OPTIONS GOOD AND BAD

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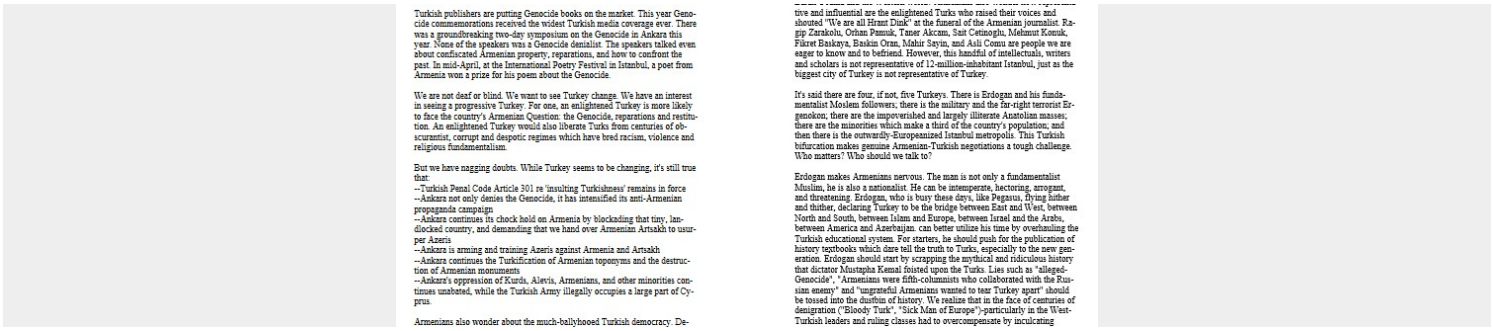

Turkish publishers are putting Genocide books on the market. This year Genocide commemorations received the widest Turkish media coverage ever. There was a groundbreaking two-day symposium on the Genocide in Ankara this year. None of the speakers was a Genocide denialist. The speakers talked even about confiscated Armenian property, reparations, and how to confront the past. In mid-April, at the International Poetry Festival in Istanbul, a poet from Armenia won a prize for his poem about the Genocide.

We are not deaf or blind. We want to see Turkey change. We have an interest in seeing a progressive Turkey. For one, an enlightened Turkey is more likely to face the country's Armenian Question: the Genocide, reparations and restitution. An enlightened Turkey would also liberate Turks from centuries of obscurantist, corrupt and despotic regimes which have bred racism, violence and religious fundamentalism.

But we have nagging doubts. While Turkey seems to be changing, it's still true that:
--Turkish Penal Code Article 301 re 'insulting Turkishness' remains in force
--Ankara not only denies the Genocide, it has intensified its anti-Armenian propaganda campaign
--Ankara continues its chock hold on Armenia by blockading that tiny, landlocked country, and demanding that we hand over Armenian Artsakh to usurper Azeris
--Ankara is arming and training Azeris against Armenia and Artsakh
--Ankara continues the Turkification of Armenian toponyms and the destruction of Armenian monuments
--Ankara's oppression of Kurds, Alevis, Armenians, and other minorities continues unabated, while the Turkish Army illegally occupies a large part of Cyprus.

Armenians also wonder about the much-ballyhooed Turkish democracy. De-

tive and influential are the enlightened Turks who raised their voices and shouted "We are all Hrant Dink" at the funeral of the Armenian journalist. Ragip Zarakolu, Orhan Pamuk, Taner Akcam, Sait Cetinoglu, Mehmet Konuk, Fikret Baskaya, Baskin Oran, Mahir Sayin, and Asli Comu are people we are eager to know and to befriend. However, this handful of intellectuals, writers and scholars is not representative of 12-million-inhabitant Istanbul, just as the biggest city of Turkey is not representative of Turkey.

It's said there are four, if not, five Turkeys. There is Erdogan and his fundamentalist Moslem followers; there is the military and the far-right terrorist Ergenokon; there are the impoverished and largely illiterate Anatolian masses; there are the minorities which make a third of the country's population; and then there is the outwardly-Europeanized Istanbul metropolis. This Turkish bifurcation makes genuine Armenian-Turkish negotiations a tough challenge. Who matters? Who should we talk to?

Erdogan makes Armenians nervous. The man is not only a fundamentalist Muslim, he is also a nationalist. He can be intemperate, hectoring, arrogant, and threatening. Erdogan, who is busy these days, like Pegasus, flying hither and thither, declaring Turkey to be the bridge between East and West, between North and South, between Islam and Europe, between Israel and the Arabs, between America and Azerbaijan. can better utilize his time by overhauling the Turkish educational system. For starters, he should push for the publication of history textbooks which dare tell the truth to Turks, especially to the new generation. Erdogan should start by scrapping the mythical and ridiculous history that dictator Mustapha Kemal foisted upon the Turks. Lies such as "alleged-Genocide", "Armenians were fifth-columnists who collaborated with the Russian enemy" and "ungrateful Armenians wanted to tear Turkey apart" should be tossed into the dustbin of history. We realize that in the face of centuries of denigration ("Bloody Turk", "Sick Man of Europe")-particularly in the West-Turkish leaders and ruling classes had to overcompensate by inculcating

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April 24 plus 1. Chapter Two. Year 101. Now What?

They all mean the same thing: what do Armenians do next? What are our options? How do we go about realising those options?

Dozens of memoranda, statements, books and reams of articles are out there limning our general and specific demands from Turkey—from individual financial compensation to the return of Western Armenia and Cilicia. Call it reparation, compensation, restitution, plain justice… They outline our demands—from the minimalist to the maximalist. Some are logically-argued proposals. Some are fantasies. Some are based on international jurisprudence and on treaties. One organization—the National Congress of Western Armenians—has already sent its memorandum for discussions to the government of Turkey while Catholicos Aram I has made a public demand that Ankara start the reparation process. At least one political party has outlined its demands.

Ankara has denied its horrific crime not because of Turkey's sensitivity to its honor and reputation. . The reason Turkey denies the Genocide is achingly obvious: it knows admission of guilt will open the gates to reparations.

Developments in the past few years give hope to many people that Turkey will eventually acknowledge the Genocide. Despite the lame euphemisms of Erdogan and Co., the gap between the Turkish public's customary convictions and the reality of 1915 is narrowing. It would be misjudgment for Armenians to ignore these changes in the Turkish mindset. The Pope and 25 countries—some of them heavyweights such as Russia, France and Germany—recognize the Genocide. Because of the highly-successful centennial commemorations, the world now knows the truth. The centennial commemorations demonstrated to Ankara that Armenians will continue the struggle no matter how long it takes. Talaat and his conspirators thought the genocide would put *fini* to the Armenian Question, but the descendants of the martyrs have shown the Armenian Question will not be airbrushed from history.

But still… from demands to reparations will be a long process. While it shouldn't take another century to find just resolution, we have to brace ourselves for a long haul. We will be facing the might, budget and diplomatic acumen of Turkey. There will be ups and downs on the long road. This is a Marathon, not a 50-yard dash.

We will experience disappointment, impatience, anger and frustration as we enter the second phase of the national campaign. It's likely that after a while some Armenians will throw in the towel and declare Turkey will remain obdurate and understands only violence. Already in the past few years a scattering of Armenians have begun to whisper: "Meeyayn zenkov gah Hayots Prgroutune" (Armenians will be saved only through the gun). The rhetorical call to arms might promise a quick

salve to some wounds. Some Armenians might even call for the return of the ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) and their swashbuckling operations.

We don't intend to analyze whether the ASALA helped or hurt Our Cause ("Hye Tadd"). However, opting for a violent solution now will get us nowhere. "Meeyayn Zenkov gah Hayots Prgoutune" makes sense on the Azerbaijan front, but it doesn't on the Turkish. Turkey has almost as many soldiers as Yerevan has residents. It's inconceivable for Armenians to dream of a military conflict with Ankara.

Opting for an ASALA-type 'solution' will lose us many of the great gains we've slowly and painfully made in the past decade and especially during the centennial commemorations. Millions of people from Tokyo to Tegucigalpa, who knew nothing about us, are now familiar with our just cause. We could wreck all that hard-earned goodwill if we hurt people who are 'guilty' of being citizens of a country which denies committing the Genocide. Our campaign is against Turkey, not the Turks.

A guerilla movement needs training bases and a credible number of fighters. There are no such training areas for Armenians, except perhaps in Artsakh. But Yerevan wouldn't allow guerilla training camps there. The days when Armenian young men could be trained by Middle Eastern liberation groups are gone. Perhaps a handful of young Armenians in the Middle East, in Armenia and in Artsakh can be coaxed into joining such a guerilla movement, but the majority of our young men will reject the violence option.

A practical road map, deft political strategy, non-violence, the legal route, far-sighted alliances, and the continued promotion of Our Cause inside and outside Turkey are our best options. But we will go nowhere unless we put internal politics and ego aside and unite for a single, pan-Armenian organization whose legitimacy is not challenged by Armenians and non-Armenians.