

Why Turkey Should Confront its Past

By Seda Muradyan,

I visited Istanbul in May, and I saw there an old cupboard with the name and date – written in Armenian – “Hranush, 1911”.

Just four years after that unknown Armenian was for some reason commemorated on that cupboard, our nation was swept up in a genocide. Squads of Turkish soldiers rounded up Armenians across the country, killing them, or driving them to die in the desert.

I exist only because my grandfather Eduard managed to escape from the town of Kharberd in Western Armenia. It is now the Turkish town of Harput and, somewhere, contains the un-marked grave of Murad, my great-grandfather.

The old cupboard reminded me of the fate of Turkey’s Armenians every time I passed it. And I passed it four times a day because it stood by the entrance of the restaurant in the Conrad hotel where we were staying.

I was part of a group of Armenian analysts, political scientists and journalists visiting the former capital of the Ottoman Empire to take part in a forum dedicated to improving relations between our states.

We saw Hranush’s name on the cupboard before our first lunch, and we flocked around it, taking photos of it and each other.

At the forum, television cameras and journalists waited to ask us questions, and the relations between our two countries were at the centre of national attention. In the midst of this uproar, Hranush’s cupboard stood still.

On the last day I even said goodbye to it, and surprised myself by how moved I was to be leaving it behind.

I am sure that Hranush, like my great-grandfather Murad, has no grave. Murad for me has always been the symbol of the genocide – the “unknown victim” – and the memorial to its victims in Yerevan has been for me a grave for him. Hranush has now joined him in my thoughts.

I truly hope that Armenia and Turkey will become good neighbours, and I want Turkey to open the border that it closed in 1993.

However, in a sign of the ten-



sions that still exist, the signing last week of the historic accord between the countries – setting a timetable for restoring diplomatic ties and reopening their joint frontier – was delayed by several hours as international intermediaries struggled to stop both the Armenians and the Turks making any political statements for the cameras after the event.

This leaves me – as well as many ordinary people in Turkey and Armenia – doubtful that the politicians are sincere in their desires to build peace.

Such distrust could interfere with any attempts to build friendship between the two nations. We have been separated by a closed border for decades. In Armenia, recollections of the genocide have extinguished any pleasant stories that Armenians could have told of Turks when they still lived together as neighbours.

Turkey must confront its own past before real peace can ever be created. Here in Armenia, we will never stop talking about the genocide. Opening the border will give us the chance to talk to the Turks, to persuade them that their ancestors waged genocide against ours – a recognition that’s key to good relations between the two countries.

The ghosts of Murad, Hranush and a million and a half other Armenian victims insist upon it.

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Armenia Marks 10th Anniversary of Terrorist Attack on Parliament

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bullets killing Vazgen Sargsyan, Karen Demirchyan, deputy NA speakers Ruben Miroyan and Yuri Bakhshyan, MPs Henrik Abrahamyan, Mikael Kotanyan, Armenak Armenakyan, government member Leonard Petrosyan in the parliament chamber.

The attack came just five months after Sarkisian’s and Demirchian’s Miasnutyun (Unity) alliance swept to a landslide victory in parliamentary elections. It thrust the Armenian government into serious turmoil, with government factions loyal to the slain officials suspecting Kocharian and then National Security Minister Serzh Sarkisian of eliminating increasingly

powerful rivals.

The main official ceremony to mark the anniversary took place outside the parliament building in Yerevan where a memorial to the attack victims was unveiled in the presence of their relatives, President Sarkisian, government ministers and parliament deputies. They stood silently as Demirchian’s widow Rima accused the authorities of failing to solve the killings in a speech.

“The crime of October 27 is unprecedented in human history with its brutality. It shook the foundations of our statehood. Many things have remained unsolved,” she said, adding: “That crime must be solved in full.”

The widow of another victim, deputy speaker Yuri Bakhshian, com-

Letters to the Editor

"Armenian Golgotha" is Must Reading

Through the years as a practicing journalist I have read just about every book on the tragedy that struck our ancestral homeland in 1915 and how to this very day the Turks refuse to admit that it was a genocide.

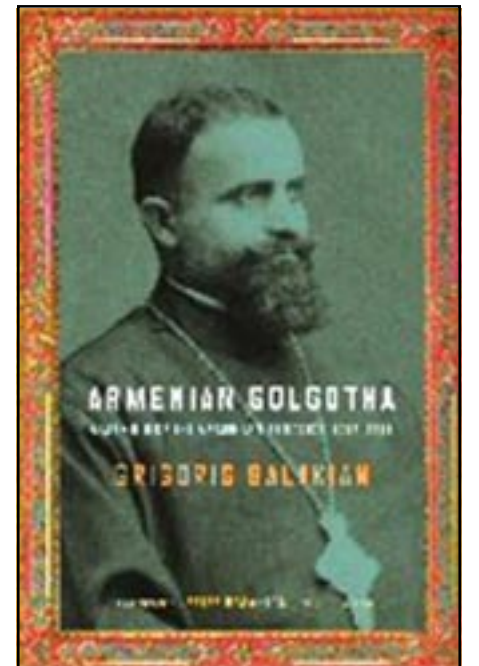
I’ve used the researched material penned by our scholarly authors to speak out in the newspapers I reported for and managed in Michigan and Ohio. In October I started reading the “Armenian Golgotha: An Eyewitness Account of the Armenian Genocide.” Every detail was chilling, yet enlightening on how the Ottoman Turkish gangsters were able to nearly eradicate our ancestors from every nook and corner of the Armenian homeland.

As has been reported in the Armenian press, Armenian Golgotha has been recognized as one of most important eyewitness accounts of the genocide. I was chilled by the work of Grigoris Vartabed Balakian, who by a miracle survived the genocide to record the murder of a nation in his masterfully written Armenian Golgotha.

Balakian’s account was first published in Armenian, in 1922. Thankfully the masterpiece eyewitness memoir was finally published in English in 2009. The translation was carried on by his grandnephew, Professor Peter Balakian of Colgate University and Aris Sevag, former editor of the Armenian Reporter and now an editor with the national AGBU News Magazine.

While Professor Balakian was in Detroit recently for a book signing visit, I personally thanked the acclaimed poet for diverting from his literary career to fulfill a pledge at translating the 509-page Golgotha memoir-written by his revered uncle. Grigoris Vartabed Balakian died in 1934.

Armenian Golgotha is must reading for every Armenian family. As the descendants of the genocide survivors, we must know what actually



happened and how the criminal minds of the Ottoman Turkish government carried out their crimes against humanity. We must if we are to achieve justice for our people.

Armenian Golgotha belongs in every college and university campus library. In 1969 I journeyed through the ravaged homeland - from Sepastia to Erzurum, Erzerum, Moush, Bitlis, Lake Van, Keghi, Kharpet and Malatya. All I found was the ruins of our massacred homeland in depopulated Turkish-held Armenia.

Armenian Golgotha took me back to the historic homeland, and I shed tears for our people.

Grigoris Vartabed Balakian’s memoir is about the heart and soul of Armenia. If you have pride in your heritage, Golgotha is must reading.

Finally, I salute Professor Peter Balakian and Aris Sevag for their dedication at translating Armenian Golgotha into the English language.

Read Armenian Golgotha.

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plained that the memorial was placed inside the parliament compound and will therefore not be accessible to the public. “They placed it here because there is a sense of guilt,” Anahit Bakhshian, herself a member of parliament from the opposition Zharangutyun party, told RFE/RL.

Demirchian’s son Stepan also attended the ceremony. “Tens years on, consequences of that unprecedented and brutal crime have not been overcome,” he told RFE/RL at Yerablur military ceremony, where Vazgen Sarkisian was laid to rest, later in the day. “Nothing was done by the authorities to prevent that crime and, conversely, everything was done to cover up the crime.”

“Had it not been for October 27, I’m sure that we would have lived in a totally different country,” added Demirchian.

“The best way to respect the memory of Vazgen Sarkisian and Karen Demirchian is not to unveil statues but to solve the October 27 crime,” scoffed Aram Sarkisian, Vazgen’s younger brother and another prominent opposition figure.

The two men visited Yerablur together with former President Levon Ter-Petrosian, the top leader of the main

opposition Armenian National Congress (HAK). Ter-Petrosian refused to talk to journalists, saying that they will find answers to their questions in a strongly-worded statement issued by the HAK the previous night.

The opposition alliance described the parliament attack as “the darkest page in Armenian history” that laid the foundation of the country’s existing “criminal-oligarchic” system. It again blamed Kocharian and Serzh Sarkisian for the killings, claiming that most Armenians consider them the masterminds of the crime.

“October 27 was a violent seizure of power perpetrated by means of terrorism,” the HAK charged. “Terrorism thus became the regime’s main tool for clinging to power and reproducing itself.”

Ter-Petrosian repeatedly accused the Kocharian-Sarkisian duo of having a hand in the 1999 bloodbath in the run-up to the February 2008 presidential election. “If you vote for Serzh Sarkisian on February 19, you will vote for Nairi Hunanian,” he told voters in one of his numerous campaign speeches. “He who elects Serzh Sarkisian would desecrate the holy graves of Karen Demirchian and Vazgen Sarkisian.”