COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT OF THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA!

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By Loosineh Markarian MA, Tehran, 9 October 2009

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The Armenian Genocide was a collective punishment. A group of people was exterminated simply because they were Armenian. Collective punishment is an outcome of racism. It is the outcome of the idea that being an Armenian, a Rwandan, or a Cambodian, is something different from being a human. It is not important whether the person as an individual or a human being is a good person or not. The value of the individual is measured based on his/her affiliation to a specific group. Consequently, the entire group is perceived as one entity and group members deprived of individuality. Therefore, the whole group can be treated as a single unit or as an individual.

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Recently, the announced Protocols by the governments of Turkey and Armenia to be singed in October 10 in order to normalize relations between respective countries have become a major point of dispute. Armenian President, Serzh Sarkissian, started a tour to gain the support of Armenians in the Diaspora that ended in major protests and demonstrations demanding the president to stop the process.

Couple days ago, Turkish Prime Minister, Erdogan, had an interview with the Wall Street Journal discussing the Protocols. In his interview, Erdogan said:

"I believe when president Sarkisian was on an international visit, he was faced by a reaction from the Armenian Diaspora. Therefore, what he does in face of the reaction of the Diaspora is very important. If he can stand firm, and if it is the government of Armenia and not the Armenian Diaspora that is determining policy in Armenia, then I think that we can move forward."

Who is Armenian Diaspora? Moreover, is this statement racist?

It seems that if for Turkish authorities in 1915 Armenians were seen as one single entity, an ethnic group, who were denied the right to exist, the Armenian Diaspora today as well is perceived as a single entity that should be denied the right to be heard. In other words, the underlying logic is the same old idea of excluding a particular group of people from the process. If in 1915 the exclusion of Armenians occurred through the genocide, today the exclusion is through the calls to ignore the Diaspora's voices. In both cases, a group of people has been perceived as one entity and the method to deal with the group is its elimination (either physically or silencing the voice).

One may argue that addressing a group of people who share one major similarity is a common approach and method. The usage of phrases like American people, French citizens, Muslim population, etc is common. However, the political leaders usually use those phrases to address the people or speak on behalf of those groups. I do not remember an accepted political leader of a democratic country expressing the idea of ignoring x or y group of people. Just imagine for instance, the President of US saying that the Israeli government should not take into consideration the Jewish Diaspora or the Palestinian authorities should ignore the people of Gaza (not specific organization or party BUT the people of Gaza).

The statements criticizing the Armenian Diaspora, or calling the Diasporans as obstacles hindering Armenia's development follows the same line of thought explained in the first paragraph. It assumes that Armenians are divided in two groups, Armenians of Armenia and Armenians of Diaspora and each group represents a single entity with a unique quality. One side wants development, peace, and the other one conflict. Thus, there is a need to silence or ignore the nationalist one that wants conflict! This style of thinking in this framework is dangerous and mistaken. It is essentially racist!

Statements calling to ignore the Diaspora's concerns are outside of Erdogan's authority. It seems the Turkish Prime Minister does not remember that the issues addressed in the Protocols are directly linked to the concerns of the Diaspora. How can you exclude the party directly linked to the issues raised in the Protocols from influencing the outcome of the political process? The Turkish Prime Minister does not understand that he has no moral right to demand such a thing. He does not realize that the Armenian Diaspora is the outcome of the Genocide of 1915, the veracity of which is questioned in the Protocols. Is this the continuation of the same Turkish policy with a different form? How much racism plays into this?