

## Rep. Schiff responds to Turkish newspaper's mischaracterization of his meeting with Turkish delegation

To the Editor:

The article in today's edition of your newspaper, "US Democrat Schiff 'Surprised' by Turkish Side of Armenian Story," grossly mischaracterizes the meeting that I had earlier this month with a Turkish delegation.

The meeting, which was arranged by the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL), was intended to promote a frank and open dialogue between a younger generation of Turkish politicians and opinion-makers and the Congress. In setting up the meeting, the ACYPL wanted to afford the Turkish members of the delegation the chance to discuss my position on the importance of American recognition of the Armenian Genocide that would afford both sides the opportunity better understand why so many Members of Congress believe that this is the right thing to do for America and for Turkey. Having followed Turkish press coverage of this issue for several years, I looked forward to the opportunity to have a dialogue that was candid and unfiltered with a group of new leaders, perhaps less wedded to the dogmas of their party elders. This is consistent with my open-door policy of meeting with those who share as well as those who disagree with my views.

I told the delegation that the historical record was unequivocal – that 1.5 million Armenians perished at the hands of the Ottoman Empire between 1915-1923 and that this tragedy constituted the first genocide of the Twentieth Century. I said that I believed that the decades of denial of the genocide was, in the words of Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, a "double killing" and that millions of Armenians worldwide were still suffering, even after more than 90 years had passed.

I also emphasized that modern Turkey's denial of the genocide was hurting Turkey and jeopardizing the country's accession to the European Union. I was especially emphatic in raising the issue of Article 301 of the Turkish penal code, which makes it a crime to insult "Turkishness," a thinly-veiled reference to the genocide. Having met the courageous journalist Hrant Dink, I told them I thought it was a travesty to prosecute his son for publishing his murdered father's words. Why would a modern nation go to such lengths to criminalize the discussion of an historical event if it was not the truth?

I also listened to the delegation members, who were eager to share their views with me and had told me that they considered obtaining this meeting the highlight of their time in Washington, D.C. and our meeting, which lasted the better part of an hour, was lively and interesting.

While I certainly did not expect the Turkish delegates to accept my views, I did not expect them to completely mischaracterize mine and for your paper to misquote me -- never bothering to contact my office to find out what in fact I said. While I am troubled by the misquote and deliberate nature of the misrepresentation, I realize that this is another small episode in a decades-long campaign of denial and self-delusion that has poisoned generations of your countrymen and has been a persistent irritant in relations between our two countries.

In 2003, I had the pleasure of a brief stop in Turkey on my way back from a visit to our troops in Iraq. The Turkish people, well aware of my views, were nonetheless warm and hospitable, and keenly aware of the importance of their alliance with the United States. That alliance can and must survive the truth. Our relationship will be better for it and, more importantly, Turkey will be as well.

Sincerely,

ADAM B. SCHIFF  
Member of Congress

### **US Democrat Schiff 'surprised' by Turkish side of Armenian story Dec. 20, 2007**

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, uneasy with the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) acting as if it is the representative of all Kurdish people living in Turkey, asked his deputies of Kurdish origin to initiate diplomatic action -- he has now begun to harvest the first fruit these efforts.

#### **Burhan Kayatürk**

At Erdoğan's request, Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Ankara deputy Burhan Kayatürk and Mardin deputy Cüneyt Yüksel, went to the US to meet with Democrat Congressman Adam Schiff, the architect of the "Armenian genocide bill" accepted by the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs. Listening to the stories of Kayatürk's own family, Schiff was surprised by the Turkish side of the story concerning the Armenian issue.

Kayatürk, who has Kurdish origins, and a Turkish delegation went to the US as invited guests of the US Youth Council (USYC). A meeting with Schiff provided Kayatürk with the chance to speak about experiences from his own life. The deputy told Today's Zaman about his experience, explaining first his own story, as told to Schiff.

"The name of my father's grandfather was Yusuf. Despite their good relations with the Armenians, the latter killed my grandfather, and I'm sure that my grandfather's relatives also killed some Armenians in return. The Armenians and the Muslims had good relations at the time, however, due to the promises the Russians made, the Armenians began doing wrong to their neighbors. As a result some atrocious events occurred between both sides. Moreover, tens of thousands of people from both sides died because of these wrongs. Then the forced Armenian emigration -- in addition to the illnesses, the clashes and traumatic events occurred along the route -- caused people to die. However, the Ottomans never killed the Armenians based on an intentional scheme. This cannot even be a matter of discussion."

When faced with the alleged claims of Armenian genocide, Turkey has opened the state archives for historians, Kayatürk said, and underlined: "We are ready; both Armenian and Turkish scholars are welcome to make research. Your [US] attempt harms Turkish-American and Turkish-Armenian relations."

He also asserted that 40,000 to 60,000 Armenians work illegally in Turkey. "Most of them nurse our children. If we were hostile, could we entrust our children to them?" In response Schiff reportedly emphasized that he was surprised with what he heard, adding: "I've never heard these [stories] before, and quite frankly I'm touched by them. For the first time, I'm hearing something different."

Kayatürk asserted that the Zeve cemetery was full of numerous graves belonging to Turks and Kurds whom the Armenians massacred in Van. He invited Schiff to Van to see for himself how many Turks were killed by the Armenians during those times of upheaval and confusion. Schiff said he was planning a visit to both Armenia and Turkey and that he could visit Van during his trip.

Meeting with Matt Bryza, US deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Asian affairs, Kayatürk explained that he is of Kurdish origin, underlining that the Kurdish issue has nothing to do with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Kayatürk also emphasized: "The AK Party represent the Kurdish people in the best way. As the votes that AK Party received in southeastern province of Hakkari increased by 430 percent, it proves the fairness of the policies the party follows. The average number of supporters in the eastern and southeastern regions rose by 51 percent." He stressed, "The sooner the PKK problem in northern Iraq is eliminated, the better for both Turkey and the US."

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