

# MEMORANDUM

## Clarification regarding interview with the Turkish Radikal Daily dated 1 February 2009

Dr Armen Gakavian

Email: [agakavian@nareg.com.au](mailto:agakavian@nareg.com.au) - Mobile: 61-4 10 658 905

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### Executive summary

In an interview with Turkish Radikal Daily, published on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009, I acknowledged and thanked the current campaign for an apology initiated by Turkish intellectuals and signed by over 30,000 Turks around the world. I emphasised that this Turkish apology is only the beginning, and clearly stated that there needs to be a Turkish *state* apology for the crime of the Armenian Genocide, followed by corrective action.

I also referred to my own “thank you” statement for the Turkish apology that I, with the help of some friends, am drafting for discussion. However I never stated that we were preparing a “counter-apology”; nor are there any plans of issuing a “counter-apology”.

In the interview, I never claimed to speak for other Armenians, nor did I state that the Armenians should apologise for anything. I merely stated my own personal view, in the context of a broader discussion, that Armenian terrorist acts were morally unjustifiable (as per international law) and that I regret that these acts happened.

Unfortunately, these few words were blown out of proportion, and the emphasis of my interview was lost; hence the need for this clarification.

Responses, both positive and negative, that I have received from some Turks reveal that the main points of my interview about the Armenian Genocide were not lost on the honest and thorough Turkish reader.

I request that the reader refer any questions to me before relying on Turkish press reports.

## To whom it may concern

I refer to media reports about an Armenian counter-apology allegedly being prepared in response to an online petition launched by Turkish intellectuals (see <http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com>) in December 2008.

I would like to clarify the situation.

Together with some friends, I recently drafted a “thank you” response to the abovementioned Turkish apology with the intention of circulating it by email for input and advice. Our response was intended as a humanistic response to the humanistic gesture by a group of Turkish intellectuals and signatories. As stated in my interview with Radikal, the response was nothing more than a draft for circulation and discussion. There is a *possibility* that it could later be presented as a counter-petition *if* there is enough interest.

Therefore:

1. The response is a personal initiative of mine, with the input of some friends, and there is as yet no “group of Armenian intellectuals” behind the response, as incorrectly reported by Today’s Zaman. See <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=165741&bolum=102>.
2. There is no intention of producing a counter-apology. The idea has been raised but rejected due to concerns about “comparative trivialisation” and distortion by the Turkish media - something we have already seen.

On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> January, the Turkish Daily Radikal was informed about the draft response and I accepted their invitation for an interview. See <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&ArticleID=919479&Date=01.02.2009&CategoryID=97>.

I am grateful that my responses to the journalist’s questions were, it seems, produced word-for-word. However, the Editor’s Introduction framed the article primarily in terms of an Armenian apology by:

1. Including a large photo of Armenian revolutionaries and related caption; and
2. Highlighting my personal statement about Armenian terrorist acts (as opposed to legitimate self-defence), without clear reference to the context

In addition, many readers of the Radikal article were confused between my personal statement and the draft response being prepared. The two are not at all connected. I would therefore like to provide some points of clarification:

1. In my interview, I expressed my **personal** disagreement with terrorist acts committed by Armenians against Turks. To me, this stance reflects basic human morality. I stand by that stance, which stems from my ethical beliefs and rejection of all forms of violence against innocent civilians, as per international law.
2. However, I CLEARLY stated in my interview that any crimes committed by Armenians “cannot compare to the attempted annihilation of an entire nation ... and one does not negate or trivialize the other.”
3. I did not mention the specific era of the victims, i.e. “Ottoman” versus “Turkish”.
4. For the record, let me state categorically that I distinguish between, on the one hand, legitimate and heroic acts of resistance and self-defence by Armenian revolutionaries before and during the

Genocide, and, on the other hand, wanton acts of terrorist violence against civilians (such as by ASALA, recognised by international law as crimes against humanity). It is the latter that I was referring to in my interview.

5. The purpose of my comments about ASALA, in the context that they were made, was to illustrate my following point: “If I were the Turkish state, I would see an apology as an excellent way of restoring the dignity lost through decades of denial.”

6. My personal comments had no relation to the draft response to the Turkish apology that is currently being circulated for discussion amongst friends and colleagues.

7. I did not make those comments on behalf of anyone except myself.

As PanArmenian.Net rightly reported (<http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=28443>):

““During an online discussion, Sydney University (*sic.*) professor Armen Gakavian expressed an opinion which was later ascribed to the entire Armenian community,” Mr. Manoyan said.”

However, the PanArmenian.net article unfortunately reproduced some of Radikal’s errors:

1. It quoted me as saying that “Armenia should apologize to the Turkish nation for killing several thousand of Turks in the early 20th century.” *I did not say any such thing.*
2. It incorrectly stated that Prof. Denis Papazian was involved in the initiative. Prof. Papazian has at no stage been involved in this initiative and has never expressed his support for it. *I did not mention Prof. Papazian in my interview*, and I believe information about his alleged involvement was taken from an inaccurate statement, made in good faith, in an earlier edition of Radikal. Thankfully, Prof. Papazian has already personally refuted such claims in an interview with PanArmenian.Net.

Finally, near the end of my interview with Radikal, I wrote that “any Armenian response to the [Turkish] apology should be similar.” I was referring to the fact that the Turkish apology did not attempt to “address the question of definitions and political explanations etc”, and that the Armenian response would also not address questions of definitions of what happened. I did not mean that the Armenian response should also include an apology – any such insinuation may have been due to a mistranslation.

Finally, quite apart from my disappointment with the Turkish media, I am disappointed that very few of the major Armenian political parties and community organisations attempted to contact me for clarification. Ironically, they initially relied on the Turkish media for their reporting. I am however grateful to those many Armenian individuals and media outlets that did contact me.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to direct them to me. Please feel free to distribute this memo to anyone who may be interested.

Sincerely,

Dr Armen Gakavian  
5<sup>th</sup> February 2009  
Sydney, Australia