

# NAGGING DOUBTS PERSIST

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 **Keghart.com team** editorial, 31 May 2010



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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. Despite its seeming independence, we suspect the Prime Minister Recep Erdogan's government remains in power because the cunning generals have allowed him slack: the covert strategy is to allow Erdogan make

brave statements and thus persuade Europeans that Turkey is democratic and thus deserving of membership in the European club. Last year's Protocol Tango with Armenia had the same goal: to qualify for EU membership, Turkey has to have open borders with all its neighbours.

In light of the openness in the coverage of the Genocide in Turkey in the past year, Armenians are naturally asking themselves: "Are the righteous, democratic, humanist Turks being used by Ankara to improve its creds, to impress Barak Obama and the Western world? Armenians also wonder how representative 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 Ergenekon; 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 Moslem, 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 ridiculous history dictator Mustapha Kemal foisted upon 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 among Turks the belief that they are super special—superior to other races, such as Armenians, Arabs, Greeks, Bulgarians... The hilarious Kemal fantasy-historiography claims that the Turkic race is the father of humanity and that most of humanity's greatest inventions were ACTUALLY fruits of Turkish genius!

For far too long, Turks have been fed lies by their government and their educational system. To transform the brave efforts of the Istanbul intellectuals into a nation-wide movement, Ankara has to come clean and tell the truth. We realize that this is not an easy task: decades of orchestrated deception can't be erased in a few years. Millions of Turks know little or nothing about Armenians, let

alone be aware that Eastern Turkey was Armenia for nearly 4,000 years. It's high time revisionist Turkish scholars and historians were allowed to tell the truth about Turkey's history. To gain credibility and respect, Turkey has to discard its fantasy history. The longer Ankara delays this vital project, longer will Turkish psychic ills continue to fester the Turkish body politic, culture and society.

"Once bitten, twice shy" is an eloquent axiom. Armenians have been bitten and ...burned more than once by Turkish government's mendacity—be they the sultans, the Young Turks, Kemal and then his idolatrous followers. Nearly a century ago our trust almost resulted in the extinction of our nation. As much as we want to trust the "new" Turkey, we need concrete, credible, meaningful proof of its good intentions.

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