

# Turkey-Armenia: The way to peace

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BOSTON - The Sevan Bakery is located in Watertown, where the Armenian population is high. As you enter the store, you feel as if you are in a grocery store in Anatolia.

Harry's father is from Bünyan in Kayseri, a central Anatolian province. "I was born in this house. My dear father was sitting beneath this tree and thinking about the homeland. We were eating the best pastrami," he says, pointing at a photograph.

Zadik, Varujan, Armenians in Istanbul... They are a total different story.

When I was about to wrap up my speech at a sports arena in Watertown, during a panel organized by the Friends of Hrant Dink, a tall, old man with gray hair and a beard approached me. He had liked my speech. The man was from Bünyan, Kayseri.

He spoke without letting go of my hand after the handshake:

"I was in primary school in Bünyan. I think it was 1942 or 1943. There were flag ceremonies at school. I enjoyed these ceremonies. One day I wanted to hold the flag. But the headmaster didn't allow me. 'You are not a Turk, you cannot hold it,' he said. I was so offended that I've never forgotten this story. My heart was broken. Toward the end of the 1950s, we moved here..."

As a journalist, I try to write people's stories so that they are able to pour their hearts out, to penetrate each other's lives and to understand each other's pain and sorrow, so that, I think, we can live in a better world. But having a dialogue is not easy. It is difficult. I know that the pains of the Armenians are deep. Especially in the diaspora, the feeling gets deeper... Such sorrow shouldn't lock them in the past, but some Armenians are living in the past.

It is as though they don't want to open the door to the future. That feeling should be defeated. On Monday evening, as we were in a discussion session following the panel at Harvard, a handsome young man took his turn. He said that he is a Turk from the city of Denizli and is studying economics.

"I see, I understand, that my ancestors did terrible things to Armenians in the past... But what do they want from me today?" he said. Laughter broke out in the hall.

The question this naïve and sincere young man asked actually underlined the facts about Turkey. Turks are unaware of the Armenian question, just like they are of the Kurdish conflict. They are in the dark.

This is the way they have been taught. Some problems are kept from them. For this reason, I believe, everyone should light a candle and look into the dark instead of cursing the darkness.

That's why I place importance on dialogue and cultural dialogue programs. That's why the Friends of Hrant Dink association established in Washington is so important. During the book-signing event at the arena, someone asked: "Will Turkey accept the genocide?"

Another added: "Will Turkey give a piece of land?"

Yet another one continued: "If there hadn't been any ASALA, the Armenian question wouldn't have been on the agenda. We couldn't get anywhere with peaceful demonstrations."

I remember another question from a conversation at Harvard:

“We are moderate Armenians. You tell us, would it be better or worse if the genocide bill is adopted in the U.S. Congress?”

There is more than one diaspora!

Conversations and the questions asked have revealed this. There are many Armenian diasporas. The common denominator is, without a doubt, “genocide.” However, they have serious differences of opinion on how they should deal with Turkey and which direction they should take. Hrant Dink’s death and developments such as the Turkish apology campaign have made them confused. The diaspora seems confused and split.

For instance, some of them have placed a great deal of importance in the protocols signed between Turkey and Armenia in Zurich last month, while some have reservations and some completely refute them. That’s OK. Change is not easy!

Turks will change too. So will Armenians. This is a painful process. In order to feel less pain, in order to facilitate the process, we must have plenty of discussions. We have no other way but to stare into each other’s eyes and communicate if we want to transform the dark into daylight... The past will, of course, not be forgotten.

But we cannot bury ourselves into the past if we want to build a peace for the future. Let’s not forget: The path to peace and democracy involves destroying some walls...

\* Hasan Cemal is a columnist for daily Milliyet, in which this piece appeared Friday. It was translated into English by the Daily News.