

THE CASE FOR SELF-RECONCILIATION

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✘ Editorial, 20 February 2015

We live in a time when money, opportunity and position are bestowed upon those who enter academia or careers under the rubric of "conflict resolution," also known as "reconciliation." A more fitting name is the "Reconciliation-Industrial Complex," or RIC. 

Like the better-known term, "Military-Industrial Complex," RIC refers to the overlapping aims and financial relationships that exist among government officials, powerful legislators, lobbyists, NGOs, think tanks, academia, media and creative fields, and the industries and corporations that support them. These parties provide funding and other support for government programs, public and private policy initiatives, salaried positions, grants, and political access that will serve their selfish interests rather than the needs of the general citizenry.

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Quite often, Armenians whose livelihoods depend on RIC ridicule or dismiss as "unrealistic," "immature," or "living in a fantasy world" those critics who advise against indiscriminately embracing so-called reconciliation initiatives without making absolutely clear that genuine Armenian goals include genocide acknowledgment, reparations and restitution from Turkey.

Among the Armenian organizations that receive funding from Western interests and governments who themselves have agendas that may not agree with the Armenian national interest are the Caucasus Institute of Yerevan; the Civil Society Institute of Yerevan; the Civilitas Foundation; the Eurasia Partnership Foundation; the Golden Apricot Film Festival; the Hrant Dink Foundation; the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation; the Regional Studies Centre; and the Yerevan Press Club.

The pro-RIC interests who fund these Armenian organizations include: European Union; Council of Europe; British Embassy in Yerevan; U.S. Embassy in Armenia; U.S. Embassy of Azerbaijan; Honorary Consulate of Israel to Armenia; Embassy of Germany to Armenia; Kingdom of the Netherlands; U.S.

Department of State; U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); Open Society Institute; Open Society Foundation-Turkey; Eurasia Foundation; Global Dialogue Foundation; Heinrich Boll Foundation; Goethe Institute; Friedrich Ebert Foundation; Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom; Enka Construction Company of Turkey; Turkey-Armenian Fellowship Scheme; and Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV).

How do we know that these pro-RIC Western interests are sincere if they and/or their governments will not even acknowledge the Armenian genocide, let alone approve of restitution of any kind? For example, a top member of the American Jewish Committee -- which works against Armenian genocide recognition and backs Israeli military and political support of Azerbaijan -- sits on the honorary board of the Civilitas Foundation. Given the strategy of the West (i.e. the U.S., Europe, and NATO) to use Turkey to penetrate the Caucasus and Central Asia, and use Armenia as a doormat, their grants to Armenian organizations should be viewed with considerable skepticism.

Ironically, there are Armenians who sermonize about forging friendships with, and exercising forbearance towards, Turks but who will not, in practice, extend that very same courtesy to their fellow Armenians.

Given the severity of Turkish barbarism that was unleashed upon the Armenian people before, during, and after the Genocide, it is paradoxical that Armenian reconciliationists seem willing to cooperate with Turks in a way that they are not willing to do with their own compatriots.

There are Armenians in the RIC camp who lack a brotherly attitude towards those Armenians who view so-called reconciliation efforts with skepticism. There is also no shortage of Armenians who hold grudges because of disagreements with fellow Armenians. And it is unfortunately common to encounter Armenians who envy, demean and hinder the efforts of, other Armenians.

Such opponents could discuss their differences, empathize, agree to coexist, cooperate, or make amends.

But then, should not understanding go both ways? Should not Armenian critics of so-called reconciliation try to find common ground with Armenian reconciliationists? This is difficult to accomplish if conflicts – whether intra- or inter-ethnic – are not dealt with and resolved but are instead swept under the carpet. Thus, we are left with pleas to “be nice to each other,” but not to discuss anything considered contentious.

Everyone is entitled to his opinion. But, is it informed opinion? As evidenced by who funds “reconciliation” initiatives, misinformation can skew our opinions. For example, how many well-meaning reconciliationists are aware that many of the funders do not recognize the Armenian genocide and are, in fact, pro-Turkey and pro-Azerbaijan?

Because the passage of years can soften people's judgments of a heinous crime, time is on the side of the perpetrator. Thus, the perpetrating side's stonewalling may be rewarded with forgetfulness.

Meaningful Armenian action, therefore, must be taken in the present and not in some vague future.

It is supremely important that Armenian reconciliationists refrain from signing away Armenian rights to reparations and the restitution of Western Armenia. They should drop their minimalist "all we want is an acknowledgment or apology" plea.

There really is no such thing as Turkish-Armenian "reconciliation." The word means a resumption of intimate relations after a breach. This does not describe the relations Turks had with Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The word better describes how we Armenians could and should unite to reach our greatest national potential.

Today, the internal strangulation of our people in Armenia at the hands of corrupt government officials continues. How long will the global Armenian nation – including Diasporan organizations who silently condone the actions of the current regime -- tolerate the annihilation of what is left of Armenia?

If we wish to survive as a nation and see the continued moral, spiritual, and material progress of Armenia and Armenians, true reconciliation with one another on the eve of our genocide centenary must begin now. In the words of poet-activist Yeghishe Charents, "O, Armenian people, your only salvation is in the power of your unity."

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