

# BLOOD APRICOTS II

*Posted on April 20, 2012 by Keghart*

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 **Keghart.com Editorial Board**, 20 April 2012 

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The question now is more dire: what does an Armenian shopper do when her Armenian-owned Middle Eastern store begins to carry a wide assortment of Turkish food products? This new development—hurtful and inexplicable—has materialized since our 2011 editorial. Whether it's Arz Bakery in Toronto or Kradjian in Los Angeles, some Armenian groceries have begun to import Turkish goods with unseemly enthusiasm. Once a tiny portion of its inventory, now Turkish packaged foods make up anywhere from 25% to 30% of the packaged food items at Arz Bakery.

A few years ago one could see the occasional Turkish pickled eggplant or imam bayelduh on Middle Eastern grocery shelves. Now it's an avalanche, particularly at Arz. Blghour, tomato paste, biscuits, chocolate, jam, hot pepper, apricots, cucumber pickles, pasta, rice, tea, black olives, gherkins, sauces, frozen foods, pastries and even croissant from Turkey have begun to dominate the packaged food inventory of Arz Bakery. The names of Turkish food brands and manufacturers—Alafia, Baktat, Basak, Berrak, Bernak, Burcu, Cicek, Dimes, Dogus, Esmé, Filiz, Marmarabirlik, Reis, Tamek, Tukas, Turkes blaze across the aisles, making one feel she is in an Ankara supermarket.

In addition to the above, there are Turkish dry fruit offerings which are difficult to identify, since they are sold loose.

Turkish domination at Arz has been boosted by other recent developments: the sale of non-food

Turkish items such as tea cups, the packaging of Turkish goods under the Cedar and Phoenicia brand names. These names are synonymous with Lebanon. We have no idea why Turkish goods are parading under the Lebanese flag. A few weeks ago Arz committed another faux pas. While in the past the Turkish products were packaged goods, Arz has extended Turkish presence to fresh produce, namely lemons. Cilicia is the lemon heartland of Turkey. Five years ago (most recent statistics) Turkey exported 286,213 tons of lemon, mostly from our Giligia, now Turkified to Cukurova. The lemon at Arz was exported by Aksun Agricultural Products of Mersin, near Adana. Our lands, which were stolen from us through butchery and deportation, are being exploited to sell us fresh produce. And the seller is an Armenian family.

Finally, the Toronto grocery store has begun to sell...(gasp)...Azeri pomegranate juice called AzPom. Pomegranate brought to you with the compliments of people who daily threaten the destruction of Armenia/Artsakh. The satiric possibilities would challenge Hagop Baronian, Yervant Odian, and Saroukhan.

One could say that spotlighting a few stores is unfair. There are other Armenian grocery stores in Toronto and elsewhere in North America, which are selling Turkish food products. However, Arz Bakery's and Kradjian's special place in their respective communities justifies our focus. Arz is not just another store: it's the most successful Armenian retail store in Toronto, if not in Canada. A significant percentage of its customers are Armenian. It arguably is the best Middle Eastern store in Toronto. It's clean and the service impeccable. The store has supported, through advertising and other means, various community projects. Until the recent invasion of Turkish goods, it was a store Armenians were proud to patronize. In light of the vast expansion of Turkish presence at Arz Bakery (it means cedar—the symbol of Lebanon) we wonder about the reaction of Armenian shoppers to the sad development.

It could be said that Arz and Kradjian have every right to sell any food product. After all, Armenia buys millions of dollars of goods from Turkey. True. But Armenia does so because it has no choice. Besides, as we said in our earlier editorial—Yetteh engert daniken tsadkeh, toon al guh tsadkeh? ("If your friend jumps from the roof, do you follow suit?")

Armenian grocery stores have a choice: they can import the same products from Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, even Saudi Arabia and Bulgaria. They can buy produce from Armenian produce exporters in California (Sam's Son, Fowler Fruit Packaging, etc.). When California is a stone's throw away, why cross an ocean and the biggest sea to buy from people who not only tried to annihilate us but also deny doing so, have blockaded our homeland, and threaten Armenia/Artsakh in case Azerbaijan attacks our brothers and sisters?

We are aware that Turkish business and government are often one. Turkish exporters are subsidized

by Ankara. Turkey has a huge export dumping program. Turkey ignores anti-dumping rules, just as it ignores justice when it comes to our demands. As a result of the underhanded Turkish government-business compact, the country has become the world's largest producer of hazelnut, cherry, fig, apricot, quince and pomegranate. The price might be right, but do pride, conscience, the blood of our 1.5 million martyrs factor in the purchase decision?

An English poet said April is the saddest month of the year. He was not referring to our April. In a few days we will again gather in our churches, community centres, at genocide monuments in Armenia and in Diaspora to remember our martyrs and commit ourselves to securing justice from Turkey. How can we look into the mirror and say we are committed to our national cause when we blithely spread Turkish jam on Turkish-made croissants, drink Dimes fruit juice, prepare various Armenian dishes with Burcu blghour, and sip Basak Turk Kahvesi?

Arz and Kradjian management have every right to decide their inventory, but Armenian shoppers also have the right to decide which store to patronize.

At a Toronto cafe two Armenians were recently overhead discussing Arz. One of them said that as an alternative to Arz, he could hardly wait for a Canadian supermarket chain to open a rumored store specializing in Middle Eastern foods.

His friend pointed out that the Canadian supermarket might also sell Turkish products.

The first man said, "I will still buy from the Canadian store. After all, Turkey didn't kill 1.5 million Canadians."

