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Diocese Sees \$\$\$ in Diyarbakir Church Opening

By Ara Khachatourian, [Asbarez](#), 26 October 2011

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According to Hurriyet Daily News, that's not the only delegation they have led. According to the newspaper, the two church leaders headed a delegation of 26 Armenian-American business people who reportedly discussed investing in Turkey with Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbas and Turkish businessman Ahmet Calik, of Calik Holdings, one of Turkey's largest corporations.

Given that such a series of business meetings could clearly not be scheduled at the last minute, one can conclude that in planning this pilgrimage to the historic St. Giragos church, doing business with Turkish businessmen—effectively Turkey—was always on the agenda for those on this religious journey.

In his reporting from Diyarbakir, Armenian Weekly editor Khatchig Mouradian observed: "Renovated by the Surp Giragos Armenian Foundation, with the support of the local Kurdish-controlled municipality, the church, which had witnessed a century of destruction, neglect, and denial, now stood as defiant as ever to the forces suppressing freedom in Turkey. And as the faithful of different religions prayed in unison, the political message wasn't lost on anyone."

One of the members of Arch. Barsamian's delegation, a senior Diocese lay leader, Oscar Tatosian,

reportedly told Hurriyet that the meeting with Calik was very important in terms of dialogue. Hurriyet quoted the Chicago and New York-based businessman as opining: "Our people should come together and enjoy a cup of tea. The dialogue starts with arts, culture, academic cooperation and trade. The rest will follow." That sadly, is Ankara's narrative, one that requires that Armenians set aside their quest for truth, justice, and security, in the name of just doing business.

Hurriyet also characterizes Tatosian as saying that the Armenian community abroad is wrongly considered a homogenous one by Turkish people. According to Hurriyet he added that many wanted a good relationship with the Turks. This has long been one of the most offensive, and transparent, traps set by the Turkish government: enticing Armenians to divide themselves into "good" Armenians (acceptable to Ankara) and "bad" Armenians (who fail to fall in line with Turkey's commands). This destructive, self-imposed and demeaning distinction ignores common sense and insults all those, including a vast majority of Diocese parishioners, who, no doubt, believe that the desire for a "good relationship" with Turkey need not come at the expense of our national history, rights, security, or dignity.

Indeed, the grand re-opening of the St. Giragos was a poignant political message and one of the many aspects of the war on stolen Armenian properties by the present day Turkish government, which continues the destructive policies of the Ottoman Empire.

At first glance, Archbishop Barsamian's efforts to congregate parishioners and lead them on an historic pilgrimage is nothing but commendable. However, what is dubious is his role in engaging in a damaging "dialogue" with the business interests of private individuals, and the state behind them, with a powerful and vested interest in using their economic resources (much of it derived from the Armenian Genocide) to partner with Armenians, however token, to lock in the fruits of their crimes.

What is even more suspect is the Primate's participation—leadership—of such an effort, given his role this past summer in the "Return of Churches" effort in Congress. His new role as a deal-maker it begs a larger question: What business do religious leaders have in commerce, especially in Turkey? Has the Church expanded its role of catering to the spiritual needs of the people and is now suddenly facilitating its parishioners financial gains?

Furthermore, by agreeing to participate in this meeting, the two church leaders and their delegation fell smack dab into the trap set by Turkish government, whose foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu has on several occasions expressed his desire to meet with Diaspora leaders to project a benevolent image of Turkey as part of its well-orchestrated Genocide denial policy.

How easily are people willing to become pawns of the Turkish propaganda machine? These Armenian-American businessmen may have personal gain—and profit—from their behavior. But, the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America engaging in such blatant kowtowing is entirely unacceptable on a moral basis, and, as a practical matter, falls far outside his clerical and spiritual mission.

It is no secret that the Diocese was one of the signatories of a statement staunchly supporting the dangerous and ill-fated Turkey-Armenia Protocols. It seems Archbishop Barsamian and his friends did not get the memo that these accords, in the words of President Sarkisian himself, are all but dead. (Armenia must withdraw its signature from the documents, since they still pose grave dangers to Armenia's national security.)

The fact that there are 26 businesspeople in the Archbishop's delegation signals that someone wants to make a profit and the Primate is the perfect cover for money grabbing individuals, whose questionable morals and scruples allow them to trample upon our national interests and aspirations. In the early 1990's Hrair Hovnanian set an early standard in this regard when, motivated by his greed, he pursued, along with then President Levon Ter-Petrosian, a Turkish port development project in Trebizond that would have made him millions of dollars richer.

As a leader of the Diocese of the Armenian Church, Archbishop Barsamian must explain his questionable actions to the public, or his shortsightedness and deep deficit of moral leadership will forever diminish the gains made by the message of the St. Giragos re-opening in Diyarbakir.

