

FACTS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

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By George Aghjayan, Westminister, MA, 10 June 2010

I recently read in Keghart.com [Lucine Kasbarian's review](#) of Khatchig Mouradian's and Emil Sanamyan's presentations at ALMA in Watertown, MA. I, too, was present at that event, where the two offered accounts of their recent trips to Turkey. However, my reactions are quite different from hers. From the outset, I must say that Kasbarian's review, while containing some valid points, is replete with distortions, leading me to believe that personal agendas and narrow perspectives are at work here. I thus feel compelled to respond.

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The length of Kasbarian's piece precludes me from addressing the issues point by point. So, I will concentrate on the sections addressing Mouradian's presentation.

First, Kasbarian devotes nearly three times the space to Sanamyan's presentation, compared to that of Mouradian's, and yet lumps them together at the end. It is clear that Kasbarian wishes to sweep Mouradian's experiences in with Sanamyan's and, as such, she fails to recognize substantive differences. Second, she focuses almost exclusively on one particular visit – one organized by TEPAV, the Turkish think-tank – while scarcely acknowledging that Mouradian has recently undertaken two trips to Turkey. These trips cannot be viewed separately; they must be understood together to draw any meaningful conclusions.

Third, her method of inquiry is laced with biases that undermine her thesis from the outset. The rhetorical questions that 'lead the witness'; the innuendos hinting toward conspiracy; the patronizing tone that condescends without a hint of respect – all of this reveals her article to be a thinly veiled accusation, more than a review of what transpired.

On substantive matters, Kasbarian's main focus is the trip organized by TEPAV, a think-tank with close ties to the Turkish government. She makes much of these ties, questioning Turkey's objectives in organizing such a trip, and especially in inviting Armenian-American editors to participate. Her conclusion is that the trip served only Turkey's interests and that Armenians played along to their (and our) detriment. Pointing this out is all well and good, but it is not enough, if we are to assess the merits of the visit. It is also necessary to review the writings and actions of both men, during and after their trips, to understand how our (collective) interests have been impacted. Particularly in the

case of Mouradian, Kasbarian has fallen far short of such an assessment.

Rather than simply pointing out a 'Turkish trap' set out for these two Armenians, she could have added that the trip was going to take place regardless of whether they participated. In fact, each of the other participants would have likely participated based on their own agendas. None of that would have changed, except for their interaction with Mouradian and Sanamyan during the trip. In my view, there is much to be gained in rubbing shoulders with other editors and opinion makers, who might prove receptive to Armenian perspectives. In hindsight, it is debatable what impact this interaction had, but the potential benefits cannot be dismissed out of hand. Similarly, Kasbarian points out that Turkey can exploit Mouradian's and Sanamyan's presence as a sign of tolerance and goodwill on its part, but she fails to acknowledge that attendance (or not) by Armenian journalists would surely have been spun either way. It is superfluous to emphasize these points.

It is a serious charge indeed when Kasbarian contends that Sanamyan and, by association, Mouradian have now been corrupted. Such a charge, however, requires more proof than what she has delivered. Sanamyan's past employment with the Armenian Assembly (or the fact that he is Baku-born) cannot be trotted out like some sort of smoking gun. Serious charges require analysis of cold, hard facts, which she has largely failed to do.

Here are some cold, hard facts: Mouradian posted five dispatches from Turkey and other articles in the 'Armenian Weekly'. It is these writings and his second trip one month later that must be evaluated (and not selectively) to discern the benefits for Armenian interests. Obviously, my assessment is that there were clear benefits, one in particular that I will discuss below but which Kasbarian ignored, whether purposefully or not.

Also of interest is Kasbarian's reporting of the question-and-answer portion of the program. It was clear at the time to me, and likely to others, that a few in the audience were asking questions in a coordinated way. One need not be a "conspiracy theorist" to guess why Kasbarian grouped these questions together, repeatedly referring to "some in the audience." The "some," in fact, were four, maybe five of her close friends and associates, out of a total audience of 100. There were many other questioners during that session, many of them non-hostile or supportive of the presenters. Yet these are found nowhere in her coverage.

Also omitted is the exchange involving one of her colleagues, who aggressively questioned Mouradian. Mouradian's passionate response (not outburst) drew widespread applause from the audience. But again, this is nowhere to be found in Kasbarian's account. Such purposefully incomplete and inaccurate coverage of the sentiments of those in attendance discredits her calls for "transparency."

But this is not all. What I find most reprehensible is that Kasbarian neglected to mention Mouradian's most significant point: That he stood in Ankara with others and spoke of reparations for the Armenian Genocide. This was the primary focus of Mouradian's supposed "outburst."

Let me repeat: Mouradian and others spoke of reparations in Ankara in April, on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of the Genocide. This is something quite significant, and the omission of it discredits Kasbarian's legitimacy as a critic.

It is no secret that Kasbarian, her husband David Boyajian and their close associates harbour a bias against Mouradian. It is because of this that I feel they missed some significant aspects of his trips to Turkey. Worse, it seems Kasbarian feels such bias allows her the right to use innuendo and not-so-veiled accusations in an attempt to bolster baseless arguments. Such tactics are cheap and unwarranted for honest discourse.

Yes, there are those in Turkish society and, more importantly, in government that still harbour racist attitudes of the past. But this cannot be used as evidence that nothing has changed inside Turkey. The depth and pace of that change should certainly be questioned, but not in the flawed and biased manner of Kasbarian. Again, one must ask why she would present such an obviously flawed perspective, especially in light of her efforts to dispel similar simplistic representations of Armenian interests.

In the end, Mouradian's two trips cannot be compared with such disastrous endeavors as the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) or the Protocols between Turkey and Armenia. It is unfair and inaccurate to do so. Even worse is to portray Mouradian's efforts as placing reconciliation before justice. His writings and actions tell a much different story.

