

# GENIUS IN IVORY TOWER

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 **Editorial**, 5 April 2016

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What's Nisanyan's crime? An assortment of crimes, particularly the unlicensed construction on a historic heritage site on the Aegean Sea and insulting Prophet Mohammad. It's no secret that the stiff sentence is a result of the latter crime. People who support him say Nisanyan received a severe sentence because he is Armenian--an uppity "gavor Ermeni" who doesn't know his place in Muslim Turkey. He has been sentenced under article 216 of the Turkish Penal Code, which regulates "insulting religious sensibilities."

Over the years Nisanyan has repeatedly mocked Prophet Mohammad with lines such as "...an age-old Arab leader who made political, financial and sexual profit by claiming contact with Deity."

For an intelligent man, Nisanyan is not very bright. He is also rash, if not reckless.

When anyone who has lived even briefly in a Muslim country knows that cursing the Prophet and his religion is the ultimate swear word, why has this well-read man who was born and raised in Turkey gone out of his way to goad Muslims? Why insult a religion which is followed almost by 99% of citizens of Turkey? Why insult a country's religion when that country is going through Muslim "revival", if not fanaticism? Why as a member of a minority, which has been subjected to religious persecution for centuries, mock the religion of the dictatorial oppressor?

Is Nisanyan living in an ivory tower unaware of his surrounding?

Is he an idiot savant?

Did Nisanyan think Turkey is on the verge of enlightenment?

Wasn't he aware that Turkey leads the world in the number of jailed journalists?

Wasn't he aware that racist TV programs get top ratings in Turkey?

Didn't he know that the antisemitic "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and "Mein Kampf" are bestsellers in his beloved Turkey?

Has he forgotten that more than a century ago the "enlightened" Turks devised the Genocide of his people?

Wasn't he aware, when he insulted Islam and its Prophet, that not only would he be persecuted ...but his fellow and cowed Armenians will receive opprobrium for nursing an "Islamaphobe".

Where does he get the permission to insult other people's religion?

Does Nisanyan have a Messiah Complex?

Nisanyan is free to be deist, agnostic, atheist... but he is not free to insult others' religion and endanger the fragile Armenian community of Turkey.

As a well-traveled and well-read cosmopolite he might have assumed PEN petitions, complaints by human rights groups, Istanbul's intellectual circles, and Turkey's obsession for a positive global image might protect him. He has learned too late that he has miscalculated. Turkey is not ready for the type of enlightenment and freedom Nisanyan assumed the country is on the verge of. The well-intentioned petition-signers are Polyannas who apparently believe Davutoglu will reverse the charges against Nisanyan. In fact, they're so innocent that they say Erdogan committed the same crime Nisanyan did when he built his 1,000-room presidential palace on heritage land without license.

That Nisanyan has contributed so much to Turkish culture is neither here nor there for Erdogan and Co. Like his 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, who persecuted Armenians who had contributed so much to the Ottoman Empire, Erdogan is a narrow-minded, racist and fanatical autocrat. Nisanyan, more than

most people, should have known that. While bear-baiting is still popular in some parts of Turkey, it doesn't pay to assume Erdogan is a bear in chains.

