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When will Noah's Dove return?

By Haroutiun Khachatrian

An interesting analysis was presented in Yerevan on May 5. The European Stability Initiative, a non-profit research and policy institute, having offices in Berlin, Brussels; Pristina and Istanbul, presented the results of its research about some aspects of the Armenian-Turkish relations.

The ESI is presented as a multinational group "created in recognition of the need for independent, in-depth analysis of the complex issues involved in promoting stability and prosperity in Europe."

The report presented by the ESI to the attention of the Yerevan audience had an intriguing title, "Noah's Dove Returns. Armenia, Turkey and the Debate on Genocide". It presented the results of a study performed in Turkey and Armenia in the last year about issues most discussed in both countries, and are seen as a major obstacle in establishing

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Stay in touch



Nairit explosion



Four people were killed and 13 wounded by an explosion at Nairit, the biggest chemical factory of Armenia on Thursday. Authorities state the explosion caused no environmental problem

IMF predicts a 5% GDP decline in Armenia

A regular Regional Economic Outlook of the IMF for Middle East and Central Asia has been made public recently. At the presentation of the report in Yerevan last week the IMF representatives presented their prognosis, according to which in 2009 GDP in Armenia will fall 5% and in 2010 the decline will stop but no growth will start. Below are fragments of the above-mentioned report relevant for our region.

The Caucasus and Central Asia: A Bumpy Road Ahead?

The global downturn is taking a toll on the Caucasus and Central Asia (CCA) region. Growth is expected to almost come to a halt this year, and current account and fiscal balances are moving toward deficit. While linkages to international financial markets are weak in most countries, the global economic crisis is being transmitted to the region via falling commodity prices, declining export demand, and lower remittance inflows, particularly from Russia. Policies should focus on providing support

to growth and safeguarding financial systems, while managing external adjustment.

Growth set to slow sharply as the global crisis bites

Economic developments in the CCA region have been very favorable in recent years. Real GDP growth averaged 12 percent during 2005-07, before slowing to a still-solid 6.3 percent in 2008. The regional average in 2008 reflects significant slowdowns in Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, but still-strong growth in other countries. For most hydrocarbon importers, remittance-driven demand was the main engine of growth. Inflation pressures had been building since 2004, peaking in mid-2008, but dissipating in the second half of the year with the decline in international commodity prices. CCA headline inflation had receded to about 12 percent year on year at end-2008. Driven by high energy prices and the coming onstream of new oil fields, fiscal and current account balances in hydrocarbon exporters improved until 2008. Fiscal developments in hydrocar-

bon importers were more mixed, while current account balances deteriorated.

The global downturn is affecting most CCA countries, with real GDP growth in the region expected to almost come to a halt in 2009. High-frequency indicators, such as industrial production, point to a sharp slowing in activity starting in the fourth quarter of 2008 in a number of countries. In Kazakhstan and Georgia, spreads on externally issued bonds have also risen sharply and, in Kazakhstan, the stock market has plunged. In Armenia and Kazakhstan, the economy is expected to contract in 2009, while growth will be just barely positive in Georgia and the Kyrgyz Republic. Only Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are expected to delink somewhat from the global recession and achieve real GDP growth of 7 percent on account of favorable developments in their hydrocarbon sectors and fiscal stimulus.

Assuming some recovery in the global economy, real GDP growth is expected to strengthen generally

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After Prague

By David Petrosyan

The long-awaited meeting between Armenian and Azeri Presidents in Prague is over. Representatives of the OSCE Minsk Group mediator countries had been long "leading" Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev to these



negotiations. A meeting between Serzh Sargsyan and President of Turkey Abdullah Gul also took place in Prague.

And what are the real results of the Armenian and Azeri Presidents' meeting?

The interpretation of the meeting results is equivocal. Some media characterized the first assessments as "cautious optimism." Suffice it to read attentively American Co-chair Matthew Bryza's statement on the meeting

results and then the joint statement of all three Co-chairs from the U.S., Russia, and France.

However, later statements and actions of interested figures and sides have been evidence that in fact there are many problems in the negotiations process. In particular, evidence of it is the statement of French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, in which he calls the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan for "not losing heart." Thus, we can make a supposition that indeed the term "cautious optimism" has been put into use too early.

Then American and Russian Co-chairs Matthew Bryza and Yuri Merzliakov gave interviews to the Ekho Moskvi Russian radio station.

At that, Bryza made a statement that not only all territories currently under control of Armenia beyond the boundaries of the former Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region, but Nagorno Karabakh proper will be returned to Baku's jurisdiction. True, then Bryza did what he usually does in such cases: made corrections to his theses and made understand that some status will be given to Nagorno Karabakh, maybe a temporary one (Bryza used the term "situation" / "interest-

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Remarks at House of Commons, Demanding Justice for Armenians



By Harut Sassounian
Publisher, The California Courier

At the invitation of the British-Armenian All-Party Parliamentary Group (BAAPPG), I spoke on May 7 at a special conference on the Armenian Genocide held at the House of Commons, Committee Room 3, the British Parliament, London. Dr. Israel Charny, Director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem, was also invited to speak at this conference. Regrettably, due to a last minute illness, Dr. Charny could not attend. His prepared remarks titled, "Denial of Genocide is not only a political tactic, it is an attack on decent people's minds and emotions," was read by Peter Barker, a former broadcaster of BBC Radio.

The conference was chaired by House of Lords member Baroness Cox, Chairman of BAAPPG. In attendance were: Members of the House of Lords, the Armenian Desk officer of the Foreign Office, representatives from the Embassies of Greece, Kuwait, Serbia, Slovenia, and Syria, non-governmental organizations, scholars, journalists, and other distinguished guests.

In my remarks titled, "Armenian Genocide and Quest for Justice," I cited the acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide by the United Nations, European Parliament, legislatures of more than 20 countries, U.S. House of Representatives, Pres. Reagan, 42 out of 50 U.S. States, and the International Association of Genocide Scholars.

I concluded that "after so many acknowledgments, the Armenian

Genocide has become a universally recognized historical fact."

I expressed regret that the United Kingdom remained one of the rare major countries that has yet to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide. I pointed out that "Britain's siding with a denialist state is not so much due to lack of evidence or conviction, but, sadly, because of sheer political expediency, with the intent of appeasing Turkey." I urged British officials to heed the cautionary words of Prime Minister Winston Churchill who said: "An appeaser is someone who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last."

I suggested that Armenians no longer needed to convince the world that what took place during the years 1915-23 was "a genocide."

Here are excerpts from my May 7 speech:

"A simple acknowledgment of and a mere apology, however, would not heal the wounds and undo the consequences of the Genocide. Armenians are still waiting for justice to be meted out, restoring their historic rights and returning their confiscated lands and properties.

"In recent years, Armenian-American lawyers have successfully filed lawsuits in U.S. federal courts, securing millions of dollars from New York Life and French AXA insurance companies for unpaid claims to policy-holders who perished in the Genocide. Several more lawsuits are pending against other insurance companies and German banks to recover funds belonging to victims of the Armenian Genocide.

"In 1915, a centrally planned and executed attempt was made to uproot from its ancestral homeland and decimate an entire nation, depriving the survivors of their cultural heritage as well as their

homes, lands, houses of worship, and personal properties.

"A gross injustice was perpetrated against the Armenian people, which entitles them, as in the case of the Jewish Holocaust, to just compensation for their enormous losses.

"Restitution can take many forms. As an initial step, the Republic of Turkey could place under the jurisdiction of the Istanbul-based Armenian Patriarchate all of the Armenian churches and religious monuments which were expropriated and converted to mosques and warehouses or outright destroyed.

"In the absence of any voluntary restitution by the Republic of Turkey, Armenians could resort to litigation, seeking 'restorative justice.'

"In considering legal recourse, one should be mindful of the fact that the Armenian Genocide did neither start nor end in 1915.

"Large-scale genocidal acts were committed starting with Sultan Abdul Hamid's massacre of 300,000 Armenians from 1894 to 1896; the subsequent killings of 30,000 Armenians in Adana by the Young Turk regime in 1909; culminating in the Genocide of 1.5 million Armenians in 1915 to 1923; and followed by forced Turkification and deportation of tens of thousands of Armenians by the Republic of Turkey.

"Most of the early leaders of the Turkish Republic were high-ranking Ottoman officials who had participated in perpetrating the Armenian Genocide. This unbroken succession in leadership assured the continuity of the Ottomans' anti-Armenian policies. The Republic of Turkey, as the continuation of the Ottoman Empire, could therefore be held responsible for the Genocide.

"An important document,

recently discovered in the U.S. archives, provides irrefutable evidence that the Republic of Turkey continued to uproot and exile the remnants of Armenians well into the 1930's motivated by purely racist reasons. The document in question is a 'Strictly Confidential' cable, dated March 2nd, 1934, and sent by U.S. Ambassador Robert P. Skinner from Ankara to the U.S. Secretary of State, reporting the deportation of Armenians.

"In the 1920's and 30's, thousands of Armenian survivors of the Genocide, were forced out of their homes in Cilicia and Western Armenia to locations elsewhere in Turkey or neighboring countries. In the 1940's, these racist policies were followed by the Varlik Vergisi, the imposition of an exorbitant wealth tax on Armenians, Greeks and Jews. And, during the 1955 Istanbul pogroms, many Greeks as well as Armenians and Jews were killed and their properties destroyed.

"This continuum of massacres, genocide and deportations highlights the existence of a long-term strategy implemented by successive Turkish regimes from the 1890's to more recent times, in order to solve the Armenian Question with finality. "Consequently, the Republic of Turkey is legally liable for its own crimes against Armenians, as well as those committed by its Ottoman predecessors.

"Turkey inherited the assets of the Ottoman Empire; And, therefore, it must have also inherited its liabilities.

"Finally, since Armenians often refer to their three sequential demands from Turkey: 'Recognition' of the Genocide; 'Reparations' for their losses; and the 'Return' of their lands, Turks have come to believe that once the Genocide is recognized,

Armenians will then pursue their next two demands.

"This is the main reason why Turks adamantly refuse to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide. They fear that acceptance of the Genocide would lead to other demands for restitution. They believe that by denying the first demand, they would be blocking the ones that are sure to follow.

"The fact is that, commemorative resolutions adopted by legislative bodies of various countries and statements made on the Armenian Genocide by world leaders have no force of law, and therefore, no legal consequence.

"Armenians, Turks and others involved in this historical, and yet contemporary issue, must realize that recognition of the Armenian Genocide or the lack thereof, will neither enable nor deter its consideration by international legal institutions.

"Once Turkish officials realize that recognition by itself cannot and would not lead to other demands, they may no longer persist in their obsessive denial of these tragic events.

"Without waiting for any further recognition, Armenians can pursue their historic rights through proper legal channels, such as the International Court of Justice (where only states have such jurisdiction), the European Court of Human Rights and U.S. Federal Courts.

"Justice, based on international law, must take its course." Following an extensive question and answer period, Armenia's Ambassador to Great Britain, Vahe Gabrieliyan, delivered the closing remarks. Based on the speeches of the two speakers, the BAAPPG issued a statement calling on the British Government to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide.

When will Noah's Dove return?

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normal relationships between them.

During the presentation which was obviously targeted to a limited group of experts only (English was the only working language with no translation envisaged), we learned that during the last years Turkey has undergone deep changes to become closer to the standards of the EU. In particular, the issue of the Armenian Genocide, which is seen by the authors as a principal obstacle to the way of establishing normal relations between the two countries, is no longer a taboo in Turkey. They expressed a hope that further efforts may pave a way to the elimination of mistrust between Armenians and Turks. It was not a surprise to learn the author's opinion that, from their side, the Armenians had to make efforts to get rid of their anti-Turk stereotypes. What stereotypes are there? Here is where one wants to discuss.

That the genocide issue is in fact an important problem which hinders the rapprochement of Armenia and Turkey, and the analysts which presented the report, showed it quite well. Quite unexpectedly for me, the report contained the demand addressed to the Armenian party to give up "dreams of a Greater Armenia" in response

"For their part, Armenians must accept that recognition of the genocide will never pave the way for challenging a territorial settlement that has stood for nearly a century," the report read.

So, the report was tailored as a balanced one, each party presented as having its part of the way to pass for making normalization possible. Meanwhile, the balance presented by the report looks at least, questionable.

From one side, the genocide problem is presented as relevant. This is in fact a widely recognized problem, on which inter-state relations, including those between Turkey and countries like France and USA, depend. On the other side, the problem of so-called Greater Armenia is raised, which is hardly known outside Armenia.

On one side is the Genocide recognition problem, which is an important element of the Turkish policy, and even, according to some experts, is considered by some Turks as threat to the current concept of the Turkish statehood. On the other side is the issue that, as the report authors recognize, is supported by only some marginal specialists and has never been declared as a goal of the state policy. "Maximalist demands for return of historical lands have had to compete with a more pragmatic

official view that recognizes improved relations with Turkey as a strategic imperative for the isolated and landlocked Armenian republic," the report reads. In short, the genocide problem is complicated by the fact that it has been part of the Turkish official policy, which is not the case for the Greater Armenia. How balanced such an approach is?



Lef to right: Nigar Göksel, Gerald Knaus, (ESI Chairman) and Tigran Mkrtchyan during presentation in Yerevan

Finally, the speakers who presented the report, unveiled an interesting detail about the perception of the Genocide in Turkey. They said that those who oppose recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey are divided into two categories. The first category includes people who believe that no genocide has occurred in the Ottoman Empire (or, at least, the number of Armenians killed in 1915 was comparable to that of

killed Turks). So, these people just need to be better informed, they have been misled by the state propaganda. And the second category includes, according to the authors, people who know that genocide did take place, but they oppose its recognition fearing that the act of recognition will be followed by the demands of Armenians to compensate their losses (or those of their ancestors). So, the only way to persuade the people belonging to the second category not to oppose genocide recognition is to make them sure that no demand for compensation will follow the recognition of the truth.

And now, let us remember what the purpose for the worldwide campaign of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is. Every schoolboy in Armenia knows: the purpose is to prevent new genocides. But in case of this part of the Turkish society the reasoning for recognition would be: don't worry! No compensation will be demanded, even if you recognize the truth! One can only imagine how this situation will help reaching the goal, namely, prevention of new genocides. What will be, if those who are planning new possible genocides, are aware that, compensation/punishment may not be inevitable.

The report does not touch this

problem.

Anyway, although it was not directly pronounced, the ESI report has revealed the simple fact, that the problem of the "Noah's Dove return" i.e., the Armenian-Turkish normalization, is more about Turkey than about Armenia. Turkey has much more problems to tackle in this way to normalization than Armenia has. And the above-mentioned balance is, to a large extent, artificial. This was evident not only from the fact that both the report and its presentation in Yerevan were, primarily, about Turkey, and to much lesser extent, about Armenia. Moreover, during the presentation of the report, an interesting forty-minute film shot by ESI was shown. It was fully about the problems of Turkey, and had no relations with the "Noah's Dove Return" problem.

It remains to express satisfaction that the organization is involved in the difficult task of finding ways to facilitate the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. For me, it was good news to see the result of two experts, whom I knew previously, my friend Tigran Mkrtchyan

and Nigar Göksel of Turkey, the researcher and activist, who visits Armenia fairly often and is already well known among the experts in Armenia.