

The Story of Hasan Atmaca: Deportation of Armenian political refugee imminent

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During the Armenian genocide many Armenians were only saved from massacre by forced conversion to Islam, moreover countless children and young girls were kidnapped by Turks and Kurds.

Today, more and more people are discovering their Armenian origins. Especially in the Kurdish areas, numerous people are living there who are descendants of those who were kidnapped and forced into marriage during the Genocide. Even if many Turks and Kurds insist that in these villages the Armenians were rescued by their neighbours, in most cases these descendents were young women and children. Therefore, the question must be asked why were only young girls and children rescued? It is only too clear, many Kurds and Turks took advantage of the situation to acquire a child or a wife. The apparent rescuers acted more from self-interest than humanitarian zeal. Thus, the Armenian Genocide entailed not only the murder of 1,5 million lives but also the kidnapping and forced marriage and conversion of countless young women and children.

During the Genocide not only could members of the ruling Young Turk Party enrich themselves without fear of legal sanctions , but also locals used the situation and helped themselves to the possessions of the murdered or deported Armenians. The Genocide also meant the occupation of most of the Armenian homeland and the destruction of priceless cultural treasures which had been collected over generations.

Nevertheless, despite intense efforts, the Turkish authorities have failed to eliminate all traces of an Armenian existence in present day Turkey. There are still pockets of silent witnesses in Asia Minor and West Armenia. In these areas where, according to the wishes of the criminal Young Turk regime Armenians should not live, there are still people who acknowledge their Armenian descent. They are called the generation of the Survivors of the Butchery. The fate of these surviving Armenians is the saddening continuation of the story of a Genocide after the Armenian Genocide during the First World War. It is a story of people who out of fear have hidden their true identities. It is also a story of how people who after

many years of silence and wordless suffering at last acknowledge publicly their Armenian descent and sense of national identity

The story of Hasan Atmaca

In the Turkish part of Kurdistan, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) has been carrying out an armed campaign against the Turkish occupation forces for the last twenty years. This fight has also been joined by the descendents of those Armenians who through forced marriage, conversion to Islam or through the help of Kurdish and Turkish friends and neighbours were able to survive the massacres. One of these is Hasan Atmaca. He was born in 1957 in the village called Cibin in the district of Halfti in the Province of Urfa. At a young age, he was subjected to the bitter experience of discrimination in all its varied forms due to his Armenian descent

This led to his joining the newly founded PKK in 1976 to campaign against the racist Turkish state. Already, before the fascist military takeover in 1980 he was arrested and taken to the infamous military prison in Diyarbakir. After the military coup this prison was filled with thousands of political prisoners who suffered from indescribable acts of torture. Dozens of prisoners died as a result of this torture or died in one of the many hunger strikes protesting against the inhuman prison conditions. Numerous prisoners set themselves alight also to protest against the inhuman conditions and barbaric acts of torture. It is almost a wonder that Hasan Atmaca survived eight years of this hell in the military prison in Diyarbakir.

After his release in 1988 he continued as a PKK activist campaigning against the Turkish state. He was arrested again in 1990 in Istanbul and spent another year behind bars. Afterwards he managed to escape to Syria and went from there to Northern Iraq where the PKK had established military bases. In the meantime the PKK had developed into a strong military organization with thousands of guerrilla fighters and was taking the fight to the Turkish occupation forces. Hasan Atmaca spent about 9 years in Syria and Northern Iraq and moved up into the highest ranks of the PKK hierarchy. Between 1999 and 2001 the Party sent him mainly to Europe. In this year deep differences in political direction and policy surfaced within the PKK and Hasan Atmaca, who was again on a PKK military base in Iraq Kurdistan. He decided to leave the party.

Hasan Atmaca managed with some other dissidents to flee, via Iran, into Armenia where he could only stay only for a few months. At the beginning of 2005, he was

arrested trying to enter Germany with a forged passport, and spent over two years in a prison in Frankfurt.

After he had served his prison sentence he was not released as the Turkish authorities had applied for his deportation in March 2005. In the deportation application the Turkish authorities cited a series of criminal offences and charges against him. However, they have been unable to provide any concrete evidence for the charges against him to the German authorities. Although one German court decided that Hasan Atmaca would be in grave danger if he were to be deported, a higher court ruled that a deportation was acceptable and legal. In order to prevent this Atmaca's lawyer has appealed to the European Court of Human Rights. If this last appeal fails, then nothing can prevent his deportation to Turkey and probable torture and death.

Hasan Atmaca's Kurdish friends turned to the Central Council of Armenian Associations in Germany for assistance in April 2007 and informed them of his imminent deportation. Selim Cürükkaya, a former member of the PKK's central Committee who had distanced himself years before from the organisation declared that it must be prevented that a descendent of a „Survivor of the Butchery” be deported to Turkey. Selim Cürükkaya had, like Hasan Atmaca, spent many years in the feared military torture prison of Diyarbakir. He was not only a victim of the sadistic torture, but also a witness of how after every Armenian attack on Turkish representatives abroad, barbaric acts of revenge and torture were carried out against prisoners of Armenian descent.

Not only Selim Cürükkaya but also other Kurdish opposition members imprisoned in Diyarbakir confirmed that Atmaca and other prisoners of Armenian descent were subject to even more brutal mistreatment and torture.

The Fate of the Armenian Village Cibin

In May 2007 Hasan Atmaca wrote to the Central Council of Armenian Associations in Germany. He appealed for their support in preventing his deportation to Turkey as this action would only result, “in all likelihood, in my death.” In his letter he described the fate of other villagers of Armenian descent in the Village of Cibin. After the founding of the new Turkish Republic many towns and village names populated by Armenians and Kurds were changed by the Turkish authorities. Thereby, the village Cibin founded by Armenians was renamed Saylakkaya. Today

the original Armenian church now serves as a Mosque.

Even before the Armenian Genocide the Turkish authorities had settled in the area Turks who had fled from the Balkan region and the Caucasus. As the deportation of Armenians from Cibin also began, a few were able to find shelter and help from their Turkish neighbours as the relationship between the Armenian and Turkish inhabitants was at the time very good. Most of the Armenians were deported in the direction of Aleppo. Only few were able to survive the Genocide. A few settled in Aleppo or Beirut, from there they emigrated later to Yerevan in the USA or to other countries.

In 1988 as Hasan Atmaca was released from prison and returned to his village, he was a witness to the visit of the nephew of an Armenian called Aleyan whose descendents had lived in the village. Hasan Atmaca reported that the old woman paid a tearful farewell to her relatives from America. Saying "You left us alone among these people and went away." Nevertheless, for those survivors of the butchery forced to leave and live scattered and uprooted across the world their pain was no less. Even if they knew that some relatives were still living in a village somewhere in Turkey, it was neither allowed nor possible to see them again. The fate of those families torn apart during the Genocide, the young women forced to marry Turks or Kurds or the children taken away from their mothers is a chapter in the history of Armenian Genocide of which little is known.

One of the old Armenians from Cibin which Hasan Atmaca reported about in a letter while in prison in Frankfurt is called Satenik Krikoryan. Her father and most of her relatives were murdered during the Genocide: She did not know that her brother Mihran was still alive and had later emigrated to Yerevan. Satenik Krikoryan could still speak Armenian and was also able to recite English poems which she had learnt by heart as a child at school. Only after an Armenian newspaper had reported the visit of Aleyan's Nephew in Cibin did Krikoryan's brother discover that his sister was still alive and living in Cibin. A few years later he and his son Agop travelled to Cibin to visit his sister. Unfortunately it was too late, as she had died in the meantime.

Hasan Atmaca succeeded, during his short stay in Yerevan, in finding Mihran Krikoryan. He told him that of his relatives, the Nersesyans family had emigrated to Australia and a few of the Acemyans, who were also related to the Krikoryans, had managed to get to America.

Can the deportation of Hasan Atmaca to Turkey be prevented?

The Central Council of Armenian Associations in Germany has appealed to the German Justice Minister in two letters in an attempt to prevent the deportation of Hasan Atmaca. Sadly, it appears that the fate of Hasan Atmaca seems not only to be of little interest to the Justice Minister but also arouses little interest in the German political community. Only Ulla Jelpke of the socialist Left Faction in the German parliament distributed a press release on 17th June 2007 which attempted to bring to the attention of a wider public the approaching deportation of Atmaca. In the press release it reiterated the danger that "In Turkey, as a member of the Armenian minority and as a former member of the PKK, Atmaca could only expect torture and a long prison sentence at the hands of the Turkish Justice."

For the last two years Hasan Atmaca has lived in constant fear of landing again in a Turkish prison. It is beyond all doubt that Turkey still views him despite his leaving the PKK, as an "Enemy of the State". A few months ago the High Command of the Turkish forces in a declaration described any citizen not accepting the ideals of Turkism as an "Enemy of the State". In the eyes of the military establishment this includes all people who do not accept Ataturks moto "Happiness is being Turkish" now and in the future. The military, who are considered as the real force in Turkey and protector of the Turkish state founded by Ataturk, have also declared as "Enemy of the State" those campaigning for equal rights in Turkey.

The case of Hrant Dink illustrates what this means in everyday life in Turkey. After he had been found guilty by a Turkish court of "Defamation of Turkism," he was murdered with a shot in his back by a fanatical nationalist on the 19th January this year. This is the method now employed by the state to dispose of „state enemies“, since Turkey has had to abolish capital punishment as a precondition for EU entry negotiations. It is of no surprise therefore, that Hasan Atmaca, also of Armenian descent, should fear for his life if deported to Turkey or at least the threat of a long prison sentence and torture

The Armenian revolutionary Garbis Altinoglu who has roots in Amasya was arrested after the fascist military coup in 1980 and was imprisoned until 1991. In this period he was subjected to severe torture and mistreatment. In an open letter he too has appealed to the democratic public to try and prevent Atmaca being deported to Turkey. Garbis Altinoglu who now lives in exile knows from first hand experience the

ferocity and barbaric nature of the “Special Treatment” handed out to prisoners in the Turkish military prisons. Altinoglu described the torture routine Hasan Atmaca was put through: „He was subjected to systematic torture in the infamous Diyarbakir Military Prison, the record of which dwarfs that of the Nazi concentration camps. Mostly Kurdish inmates of this inferno were beaten on a daily basis, put into isolation cells filled with human excrement, forced to drink their own urines, spy on, beat and at times even eat human excrement and copulate with each other, were deprived of all basic human necessities months on end, compelled to say prayers, memorize and chant chauvinistic and military songs and salute even the lowest officials who systematically tried all forms of torture on them. Being of Armenian origin secured to Mr. Atmaca only extra insult, abuse and torture. 35 inmates died or were killed under horrific conditions during the 38 month-long period between March 1981 and May 1984, which mark the most intense period of repression in this Gestapo camp. To allow the extradition of Mr. Atmaca will almost amount to pass a death sentence on him. Therefore, I ask you to do your utmost and call on the German authorities to desist from deporting Hasan Atmaca or any other political refugees to Turkey. His extradition to Turkey shall be perceived as an approval of the crimes of humanity committed by the Ankara regime whose hands are stained with the blood of hundreds of thousands and even million of Armenians, Greeks, Kurds and other opposition figures of various nationalities.“

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