

SAME OLD TRICKS

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Raffi Bedrosyan, Toronto, 25 February 2015

Turkey has announced that the annual commemoration of the Gallipoli Dardanelles battles of the First World War, which were traditionally held on March 18, will be held on April 24 this year. President Recep T. Erdogan has invited over 120 world leaders, including President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia, to attend the ceremonies. The reason for the date change is apparent to all Armenians.



There is a term in Turkish, '*Sark kurnazligi*', meaning 'Oriental slyness'. The term is used to define someone who resorts to cunning to deceive someone, but both the deceiver and the deceived know that there is trickery involved, and more cynically, the deceiver does not care if the deceived person is aware of the deceit.

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Already a few state leaders have announced that they will attend, including 'Turkey's little brother' Azerbaijan, some African and Muslim states, and notably, Prince Charles of Britain.

It is worthwhile to remind these people, and all the English-speaking world, that another Turkish scheme involving trickery of dates which happened eight years ago.

The Holy Cross Church and monastery complex on Akhtamar Island in Lake Van in Eastern Turkey had been in ruins since 1915, and in fact, was being willfully destroyed by the Turkish Army in the 1950s. Only interference by famous Kurdish author Yashar Kemal (whose hidden Armenian roots were revealed recently) had prevented the complete destruction of the last remaining Armenian church. The Turkish government had decided in the 2000s to restore the church as a museum. The restoration was completed in early 2007 and the government announced that the museum will open on April 24, 2007. The Istanbul Armenian Patriarch Archbishop Mesrob Mutafyan forcefully protested that by choosing this date the government was attempting to make political gains using the Armenian pain, and that he would refuse to attend the opening ceremony if this insensitive decision

was not revised. The government appeared to appease the patriarch, but continuing to employ tactics of 'Oriental slyness', announced that opening day would be April 11, 2007.

The government was aware that April 11 was also equally significant and unacceptable to the Armenians, as it is the same date as April 24 in the old calendar in effect in 1915. In fact, in 1919, the famous Armenian journalist and survivor of the 1915 Genocide Teotig had compiled a list and biographies of 761 Armenian intellectuals arrested and subsequently murdered, in a booklet called "Houshartsan (Memorial) to April 11". The first April 24 commemoration had taken place in 1919, with the opening of a memorial sculpture called "April 11 Houshartsan", in the Istanbul Armenian Cemetery in Taksim, since then expropriated and converted in the 1930s to the famous Taksim Square, the scene of recent protests against the government.

All these facts, known to Armenians in Turkey and the Turkish government, were revealed in an editorial in the "Agos" newspaper which questioned the wisdom of using these dates for the Akhtamar opening. The "Agos" headline "Are you sure? Is this your final answer?" was copied and repeated on the popular TV quiz show, "Who wants to be a millionaire?"

The date of that Agos editorial? January 19, 2007... the very same day Hrant Dink was shot in front of the "Agos" newspaper offices.

The Akhtamar Museum was opened on March 29, 2007. Patriarch Mutafyan reluctantly attended. Shortly thereafter, he became incapacitated with a still-unexplained debilitating mental disease and lives in a vegetative state. In the meantime, eight years after Dink's murder, the real perpetrators and conspirators of the murder are still not arrested or tried.

Therefore, it is now appropriate to again ask the Turkish government who sent the Gallipoli invitations for April 24, 2015, and any state leaders who choose to ignore the real significance of this date:

"Are you sure? Is this your final answer?"

