MISGUIDED AND PREMATURE CELEBRATION

Posted on January 30, 2012 by keghart.com

Category: Opinions

Keghart.com Editorial Board, 29 January 2012
"The French Senate has just passed a bill, proposed by President Nicolas Sarkozy's party that will make it a crime to question whether the Armenian massacres in eastern Turkey in 1915 qualified as genocide."—Gwynne Dyer, "Sucking Up to Armenians," Hurriyet, Jan. 26.

Dyer, a notorious Genocide of Armenians denier, echoed what many Turcophile and anti-France Anglo-American media reported regarding the passage of the genocide bill by the French Senate last week. Dyer's prejudiced take—like that of J. Michael Kennedy ("The Los Angeles Times") and other Western reporters was based on second-hand information, since the official text of the bill will not be released until its promulgation by President Sarkozy. It's also a well-known fact that most Anglo-American journalists are monolingual.

Keghart.com Editorial Board, 29 January 2012
"The French Senate has just passed a bill, proposed by President Nicolas Sarkozy's party that will make it a crime to question whether the Armenian massacres in eastern Turkey in 1915 qualified as genocide."—Gwynne Dyer, "Sucking Up to Armenians," Hurriyet, Jan. 26.

Dyer, a notorious Genocide of Armenians denier, echoed what many Turcophile and anti-France Anglo-American media reported regarding the passage of the genocide bill by the French Senate last week. Dyer's prejudiced take—like that of J. Michael Kennedy ("The Los Angeles Times") and other Western reporters was based on second-hand information, since the official text of the bill will not be released until its promulgation by President Sarkozy. It's also a well-known fact that most Anglo-American journalists are monolingual.

While the Anglo-American media's bias is something Armenians are used to, what's alarming in this instance is the premature and misguided Armenian celebration, unaware that the issue had been hijacked by Turkey. Armenians missed the fact that Turkey and the Anglo-American media had misrepresented the French law and had portrayed it as a law against the freedom of expression. For added measure, Turkey was depicted as the injured party while President Sarkozy was criticized for supposedly courting the French-Armenian vote for the upcoming elections. There was also no mention that the hysterical country whose leader was throwing temper- tantrums and demanding freedom of expression in France has more journalists in jail than any country.
It's time Armenians removed their blindfolds, stepped back and took a careful look at what the French Senate's bill actually proposes.

--The bill's wording is very general. It covers war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The bill makes no mention of the Genocide of Armenians. The law is meant to stop all negation of genocides which are recognized by France.

--The Genocide of Armenians and the Holocaust were recognized by the French parliament a long time ago (Gaysot Law, 1990), except that the denial of the Holocaust was made punishable but not the denial of the Genocide of Armenians. Thus there was an obvious inconsistency in the way the Holocaust and the Genocide were being treated by French law. The new law makes "les negationists"/deniers of the Holocaust or of the Genocide equally culpable. While the Genocide of Armenians is not mentioned, it's there by reference. It's for this reason that Minister Patrick Ollier and other speakers repeatedly emphasized the intent of the new bill.

--The wording of the law is not of French origin. The text was recommended by the European Union to all EU member states.

--The law covers any crime recognized by Articles 6,7, and 8 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 6 of the Nuremburg Tribunal Charter of 1945, and any crime recognized by France.

The Turkish propaganda machine, including their leading newspapers (Today's Zaman, Hurriyet, Cumhuriyet, etc.) twisted the wording of the bill to make readers and viewers believe Armenians are getting something special from France because President Sarkozy "needs the votes of 500,000 Armenians."

(The statistic that there are 500,000 Armenians in France is an exaggeration. The number is closer to 400,000. As well, many Armenians, most of them third-generation, are assimilated and don't speak Armenian. The half-a-million is also misleading because not all of them are of voting age. However, bandying about the false and inflated figure suits Turkish intentions so as to incite French citizens into believing French-Armenians are a privileged group.)

For added mischief and pressure, Turkey is portraying Sarkozy's France as a place where a Christian minority gets preferential treatment. These types of malicious and mendacious reports find eager ears on "Al-Jazeera" and in the murky alleyways of Cairo, Riyadh, Islamabad and Kabul.

According to Zeynap Necipoglu, president of the Turkish-French Chamber of Commerce (established in 1885), an increasing number of politicians are planning to refer the matter to the French constitutional court for judgment on two grounds: the bill allegedly limits the freedom of expression and second the present penal code is sufficient to refer cases to a penal or civil court when a person makes racist statements. According to Necipoglu, the number of opponents to the bill was 30 earlier in the week, but "could reach the required 60 soon." The court would decide whether the bill is compatible to French law. Politicians opposing the bill are joined by Reporters Without Borders. The journalists' group has also urged members of parliament to refer the bill to the constitutional council.

Rather than celebrating a premature victory and claiming it an Armenian victory over Turkey, Armenians should be circumspect and study the French bill with a higher level of sophistication and maturity. Let's defend the justice of the bill, rather than bear-bait Turkey. Let's be cognizant of

French politics and French public opinion. Let's not appropriate the bill as an Armenian victory. And when critics say the bill is anti-freedom of expression, let's point out that the denial of genocide is the last act of genocide; that denial is incitement to further genocides; that saving innocent lives takes priority over the abuse of the freedom of expression. Let's remind the world that it needs no lessons from Turkey about freedom of expression. Just this week the World Press Index placed Turkey in number 148 (of 179) in freedom of the press. While Prime Minister Recep Tayyep Erdogan boasts about democracy in Turkey, since he rose to power (2002) Turkey has regressed from 100th place to 148th on the World Press Index.