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Hugh Pope (1/28 op-ed) errs when attempting to portray the Turks sympathetically due to the demise of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to the Armenians, the declining Empire perpetrated genocide against its Greek and Assyrian populations. Historical evidence suggests that Mustafa Kemal fulfilled the Young Turks' aims because of assistance from the Italians, French, British, and Americans who while arming Kemal sabotaged the Greek campaign in Asia Minor.

The Turkish Republic and various nationalist and extremist groups which operate without restraint or opposition from either the Turkish government or security forces, never ceased persecuting the Christian and Kurdish minorities even long after Republic's founding. The anti-Greek pogroms of 1955 and unfounded claims on the territory of the Republic of Cyprus affirm that neither the Ottomans or Kemalists are victims. Finally, the assassination of Mr. Dink should be looked upon within the reality Turkey's Christian minorities face daily.

Though familiar with the plight of the Greek minority (mentioned in his book, "Turkey Unveiled"), Mr. Pope ignores the multiple bombings of the Ecumenical Patriarchate between

1994 and 2004, as well as the 1922 burning of predominantly Greek Smyrna by one of Kemal's most notorious generals. That Turkish Islamicization is accompanied by anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism as well as deep-rooted distrust and intolerance of Turkey's Christian and Kurdish minorities, demonstrates that Ottoman and Kemalist history cannot be rehabilitated, and that serious political sanctions should be imposed on Turkey.

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Opinion / Press Clippings

Turkey's Curse: Armenia Haunts the Turks Again

By Hugh Pope - Los Angeles Times

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Is there a curse hanging over Turkey? Each time the country achieves sustained development, something trips it up. This time, it was the assassination of Hrant Dink, a newspaper editor, peacemaker and one of Turkey's most prominent Armenians.

Turkey is trying to rise to the challenge, as its credibility in talks on membership in the European Union is at stake. Denunciations of the slaying - from the government, from Islamic leaders, from the army - fill the airwaves. Thousands of Turks marched through the streets of Istanbul hours after the editor was shot, shouting, "We are all Armenians! We are all Hrant Dink!"

LYNCH MOB ATMOSPHERE

Police have arrested a suspect who has confessed to pulling the trigger, but no murkiness must remain about the people and the thinking behind the killing. The alleged killer is under 18, and is close to rightwing nationalists. Dink, who was repeatedly threatened by such nationalists, was left unprotected, but not just by the Turkish police. Bad laws, malevolent prosecutions and a growing nationalist hysteria helped create a lynch mob atmosphere.

In short, what killed Dink is the Turkish republic's inability to deal with the Armenian issue - the charge that its predecessor state, the Ottoman Empire, killed 1.2 million Armenian men, women and children in a genocide which began in 1915.

Official Turkey is stuck in a rut of denial. Discussing the great omissions

on the subject in Turkey's public education remains taboo. Efforts to open archives and to "leave it to the historians" lead to dead ends, partly because a scholarly debate won't assuage Diaspora Armenians who demand formal acknowledgment of the genocide, and partly because of Turkey's anti-free-speech laws - most notoriously, Penal Code Article 301, with its catch-all penalties for "denigrating Turkishness."

The Turks have reasons to feel victimized. Christian powers don't apologize much for ethnic cleansing carried out between 1821 and 1923, when they rolled back the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Millions of Muslims were killed. In 1915, World War I was raging. Turkey was again under attack from Russia in the east and Britain and France in the west. The Armenian leadership openly sided with Turkey's enemies, demanded a state on Ottoman land and formed anti-Ottoman militias. Many Turks were killed by these Armenian groups.

Turkey fears an official apology for the Armenian deaths would trigger claims on its land or on seized Armenian assets. Turks can not believe the sincerity of foreign parliaments which, usually ill-informed about the Turkish case, give into Armenian Diaspora lobbying for genocide declarations (one such bill looks likely to pass the U.S. Congress in April).

Politics often seems to trump history. Would the French Parliament have made it a crime last year to deny a "genocide" by the Turks if an unrelated desire to keep Turkey out of the European Union had not been prevalent?

Dink didn't take this maximal view of Turkish evil. He once wrote that Diaspora Armenians should commit their energy to independent Armenia, and not "let hatred of the Turks poison their blood." Idiotically, it was that very column which led to his trial for violating Article 301, on the pretext that he had said Turks were poisonous. That misquote is the motive the assassin has given to police for his act - yet the Turkish media keep recycling this libel. Commentators are subtly shirking responsibility by labeling the murder a "provocation" or blaming "outside forces."

Brave new Turkish novels, films, exhibitions and conferences have tried to reassess the Armenian issue in recent years. But the nationalist upsurge has slowed, if not stopped, that progress.

Neither Turks nor Armenians should go on like this. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan could try a grand gesture. He might open the border with Armenia, closed since the early 1990's. He could advocate an international conference, where Turkey could argue its case that there was no centralized attempt to wipe out the Armenians. After all, Turkey already officially accepts that 300,000 people died. Best of all, Erdogan could abolish Article 301, which makes intellectuals like Dink a target.

None of this is likely to happen, however. Turkey has presidential and parliamentary elections this year, and ultra-nationalists pose the main challenge to Erdogan's centrist, pro-Islamic Justice & Development Party, or AKP.

Europe - whose support is critical in making a Turkish regime feel safe to reform - seems in no mood to extend lines of political credit to Turkey.

Dink was a rare Armenian ready to compromise with Turkey, and his assassination will deter replacements.

So the gap between Turkey and Europe will widen again. Muddled thinking and inward-looking nationalism will continue to plague Turkey, and not only in its approach to the Armenian problem. After all, Dink's death is the symptom of negative currents which persist, not their cause. And that, of course, is why Turkey's curse keeps returning to strike with such tragic ease.

The Los Angeles Times published the above on January 23. Mr. Pope is the author of ³Sons of the Conquerors: The Rise of the Turkic World.² He resides in Istanbul.