

TURKEYBAIJAN UNDERMINE APPOINTMENT OF JUDGE

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By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 17 September 2009

✘ Turks and Azerbaijanis, probably at the instigation of their governments, have attempted to undermine the recent appointment of Canadian-Armenian Aris Babikian as a Citizenship Judge, responsible for making decisions with regard to applications for Canadian citizenship. In making the appointment, Jason Kenney, Canada's Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, described Babikian as an individual who has been "very involved in immigration, citizenship, social services, culture, human rights and multicultural issues in his community. He has served as Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of Canada, and been a member of the Ontario Film Review Board and the Canadian Ethnocultural Council. Mr. Babikian was awarded the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal and the Ontario Volunteer Service Award. He speaks English, Armenian, Arabic, Turkish and Greek."

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Canadian-Turkish and Azeri organizations immediately launched a vicious hate campaign against Judge Babikian, writing letters to the Minister of Citizenship and the Prime Minister protesting his appointment.

Day.az, an Azeri news website, called Judge Babikian a racist, chauvinist, and an extremist. Stating that his appointment is "unacceptable" and "of serious concern to the Azerbaijani and Turkish communities of Canada," the Azeri website made the ridiculous claim that "Babikian had access to all sectors of the Canadian political establishment due to the power and money of the Armenian community, particularly the Dashnaks." The website attacked the Canadian government for having recognized the Armenian Genocide and disparaged Minister Kenney for being selected ANC's "Man of the Year." The Azeri site made the baseless charge that any Canadian journalist who dared to write against Armenians would jeopardize his career.

"Bizim Anadolu," a Canadian-Turkish monthly newspaper, also targeted Judge Babikian in its July 2009 issue, calling him "a hard-line Armenian political lobbyist has displayed bias and hatred towards Turks, has been against dialogue and reconciliation, and clearly does not possess the cross-cultural sensitivity that is a prerequisite for the appointment of a citizenship judge."

Reacting to these Turkish attacks, Canadian political figures, journalists, leaders of ethnic communities, and NGO representatives wrote letters of commendation to the Minister of Citizenship and the Prime Minister in support of Babikian's appointment.

The most unexpected defense of Judge Babikian came from a liberal Canadian-Turkish newspaper, Yeni Hayat, which published a lengthy editorial on August 27, countering the defamatory Turkish and Azeri attacks against him.

Yeni Hayat wrote that Judge Babikian was being subjected to "an orchestrated campaign of character assassination, intimidation, lies, innuendo, misinformation, and propaganda was launched in certain Canadian-Turkish media outlets, mirroring similar campaigns in Azerbaijan and Turkey."

Yeni Hayat highly praised Babikian's "cross-cultural, civic, human rights, educational, multicultural, civic projects, plus his service record, voluntarism, and contribution to the enrichment of the Canadian civil society should suffice as convincing rebuttal to this vicious, immoral, unethical and mendacious campaign. Everyone who has had the opportunity to work with and to know Judge Babikian will attest that he is a man of integrity, honesty, sincerity, moderation and a firm believer in peaceful coexistence. The accolades he has received from many governments and NGOs are testimony to the man's high moral standing and commitment to making Canada a welcoming place to everyone regardless of religion, color, race or any other differences."

Yeni Hayat pointed out that Babikian "always made a distinction between the Turkish people and the Turkish government." He is "cognizant that the Turkish government and a minority of ultra-nationalists are out of touch with their civil society's thinking when it comes to the Armenian Genocide." The Turkish newspaper deplored that these "ultra-nationalists, with the help and support of foreign elements, have taken over the Canadian-Turkish community and are trying to radicalize the community and sow the seeds of hatred against other communities in Canada."

It appears that the Turkish government, just as it has done in a number of countries around the world, has been financing ultra-nationalist Turkish groups in Canada in order to export genocide denialism, silence its foreign critics, and counter the political activities of the Armenian community. In this particular case, Turkey's long arm, with Azerbaijan's backing, has sought to reach all the way into Canada to undermine the appointment of a qualified Canadian-Armenian Judge. Ankara and Baku have no right to interfere in the Canadian government's internal decision-making on judicial appointments.

Instigating Turkish and Azeri immigrants against Canadian-Armenians could have dire consequences for which Turkey and Azerbaijan would bear full responsibility.

