A CONTROVERSIAL AND EMBARRASSING ACADEMIC APPOINTMENT BY AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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At a time when the academic world is trying hard to erase racism and other forms of discrimination, Clark University in Massachusetts/USA seems to be going back in time by awarding chairs to authors with racist and discriminatory behavior. In a recent announcement, Clark University announced Elyse Semerdjian as the next Kaloosdian Mugar Professor.[1]

Elyse Semerdjian, an Armenian American professor of Middle East History, formerly at Whitman College, is most well-known for involvement in a recent scandal in the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye that took place last February when she made blatantly racist remarks concerning the victims.

Following the earthquakes, Armenia sent a rescue team to Türkiye and forwarded humanitarian aid to the earthquake zones. However, the humanitarian aid received fierce criticism and opposition from the hardcore Armenian nationalists that unfortunately make up a vociferous portion of the population in the Armenian Diaspora. The vile and hateful remarks by these people mocked and dehumanized the earthquake victims solely based on their Turkish identity and argued that Armenia should have never sent aid to them.

As a professor of humanities, one would have expected Semerdjian to condemn and reject such racist and hateful remarks. Instead, Semerdjian added fuel to the fire by adding her own hateful and racist remarks. She assured such fanatical Armenians, in a tweet she posted just 5 days after the earthquakes, that the humanitarian aid was only being sent to non-Turkish populations and, according to her, in doing so, Armenia was merely helping non-Turks against the Turks in their eternal struggles since the areas affected by the earthquakes are (according Semerdjian) mostly populated by non-Turks and that these people are persecuted by and thus hostile to the Turks.

So far Semerdjian has not apologized or retracted her comments, and instead of facing the justified criticism, she has deactivated her account and run away from the public reactions to her racist behavior.

Clark Universitys appointment of Semerdjian can only be interpreted as awarding irredentism, racism and discrimination, an alarming and scandalous development for an American institution of esteem. It is to be seen if the universitys faculty and the students will protest this appointment, as such individuals should not be allowed to abuse their

academic clout to spread hatred. Allowing racist and discriminatory behavior to go unpunished will only result in greater insults and tragedies for the victims of racism.

[1] Clark News and Media Relations, Armenian Genocide scholar to join the Strassler Center, *ClarkNow*, March 1, 2023, https://clarknow.clarku.edu/2023/03/01/armenian-genocide-scholar-to-join-the-strassler-center/

About the Author :

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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