SYSTEM OF A DOWN AND EUROVISION: FALSE TURKISH CLAIM EXPOSED

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By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 22 January 2009

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The Turkish media regularly reports false stories and makes exaggerated claims. The latest example of misinformation is the Turkish claim of preventing the participation of the world famous American-Armenian rock band System of A Down (SOAD) in the May 2009 Eurovision Song Contest in Moscow.

What are the facts? Last August, in an interview with Asbarez newspaper, SOAD?s lead singer Serj Tankian said that a Finnish journalist had asked him if he would be interested in participating in "a song competition" which would raise "awareness about the Armenian genocide." Tankian told the reporter that it was "an interesting idea." When the reporter asked if he would be interested in participating in such a song contest, Tankian said, "Maybe, yeah."

Soon after the Finnish interview, Tankian said he was inundated with media reports that he was "going to take System of A Down to do this Eurovision thing." He told Asbarez: "It was all a misinterpretation and a misunderstanding to a point where I had to actually call my label reps in Finland and asked them to please tell the journalist to retract those statements, since I never said that."

Despite Tankian?s attempts to lay these rumors to rest, the Armenian and Turkish media continued to report that SOAD would be presenting a song on the Armenian Genocide on behalf of Armenia in the 2009 Eurovision Song Contest. Armenian public TV officials, who have the task of selecting Armenia?s official representative to the Eurovision Song Contest, repeatedly announced that they had received no such request from SOAD.

Nevertheless, Parliamentarian Akif Ekici, a member of an opposition Party, speaking in the Turkish Parliament, urged Prime Minister Erdogan to act quickly to prevent SOAD from presenting a song dedicated to the Armenian Genocide in the Eurovision Contest. Worried that hundreds of millions of viewers throughout the world would become aware of the Armenian Genocide, Ekinci asked Erdogan: "What will happen if this group wins the contest with its song on so-called ?genocide?? Would the world recognize genocide?" Ekinci also wanted to know if Erdogan had taken any steps in this regard with the Armenian government.

Having invented a fictional participation by SOAD in Eurovision, the Turkish media went further in misleading the public. Last week, Kanalturk proudly announced a decisive Turkish victory, claiming that as a result of Turkish complaints, the SOAD song on the Armenian Genocide was left out of the Eurovision competition.

Turkish State Television claimed that Armenia was forced "to withdraw the SOAD group" from Eurovision because of "the great reaction" of the media "reaching all the way to the Turkish Parliament." Kanalturk further alleged that Armenian officials did not find SOAD?s participation in Eurovision appropriate, at a time when they were trying to reconcile with Turkey. Regrettably, Lragir, an opposition newspaper in Armenia, reprinted these false allegations last week, claiming that Armenia withdrew SOAD from the Eurovision Song Contest at Turkey?s demand.

To set the record straight, once and for all, this writer contacted Serj Tankian who stated: "This whole Eurovision thing has been a funny and interesting phenomenon. It started with a Finnish journalist asking me if I would ever be interested in participating in Eurovision, (which I had no idea what it was), and use it as a way to promote recognition of the Armenian Genocide. I told him I didn't know what it was but I'd look into it. He kept on re-raising the issue over and over, and I said ?you're making it sound like a good idea? so I'll look into it. I never said to him or anyone else that I would do anything regarding Eurovision, let alone get SOAD involved in it. In fact, after the initial reports I called our Warner label rep in Finland and asked them to call the journalist and have him retract the statement, because it's false. Nonetheless this has spread. I have denied it in the press numerous times already."

Tankian further noted: "Neither I nor anyone I know has spoken to the Armenian government about Eurovision. However if the Turkish government doesn't fess up to its own history and recognize the Genocide, it may be something to consider."

It would be highly ironic if Turkish claims of success in suppressing the dissemination of information about the Armenian Genocide through music trigger a popular demand for the participation of SOAD in Eurovision, which would dramatically raise the issue of the Genocide before a worldwide audience!