

# TODAY'S ZAMAN

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## **[Letter to the editor] Inaccurate commentary on debate surrounding Sarkis Torosyan 'memoirs'**

**by Halil Berktaş, Edhem Eldem & Hakan Erdem\***

We have just come across an article posted on your website and signed by Mr. Tal Buenos under the title "Leading historians object to Akçam's anti-methodical construction of Armenian memory" (April 11, 2013).

While we are flattered to be called "leading historians," we are afraid that the author has either misunderstood, or worse, willfully distorted some of our words and thoughts.

One way or the other, Mr. Buenos's article is an inaccurate summary of, and commentary on, the debate that has taken place in the press on the authenticity and nature of the "memoirs" of a certain Sarkis Torosyan, recently published in Turkish by Ayhan Aktar. At the simplest level, Hakan Erdem and Halil Berktaş are not "professors from Boğaziçi University," but from Sabancı University. Mr. Buenos also suggests that the whole process was initiated by Erdem's book on the issue, and only then "picked up" by Edhem Eldem and Berktaş. He should have known that Berktaş had already pointed out some initial inconsistencies in Torosyan's memoirs three years ago. Eldem, on the other hand, has been the last to tackle this question in his article in the February issue of *Toplumsal Tarih*.

These may be trivial mistakes, but are indicative of Mr. Buenos's sloppiness. More seriously, in various ways, we have all been critical of this book entirely on empirical grounds. We have contended, and demonstrated, that Torosyan has not only largely invented his "memoirs," but also forged at least three "documents" in support of it. It is our conviction that history as a discipline should have its autonomy from politics and should not be sacrificed to political priorities. However, we have not seen the publication of the book as an attempt (by Aktar or Taner Akçam) "to politicize history" by providing the Armenian cause with a narrative "that counters historical facts regarding the Armenian rebellion prior to the World War I deportations."

Nowhere has any "Armenian rebellion" entered this debate. Nor have we been trying to discredit any and all scholarship that runs counter to the Turkish nationalist position on what happened in 1915. We have not accused anybody of using Torosyan to fabricate an image of Armenian innocence; conversely, we have repeatedly argued that proving the falsehood of the Torosyan narrative has nothing whatsoever to do with (our views of) the general truth of the horrors that were visited on Ottoman Armenians in 1915.

In particular, apart from Torosyan there is other evidence of the presence of Armenian soldiers and officers in the Ottoman army during World War I. As for Mr. Buenos' jump from our refutation of Torosyan to the claim that the entire Armenian population of the empire now stand confirmed as "rebels," this is nothing short of preposterous.

*\*Edhem Eldem is a professor at Boğaziçi University. Hakan Erdem and Halil Berktaş are professors at Sabancı University.*

2013-04-21

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