

An Un-Canadian April

High Volume Message Traffic Between PMO and Various Armenian Organizations

LALE ESKİCİOĞLU

On April 24, 2009, Mr. **Rick Dykstra**, Member of Parliament from St. Catharines and Parliamentary Secretary to Hon. **Jason Kenney**, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, made the most one-sided and incriminating statement yet from any Government official on the Turkish-Armenian controversy regarding the events of 1915:

"...between 1915 and 1923, ... brutal and systematic destruction of the Armenian people, ... one and half million Armenian perished, ... first modern genocide..."

Had Parliamentary procedure allowed a longer statement, it would have probably included rest of the language that so clearly identifies radical groups within the Armenian Diaspora. Why has the Government caved in so unabashedly to the aggressive Armenian lobbying?

The previous night, on April 23, 2009, Mr. **Dykstra** was the guest of honour at the gala dinner – charity fundraiser organized by the Turkish community of Ottawa on the occasion of the Turkish National Sovereignty and Children's day. Mr. **Dykstra** made a nice speech at the event, on behalf of the government and the office of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. In less than 24 hours, he stood up in the House of Commons and made the above speech. This is ethnic politics at its worst.

Needless to say Turkish Canadians were appalled. Being brought up in a culture which is world famous for its hospitality, Canadians of Turkish descent are deeply committed to the spirit of the Turkish saying that when they drink a cup of coffee offered by their host, they are indebted to their host for forty years. Turkish community was shocked by Mr. **Dykstra's** behaviour as a member of the Government.

Canadian intellectual tradition was long compromised when the Canadian Parliament and Government, ignoring the on-going scholarly debate, took upon itself to give a verdict on events thousands of miles away, almost a century ago. Is this the new way to re-write history, legislate it by a show of hands under

the stare of lobbies? Should we then expect foreign countries to pass judgments about Canadian history?

But this year a new low was hit. From Mr. **Dykstra's** message, we understand that, after having successfully distorted history in the eyes of the less acquainted, now the Armenian Lobby is pushing their claims one step further and succeeding. The well-connected Armenian lobbyists and insiders are now able to implicate modern Turkey through governmental statements. So much for the nice words we had heard from politicians trying to explain how they were merely talking about a past event that had nothing to do with modern Turkey. The events of 1915, triggered by a revolt of the Armenian citizens of Ottoman Empire, resulted in the deaths of thousands of Turks and Armenians alike. Turkish Canadians were greatly disappointed to see a representative of the government to make a speech that extended the blame all the way up to 1923. According to his logic, Turks perpetrated a vicious crime, genocide, when they were under the occupation of the major European powers at the end of the First World War.

But this was not all. April was stormy indeed. Compared to previous years, this year there was a deluge of "genocide commemoration" messages delivered to various Armenian organizations from the Prime Minister's Office and from Hon. **Jason Kenney**, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. Let's look at the sequence of events:

- On April 14, 2009, Prime Minister sends a "genocide commemoration" letter to *Congress of Canadian Armenians* which they publish on their web site. The next day the letter is withdrawn, and the in the following days it is posted again with the modification of a few words.

- On April 21, 2009, several Armenian organizations hold an event at the Parliament Building which is attended by the members of the government.

- On April 23, 2009, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Turkey and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs issue a joint statement: *"Turkey and Armenia, together with Switzerland as mediator, have been working intensively with a view to normalizing their bilateral relations*

and developing them in a spirit of good-neighbourliness, and mutual respect, and thus to promoting peace, security and stability in the whole region..." In unison with the radical groups within the Armenian Diaspora, the Government simply ignores this development.

- On April 23, 2009, MP **Rick Dykstra** comes to the Turkish Canadian gala dinner for *CHEO* on the occasion of the Turkish National Sovereignty and Children's Day, the 89th anniversary of the establishment of modern Turkey's parliament. Members of the Turkish community talk to Mr. **Dykstra** about the new positive developments and mention the joint statement issued by Switzerland, Turkey and Armenia.

- On April 24, 2009, Hon. **Jason Kenney** sends a message to *Armenian General Benevolent Union of Canada Inc.*, from which we learn that his new chief of staff, Mr. **Agop Evereklian**, is of Armenian origin.

- On April 24, Prime Minister makes another statement repeating his support for the Armenian claims.

- Also on April 24, 2009, Mr. **Dykstra**, Parliamentary Secretary to Hon. **Jason Kenney**, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, makes the unfortunate speech in which he repeats the most atrocious claims of ultra-nationalist Armenian lobbyists in Canada. He does not mention the reconciliation efforts or the very current joint statement.

- On April 28, another Armenian group that opposes the normalization process with Turkey holds an event at the Parliament with the support of the Government.

Why have those responsible for this file in Government allowed so much one-sidedness this year? Who really handles this file after all? Are the moderate Armenians really happy with the radical position of the government which marginalizes Canada's position internationally? Minority governments are a fact of life. But should this necessarily be at the cost of Canadian traits of fairness and even-handedness? These are worrying questions. Less than a year ago we established a warm and positive relationship with the Prime Minister. We would like to count on that relationship to ask Mr. **Harper** to listen to the concerns of a large group of Canadians and refrain from allowing bias control his relationship with us.

It is not good to end on a negative note. And there is some good news. First, constructive statements were made on April 24th, by two MPs, Mr. **Maurice Vellacott** of the Conservative Party and Mr. **Mauril Bélanger** of the Liberal Party. Their statements, given below, reflect an approach that deserves to be called truly Canadian. The second development, has been the agreement between Turkey and Armenia, mediated by Switzerland (where was Canada?), to normalize their relations. This can open



Statement by Hon. Mauril Bélanger

Member of Parliament, Ottawa-Vanier, Liberal Party
House of Commons, April 24, 2009

Mr. Speaker, in 2004 the majority of this House voted to recognize the terrible suffering endured by the Armenian people in 1915 as genocide. The opposition of 68 hon. members to this motion underlined the still ongoing debate about the sequence of events that led to this terrible tragedy. Canadians have built a reputation as fair arbitrators in conflicts all over the world. Let us continue in this tradition and encourage the governments of Turkey and Armenia to move forward in their desire to normalize their relations. It is with great encouragement that we learned yesterday that a comprehensive framework has been agreed upon by the governments of Turkey and Armenia to improve their bilateral relations. We must make sure that this road-map succeeds. In the spirit of this agreement, let us support Canadians of Armenian and Turkish origin in their efforts to also come together in mutual understanding and respect. BelanM@parl.gc.ca



Statement by Mr. Maurice Vellacott

Member of Parliament, Saskatoon-Wanuskewin, Conservative Party
House of Commons, April 24, 2009

Mr. Speaker, the 20th century has been witness to some of humanity's greatest tragedies. One of these tragedies took place in 1915 when the Ottoman Empire collapsed under the onslaught of World War I. After more than four centuries of peaceful relations, a wave of nationalism broke into a frenzy of violence between Turks and Armenians. Hundreds of thousands lost their lives in countless revolts, pitched battles and massacres. Others fled abroad. Many have come to Canada and made it their new home. This terrible tragedy continues to haunt Turks and Armenians alike. Recently however, as mentioned before, the Turkish and Armenian governments have undertaken important steps toward normalizing their relations in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. Our government supports recent efforts by the Turkish and Armenian governments to jointly study the still unresolved questions of their shared past. Canadians have a reputation as fair arbiters in conflicts all over the world. We encourage the governments of Turkey and Armenia to move forward in their desire to normalize their relations. Let us also encourage Canadians of Armenian and Turkish origin to come together in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect. VellaM@parl.gc.ca

On April 23, 2009, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Turkey and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs issued a joint statement:

"Turkey and Armenia, together with Switzerland as mediator, have been working intensively with a view to normalizing their bilateral relations and developing them in a spirit of good-neighbourliness, and mutual respect, and thus to promoting peace, security and stability in the whole region.

"The two parties have achieved tangible progress and mutual understanding in this process and they have agreed on a comprehensive framework for the normalization of their bilateral relations in a mutually satisfactory manner. In this context, a road-map has been identified.

"This agreed basis provides a positive prospect for the on-going process."

the way to a proper study of the historical tragedy and eventual reconciliation. Perhaps we will at least see peaceful Armenians in Canada, though not the aggressive lobbyists, support this process. And maybe, the

Government will come to its senses, hold accountable those who created this mess and stand on the side of peace and reconciliation. Although the last few weeks caution us against naivety, we can still hope.

Ali İhtiyar Kısa Filmleri

2 Haziran 19.00'da,
ONF Salonlarında
Adres: 1564, rue Saint-Denis
(Métro Berri-UQAM)

Giriş Ücretsiz

