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INTERNATIONAL HRANT DINK AWARDS AND TANER AKÇAM

Mehmet Oğuzhan TULUN

Analyst

The Hrant Dink Foundation held the International Hrant Dink Awards event on 15 September 2015. The keynote address for the award night was given by sociologist Taner Akçam.[1] Pointing out that this year is the centenary of the Events of 1915, Akçams address mostly focused on the Armenian question and the Events of 1915 that he insistently and in a provocative manner characterizes as genocide.

Akçam has a number of publications regarding the Events of 1915. However, due to the serious problems present in his works in terms of academic quality, Akçam has come under (sometimes heavy) criticisms on many occasions from various scholars and writers. [2] A recent example of this is the academic article by historian Maxime Gauin (who contributes to AVIM as a scholar in residence) published in an international academic journal.[3] In his article, Gauin has indicated that he detected a number of serious flaws in Akçams publication, such as: the use of use of false documents, the exaggeration of selected and questionable materials, the denial of the series of insurrections in 1914-1915 carried out by Armenian revolutionary committees, and the misrepresentation of the Ottoman governments relocation policy. However, up until now, Akçam has failed to provide a rebuttal to the criticisms that Gauin and others have expressed regarding his works.

In his keynote address, Akçam has presented a number of undeniably false information as if they were true, and has reflected historical events in a distorted manner that would fit with his genocide thesis. We will not delve into the multitude of falsifications and single-mindedness present in his keynote address, since such flaws have already been academically revealed in the past.

What AVIM finds to be awkward is the fact that the Hrant Dink Foundation chose Taner Akçam as its keynote speaker. Whether or not a person characterizes the Events of 1915 as genocide is not the issue here. The issue here is the fact that a prestigious institution such as the Hrant Dink Foundation has given a person, whose academic reputation has been tarnished due to his inability to provide a rebuttal to criticisms of high magnitude, the opportunity to deliver a keynote address.

AVIM also finds it strange that the US Ambassador in Turkey has attended an event in which such a controversial personality like Taner Akçam delivered the keynote speech.[4]

The US Ambassador, whether he intended it or not, has provided a sense of reputability to Akçams address that contained a one-sided and misleading narrative. When its recent foreign policy is analyzed, the US is a country that chooses not to a take any sides in the dispute over the Events of 1915. Within this framework, the US Ambassadors attendance in such an event raises question marks about the foreign policy of the country that he represents.

People are free to characterize the Events of 1915 however they wish, and the discussions on this issue should be continued in an unrestricted manner. In this context, however, resorting to one-sided narratives and distortions serves no beneficial purpose in understanding past events, and only damages the quality and seriousness of such discussions. A historical academic work should strive to narrate past events in the way that they actually unfolded. Only when an academic work possesses such a quality can it contribute something valuable to a discussion.

[1] Taner Akçam: Soykırım, Ermeni reform meselesine verilen nihai cevaptır, *Agos*, http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/12773/soykirim-ermeni-reform-meselesine-verilen-nihai-cevaptir

[2] Alphabetically: Erman Şahin, Ferudun Ata, Fuat Dündar, Hakan Erdem, Hakan Yavuz, Hilmar Kaiser, Jeremy Salt, Kemal Çiçek, Michael M. Gunter, Sean McMeekin, Taha Akyol, Yücel Güçlü, Yusuf Halaçoğlu

[3] Maxime Gauin, Proving a Crime against Humanity?, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, Iss. 1, 2015. Gauins article can be accessed from his *Academia.edu* profile page: https://www.academia.edu/11715403/Review_Essay_Proving_a_Crime_against_Humanity_

[4] In Istanbul, Clark U. Professor Taner Akçam gives Hrant Dink award ceremony keynote, *Clark University*, http://news.clarku.edu/news/2015/09/18/in-istanbul-clark-u-professor-taner-akcam-gives-hrant-dink-award-ceremony-keynote/

About the Author :

Mehmet Oğuzhan Tulun is an AVİM Analyst. His research focuses on Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Asia, Turkish-Armenian and Turkey-Armenia relations, international crimes and history, and the interplay between religion and politics.

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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