WE ARE ALL GUILTY!

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The **Armenian** Weekly
By Eren Keskin, The Armenian Weekly, 20 October2009

> ***Eren Keskin*** *(24 April 1959, Bursa, Turkey) is a Kurdish-born lawyer and a human rights activist in Turkey. She is vice-president of the Turkish Human Rights Association (İHD) and a former president of its Istanbul branch. She co-founded the project "Legal Aid For Women Who Were Raped Or Otherwise Sexually Abused by National Security Forces", to expose the abuses happening to women in Turkish prisons. She has been repeatedly threatened, assaulted, harassed and arrested by Turkish authorities. She was the object of numerous lawsuits in relation to her human rights activities. In 1995 she was imprisoned for her human rights activities and was adopted as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. In 2004 she received the Aachen Peace Award "for her courageous efforts and activities for human rights." In 2005 she was awarded the Esslingen-based Theodor Haecker Prize for Civic Courage and Political Integrity.*
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On the day that I am writing this, the protocols for "normalizing the relations" between Turkey and

Armenia has been signed.

It is always the “governments” who decide what is “normal”!

Same thing today. The “world sovereigns” have determined how the relationship between Armenia and Turkey are to be “normalized.”

In my view, the only thing that should be normal is accepting the fact of the genocide, with all its consequences, and apologizing to the Armenian nation.

I realized very early on that we live in an “identity graveyard.” My uncle, the twin brother of my father, had decided to marry an Armenian woman. They were very much in love. The marriage just had to happen. But my grandfather, a retired governer, agreed on one condition: Jozefin would be a “Muslim” and her name would be changed to Hulya.

Even though I was very young, I could not wrap my mind around this: How could it happen? How could one’s right “to be oneself” be taken away like that?

They did get married. But nobody in my family called my aunt Hulya. She always remained as our dear Jozefin.

In my best childhood, there is always an aunt Jozefin, or an aunt Antuanet, or a cousin Alex or Arthur.

When I was a child, I always believed that Armenians were the nicest people in the world.

Once when I was 14, we went to Kilyos beach (in Istanbul) as a large family group. The son of my father’s aunt said, “Let’s go for a swim, I will tell you something.” We walked and walked and walked…

When nobody else was around, he said, “We are Kurds, don’t forget that. They might deny this fact, but we are Kurds.”

I was stunned, and a little pleased. But that this fact was “so scary that it had to be kept a secret” put me in a strange state of mind.

Who, and with what right, could decide that his own identity was to be kept a “secret”?

After that day, I started reading the “unofficial history.” I tried to read anything I could find on the Armenians and the Kurds.

When I was 16, aunt Jozefin and I went to Sedef Island. We were sitting at the beach when I asked her, “Aunt, your family suffered a lot during the genocide years, didn’t they?”

My aunt looked around and said, “Let’s go for a swim.” At that moment I remembered Kilyos.

We swam farther and farther and farther away from the land…

When we were sure that nobody could hear us, my aunt told me what they had gone through.

From then on, I believed that a big crime had been committed on this land—and that the mentality that had committed it was not left in the past at all.

In my later personal history, I thought, worked, and spoke about this as much as I could.

In 2005, there was a conference in Istanbul. The intellectuals who organized this conference, known as "the Armenian Conference," wrote in the call for papers: "The orders that led to the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of people, and the death and murder of many of them in and after 1915 were, after all, given and executed by a government of the Ottoman Empire (which is not identical to the present Turkish Republic)."

I think that the crucial difference in mentality lies in the parantheses above. I believe that the ideology of the perpatrators of the Armenian Genocide, the Committee of Union and Progress, and its special organization Teskilat-i Mahsusa, are the "founding ideology" of the Turkish Republic.

For years I have been arguing that the main problem in Turkey is militarism; that the "red lines" and thereby the fear it creates in society leads to totalitarianism; that miltarism is the biggest obstacle to the de-militarization of "internal and external" politics; and that the legislative, executive, and judicial institutions are wholly under the influence and coercion of militarism. I, and a few other people who agree on this, have been under constant pressure because of our thoughts.

But life itself confirms us!

Just when the "normalization of the relationships" between Turkey and Armenia was being discussed, the Turkish High Court made a decision that showed how difficult it was to change things: It ruled that anybody who "suffered mentally" because of what writer Orhan Pamuk had said in an interview—namely, that "we killed 1.5 million Armenians"—could sue Pamuk for pain and suffering. That ruling revealed once again the real stance of the Turkish Republic—that it is dependent on militarism.

Being a democrat and being a realist requires, instead, to call the Turkish Republic to recognize the crime of genocide and pay reparations for the damages Armenians suffered.

Of course, that is a difficult and scary stance.

Benda says, "Real intellectuals have to risk being burned at the stake, sent to exile, crucified. That's why there aren't many of them. Above all, they have to always be critical of status quo."

Edward Said describes the intellectual as one who "tries to create crises, not to resolve them".

Yes, there are so many who are trying to resolve the crisis, to normalize it… But others choose to "not let the crimes and the criminals be forgotten."

That's what we are doing.
- It's been 94 years!

- Those who believe in the lies,
- Those who don't question the lies,
- Those who remain silent even if they don't believe in the lies,
- Those, by their silence, approve of the lies,

We are all guilty…

And we owe thousands, millions of apologies…