OF INSULTING JUNKETS AND BRAZEN DENIALISM

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By Antranik Antourian, Toronto, 22 March 2014

During the recent Ankara visit of Andrew Scheer, the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons, the Turkish parliament's Speaker Cemil Cicek, said: "We did not have a criminal record until now. The biggest insult and the biggest disrespect that can be done to a society is accusing them of committing genocide, though it is not real." During a later meeting between the two speakers, Cicek added that Turkey is ready to accept the conclusions of a "Joint History Commission" with Armenia. Mr. Scheer replied that Turkey's call for a "Joint History Commission" with Armenia to address the 1915 events **is positive**.

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The "Joint History Commission" is a staple of Ankara's deceptive foreign policy to deny the Armenian Genocide and to divert world attention from Turkey's responsibility for one of the most heinous crimes against humanity in the 20th century.

As usual, the Turkish government, its officials, and its cohorts are trying to deceive visiting dignitaries and the public with a battery of falsehoods, propaganda, and duplicity. This time its victim was the speaker of the Canadian House of Commons. Since 2006, when the Canadian government, under the leadership of the Right. Hon. Stephen Harper, made the Armenian Genocide recognition an important part of its policy, Turkey has been working feverishly to reverse the policy and make Canada one of the Turkey's denialist accomplices.

The Turkish government uses every crass and unscrupulous means to achieve its goal in Canada. Inviting politicians and journalists to all-expense-paid junkets is one of the favorite means the Turkish government and its hired guns in Canada try to influence Canada's government to change its principled and ethical stand.

One of the most devious and disingenuous Turkish government approaches to deny the Armenian Genocide is the so-called Joint Historians Commission to research the Genocide of Armenians.

Considering a century of countless history books, government documents (British, French, United States, and even by the then-Turkish allies Germany and Austria), photographs by war correspondents, massive coverage by Western journalists, missionaries and NGOs, and

documentary films, it is tad redundant to try to prove what has been proven irrefutably countless times.

To top it off, the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), the world's number one expert on genocides, has repeatedly confirmed that Turkey committed genocide against Armenians. One wonders, after all, if anyone would demand that a "historians' commission" be formed to question whether the Holocaust took place.

To underline their concern in Turkey's continued denial of the undeniable, in a Nov. 3, 2009, the seven past-presidents of the IAGS (Helen Fein, Roger W. Smith, Frank Chalk, Joyce Apsel, Robert Melson, Israel Charny, and Gregory Stanton) sent a letter to Prime Minister Erdogan, stating: "Outside of your government, there is no doubt about the facts of the Armenian Genocide, therefore our concern is that your demand for a historical commission is political sleight-of-hand designed to deny those facts. Turkey has, in fact, shown no willingness to accept impartial judgments made by outside commissions. Five years ago, the Turkish members of the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission pulled out of the commission after the arbitrator, the International Center for Transitional Justice, rendered an assessment that the events of 1915 were genocide. And, Prime Minister Erdogan, you have repeatedly stated that even if a historical commission found that the Armenian case is genocide, Turkey would ignore the finding."

The IAGS former president's concluded their letter by saying: "As William Schabas, the current president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, said in his letter to you and President Sarkisian, acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide must be the starting point of any 'impartial historical commission,' not one of its possible conclusions.' Our previous letter…lays out the consensus among historians as to the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide. We believe the integrity of scholarship and the ethics of historical memory are at stake."

Caleb Lauer, Canadian freelance journalist based in Istanbul, wrote in in his *Asia Times (Feb. 3, 2010)* article, wrote: "Roger W. Smith, a former president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, wrote in a September 30, 2009 open letter to Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian that genocide scholars have no confidence 'that a politically organized commission would not compromise historical truth, especially considering the imbalanced power relations between Armenia and Turkey.' He also argued such a commission would show 'how easily genocide can be relativized, especially by the powerful.'"

Cengiz Aktar, a retired United Nations Turkish official and creator of an online "I apologize" proclamation addressed to Armenians and signed by more than 30,000 Turks, said such a commission would have so little credibility, and would be so dysfunctional, it would be simply impracticable. "It is ridiculous to think for even a second that commission could even meet, let alone decide about anything ," said Aktar.

Any equally weighted, government-run commission, Aktar imagines, would consist of one side of

"denialists" and one side of genocide scholars. "These guys are not capable of even shaking hands," he said.

Volkan Vural, retired Turkish ambassador to Moscow (in the final years of the Soviet Union), Germany, Spain, and the EU, in a September 8, 2008 interview with Turkish daily *Taraf* stated:

"A solution to this problem cannot be found via history alone, because a solution requires overcoming the psychological problems this issue has created among people. A solution requires the creation of a climate of trust in which the two peoples can draw closer with affection and respect and where they can talk to each other with ease. This is not a situation that historians can overcome. The Armenian question is a problem that needs to solved by politicians, not historians. History can only shed light on certain issues and play a role that facilitates a solution. That is all."

Furthermore, numerous attempts have been made by the Armenian government and the Armenian Diaspora to engage in dialogue with the Turkish government. These attempts have failed because of the Turkey's intransigent and unreasonable conditions. The Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) is a prime example. Turkish and Armenian members of TARC agreed to submit the arbitration of the Armenian Genocide issue to a third party—the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). When ICTJ's report concluded that what happened to the Armenians in Ottoman Turkey was a classic case of genocide and fulfilled four out of five conditions set by the UN Genocide Convention, the Turkish government pulled the plug on TARC by asking its Turkish members to withdraw from the commission.

More recently, the Foreign Affairs Committee of Armenia's Parliament organized a conference in the Armenian Parliament on Turkish-Armenian relations. Among the invitees were Professors Yusuf Halacoglu (president of Turkish Historical Society), Sedat Laciner (director of Turkey's International Strategic Research Institute), former Turkish Ambassador Omer Engin Lutem (head of the Armenian Studies Institute of the Eurasian Strategic Research Center), Turkey's Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, and Dr. Can Paker (Turkey's special representative for relations with the European Union). None of the Turkish invitees attended the important and unique conference. The Turkish side missed a golden opportunity to meet Armenian politicians, historians and scholars to discuss relations between the two neighboring nations.

The Speaker of the Armenian Parliament Tigran Torosian voiced his concern that Turkey's decision not to participate in the discussions would not contribute to the dialogue between the two nations. The last attempt by the Armenian government to reach out to the Turkish government took place when the Armenian President invited the Turkish President to watch a soccer qualifying game in Yerevan (September 6, 2008). Hence "football diplomacy" was launched with the culmination of the signing of two Protocols on October 10, 2009 to normalize the relationship between the two countries and open the border which was closed illegally by Turkey in 1992.

Immediately after the signing of the Protocols, the Turkish Government started setting preconditions

and new demands to ratify the Protocols and open the border. It was very obvious that the Turkish government was not sincere in its efforts to normalize its relation with Armenia. Furthermore, the Turkish government's intention was to deceive the international community and stop the Armenian Genocide recognitions momentum. It was a ploy to discourage President Obama from using the word "genocide" in his annual commemoration statement, and to facilitate Turkey's admission to the European Union (EU), since open borders is one of the key prerequisites for EU membership.

When the President of Armenia realized the underhanded intentions of the Turkish government, he froze the Protocol ratification process until the Turkish government acted in good faith and took confidence-building measures. In his statement, the President of Armenia stated: "We have made clear to the whole world that our position is nothing but firmly constructive. We have stated that, if Turkey ratified the Protocols, as agreed, without preconditions and in a reasonable time frame, failure by the Armenian parliament to ratify them would be precluded."

He further added that: "For a whole year, Turkey's senior officials have not spared public statements in the language of preconditions. For a whole year, Turkey has done everything to protract time and fail the process…We consider unacceptable the pointless efforts of making the dialogue between Armenia and Turkey an end in itself."

David Phillips of the Program on Conflict Prevention and Peace building at American University, in an op-ed editorial in the *Boston Globe* (Feb. 11, 2010) wrote: "The ball is in Turkey's court. Armenia's President Serge Sarkisian announced yesterday that he would formally submit the protocols to the Armenian parliament for ratification despite Turkey's efforts to stonewall and distort the deal."

In an op-ed piece (Feb. 5, 2010) in the *Los Angeles Times,* Henri J. Barkey, professor of international relations at Lehigh University and a visiting senior scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Thomas de Waal, senior associate on the Caucasus at Carnegie Endowment, wrote: "In January, Turkey showed signs of having cold feet… Why is Turkey trying to backtrack? Its government agreed to the protocols, in part because it wanted to prevent the U.S. administration and Congress from passing a resolution describing the Armenian massacres as genocide."

Howard Berman, US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman, in an April 13, 2010 letter to his House colleagues stated: "The protocols have been gathering dust in the Turkish parliament since they were signed in October, and particularly in light of the preconditions established by the Turkish leadership, there is little likelihood that they will be ratified any time soon."

The above quotations clearly show that the Turkish government's manipulative and insincere offer of dialogue with Armenians is akin to the neo-Nazis' suggestion of an independent, objective historical commission to determine whether the Holocaust took place or the Flat Earth Society's offer to hold an academic dialogue with *National Geographic* about the true shape of the earth.

If the Turkish government does not allow its citizens, historians and intellectuals to freely discuss the

issue of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey, and prosecutes them under article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, how can one take its offer of dialogue with Armenians and the creation of a "historians commission" seriously?

The Canadian government and the members of the House of Commons should stand by their principles and moral convictions. They should continue to resist the Turkish government's blackmail and "Joint History Commission" charade, and make it clear that the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is here to stay and that under no circumstance would they abdicate their commitment to uphold justice and to protect universal human values.

Furthermore, our executive and legislative leaders should not participate in propaganda trips organized by a government which is renowned as the prime abuser of the civil and human rights of its citizens and minorities. A government which has in jail more journalists than any other government in the world. Our leaders should not be pawns in Turkey's attempt to burnish its image by tarnishing that of Canada`s.

Our leaders should make it clear to Turkey that unless it recognize the genocides of the Armenians, Assyrians, Greek, and Kurds and repent, Canada will cease its bilateral cooperation with Ankara.