

TOO LATE, TOO UGLY

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✖ Yossi Sarid, [Haaretz.com](https://www.haaretz.com), 27 May 2011



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I have achieved a great success: Finally the Knesset plenum has enabled its Knesset Education Committee to conduct a public discussion of the genocide of the Armenian people. This is the discussion that was prevented for decades. For generations our governments firmly opposed it. And this, of all governments, is the one that agreed. All the MKs present voted in favor, nobody was opposed, a unanimous decision that exudes a bad smell: too late, too ugly, yuck.

Zahava Gal-On, who returned to the Knesset with renewed strength, made a very nice speech. That is how she assumed her place in the relay race and the mission of her movement, the only one in Israel to avenge the honor of the Armenian people and demand that the historical lesson be learned from an orphaned genocide - victims without murderers. Ahead of time I wished her success where her predecessors - the heads of Meretz - had failed; and my wishes came true.

But it was not my wishes that changed the parliamentary decision, and the reason for the reversal is clear: The Israelis no longer favor the Turks, and are willing even to give up the charms and temptations of Antalya; that's how angry they are. Now we will demonstrate to you what happens to a country that Israel no longer favors - we will seat it in the low chair; revenge against the gentiles. Now we'll show them who's boss.

So we showed them, and how do we look: All the past explanations in favor of the Turks suddenly sank to the bottom of the glass of anger, for which Israel is famous. These, as we recall, were profound explanations from the Sea of Marmara, to which our leaders lent an ethical character, even accompanying them with historiosophical insights.

Eleven years ago, on the 85th memorial day, I went to the Armenian church in Jerusalem, and as "a human being, as a Jew, as an Israeli and as the minister of education of the State of Israel" - that is how I introduced myself - I spoke about the historical justice that must be done, about the special commitment of the Jewish people to the Armenian people, and about my plan to teach our students the universal significance of genocide.

The scandal erupted immediately. My prime minister objected sharply, and Ehud Barak was swiftly joined by Shimon Peres: "These events," he said, "should be left to historians and not to politicians."

He was struck dumb last week, when the right thing was done for the wrong reason, and the voice of Shimon was not heard.

~~At the time the Turks declared me a persona non grata. They, like me, sometimes get confused~~ between rivals and friends, and I consider myself their friend. Turkey is today a developing world power, an example of economic prosperity, which conducts its affairs in the regional and international arena wisely. It is also proof that an Islamic regime is not necessarily Iranian, and that Europe is bitterly mistaken when it locks the gate to Ankara instead of opening it.

The bad guy - Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan - is good for the Turks, and was reelected by an increasingly large majority. This week he said that he tried to convince Hamas to recognize Israel, and will continue to do so.

It is just because of my admiration for Turkey that I find it difficult to understand its insensitive position on the Armenian issue. After all, it was not this generation that spilled the blood 100 years ago; many countries have accepted responsibility for crimes committed in their name a long time ago. Only this week Queen Elizabeth II visited the Irish Republic and offered her hosts regret and identification with all the Irish people who ever suffered at the hand of England. It is not clear why Turkey alone remains intransigent.

But it is quite clear why Israel supported it all these years. In addition to security and financial interests, there is something else concealed here: If everyone begins to acknowledge the tragedy of the other - his own part in the Nakba - what will become of us?

