

Searching for the enemy

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A climate of nationalism mixed with racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia is dangerously taking hold of Turks, largely due to power-hungry politicians desperately seeking to gain votes for their parties in this election year.

The country appears increasingly to be searching for an enemy in the belief that this will somehow be “revitalizing and replenishing for the nation.” This of course is the parlance of fascism. This country has even had politicians in the recent past, the late Turgut Özal being one, who believed that İsmet İnönü’s policy of neutrality, which was brilliant and kept Turkey out of World War II, had done a disservice to the nation.

Meanwhile the brutal murder of the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, rather than galvanizing a sense of soul-searching for the nation or prompting questions about where it is headed, appears instead to be doing the opposite for the uneducated masses, thus feeding the hate-filled environment.

“A sense of being wronged”

We are seeing fresh examples in this context of how the mere mention of the name “Armenian” is enough to send significantly large elements of this society into paroxysms of hatred. The fact that politicians are cultivating a “siege mentality,” with their constant bickering about how “Turkey is being wronged by its enemies,” is all that such an environment of hate needs to explode into violence.

It was a similar sense of “being wronged as a nation” that gave birth to Hitler and plunged the Germans – and the rest of the world – headlong into war half a century ago. Meanwhile Turkey’s uneducated “lumpen masses” are nothing but “storm troopers waiting to be made” and assigned a mission for the Fatherland (or Motherland in Turkey’s case).

We see evidence of this in the streets, at football matches, at political rallies, at concerts and on television. Moneyless, brainless and futureless, scores of young people are merely waiting for instructions to take to the streets and avenge their sense of having being wronged.

The “enemy,” for them is also apparent: Namely the West and its lackeys the Greeks, the Armenians and the Kurds, as well as their hated “domestic collaborators,” the intellectuals and all those who have an objective approach to the country’s problems.

In days gone by the “enemy within” was anyone who was left-leaning. Now it is the liberals and intellectuals. It is telling in this context that those who killed Dink, rather than feeling any sense of remorse, actually believe that they did well and good for the sake of the nation and for the ideal of “Turkishness.”

“Back stabbing traitors”

Neither have they felt any need to restrain themselves in issuing new threats to the intelligentsia in this country who they abhor. All they have to do to cultivate such hatred is listen to what politicians are saying. It is clear that the republican People’s Party (CHP), while being one of the main offenders, is not the only

culprit here.

Take for example our justice minister, Cemil Çiçek, who castigated the organizers of last years Armenian Conference in Istanbul as “back-stabbing traitors,” and has on numerous occasions supported the notorious article 301 with the demagogic argument that “enemies within will not be given the privilege to insult Turkishness with impunity.”

Neither does there seem to be a way out of this morass at the present time, since the only way to prevent this slide towards fascism requires that the organs of state and the powers that be cooperate for the benefit of the whole, rather than serving the interests of specific parts.

This, of course, requires that the presidency, the government, Parliament and other power centers specific to this country, most notably the military and civilian bureaucracy, overcome their subjective agendas and come up with a joint agenda.

But it is these organs of state and centers of power that are involved in internecine fighting in what is basically a “post-modern civil war.” Political maturity is required if Turkey is to get better without first getting worse. That, however, does not appear a likely prospect from today’s perspective.