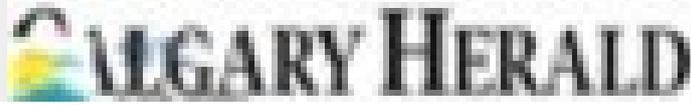


SPRING IS SADDEST TIME OF YEAR FOR ARMENIANS

Posted on April 7, 2010 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



✘ By Christopher Hitchens, [Calgary Herald](#), 7 April 2010



By Karekin Dikran

April is the cruellest month for the people of Armenia, who every year at this season suffer a continuing tragedy and a humiliation. The tragedy is that of commemorating the huge number of their ancestors who were exterminated by the Ottoman Muslim caliphate in a campaign of state-planned mass murder that began in April 1915. The humiliation is of hearing that the Turkish authorities deny that these appalling events ever occurred or that the killings constituted genocide.

✘ By Christopher Hitchens, [Calgary Herald](#), 7 April 2010



By Karekin Dikran

April is the cruellest month for the people of Armenia, who every year at this season suffer a continuing tragedy and a humiliation. The tragedy is that of commemorating the huge number of their ancestors who were exterminated by the Ottoman Muslim caliphate in a campaign of state-planned mass murder that began in April 1915. The humiliation is of hearing that the Turkish authorities deny that these appalling events ever occurred or that the killings constituted genocide.

Technically, the word genocide does not apply, since it only entered our vocabulary in 1943. (It was coined by scholar Raphael Lemkin, who wanted a legal term for the intersection between racism and blood lust and saw Armenia as the precedent for what was then happening in Poland). I prefer the phrase used by America's then-ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau. Reporting to Washington about what his consular agents were telling him of the foul doings in the Ottoman provinces of Harput and Van, he employed the striking words "race extermination." Terrible enough in itself, Morgenthau's expression did not quite comprehend the later erasure of all traces of Armenian life, from the destruction of their churches, libraries and institutes to the crude altering of official Turkish maps and schoolbooks to deny there had ever been an Armenia.

This year, the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington and Sweden's parliament joined the growing number of political bodies that have decided to call the slaughter by its right name. I quote from a response by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, prime minister of Turkey and leader of its Islamist party: "In my country there are 170,000 Armenians. Seventy thousand of them are citizens. We tolerate 100,000 more. So, what am I going to do tomorrow? If necessary, I will tell the 100,000: OK, time to go back to your country. Why? They are not my citizens. I am not obliged to keep them in my country."

This extraordinary threat was not made at some stupid rally in a fly-blown town. It was uttered in England, on March 17, on the Turkish-language service of the BBC. Just to be clear about the view of Turkey's chief statesman: If democratic assemblies dare to mention the ethnic cleansing of

Armenians in the 20th century, I will personally complete that cleansing in the 21st!

Turkish "guest workers" are found in great numbers through the EU, membership in which is a Turkish objective. How would the world respond if a European prime minister called for the mass deportation of Turks? Yet, Erdogan's xenophobic demagoguery attracted no condemnation from Washington or Brussels.

The outburst strengthens the already strong case for considering Erdogan to be somewhat unhinged. In Davos in January 2009, he stormed out of a panel discussion with the head of the Arab League and Israeli President Shimon Peres, having gone purple and grabbed the arm of the moderator who tried to calm him. He yelled that Israelis in Gaza knew too well "how to kill"-- which seems to betray at best an envy on his part. Turkish nationalists have also told me he was out of control because he disliked the fact that moderator David Ignatius, of the Washington Post, is of Armenian descent. Later, at a NATO summit in Turkey, Erdogan went into another tantrum at the idea that former Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen would be the next head of the alliance. Cartoons published on Danish soil frayed Erdogan's evidently fragile composure.

In Turkey, the denial has abysmal cultural and political consequences. Novelist Orhan Pamuk was dragged before a court in 2005 for acknowledging Turkey's role in Armenia's destruction. Had he not been a Nobel Prize winner, it might have gone very hard for him. Turkish-Armenian editor Hrant Dink, prosecuted under a state law forbidding discussion of the past, was shot down in the street by an assassin who was later photographed with beaming, compliant policemen.

The original crime defeats all efforts to cover it up. The denial necessitates secondary crimes. In 1955, a government-sponsored pogrom in Istanbul burned out most of the city's remaining Armenians, along with thousands of Jews, Greeks and other infidels. The state-codified concept of mandatory Turkishness has been used to negate the rights and obliterate the language of the country's enormous Kurdish population and to create an armed colony of settlers and occupiers in Cyprus.

It is not just a disaster for Turkey that its prime minister suffers from morbid personality disorders. The dead of Armenia will never cease to cry out. Nor, on their behalf, should we cease to do so. Let Turkey's unstable leader foam when other parliaments and congresses discuss Armenia and seek the truth about it. The grotesque fact remains that the Turkish parliament is forbidden by its own law to do so. While this remains the case, we shall do it for them, and without any apology, until they produce the one that is forthcoming from them.

