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SURMOUNTING NATIONALISM IS TURKEY'S SOLE PATH TOWARD MODERNIZATION

*The question is not how Turkey can be integrated into Europe,
but rather how the Turks can become Europeans*

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Surmounting Nationalism is Turkey's Sole Path Toward Modernization

The question is not how Turkey can be integrated into Europe, but rather how the Turks can become Europeans

22 April, 2010

New Turks are needed to achieve a new Turkey

The formation of the Turkish nation—that is, of the Turkish identity—is a process that has not yet ended, and the West should not lose the chance to get actively involved to help the Turkish nation become more modern.

Today, there really are three geographical and three political Turkeys. The “European” Turkey has the greatest potential to integrate with Europe. If Turkey was comprised solely of Istanbul, Eastern Thrace, and Izmir, and a population of 25-30 million, it would have fewer problems in terms of its integration with Europe. However, Turkey’s central and eastern parts are burdensome in this regard to its western parts.

The “political” Turkey, too, is divided into three parts. The Islamists, who dominate the modern-day Turkish society, have taken advantage of the opportunity endowed by democracy and are gradually “conquering” the secular nationalists, who were in power until 2002. The latter are the second major power in the political domain. The followers of Kemal Ataturk still have an overwhelming influence on the army and within the “deep state”.¹ And third, the weakest political division is comprised of the liberals and the Kurds who, even though they have different objectives, are nonetheless united against the clerical-nationalist political elite that rules the country, and against this elite’s characteristic mentality. And those who think that the creation of an independent Kurdistan in southeast Turkey can resolve this country’s main political and ethnic problems need to consider the fact that if this happens, Turkey’s progressive society could lose an ally in the form of the Kurds.

So, which of these Turkeys will the West support? What kind of a Turkey do the United States and the European Union want to encourage? That of Orhan Pamuk and Hrant Dink, Ibrahim Baylan and Yilmaz Kerimo, or that of Talat and Erdogan?²

After eight years of governance by the Islamists, it has become clear that their mindset does not differ all that much from that of the nationalists. Perhaps the most significant difference, however, is the fact that the modern-day Turkish republic has renewed its nationalist foundation with a clerical influence, which existed under Ottoman rule but has now become even stronger. Turkey, to that end, is not even hesitating to take steps that run counter to the interests of the democratic world. The Turkish diplomats continue to “urinate”—in both the literal and figurative sense—on the walls of Western embassies.³

Former Sovietologists must deal with Turkey

In actual fact, the former powerful empire, today’s Turkey still remains—albeit smaller—an empire; and its working mechanisms are virtually similar to those of the former USSR. Turkey has to go through the path of social democratization, ridding of ideological rhetoric, and the decolonization of its nations and nationalities, which the USSR went through by way of honoring and defending the rights of national, religious, and other minorities. Therefore the former Western Sovietologists and those new Turkologues who have received political and academic schooling from these Sovietologists can more efficiently deal with Turkey’s problems.

Despite the fact that in 2009 the Armenian-Turkish Protocols were signed with the goal of improving relations, the correlations between the two countries and peoples were much better in the past than today. This demonstrates how important it is, and specifically for its neighbors, that Turkey faces its history and that its citizens fundamentally change their way of thinking.

Some Western political scientists are hopeful that democracy will sooner or later come to Turkey, that its two extreme poles will ultimately discredit one another, and that, until then, the moderates will remain Turkey's partners with the West.⁴ But the true picture in Turkey shows something different: its society is becoming more fundamental, both in terms of Islam and nationalism.

The West was completely unsuccessful in Turkey's social and human modernization

In fact, in the past 65 years, the West has not been able to comprehensively assist in instilling civilizational and human values in Turkey. Hence, out of Turkey's current population of 70 million, its liberal and civil societies are comprised of a mere 4-5 million, at best. And if we factor in the verity that this number is greatly constituted of the different national, religious and other minorities, just like at the turn of the past century, the fiasco for the West becomes especially apparent. Thus, when the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan declares that he might deport all Armenian citizens living in Turkey, the protests against such statements coming from within Turkey are hardly audible.

The fact is that, even after Turkey's 65-year permanent presence in the Euro-Atlantic mainstream, open-minded writers, journalists, and social and political figures are still being persecuted in that country, such as the prominent liberal-thinking Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who was murdered. Before arresting his murderer, police officers first took their photographs with that killer, seen as a national hero. After all this, several tens of thousands of freethinking Turks took to the Istanbul streets to protest, shouting "We are Hrant Dink," and "We are Armenian." But the fact that such relatively few numbers of people spoke out leaves a lot to think about.

Moreover, the tremendous amounts that Western democratic funds have spent in order to "Europeanize" this Asian nation have in effect brought discomfiting results, and this is a basis for concern. The strong "machine" of the "United" Europe, which is able to assimilate Iranian, Afghan, Indian and Lebanese immigrants even to this day, has, over the course of numerous years, demonstrated its incapability to assimilate the Turkish immigrant minority. It is not surprising that the Europeans are not in a hurry to grant Turkey access into the EU; otherwise what will the concept of a "European" transform into?

It is apparent that immediate and fundamental measures are needed to resolve this problematic issue. A new and effective plan is indispensable, or else the problem will become more complicated. And Turkey is already doing this. Based on the death of several scores of people during the street clashes in China's Xinjiang province, it is accusing China of carrying out genocide against the Uyghurs and Israel of organizing genocide in Gaza, but at the same time it is considering as absurd the fact of genocide in Darfur, where the Sudanese government—which is cordial to the Turkish government—and its lackeys have exterminated hundreds of thousands. And after all this, how can we hope that modern-day Turkey will acknowledge the sin of the Ottoman leaders, in 1915, of not only organizing and executing the genocide of the Armenians, but also of leaving the genocide survivors without ninety percent of their homeland, where the Armenian people had continuously lived for over three millennia?

So, let us call it like it is. The majority of Turkey's ruling elites need to overcome nationalism. Will "political correctness" force the social and political figures of the West to persistently remain silent? Wouldn't this tolerance cause the further deepening of nationalism, which we have already seen in Europe many years ago? In the event its demands are not implemented, Turkey is

already threatening the world with destabilization in the Caucasus; that is to say, with instigating its “younger brother” Azerbaijan to start a war against Armenia. Azerbaijan is already spending more for just its military needs than all of Armenia’s state budget, and Turkish military instructors are teaching their Azerbaijani kinsmen everything they have learned from their Western partners. Do we have to wait until a segment of today’s Turkish elite turns into new Taliban, and talk and take action only after that?⁶

The Turkish prime minister’s statement that if the Armenian communities of the Western countries continue their campaign toward the recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide, all Armenian nationals living in Turkey can be deported—(incidentally, the genocide of 1915 likewise had begun with the deportation of the Armenians)—is, unfortunately, wholly pragmatic in light of domestic politics and the upcoming elections in Turkey. Erdogan knows all too well what must be said so as to be liked by the majority of Turks, and he knows which dispositions must be complied with in order not to lose the electorate and to remain at the helm of power. He is simply satisfying the domestic social demand for the chauvinistic and xenophobic political product.

This is a demand that is growing by the year under the international community’s silent encouragement and the continued attempt, in the framework of the false “political correctness,” to not notice it. The facts are telling. Covering a sociological survey, the *Hurriyet Daily News* notes that 50-70 percent of Turks do not want to have an American, Jewish or a Christian neighbor, while 54 percent either tolerate torture or finds that it should be legalized.⁶ This survey, which was conducted under the leadership of two professors from Turkey’s Sabanci University, clearly demonstrates that a mere 12 percent of Turks have a positive view of Christians; 10 percent, concerning the Jews; and 7 percent, with respect to the atheists. The absolute majority of Turks do not share Western values. According to the opinion poll conducted in 2009 by the PEW Research Center, 69 percent of Turks stated that he or she “does not like” the United States, and only 14 percent had warm disposition toward that country. In addition, 37.5 percent of Turks consider the United States to be Turkey’s main foreign political adversary. Fifty-nine percent of Turks confess that they do not like the European Union, and this is significant since 55 percent of Turks want to see their country in the EU.

In line with the 2009 Report of the European Court of Human Rights, Turkey was in first place—with 2395 petitions—in the number of petitions the Court had received concerning the violation of human rights. On top of that, the 2009 indicator had increased by 27 percent in comparison with the 2008 indicator.

Turkey’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism has launched an extensive plan aiming at restoring and renovating the monuments belonging to the Ottoman Empire’s cultural heritage in the Balkans. This is so even while thousands of monuments belonging to the Armenian cultural heritage are either being or have already been destroyed. In all probability as an act of “compensation,” just one Armenian cultural treasure, the church on Akhtamar Island in Lake Van, was renovated—but it was prohibited to place a cross on it.

Today numerous Western funds are spending tens of millions of dollars and euros to convince Turkey’s neighbors, and in particular the Armenians, that this country is no longer what it was back in 1915, that it has now become humanistic and fairly democratic. Perhaps it would be more effective if those amounts were spent on really changing the Turks.

Thanks to the ushering in of a new purpose that had started from Gandhism, the British colonialism of the 20th Century changed into global political responsibility toward the end of the last century and, attributable to the Denazification of 1945, the German colonialism turned into global repentance and atonement. The Ottoman colonialism, on the other hand, because of the superpowers’ centuries-long and still continuing coaxing and encouragement, became a global neo-Ottoman, multi-vector, and pretentious arrogance and hatred.

The matter concerning the surmounting of nationalism in Turkey has remained contemporary since 1915, and the aforesaid denazification methodology is probably applicable and effective.

Is a liberal Turkey possible?

Throughout the eight centuries of its existence, by having assimilated the millions of Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Laz, Kurds, northern Caucasians, Albanians, and Arabs who lived in it, the Turkish nation truly possesses a sufficient potential to become more modern, democratic, secure and predictable. However, this can take place not thanks to, but in spite of the nationalists and the radical Islamists. Turkey's newly-forming, yet still small liberal-democratic civil society, which is primarily concentrated in Istanbul, can reveal the hidden civilizational potential of this young ethnos. It is not a happenstance that, over the course of its several-century existence, Turkey for the first time gave to this world a fairly estimable cultural figure, in the person of Orhan Pamuk.

If today the West becomes successful in substantially supporting and defending the movement by the progressive segment of the Turkish society, it is not unclear whether this possibility will exist tomorrow, as well, when official Ankara finishes its geopolitical positioning change, in the Greater Near East and in terms of the entire global politics, and in the opposite direction of the universal human values.

On the verge of the anniversary marking the 1915 genocide of the Armenians in Ottoman Turkey, we are compelled to accept the fact that the Armenian people, who have become the victims of that terrible tragedy and have been left without their homeland, still do have all the grounds to be concerned. And it is not only the Armenians who should be concerned.

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The Information-Analytical Center's (Russia) web-site: <http://ia-centr.ru/expert/7821/> .

ENDNOTES

¹ The typical expression of this phenomenon is the “Ergenekon” organization.

² Orhan Pamuk is a progressive Turkish writer and a Nobelist; Hrant Dink was the editor-in-chief of the *Agos* independent Armenian weekly newspaper, and he was killed by a Turkish nationalist in 2007; Ibrahim Baylan and Yilmaz Kerimo are the Swedish parliament's Turkish-origin MPs who voted in favor of that country's recognition of the 1915 Armenian; Talat Pasha was the minister of the interior of the Young Turk government during World War I and one of the organizers for the Armenian genocide; Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been the head of Turkey's Islamist government since 2002.

³ An incident took place on April 7, 2010 in which the Turkish ambassador to Afghanistan urinated on the wall of the U.S. embassy in that country.

⁴ Nick Danforth, “How the West Lost Turkey”, *Foreign Policy*, November 25, 2009 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/25/how_the_west_lost_turkey?page=0,1

⁵ Let us remember that the Taliban, too, had gained strength due to efforts by the West.

⁶ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=mamma-li-turchi-2009-11-19>