media owner to fire several journalists, decides how much certain contractors must pay in bribes or properties in return for getting large contracts involving construction of airports and bridges.

In the western world, even a hint of attempted bribery or corruption may be sufficient to bring down governments. In Turkey, Erdogan carries on, dismissing the evidence as plots hatched by his one-time ally and now mortal enemy Gulen. He also dismisses other virtual enemies such as 'parallel states' within Turkey, and predictably, external enemies such as Israel, US, EU and the 'interest

Erdogan's latest move is to try to win back the nationalists who were charged and jailed for attempting to topple his own government; as a result, most of the jailed deep state leaders are immediately released this week, including the former army chief of staff and other commanders, intelligence agents. He also released one of the masterminds of the Hrant Dink assassination, the racist lawyer who hounded Hrant Dink for 'insulting Turkishness', and the politician who was charged for stating 'Armenian Genocide is a lie' in Switzerland but the European Court of Human rights had recently sided with him in the name of 'freedom of speech'. Erdogan also released the murderers of a German and two Turkish Protestant missionaries in Malatya, several ultra nationalist/racist journalists, and an organized crime leader who arranged contract killings of anti-nationalists and Kurds.

It seems that the stage is set for a potential settling of accounts.

While these divisions took place among the Turks of Turkey, the Kurds of Turkey made major advances toward their goals of greater autonomy, language rights and self-determination, a struggle on going since 1980s first as a guerilla movement and from the 2000s on as an emerging political movement. The imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan imposed his will on Erdogan, who conceded to start peace talks with him in exchange for a ceasefire.

Even though these four major divisions within Turkey keep fighting and plotting against one another, they come together and close ranks when it comes to the Armenian issue, past and present.

The Turks categorize Armenians into three distinct groups, in a completely misguided manner—the good, the bad and the poor. The small Armenian community remaining in Turkey is the 'good', easily controllable, not a threat anymore, with neighborly memories of shared 'dolma' or 'topik'. But these Armenians in Turkey are 'good' as long as they don't demand much about the past or present, like Dink dared. The Diaspora is the 'bad', the evil presence in every country poisoning the locals against Turks and Turkey, spreading lies about the 'alleged' genocide of 1915. Finally, the Armenians of Armenia are the 'poor', who leave their country and come to Turkey to find bread.

The Kurds relatively have more empathy toward the Armenians; however, it is more a case of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. Although Ocalan came close to acknowledging the genocide, he has empathy only for the 'good' Armenians in Turkey and he continues defining the Diaspora as part of the external lobby threat against both Turks and Kurds. While the Kurds acknowledge the sufferings of the Armenians in 1915, they see themselves only as manipulated tools of the Turks and cannot bring themselves to acknowledge their active role in the Genocide, nor open the subject of returning the vast properties seized from the Armenians, barring a few exceptions.

Armenians who believe in meaningful dialogue with the peoples of Turkey, now face the additional challenge of choosing one or more of these groups at the expense of alienating the others, and on the eve of the centennial in 2015, the prospect of any productive results becomes dimmer by the

day. But dialogue does continue, with the help of various civil society organizations, intellectuals, and more significantly, through the facilitation of the new emerging force of Islamized Armenians of Turkey. Dialogue must and will continue until all four groups in Turkey start to see that all Armenians, whether in Turkey, Diaspora or Armenia, whether good, bad or poor, are all equally impacted by the genocide and equally demand acknowledgment and restitution.

