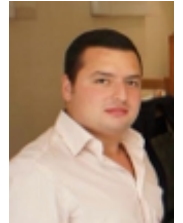


# Turkey's Gallipoli centenary events are set to become the latest focal point in the Armenian genocide dispute

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2015/04/08/gallipoli-centenary-events-are-being-used-by-turkey-to-overshadow-the-commemoration-of](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2015/04/08/gallipoli-centenary-events-are-being-used-by-turkey-to-overshadow-the-commemoration-of)

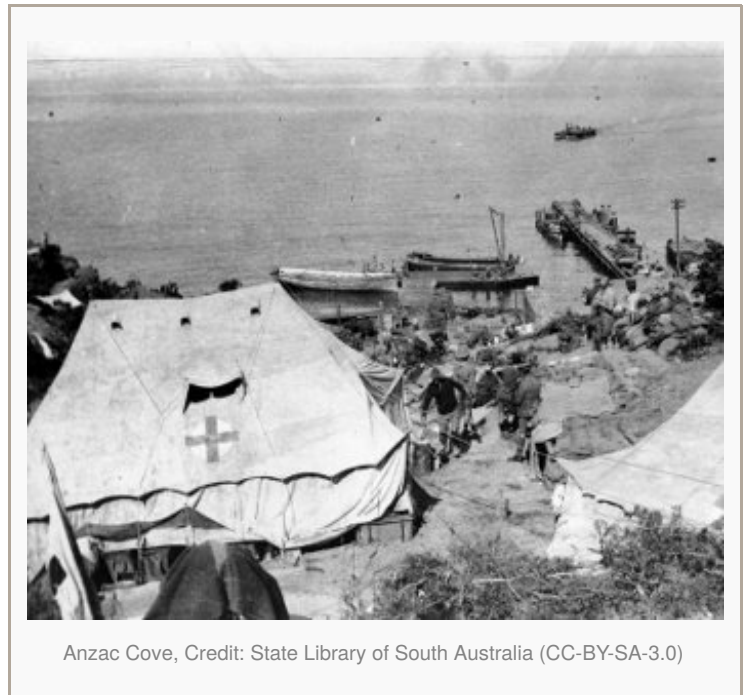
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*On 24 April, events will be held in Turkey to commemorate the First World War campaign in Gallipoli, which took place in 1915. [Hayk Hovhannisyan](#) writes, however, that the commemoration has generated controversy because it risks overshadowing another centenary: that of the mass killing of Armenians, which is traditionally marked on the same day. He argues that Turkey's decision to bring the date forward one day from the usual date of 25 April was made for political reasons and that the international community should be more willing to criticise Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan over the issue.*



During WWI, in early 1915, the British decided to mount a naval expedition to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula on the western shore of the Dardanelles, with Constantinople as its objective. The naval attack [began](#) on 19 February.

On 25 April the first wave of Anzacs, short for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, disembarked from 36 rowing boats and surged up the steep cliffs of the Peninsula under the shells and bullets of the Ottoman troops. They managed to capture a small strip of land and held it for several months. Since the 1920s, 25 April has been commemorated in Australia and New Zealand as Anzac Day and is one of the major national occasions for the two countries. Memorial services are held at numerous war monuments, and many Australians and New Zealanders, as well as Turks, gather at the immediate location of the landing.



Despite the fact that 25 April, as the commemoration day of the Gallipoli campaign, is firmly fixed by a decades-old tradition, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has recently sent out invitations to more than a hundred world leaders to commemorate

the Centennial of the Campaign in Turkey on, importantly, 24 April. Of course, one could shrewdly advocate for the date being brought forward saying that the initial attack was scheduled on 23 April, or that *HMS Prince of Wales* started manoeuvring off the Gallipoli shore on the eve of the landing. In reality, however, the date chosen had a political motive. It is an attempt to overshadow another commemorative event that will be taking place on the same day, roughly a thousand miles east of Anzac Cove, in Yerevan: the centenary of the Armenian Genocide.

## A century of denial

Perpetrated by the Young Turks' regime of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian Genocide claimed lives, lands and the millennial heritage of more than 1.5 million Armenians. This ruinous event in the history of the Armenian people is annually commemorated on 24 April, the day in 1915 when hundreds of Armenian intellectuals were rounded up and killed in Constantinople, giving start to the wider barbaric annihilation of the Armenian population across the Empire. The goal of the Young Turks was to create a homogenous Muslim population; a [backbone](#) for the newly

forming Turkish nationhood. To this date, Turkey does not recognise this act as genocide, although dozens of states, international organisations and many of Turkey's own citizens have been calling on their successive governments to do so.

Official Yerevan and Armenian Diaspora communities across the world are preparing a memorial programme on an unprecedented scale for the Centennial. The Armenian capital will be hosting hundreds of top-level guests, including the French President François Hollande. On 28 August 2014 the Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandyan attended Erdoğan's inauguration ceremony in Ankara and personally passed him an official invitation from the President of Armenia to participate in the commemoration of the victims of the Genocide. Without responding, the Turkish President decided to organise an event of his own on the same day and, among other heads of state, [sent an invitation](#) to Armenian President Serge Sargsyan in January.

There are two main reasons for the international community to stop short of accommodating these actions. First, Erdoğan has a harmful leadership style, both for Turks and non-Turks. In the last two years, in the role of Prime Minister, he violently [crushed](#) the Gezi Park protests, oppressed free speech through [bans](#) on Twitter and YouTube, held a highly controversial [stance](#) toward the Islamic State and Islamic extremism in general, averted his eyes to [illegal imports](#) of oil from Islamic State, and has appeared at the [epicentre](#) of a major corruption scandal.

Taken together, these examples sketch a personal philosophy of leadership for solving social, economic and political issues, which could be summarised as striking hard, irrespective of whether he is right or wrong, achieving his goal, and holding on until the noise dies down. And it usually does. The above-mentioned manipulation with the dates is an example of this approach, and by allowing it to go unchecked, the international community does nothing to discourage similar actions in the future, either by Erdoğan, or other leaders.

Secondly, by not taking a stronger stance against Erdoğan, the international community shows clear signs of double standards in international policy, which simply erode the notions of "truth" and "fairness" – two central concepts for sustaining a just world order. We have already seen, for example during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, that the threat of boycotting events of landmark importance to a nation can be used to exert pressure (in this case over the issue of homophobia). Given statements from Erdoğan such as his [claim](#) that 'women are not equal to men', combined with the violations of the principles of human rights and a peaceful world order outlined above, it is reasonable to ask why there are no similar calls for boycotts of the 24 April event to mark the centenary of the Gallipoli landing, given its dubious itinerary and goals.

It is not a secret that Turkey has always been perceived by the West as a potent lever against the growth of Russia's influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the precarious nature of tolerating the distortion of history. If accepted in one case the principle can lead to similar attitudes in other cases.

A relatively amusing, but also concerning example would be the assertion Erdoğan made in November 2014 during a meeting with Muslim leaders from Latin America, where he [claimed](#) that Muslims discovered America three centuries before Columbus. He based his belief on the fact that Columbus had allegedly mentioned a mosque on top of a hill in Cuba. In reality this [refers](#) to a metaphorical description of a hilltop in the Bahamas figuring in the diary of the great pioneer. Nevertheless, when criticised for his declaration, Erdoğan vigorously protected his position, [accusing](#) Muslim doubters of simply a "lack of self-confidence".

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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