NO MORE GAMES

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Editorial, 15 March 2014

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Being factual, the Armenian narrative of 1915-'23 differs from the Turkish version. As well, when Armenians think of the conflict, they inevitably recall the centuries of oppression they suffered under the Ottoman Turks. They remember the 1895 Hamidian massacres when more than 200,000 innocent Armenians were slain by Sultan Abdul Hamid II's soldiers and the Hamidiyeh irregulars. Armenians also recall the 1909 massacre of 30,000 Armenians in Adana, when the so-called progressive Young Turks were at the helm of the Ottoman government. Armenians also remember a century of Turkish government Genocide denial, the wealth-tax imposed on Armenians during the Second World War and the September 1955 pogroms in Istanbul. Finally, Armenians sitting down with Turks are only too aware of Turkey's blockade of Armenia and its support of the warmongering Baku regime.

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Despite the overpowering presence in the Armenian psyche of Turkey's long history of crimes against the Armenians, the latter have the will to overcome their woes so as to seek a just peace

between the two peoples. However, their Turkish interlocutors should be aware of "where Armenians are coming from" and the dilemma Armenians face when they contemplate peace talks with the Turks.

In turn, Armenians should know how Turks perceives the First World War. It's the war which saw the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the loss of all Turkish-occupied lands outside Asia Minor. To Turks this is a far more important episode than the Genocide of Armenians. Many Turks grieve, to this day, the death of the Sick Man of Europe. While the loss that empire was the result of miscalculation, greed (Turkey expected to occupy even more lands, thanks to the hoped-for victories of its German and Austrian allies), and military incompetence, many Turks mourn the loss of lands they had occupied through the sword and had controlled through the exercise of a hideous military.

Having been promised justice by Turkish authorities and then being betrayed many times, starting in the 1830s, Armenians have reason to be cautious about Turkish honeyed words. Armenians are cognizant of Turkish diplomatic *léger de main*. Many Armenians wonder whether recent Turkish government baubles (allowing the repairing of Armenian churches) are intended to deflate Armenian efforts to obtain justice during the centennial of the Genocide next year. Once the centennial is history, Turkey would revert to square one, some Armenian fear.

There's no doubt that hundreds of thousands of Turks are sincere in their desire to see justice done to the Armenians. The human rights advocates, the various Turkish NGOs, the intellectuals, the journalists and authors, who have backed the Armenian cause, are undoubtedly honest. However, Armenians wonder how representative of Turkey are these mostly Istanbul Turks. Armenians also wonder whether righteous Turks are being used by Ankara to burnish its international image, and that once they have served their purpose, they would be discarded like a wet rag. The primordial xenophobia, which novelist Elif Shafak mentioned in her "New York Times" (Feb. 23, 2014) article, is another justified Armenian fear.

Finally, an Armenian sitting down with a Turk to exchange views have to consider the future of a turbulent, unpredictable Turkey. Will Turkey become, as a political analyst recently said, another Pakistan hamstrung by religious dogma? And where is Turkey headed as the permanently irate and not obnoxious Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and Fathullah Gulen of the Hizmet religo-political group continue their bloodletting? Will the Gulen feud or the recent Erdogan corruption scandals be an invitation to the military to step in to "save the nation"? Will the Kemalists and the White Turks get back into the saddle? As well, Erdogan's recent repressive measures (tightening of his control over the judiciary, the jailing of writers, intellectuals, and journalists, the censorship of print and digital media) don't bode well for a civilized exchange between the Armenians and Turkey. Turkey's rejection of the rightful demands of the Kurds is another sore point. Will the Kurdish struggle push Turkey into renewed military heavy handedness? To say Turkey is in a flux is to say the obvious.

Armenians are eager to resolve the conflict with Turkey, but Turks should respect Armenian reservations, if not cynicism. Armenians also remain particularly cautious in light of reports that Turkish officers were, as recently as a few months ago, advising Al-Qaida and similar terrorists to attack Aleppo's Armenian Quarter. Armenians question Ankara's goodwill when Turkey has renewed its Genocide-denying campaign with increased vigor. It's also no secret that Turkey is the guiding hand behind recent Azeri global efforts to have the Khojali battle during the Nagorno-Karabakh War recognized as genocide.

To gain the confidence of Armenians Ankara should come forward with significant confidence-building measures. Sly gestures, cheap propaganda, empty words, Davutoglu-style double talk will not do. Football diplomacy does not run into overtime.