

INTERVIEW

Leyla TAVŞANOĞLU*

Cumhuriyet daily discussed the Armenian problem with the Director of the Institute for Armenian Research, Ambassador (R) Ömer Lütem**

Leyla Tavşanoğlu

I believe that one of the major problems that Turkey faces is the so-called Armenian genocide issue which is continuously repeated and brought to table. This deeply upsetting issue was once again broached in the Caucasus Report of the Swedish member of the European Parliament, Per Gahrton. "What does Per Gahrton have to do with the alleged Armenian genocide?" you may ask yourself. The said politician was first a member of the Liberal Party, he later transferred to the Green Party where he was even against the EU membership of Sweden. Gahrton, recently also a writer of detective novels apparently sees the alleged genocide through the eyes of Hercules Poirot. While Western politicians continue to delve in the issue the Ankara based Institute for Armenian Research organized in Istanbul an international symposium on the occasion of the anniversary of the assassination of Talat Pasha. We talked to Ambassador (Rtd.) Ömer Lütem about the aims of this symposium and the alleged genocide which we constantly witness being pushed to the forefront of the agenda.

- Although it is widely known that during the First World War all parties were involved in fighting and that Armenian Hinchak and Dashnaks were being used by Russia, why, in your opinion, are these realities disregarded and allegations of a systematic genocide continuously brought up nearly a century later?

- That is a very good question. The Armenians form a very large diaspora. In my opinion the root of the matter can be explained in the following way: Everyone says that great injustice was done to

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** This is a slightly abridged version of the original interview.

the Armenians in the First World War and they believe that they are now taking revenge. The idea of vengeance may be correct here but as you mentioned, roughly a century has passed over these events. How can there still be talk of revenge after all this time? One may ask "what kind of hatred is this?" In fact there are other reasons behind.

- What could be these reasons?

- These reasons are not publicly discussed, nor are they written about openly. Yet if one pays close attention they can be detected between the lines: the Armenians in France are becoming increasingly more French, those in the USA are becoming increasingly more American. These people are losing their Armenian identities after a while. There exist groups which are very disturbed by the Armenians losing their ethnical identity. The first one that comes to mind is the Armenian Church.... The Armenian Church in the USA, France and other countries. Other groups are the Armenian political parties, foundations and cultural organizations...The leaders of these institutions are well aware that once the Armenians are integrated into the societies in which they live, the reason for the existence of the said organizations will also cease to exist. There will be no need for an Armenian Church where there is no Armenian population. Therefore the only way of maintaining their *raison d'être* is for the Armenians there to be fully aware of their Armenian identity.

- What do they do to maintain their Armenian identity in the face of the tendency to assimilate?

- To depict the events of the First World War as if they were a genocide and a tragic disaster and thus unite the people around this. In other words, to create a common enemy to be united against. As you know hatred makes people united very easily but it is far more difficult to unite them through a common good. The factor which creates the consciousness of being Armenian in the Armenian diaspora is the claims of genocide. As soon as these allegations are dropped, we will witness complete assimilation. Local Armenian churches will be closed, local Dashnak parties will cease to exist and large foundations will become ineffective. The interesting thing is that they claim they do not hate anybody...They say, "we want historical justice to be served". Words like historical justice sound good yet they are not concepts that hold any legal validity. Events take place in history, they end and new

arrangements are created accordingly. History has always been like this. The Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires were all dismantled following the First World War. New arrangements were made after this and new maps were drawn accordingly. The rest is no longer significant from a political perspective because a new political order had been created. Therefore, the Armenians are in no position to make any historical demands. If we would be to deal with 1915 we would see that the historical reorganization for this period was made in 1918 and in 1923 for Turkey. A second war followed and led to a reorganization which occurred in the region in 1945-1946. Yet another political reorganization took place in 1991-1992. There is no point in returning to 1915 today and making political demands. I was in Brussels before the Southern Caucasus Report of Per Gahrton was published. I talked about the matter to some members of the European Parliament. I asked the following question: "Would you politically accept an allegation about 1915?" None of them said that they would. Yet the Armenians still believe that this can be done, that a return to that date is possible, that they can reverse the clock.

- It is known that an ordinary citizen living in Armenia has little to do with all this. Is not it the Armenians of the diaspora and the Armenian authorities who keep the allegations on the agenda?

- As I just stated, their very existence depends on it. A part of the Armenian population reacts negatively to this situation. The political parties, foundations and churches in the diaspora are continuously brainwashing people. They are now in the fourth generation after 1915. Let us analyze the hatred and antagonism towards Turks, in line with the generations. Under normal circumstances a psychological and sociological analysis should yield the result that the first generation Armenians are the ones who are supposed to hate the Turks most. They are the ones who lived through war and experienced the suffering. The second generation is composed of their children. They must have emotions that are weaker than the first generation, yet still quite strong on the overall. The third generation should have far weaker emotions because practically they do not know anyone from the first generation that had suffered.

- Does the third and fourth generations have an ill-psychology to be still living in the 1910s?

- Yes. That would be the finding of a normal psychological and sociological analysis. For them it is the exact opposite of what one would expect to find; the third and fourth generations bear the greatest hatred against the Turks. The first and second generations have weaker feelings of hatred. The Armenian Church, political parties and other diaspora organizations brainwashed the third and fourth generations into hating the Turks. People that did not witness the events react in the worst way when they hear the word "Turk". This can only be seen as a psychological case. But one cannot acquire this condition by himself, it must be injected by someone else. Someone is constantly feeding them with hate. That is the most frightening part of the matter. Armenian intellectuals are also aware of the situation but they are scared of confessing it. Some say that the situation arises from "the traumatic events that have taken place". What traumatic events? Fictitious trauma if I may say so. The Armenians who murdered the Turkish diplomats were all from the third generation. They were persons who had never witnessed the events whatsoever. We can summarize the whole issue in the following way: This is a way certain interest groups have chosen to maintain their existence. In other words some interest groups are abusing the Armenians in the diaspora. This is what lies at the root of these developments. Let's put it this way; if there was no Armenian society in the USA there would be no Apostolic Gregorian priests, they would have to go to Echmiadzin, but would they ever? Nobody would leave the USA to return to Armenia in its current condition.

- Recently a Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission was formed. On the Armenian side there were Armenians who were not citizens of Armenia. What do you think could be the idea behind inviting Armenians who are not citizens of Armenia to the Commission?

- That was an idea conjured up so that the entire Armenian people would be represented. But, the Armenians of Armenia have no such feelings or do not have the same mentality. You can't say that they are very friendly towards Turkey but they live their daily life. As such they do not face the constant story of the genocide and therefore they have far weaker negative sentiments towards Turkey and the Turks.

- The Institute for Armenian Research which operates under the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies decided to organize a symposium on the anniversary of the assassination of Talat Pasha. How did this idea come about?

- We came upon this idea some time ago. But I believe the terrorist attacks of September 11 lie at the root of this initiative. This event caused the world once again to focus on terror. Then, one day as we were talking among each other we thought of the date when Talat Pasha was murdered. We are bringing together people from all over the world who studied this matter. Turkish Minister of Culture expressed a great interest in a symposium on Talat Pasha and terror. We would not have achieved such a high level of participation had he not given his assistance.

- Why do you think attacks of Armenian terror organizations that targeted Turkish diplomats in particular were initiated in 1973?

- The first attack took place in 1973 when an Armenian named Yanikyan killed the Turkish Council General in Los Angeles, Mehmet Baydar and his deputy Bahadır Demir. Yet this was not an act of organized terror. In fact Yanikyan was known to be mentally unstable. However, his acts found such wide support among radical Armenian political circles that came under the impression that they could further their cause by killing Turkish diplomats. Until that day Armenian claims had found little interest in the world. When the Yanikyan incident was widely covered by the world media the extremist Armenian circles came to believe that they had discovered a window of opportunity. In their opinion, killing Turkish diplomats would make their cause more popular in the international press. At this stage there is an important point that must be made: Yanikyan committed murders in 1973 and Turkey intervened militarily in the Cyprus problem in 1974. The Cyprus military operation meant that Greece would start opposing Turkey in the strongest way possible. It was during this period that the Armenians received a great deal of support from Greece. However, Greece has never acknowledged this publicly.

- Do you believe that it was a coincidence that the Armenian murders of Turks reached their peak when Turkey made a military operation in Cyprus?

- Not necessarily. Anyway, in those days the Armenian diaspora found a new ally in Greece. Greece supplied them with significant aid but never admitted this. Almost all murders of Turkish diplomats were conducted in a professional manner, meaning they were well planned in advance, not that someone was upset and shot the other on the spur of the moment.

- How did the murders by the Armenian terror organization of ASALA suddenly stop?

- These murders continued for 11 years. 34 Turkish diplomats were killed in this time-span. 4 were Ambassadors, 4 Consul Generals and one Military Attaché. Terrorism is blind. It was used as a means to reach political aims. The violence spins out of control after some time. This is the nature of terror all over the world and it was no different for Armenian terror. The turning point was the massacre at Orly, France. Of those killed there as a result of the explosion, two were Turks and six foreigners. The foreign press which did not support Armenian terror but did not openly condemn it either took a clearly negative attitude when it saw that the terror had begun to target non-Turks as well. Not only had the Armenians erred in their target, but also their policy became a boomerang this time. Instead of being able to publicize their cause they began to draw criticism. Their financial aid was cut off. Some times later it was all over. Later Armenians tried hard to ensure that this period would not be remembered or talked about because this terror era is something to be ashamed of and a disgrace for the Armenians.

- Did not these Armenian terrorists consider the difficult position they were placing the Armenians living in Turkey into while they were killing all those people with the aim of publicizing their cause?

- They paid absolutely no attention to the Armenians living in Turkey. I was in Turkey during those years. I saw clearly that the Armenians living in Turkey had serious problems, they were even scared. I also would like to stress this; whenever the Armenian problem escalates the moral price is paid by the Armenians living in Turkey.

- Why do you think resolutions that recognize the Armenian genocide are being tried to brought to the agenda of the parliaments of Western countries in recent years?

- The answer of this question is very complex. It varies according to each country and each incident. There are 11 countries that recognize the Armenian genocide. Here you will find two types of countries. In the first type the most important reason is the Armenian diaspora that lives in that country. This is the case in approximately 9 of the 11 countries. In the remaining two- Greece and Southern Cyprus- the situation is different. It is not

possible to say that the Armenians living there have any significant power. These countries have recognized the genocide only because of their traditional animosity towards Turks.

- *How about the situation in the European Parliament case?*

- As far as I can see there is an overt or even secret coalition of those who do not want Turkey to integrate into the EU at all or those who do not want Turkey to become an EU member now. The Armenian matter seems to be a part of the negative atmosphere against Turkey in this forum. When a resolution on the Armenian matter is brought the table it is not supported due to its content but rather because it is a part of the general anti-Turkey campaign. I would like to draw your attention to an important point. The resolutions adopted in both National Parliaments and in the European Parliament are only recommendatory, meaning they lack any enforcement mechanism. This, however, does not mean that they are unimportant. They are quite boring

- *Don't these resolutions reflect the anti-Turkish aims and mentality ?*

Certainly, they do so. The image of Turkey has been deteriorating since the 1980's- even the 1970's – for a number of reasons. That is bad enough. When you add genocide which is the worst crime committed against humanity on top to all this you really hit rock bottom on the image scale. Such an image may have a very negative effect on our claim to EU membership than our economic problems do. I think that is where the importance of the resolutions taken against us come into play. Our image which is not too bright anyway is further tarnished. The resolutions may not have any sanctions attached to them but they do cause harm anyway. They harm us also in the following way: When such decisions are taken Turkey rejects them. But the relations with the states whose parliament adopts these resolutions are also damaged, as has been the case with France. A year has gone by since the French Parliament adopted a Law concerning the Armenian "genocide" and things still have not settled between the two countries. I receive negative responses when I express this view. I am told that the French also suffer from the consequences of the souring of bilateral relations. Surely this has important effects on the French. But we must know that this situation also caused significant impacts on Turkey. France is a country that

supports the accession of Turkey to the EU. French policy on the Eastern Mediterranean and the views of Turkey on the same topic overlap. France is a very important partner in the military and technical fields. When our relations are damaged both states suffer. Therefore, although these resolutions have no enforcement attached to them they do cause serious harm to bilateral relations.

- As far as I know an American researcher and writer called Sam Weems has written a book in response to the allegations of genocide. I was told that his arguments against the genocide are parallel to the arguments of Turkey. Could you give us some more information on this?

- Sure. The name of the book is "Armenia: A Great Deception". Sam Weems conducted extensive research into many documents. However I have not seen the book yet. It will be published in the USA on April 6th by St. John's Press. The book has already caused great protests from the Armenians because until now there were only books written by Armenians, only their views were voiced. That is why this new book is being received with great interest.

- For what reason did Sam Weems decide to write a book on this issue?

- Because he believed that a grave injustice is being done to the Turks. He probably is of the opinion that Turkey and the Turks are unable to make themselves heard properly.

Portrait – Ömer Lütem

Mr. Lütem completed his secondary school at the Galatasaray High School and was later graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences, the University of Ankara. He entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1957 and served in different posts. He was appointed as ambassador to Sofia in 1983 and remained there until 1989. This 6 year-period witnessed the forced name changing campaign directed at the Turkish minority of Bulgaria by the communist regime in Sofia. He returned to Ankara shortly before the end of the ordeal. The first volume of his memoirs of the period was published. He served as Deputy Undersecretary for a period in Ankara. He was posted as Ambassador to the Vatican and held his last official position as Permanent Representative of Turkey to UNESCO. He retired in 1998. Mr. Lütem first directed the Balkans division of the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies (ASAM). He later became the director of the Institute for Armenian Research which was founded as a branch of ASAM a year ago.

BOOK TAKES A CLOSER LOOK AT EGOYAN'S ARARAT*

Fatma DEMIRELLI**

'It is hard for members of the diaspora to feel like Armenians if they do not hate Turkey. The same thing is true for Egoyan. He even did not accept that he was an Armenian. He became an Armenian when he started to hate Turks'

Talented Armenian - Canadian director Atom Egoyan's *Ararat*, which its promoters said is a 'film on the Armenian genocide,' was shown at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this week, intensifying further an already ongoing controversy. Many are concerned that *Ararat* will be a second 'Midnight Express,' leaving irremediable traces on the image of Turks and Turkey. But the point is that this may not even be all, because in addition to the image, the film tackles a highly political and inflammatory issue, the alleged genocide. Ankara - based Institute for Armenian Research senior researchers **Şenol Kantarcı** and **Assist Prof. Dr. Sedat Laçiner** perhaps have been the first to react and draw attention to what the film may do to Turkey. Their book, 'Ararat: Artistic Armenian Propaganda' is set to reach bookstores next week. Our lengthy interview with the two authors revolved around 'Ararat', which they described as 'artistic propaganda.' At one point, **Assist. Prof. Dr. Laçiner** suggested legal action against the film, saying it contained racism. The authors also explained how the film was linked to an 'identity problem' of the Armenian diaspora and the appeal of the film's promoters to the arguments of an 'Islamic - Christian confrontation' that intensified after the Sept. 11 attacks.

- *Ararat is not the first film that tackles the alleged Armenian genocide. You say in your book that there have been around 50 such films long before Ararat. Then what makes it so special? Why is it so heavily on the agenda?*

* Interview published by daily *Turkish News* on 24 May 2002.

** Correspondent, *Turkish News*.

LAÇINER: First of all, its director, Atom Egoyan, is a very well-known figure. He is the 'national pride' of Canada. One other factor is its timing. It closely followed efforts in the parliaments of different countries to have resolutions passed that recognize the alleged Armenian genocide. Third, it was put on display after an extensive promotion campaign. A serious propaganda campaign was underway throughout the 2.5 years that elapsed since Egoyan and his team started to shoot the film. He invited journalists to the film set and told them that he was working on a film that would uncover the 'genocide.' This was quite unusual in a peaceful and quiet country like Canada. Egoyan's fame in Canada and his and his wife's close ties to France were also effective. The great fuss about the film in Turkey is also understandable because this film was the latest and most unbearable of Armenian efforts against Turkey, and as such it was the last drop to pour into the glass.

- You refer to *Ararat* as an 'artistic propaganda' in your book. Why did you prefer to opt for such a description?

LAÇINER: Art has been frequently used for political purposes. Turkey, however, is not aware that it may face psychological warfare through such means as sports, literature, art and it is still preoccupied with classical warfare, such as actual war or terrorist attacks. Armenian politics frequently resort to art as a way of achieving its goals. There are dozens of films, books, and plays that concentrate on the alleged genocide, yet Turkey is hardly aware of their existence. *Ararat* is indeed a perfect example in this regard. Our book is not really on *Ararat* or Egoyan. It is meant to open Turkey's eyes to this fact.

- You haven't watched the film but had time to extensively examine the scenario. What is your impression about the film? What is the image of Turks as represented in the film for instance?

KANTARCI: This is the conclusion we reached after reading the script: It smells of propaganda. It attempts to give the image that *Ararat* and Lake Van belong to the Armenians; it ponders on the question whether ASALA was a terrorist organization or a group of heroic men, and concentrates on the political message that Turkey should recognize the alleged genocide. In short, all the themes of Armenian propaganda that have crystallized especially in the post-1960 era were used in the film.

- To what extent do you think, the film is a piece of art and to what extent is it a tool for propaganda?

LAÇINER: That was indeed a question that kept my mind busy for a long time. Only reading the scenario would not be sufficient to get the answer. One has to have a familiarity with Egoyan, characteristics of Armenian movies and how these movies are used for propaganda purposes. Some clichés are used in all propaganda films, not only in Armenian ones. For instance, the 'bad guys' are inhumane characters, whose sole job is to perpetrate atrocities and kill. They are ugly, they have no family, they are depicted as sort of 'creatures' or 'monsters.' There are more specific clichés about Turks; they are barbarians and the 'scourge of God.' We examined Ararat to find out whether it used these clichés. We saw that both kinds of clichés, both the ones that are general to all propaganda films and the ones about Turks, have been used in Ararat. Turkish soldiers in Ararat are coarsely big, they have dirty faces, they have no families, their sole activity is to kill and torture Armenians. Armenians, on the other hand, are people with families, children, problems of different kinds, etc., that is, they are people like us. The film classifies the world as a civilized one and a non-civilized one. The latter is populated by Turks, the former comprises of Armenians, flanked by Americans, the French, etc. The film repeats usual propaganda theses and clichés, whose main feature is that they lack a documented basis, and which have been used in a number of visual or literary works in the past. A number of unsubstantiated theses and slogans, used by Armenians in every platform, are incorporated by the intellectual director into the film.

- You were not impressed artistically then?

LAÇINER-KANTARCI: We do not believe the film makes any artistic contribution. We predicted that the film would be the worst film by Egoyan and this prediction has now been proved.

- In your book, you link 'Ararat' to an identity problem of the Armenian diaspora. How did you get this interesting linkage?

LAÇINER: Our book extensively touches on the life of Egoyan. From the years of his childhood, Egoyan was exposed to the impact of three different cultures: Armenian culture, Arabic culture - Egoyan was born in Egypt and his family migrated to Canada when he was four - and Canadian culture, in which he grew up. He was to incline towards the most powerful of them. Armenian culture is weak in terms of major cultural components, such as

the spoken language and the common history. Egoyan is a good example for all members of the Armenian diaspora indeed. Faced with the serious threat of assimilation in countries in which they live, most of which have a national culture much stronger than that of the Armenians, these people have to find a factor that would define and strengthen the notion of Armenian culture, and they opted to do it with the help of 'the other.' Turkey and Turks represent the 'other' against which Armenian national identity and culture acquire a meaning. There is one factor that unites them all and it is the ideal of a 'Greater Armenia' that would be established in parts of Turkish territory. By turning the events of 1915 into a legend that is passed from one generation to the next, Armenians form a national culture, which is fed by enmity against Turkey and Turks. Therefore, it is hard for the members of the diaspora to feel like Armenians if they do not hate Turkey. The same thing is true for Egoyan. He even did not accept that he was an Armenian. He became an Armenian when he started to hate Turks.

- There is one point that sounded very interesting for me. In Turkey, we are used to being worried, angry, furious about the Armenian lobby's efforts to convince Western parliaments to recognize the alleged genocide through legislative resolutions. You say in the book that Armenians are very active in the vast Central Asian geography and Russia as well. Does this mean Turkey may soon face an 'Armenian genocide' wave this time from Central Asia, the land of Turkic republics?

LAÇINER: Such a wave already exists. But Turkey unfortunately has a bad habit; its radars are directed only to the West. However, the Armenian lobby is active in all parts of the world, ranging from the Far East to Africa. The prevailing belief in the Turkic republics of Central Asia is that the events of 1915 amounted to an Armenian genocide. This is so because even the text books in state schools incorporate Armenian theses. What is terrifying is that Turkey is not even aware of that, and as such it cannot explain its own theses even to these sister states. This is because of this excessive preoccupation with what happens in the West. My personal view is that Turkey should give priority to its region i.e. the Caucasus, Russia, Central Asia, Iran. Then it should move onto making itself clear to the West.

- Perhaps Turkey is not very much cognizant of this, but Armenian propaganda in the West has heavily made use of

the theme of a Muslim-Christian confrontation. You mention that Ararat appeals to the same notion and cites a comment on the film, which says to Americans 'you lost 4,000 of your beloved ones and we lost 1.5 million.' Could you elaborate on this aspect of the film?

LAÇINER: Armenians are trying to appeal to as many people as possible. In this regard, they attempted to use the post-Sept. 11 political conjuncture. They accepted as truth the faulty argument that Islamic and Christian worlds are in a conflict and tried to use such a wrong perception in the service of their objectives. Ararat's promoters took the same line. What made us sorry is that a highly-enlightened person like Egoyan took up such an oversimplified attitude and took the easy way to success and prestige.

- So how was the initial reaction following its showing in Cannes? Was the film up to Egoyan's expectations?

LAÇINER: We argued that the film was a bad film and film commentators agreed that the film was not a good one. A good product requires effort, pain and meticulousness. Prejudice and rough classifications of good and evil would not help improve the artistic quality of a film. I do not think Egoyan is doing it with bad intentions. The point is that he is acting like a believer and as such does not question what is true and what is not. Yet, this does not justify what he did, because he, as an intellectual, has a responsibility to question. He did not question and acted like a layman, as an ordinary Armenian.

It was not up to film makers' expectations because they hoped for an intense period of discussion on the alleged genocide. But there is no indication in comments on the film to that effect so far.

The film does not contribute to peace and dialogue between Turkey and Armenia at all. And there is one important point as well. Armenian propaganda is an 'economic sector.' People talk about a \$50-60 million budget for Ararat. Given that Egoyan's most expensive film cost \$5 million and that the budget of an average Hollywood film is about \$5 - 6 million, one can get a glimpse of the size of the financial dimension of the film. Now that the film is a failure in artistic terms, I think the Armenian lobby, which made great financial contributions to the film, will have some questions on how their money was used. Egoyan may have difficulties in explaining to the Armenian diaspora how he spent that amount of money on such a low-quality film.

- Is there anything special about the timing of the film? Not a long time ago, there were resolutions calling for the recognition of the alleged genocide. They followed one another Such as in the United States, France, the European Parliament, etc. Now all eyes are on Ararat. How should one interpret this sequence?

KANTARCI: I do not know for sure, but I doubt that the film may be setting the stage for some future developments, such as the recognition of the alleged genocide in the United States or somewhere else.

- First there was the ASALA terror and killings of Turkish diplomats in Western countries. Somewhere in the mid - 1980s, Armenians relinquished terror and a new stage in which these legal efforts, to get the alleged genocide recognized, came onto the scene. Does Ararat signify passage to a new stage?

LAÇINER: Instead of passing from one stage to another, I guess, there is a continuation. Egoyan's start in shooting the film coincided with an important time period. At that time, resolutions were being presented to national parliaments and international organizations one after another. The Armenian lobby calculated that these resolutions would be passed and then Ararat would come to complete their efforts and shape world opinion to accept that there really was an Armenian genocide in 1915. But there was one very important and uncalculated development, the Sept. 11 attacks. It was hard to convince the world to support anti-Turkey theses in the political conjuncture of the post-Sept. 11 era, where Turkey's importance came to be appreciated more and more deeply. Therefore, Ararat could not catch the wind and was a little bit late in this sense.

- A group of people in Turkey have been rather optimistic. They said the film may contribute to Turkish - Armenian dialogue or some others opted to disregard the film, saying Turkey should not bother because there are such negative films about every other country. How do you evaluate this optimist reaction?

KANTARCI: There were examples of such reaction in the press before the film was shown in Cannes. But over the last few days that elapsed since the showing of the film, optimism was replaced by a negative reaction against the film.

We tend to make a certain mistake often; we mix things up. Yes, Turkey is a country which makes grave mistakes in several fields, especially in the field of freedoms. However, there is nothing to defend in Ararat in the name of liberalism. One should be very careful on this point: We may be angry with our government for its mistakes, but this does not mean we have to automatically accept charges on such critical issues, where indeed we have very powerful arguments. I request everyone to speak on the Armenian issue to read something and have some minimal historical information before commenting.

- How should Turkey react? Some argue that Turkey's tough reaction would have no effect but to promote the film. Should Turkey keep silent?

LAÇINER: Turkey's reaction to a challenge from abroad has been 'either all or none.' It is either entirely silent or reacts excessively and acts like a 'bull in a china shop.' Now it should be moderate. It is one thing to use art as a means to advance political objectives but it is another thing to insult a person. Thanks to Turkey's inability to take effective measures, everyone in every country of the world just goes ahead with insulting Turkey and Turks. Turkey did not do what it was supposed to do in response to the film 'Midnight Express' and had to suffer its consequences for two decades. Ararat has a criminal content. It insults the Van governor of the time, accuses him of torturing Armenians. It is the duty of his family to sue the film on charges of insult. Turkish soldiers come under unjust attacks, their families could apply to courts. What is more, the film has a racist content. That should be tackled.

Turkey should react in the similar way, through films, books, documentaries. Egoyan says he has 'poetic license' when he faces criticisms about the film. He is right. Politicians cannot tackle a film, only artists can do so. I personally think that politicians should keep away from the Ararat controversy. Turkish NGOs and the Turkish cinema sector have the duty to handle the issue.

- You looked into the historical side of the controversy in your book as well. What did you see? To what extent is Ararat in line with your findings?

KANTARCI: Egoyan says he totally based his film on a book written by an American missionary, Clarence Ussher, who was in Van then. I conducted my studies along two lines: first to find out

whether Ararat was really based on this book, and second what really happened in 1915. Egoyan's argument is very convincing for the audience because in this way they think that the film is objective. Yet, a comparison between Ararat's scenario and Ussher's book reveals many discrepancies. Ussher's book made no reference at all to the terrifying massacre and torture scenes of the film. Ussher's book contains pictures of Armenians producing bullets, Armenian soldiers in uniform shooting at Turkish soldiers from trenches, a clear indicative of the fact that the Turkish army and Armenians engaged in a war at that time. These were simply lacking in Ararat.

Egoyan focused on the Van revolt by Armenians in 1915, but does not say that the revolt ended with the victory of Armenians, when the Van governor was forced to flee and was replaced by an Armenian at the end of a joint attack by the Russian army, which entered the city at that time, and local Armenian forces. This attack resulted in the killing of more than 20,000 Van residents, this is what the historical sources report.