

# Taner Akçam veut institutionaliser le génocide

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POLITICS

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### Dr. Taner Akçam stresses the need to “institutionalize” Armenian Genocide research



In an op-ed, Turkish historian Taner Akçam has slammed Erdogan's decision to set up a commission to “respond to accusations of genocide” and stressed the need to “institutionalize” Armenian Genocide research.

According to a report in the June 23, 2020 edition of *Hürriyet*, Turkey has taken the decision to establish “a new autonomous and civil institution” in order “to respond to the accusations of genocide and to develop a strategy [to counter them].” The decision was taken at the 5-hour meeting of the President's High Advisory Board on June 16, 2020.

At the meeting it was determined that Turkey's principal failing in this regard was that it did not possess a single institution to deal directly with the Armenian claims and develop a [coherent-organized] strategy” and that it “had not developed a comprehensive strategy”.

Therefore, it was decided to form a new institution to address this shortcoming. The

“sole task” of this new organization would be to “view the various dimensions of the topic—such culture, history, propaganda, and law, not merely politics—as a whole.” Additionally, as part of the decision it was also stated that “the institution would be an autonomous and civil [society] initiative without direct connection to the government or state”.

Ultimately, this news must be greeted with the acknowledgment of another bitter truth: Today, in all of North America there does not exist a single research center or academic program at a University that deals solely or directly with the Armenian genocide or that has been created for this purpose.

There are approximately 250 programs at American universities devoted to studying the Holocaust. Some of these are simply research institutes. Against this background, the complete absence of such programs—research or otherwise—that deal directly and exclusively with the Armenian genocide is all the more marked and a bitter pill to swallow.

Let us again stress: apart from the devoted and priceless efforts of various independent and civil society Armenian institutions and individual scholars that make valuable contributions to Armenian Studies, including the study of the Armenian Genocide, there is no institutionalization within American academia of this field, and a relative paucity

of research and studies. The biggest challenge for the further advancement of this field is the absence of institutional structures within American universities.

In the last years, at all events to which I have been invited, at all opportunities I have had to speak publicly I have dwelled at length on the need to “institutionalize” Armenian genocide research. I have highlighted the responsibility of responding effectively to the Turkey's extensive and well-funded “denialist industry” without the existence of competing organizations or institutions. It would be foolish to assume that merely because we have the truth of historical facts on our side that this is the only factor determining who will prevail in the long run.

I wish I could say that my pleas have thus far fallen on fertile ground, but it has not been the case. Perhaps this latest initiative by the Turkish government will finally set off an alarm bell, one that allows others to see the critical importance of this matter.

Let's hope that Ankara's action will somehow drive home the urgency of the matter and arouse those concerned from their complacency. One of the most important ways to counter Turkish denialism and Turkey's new initiative is precisely this: the institutionalization of Armenian genocide research within an academic setting.

page 8 ➔ Chairs and tries to frame its rejection in a very misleading formula of “accepting but with strong and deep reservations”.

While the Basic Principles did not prejudice the outcome of the peace process and enables the majority of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh to determine their future without any limitation, Azerbaijan admits only one outcome of a peaceful resolution, that is Nagorno-Karabakh within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. As long as Azerbaijan insists on its “strong and deep reservations” towards proposals of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs and to its maximalist positions, it will not be possible to register substantial progress in the peace process.

Azerbaijan does not merely reject the right of self-determination, but it refuses to talk to the elected representatives of

Nagorno-Karabakh whose role in conflict resolution was recognized by the OSCE in founding documents of the Minsk Process, as well by the US Senate. Azerbaijan's position is counterproductive and detrimental to the international effort to bring peace to this region.

For over a quarter of a century since the end of the war, Nagorno-Karabakh has been a key player in maintaining the ceasefire with Azerbaijan, without any international peacekeepers. It has therefore earned its right to take its place at the negotiating table and help convert the ceasefire into a lasting peace. Denying it a role in peace will delay peace and prolong uncertainty.

Nagorno Karabakh has a tradition of representative government and legislature, elected through free and fair voting, its demonstrated ability to provide for a peaceful constitutional transition of power stands

in stark contrast with Azerbaijan, where the power has remained in the hands of a single family, passing down from father to son, in a manner that defies democratic choice and perpetuates autocracy.

I hope that you will join your colleagues in the U.S. Congress and support U.S. mediation that encourages the direct participation of Nagorno-Karabakh in the peace talks, and enables an outcome that is more closely aligned with the founding principles of the American Republic – the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I will be pleased to have a follow-up phone call or meeting with you, as the conditions permit, and look forward to being of assistance with information regarding Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Thank you for your support of the U.S.-Armenia relationship.