

Turkeys march towards Europe and Emasculation of the European Armenian Lobby

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On the 14th December the State heads of the European Union (EU) will be holding their summit meeting in Brussels and will be discussing, among other subjects, the acceptance of Turkey into the EU. Armenian associations from across Europe have been busily organising a massive demonstration in the Belgium capital city. This protest is aimed at the EU as they have decided not to make Turkey's recognition of the Armenian Genocide a condition for EU entry negotiations.

In June 1987 the European Parliament had passed a resolution accepting the tragic events which took place 1915-1917 against the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire to be Genocide in the sense of the UNO's General Assembly convention for The Prevention and Prosecution of Genocide. At that time Turkey's refusal to recognise its crimes against the Armenian people was viewed by Parliamentarians as an insurmountable barrier to Turkey's entry into the European Community. Since then, the European Parliament has demanded in numerous resolutions that the European Commission and the Council persuade Turkey to recognise the Armenian Genocide and to open the border to the Republic of Armenia. In December 2004 the European Parliament appealed to Turkey to push forward the reconciliation process with the Armenian nation by recognising the Armenian Genocide during the Ottoman Empire period. Again in 2005, the members of the European Parliament appealed to Turkey to recognise the Genocide and made this a condition of EU membership. A year later Turkey was criticised in a resolution by the European Parliament for continuing to deny the Genocide despite countless appeals to accept the historical and proven facts. Although, the recognition of this crime is not formally one of the membership criteria it is essential that Turkey stands behind and comes to terms with its past.

Despite these countless resolutions voted on and passed by the European Parliament, Turkey continues its well known policy of denial. The European heads of state and government have ignored the resolutions of the European Parliament, as a result these resolutions have had no effect. Most recently, a certain change has

been taking place in the European Parliament. In one European Parliament resolution passed on 24th October, Turkey was only asked to begin an honest and open dialogue about their past events. A motion to change the resolution demanding official Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide did not find a majority and was voted down 260 to 309, with 31 abstentions.

Whilst the Armenian lobby in Brussels is increasingly losing influence, the Turkish lobby is making up ground rapidly. It has been the intensive work and influence of German members of the European Parliament of Turkish descent which has resulted in the demand for official recognition of the Armenian Genocide being removed from most recent resolutions. The successful travel entrepreneur Vural Öger who holds a seat for the SPD in the Foreign Affairs Committee in the European Parliament has been following a Pro-Turkish course. As committed to the cause and sitting in the Foreign Affairs Committee in the European Parliament is Cem Özdemir a member of the Green Party and also of Turkish descent.

The Turkish government has known for a long time that the increasing number of politicians of Turkish descent sitting in the European Parliament and in National Parliaments can be of great value in their lobbying campaigns. The Armenians in Europe are in intense competition with a quietly growing Turkish lobby, especially in Germany. In the coming years the influence of this Turkish Lobby will grow and it is becoming clearer that the Armenian voice has only a significant power base in France.

The Armenian National Committee of Europe was renamed the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy in 2002 and has worked hard trying to establish an influential Armenian lobby in Brussels. Unfortunately, the results have been very marginal. One significant weakness in the EAFJD's strategy has been their unrelenting efforts on making the recognition of the Armenian Genocide a condition for Turkey's EU membership. Even when many European politicians have a deep respect for this demand, they are not prepared to bring up this question during the EU entry negotiations with Turkey. They are hoping that out of the slow democratization process now beginning in Turkey the conditions will be created for a Process of Reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia.

However, despite some improvements in the direction of more democracy, the official position in Ankara regarding the question of the Armenian Genocide remains unchanged. The court judgement of Hrant Dinks, the publisher of AGOS has shown that even those Armenians who also believe in change through dialogue are seen as

enemies by the Turkish Government. That Hrant Dinks did not allow himself to bend to Turkish legal pressure resulted in his murder.

Turkey is continuing its blockade of Armenia and, in cooperation with Azerbaijan, is attempting to weaken the Armenian Republic through political and economic isolation. All appeals from the EU have been ignored and it is clear that not one of the resolutions stemming from the Europeans Parliament have had the least effect on the Turkish Government's attitude towards the Armenian Republic or the Armenians. Neither the EU Commission nor the EU Council have taken any measures to give any of the EU Parliament's resolutions any degree of political weight. From this it is easy to conclude that the EU Parliament's historical resolution of 1987 and all the following resolutions are merely worthless pieces of paper. Over the last years, Turkey has confidently carried out its old policies and through pressure and blackmail has prevented the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by other nations. At the same time the Turkish Government has suppressed critical opinion in its own country, thus preventing an open and critical discussion which the crimes against the Armenian people require.

The demonstration on the 14th December will certainly not change the present policies supported by the various EU decision making institutions. It will remain a powerless protest of a powerless association whose voice is becoming weaker and weaker and being listen to by fewer and fewer politicians. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to establish an Armenian Lobby which is in the position to develop and make public a new political strategy reflecting the conditions of this new political reality. The campaign to force the political recognition of the atrocities has reached its limits and as in 1980 when it became necessary to change the strategy in the fight for the recognition of the Genocide to more political and peaceful methods so it is today necessary to make critical changes to the present flawed strategy.

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