

## **Turkey's new envoy says genocide bill impedes reconciliation**

By Bridget Johnson, Staff Writer  
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U.S. lawmakers should not fixate on the Armenian Genocide bill, which is an insult to many Turks and a roadblock to reconciliation between Turkey and the Armenian community, the new Turkish consul general in Los Angeles said.

In a recent interview with the Daily News, R. Hakan Tekin said his country strongly objects to the Armenian Genocide legislation that passed the House Committee on Foreign Affairs last month, which labels as genocide the killings of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

The committee's 27-21 vote has raised ire in Turkey and was slammed by some U.S. lawmakers and commentators for the potential harm it might do to U.S. relations with Turkey, a longtime strategic ally of America and NATO partner.

Turkey briefly pulled its U.S. ambassador, Nabi Sensoy, back to Ankara after the vote.

"It certainly had an effect on our bilateral relations," Tekin said of the bill, which was shelved late last month under increasing political pressure.

"It's about our history and it's about, in our opinion, a misreading of our history... To many of us, it's even insulting. ...

"We don't know now where it will end," Tekin said Wednesday at the Wilshire Boulevard consulate.

Turkey severed military ties with France after that country's lower house passed a bill last year making it a crime to deny the Armenian killings were genocide.

Tekin, who assumed the consul general post six months ago and oversees 12 Western states, said lawmakers should not "legislate history." He noted that in 2005 Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan asked Armenian President Robert Kocharian to form a joint commission of historians to study the disputed 1915 events, a proposal that has not been accepted.

"We are not scared of our history, and we are not trying to hide anything," Tekin said. "And if this commission is established, we will accept whatever result it reaches. ... It is (time for) the Armenian side to make a move."

Tekin believes it is the size and influence of the U.S. Armenian community that has kept the issue alive.

"Why are the Armenian events of 1915 brought to the Congress of the U.S.?" he asked. "Because there is a strong Armenian voting bloc in the country.

"Why is not, for instance, the massacres in Kenya carried out by the then-British imperial government not brought to the Congress? Because there are no Kenyan voters here.

"When you politicize history, you pick and choose and you lose objectivity, and then you are prone to the pressures of narrow group interests."

Tekin also said Armenians in Armenia appear less focused on the past than the Armenian diaspora.

"It doesn't seem that for the Armenians of Armenia proper, it carries that much priority ... because Armenia now has much more serious problems for day-to-day life," he said.

Unfortunately, he said, continued lobbying by Armenian groups in the U.S. on claims that the Turks slaughtered more than 1 million Armenians from 1915 to 1918 hurts chances at reconciliation.

"And that's really sad, in my opinion, because both countries, Turkey and Armenia, have a lot to gain to improve their relations, to establish normal relations in our region," he said. "We need that."

When asked about the potential of the resolution to revive hostilities between the two communities, Tekin brought up the history of assassinations of Turkish diplomats in Los Angeles: Consul General Mehmet Baydar and his deputy, Bahadir Demir, slain in 1973 by Gourgen Yanikian at a Santa Barbara hotel; and Consul General Kemal Arikan, shot to death by Harry Sassounian and a second gunman in Westwood in 1982.

A group calling itself Justice Commandos for the Armenian Genocide claimed responsibility at the time for Arikan's slaying.

"(It) has been ignored by many people here that two of my predecessors ... have been killed by Armenian terrorists here in Los Angeles, and nobody speaks about that," Tekin said. Black-and-white portraits of the three slain men adorn the wall outside the door to Tekin's office.

The consul general now receives special protection from the State Department, Tekin said.

Still, Tekin said Turks and Armenians have a lot in common: They are bonded not only by a border, but by cultural similarities as well.

"In a thousand years, maybe we had this trouble period of 20 years, 15 years, and the result here is a hostility," he said. "In Turkey, we don't preach hatred toward Armenia."