RESIDING IN FOOL'S PARADISE

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Our antagonists are far from asleep. In fact, in the past several years they have re-energized their campaign against us—in Canada and around the globe. Just a few days ago, on Dec. 28, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu pledged to neutralize the Armenian Diaspora in the conflict between our nation and Turkey. Prime Minister Erdogan had similar words. We also know about the Turkish-Azeri alliance is not just against Armenia and Artsakh but also against Diaspora Armenians. But back to Canada… where some Armenians seem to think the battle is over.

--The Turkbaijan lobby continues to attack the Toronto Public School Board's curriculum to make sure the Genocide of Armenians is removed from history courses of Grade 11 students. The activities of the Intercultural Dialogue Institute and the Intercultural Dialogue Centre we focused on ("Turkbaijan Propaganda in Bloom") last month are part and parcel of the campaign to influence Canadian educational institutions to deny or at least ignore the Genocide.

--The Turkbaijan lobby is throwing its weight to exclude the Genocide of Armenians from the Human Rights Museum, scheduled to open in Winnipeg in 2013. The $350-million museum will be largely funded by the federal government. However, there are indications that the Turkbaijan lobby is trying to persuade the Asper family of Winnipeg—the initiators of the project—to give cold shoulder to Armenian representation at the museum. It's more than likely that our antagonists are using the Turkish-Israeli relationship card to influence the Aspers—one of the leading Zionist families in Canada.

--The Armenian community in Canada is not aware that Ankara-Baku lobbyists operating in Canada have been trying to persuade Prime Minister Stephen Harper (through pressure exerted by Canada's foreign minister) to remove the word "genocide" from Mr. Harper's annual message on April 24.

--The Armenian community in Canada seems to be unaware that political gains can be reversed. A new administration in Ottawa can back peddle and waffle on genocide recognition. Canada's recognition is based on a motion which doesn't have the power of a more legally-binding resolution. While Michael Ignatieff, the leader of the opposition Liberal Party, does recognize the Genocide of Armenians, there's no reason to believe that Mr. Ignatieff would become the next prime minister or that a future Liberal Party would follow in the noble steps of the ruling Conservative Party and Prime Minister Harper and withstand Turkish blandishments and coercion.

--A few years ago the Turkish lobby hired Fleischmann-Hillard, one of Canada's and possibly one of the world's largest public relations, to improve Turkey's image in Ankara's denial of the Genocide of Armenians. After a thorough research, including Canadian public opinion of Turkish politics, tourism, cuisine, etc. the PR agency made its recommendations to the Turkish Embassy. Since then, the Turkish lobby has been acting upon those recommendations. For example, every summer there's a "Turkish Day" at Dundas Square, the most important public square in Toronto, meaning in Canada. Turkish food, travel, culture, live bands are featured at the event. And all this dominated by blazing, oversized red flags with the star and yataghan-sharp crescent.

We, Armenian-Canadians, tend to talk too much among ourselves. A great deal of our Genocide talk and activities are internal. For example, for a number of years the Toronto Armenian Centre (TAC) has sponsored mostly-Armenian films at the Pomegranate Film Festival. However, the festival takes place in the suburban TAC, which is a difficult commute. It's no brainer that the festival would have a much greater attendance if it was held in downtown Toronto rather than in the suburban "ghetto" which is considered boondocks to the film buff denizens of downtown.

Too much of our effort is uncoordinated or badly coordinated, to wit the recent campaign against Los Angeles Lakers' Kobi Bryant becoming a spokesman for the Turkish Airlines (THY). Some 30 Toronto Armenian young people braved the elements to demonstrate where the Bryant had come to play in Toronto. A similar demonstration took place in Los Angeles. While the commitment of the Armenian activists is commendable, in this instance it was for naught—if not worse. Does anyone believe that the demonstration would make a difference to the millionaire Bryant? About the same time, Faruk Cizmecioglu, THY's marketing and sales deputy director general, announced that the airline had also signed a contract with Danish tennis star Caroline Wozniacki. The Turkish Airlines has similar contracts with football clubs in Barcelona and Manchester United, and other athletic organizations. Are we going to demonstrate against or boycott these people and organizations? In addition to not helping advance our cause, these demonstrations could backfire and antagonize sports fans who don't know or care about Armenian-Turkish politics. Incidentally, actor Kevin Costner has been a THY spokesman for a number of years, yet there was no Armenian demonstrations against him.

It seems every other Armenian-Canadian parent's dream is to have an offspring who is a physician, pharmacists, dentist, lawyer or electrical engineer. Surely a commendable ambition, but to make our

case heard we need Armenians in the mass media. Our organizations can encourage young Armenians to pursue careers in media and in public relations by offering them scholarships, by helping them get jobs upon graduation.

In North America an overwhelming percentage of politicians are former lawyers. Why not encourage Armenian lawyers to enter politics? By encourage we mean raise funds and help in election campaigns.

While having Armenian politicians is certainly the "gold standard," we should realize that political aides have a tremendous impact on the thinking and actions of politicians. We should encourage and support our young people who want to enter the political arena, but not necessarily become politicians.

At one time there was a group of Armenian-Canadians which made a point of writing letters to the media to advance Hye Tadd or to shoot down Turkish propaganda in Canadian media. It's time we created something similar. It doesn't take much work: Half-a-dozen people who read newspapers or follow TV and radio can make a huge difference when they write to editors to correct inaccurate or biased anti-Armenian news reports or opinions. All it takes is a letter or two.

Just like the Turkbaijan foe, we have to promote familiarization trips—to Armenia. Politicians, media, public figures who visit Armenia would retain lifelong positive attitudes of Armenia and Armenians after a visit to our homeland.

The ideal would be to have a full-time public relations professional whose sole job would be coordinating and leading our public relations efforts. A $50,000 budget would guarantee the hiring of such an individual. The sum might seem high to some Armenians, but considering what the other side is spending, it's not a drop in the bucket.

Finally, we—and Armenians everywhere--have to realize that our battle with Turkbaijan is permanent and open-ended until Turkey meets the Three Rs—Restitution, Reparation, Return of our lands and Baku renounces its claims on Artsakh.