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Last year was the centenary of the events in the Ottoman Empire in which up to a million and a half Armenians met their death. Historians are on all sides more or less in agreement on what took place then, but present-day Turkey and Armenia continue to be in open disagreement on whether to call these events genocide or not. Attempts to resolve this in a history commission with members from both sides have come to naught and both parties continue to blame each other for this failure.

Even if this disagreement is highly unlikely to lead to any kind of armed conflict between Turkey and Armenia, it has continued to prevent a rapprochement between them and a normalization of their relations. This has not been helped in anyway by how many politicians, governments and parliaments have wanted to join the controversy and have had parliaments pass resolutions on calling the events genocide and demanding everyone to use this terminology.

Even if one regrets the failure of present-day Turkey to address the Armenian mass-murders in a sufficiently open manner, this does not mean that parliaments should be called on to pass resolutions on the issue, let alone adopt legislation on it and on decree by what name everyone has to call it.

What then should be the proper role of politics and politicians vis-a-vis history? It might be easier to begin by laying down what it should NOT be; Historical truths and interpretations of history should not be made into legislative issues. One could therefore also question the way in which Holocaust-denial has been criminalized in some countries. Those who dismiss the concentration camps as mere details and deny the systematic genocide of Jews and other people designated as sub-humans are anti-Semitists intimately linked with racist and Fascist ideology and politics. There is enough legislation criminalizing defamation and incitement on the books without extending the law to explicitly regulate how history should be studied and taught.

As desirable as it is that politicians should have an adequate knowledge and understanding of history so as to be able to address historical issues, they should not do it by resorting to legislation. Their task is to see to it, that historical research is adequately resourced and that it can be carried out freely without governmental guidance. This does not role out politics identifying issues and items where research is needed, nor establishing and funding specific research projects. A good example of this is the project carried out in Finland on all our war deaths between 1914 and 1922, which produced valuable information and enhanced understanding.

Politicians should also see to it, that historians have unlimited and open access to all historical archives, documents and other sources. Notwithstanding the proliferation of international agreements, regulations and directive on almost everything, there are no binding agreements on access to archives and their use. There is, however the International Council on Archives who's

Code of Ethics adopted 20 years ago are a good starting point for working for international and bilateral agreements to enhance open access to archives. At the same time it should be born in mind that that the principle of openness also calls for the sufficient protection of privacy.

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We are living in increasingly ahistorical times, by which I mean that peoples awareness and understanding of from where and how we have arrived at where we are today is diminishing rather than increasing. One consequence of this ignorance is that it also makes it more difficult to see into the future and shape it, fostering what is sometimes described as postmodern here-and-now short-termism.

To assert that those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it may or may not be true, but ignorance will always increase the risk of being made an unconscious prisoner of history and prey to the machinations of politicians seeking to exploit history for their own ends.

History and politics have always been intertwined, even if the links have not always been recognized. These links and the use – and abuse – of history for political ends are much older than the concept of Politics of History, for which there is still no commonly agreed definition. One could give precedence for the concept to Germany, where the roots for the Politics of History lead. Research into the Politics of History seeks to delve into history debates and is interested in everything that comes under the concept of *vergangenheitsbewältigung*. There are very few languages in addition to Finnish into which this is easily translated with a single word. It does not mean the management of History in the sense of manipulating it, but rather refers to addressing one's history with an open mind and coming to terms with it, warts and all. In this respect Germany provides the best model for dealing openly with the most challenging and awful periods of its own history.

The list of countries who have achieved anything close to this frankness with their own history is very short compared to the long list of countries where this has not been possible and where any attempts to do so have been rejected. A positive example could be Post-Apartheid South Africa with its Truth and reconciliation Commission. But it is already a completely different case with Austria which shares to a great extent its 20th century history with neighbouring Germany and which has been with a little help from Hollywood (*Sound of Music*) able to make itself into a victim of National-Socialism and avoid confronting its own past.

The list of bad and even frightening examples is long. Japan and Serbia spring easily into mind, not to mention Russia which can be regarded as the most problematic case in this respect. This is underlined when the country in question is a superpower which can allow its views of history to be directly reflected in its foreign policy. In the authoritarian atmosphere prevailing in Russia with growing restrictions on freedom of speech and civil society it has also lead to a situation where

independent and critical historians may have been put under pressure and intimidated even with physical threats.

In a lecture I held in Tallinn five years ago I noted how "the picture concerning dealing with history is not uniformly depressing. The final and open confession that the Soviet Union was responsible for the mass murders in Katyn and the readiness of the Russian leadership to honour the victims of Stalinism in a joint commemoration with the Polish leaders was an important and real breakthrough for building historical understanding across borders, which because of the tragic death of the President of Poland in the Smolensk air crash on his way to the commemoration became an even stronger instrument for reconciliation".

Since then we have to our dismay seen, how Russian state representatives have again wanted to elevate differing interpretations of history into disagreements between states. The Poles have for their part espoused to an astonishing degree totally incredible conspiracy theories about Russian responsibility for the Smolensk air crash.

However it has to be said, that not all the countries we regard as liberal democracies pass critical scrutiny without remarks. This can be said of the United Kingdom, France and former Colonial powers in general, which still have difficulties in openly addressing the dark corners of the colonial wars in Algeria, Kenya and elsewhere. Even Germany, notwithstanding the kudos it has earned for its *vergangenheitsbewältigung*, still has stones to turn about its own colonial history. But it has to be added, that this has not in these countries lead to restrictions on revisionist and critical historiography of the kind we have seen in states actively engaged in history denial.

The use of history in Asia, where relations between China, Japan and the Republic of Korea are still burdened by different historiographical interpretations of events prior to and during the Second World War. These and most other countries also have disputes concerning the writing and teaching of their own national histories.

I will spare you the details of our own past "history battles in Finland". The happy part is, that these battles belong to history and no longer engage historians in conflicts, although journalists and politicians sometimes will try to rekindle them.

Also after our independence in 1917 historians have been used before and during the Second World War to support nationalist ambitions for a Greater Finland. After the armistice in 1944 historians were again needed to propagate the thesis of Finland as Germany's cobelligerent conducting a completely separate war against the Soviet-Union and to explain how Finland was drawn like a piece of driftwood into the Continuation war in 1941. It did not take long for a younger generation of historians to sink the so-called driftwood theory and today there are no controversies among historians about the historical facts of our wartime policy or even their interpretation. Nevertheless there are still sensitivities involved which surface from time to time.

During the Cold War Finns resorted to historical narratives which were useful for us living in the shadow of the Soviet-Union. One example is the way President Urho Kekkonen personified and overstressed the role of Lenin in recognizing the independence of Finland. The calculating Kekkonen knew exactly what he was doing but this understanding did not necessarily apply to all of his followers, who may have swallowed hook line and sinker the simplified view of Finnish independence as a gift from Lenin.

The 1918 Civil War in Finland left deep wounds in our society, which were kept unhealed by the way the War was commemorated by the opposing sides. Neither did historians always contribute to the healing, often actually exacerbating the wounds. In literature it was Väinö Linna and in historiography Jaakko Paavolainen whose works in the beginning of the sixties promoted understanding and reconciliation. They were pioneers for the state of affairs where it has been possible to view these events without linking different interpretations and opinions in any meaningful way to issues concerning or dividing Finns today.

What happened in Finland in 1918 was not unique in the world neither at the time nor today. Fortunately we have been able to gradually establish and strengthen a mind-set emphasizing a common responsibility to intervene to prevent and stop all Human Rights violations and war crimes. We have established an International Criminal Court which should in the last instance see to it that no-one responsible for such crimes has impunity because of the inability or unwillingness of the courts in any country to bring them to justice.

When we today follow news from Rwanda, Srebrenica, Chechnya, Syria or Darfur and as responsible members of the international community take a stand on these events and conflicts we cannot fail to see the similarities with what took place in Finland almost a hundred years ago. We now have to address our own history on the basis of the universal and binding humanitarian criteria we are committed to respecting today.

Finland is one of the few countries in the world that has not undergone any sudden or violent regime changes during its almost one hundred years of independence. Neither have we had to recourse to any political censorship of history books or other literature, apart from briefly after the war in 1944. Even then it was not based on any legislation but rather a form of more or less voluntary self-censorship primarily directed against war-time propaganda material. But almost all the material pertaining to the pre-war and war periods survived in archives or the library basements.

When regimes change, this almost inevitably leads to some purges and rewriting of history. When dictators and dictatorships fall, it is understandable and maybe to some extent also necessary that the statues and monuments erected in their honour also fall. All regime changes will also entail a close scrutiny of the individual responsibility that supporters and officials of the previous

regime had for any crimes committed. This kind of lustration has been done in very different ways, from summary executions and show-trials to long-drawn-out legal processes and truth commissions.

Communist and Fascist takeovers have usually been followed by the former methods; democratic changes have tried to do better. But many still ongoing processes and recurring crisis situations in the former communist countries in East and Central Europe are evidence of the many difficulties and challenges this entails. Post regime-change situations will always entail a demand for the work of historians. While they should be ready to make their knowledge, experience and research results available to those directly engaged in these processes, they should not allow themselves to become institutional parts of them, much less take any role resembling that of a judge.

Let history – and historians – judge is a good and correct slogan, but the judgments passed by history and historians should not have any direct links to or dependence on formal judicial processes.

A regime change, whatever the viciousness of the former regime, should not and cannot entail erasing history, or the eradication of all the very concrete marks and monuments the *ancien regime* has left. A cultured approach to historical monuments should leave an environment where traces of all our history, the more unpalatable and unsavoury parts of it included can be seen and, as times passes, can be regarded as historical relicts which need not unduly bother future generations but will serve as focal points in understanding our common past. Nobody would think of demanding that the ruins of the Colosseum in Rome be demolished because people were tortured and killed there in gladiator games.

This respect and comprehension is even more needed when these relicts may still arouse contradictory memories, feelings and passions among different groups of the population. Memorials to those have lost their lives in wars and conflicts should be and usually are respected irrespective of the nationality of the victims.

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I have warned about politicians who abuse history for different purposes in a way which uphold and deepen confrontations or even hostilities between peoples and countries. Unfortunately there is nothing that would a priori exclude the possibility that historians like any other professional group would not lend their knowledge and expertise to abusive purposes. Examples abound of historians who have been party to this kind of abuse either as initiators or when pandering to the powers-that-be.

There are also plenty of examples of differing historical interpretations being party to creating and fostering conflicts. The differences between Turkey and Armenia on the interpretation of the

events in 1915 are far from the worst cases, and the historical roots for many of these conflicts may go back to 500 centuries or more. More recent events too call for dismantling the traumas of the past in an open and honest manner, and when this succeeds it can have a directly therapeutic value as the fragments of the national identity are put together again.

This is not easy. The statement of how the “Balkans produce more history than they can consume” seem still hold true, even if it is wrongly attributed to Winston Churchill. History continues to provide fuel for cross-border wars, as is evidenced by the disputes between Croatia and Serbia or how myths about the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 continue to poison Kosovo-Serbian relations. In the Far East Chinese and Korean relations with Japan continue to be held hostage by the history of Japanese imperialism.

Colonial history remains a challenging subject. Efforts to describe it in a way which would bring together the experiences and views of both those responsible for and those subjected to it are rare indeed.

One could go on listing such examples at length. We can with good reason criticize the many countries and their leaders as well as the historians who lend themselves to the nationalist and confrontation-seeking use of history. These historians are a minority, but the works of any historian can be quoted and misused. This is why it is extremely important to engage in dialogue with all historians as researchers with the aim of encouraging and supporting the possibilities for independent and critical historical research transcending borders, so that historians could also be contributors to conflict prevention and resolution.

Such work does not finish with agreements putting an end to conflicts. Neglect of post-conflict aftercare leads easily to renewal of the conflict. Aftercare also entails writing the history of the conflict in a way which meets the approval of all parties to it. We can well imagine how challenging this is for example writing a common history for Cyprus, not to mention how to write Middle Eastern history if and when a lasting peace can be made between Israel and Palestine.

The use and abuse of history is an issue which I have discussed already for many years with historians, scholars of international relations, diplomats and politicians in Finland and countless other countries. My vision for how international cooperation between historians could actively and systematically be used for conflict prevention, resolution and mediation has been met everywhere positively.

Encouraged by this reception last June a large number of Finnish historians were brought together to discuss the issue. At the end of the discussion we decided to establish an NGO called Historians without Borders in Finland.

According to the statutes of Historians without Borders the aim of the organisation is to

- promote and deepen general and comprehensive knowledge and understanding of history;
- promote open and free access to historical material and archives;
- promote interactive dialogue between different views and interpretations of history to bring closer diverging views of the course of historical events;
- support efforts to impede the abuse of history to foster conflicts or to sustain enemy-images and distorted myths, and to contribute to the use of history in defusing conflicts and in conflict-resolution.

The first major project of our organisation has been the publishing of an anthology on the Use and Abuse of History which came out in Finnish and English.

The central aim of the initiative Historians without Borders has been to establish an international network. Our organisation together with the University of Helsinki, The Finnish Institute for International Affairs and other partners organised an international conference in May in Helsinki with the title Historians without Borders – The Use and Abuse of History in Conflicts, where at the final plenary of the conference the 300 participants unanimously adopted the declaration on establishing the International Network of Historians without Borders.

Wanting to promote and deepen the general understanding of history;

Calling on historians to defuse conflicts by sharing knowledge about history in conflict-resolution processes;

Recognizing the role of historians in reconciling divergent views about historical events by promoting interactive dialogue between differing interpretations of history;

Concerned about how insufficient historical knowledge and understanding leaves people vulnerable to the misuse of historical narratives and impedes their ability to see into the future;

Emphasizing the need for concentrated efforts to counteract the misuse of history;

Appealing to governments and legislatures to refrain from unilaterally passing resolutions and legislation on controversial interpretations of historical events;

Underlining that an understanding approach to historical monuments should leave an environment where traces of all our history can be seen and in due time serve as focal points for understanding our common past;

Stressing the importance of open and free access to historical material and archives;

Welcoming the initiative of Historians without Borders in Finland to convene the international conference Historians without Borders: the Use and Abuse of History in Conflicts;

Meeting in Helsinki at this conference we have agreed to continue working together in order to

- deepen general and comprehensive knowledge and understanding of history;

- promote open and free access to historical material and archives;
- encourage interactive dialogue between different views and interpretations of history to assist in the process of mutual understanding;
- support efforts to identify the abuse of history in fostering and sustaining conflicts,
- help defuse conflicts and contribute to conflict-resolution processes;
- to promote the teaching of history in the spirit of this declaration;
- incorporate an understanding of the role of women and gender perspectives in efforts to build peace and resolve conflicts;

and have today decided to establish an international network of Historians without Borders. Historians without Borders invites all professional historians and others working with historical issues and international relations, who are willing to build better mutual understanding of history and want to prevent the misuse of history to create and foster conflicts, to join our network.

The network will establish a roster of historians who are available as independent scholars and experts to work in commissions, working groups and other fora in aid of promoting a culture of peace, confidence-building, mediation and conflict resolution.

The network will promote and engage in independent and cross-border study of historical Conflicts.

We have appointed an international coordinating committee with Jan C. Behrends, Carl Bildt, Vasu Gounden, Margaret MacMillan, Erkki Tuomioja, Christina Twomey and Sergei Zhuravlev as members to guide the work of the network.

The committee can also co-opt new members to enhance the geographical and gender representation. A full meeting of the network will be convened next year to take stock and decide on the future structures of the network.

The network welcomes the contribution that Historians without Borders in Finland is prepared to extend to the network at its initial stage in the form of secretarial services.

Agreed in Helsinki 20th of May 2016

All of the IAHLHI participants are also welcome to join the network, which entails no fees or obligations apart from signing the declaration and acting to further its aims.