

'If Dink had been saved, Mutafyan and others would have been killed'

mardi 1er février 2011, par [Yonca Poyraz Doğan](#)

Murder of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was part of a bigger plan to create chaos and eventually a military takeover in Turkey, said journalist and writer Adem Yavuz Arslan, who added that if Dink had not been assassinated, some other prominent figures would have been.

"Society now believes that [Ogün] Samast was only the hit man in Dink's murder and that the murder was not the work of a few ultranationalists. Dink's murder was part of a big plan to foment chaos in the country to prepare the groundwork for a military takeover to unseat the government," he told Today's Zaman for Monday Talk.

He was referring to the recent discovery of confidential documents seized from the **Gölcük Naval Command** detailing the **Sledgehammer** coup plan, suggesting that the junta hoped to kill many leading intellectuals in Turkey, including Dink, non-Muslims like Bartholomew I, Armenian Patriarch Mesrob Mutafyan and former Vatican representative George Marovic, in addition to many Turkish journalists.

As Dink's murder has still not been resolved in four years, Arslan, who wrote "Bi Ermeni Var" ("There's this Armenian"), answered our questions and elaborated on the issue.

"When the ultranationalist campaign was at its peak in the years of 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007, the number of attacks against churches and minority institutions was 110. With the arrest of Veli Küçük in 2008 the number of attacks suddenly dropped to 11 and there were only eight attacks in each 2009 and 2010."

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Ogün Samast, self-confessed murderer of Hrant Dink, told the court that Yasin Hayal told him, "There is this Armenian," and the title you gave your book is "Bi' Ermeni Var" ("There is this Armenian"). What made you to choose this title ?

This phrase is used to raise fears in people's minds. In some places in Turkey, like Trabzon, there is always some fear about Pontus and non-Muslims. The masterminds of Dink's murder used this concept to simplify a very complicated plan in order to mobilize some people against Dink. I mention in the book that selected words from Dink's speeches and writings were put together in a CD and shown to some people with ultranationalist sentiments. But we have to see that there is a macro plan, thought to be implemented in phases over several years. Hrant Dink's murder was just one of the legs of this plan.

What are the other legs about ?

The murder of Andrea Santoro, the Malatya murders at the Zirve Publishing House, attacks against non-Muslims in İstanbul, these were all part of the plan. We often see that in Turkish history, such simplifications are used in order to realize bigger plans. For example, we see a similar thing in the Council of State attack staged in 2006. Based on the initial statements of the suspects, it looked as if the attackers had chosen their target to protest a decision by the high court against the headscarf. However, as the Ergenekon investigation unfolded, it increasingly appeared that the case was tied to the organization, which aimed to foment chaos inside the country with the ultimate purpose of triggering a coup d'état.

You say in the book that even though the gendarmerie is in the middle of the issue because of

its serious neglect of duty in ignoring threats against Dink, it has been successful in getting out of the trial. How is that possible ?

Gendarmerie and military people have long been untouchable in Turkey. You cannot question them. For example, until very recently, the police were unable to touch a gendarmerie person if he were involved in a traffic accident. When retired Gen. Veli Küçük was arrested, the earth was shaken. Even the Prime Ministry Inspection Board was not able to touch the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and the İstanbul Police in the report they prepared on Dink's murder.

Nobody has been able to question the office of the governor of İstanbul, where Dink was threatened in the presence of MİT officials, as he described in articles just prior to his murder...

The Şişli Prosecutor's Office should have started an investigation into the issue as Dink wrote about those threats in 2004. But we see that the prosecutor's office was in close contact with Veli Küçük. Many attempts to lynch Dink occurred in front of the Şişli Prosecutor's Office, but they never tried to pursue the perpetrators. And we see that from 2004 to 2007, Dink was clearly a target.

Dink had been followed by intelligence agencies since the 1970s, right ?

Yes, he was followed since the '70s because of his involvement in left-wing politics. But he was under hot pursuit starting in 2003 in relation to the big plan to foment chaos in Turkey in order to implement the coup.

'Veli Küçük's visit to Öz meant support for Öz'

Would you tell us about the photograph you revealed in your book ?

In the photograph there are two people : Ali Öz, gendarmerie regiment commander in Trabzon, is the person who received the information in May 2006 that Dink was going to be killed. His role in the killing of Dink goes beyond negligence of duty. The other person is the retired Gen. Küçük, who was threatening Dink. Öz is not protecting Dink and Küçük is threatening Dink, and those two personalities often come together.

You know the gendarmerie released a statement saying that one visit to Öz does not mean that they are involved in a crime...

First of all, they met several times, not just once. The visit in the photograph was in Bilecik, where Öz was appointed and being investigated following Dink's murder. Öz was a defendant at the time of Küçük's visit, who was about to be investigated in the case at the time. The meaning of his visit was to express support for Öz. It was not a routine visit. The photograph was found by a journalist, even though it should have been in the Dink case file. ... The gendarmerie did not share this photograph with authorities until then.

'MGK raises concern about 54 missionaries in Turkey'

What did the report on the missionaries say ?

The MGK's own report says that there are 54 missionaries in Turkey. That's all. How would they divide the country or make it all Christian ? But the real issue was about using this to create a perception of threat. They needed to create an enemy : missionaries. Untrue stories followed, including that missionaries were working to make Turkish youth turn to Christianity or they were buying land and the country would soon be divided. This plan continued. In 2004 and 2005, there were several ultranationalist organizations, the Kuvayi Milliye (National Forces), established in various cities in Turkey. The MGK instructed the police to take precautions against missionaries. I indicated in the book that the police did a study on missionaries following the warnings from the MGK but couldn't find a really threatening element.

Allegedly, it was not only the gendarmerie that was responsible for paving the way to Dink's

murder, but the police and also MIT, as you and the reports of Dink's lawyers have indicated.

It is the best example of how a murder, which was obviously coming, would not be prevented while all security agencies cooperated with each other in that regard. Not only the gendarmerie, not only the police, not only MIT and not only the İstanbul Governor's Office, but all of them were involved in neglect of duty.

Your book concentrates on plans prior to the murder. Would you elaborate on that ?

The gendarmerie, unfortunately, played an active role in the preparation phase of the murder. The police's role comes later, as they neglected their duty following the murder.

'NCS instructs gov't to take precautions against missionary activities'

There is that National Security Council (MGK) report to the Prime Ministry on March 12, 2003 on the issue of missionary activities. In your book you show this document where the MGK instructs the government to take precautions against missionary activities...

The basis of various plans called Sledgehammer [Balyoz], Cage [Kafes] and Ergenekon, which we recently revealed, indeed goes back to 2003. Gen. Tuncer Kılınç, who signed that MGK directive in 2003 as the secretary-general of the MGK is now a defendant in the Ergenekon case. In November, there was a similar directive signed by the next MGK Secretary-General Şükrü Sarıışık, who is now a defendant in the Sledgehammer case. They are being trialed as suspects in planning a coup d'état. The background behind the missionary threat is that some people with shady connections desired to create a virtual fear in order to prepare the groundwork for chaos and eventually for a military takeover. It was social engineering.

It was in the initial period of the AK Party [Justice and Development Party] government. Abdullah Gül was prime minister from November 2002 until March 12, 2003. His successor was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who came to power on March 14, 2003. What was the response of the government to all of those developments in 2003 and 2004 ?

The government was in trouble. It was trying to save itself from being unseated. We have learned from the diaries of Özden Örnek that the government was not at ease and was aware of the plans. The Sledgehammer plan was being prepared in March 2003. The end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004 is when they started to target Dink. At the same time, television programs showed "threatening scenes" of the distribution of the Bible in various locations in Turkey and fake priests increasing every day. What came as a response to that ? Young Turkish people started to distribute copies of the Quran, and there ultranationalist organizations were flourishing. Meanwhile, there have been also other attempts, mainly by the gendarmerie, to start a conflict between Turks and Kurds. This was done in Giresun and Sakarya. JİTEM is in the middle of the issue but remained untouched. Its role remains untouchable in the Dink murder as well.

You say that the hands of the government were tied in the period prior to Dink's murder since its own seat was not secure. But what is the situation now ? Can the government not put more power behind the investigation of the case ?

Let's remember that the Balyoz plan had a list of judges and prosecutors that were supposed to help the military during the coup process. One of the chief prosecutors in Dink's murder investigation was on that list. It was obvious that this committee would not solve the problem. Prosecutors can be changed only by the HSYK [the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors]. It was clear that the previous HSYK would not make that change. When the structure of the HSYK was altered following the Sept. 12 referendum last year, the presiding judge of the Dink murder case was changed. Dink's lawyers had previously demanded the removal of that judge — who allegedly had connections to drugs and the mafia — but their demands were not realized until recently.

'ECtHR makes reference to Ergenekon from miles away'

The rule of the ECtHR has been an important development in the past year. In a unanimous decision, the court ruled that Turkey violated the right to life, freedom of expression and the right to an effective remedy and investigation.

The ECtHR makes a reference to Ergenekon, but even though the İstanbul 14th High Criminal Court has the same information that the ECtHR has on the Dink case, the İstanbul court attributes the crime to only a few people. From thousands of miles away, the ECtHR indicated Ergenekon in the plan to kill Dink and said there are links to be found in the Cage Action Plan, Santoro's murder and the Malatya murders. After the ruling of the ECtHR, a new investigation involving police, gendarmerie, MİT, etc. in Dink's murder became a must. Dink's lawyers have already applied to the court with this demand.

Do you think that there is now more knowledge out in the open and that society cannot be easily manipulated on how things were regarding Dink's murder ?

Definitely, yes. Journalists played a big role in presenting that information. Unfortunately, we are doing the job that needed to be done by security and judicial forces. At the end of the fourth year of the Dink case, society now believes that Samast was only the hitman in Dink's murder and that the murder was not the work of a few ultranationalists. It's time to stop concentrating on the killer. Dink's murder was part of a big plan to foment chaos in the country to prepare the groundwork for a military takeover to unseat the government. There is a need to reveal the behind-the-scenes structure that planned so many murders. New developments and evidence require a new investigation. And the Ergenekon case and the Sledgehammer case present an opportunity to shed light on Dink's murder. Otherwise, we would be guilty of not respecting Dink's memory.

Are you hopeful that the case will be solved in its entirety ?

I am hopeful because it is now obvious that events have not developed as they were presented. First, the presiding judge has been changed ; second, there is new evidence ; and third, hidden structures are penetrated more easily than yesterday. For example, a secret witness gave much information in the Malatya murder case, and there are connections to Dink's murder to be found. Those developments will motivate and force the political will to put more support behind the investigation. The Prime Ministry should be able to establish a commission for the investigation of all institutions believed to be involved in the murder of Dink. The revelation of all those links and connections will help the government in the international arena where there are some supporters of the idea that minorities are being threatened by the ruling AK Party government, even though this is not the reality.

Adem Yavuz Arslan

Currently Bugün daily's Ankara representative, he started his career in journalism as a court reporter in İzmir. Although he has worked in all areas of journalism, from photography to war reporting, he specializes in terrorism, security, organized crime and the military. He produces the television program "Temsilciler Meclisi" (House of Representatives), and "Bi Ermeni Var : Dink Operasyonunun Şifreleri" ("There's this Armenian : The Codes of the Dink Operation") is his first book.

Sources

Source : TdZ, 24 January 2011