



HRANT DINK

**TWO CLOSE  
PEOPLES  
TWO DISTANT  
NEIGHBOURS**

THE BOOKS  
OF  
HRANT DINK

**1**

## HRANT DINK FOUNDATION

*Hrant Dink Foundation was established after the assassination of Hrant Dink in front of his newspaper AGOS on 19 January 2007, in order to avoid similar pains and to continue Hrant Dink's legacy, his language and heart, and his dream of a world that is more free and just. Democracy and human rights for everyone regardless of their ethnic, religious or cultural origin or gender is the Foundation's main principle.*

*The Foundation works for a Turkey and a world where freedom of expression is limitless and all differences are allowed, lived, appreciated, multiplied and conscience outweighs the way we look at today and the past. As the Hrant Dink Foundation 'our cause worth living' is a future where a culture of dialogue, peace and empathy prevails.*



**HRANT DİNK VAKFI**  
**HRANT DINK FOUNDATION**  
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**TWO CLOSE PEOPLES  
TWO DISTANT NEIGHBOURS**

## **HRANT DINK**

*HRANT DINK was born on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1954 in Malatya and his family moved to Istanbul in 1961. He was placed in the orphanage of Gedikpaşa Armenian Protestant Church with his two brothers. He attended İncirdibi Armenian School, Bezciyan and Surp Haç Tibrevank High School in Üsküdar and spent summers in the Tuzla Children's Camp. Later, he married to Rakel Yağbasan from the Armenian Varto Village, south eastern Turkey, with whom he grew up at the orphanage, and they had three children. He studied zoology and philosophy at Istanbul University. He became the manager of the Tuzla Children's Camp that supported hundreds of children in need or without families from Anatolia as himself. Due to the minority foundation laws based on 1936 Property Declarations, the Camp was seized by the state in 1984. He was taken under custody three times and imprisoned during this period due to his political views.*

*In 90s, he wrote articles in the daily Armenian newspaper, Marmara published in Istanbul. In 1996, he established AGOS, the first weekly Turkish-Armenian newspaper in the history of the Turkish Republic. The main goals of AGOS were, to get in touch with the Armenians in Turkey who don't speak Armenian, to voice the institutionalized problems of Armenians in Turkey and to get support from public, and to share the Armenian culture and history with the rest of the society in Turkey. AGOS with its left wing and opponent tendency, criticized the closed structure of the Armenian community, and proposed new social projects.*

*Hrant Dink also wrote columns in Turkish dailies, Yeni Binyıl and Birgün. He defended the establishment of relations and the opening of the border between Turkey and Armenia, supported the democratization process of Turkey and the facilitation of a mutual, considerate, and empathetic dialogue about 1915 for both nations.*

*In 2004, based on an article he wrote, he became the subject of a harsh edict by the General Staff, he was sued with the accusations of 'insulting Turkishness', he was convicted to six months of imprisonment regardless of the opposing expert opinion and he became the target of negative mass media propaganda.*

*Hrant Dink was assassinated on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007 in front of his newspaper building. The ongoing murder trial is considered to be the search for justice in Turkey.*

**TWO CLOSE PEOPLES  
TWO DISTANT NEIGHBOURS**

HRANT DINK

**BRIDGING A MENTAL GAP: HRANT DINK AND  
TURKISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS**

Generally to put the names “Armenian” and “Turkish” together in the same sentence is to evoke a wave of negative emotions: anger, confrontation, grief.

Over the past 15 years, a few individuals have begun to challenge such associations and tried to bridge the huge mental gap between Armenians and Turks. One person, above all, rose to that challenge, and succeeded in transforming perceptions of the Armenian-Turkish relationship. That person was Hrant Dink.

In articles and essays written over the years for *AGOS*, the newspaper he founded in 1996 and which was published in both Armenian and Turkish, Dink wrote with intellectual clarity and humanity about the complexity of the relations between Armenians and Turks over the years.

He brought something completely new to this question and it is probably no coincidence that he did so as an outsider, a self-made man, who thought everything through afresh for himself. The city of Istanbul has had an Armenian elite that has lived there for centuries and survived even the Great Catastrophe of 1915. Hrant Dink was not from among them. He came from an ordinary family in the Anatolian city of Malatya and experienced poverty and hardship in Istanbul’s orphanages in childhood. As an outsider, he identified with the marginalized, with the underdogs.

As he writes here, he had two identities, being proud both to be an Armenian and a citizen of the Turkish Republic. He used that double identity to express a rare empathy for the collective psychological state of both Armenians and Turks. Both of them, he writes with insight and a dash of black humour, have clinical conditions: the Armenians suffer from trauma, the Turks from paranoia.

Two of his convictions shine through in these writings and have stood the test of time. The first—unwelcome in many Armenian diaspora circles—was that the resolution of the issue of justice for the Ottoman Armenians and of the 1915 Genocide needed to take place inside Turkey itself. As he put it, the crime was committed in Turkey and justice for it needs to occur in Turkey too. That led Hrant Dink to be sceptical about the main focus of Diaspora politics, the passing of genocide resolutions in foreign parliaments with the aim of applying pressure on the government of Turkey.

For Dink, justice for the Armenians would come within the broader context of the democratization of Turkey and the granting of democratic rights to Kurds, women and others as well.

A second conviction was that the greatest asset Armenians had after 1991 was the independent post-Soviet Republic of Armenia, a small weak state that needed the support of all Armenians across the world to survive and prosper. (And it is important to stress here that that was not a call for unconditional support of the government but of the state as a whole).

Hence the close focus in his writings on relations between the two republics of Armenia and Turkey, many of which are re-printed here. After Turkey closed the border in April 1993 in solidarity with Azerbaijan in the midst of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, the issue became of how to normalize relations between the two countries and open the border. For Armenia to develop economically as a country and trade with Europe, it was important that the border with Turkey should be open. As it is, only two of Armenia's four borders, those with Georgia and Iran, are currently open.

Hrant Dink was an oracle and that also made him a threat to those who did not want to change and who wanted to stick with a narrative of hatred



and ignorance. In Turkey, his articles earned him rebukes from senior representatives of the old Kemalist establishment and death threats from the nationalist far-right.

On January 19, 2007, the worst came to pass. Hrant Dink was assassinated by a young nationalist outside the offices of AGOS. The truth he had been telling had become literally unbearable for those who had ordered his killing. It was one of the most tragic days in the history of modern Turkey.

The reaction to the tragedy was heartening. Tens of thousands of people from all over Turkey turned out for Hrant Dink's funeral on January 23, 2007. Many of them held placards saying "We are all Hrant Dink," or, even more remarkably, "We are all Armenian."

Following the assassination, four Turkish intellectuals launched an initiative for an online campaign entitled "I Apologize." When the website opened in December 2008, 275 intellectuals signed the online petition. In 2014, the number of signatures stood at more than 32,000.

On a societal level, much has changed in Turkey over the past eight years. Turkish historians have written more openly about the mass slaughter of the Armenians in 1915, new oral histories have been published, Armenian churches have re-opened. Slowly, but surely, the "Armenian question" has stopped being a taboo.

The aftermath of Hrant Dink's funeral was also the most favourable moment for political rapprochement. At the end of 2007, Switzerland began chairing confidential negotiations between Armenian and Turkish diplomats on the normalization of diplomatic relations and the opening of the border.

The process gathered speed in 2008. Serzh Sarkisian was elected as independent Armenia's third president and made it clear he wanted to normalize relations with Ankara. It was then helped along by a coincidence of sports scheduling. Armenia and Turkey were drawn to face each other in the same qualifying group for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Sarkisian invited Turkish president Abdullah Gül to come to Yerevan to attend the football match. On September 6, 2008, Gül made a short but historic trip to Armenia, attended the game with Sarkisian and then held bilateral talks.

x | In the spring of 2009, the text of two Protocols on establishing and developing diplomatic relations was ready. But the process was crippled with misunderstandings. The most difficult issue to negotiate had been over the status of a “commission of historians,” which the Turkish side wanted, established to study the question of 1915. This was not such an important issue for the Republic of Armenia as it was for the Diaspora. They represented two different Armenian perspectives: that of an eastern Armenian territory, which had spent most of the previous two centuries in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and that of the scattered descendants of the Ottoman Armenians, for whom 1915 was the crucial breaking-point in their history. Although the Armenian side negotiated a form of words in the Protocols which they believed was ambiguous on this issue, this was not good enough for Diaspora political organizations which denounced President Sarkisian as a traitor for having negotiated a deal on Armenian history with the Turks.

The second issue was of fundamental importance in the Caucasus. At their talks in Switzerland, the Armenian and Turkish negotiators had agreed not to discuss the issue of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh, which had been the reason for the border closure in 1993. For the Armenian side this “de-linkage” was a prerequisite for doing a deal. The Turks went along with this on the understanding that either their Turkic cousins in Azerbaijan would tolerate the de-linkage or that someone--preferably the United States--would ensure some progress in the Karabakh talks that Turkey could use to declare that Azerbaijan was benefiting from the normalization process as well.

On October 10 2009, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Turkey signed the two Protocols in a ceremony in Zurich, attended by luminaries who included US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the French and Russian foreign ministers. Clinton persuaded Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian to sign after he had last minute objections to the planned speech by his colleague, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.

The Protocols were signed but they had then to be given a political imprimatur and ratified by the two parliaments. And Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made it clear that, even if the diplomatic talks did

not make a linkage with the Karabakh conflict, he saw one. The process drifted, the Turkish side hoping for progress in the Karabakh talks that did not materialize, the Armenian side sticking firmly to its position that the Protocols must be ratified. Eventually, with no breakthrough in sight, President Sarkisian suspended Armenia's participation in the Protocols process in April 2010.

Since then, state-level Armenian-Turkish rapprochement has been stuck and is still hostage to the unresolved Karabakh conflict. Not that this has helped Azerbaijan: the failure of normalization with Turkey has only driven Armenia closer into a military and economic relationship with Russia and has not made it any more inclined to compromise with Azerbaijan.

So, as the centenary of the Armenian Genocide is marked in 2015, the two republics of Armenia and Turkey still have no diplomatic relations and no open land border. Hrant Dink's dream of Armenian-Turkish reconciliation remains unfulfilled, the hostage of prejudice and high politics. However, his vision of dialogue and better understanding between ordinary Armenians and Turks continues slowly to advance, step by step.

**Thomas de Waal**

November 2014

Hrant was not someone you would categorize as a ‘man of ideas’... He did not have a bunch of published books and articles. And after all, I never witnessed him displaying a desire to be a ‘man of ideas’. That is because he was much more than that... Hrant was a man of action, with his own voice and own words to say, a man who thought, and added his thought to life. His concern was to improve, to change, to make others happy, and most of all, enjoy the happiness he created. Therefore, everyone, whether he knew them or not, were his potential friends, and fellow travellers. For him, the language of conscience was sufficient to overcome all distances, deadlocks, contradictions and conflicts. This is why he was always full of hope, he always trusted others, and ‘extended invitations’ to them. Hrant’s invitation was fundamentally about conscience, and as he progressed along that path, about good sense and love. This is how people perceived him, in an ‘unadorned’ way. Holding on to the leadership of his sincerity and authenticity, they tried to become more ‘human’.

On the other hand, Hrant was not a pure romantic... He was well aware of the fact that he swam in a world of reality framed by balances of power and all manners of opportunism. His brain and heart, oscillating between what is possible, and what may become possible in the future, he was after the most realistic solutions for tomorrow. This is also why he had immediately accepted when he was asked to take part in a project of the TESEV (The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) Foreign Policy Program.

What program director Mensur Akgün expected from him was a solution-oriented, monographic text on the various aspects of Turkey-Armenia relations, but with an additional view on the relationship between Turks and Armenians that forms the background of the issue. I was a close witness of the writing process of this text... In the beginning, Hrant did not talk much about what he was writing. It was clear that it was not a text that excited him much that he was penning. However, as time passed, and as he thought about the issue, and as these thoughts, enveloped by his emotions, extended into both the past and the future, the work he was producing must have appeared more meaningful to him... Because now he was inserting what he was writing about into other issues, and questioning how he should be writing...

However, this significance came with a certain enthusiasm, and that enthusiasm drew Hrant away from the ‘calm’ path the project expected from him. When he was about to finish the text, he had said to me, “You’ll see, Mensur won’t want to publish this.” “What makes you say that?” I asked him. But I already knew the answer, thus he gently shook his head and said, “Since I was writing, I thought, I might as well write what I have in mind...” To be frank, he had thought even further, because he immediately added, “If they don’t publish it, I’ll publish it myself.”

Thus, as in many other issues, Hrant’s prediction proved right on this issue, too. A while later, Mensur called me to tell me that Hrant had sent him the text for the book, but that it was ‘a bit’ removed from the detached stance that was requested. Meanwhile, he did not forget to request from me to read the text, and convince Hrant to make some changes. However, by this point, Hrant was quite happy with what he had written. He felt like he had put to paper what he had in his mind and heart. On the other hand, he was probably feeling uncomfortable about not having fulfilled the task expected from him... Because the book project was suddenly no longer our topic, and it was now waiting for the moment it would be taken up again in his own assessment.

Unfortunately, that moment never came... The treachery that constitutes one of the deepest illnesses of these lands, suddenly took him from us. On the other hand, Hrant's text was waiting in the archive of the TESEV Foreign Policy Program, untouched, in other words, precisely in the way that Hrant wanted to express himself. When Mensur told me that publishing this book was a duty of loyalty, and that this task would now best suit the Hrant Dink Foundation, I remember feeling happy like I had found a precious memento I had lost... It is difficult to believe, but it was almost as if I had forgotten this book. Perhaps, Hrant's loss had led to the rejection in my inner world of everything that would replace that feeling of loss.

However, after a while, this book became one of those tools that facilitated my spiritual healing. I made almost no changes to the text... I preserved the appendices in the way he planned them. I corrected a few structural problems, and some ambiguities that stemmed from the fact that it was written in a colloquial style. Yet Hrant's language, voice and words are presented to you precisely in the manner he thought and felt... It is difficult not to feel the warmth of this voice, the way it flutters like in a game of blind man's buff, searching for humanity, and not to feel this effort in your spirit.

This book is an invitation... An invitation to courage, love, conscience, and humanity as a whole... This is a memento of a man of action who left his imprint on this world, on our spirits, a man who calmed us with a single touch... It is like the document of the adventure of a gushing, overflowing, exultant stream of water, seeking the crack it will flow into... Yet this is Hrant! Is it possible for him to fit into just any crack? So, this book, too, will flow over the cracks in our heart, will fill them up, but will always offer more. Because, as I said above, this is Hrant! Can any crack hold his flow?

**Etyen Mahçupyan**

June 2008

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## IN DEDICATION...

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*The full pages of history correspond to what has passed, whereas its blank pages correspond to what is yet to be lived.*

*So, in terms of Turkish-Armenian relations, too, our common fate that reaches back centuries, and will extend into centuries to come, stands once again before us.*

*Our forefathers filled up their share of pages for good or worse.*

*The real issue is how we will fill the blank pages before us today.*

*Will we act in the same manner as those responsible of the great disaster that took place in the past, or will we learn a lesson from those mistakes and fill the new pages in a manner that befits civilised humanity?*

*This is the greatest responsibility that we face.*

*Those who abstain from acting according to this responsibility, or would fill these pages with evil and painful experiences, are those who are in fact, no less evil than those responsible of the pains experienced in the past.*

*We, who feel the responsibility, should not permit them to do so, and not leave it in their monopoly to fill these pages in the same manner as the past.*

*I share this modest work with all the peaceful sections of society who take up on themselves the responsibility of the blank pages, and dedicate it to the memory of the Armenian people who lived for thousands of years on this land as a productive people, but were torn from these lands they lived on during those painful years and disconnected from life and the civilisation they had created, and to all the innocent Anatolian people, whether Armenian, Turkish and Kurdish, who lost their lives during that period.*

**Hrant Dink**

5 November 2005

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### **b) A call from Armenia to Turkey, 103**

(The full text of the appeal made by Vartan Oskanian, the Foreign Minister of Armenia, at the international 90<sup>th</sup> year commemoration conference titled "A Great Crime-A Great Challenge: Genocide and Human Rights" held in Yerevan on 23 April 2005.)

### **c) From the Parliamentary Commission Minutes, 109**

(The full text of the speech made by Hrant Dink at the meeting on the Armenian Question jointly held by the Commission for EU Harmonization and Foreign Affairs Commission of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, on 5 April 2005, at the Grand National Assembly building.)

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Turkish Foreign Policy has displayed a strong will to resolve problems and establish a secure relationship with its neighbours, yet the only neighbour it has failed to take a significant step with is Armenia.

I am an Armenian journalist from Turkey who has closely followed civilian and official meetings at various levels between Turkey and Armenia, or Turks and Armenians.

During my travels abroad, the impression I have gained in meetings with even hardline sections of Diaspora Armenians is that as dialogue increases, the awareness regarding the other side increases, and the timidity in the beginning is replaced by positive normalization.

This positive mood is especially significant in civilian society dialogue.

However, Turkish-Armenian relations, from today until tomorrow, are still a long way from a solution that can be brought about only through the expression of good intentions.

First and foremost, the sides, actors and facts of the problem display great diversity.

History is one unique problem, the tension present in Caucasia today is another, the interest of external actors in the question is another, and finally, the fact that the Turkish and Armenian sides display a heterogeneous diversity in their views of the issues is another problem.

2 | For instance, the Armenian world... On the one side, there is the Armenian state and people, on the other side, there is the Diaspora, spread across all corners of the world; and then there is also, of course, the existence of the Armenians of Turkey, despite possessing very limited power as an actor.

This fragmentation naturally forces everyone to view the issue from their own vantage point.

And since every vantage point is different, different viewpoints are inevitable.

This work that I present to your attention, then, is the product of my view, from my vantage point.

And I should immediately point out that this is the viewpoint of Hrant Dink, an Armenian from Turkey, and lays absolutely no claim to represent the viewpoint of all Armenians from Turkey.

As for the coordinates of my vantage point:

I have two identities, and I am highly aware of both of them.

First, I am from Turkey, I am a citizen of the Republic of Turkey...

Second, I am an Armenian.

And although I am part of the Armenian Community in Turkey, I am also a moral part of Armenia, and the Armenian Diaspora scattered across all corners of the world, I am kin to them.

And it is for all these reasons that, if anyone wants, even for one sole reason, the improvement of Turkish-Armenian relations, I have at least twice as many reasons than them.

It makes no difference from the angle of which identity I possess you approach me from...

In both my conditions, to make an effort for the improvement of Turkey-Armenia relations and the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations stands before me as my most essential duty.

Let me begin with the first...

I just said that “I am from Turkey”... It is naturally my greatest wish as a citizen that my country has no problems with its neighbours.

In my country, which has been constantly plagued by troubles in its relations with its neighbours since the foundation of the Republic, not only does shallow nationalism which blocks democratic progress greatly feed off this policy of hostility, but a great share of my country’s resources are spent on defence to counter ‘the threat of neighbouring countries’ and for ‘security’.

Yet if my country was at peace with its neighbours, naturally more resources could be allocated to development, education and health, and people would be happier, more secure and more peaceful.

Thus, Armenia is one of the neighbours Turkey has problems with, and at the moment, the two countries do not even have diplomatic relations, their borders are closed.

To want this relation to improve and the borders to open is, of course, my primary responsibility as a citizen of the Republic of Turkey.

Secondly, I said “I am Armenian”...

We, the Armenians of Turkey, whether we want it or not, whether we shy away from expressing it or not, are kin to the people who live in the country called Armenia, and to Diaspora Armenians scattered across the world, we are the sprouts of the same tree inherited by the present day.

This moral tie we share, of course does not mean that it prevents us from being citizens of Turkey, or impels us to betray our citizenship.

Being a good citizen of the country one lives in does not prevent one from feeling a moral tie with his or her kin who lives on a different piece of land, and to do whatever one can to see the happiness of those people.

It is with such awareness that I desire Armenia’s and the Armenian world’s future to be secure and peaceful, and especially for Armenia to be free of problems with its neighbours.

Otherwise, I know very well that, even if it solves all its internal problems, if Armenia still has problems with its two neighbours, Turkey and Azerbaijan, it can never feel safe and secure.

If it continues to have problems with its neighbours, it cannot recover its resources from defence spending, and allocate them to the development and welfare of its people.

Every 'Armenian Genocide Draft Resolution' brought before the parliaments of foreign nations will turn into a knife-edge test for us as Armenians of Turkey.

The reason I use the term 'knife-edge' is completely related to the concern that can be summarized with the question, "Now what do we, as Armenians of Turkey, say about this?"

In view of similar situations that have occurred in the past, this is not a misplaced concern.

Thus, every time such situations arise, until recently, it was impossible to come across any expression of the true feelings of the Armenians of Turkey other than a certain discourse that can be summarized with the question, "We are very comfortable in Turkey." What was exhibited, rather than an opening, was 'our impasse'.

First and foremost, the issue placed on the agenda an undeniable historical reality of ours, and although we lived in Turkey, we were part of the Armenian world. On the other hand, although we were part of the Armenian world, we lived in Turkey, and we were citizens of Turkey.

We knew Turkey much better than anyone who lived outside of it.

Therefore, any discourse we produced that was disconnected from both these realities could easily put us in a position of either 'betraying our kin' or 'betraying our country'.

In other words, we had a truly difficult task...

It is clear that we will continue to face similar tests in the future.

Therefore, the discourses we produce from now on must be clearly comprehensible, and rest on a firm basis.

We are passing through a process in which we must express ourselves even better than usual.

In this respect, even the details of our discourses bear great importance.

Otherwise, it is impossible to prevent the falsification, distortion or misapplication of what we say.

And God knows there are plenty of groups both inside and outside Turkey who are waiting as 'quick reaction forces' to do just that.

I wish for this modest work to be assessed in view of all these details.