From: Henry Theriault <henry.theriault@genocidescholars.org>
Sent: Tuesday, May 18, 2021 4:50 PM
To: Rosa Balfour <rosa.balfour@ceip.org>; Lizza Bomassi <lbomassi@ceip.org>; Carnegie Europe Program <Carnegie.Brussels@ceip.org>
Subject: Letter Regarding April 30 Publication

Dear Dr. Balfour and Esteemed Colleagues at Carnegie Europe,

On behalf of a group of academics and practitioners concerned over the article by Thomas de Waal published on April 30 by your institution, I am sending to you the attached letter and kindly ask you to respond within the specified period.

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Kind regards,

Henry C. THERIAULT, Ph.D.

May 18, 2021

Dr. Rosa Balfour
Director, Carnegie Europe
Rue du Congrès, 15
1000 Brussels, Belgium

VIA E-MAIL

Re:  Letter of Protest Over Thomas de Waal’s April 30 Article and Request for Retraction or Publishing a Rebuttal

Dear Dr. Balfour:

On April 30, your esteemed organization published an article by Carnegie Senior Fellow Thomas De Waal entitled “What Next After the U.S. Recognition of the Armenian Genocide?” We write to you as a group of academics and practitioners who care about scholarly integrity and rigor. With
our backgrounds in Genocide Studies, Middle Eastern History, International Law, Political Science, Journalism, and other fields, we hold Carnegie Europe’s work in high regard.

Although the article has already been corrected to fix some of the egregious statements, it remains riddled with factual errors and misrepresentations. We would like to highlight only three of the most serious examples of those errors with this letter and ask your reputable organization to allow us an opportunity for a more detailed rebuttal by the signatories or an established scholar.

De Waal’s placement of the Armenian Genocide narrowly within the years 1915 and 1916 is contrary to decades of academic research on this issue. Even a quick glance at the United States Library of Congress subject heading for the Armenian Genocide lists it as “Armenian Genocide, 1915-1923.” This sort of carelessness by a Carnegie Senior Fellow is quite shocking.

Further, to bolster his assertion that the 1948 UN Genocide Convention does not apply retroactively, de Waal attributes to Raphael Lemkin words and arguments that the latter never said nor implied. In fact, by Lemkin’s own statements in print and in a recorded television interview, the Armenian Genocide was a reference case for him in creating the definition of genocide—a far cry from de Waal’s assertion that Lemkin would argue that the term “cannot be applied retroactively.” It is not only an inappropriate use of Lemkin’s name, but moreover, the argument itself is also irrelevant to what the convention or international legal norms dictate. Carnegie Europe’s credibility suffers by publishing a piece that is so easily refutable. Moreover, such perverse line of thinking also opens the gates wide for deniers of other atrocities that took place prior to the Genocide Convention, such as the Holocaust.

In citing the figure of “5 million deaths” in the late Ottoman Empire from 1914-1922, de Waal asserts that “vast numbers” of the dead were Muslim. In other words, he lumps the 1.5 million Armenians systematically massacred by the state with the Turks and Kurds who died from a number of causes (such as the Spanish Flu, water contamination from large numbers of rotting Armenian corpses, as well as internecine and international skirmishes). Piling all casualties into one category of “death” is irredeemably irresponsible and morally reprehensible. How would it sound if a neo-Nazi made a similar argument by pointing to the fact that millions of Germans died during WWII alongside six million Jews? It would sound like obfuscation, the minimization and denial of a crime targeting a specific population. It sounds the same way in the case of the Armenian Genocide.

These are a few of the reasons we believe de Waal’s article requires a response by a specialist in the field. Moreover, keeping the article published in its current form undermines Carnegie Europe’s self-described presentation as “a trusted source on European foreign and security policy.” To meet Carnegie Europe’s goal of keeping “a multiplicity of perspectives on the most pressing global challenges to European audiences,” we recommend either the full retraction of de Waal’s
article with an explanatory statement, or a response authored by the signatories of the letter or an established scholar in the field be published on your website. By retracting or publishing a scholarly response to the errors, omissions, and false equivalence of de Waal’s article, Carnegie Europe would maintain its integrity while upholding the values that we all—followers of Carnegie Europe’s work along with the leadership at Carnegie Europe, including the late Vartan Gregorian—hold dear.

We look forward to hearing from you within a week from the date of sending this letter.

Sincerely,

Henry Theriault, PhD, President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars and Co-Editor of Genocide Studies and Prevention (Worcester, MA)
Karena Avedissian, PhD, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (Los Angeles, CA)
Michael Bobelian, Esq, Author of “Battle for the Marble Palace” and “Children of Armenia: A Forgotten Genocide and the Century-Long Struggle for Justice” (New York)
Bedross Der Matossian, PhD, Hymen Rosenberg Associate Professor of Judaic Studies and History, University of Nebraska, Lincoln (Nebraska)
Harout Ekmanian, Esq., LL.M. Harvard Law School (New York, NY)
Lisa Gulessarian, PhD, Preceptor at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University (Cambridge, MA)
Laurent Leylekian, PhD, Former Director of the European Armenian Federation for Justice & Democracy (Paris, France)
Philipp Lottholz, PhD, University of Giessen (Germany)
Marc A. Mamigonian, Director of Academic Affairs, National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (Boston, MA)
Polina Manolova, PhD, University of Tuebingen (Germany)
Alison Tahmizian Meuse, Senior Fellow at the Regional Studies Center of Yerevan (Beirut, Lebanon)
Elyse Semerdjian, PhD, Professor of Middle Eastern History at Whitman College (Washington)
Judith Saryan, Board Member of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (Boston, MA)
Mark Youngman, PhD, University of Portsmouth (UK)

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From: Rosa Balfour <rosa.balfour@ceip.org>
Sent: Tuesday, May 25, 2021 10:10 AM
To: Henry Theriault <henry.theriault@genocidescholars.org>
Subject: RE: Letter Regarding April 30 Publication

Dear Dr Theriault,

Thank you for your letter. I appreciate that you have decided to contact me in a polite fashion and that you have taken the time to illustrate your arguments. I am also mindful that this issue is deeply contentious and inevitably stirs emotions.

However, I also feel that the main points of Thomas de Waal’s article ‘What Next after the US Recognition of the Armenian Genocide?’ were perhaps not fully appreciated. Tom’s commentary focuses more on the policy implications of the decision of the Biden Administration. Rather than make a historical assessment of events, he explores how the issue has been politicized and what may come of this new step, whilst arguing in favour of more historical research in the events of the time.

Let me also reassure you that Carnegie Europe’s quality has not been jeopardized by this article. Our excellence is based on a meticulous attention to quality and all our publications undergo peer review processes involving several scholars. In this particular case, and fully aware the difficulties in writing on this subject, Tom also consulted a plurality of views outside the Carnegie family. You will find attached a precise and detailed response to the individual issues you raise in your letter.

What I did not appreciate were some allusions to Tom’s expertise. Thomas de Waal is an internationally recognized scholar, and his work is hugely appreciated in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, including by the late Vartan Gregorian. The Armenian Genocide is among his areas of expertise. He knows the history and historiography very well, having researched it for his book, Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide (OUP, 2015).

Personally, I find Tom’s article very balanced and sensitive.

For the reasons above, I will not retract the article nor will I publish a response by non-Carnegie scholars.

I hope the letter attached clarifies your objections and that you can acknowledge the spirit of a policy-relevant article written with deep knowledge of the issues and empathy.

Best regards,
Dr Rosa Balfour
RESPONSE TO LETTER OF MAY 18

May 25, 2021

Dr. Rosa Balfour has passed on to me a letter with criticism of my recent article for Carnegie Europe, “What Next after the U.S. Recognition of the Armenian Genocide?”

The criticism of my article is a reminder, if I had needed one, of the need to tread carefully around this subject, which is still a matter of pain for almost all Armenian families. I am genuinely sorry if some Armenians found my words insensitive. Having said that, I think the signatories of the letter have misunderstood and misread the article.

Let me take the three main points in the letter in turn:

1. I refer to the Armenian Genocide as being of “1915-16” in accordance with historians, who describe a process which began in April 1915 and culminated with the slaughter in Der Zor, ending in January 1917. After that a new phase began, also full of bloodshed, but less characterized by state-sponsored killing. Here is Ronald Suny in his book, They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else:

“The Genocide of the Armenians can be said to have ended by late January 1917. Mass starvation continued, as well as sporadic killing. Refugees died, and fighting between Armenians, Turks, and Kurds went on until the early 1920s, but the intentional massacre of Armenians and Assyrians by the Ottoman state gradually ceased.” (Ronald Grigor Suny, They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else, A History of the Armenian Genocide, Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 330.)

2. On the issue of Raphael Lemkin and genocide not being retroactive. It is well known that Lemkin defined the destruction of the Armenians as a genocide and as a historical precedent. I wrote about this in my book at length. I referred to it recently in a Twitter thread of April 22. The link I give in the article is to Lemkin’s reminiscences, as follows:

“A bold plan was formulated in my mind. This consisted obtaining the ratification by Turkey among the first twenty founding nations. This would be an atonement for genocide of the Armenians. But how could this be achieved? . . . The Turks are proud of their republican form of government and of progressive concepts, which helped them in
replacing the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The genocide convention must be put within the framework of social and international progress. I knew however that in this conversation both sides will have to avoid speaking about one thing, although it would be constantly in their minds; the Armenians."

My point should be clear, that Lemkin was saying that modern Turkey would make "atonement for the genocide of the Armenians," for crimes in the past, by ratifying the convention, but he evidently did not believe that this would be a case for criminal prosecution in the present.

3. On the issue of "five million deaths" among the citizens of the Ottoman Empire between 1914 and 1922.

The "five million" number I mention, citing the Robert Schumann Centre, covers the victims of the Armenian Genocide, and all civilians up until 1923 in the Ottoman Empire, but not military casualties. It is a big number that deserves reflection and analysis.

Writing about this era and its legacy, it is important to evoke the singularity of the Armenian Genocide, and also that of the Assyrians. As I wrote in the article, "The Armenian Genocide was the most terrible crime in the sense that the Armenians, and also the Assyrians, were not only killed but also had their culture destroyed."

It is also worth remembering traumas and atrocities suffered by other peoples of eastern Anatolia in that era including the Pontic Greeks and the various Muslim peoples of the region. That these peoples also suffered atrocities is a matter of historical record in the contemporary literature of the time, such as the report of U.S general James Harbord from 1920.

This is a recurring theme in Armenian-Turkish dialogue, and I raised it as my response to the call made by Pres. Biden for “healing and reconciliation” in the Armenian-Turkish context. I believe that movement towards the goal of the eventual acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey itself will be aided by dialogue and discussion of these issues. I also fervently hope that the normalization of recognition of the Armenian Genocide across the world will makes these conversations a bit easier.

Finally, the signatories of the letter mention Vartan Gregorian, the beloved and lately dearly missed president of our sister organization, the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Carnegie Endowment has just published a series of tributes by our scholars, including myself, to Vartan. In my view he embodied the spirit of our “Carnegie family,” and the tradition of Andrew Carnegie himself in seeking to pursue international peace through research, dialogue and rigorous analysis of the most difficult topics. This is the spirit I try to emulate in my work every day.

Sincerely

Thomas de Waal