

## **Writer Tûba Çandar : Solving Dink's murder will benefit all citizens of Turkey**

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**If Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink's 2007 murder is solved in its entirety, that would mean that Turkey has gone through a serious transformation in its judiciary, security and gendarmerie systems, says writer Tûba Çandar, whose 700-page biography of Hrant Dink's life, "Hrant," came out on Dink's birthday in September of last year.**

"Then we would see that there is a big leap forward on the way toward a transparent and democratic new Turkey. All citizens of Turkey would benefit from such a transformation. And Hrant's soul would rejoice," Çandar told Today's Zaman for Monday Talk.

She added : "Hrant's struggle has not ended. With its Ergenekon and Balyoz [Sledgehammer] cases, there is still need for Hrant's energy in Turkey, which is trying to cleanse itself of such filth. That's why we all try to keep Hrant alive."

Dink was shot dead by an ultranationalist teenager outside the offices of the Agos newspaper in İstanbul on Jan. 19, 2007. The investigation into his murder has stalled as the suspected perpetrator and his accomplices have been put on trial, but those who masterminded the plot to kill him have yet to be revealed.

There is a lengthy list of suspicious irregularities in the investigation into Dink's murder, including deleted records and hidden files suggestive of an attempted police cover-up. The Dink family's lawyers have said much of the evidence indicates that the murder could have been prevented.

Çandar's book is in the process of being translated into English by acclaimed translator Maureen Freely.

Answering our questions, Çandar elaborated on the expectations regarding the ongoing court case and told the story of writing the biography of Hrant Dink and what it means to her.

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**It's been four years since Hrant Dink was murdered, but he is always with us with his ideas and actions as if he never left us. Do you feel as though he is still alive in a way ?**

'If Dink's murder is solved in its entirety and justice is served, then that would mean that Turkey has gone through a serious transformation in its judiciary, security and gendarmerie systems. Then we would see that there is a big leap forward on the way toward a transparent and democratic new Turkey. All citizens of Turkey would benefit from such a transformation. And Hrant's soul would rejoice.

We started with a difficult question. In order for us to say Hrant Dink is alive, we first have to see that justice has not been denied to him. We have to see that Turkey does exactly what the European Court of Human Rights [ECtHR] ruling requires — except for paying the compensation. Still, we can say that the conscientious people of Turkey try to keep Hrant Dink alive. Through the initiative Hrant's Friends there is an ongoing search for justice for Hrant : The murder case is being closely watched, and people gather with the participation of intellectuals and journalists in Beşiktaş Square before the court hearings. News of these hearings is given a great deal of space in the media, and the day of Dink's death has become a striking commemorative event each year. The International Hrant Dink Foundation keeps his name and memory alive with the awards given on his birthday ; however, Hrant's struggle has not ended. With its

Ergenekon and Balyoz [Sledgehammer] cases, there is still need for Hrant's energy in Turkey, which is trying to cleanse itself of such filth. That's why we all try to keep Hrant alive.

### **Why do you think Hrant Dink's life was taken by the people who planned his murder ?**

This question should go to the people who think that way. Hrant Dink was a courageous and impressive voice. As an Armenian from Turkey, he not only raised his voice to protect the minority rights of the Armenian community, which was repressed and had no choice other than to be isolated, but he also spoke out as a "Türkiyeli" [the term has a territorial meaning and it encompasses all ethnic-religious communities to replace the concept "Turkish" which has an ethnic meaning] intellectual on all issues considered as taboo, from the ban on the headscarf to the Kurdish issue. Some people held grudges because he was doing all this as an Armenian. Remember, first and foremost Orhan Pamuk and Elif Şafak, and then the country's well-known writers such as Murat Belge, Hasan Cemal, İsmet Berkan, Haluk Şahin and Erol Katırcıoğlu, were being tried on the basis of Article 301, which restricts freedom of expression. However, those cases were somehow dismissed, and those trials ended. It was only Hrant Dink who was convicted of violating Article 301. And as the Supreme Court of Appeals approved the ruling of the court, Hrant was labeled an "Enemy of Turkey" through media campaign. As he asked in his last article, "Doesn't being an Armenian have a role in this ?"

### **'Focus on responsibilities of state rather than deep state'**

**When the issue is the murder of Hrant Dink, a lot of commentators mention the involvement of the "deep state" in it. However, some high-level security and gendarmerie officials have been promoted even though their negligence in preventing Dink's murder has clearly been presented by lawyers to the court. Were those promotions the work of that deep state ?**

You are talking about state officials whose names and capacities are clear. It is not right to say that their promotions were the work of the deep state and refer the issue to an unidentified space. It would be more appropriate to focus on the responsibilities of the state rather than the deep state and how those responsibilities were not fulfilled by the state during and after Hrant Dink's murder. The ECtHR ruling of Sept. 14, 2010, which found Turkey guilty and ruled that the country should pay compensation, also emphasizes the same point.

**It seems like the court that hears the Dink case does not pay much attention to the efforts of the Dink family lawyers, who try to highlight the systematic irregularities in the murder. Instead, the court seems to treat the case as a regular murder case. Do you think it is possible to overcome this mentality in court ?**

I don't know. I wrote the life story of Hrant Dink who "lived" and "will live." The question is in regards to Hrant's court case. The Dink family lawyers can probably answer this question appropriately. But what I'd like to say is that in order to change a certain type of mentality, it is necessary to understand who Hrant Dink was and why he was targeted. That's why I attach a lot of importance to knowledge and debate about his life.

### **'Hrant was sure of his innocence'**

**How do you think the ECtHR would influence the case ? Some government officials made statements following the ECtHR ruling. Do you think those would be enough to change the general course of the trial ?**

The ECtHR ruling is about Hrant's clearance from a judicial point of view, crowning his moral rightness, which has taken root in the public's conscience from the beginning. Hrant went to the ECtHR because he was sure of his innocence. The ECtHR ruling strongly approved his rightness. Unfortunately, Hrant was

not able to see the ECtHR ruling, but he had no doubts that the ruling would be like this. The statements of the government officials reflect the timidity of the state. I don't know if those statements can have an influence that changes the course of the trial. We will see. The reasoning in the decision indicates that the investigation was found to be lacking and thus has not revealed the real people who are responsible for the murder. Another development that disturbs one's conscience has been that the head of the court ruled that the suspected murderer should be tried in a juvenile court since he was a minor at the time of the crime — after he confessed to the murder. And recently, the head of the court has been changed as a result of the first actions of the new Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors [HSYK]. Now we are waiting for developments to see whether or not the investigation will become more thorough, whether or not the court will hear the testimony of new witnesses and officials related to the issue and whether or not attention will be paid to the report from the Prime Ministerial Investigation Commission.

**In your response to the first question you mentioned that Turkey has been trying to cleanse itself of its filth as you referred to the trials of Ergenekon and Sledgehammer. Dink's lawyers have tried hard to convince the court that they need to be involved in those trials as they have stated that the acts of some Ergenekon suspects in turning Hrant Dink into a target for ultranationalist people and groups were likely. They recalled that when Dink was facing charges under the Turkish Penal Code's [TCK] Article 301, which then criminalized "insulting Turkishness," some of the people — who are in jail now as alleged Ergenekon members — brought crowds of protestors and even attacked Dink and his supporters as they entered and left the courtroom. Is it possible for Turkey to be cleansed without understanding the relationship between these cases ?**

It is not possible. The answer is inside your question. If this is not done, the trial process will only have been done for show and justice will not have been served. And we will continue to live in filth and rust. Because the reality is that Turkey should face its political past. And that means that much more needs to be done. If Dink's murder is solved in its entirety and justice is served, then that would mean that Turkey has gone through a serious transformation in its judiciary, security and gendarmerie systems. Then we would see that there is a big leap forward on the way toward a transparent and democratic new Turkey. All citizens of Turkey would benefit from such a transformation. And Hrant's soul would rejoice.

**'He died but we live... We live with this terror, pain and shame'**

**Why did you write 'Hrant' ?**

I wrote it to make Hrant live and to set him back on his feet. It was not only Hrant who was shot on that sidewalk on Jan. 19 ; people who were hugged by Hrant's huge arms, who were touched by Hrant were also shot. People who have a conscience in this country were shot. He died but we live... We live with this terror, pain and shame. This has been what I've been able to do. When I went to his home for condolences, I promised him. There was a notebook for condolences, pages open, on a coffee table at the entry to his home. And there was also his sad-eyed photograph, illuminated by candles. It was as if he was saying : "See, I'm not with you anymore ! None of you could protect me !" ... I couldn't write a word then. I looked at his photograph for a long time, and I told him : "I'll write about you, Hrant. I will write about your life and struggle to show what is done to a man of such quality in 21st century Turkey." I wrote the book because I was not able to cope with the pain of his murder. I wrote it to be healed. I started my book on the sidewalk that he fell on after being shot, and as I had the people closest to him talk about him in the book, I called on them all together to raise him from that sidewalk and put him back on his feet again. That was the only way for us to be healed.

**As you said, you don't interfere in the narrative of people who talk about Hrant Dink. You don't even interfere much in between the narratives. Have you used that technique before ? How did you decide to use it ?**

I've not tried this technique before, and I've never seen anybody who has tried it. My preference was

determined by the terror of his murder, which occurred in front of our eyes. As I decided to write the book, I was on one side with other conscientious people in Turkey. I wouldn't be able to write his biography with a classic hands-off attitude, keeping a distance from Hrant. I eliminated my voice, and I decided to construct his life story from the voices of the people who were closest to him. I started the book from that sidewalk where he was shot, and from there I carried it on to his birthplace in Malatya, "Gavur Hamamı" [Infidel Bathhouse], and told the last century of the Anatolian Armenians from the stories of the elder people of the family. Therefore, there is no "I" telling the life story of Hrant, and there are 125 storytellers who come to the stage on and off. There are the voices of those people out of my interviews. More importantly, there is the voice of Hrant. I found his voice in the archives of his newspaper Agos where there were approximately 1,000 articles that belong to him. There was a hidden treasure of oral history and oral culture. As he entered the book with his own voice, he changed the course of the story and made it an epic.

**Your book is really an epic. There are 700 pages, and it is telling a modern tragedy. What types of reactions have you received ?**

There are two books in those 700 pages. The first book, which has an epic quality, "Khent Hrant" [Khent means mad in Armenian] starts with his birth and goes on to the orphanage where he grew up, then to Tuzla Armenian Children's Camp, which he established, and to Tibrevank High School, where he became familiar with left-wing views and to the military jails of the Sept. 12 military period, to the years of his university education, to the special division in his military service since he was discriminated against, to his struggle to get married to his spouse Rakel and to his struggle to earn a living. The second half of the book tells about "Baron Hrant" [Baron means gentleman in Armenian ; it is also a reminder of Dink's delicate character under his rough Anatolian appearance]. This section starts with the establishment of Agos and Hrant's life afterward. It's a modern tragedy. ... I received positive reactions. It was on the best-sellers list for weeks. The publishing house, Everest, declared it "our most prestigious book," and Radikal's book supplement listed it among the best books of the year. I've been most affected by the letters coming from readers. Those will always have a special place in my heart.

From Hrant Dink's article 'I present' which found its way to Çandar's book :

*"I am Türkiyeli... I am Armenian. I am from Anatolia down to my marrow. Not even for a day have I thought about leaving my country and establishing my future in that place called 'Batı,' 'the paradise of readily available freedoms' and to stick like a leech to democracies that other people have created by paying a price. My basic concern has been to turn my own country to that kind of paradise of freedoms."*

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## **Tûba Çandar**

Born in 1948, she completed her education in the United States after secondary schooling in Austria High School in Turkey. She graduated from the International Relations Department of the Ankara University Faculty of Political Science. She lived in Germany following March 12 military coup. Returning to Turkey, she became the editor-in-chief of "Bizim Almanca" magazine under Cumhuriyet daily. She also worked as an editor at "Gergedan" magazine. At Yeni Yüzyıl daily, she wrote culture and arts and travel pieces. She had a "Portraits" column in "Gazete Pazar." Her first book about the life of Mualla Eyubiğlu Anhegger, "Hitit Güneşi" (Hitite Sun), was in 2003. In 2007, she had "Murat Belge Bir Hayat" (Murat Belge A Life). Her latest book, "Hrant" came out on the birthday of Hrant Dink on Sept. 15 in 2010.

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## **Sources**

Source : TdZ, 17 January 2011