

January 22, 2007

Turkish Gunman Said to Confess to Killing Armenian Editor

By Sebnem Arsu and Susanne Fowler

ISTANBUL — A teenage Turkish gunman arrested in connection with the killing of an ethnic Armenian journalist has given prosecutors an extensive confession, Turkish news agencies reported Sunday. They said he explained how he plotted the killing and how he stalked the victim and shot him directly from behind three times in the neck and head on a crowded Istanbul street.

Anatolia, one of the news agencies, also reported that at least 10 other suspects had been arrested in connection with the killing of the journalist, Hrant Dink, on Friday, suggesting that the police were assuming that the accused gunman, Ogun Samast, was part of a conspiracy. The accounts of the confession by Mr. Samast, 17, however, suggested that he had acted alone.

The killing of Mr. Dink, 52, the editor of the weekly bilingual newspaper Agos, shocked this mostly Muslim nation and sent thousands of furious Turks into the streets during the weekend, waving placards and chanting, “We are all Armenians!” and “We were all Dink!”

The killing also has intensified a debate here on the delicate topics of national identity and freedom of expression during an important election year and a time when Turkey has held strained application talks with the European Union. Some critics contend Turkey’s history of extremism and repression makes it unqualified for full membership in the union.

Mr. Samast was being held Sunday under heavy security at an Istanbul police station after his arrest on Saturday. The police were tipped off by the suspect’s father, who recognized him from a surveillance camera photo shown by the news media. Mr. Samast was taken into custody at the main bus station in the Black Sea coast city of Samsun, apparently on his way to his hometown, Trabzon.

According to Anatolia, a government-run news agency, the chief prosecutor, Ahmet Cokcinar, said Sunday that Mr. Samast had been arrested in possession of the gun used in the killing. Mr. Cokcinar also said Mr. Samast had explained in a detailed confession how he unsuccessfully sought a meeting with Mr. Dink on Friday, went to Friday Prayer, later followed Mr. Dink as he walked from his newspaper office to a bank and back, then stalked him as he left the newspaper again.

“I approached him from behind and shot him from one meter away,” Anatolia quoted Mr. Samast as saying in his confession. “I’m not sorry.”

According to Anatolia and Dogan, a private Turkish news agency, Mr. Samast told the police that he was angered by analyses of Mr. Dink's columns on Armenia's history, which he had been reading on the Internet, and "decided to kill him."

Turkey and Armenia, which share a border but have no diplomatic ties, have long been at odds over Turkey's refusal to use the term "genocide" to describe the deaths of Armenians beginning in 1915. Many scholars and most Western governments say more than a million Armenians were killed in a campaign they describe as genocide.

Turkey says that the deaths resulted from war as the Ottoman Empire was crumbling and that many Turks also were killed.

More recently, some Turks have begun to feel betrayed by the European Union, which recently froze sections of the talks on Turkey's application to become a full member.

"This killing is an ultimate result of increasing nationalism, isolationism and animosity toward minorities that the European Union fueled in its handling of Turkey's membership process," said Can Baydarol, a Turkish expert on the European Union. "If the E.U. pushes Turkey even further after this tragic incident, this would serve the interests of the extremist circles that Mr. Dink was in constant struggle with."

Esra Uras, 43, of the Liberal European Association, a group that advocates Turkey's full membership in the European Union, said that while the violence could hurt Turkey's chances, "the government had actually handled the situation after the murder very well."

Mr. Dink had long been surrounded by controversy. He was convicted in 2005 of insulting Turkishness, a crime under Article 301 of the Turkish penal code, but his six-month sentence was suspended.

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