

Armenian MP Paylan: I will never give up my fight for Turkey’s democratization

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HDP deputy Garo Paylan (Photo: Hurriyet)

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In an April 24 statement remembering the slaughter of Armenians in their indigenous land by the Ottoman Empire, US President Joe Biden said the word “genocide,” marking a historic moment for Armenians and Turks.

Armenian communities across the globe have long been waiting for this step; however,, the recognition brought a new wave of denial of the history and a renewal of the hatred of Armenians in Turkey.

Turkish far-right independent lawmaker Ümit Özdağ threatened Garo Paylan, an Armenian deputy from the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), with another genocide. Özdağ, who was sacked from the nationalist far-right İYİ (Good) Party last year, said in a tweet that Paylan

should have a “Talaat Pasha experience,” referring to the Ottoman politician who ordered the Armenian genocide in 1915.

The knives were out for Paylan, who told Turkish Minute *he would continue to fight for the democratization of Turkey and would never give up.*

“With his tweet, Ümit Özdağ admits the Armenian genocide they denied for 106 years. We know very well that these genocidal crimes went unpunished and therefore are still happening. We Armenians have always lived under ‘Talaat Pasha oppression and fear’ in Turkey and have constantly witnessed the hate crimes that have been repeated,” said Paylan.

On April 24 Paylan criticized the [naming of streets in Turkey after Talaat Pasha](#) in a [tweet](#).

“We are walking on streets 106 years later named after Talaat Pasha, the architect of the genocide. We send our kids to schools named Talaat Pasha,” tweeted Paylan.

“You shameless, provocative man. You can go to hell if you’re not happy [here]. Talaat Pasha exiled traitors like you, not patriotic Armenians. You’ll go through a Talaat Pasha experience when the time comes, and you should,” Özdağ [tweeted](#) on April 26 in response to Paylan’s criticism.

Turkey’s Human Rights Association and Paylan filed a complaint under the penal code articles of “incitement of enmity,” “insults and threats” and “incitement to commit a crime” against independent lawmaker Özdağ for his tweet amid a heated social media debate on the topic in the days after Biden recognized the Armenian genocide by saying “Each year on this day, we remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman-era Armenian genocide.”

Paylan said hate speech leads to hate crimes in Turkey and that he wants to expose this. “I filed a criminal complaint not because I had any hope from the politicized judiciary, but to make a note in history. I hope there will soon be changes in this country, and when that day comes, they will be held to account and answer for what they’ve done. That’s why I’m struggling today.”

Paylan, who is frequently the target of insults and threats, knows his struggle for the truth is very dangerous but emphasizes that he will not give up.

“We live in a climate of hate, and we are exposed to hate speech every day. This climate of hate and rhetoric causes hate crimes, but I still feel that I’m not alone. Millions of citizens who want Turkey to be a democratic country oppose the government and fight against racist Turkish policies. Regardless, I live with the awareness that this hate speech against me can lead to hate crimes, but this struggle never distracts me from my determination,” Paylan said.

Turkey’s parliament on April 27 condemned Biden’s remarks. “As the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, we regretfully and strongly condemn US President Joe Biden’s remarks in a statement dated April 24, 2021 to adopt the Armenian lobbies’ claims on the events of 1915,” said a joint declaration by political parties in the legislature.

The parliament called on Biden to correct his mistake by changing his remarks on the events of 1915 in the statement that was approved by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Republican People’s Party (CHP), the IYI Party and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

Only the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) voted against it and called for justice for the Armenian genocide in the land in which it took place. “The great crime went unpunished, and discrimination and hate crimes became commonplace,” said the statement.

According to the HDP, the Armenian genocide symbolizes the “politics of massacre” toward the Greek, Syriac, Chaldean, Kurdish, Alevi and Yazidi minorities of Turkey and that confronting this genocidal tendency is the “sine qua non of a common life together.”

Paylan thinks Armenians have been trying to continue living in Turkey since the genocide but says they always remain silent in racist environments. “We experienced a long silence that lasted for three generations, and this silence was broken only after the 1990s, with the struggle for democratization and Hrant Dink’s efforts. After this silence, we, a small number of Armenians who spoke out, introduced the 1915 Armenian genocide to the majority of Turkish society, and even though they were reluctant to use the word ‘genocide,’ they acknowledged this great catastrophe. This is progress that cannot be underestimated.”

According to Paylan, the Armenian genocide took place in Turkey, and justice should be achieved again in these lands. Therefore, the first step should be to realize the pain of the Armenians.

“We should be the narrators of our history and suffering because only a democratic Turkey can face the Armenian genocide. For this confrontation, we need to support our comrades who are struggling for democracy in Turkey. In the parliaments of the world, genocide is being recognized, but our wounds are not healing. We need to continue our struggle in Turkey where we belong.”

Paylan is convinced there is a regression in Turkey today and that the country is in great darkness, but he believes this regression will come to an end and that Turkey will emerge from the darkness.

“One thing that should not be forgotten is that millions of people in Turkey accept the Armenian genocide. In this respect the democratization movement should be kept alive in Turkey. I am fighting for democratization and paying the price; I will never give up and will continue my fight. I am not afraid, many people are standing by me. I never think of leaving Turkey. I hope I will not have to do that.”