

## **PICTURE STORY**

# **Armenia-Turkey: The Great Debate**

**August 2009**

# Armenia-Turkey: The Great Debate



No single topic poisons relations between Turks and Armenians more than the 1915 destruction of the Armenian communities of Anatolia, and the question of whether it constituted genocide. For Turkey, the fight against genocide recognition on the international stage has been a central goal of foreign policy. For Armenians, the genocide and the resulting loss of a traditional homeland is a defining element of their national identity. This *ESI Great Debate* section looks at some of the arguments, people and issues that have most shaped this debate. It is a debate that matters enormously for both societies.

Gerard Libaridian once defined the battle for the soul of the Armenian republic as the response to the following question: Is the Republic "to be defined by the Genocide and anti-Turkism or become a normal state in peace with its neighbours and in pursuit of the welfare and security of its citizens"? And in December 2008, Turkish intellectuals launched an online signature campaign with the following text:

"My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them."

Cengiz Aktar, a leading liberal intellectual and initiator of the apology campaign, stressed that it is only the beginning of a longer process: "Centenaries to come, almost every year until 2023 and even beyond, will provide us the opportunity to learn and remember the fate of Armenians."

At present, the two countries have no diplomatic relations. The border between them remains closed. In recent times the first signs of a rapprochement have appeared, with the political leadership on both sides making conciliatory gestures. For a normalisation of relations to take place, however, many Turks and Armenians will have to overcome some deeply entrenched prejudices. As this overview shows, it is a process that is already under way.



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## Timeline: 1990-2007



Independence Day celebrations in Yerevan in 2006. Photo: flickr/elmada

### 1991

In April 1991, Turkish Ambassador to the USSR Volkan Vural holds a three day official visit to Yerevan. Vural's visit to Armenia – still officially part of Soviet Union, but on the way to independence – is the first by a high-ranking Turkish official in 70 years.

In a meeting with Ambassador Vural, Levon Ter-Petrossian – then the President of the Supreme Council (the Parliament) of Armenia – declares:

"Armenia is changing, and in this new world we should be neighbour states with new thinking. We want to become friends. We are ready for any type of mutually beneficial cooperation. Armenia has no territorial claims towards Turkey".[\[1\]](#)

After returning to Turkey, Ambassador Vural tells *Hurriyet*, a Turkish newspaper:

"I can say that the new policy toward Turkey adopted by the current Armenian governing bodies is modern and is in the best interests of the two peoples".[\[2\]](#)

*Azg*, an Armenian daily, had attentively been following Turkish press coverage of Armenian-Turkish relations and Turkey's stance on Nagorno-Karabakh issue. In a May 1991 issue *Azg* complained of a great deal of scepticism, if not opposition, towards Armenian-Turkish relations in the Turkish press.

"One of the journalists is even stating that as a precondition the Armenians should officially state that they have no territorial claims towards Turkey. Another journalist says that there is no need to establish economic ties with Armenia while Turkey's 'brother' nation, Azerbaijan, blockades Armenia over the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh".[\[3\]](#)

A June issue of Milliyet, a Turkish newspaper, lived up to such concerns when it reported that Ter Petrossian, in his meeting with Vural, did not utter a single word about Armenia's having no territorial claims toward Turkey. What's more, the newspaper said,

"[Ter Petrossian] did not refrain from saying, insolently, that any foreign interference in the Karabakh issue would make its resolution very hard, and from calling Turkey not to support Azerbaijan – asking, that is to say, for it to betray its brother."[\[4\]](#)

#### 11 September 1991

Receiving a delegation from the US House of Representatives, Ter Petrossian addresses the issue of Armenian-Turkish relations:

"There are serious historical controversies between Armenia and Turkey. The Armenian people cannot forget the Genocide of 1915 committed against it; their demand for the international recognition of the genocide is quite righteous and legal. But in spite of all this Armenia and Turkey should normalize their relations".[\[5\]](#)

#### 23 September 1991

Armenia declares independence.

The AIM journal reports that 77% of Armenians in Armenia reply favour establishing relations with Turkey; the figure among Armenians in the diaspora is 69%.

#### 4 November 1991

Returning from a visit to Armenia (during which he had interviewed Levon Ter Petrossian), Turkish journalist Mehmed Ali Birand shares his impressions on '32 days', a TV program:

"Armenia wants to come out to the outer world, but problems with its closest neighbours are impeding her from doing that. For 4 years it was involved in a civil war with Azerbaijan; the other neighbour, Georgia, is showing a negative attitude towards it; Iran does not have warm attitudes either. [...] In a word, Turkey is Armenia's main hope today. But you can see that the people of Armenia have been pushed against Turkey for years, they have been disciplined in an inimical spirit. Can that people change its stance vis-à-vis Turkey?

[...] It would be a mistake to perceive that everyone is filled with love towards Turkey. Everyone defends the views about the historical events of the past in the same manner. In reality, the current Armenian attitude toward Turkey is conditioned not only by today's difficulties. It is a result of long term political planning, as this stance is viewed as a precondition for the republic's independence and the survival of independent statehood."[\[6\]](#)



*Levon Ter-Petrossian*

27 November 1991

In an interview with the Russian newspaper Izvestiya, Volkan Vural, the Turkish Ambassador to Moscow, declares that Turkey plans to open a consulate in Yerevan.[\[7\]](#)

16 December 1991

The Turkish government recognizes Armenia's independence, though diplomatic relations are not established.

24 December 1991

In a message to Armenian President Levon Ter Petrossian, Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel states that Turkey will develop mutually friendly relations with the Armenian government in accordance with OSCE principles – which, as Demirel underscores, imply accepting the territorial integrity of states and border inviolability.[\[8\]](#)

26 December 1991

The Soviet Union disintegrates.

**1992**

30 January 1992

Armenia is admitted to the OSCE.

Christian Ter Stepanian, an Armenian Foreign Ministry official who had taken part in the OSCE meeting where Armenia was elected, is later to tell Azg Daily about the backdoor negotiations with the Turkish delegation.

"We talked with the Turkish side. They claimed that the Armenian side had territorial claims towards Turkey and as a proof of that they brought the clauses about the so-called land claims in our independence declaration. They required that Armenia: (1) endorse the inviolability of borders and endorse the Kars and Moscow Treaties; (2) not sponsor terrorism and not support organizations that have territorial claims; (3) adopt laws that would exclude racial, ethnic, religious intolerance in Armenia, as well as towards OSCE states.

To our question of what would happen if we did not present such a written statement, the Turks said that they would apply their right of veto against Armenia. Then the US representative undertook the responsibility of mediating. We presented our positions in the following manner:

1. As Levon Ter Petrossian stated in October (1991), Armenia wishes to normalize relations with Turkey without any preconditions;
2. We affirm that there are issues to be resolved between Turkey and Armenia;
3. All those issues that Turkey puts in front of us, we can put in front of Turkey in the same manner. We also stated that we are ready to discuss the issues raised by the Turks according to OSCE principles in bilateral negotiations. The Americans took note of those suggestions, after which Turkey, getting acquainted with our positions, stood back [...] and Armenia became an OSCE member."[\[9\]](#)

## February 1992

As war rages in Nagorno Karabakh, Turkish-Armenian relations deteriorate rapidly. On 25 February, Armenian forces capture the town of Khojaly. Over 600 Azerbaijani civilians die in the ensuing massacre.

On 4 March, Turkish President Turgut Ozal demands that Turkey take more decisive steps to counter the "Armenian atrocities". Hinting at the possibility of armed confrontation, he ponders using Turkish military forces "to halt the Armenian progression".[\[10\]](#)

One of the more immediate consequences of the rise in Turkish-Armenian tensions is the cancellation of a project – developed by Ishak Alaton, a Turkish businessman – to open the Turkish harbour of Trabzon to Armenian shipping. The project also included plans to transit Central Asian gas and oil through Armenia to Trabzon.[\[11\]](#)

Although no Turkish official ever confirmed that Ankara had backed the project, such an ambitious plan could not have been initiated without the tacit agreement of the Turkish government.

As the New York Times was later to report, "the venture collapsed when word of the initiative leaked to Turkish newspapers and [Alaton] was widely criticized for ostensibly collaborating with Turkey's traditional foes in the American-Armenian lobby to bolster Armenia"[\[12\]](#).



*Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) soldiers from the 8th regiment are rushing out of a trench during operation on the Agdam front. Photo: Jonathan Alpeyrie 2008*

### May 1992

The following months see a further increase in tensions between Ankara and Yerevan.

On 9 May, Armenian forces capture the town of Shushi in what is to become a turning point in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. What happened in Shushi, thunders Turkish Prime Minister Demirel, is "Armenian terror against the Azerbaijanis. Henceforth Turkey cannot act as a bystander to the conflict, as it is obvious that the Karabakh conflict is solved through use of force".[\[13\]](#)

As rumours begin to circulate that the Armenians have attacked Nakhijevan – the landlocked Azerbaijani exclave bordering Turkey – the Turkish military goes on high alert. The Chief of the General Staff, General Doghan Güresh, asserts that he is ready to send as many soldiers to Karabakh as the Azerbaijani government will demand.[\[14\]](#) Infantry general Muhittin Fisunoglu announces that "all necessary preparations are done and the army is waiting for a command from Ankara in order to set off."[\[15\]](#)

On 18 May, the Turkish cabinet of ministers adopts a statement warning that "Armenia is heading the wrong way. If it does not stand back from aggressive politics, it will bear responsibility for the consequences." Speaker of Parliament Hikmet Zindoruk then announces, "Turkey's patience has limits. One should not test it too long".[\[16\]](#)

Immediately, Russia decides to check Turkey's ambitions of entering the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Military Commander of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Marshall Yevgeni Shaposhnikov warns that "if another side enters there, we may find ourselves on the threshold of World War III".[\[17\]](#)

## June 1992

On 2 June, Armenian President Ter Petrossian causes a stir in Turkey by telling Cumhuriyet, a Turkish newspaper, that Ankara is pursuing Panturanist policies in the Central Asia and the South Caucasus. (The interview is translated into Armenian and published in Azg Daily.)

To the journalist's question about Turkey's policies in the region, Ter Petrossian replies:

"Would Turkey not pursue ideological aims in the South Caucasus and Central Asia but instead develop its policies on the basis of cultural, scientific and economic developments, we would gladly welcome it. Armenia would participate in such cooperation with pleasure. We believe it would be very effective".

The journalist then asks, "By saying ideological aims what do you mean?" "I mean Panturanism," replies Ter Petrossian, "and the aim of filling in the political vacuum that has emerged in the region."

Concerning the normalisation of the Armenian-Turkish relations Ter Petrossian says:

"Both in Armenia and in the diaspora generations were raised with anti-Turkish sentiments. This was pushed by the previous USSR government. The previous governing administration wished to isolate Armenia from Turkey, aiming at further strengthening the Soviet rule in Armenia [...]. When democratic forces came to power, Armenia succeeded in overcoming these psychological barriers right away. [...] Armenia wishes to see Turkey as a friend and partner state. After all, we are neighbours and our cooperation would be fruitful for both of our countries from an economic and political viewpoint. Would there to have been diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey [...] there would be peace in the region. But I think even now it is not late for this."[\[18\]](#)



*Suleyman Demirel*

On 5 June, Prime Minister Demirel meets with Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Hrant Bagratian in Istanbul. The two discuss the privatization process in Armenia, the Karabakh conflict, and regional economic cooperation. Through Bagratian, Armenian President Ter Petrossian invites the Turkish Prime Minister to Armenia.[\[19\]](#)

On 14 June, Ter Petrossian meets Demirel in Rio de Janeiro. According to Azg Daily, Demirel tells the Armenian President:

"You cannot reach your purposes by war or clashes. After a thousand years you have gotten an opportunity to create an independent Armenia. But you cannot base that state upon revenge, hatred and war. The states founded on brutal force do not last long. [...] You are surrounded by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Unless you establish friendly relations with them you will find yourself in serious problems and difficulties."

Reacting to Ter Petrossian's view that it was Azerbaijan not Armenia that started the Karabakh war, Demirel adds:

"If you want peace, then leave Shushi and Lachin. Moreover, you should know that we are following the events around Nakhichevan with deep concern. We advise you to solve your issues through negotiations with Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan [...] Try to govern your country, and do not invite other countries to interfere in your internal affairs. And do not allow the American Armenians to govern you and your affairs."[\[20\]](#)

Meanwhile, the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul begins receiving anonymous threats, warning of attacks against the Patriarchate and other Armenian targets in Turkey. The Armenian Patriarch, Garegin Ghazanchian, sends a letter to the Turkish Minister of Internal Affairs asking for measures to protect Turkish Armenians and their property, as well as to pre-empt any possible attacks on Armenian religious sites in Turkey.

On 25 June, during a Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) summit in Istanbul, Ter Petrossian tells Demirel that "Azerbaijan and Karabakh should stop being the main factors in defining relations between Turkey and Armenia; the two neighbourly states should establish direct relations with one another over the issues of concern."[\[21\]](#)

### 17 August 1992

The US Embassy in Ankara asks the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to clarify its position as to the inspection of planes carrying humanitarian aid to Armenia. (Turkey had started inspecting such flights as of March, drawing protests from the West).[\[22\]](#) In its reply, the Ministry defiantly noted that "Turkey has no intention of changing its policy of checking planes flying to the region of Karabakh conflict under any outside pressure."[\[23\]](#)

According to an article that appeared in a 2000 issue of Survival magazine, Turkey had arranged "a secret airlift of 5000 rifles, ammunition and mortars to Azerbaijan via Nakhijevan" in mid-1991 and, in March-April 1992, trained 450 volunteers "at a Ministry of Internal Affairs base near the town of Gabbala, in northern Azerbaijan."[\[24\]](#) The Russian press even claimed that approximately 5-6 thousand Turkish troops had entered into Azerbaijan by the end of 1992.[\[25\]](#)

### 23 August 1992

A delegation of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs visits Yerevan to discuss, among other things, the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict. When told that Armenia is ready to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey right away, Bilgin Unan, the head of the Turkish delegation, replies that Ankara also favours improving bilateral relations – but that Armenia should take the first step by confirming the inviolability of the Turkish and Azerbaijani borders.[26]

The Dashnak Central Committee had organized a protest at the airport to greet the Turks. "The Genocide perpetrator Turk is not our friend", "The generation of murderers has no place in Armenia" and "Hands away from the Republic of Karabakh", some of their posters read.[27]



*Dashnak demonstration in Yerevan Dashnak demonstration in Yerevan.  
Photo: flickr/onewmphoto*

### 4 September 1992

Armenia, reeling from economic meltdown, asks Turkey for a loan of 100,000 tons of grain. On September 18, Prime Minister Demirel agrees. "Our sincere wish," he says, "is to see our neighbouring region as an island of cooperation, stability, prosperity and concord. I can assure you that Turkey will continue its constructive activities in that sphere." [28]

### 10 September 1992

During a Council of Europe summit in Istanbul, Armenian Foreign Minister Raffi Hovhannisian blasts Turkey for not establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia, taking sides in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, and obstructing Armenia accession to the OSCE. He also makes reference to the Armenian genocide.

"Armenia has always perceived that the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations is important not only for the future prosperity of Armenia and Turkey, but also for European

stability and security. Despite the tragedy of the Genocide, President Levon Ter Petrossian has actively and consistently sought good relations with Turkey. To date, however, Turkey has declined Armenian offers to establish diplomatic relations and open the border. Quite the opposite, Turkey has often hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid to Armenia and has not been able to maintain neutrality [in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict], thus becoming privy to the Karabakh issue. There are Turkish military advisers and officers in Azerbaijan, there are reports about the transfer of weapons from Turkey into Azerbaijan, and Turkey would have hardly paid any constructive role in the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict during the OSCE discussions.

[...] Briefly, despite the fact that some consider Turkey as a model for the new Central Asian republics, Turkey cannot yet claim that it is a model of European values and cultural identity. In our view, Turkey is clearly in no position to oppose the Council membership of a country which has already expressed commitment to those values and identity during the brief period of its independence."[\[29\]](#)

### November 1992

Under pressure from Azerbaijan, Turkey annuls an agreement to deliver 300 million kilowatts of electricity to Armenia.[\[30\]](#)

## **1993**

### 3 February 1993

Despite furious reactions from Azerbaijan, Turkish Prime Minister Demirel confirms that Turkey will allow the delivery of 100 tons of humanitarian aid to Armenia. Azg daily publishes an article denouncing Ter Petrossian's policy of 'begging' for Turkish support.

[Gerard Libaridian](#), Ter Petrossian's influential adviser, states that Armenia and Turkey are very close to establishing diplomatic relations.

"The protocol text for establishing diplomatic relations is very close to being mutually agreed upon. There is very little disagreement. The Turkish side assured us that the little disagreement there is will disappear after a few hours of discussion. For them it is important to open relations in an atmosphere of stability. They think that it would be much worse if after having established diplomatic relations they would be forced to cut those relations as a result of some military actions [...]. They told us that as soon as there is a ceasefire they would establish relations the next day."

Asked whether Armenia could make some concessions to Turkey for the sake of opening relations, Libaridian answered that "up until now" he "could not imagine that such a thing could happen. Good relations must be based on mutual understanding. Making some concessions does not mean good or friendly relations."[\[31\]](#)

### April 1993

On 5 April, after the Armenians capture Kelbajar, an Azerbaijani region, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs warns:

"Armenia is trying to violate the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan by use of force and change the borders recognized by the whole world."

The same day Turkey closes its airspace to Armenia-bound flights (humanitarian or other), stops all regular or charter flights to Armenia, and shuts down the Kars-Gyumri railway. The Turkish-Armenian border is effectively closed.

Hurriyet reports that the forces of Turkey's Third Army have been mobilised and are ready to engage.[\[32\]](#)

Turkish President Turgut Ozal, meanwhile, issues a threat to Armenia:

"What would happen if during military exercises three of our bombs fall in the Armenian territory? What would happen if we sent 1-2 military brigades to Nakhijevan? We are bound to Nakhijevan with an agreement. What would happen, who would do us anything, who would come to intervene? Who could intervene in Bosnia? In world politics we can reach nothing without resorting to risk."[\[33\]](#)

"[The Armenians] learn nothing from history. In Anatolia, they also tried it. But they got an incredible slap in the face. And they have not forgotten the pain to this day. If they try it again here [in Azerbaijan], relying on this or that foreign country for help, they have something coming."[\[34\]](#)

"There is no more a Karabakh issue, there are the Armenian wishes about the Great Armenia. [...] Do not ask me whether we would invade Armenia or not. But Turkey should calculate its steps well."[\[35\]](#)

On 15 April, however, the Turkish President excludes the possibility of war against Armenia.

With the Turkish parliament on the verge of discussing a military treaty with Azerbaijan, the White House warns "that it will not tolerate a third country's interference in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict."[\[36\]](#)

On 17 April, President Turgut Ozal dies of a heart attack. An Armenian delegation that includes President Ter Petrossian, Foreign Minister Papazian, and Deputy Foreign Minister Libaridian travels to Turkey to attend his funeral.



*Turgut Ozal. Photo: Time inc*

### May 1993

On 16 May, Süleyman Demirel becomes President of Turkey.

### June 1993

In an interview with Turkish Daily News on 15 June, Mete Geknel, President of Botas, Turkey's state-owned gas and oil company, mentions the possibility of building a pipeline through Armenia and Azerbaijan to deliver Turkmen gas across the Caspian to Turkey and Europe.[\[37\]](#)

In August, the Azerbaijani government is to reject the possibility of building a pipeline through Armenia.

On 17 June, Azg Daily quotes Congressman Joseph Kennedy as calling on the Clinton administration to "delay the provision of the promised aid of 500 Million USD to Turkey until Turkey lifts its blockade against Armenia."

On 29 June, the governor of Kars visits Armenia with a delegation. On 7 July, the head of the Akhurian region (in Armenia) travels to Turkey. Their discussions centre on trade relations between Gyumri and Kars and the possibility of reopening the Gyumri-Kars railway.

### 26 July 1993

After Turkish Minister of Interior Mehmet Gazioglu accuses the Armenian government of ties with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Armenia avows that it has no connection whatsoever with the PKK, and that there is no PKK office in Yerevan. In its statement, the Armenian Foreign Ministry adds:

"By such distortions some circles in the Turkish administration are attempting to disseminate anti-Armenian sentiments in the Turkish public opinion, defame Armenia in the international

community, as well as hinder the establishment of friendly relations between the two countries." [38]

### August 1993

On 18 August, after Armenian forces attack Fizuli, Jebayil and Agdam in Azerbaijan, the UN Security Council calls for immediate withdrawal of Karabagh Armenian forces from the recently occupied areas of Azerbaijan.

A day later, foreign affairs ministers Hikmet Cetin and Vahan Papazian meet in Moscow to discuss the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Papazian expresses his concern about the biased coverage of the Karabakh conflict by the Turkish press. Both ministers agree to hold similar meetings in the future.[39]

On 24 August, an article in Hurriyet alleges that the US, Russia and France are backing Armenia; that Yerevan is receiving modern weaponry from around the world; and that international groups – including "ASALA terrorists, French legionaries and PKK groups" – are fighting on the Armenian side.

### October 1993

On 18 October, Turkish Ambassador Ayhan Kamel meets Armenian president Ter Petrossian in Moscow. After the meeting Kamel states that Armenia must stop referring to the events of 1915 if it wants to see relations with Turkey improve.[40]

On 30 October, Azg Daily cites Turkish Minister of Interior Megmet Gazioglu as having said that "the PKK is an Armenian organization," while "PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan is an Armenian." [41]

## **1995**

### February – March 1995

On 18 February, Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Murat Karayalcini states that his government does not oppose the possibility of a Caspian oil pipeline passing through Armenia.[42]

On 12 March presidents Demirel and Ter Petrossian meet in Copenhagen on the sidelines of a UN summit on social issues. The Karabakh conflict, Demirel tells the Armenian president, "delays the realization of oil pipelines [...]. Would it be bad if the oil pipeline passed through your country? Solve your problems with Azerbaijan. They [the existing problems] are hurting us." [43]

### 20 May 1995

The Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry announces that the international air corridor between Armenia and Turkey, closed since 1993, has been re-opened.[44]

### 27-29 June 1995

A delegation headed by Gürbüz Capan, mayor of Esenyurt, a district of Istanbul, visits Yerevan. The delegation visits the Genocide Memorial, paying their respect to the victims of 1915. (Capan's is the first and so far, only, visit by a Turkish official to the Genocide Memorial.).



*Genocide Memorial in Yerevan. Photo: flickr/azkid2lt*

#### 15 August 1995

A decision is taken permitting Armenian citizens to obtain Turkish visas at Turkish border gates.

#### 25 October 1995

During the UN's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary summit, presidents Demirel and Ter Petrossian meet in New York. Demirel says:

"Relations between Armenia and Turkey would be more effective if Armenia were to withdraw its forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, specifically from the Lacin corridor [...]. The withdrawal of forces from the Lacin corridor is very important for Turkey, and the withdrawal of a handful of forces from there would be a signal of cooperation." [\[45\]](#)

### **1996**

#### May 1996

The Turkish government, claiming that Kurdish insurgents are using Armenian territory, announces that it is tightening up the Turkish-Armenian border regime. According to Rossiyskaya Gazeta, a Russian newspaper, the decision had to do with increasing Turkish anxiety over Russia's growing influence in the Caucasus. The tightening of the blockade on the Armenian-Turkish border, noted the newspaper, was announced on the eve of the Russian

Defence Minister's visit to Armenia and the signing of Russian-Armenian military agreements.[\[46\]](#)

### 12 September 1996

President Ter Petrossian, visiting the Metsamor nuclear plant, makes several comments regarding relations with Turkey.

"The biggest Armenian foreign policy achievement is that Turkey remained neutral in the Karabakh conflict and also the fact that in the last six years the Armenian-Turkish relations added no new contradictions to the existing ones [...]. We are neighbours and have to establish normal trade and economic relations."

### 30 September 1996

Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vahram Papazian meets with Tansu Ciller, Turkish deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in New York. During the meeting Ciller notes that Turkey is interested in having good relations with Armenia, and even in opening the border. For that to happen, Armenia needs only to make some small concessions on the Nagorno Karabakh issue.[\[47\]](#)



*Tansu Ciller*

### 25 October 1996

Ter Petrossian and Demirel met in Moscow. Levon Zurabian, Ter Petrossian's spokesman, notes that Turkey regards the settlement of relations with Armenia, in particular the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border, as inseparable from progress in negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh. Zurabian quotes Ter-Petrosian as saying that opening the borders would only promote the settlement of the Karabakh problem.[\[48\]](#)

## **1997**

### 26-28 February 1997

A delegation of the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry visits Yerevan, meeting deputy foreign ministers Vardan Oskanian and Sergey Manasarian. Discussions centre on Armenian-Turkish relations and the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

### 1-5 August 1997

A group of Turkish businessmen, guests of the Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen of Armenia (UMBA), visits Yerevan. The delegation, led by the Chairman of the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC), meets with Deputy Foreign Minister Oskanian and the Minister of Trade and Industry, travels across Armenia, and holds meetings with Armenian businessmen.

### 30 October 1997

During a speech in Kars, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel says that the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border is conditional upon "the complete withdrawal of the Armenian forces from the Azerbaijani territories [...]. The opening of the Turkish-Armenian border is a political issue. We can not put the Azerbaijanis in difficult conditions in exchange for trade that is worth a few coins."[\[49\]](#)

### 21-28 November 1997

A delegation of Armenian businessmen visits Istanbul. As in Yerevan four months earlier, a joint business protocol is signed. The signing of the protocol upsets Baku. "It is not a government action but rather the initiative of some individual businessmen," says Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Hasan Hasanov. "We condemn this action and believe that they have put personal profit above state interests."[\[50\]](#)

## **1998**

New strains in the Turkish-Armenian relationship became noticeable in the beginning of 1998 after the forced resignation of Levon Ter Petrossian in February and Robert Kocharian's rise to the Armenian presidency on 10 March. In Turkey, a sense of disappointment sets in. "Turkey should have supported a moderate president like Ter Petrossian," writes Hurriyet, "instead of abandoning him to his fate."[\[51\]](#)

Also in 1998, as the TABDC was preparing to organize a trip of Turkish businessmen to Armenia – 150 Turkish firms were ready to participate in the exposition of Turkish and Armenian products in Yerevan – the visit was cancelled at the last moment by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs."[\[52\]](#)

### 3 February 1998

25 Turkish journalists and businessmen visit Yerevan. At the end of the visit, plans are made to organize an Armenian-Turkish business forum in Yerevan, as well as an expo of Turkish

products. The Istanbul Chamber of Commerce pledges to cover expenses for the reconstruction of the Akhtamar Church on Lake Van. Istanbul and Yerevan universities agree to cooperate in student exchange programs.

30 April 1998

The French National Assembly recognizes the Armenian genocide.

5 June 1998

Presidents Kocharian and Demirel meet in Yalta during a high-level Black Sea Economic Cooperation summit. President Kocharian speaks about the need to form a working group to address problems between Armenia and Turkey. Armenian-Turkish relations, he also notes, should not be affected by other issues or problems with other countries, particularly with Azerbaijan.



*Robert Kocharian*

26 August 1998

Arsen Gasparian, the Press Secretary of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses "surprise" at the "hypocrisy of Turkish Minister of State Hikmet Sami Turk, who has stated that the Turkish authorities link the normalization of relations between the two states and the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border to the question of recognizing the Armenian genocide of 1915." Gasparian adds:

"Although over the seven years since it acquired independence Armenia has not raised the issue of the genocide and has carried out a policy aimed at normalizing relations with Turkey, the Turkish side nonetheless has found in the Nagorno-Karabakh problem a reason to ignore the hand of goodwill stretched out by Armenia"

"We have stated frequently that putting the genocide issue on the agenda of the Armenian-Turkish political dialogue is not a prerequisite for the normalization of relations between the two states and is not aimed at spreading hatred between the Armenian and Turkish peoples, as

the Turkish authorities say. On the contrary, it pursues the aim of getting rid of the psychological barriers which exist between the peoples."[\[53\]](#)

6 November 1998

In response to new allegations by Ankara (of Armenia's links with the PKK), Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian stresses that "the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, Abdullah Ocalan, has not been, is not, and will not be on Armenian territory."[\[54\]](#)

**1999**

16 February 1999

A delegation from Yerevan State University, headed by Rector Radik Martirosian, visits Turkey. Yerevan State University and the Middle Eastern Technical University of Ankara sign an agreement on cooperation under the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

27 August 1999

Armenia sends humanitarian aid to Turkey after a massive earthquake hits Izmit. An official Armenian delegation led by head of the Emergency Situations Department arrives in Turkey to deliver the aid.

30 October 1999

A Turkish delegation headed by State Minister Mehmet Ali Irtemcelik visits Armenia to attend the burial of the recently assassinated Armenian Prime Minister, Parliamentary Speaker, Deputy Speaker and MPs. It is the highest-level visit to Armenia by Turkish officials.

17-19 November 1999

Armenian president Robert Kocharian participates in the BSEC summit in Istanbul and meets with Turkish president Demirel. The Turkish leader emphasizes that establishing diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey depends on the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

"Turkey wishes peace in the region. And if peace is established that will support the development of relations between Turkey, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Particularly with the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, Armenia may be included in the oil pipeline projects".

Kocharian replies: "No one has illusions that we would make concessions for the sake of those regional projects."[\[55\]](#)

**2000**

12 January 2000

In Aksham, Shadan Eren, president of the Trabzon Chamber of Commerce, argues against placing conditions on normalising relations with Armenia:

"The establishment of relations and opening of borders between Turkey and Armenia should not be conditioned by other factors. Due to the softening of Azerbaijani positions the would-be opening of border gates with Armenia would bring great benefit to Turkey. Armenia is an ideal market for Turkey." [\[56\]](#)

28 June 2000

An Armenian delegation visits Kars to participate in a conference on the 'Caucasus Initiative Pact'. As soon as they arrive, members of the delegation are barred from participating in the conference and immediately deported from Turkey. The incident sparks criticism, including in Turkey. Murat Karayalcin, the former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tansu Ciller, the ex- Prime Minister, criticize the incident. Ciller also criticises Ankara's policy vis-à-vis Yerevan:

"The linking of Armenian-Turkish relations to Azerbaijan has brought about problems until now. In order to reach an agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia through dialogue it is necessary that Turkey have an influential role. Turkey must clarify its positions in this region. From this viewpoint, what happened in Lars is very bad, and it is impossible for us to accept it." [\[57\]](#)



*Murat Karayalcin*

October 2000

In the second half of 2000, Turkish-Armenian relations become more strained owing to the Armenian government's intensified pursuit of international recognition of the 1915 genocide.

Turkey toughens its stance towards Armenia; in October Ankara tightens its visa regime vis-à-vis Armenian citizens.

In early October, following the recognition of the genocide by the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, Armenian TV reports that Turkish troops have begun to concentrate on the Armenian border. The Armenian government soon discredits these reports, however.[\[58\]](#)

### 3 November 2000

Commenting on the genocide recognition debate in the US Congress, President Kocharian said that Armenia has nothing to lose:

"It has no diplomatic relations with Turkey, Turkey is maintaining its blockade of Armenia, and Turkey has not even given Armenia a chance to make a choice on this issue. [...] Armenia's aim is not to aggravate relations, but first of all to attract attention to the problem. The entire world can recognize the Armenian genocide, but it is more important that a dialogue opens with Turkey. It is very important that the Turkish people know the truth about those events."[\[59\]](#)

## **2001**

### January 2001

Turkey further tightens the visa regime for Armenians after the French Senate recognizes the Armenian genocide on 18 January 2001 (President Jacques Chirac endorses the bill on 29 January). From January 2001 until January 2002 Armenian citizens will have to wait one to four weeks to receive a visa to enter Turkey from Georgia.[\[60\]](#)

### 9 July 2001

The Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) is founded. It includes 6 Turkish and 4 Armenian members.

## **2002**

### January 2002

Armenian citizens are granted the possibility to obtain visas at the airport when travelling to Turkey.

On 29 January, the Turkish National Security Council, headed by President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, discusses the possibility of establishing economic relations with Armenia. During that meeting, according to Cumhuriyet, a newspaper, NSC members cite two preconditions for establishing relations with Armenia: the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijani territories; and the rejection of a policy that favours international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. [\[61\]](#)

## 2 February 2002

Foreign Affairs Ministers Oskanian and Cem meet in New York to discuss issues of bilateral and regional importance. The pair agree to have regular meetings on bilateral (Armenia-Turkey) and trilateral (Armenia-Turkey-Azerbaijan) issues. Five days later, in the course of an official visit to Baku, Speaker of the Turkish Grand Assembly Omer Izgin declares that "until Armenia withdraws from the usurped lands of Azerbaijan, until the refugees are returned to their fatherland, let no one expect a softening of Armenian-Turkish relations."



*Ismail Cem*

## 15 May 2002

Oskanian and Cem meet in Reykjavik. According to Hurriyet, Ankara's demands, as put forward by Cem, include putting an end to accusations that Turkey had committed genocide against the Armenians; giving up territorial claims against Turkey; ensuring a quick resolution to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict; and providing a security corridor connecting Nakhicevan with Azerbaijan. Oskanian flatly denies that Cem has put forward such conditions. According to him, a full range of problematic issues were discussed, but no conditions were put forward.[\[62\]](#)

Later that day, a tri-partite meeting between Oskanian, Cem and the Azerbaijani foreign minister, Vilayat Quliyev, takes place. It is the first such meeting between the three foreign ministers.

## 25 June 2002

Oskanian and Cem meet in Istanbul during the BSEC's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary summit. Oskanian denies that Cem has reiterated the preconditions that Turkey had put forward in Reykjavik; implying that the talks were not successful, he notes that "one should cherish no illusions."

3 November 2002

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, sweeps the Turkish parliamentary elections, receiving 34.2 percent of the vote, and winning 363 of the 550 seats in the parliament.

27 December 2002

At a press conference, Turkish foreign minister Yasar Yakis hints at the possibility of opening ties with Armenia:

"We will develop our relations with Russia, Iran and Armenia. We will take into consideration the Azerbaijani concerns in establishing relations with Armenia, but if our economic interests require the establishment of relations with Armenia, we will do that."[\[63\]](#)

**2003**

January 2003

On 7 January, during a two day visit to Azerbaijan, AKP leader Tayyip Erdogan notes that "Turks and Azeris are brothers, but strategic interests are above anything."[\[64\]](#) A day later, in an interview with the Azerbaijani newspaper 525, Turkish foreign Minister Yasar Yakis reassures Baku:

"Turkey's policy towards Armenia will not change. Turkey longs for friendly relations with its neighbours, but is not going to widen its relations with Armenia. Turkey will not open its border with Armenia without the consent of Azerbaijan."[\[65\]](#)



*Tayyip Erdogan. Photo: World Economic Forum*

## June 2003

On 3 June, Foreign Affairs Ministers Abdullah Gul and Vardan Oskanian meet in Madrid during a NATO foreign ministers summit.

Later the same month, Turkish troops take part in a NATO military exercise in Armenia. Armenian society has always taken a sceptical view of the Atlantic Alliance; partnership and alliance with Russia has seemed incompatible with deeper cooperation with NATO. The military exercise, therefore, provokes some negative reactions among Armenians. Turkey's participation further deepened the criticism. "For the first time after Sardarapat,[\[66\]](#) the foot of Turkish asqyar (army-man) has set on Armenian soil," read an article in Golos Armenii. "We know what sort of 'brotherly' feelings emanate towards us from our neighbour beyond Araks."[\[67\]](#)

## October 2003

A private company receives permission to fly direct between Istanbul and Yerevan.[\[68\]](#)

## **2004**

### January 2004

On 12 January, at a joint press conference with Vilayat Guliyev, the Azerbaijani foreign minister, Abdullah Gul re-iterates Ankara's official line that the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict must be resolved on the basis of the Azerbaijani territorial integrity.[\[69\]](#)

During an official visit to the US at the end of the month Prime Minister Erdogan remarks:

"It is possible that the Turkish government will make a decision to open the border with Armenia if Turkey's friendly initiative has reciprocal repercussions. Turkish citizens living in regions neighboring Armenia wish to see the borders open so that they can trade quietly with Armenia."[\[70\]](#)

### 16 December 2004

The Armenian Foreign Affairs Ministry welcomes the European Parliament's 15 December decision to call on the Council of Europe and the European Commission to demand that the Turkish Government recognize the historical fact of the Armenian genocide and open the borders with Armenia as soon as possible.

## **2005**

### 10 April 2005

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan sends a letter to the Armenian President proposing that the two countries establish a commission of historians. Erdogan writes:

"It is not a secret that we have diverging interpretations of events that took place during a particular period of our common history. These differences that have in the past left behind traces of painful memories for our nations continue to hamper the improvement of friendly relations between our two countries today.

I believe that, as leaders of our countries, our primary duty is to leave to our future generations a peaceful and friendly environment in which tolerance and mutual respect shall prevail.

[...] Within this framework, we are extending an invitation to your country to establish a joint group consisting of historians and other experts from our two countries to study the developments and events of 1915 not only in the archives of Turkey and Armenia but also in the archives of all relevant third countries and to share their findings with the international community.

I believe that such an initiative would shed light on a disputed period of history and also constitute a step towards contributing to the normalization of relations between our countries.

I hope that our proposal, which aims to create a friendly and more peaceful climate to be passed on to future generations, will meet your consent. If we receive a favorable response from your side to our proposal of forming such a group, we will be ready to discuss the details of this proposal with your country."

Kocharian's reply, on 26 April, reads:

"Indeed, as two neighbors, we both must work to find ways to live together in harmony. That is why, from the first day, we have extended our hand to you to establish relations, open the border, and thus start a dialogue between the two countries and two peoples.

There are neighboring countries, particularly on the European continent, who have had a difficult past, about which they differ. However, that has not stopped them from having open borders, normal relations, diplomatic ties, representatives in each other's capitals, even as they continue to discuss that which divides them.

Your suggestion to address the past cannot be effective if it deflects from addressing the present and the future. In order to engage in a useful dialog, we need to create the appropriate and conducive political environment. It is the responsibility of governments to develop bilateral relations and we do not have the right to delegate that responsibility to historians. That is why we have proposed and propose again that, without pre-conditions, we establish normal relations between our two countries.

In that context, an intergovernmental commission can meet to discuss any and all outstanding issues between our two nations, with the aim of resolving them and coming to an understanding."

## **2006**

12 October 2006

The National Assembly of France adopts a bill criminalizing public denial of the Armenian genocide in France. The bill subsequently fails to become law, as it is not endorsed by the Senate or the President.

**2007**

19 January 2007

[Hrant Dink](#), the Armenian-Turkish editor of the Istanbul-based Armenian-language weekly 'Agos', is assassinated by a Turkish nationalist in front of his newspaper's office. Armenian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Arman Kirakossian, accompanied by other Ministry officials, attends the burial.



*Hrant Dink. Photo: tog.org*

29 March 2007

The Akhtamar Surp Khach (Holy Cross) Church near Lake Van in Turkey opens (as a museum) after restoration work. An Armenian delegation headed by Gagik Gyurjian, deputy Minister of Culture and Youth, attends the opening ceremony. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses its appreciation of the Turkish initiative, hoping that it is the first of many; the Ministry also states that opening the border would help achieve real progress in Turkish-Armenian relations.

9 April 2007

53 Nobel Laureates address a [letter calling for reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia](#):

25 June 2007

Oskanian and Gul meet in Istanbul during a BSEC 15th anniversary summit. Oskanian reiterates Armenia's stance: a normalization of relations without any preconditions. Gul underscores Turkey's interest in a quick resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

10 October 2007

The Foreign Relations Committee of the US House of Representatives passes a non-binding resolution on the recognition of the Armenian genocide.

7 November 2007

During his visit to Baku, Turkish President Abdullah Gul lays the blame for the stalemate in Armenian-Turkish relations squarely on Yerevan:

"Turkey recognized the independence of the Republic of Armenia on 16 December 1991. Despite Armenia not being a Black Sea littoral state, Turkey invited Armenia to join the BSEC. Contrary to that, there emerged problems hindering the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey. I think Turkey is not responsible for the current situation. It is time that the whole world sees that the reason for the current situation lies in Armenia's hostile attitude towards Turkey on the one hand and, on the other, in keeping the territories of the neighbouring Azerbaijan under occupation. While Armenia is pursuing a policy of labelling the events of 1915 in foreign Parliaments [as genocide], there is no need to expect any progress in the normalization of relations. Currently the peoples of Georgia and Azerbaijan are getting great benefits from regional projects. Only countries that treat the territorial integrity of other states with respect and desire peaceful co-existence can be included in regional projects. Armenia and its people should understand this."<sup>[71]</sup>



*Abdullah Gul. Photo: GMFUS*

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<sup>[1]</sup> Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Russian newspaper), 14.05.1991.

<sup>[2]</sup> Hurriyet, 02.05.1991.

<sup>[3]</sup> Azg Daily, June 8, 1991.

<sup>[4]</sup> Azg Daily, June 8, 1991.

[5] Azg Daily, September 11, 1991.

[6] Azg Daily, November 6, 1991.

[7] Azg Daily, November 27, 1991.

[8] Armenian National Archive, Fond 326, List 9, Dossier 192, pp. 1-2.

[9] Azg Daily, February 12, 1992.

[10] Hurriyet, 05.03.1992.

[11] Azg Newspaper (in Armenian), 23.11.1991.

[12] [New York Times](#), March 7, 1992.

[13] Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Russian), 13.05.1992.

[14] Turkish Daily News, 27.05.1992 quoted in PhD thesis by Arshakian Grigor, Academy of Sciences of Armenia, Yerevan, 2008, p. 52 ; "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 108.

[15] Hayk Demoian, *Turkey and the Karabakh Conflict* (Turtsiya I Karabakhskiy Konflikt, in Russian), Yerevan, 2006, p.32, quoting from William Hale "Turkey, the Black Sea and Transcaucasia", in *Transcaucasian Boundaries*, New York, 1996, p.64.

[16] Azg, May 20, 1992.

[17] Turkish Daily News, 21.05.1992; 'Up Against the Border', *Time*, June 01, 1992; The Financial Times, 22. 05.1992; Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Russian), 22.05.1992. Please look below for the Turkish PM Demirel's restrained answer, in quotes, 08.06.92. Another Russian official, Gennady Burbullis, Russian State Secretary, when asked about possible Turkish intervention, abruptly answered 'That is excluded!' (Azg, 23, May, 1992).

[18] Azg Daily, June 2, 1992 (in translation from Cumhuriyet article from June 4, 1992, without any comments).

[19] Azg Daily, June 11, 1992.

[20] Azg Daily, June 18, 1992.

[21] Azg Daily, July 4, 1992.

[22] Hayk Demoyan, *Turkey and the Karabakh Conflict* (Turtsiya I Karabakhskiy Konflikt, in Russian), Yerevan, 2006, p.76.

[23] Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Russian), 23,06,1992.

[24] R. Bronson; R. Bhatti, "NATO's mixed signals in the South Caucasus and Central Asia", *Survival*, volume 42, issue 3, January 2000, p.134.

[25] Hayk Demoyan, Turkey and the Karabakh Conflict (Turtsiya I Karabakhskiy Konflikt, in Russian), Yerevan, 2006, (quoting 'Literaturnaya Gazeta' (Russian), 23,09,1992).

[26] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 109.

[27] Yerkir, August 25, 1992.

[28] Yerkir, September 22, 1992.

[29] The full speech (from English into Armenian) was translated in Azg Daily, October 20, 1992.

[30] Karen Dawisha, Bruce Parrott, Russia and the New States of Eurasia, The Politics of Upheaval, Cambridge, 1995, p. 192.

[31] Azg Daily, February 5, 1993.

[32] It included 1500 tanks, 2500 weaponry and mortars, 1100 artilleries backed by the Second Tactical Aviation Command including 270 warplanes (Izvestiya, 09.03.1992).

[33] Hurriyet, 08.04.1993.

[34] 'Türkiye', 16.04.1993.

[35] Milliyet, 08.04.1993.

[36] Azg Daily, April 17, 1993.

[37] Azg Daily, June 16, 1993.

[38] Azg Daily, July 27, 1993.

[39] Azg Daily, August 20, 1993.

[40] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005.

[41] Azg Daily, October, 30, 1993.

[42] Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Russian) 18.02.1995.

[43] Hurriyet, 01.03.1995.

[44] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 109

[45] Azg (Armenian daily) 26.10.1995.

[46] Rossiyskaya Gazeta, May 25, 1996.

[47] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 110.

[48] ITAR-TASS, 29 October, 1996 (from <http://wnc.dialog.com>).

[49] Azg (Armenian daily) 01.11.1997.

[50] Turan News Agency, December 4, 1997 (from <http://wnc.dialog.com>).

[51] Hurriyet, 14, 2, 1998.

[52] Burcu Gultekin, The Stakes of the Opening of Turkish Armenian Border, Istanbul 2002, p. 10.

[53] Snark, 26, August, 1998 (from [wnc.dialog.com](http://wnc.dialog.com)).

[54] Snark, 6, November, 1998 (from [wnc.dialog.com](http://wnc.dialog.com)).

[55] Mediamax News Agency, 26.11.1999.

[56] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 112

[57] Hurriyet, 01.07.2000.

[58] Snark News Agency, October 5, 2000; (from [wnc.dialog.com](http://wnc.dialog.com)).

[59] Snark News Agency, November 3, 2000; (from [wnc.dialog.com](http://wnc.dialog.com)).

[60] Azg Daily, 16/01/2002, also available at [Eurasia.net](http://Eurasia.net).

[61] Cumhuriyet, 01.02.2002.

[62] Mediamax, "Armenia: Optimism expressed following Azerbaijan-Armenia-Turkey meeting", May 18, 2002; (from [wnc.dialog.com](http://wnc.dialog.com)).

[63] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 114

[64] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 115

[65] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005

[66] In 1918 the Turkish army had attacked Armenia (which after the dissolution of the Tsarist regime in Russia and the revolutionary war and overall chaos in Russia) which was trying to establish an independent state on the Tsarist part of Armenia (then called Eastern Armenia). But in Sardarapat (close to Yerevan) the Turkish forces were defeated and withdrew. After that on May 28, 1918 Armenia founded an independent state which lasted for two years until 1920 (which fell from the attacks of Bolsheviks from the north and the Kemalist attacks from the west).

[67] Golos Armenii (Russian language Armenian newspaper), 07.11.2003.

[68] In correspondence with ESI, Mr. Dikran Altun, Turkish-Armenian businessman noted on the topic of flights

"As far as I remember the Armenian Airlines started charter flights between Yerevan and Ýstanbul from 1996 till 2003. Only Armenian planes were flying between those cities. In 2003 I personally asked the Turkish Civil Aviation to start Ist-Evn flights by a Turkish carrier. After trying very hard, especially to get the permission from the Ministry (T.M. in his interview below it becomes clear that he means Ministry of Foreign Affairs), my company started charter flights by Fly Air (Turkish carrier). Because Fly Air had some economic problems, in 2006 we made an agreement with Atlasjet Air and still are carrying out flights by Atlas aircraft.

Turkish nationalities may get visa at the Armenian airport when entering the country. It is the same for the Armanians while entering Turkey. The only difference is that Turkish visa is 15USD for a period of 1 month. But in Armania they are asking for 50USD for the same period". (Correspondence of ESI with Mr. Dikran Altun, March 11, 2008)."

[69] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 116.

[70] "Brief Chronology of the Armenian-Turkish Relations, 1991-2004", in *Armenia-Turkey: Open Conversation*, published by the Center of Public Dialogue and Development, Yerevan, 2005, p. 116.

[71] See [Day.az](http://Day.az).

## Timeline: 2008-2009



"Football diplomacy". Armenia-Turkey World Cup Qualifier 2008 in Yerevan.  
Photo: Onnik Krikorian / Oneworld Multimedia 2008

The recent warming in Turkish-Armenian relations began with the February 2008 presidential elections in Armenia.

### 19 February 2008

Serzh Sarkisian wins the presidential elections in Armenia with 53% of the vote, a first round majority, well ahead of second place candidate Levon Ter-Petrossian. For over a week after the election Ter-Petrossian's supporters, disputing the official results, hold large protests in Yerevan. These are violently broken up by police on 1 March: eight people are killed, and a state of emergency is imposed for 20 days, ending on 20 March. The opposition claims the election was rigged to ensure Serzh Sarkisian's victory, but international observers attest that the vote met democratic standards.

### 21 February 2008

President Abdullah Gül congratulates Serzh Sarkisian on winning the presidential election. "I hope your new position will offer an opportunity for the normalization of relations between the Turkish and Armenian peoples," Gül says in his message to Serzh Sarkisian.

### 26 February 2008

Erdogan refutes Armenian claims of genocide in 1915.

"Against the nonsense they fabricate and disseminate in the world public opinion, we tell them the following: Talk after looking right into the mirror. If there was genocide, it was you who perpetuated its most violent form. [...] The character of this nation does not let it commit such crimes."

### 21 April 2008

Foreign Minister Ali Babacan sends a letter to Yerevan saying Turkey wants to normalize ties between the two countries. As he tells a news conference:

"Turkey wants to see peace, stability, security and prosperity in its region, but as you know our relations with Armenia do not fit into that formula. We have problems, and the only way to solve these problems is through dialogue."

### 27 April 2008

Turkish and Armenian PMs exchange letters. Prime Minister Erdogan expresses hope that with the election of Sarkisian Turkish-Armenian relations "will enter a new period, which would contribute to peace, stability and welfare in the region." Armenia is ready to start dialogue with Turkey on improving relations if Ankara does not set preconditions to talks, Sarkisian writes in his response. "I confirm the readiness of the government of Armenia to engage in constructive dialogue and establish relations without preconditions," he writes. In the same breath, however, Sarkisian gives a cold shoulder to Turkey's proposal to establish a committee of historians to study the events of 1915.

### 5 July 2008

Sarkisian invites the Turkish president to visit Armenia on 6 September to watch the World Cup qualifying match between Armenia and Turkey.

### 9 July 2008

In an article published in the Wall Street Journal, Sarkisian writes:

"The time has come for a fresh effort to break this deadlock, a situation that helps no one and hurts many. [...] I take this opportunity to propose a fresh start – a new phase of dialogue with the government and people of Turkey, with the goal of normalizing relations and opening our common border. [...] Establishing normal political relations would enable us to create a commission to comprehensively discuss all of the complex issues affecting Armenia and Turkey. We cannot expect tangible progress without such structured relations. Only through them can we create an effective dialogue touching upon even the most contentious historical issues."

Sarkisian cites the economic fallout of keeping the border closed. "Strategic projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the projected Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad bypass Armenia, while the existing railway between Turkey and Armenia remains shut."

### 18 July 2008

Ali Babacan confirms that Turkey and Armenia have held a series of secret meetings in Bern in May and July. (Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry Ertugrul Apakan and his deputy Ünal Çeviköz headed the Turkish delegation.) Babacan and Sarkisian downplay the significance of the talks, however, the Armenian Prime Minister saying, "There was no secret or reason to be surprised. Such contact between Armenian and Turkish diplomats never stopped. They have always taken place."



*Ali Babacan. Photo: World Economic Forum*

25 July 2008

The presidents of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan inaugurate the 76-kilometer Turkish section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad project. (The Iron Silk Road will not only link Turkey's rail network with that of Georgia and energy-rich Azerbaijan but will also connect Central Asia and China to Europe. With an estimated cost of \$450 million, completion is expected in 2010. The railroad will carry one million passengers and 6.5 million tons of freight per year.) Speaking in Kars, a Turkish city near the Armenian border, Gül makes it clear that the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars project, which excludes Armenia, is part of the normalisation package with Yerevan. "The project", he said, "is open to all countries in the region who want to contribute to good, neighbourly relations, peace and prosperity".[\[72\]](#)

(Speaking in September, Transportation Minister Binali Yyldyrym was to be even more explicit. "The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway," he said, "is by no means a project excluding Armenia."[\[73\]](#))

8 August 2008

The war in Georgia erupts. The war in neighbouring Georgia – and its implications for Turkish / Russian / Western interests in the Southern Caucasus – helps bring home the importance (and the urgency) of normalizing relations with Armenia (and, in parallel, of attending to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh). The fighting in Georgia "showed we need to come up with a fresh approach to resolution of conflict in the Caucasus," including Armenia, Ali Babacan will say a month later.[\[74\]](#)

Russia's intervention in Georgia made Turkey's regional interests – political and economic – seem very vulnerable, all of a sudden. The war made a number of things clear, as far as Turkey's regional interests are concerned: Russia was capable of using force in the Caucasus; Georgia, particularly given Sakaashvili's adventurism, was vulnerable to destabilization and Russian aggression, possibly calling into question its capacity to protect present and future pipelines. Commentators began to worry about the future of projects like the Nabucco or

Trans-Caspian pipelines. The Georgia events increased the understanding of vulnerability of oil and gas routes, a Russian diplomat told ESI. [\[75\]](#)

13 August 2008

During a trip to Moscow, Erdogan proposes the formation of a Caucasian union – the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform – to strengthen economic ties between the countries in the region and to contribute to the peaceful solution of problems.

14 August 2008

Armenia decides to unilaterally suspend its visa regime with Turkey to facilitate the arrival of Turkish fans for the upcoming football match.

20 August 2008

Ankara decides to loosen its air space quota for Armenia to allow easier access for humanitarian aid to war-torn Georgia.

22 August 2008

Georgia and Russia welcome Turkey's proposal of forming a Caucasian platform but decline to sit at the same table, dealing a blow to Ankara's hopes to contribute a solution to the region's problems. "We are ready to discuss with Turkey all kinds of regional initiatives but at this stage there is no possibility that we would enter any cooperation mechanism with Russia as long as the occupation goes on and a single occupying soldier stays on my soil," says Georgia's Ambassador Grigol Mgaloblishvili.

30 August 2008

President Gul accepts Sarkisian's invitation to watch the World Cup qualifier in Yerevan.



*Serzh Sarkisian*

### 7 September 2008

The Turkish and Armenian delegations, headed by the two foreign ministers, hold talks regarding Turkey's proposal for a new regional forum in the Caucasus, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and other regional issues. Babacan tells Nalbandian that Turkey supports the Minsk process for the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and adds that his country favors the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries in the region.

### 10 September 2008

President Gul says opportunities had emerged to solve the long-standing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. "I've seen in Yerevan that the Armenians are willing to pull out from the Azerbaijani territory," he tells journalists during his trip to Baku. In Baku, following a meeting with President Ilham Aliyev, he notes that "In Azerbaijan I saw the same frank, honest and sincere desire for a solution and respect to opponent that I observed in Armenia earlier. There is a significant opportunity to resolve a long-standing problem." "We agree that we should make efforts to try to resolve the issue... If this opportunity is missed, who knows when a new opportunity will arise?" he says. "Everyone is aware that a settlement will lead to comprehensive cooperation from which all will benefit."

### 21 September 2008

"I generally said that I was not against the establishment of commissions between the two countries... First, let our joint border be opened and diplomatic relations constituted, then we can establish commissions, sub-commissions and sub-sub-commissions for any issue," says Sarkisian.

The decisions taken by the commissions are not final. Commissions can only make recommendations for decision takers and governments, Sarkisian says.

"In fact, if you remember a similar commission to this was formed in the past with the efforts of the United States and this commission concluded a 'genocide had taken place'. What happened then? Has something changed? Did anybody accept it? No. Nobody accepted."

### 22 September 2008

Ali Babacan meets with his Azerbaijani counterpart Elmar Mammadyarov in New York.



*Elmar Mammadyarov. Photo: NATO*

23 September 2008

"The recent crisis in Georgia urged all the countries in the region to re-evaluate policies and also have a stronger feeling of urgency," Babacan says.

24 September 2008

It is impossible for the Nabucco pipeline to pass through Armenia, says the head of the Azerbaijan President's Public Policy Department.

"Azerbaijan has stated on a many occasions that it would not cooperate with Armenia before the returning of territories occupied by Armenia, the restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereign rights over these territories and the establishment peace in the South Caucasus."

26 September 2008

Turkish, Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers hold a trilateral meeting on Friday in New York. Before the meeting, Armenian and Azerbaijani diplomats meet to discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to reports, Turkish and Azerbaijani officials "seriously mulled" Armenian participation in the Nabucco pipeline project "as part of a comprehensive Karabakh peace pact."[\[76\]](#)

Gul himself appeared to have admitted as much during his 10 September visit to Baku. There is "no doubt", he said on that occasion, "that the liberation of the occupied [Azerbaijani] territories [...] would encourage very efficient economic cooperation in the region. Pipelines and transport communications would cover the entire Caucasus region."[\[77\]](#) "Armenia will connect with the West through Turkey," Unal Cevikoz told ESI in February 2009. "Having a link to the West should be a main motive for Armenia."[\[78\]](#)

29 September 2008

"Our policy toward Armenia is very much in line with our overall policy toward our neighbours," writes AKP MP Suat Kiniklioglu. "President Gül's visit to Yerevan should be seen as the beginning of new relationships in the South Caucasus that are complementary to our overall policy in the region." [\[79\]](#)

15 October 2008

Incumbent Ilham Aliyev wins the presidential election in Azerbaijan.

17 October 2008

Turkey edges out Iceland, securing a non-permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. Ankara had been lobbying for a Security Council seat for years.

21 October 2008

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev proposes a renewed role for Russia in mediating between Armenia and Azerbaijan.



*Dmitry Medvedev. Photo: World Economic Forum*

23 October 2008

Armenia's economy has suffered losses of \$670 million (520 million euros) from the August conflict between Russia and neighbouring Georgia, says Prime Minister Sarkisian.

28 October 2008

"We are in an era in which mutual confidence based relations between Turkey and Armenia have started. A wrong step not only harms cooperation between Turkey and the United States, but also risks such expansions from Turkey," Ahmet Davutoglu tells reporters in Washington, warning that US genocide recognition could undermine Turkish-Armenian reconciliation.

### 3 November 2008

In Moscow, under the auspices of Dmitry Medvedev, the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia sign a declaration agreeing to continue work toward a political resolution of the NK conflict.

### 24 November 2008

Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian visits Istanbul to take over the presidency of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC). According to Nalbandian, "The events around South Ossetia have shown how fragile and vulnerable is our region, how weak and undeveloped is its transport infrastructure and how important it is to have open borders."

### 1 December 2008

Foreign Minister Ali Babacan visits Baku. "The normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations would have a positive impact on the Azerbaijan-Armenia talks over Nagorno-Karabakh," he says following his talks with Azerbaijani FM Elmar Mammadyarov.

### 4 December 2008

The Turkish-Armenian border could be opened only after Armenia gives up distorting history and restores Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, Turkish Trade Minister Kursad Tuzmen says. "We do not oppose developing trade relations, which will have a positive influence on the development of the whole region; however, prior to this historians should solve some issues and Azerbaijan's territorial integrity should be restored."

Foreign Minister Ali Babacan meets separately in Helsinki with Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov to discuss the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

### 12 December 2008

The Turkish Parliament urges the parliaments of third party countries not to disrupt the process of rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia with efforts to recognize the 1915-dated events as "genocide". "Politicians and parliaments cannot judge history," says Parliament Speaker Köksal Toptan

### 15 December 2008

A group of Turkish intellectuals and academics issue a public apology for the killing of Armenians during the First World War. The text, which as of January 2009 has been signed by around 30,000 people, reads:

"My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers. I apologize to them."

Shortly after the intellectuals' campaign is announced, a group of 146 retired Turkish ambassadors issues a counter-declaration. "Today, Armenian terror has completed its

mission," it laments. "We are aware that the second phase of the plan includes an apology and the next step will be demands for land and compensation."

#### 8 January 2009

Azerbaijani media reports that in 2008 weapons and army vehicles had been delivered from a Russian military base in the northern Armenian town of Gyumri to Armenia's defence ministry. Anonymous experts put the approximate value of the transfer at roughly \$800 million. While both Moscow and Yerevan deny the transfer, Azerbaijani officials say they have no doubts that the handover took place. Widespread expressions of outrage surface in Azerbaijan, including from Aliyev's allies in parliament.

If the increased momentum towards normalizing relations with Armenia was induced by anxiety over existing and planned energy infrastructure, then it was also spurred by Turkey's anxiety that, just as the situation in Georgia and South Ossetia proved vulnerable to political miscalculation and Russian aggression, Nagorno Karabakh could be next in line. (The recent conflict, said Gul in August, affirms the need for "early measures to resolve frozen problems in the region and ... prevent instability in the future."[\[80\]](#)) A repeat of what happened in South Osetia in Nagorno Karabakh would throw into disarray all of Turkey's energy-related plans in the southern Caucasus. August 8, said Cevikoz, "triggered the realization that unresolved conflicts can escalate into hot conflict. [...] No one wants to see a repeat of this, including Sarkisian and Aliyev."[\[81\]](#)

#### 16 January 2009

"We have never come this close to a plan regarding the final normalization of relations with Armenia," says Babacan.

#### 22 January 2009

"We are very close to normalising Armenian-Turkish relations," says Nalbandian. "We can take the next step and resolve the issue if Turkey, like Armenia, approaches it without preconditions and opens the border. [...] After the border opens, we are ready to form a commission in which we can discuss issues relevant to both countries."

#### 29 January 2009

Turkish PM, Armenian president hold talks in Davos

#### 7 February 2009

Foreign Minister Ali Babacan holds talks with Nalbandian and Sarkisian on the sidelines of the 45th Munich Security Conference.



*45th Munich Security Conference. Photo: securityconference.de*

#### 9 February 2009

Babacan meets his Azeri counterpart Elmar Mammadyarov and President Ilham Aliyev in Baku.

#### 19 February 2009

Following a wave of criticism, Turkey's Ministry of Education decides to halt the distribution of "Sarı Gelin – The True Face of the Armenian Question," a controversial documentary, to all elementary schools. The film meticulously set out the case that Armenians had brought about their own destruction through subversion and rebellion and that Armenian terrorists had massacred Turks throughout history. Atrocities committed by Armenians in Iğdir province in Eastern Anatolia are cited in horrific detail. In one scene Turkish villagers recall: "Children were cooked over the fire [...] women were forced to eat their husbands."

#### 6-7 April 2009

President Aliyev refuses to join the Alliance of Civilizations summit in Istanbul. On 7 April, speaking before the Turkish Parliament, US President Obama says the following, in relation to Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and historical reconciliation:

"Each country must work through its past. And reckoning with the past can help us seize a better future. I know there are strong views in this chamber about the terrible events of 1915. While there has been a good deal of commentary about my views, this is really about how the Turkish and Armenian people deal with the past. And the best way forward for the Turkish and Armenian people is a process that works through the past in a way that is honest, open and constructive.

We have already seen historic and courageous steps taken by Turkish and Armenian leaders. These contacts hold out the promise of a new day. An open border would return the Turkish and Armenian people to a peaceful and prosperous coexistence that would serve both of you

nations. That is why the United States strongly supports the full normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia."



*Ilham Aliyev. Photo: NATO*

#### 10 April 2009

Prime Minister Erdogan forcefully declares that Turkey would not sign a final agreement with Armenia until an agreement on Karabagh is reached. His position, echoed by other ministers and institutions in Ankara in days to follow, reflects a shift in political rhetoric.

#### 22 April 2009

After intense diplomatic manoeuvring (with the United States playing a leading mediating role), Ankara and Yerevan release a joint statement – at midnight – stating that a road map and "a comprehensive framework for the normalization of their bilateral relations" have been agreed upon.

#### 24 April 2009

In his statement commemorating the tragedy of 1915, President Barack Obama – noting that 1.5 million Armenians had been massacred or marched to their death during 'Meds Yeghern', the 'Great Calamity', a term used by Armenians before the word genocide was coined – comes as close as possible to recognising the massacres as genocide without actually stating the "g-word". Obama's statement fails to please either Turks or Armenians. Around the world, critical commentary brings more publicity to the issue than could have otherwise been expected.

Prime Minister Erdogan, fretting over the politicization of disputed history, expresses distaste for President Obama's "play with words". Leading opposition parties claim that – despite losing ground and infuriating Azerbaijan by signing a document that supposedly de-links the Karabagh conflict from the normalization process – Turkey was still subject to the heaviest wording ever on the events of 1915 from a U.S. President.

27 April 2009

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation leaves the four-party coalition government of Armenia.

7 May 2009

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian meet in Prague, hosted by the U.S. as co-chair of the Minsk Group.

13 May 2009

The border with Armenia will remain closed until Armenian occupation of Azeri territories comes to an end, says Prime Minister Erdogan during a visit to Baku.

"There is a cause and effect relation here. Occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh is the cause here and closing of the border is the effect. It is impossible for us to open the border unless that occupation ends."

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[72] ["Armenia misses the trans-Caucasus train"](#), *Turkish Daily News*, 25 July 2008.

[73] ["Armenia not excluded in railway project"](#), TODAY'S ZAMAN, 12 September 2008.

[74] ["Turkey ready to discuss diplomatic ties with Armenia"](#), *Hurriyet Daily News*, 6 September 2008.

[75] ESI interview with high-ranking Russian diplomat

[76] Shahin Abbasov, ["Azerbaijan: potential pipeline deal could help settle Nagorno-Karabakh issue"](#), 30 September 2008.

[77] Shahin Abbasov, ["Azerbaijan: potential pipeline deal could help settle Nagorno-Karabakh issue"](#), 30 September 2008.

[78] ESI interview with Unal Cevikoz

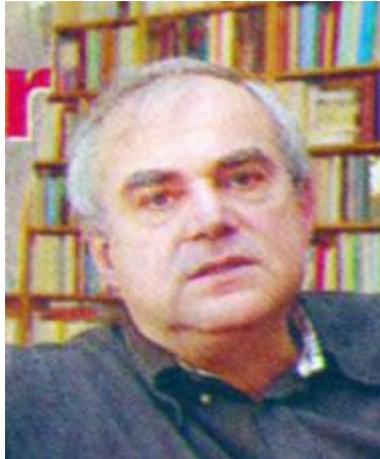
[79] Suat Kiniklioglu, ["Turkey's Armenia policy"](#), 29 September 2008.

[80] Torbakov, Igor, ["The Georgia Crisis and Russia-Turkey Relations"](#), Jamestown Foundation, November 2008.

[81] ESI interview with Unal Cevikoz

## People

### Halil Berktaş



Halil Berktaş

On 9 October 2000, Turkish historian Halil Berktaş, a professor at the prestigious Sabancı University in Istanbul, gave a [full-page interview to the daily Radikal](#). "A special organization killed the Armenians", read the title of the text. Berktaş laid responsibility for the deaths of at least 600,000 Armenians in 1915 – during the final decade of the Empire – at the door of the last Ottoman government. An Armenian rebellion had resulted in the deaths of thousands of Turkish and Kurdish Muslims, he noted, but "the activities of the Armenian rebels had more the character of localised violence." The Ottoman response, however, was of a different order: the government, said Berktaş, created "special death squads" and volunteer forces of convicted criminals to conduct the massacres.

Never before had a respected Turkish academic spoken so openly in the mainstream press about Ottoman responsibility for the Armenian massacres. The reaction, Berktaş told ESI, was immediate:

"After my interview I got very positive responses. By phone, by mail, people stopping me in the street. There were many more positive than negative reactions. At the same time, hell broke loose. The day after the interview many websites published information about my background, including details which could not have been found through normal journalism. It was an orchestrated attack. I received hate mail. It was choreographed intimidation – fake indignation."

One of Turkey's most influential columnists, Emin Colasan, attacked Berktaş on the pages of the country's then best selling daily paper, *Hurriyet*, with an article entitled "Those who stab us in the back." Colasan accused Berktaş of treachery and demanded his dismissal from Sabancı University for "inciting his students against the fatherland and filling their young minds with lies." When Berktaş and other Turkish scholars met with Armenian historians at a conference in Mulheim, Germany, in March 2001, *Hurriyet* called it a "meeting of the evil" where "so-called Turks attack Turkey."

Berktaş was not intimidated, however. In [another interview in Milliyet in 2000](#) he stressed that while he did not support the idea of passing resolutions on Ottoman history in the US Congress, it was crucial for Turkey to face the truth about 1915 for the sake of historical truth:

"In fact, I stressed that it is entirely wrong for the U.S. Congress, or any other political institution, to see itself as empowered to judge history in this way. Those who introduced this resolution, and who supported it, did a great disservice to everyone; they remove the possibility for finding common ground and dialogue.

But that is another issue entirely, completely distinct from what is known and what is not known. We can talk all we like about the context, but there's no way you can convince any half-way well-read person in the U.S. or Europe that no horrific event happened in 1915. For there are tons of documentation there that treat of it. Diplomats' reports, journalists' telegrams, the accounts that reached the West from Christian missionaries and their schools, diaries that were kept, photographs: all of these things. And moreover, there are the documents of the Ottoman state; for instance, the documents covering the 1918-19 investigations and trials.

In fact, neither I nor any other historian can reach a conclusion without recourse to these sources. For instance, the figure of 'at least 600,000' dead has been in every edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica since 1915."

In September 2005, Berktaý, joined by fellow intellectuals Murat Belge, Edhem Eldem and Selim Deringil, organised a conference on the fate of the Ottoman Armenians. For parts of the establishment, it was a deeply provocative event. Justice Minister Cemil Cicek attacked the organisers in the Turkish parliament with the familiar charge of "stabbing the Turkish people in the back." Recalling the impact that the conference had, both in Turkey and abroad, Berktaý says:

"I did not imagine that it would be this much, but it became an enormous breakthrough. In fact, the efforts made to prevent the conference from taking place created a feeling of unfairness; this made it twenty times more successful than it would have been otherwise. We showed the world that it is not possible to silence us."

Every country has foundation myths, Berktaý tells ESI in early 2009. Turkey's, however, thanks largely to the perseverance of Kemalist dogma, has been virtually uncontested – at least till the 2000s.

"Turkey was a late nation state. The hegemony of state Kemalism allowed foundation myths to survive longer than in most nation states. Our myth of immaculate conception is that though other countries might have performed ethnic cleansing, our nation state is virtuous, perfect, white and pure. It's like a child when he learns about sex. He thinks, 'Maybe others parents did this, but not my mother and father; a stork brought me.' [...] And in this context the most important repressed issue is the Armenian question. [...] It has the potential to stain the idea of the immaculate conception."

"A few Turkish intellectuals, such as Taner Akcam or Fikret Adanır, addressed the Armenian issue in the 1990s. But they were isolated from Turks in Turkey. The press did not cover their views. Marginal journals or printing houses printed 1500 copies of one of their books, for example. But no one ever heard of them."

Berktaý decries how dialogue between Turks and Armenians has been undermined by the fixation, on both sides, with single word: genocide.

"In 2001, I went to the Mullheim conference – it was a mix of historians, Armenians and Turks. All of them had come to hear – or not to hear – one thing only: the g-word. The word 'genocide' is quintessentially legal vocabulary. [...] But historians cannot decide if something constitutes genocide or not. They can only relate the events that took place. The word

genocide implies a crime, as in a court of law. And the Turks feel like they have been seated, en masse, at the seat of the accused."

"So at this conference, whenever someone would use the word 'genocide', the Armenians would cheer and clap, and the Turks would jeer. And then no one would listen to the rest of the presentation. And vice versa: whenever someone didn't qualify the events as genocide, the Turks would clap and the Armenians would jeer, and again, no one would listen any further."

Berktaş is quick to acknowledge the extent to which freedom of speech in Turkey has evolved over the past 10 years, particularly in reference to the Armenian genocide. "How much things have changed in Turkey in 10 years on this topic is hard to believe," he tells ESI.

"Since my 2000 interview in Radikal, I have been using the word genocide regularly. There has never been a court case opened against me. It is also the way you say it. I am a professional historian. I have an historian's ethic. We don't talk in terms of collective statements. This is not for any legal measure, it's just part of a historian's craft. Or maybe they didn't indict me because I am too famous. I really don't know. I did not take any measures to prevent indictment."

"Many interviews followed – for a Dutch newspaper, for an Australian documentary, for PBS. I must have given 40 interviews. The first hate campaign against me [after the Radikal interview] lasted two-and-a-half months. The second lasted one-and-a-half months; the one after the BBC interview, 15 days; after the Australian one, even less. My point is, it was a long haul effort. They want to intimidate you with noisy clatter. And if don't get intimidated, they get tired before you do."

"Their energy ran out. It was a snowball effect."

### Further reading

- [Full 2000 interview with Berktaş in Radikal](#)
- [Follow up interview with Berktaş in Sabah in 2000](#)
- [Another interview Berktaş gave in 2007](#)

## Hrant Dink



Hrant Dink. Photo: tog.org

"I challenge the accepted version of history, because I do not write about things in black and white. People here are used to black and white; that's why they are astonished that there are other shades, too."

Hrant Dink

Hrant Dink was best known for advocating Turkish-Armenian reconciliation and human rights in Turkey. He criticised both Turkey's denial of the 1915 Armenian Genocide and the Armenian diaspora's aggressive campaign for its international recognition.

Hrant Dink was born in Malatya in 1954 and grew up in an Istanbul orphanage. Dink, together with his wife Rakel, later ran an Armenian Children's Summer Camp near Istanbul. The camp was confiscated by the state in 1984.

Hrant Dink was one of the founders of the weekly *Agos*, the only newspaper in Turkey published in Armenian and Turkish, and served as its editor-in-chief from its founding in 1996 until his assassination. *Agos* started with a circulation of 2,000 and currently has about 6,000. It has become an important voice of liberals of Armenian and non-Armenian origin.

While at *Agos* Dink was prosecuted three times for "denigrating Turkishness" under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. He received numerous death threats from Turkish nationalists and once complained that he was threatened by the governor of Istanbul. Dink and his lawyer [Fethiye Cetin](#) deplored the authorities' indifference to this atmosphere of terror, though to little avail at the time.

On 19 January 2007 Dink was assassinated in front of the *Agos* office building in Sisli. The murderer, the young nationalist Ogun Samast, was arrested soon afterwards. Though the trial is still pending, a separate investigation has led to reasonable suspicion that Ergenekon, an underground nationalist network, was involved in Dink's assassination. Many of Ergenekon's

alleged members, including Veli Kucuk, have been present at Dink's trials. A week before his assassination Dink wrote in Agos that he felt "nervous and afraid" because of the hate mail he was receiving:

"I see myself as frightened, the way a dove might be, but I know that the people in this country would never harm a dove."

On the day of Dink's murder, hundreds of people gathered in front of the Agos office building. The slogan "We are all Armenians", an expression of solidarity, was heard for the first time. More than one hundred thousand mourners marched at Dink's funeral on 23 January 2007. His wife Rakel delivered an emotional speech:

"Unless we can question how this baby grew into a murderer, we cannot achieve anything. [...] You have left your loved ones, but you have not left your country."

About a year earlier, Dink had penned an article on Turkish-Armenian relations for "Open Democracy", an online forum. Having cited an emotional story of a woman who travels to Turkey to recover the body of her Armenian mother for burial, Dink closed with the following lines:

"A lady at the Istanbul conference implied that remembering the dead meant coveting territory. Yes, it is true that Armenians long for this soil. But let me repeat what I wrote soon after this experience. At the time the then president of Turkey, Suleyman Demirel, used to say: 'We will not give even three pebblestones to Armenians.' I told the story of this woman and said: 'We Armenians do desire this territory because our root is here. But don't worry. We desire not to take this territory away, but to come and be buried under it.'"

In "Two close Peoples, two far Neighbors", a posthumously published book on Turkish-Armenian relations, Dink writes:

"Both sides stance towards each other is restless and unhealthy [...]. The Armenians with their trauma and the Turks with their paranoia are like two clinical cases. For the identity of both, the 'other'ness of the other is indispensable."

Armenians, he writes, are "the most other, the deepest other".

The syndrome of land loss underlies each side's paranoia. "Even today the "Armenians want our land" syndrome lives on as the most distinct reason for what has been experienced in history."

"The loss of land from the Ottoman Empire with the independence of nations was also the loss of an order and a unity. [...] It was the inevitable fate of the Empire to constantly lose blood [...]. Armenians paid the price of all the other peoples who separated from the Ottomans."

### Further reading

- [International Hrant Dink Foundation](#)
- [Articles by Hrant Dink](#)
- [Rakel Dink's speech at her husband's funeral in 2007:](#)

"All the time up to today, we [the Armenians] were humiliated, insulted for being Armenians; we heard people use [the term] Armenian as a curse. We heard it and we still keep hearing it as such in the newspapers, TVs, birth registration offices; [we hear it] from public servants all the way to the highest authorities. Sometimes we were treated as if we were not citizens of this country, but migrants from somewhere else. We still witness all these, this structure and this understanding; this darkness continues to produce murderers out of babies ... Today, we see here the babies who have turned into murderers; [but] where is the darkness that created them [in the first place]?"

The darkness I point to is not unknown. You can find pieces of this darkness in the [Turkish] Governorship, the Gendarmerie, the Armed Forces, the National Intelligence Agency, the Police, the Government, the Opposition Party, the [minority] parties that do not have a seat in the parliament, and even in the media and [some] non-governmental organizations. Their names and their positions are known. They continuously create murderers from babies and they do it in order to serve Turkey."

## Ronald Grigor Suny



Ronald Grigor Suny

Ronald Suny is professor of Social and Political History at the University of Michigan and co-organizer – with Gerard Libaridian and Muge Gocek – of the Workshop for Armenian Turkish Scholarship (WATS). His expertise covers 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian and Soviet history, the Caucasus, and Armenia. Though he has not made many appearances in Armenia or Turkey, Suny is a well known media figure in the United States and around the world. Suny's grandparents left Turkey after the massacres of 1894-1896 and 1909; all of their remaining relatives died during the genocide.

Using the accounts of then US Ambassador Henry Morgenthau as a basis for his research, Suny suggests that psychological factors helped prepare the ground for the events in 1915. In doing so, he has challenged the view of many Armenian historians who claim that the genocide was planned rationally and in cold-blood.

"In Morgenthau's reports on the Young Turk leaders, fear is prevalent. The Armenians' role in Ottoman society, their successes at the expense of Turks, their lack of gratitude, and, in general, the reversal of traditional status relationships in which Muslims should be on top and Christians below all contributed to a generalized resentment of Turks toward Armenians. Anger is also expressed – anger at rebellion and the threat presented by the Armenians to the war effort and their relationship with the Russians.

But anger is an emotion directed at what someone has done to you, while hatred is an even more powerful and destructive emotion directed at someone for what they are. For the Young Turks anger had turned into hatred of a group that was not conceived as an existential threat to their empire and their rulership. Fear and anger, resentment and hatred are all found in the statements of Enver and Talaat to Ambassador Morgenthau. Given their strategic aim to preserve the empire, and their conceptualization of the Armenians as internal traitors threatening its existence, anger metastasized into hatred and made possible the choice to deport and murder the Armenians.

Here was an ethnic cleansing combined with mass annihilation carried out, not by a nation-state, but by a decaying empire determined to save itself. That salvation required, in the minds of the Young Turks, and many of their German allies, the elimination of the Armenians."[\[1\]](#)

Religion, Suny believes, had nothing to do with the annihilation of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

"Why religion should have led to genocidal violence at this time and not throughout Ottoman and Islamic history, when the two religious communities managed to coexist for centuries without mass killing is not explained."[\[2\]](#)

Rather than a long-planned and carefully orchestrated program of extermination, Suny has argued, the Armenian Genocide was a vengeful and panicky act of suppression. For this, he has come under fire from fellow Armenian historians.

Reviewing Suny's "Armenia in the Twentieth Century", Rouben Adalian writes:

"Suny does not differentiate between massacre and genocide. He treats the Armenian holocaust as a massacre with a larger number of victims. Its ideological roots in Turkish nationalism are never mentioned. Its deliberateness is ignored. Its finality overlooked. Its tragedy trivialized [...].

To contend that 'Turkish actions against the Armenians were taken in dispersion and panic' is to minimize the guilt, responsibility, and inhumanity of the perpetrators of the genocide. Besides, the statement is false [...] the facts so evidently show a very clear plan of action, executed with efficiency and not halted until fully implemented [...]. I found Suny's analysis of the genocide of the Armenians disturbingly shallow."[\[3\]](#)

Genocide recognition is indispensable for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, Suny has recently argued – but it is not indispensable for establishing diplomatic relations.

"Recognition of the Armenian Genocide by scholars, the general public, and even officially by governments is an important step towards clearing the air that fouls relations between Armenians and Turks, Armenia and Turkey. Efforts to prevent such recognition only pollute the atmosphere and makes progress in improving relations more difficult. But this does not mean that official recognition of the Genocide by one or another government should be a prerequisite for discussion, negotiation, or other kinds of relationships. Armenian-Turkish relations can be normalized without official recognition. Indeed, relations can lead to recognition rather than the other way round."[\[4\]](#)

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[\[1\]](#) Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Explaining the Armenian Genocide', a talk by R. Suny, The University of Michigan, 10 April 2005, p. 11

[\[2\]](#) Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Explaining the Armenian Genocide', a talk by R. Suny, The University of Michigan, April 10, 2005, p. 3

[\[3\]](#) Rouben Adalian, *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, Volume 2 1985-1986, pp. 217-222

[\[4\]](#) R. Suny: [Armenian-Turkish relations can be normalized without recognition](#), PanArmenian, March 15, 2007

## Further reading

- [Ronald Grigor Suny on Hrant Dink](#)
- Ronald Grigor Suny, [Looking Towards Ararat](#), 1993

## Gerard Libaridian



Gerard Libaridian

Gerard Libaridian, who holds the Chair in Modern Armenian History at the University of Michigan, is one of the most eminent US scholars of Armenian background. As adviser (1991-97) to President Levon Ter Petrossian, Libaridian was the architect of Yerevan's policy vis-à-vis Turkey. Gerard Libaridian was also actively involved in the Workshop for Armenian Turkish Scholarship (WATS), which organised several meetings and discussions between Armenian and Turkish scholars between 2000 and 2006. In 2007, Libaridian and Muge Gocek presented a curriculum entitled "Armenian-Turkish relations beyond the 19<sup>th</sup> Century". Born in Lebanon, Libaridian comes from a family that survived the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Armenian massacres.

Much of Libaridian's research has focused on Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide. In Turkey, as he puts it, the issue has been "denied, trivialized or explained away."[\[5\]](#)

In a 2005 article entitled "The Past as a Prison, The Past as a different future", Libaridian argues that Turkish denial of the genocide will not make it go away. Just the opposite:

"The Turkish side, and especially officials and policy makers must realize that, however the events of 1915-1917 are characterized, there is no doubt that they brought to an end the collective existence of the Armenian people on their ancestral homeland. [...] For the less traumatized progenies of the survivors in lands nearby and distant, the past is the present. Denial of the genocide is a denial of not only their past but also their present.

Furthermore, the sustained policy of denial of that past by successive Turkish governments only infuriates the new generations of Armenians; it makes it more difficult for them to focus on the historical context in which these events took place or to generate a desire to understand the position within which Turkish society finds itself. [...]

The more the Turkish state denies the past, the more adamant the new generations are in asserting it. That part of the collective memory tends to take over as the determinant of their identity, more difficult to transcend, more important to have others recognize it. There are good reasons why the use of the term "genocide" has become so important for the Armenian side."

The onus is not exclusively on the Turks, however. The Armenians, says Libaridian, must also learn to understand and appreciate the trauma of the Turks' Ottoman past, as well as the effect it has on Turkey's policy towards Armenia.

"The Armenian side must recognize that the Great Powers did in fact prey upon the Ottoman Empire; until the rise of the Kemalist Movement the rivalry between Great Britain and Russia was probably the main reason why Anatolia did not suffer the same fate as Africa in their hands. The importance of the centrality of Great Power threat to the Ottoman state cannot be underestimated; nor can one underestimate the role of that threat in the rise of the modern Turkish state and in Turkish perceptions of the past.

That such historical facts are also used to justify a security oriented state, the role of the military in Turkish politics, and the use of force to settle political conflicts, is very much part of the ideology, just as the Genocide is at the basis of territorial demands from Turkey for some Armenian political parties.

Such territorial demands feed into the logic of denial: recognition of the Genocide, Turkish officials argue, will result in the demands for reparations, including territorial ones. Whether Turkey will face a real threat in this area is immaterial; what matters are that such fears find a receptive audience, are embedded in the political psyche, and are easily manipulated in a society educated in the historical threat of dismemberment."[\[6\]](#)

The Armenian nationalists' "coarse and indiscriminate" discourse, Libaridian writes in "Modern Armenia – People, Nation, State", a 2004 book, "accused all Turks, past and present, of being party to the criminal action. It was, or appeared to be, a battle of all Armenians against all Turks [...]. The policy of denial of the genocide was seen as the mere manifestation of the evil nature of Turkey and of Turks."

By linking genocide recognition to territorial claims, he adds, the nationalist discourse has proven counterproductive.

"Armenian political parties considered a Turkish recognition of the genocide as the first step and the legal basis for territorial demands from Turkey. Even if there were no other reasons, this linkage would have been sufficient for the Turkish state to deny the genocide at all cost."

Under Ter Petrossian's presidency, Libaridian believes, Turkey lost the opportunity for good relations with Armenia by indexing its relations with Yerevan to Armenia's withdrawal from Nagorno Karabakh.

"The Armenian Genocide was not put up as a problem, as a basis for relations with Turkey. This is very critical because the politicization of the Genocide had served, wittingly or unwittingly, to create the mentality and psychology that Turkey, through its nonrecognition of the Genocide, is likely to repeat it, that Turkey is the eternal enemy.

If Turkey is the eternal enemy, then Russia is the eternally necessary friend. And this then creates pressures on your policy of independence. Armenia set out to establish normal relations with Turkey without preconditions. This was the crux of the revolution in Armenian political thought. It defies most Armenians' view of their history, of the role Turkey has played

and is likely to play in the future. In practice, however, Turkey did not accept the same basis of normalization of relations, that is, no preconditions, and although it recognized Armenia's independence, it has refused to this day to establish diplomatic relations." [7]

Robert Kocharian's (1998-2008) policies of making international recognition of the Genocide part of Armenia's foreign policy agenda, writes Libaridian, was tactical.

"Kocharian thought that by raising the question, a thorny one for Turkey, he would counter Turkey's insistence on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict before normalization proceeds. The corollary was that for Armenia not to raise the Genocide question, Turkey would withdraw its own precondition which, in turn, would weaken the Azerbaijani negotiating position and strengthen Armenia's economy and standing.

Kocharian believed that his tactical step would be welcomed in the Armenian Diaspora as result of which the Diaspora would multiply its investments in the country, thus solving Armenia's economic woes." [8]

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[5] Gerard Libaridian, 'Negotiate or not to Negotiate: The Past as Dilemma', April, 2005, Ann Arbor, Michigan, p. 1

[6] Gerard Libaridian, *The Past as a Prison, The Past as a different future*, Turkish Policy Quarterly, vol. 4, No. 4, 2005, pp. 2-4

[7] Gerard Libaridian, "[The New Thinking Revisited](#)", Libaridian speaks at Princeton University, May 9, 1998

[8] Gerard Libaridian, *Modern Armenia*, Chapter 12, 'The Re-Imagined Future: Turkey-Armenia and Turkish-Armenian Relations since Independence'

### Further reading

- Gerard Libaridian, [Modern Armenia, People- Nation - State](#)
- Gerard Libaridian, [The past as a prison, the past as a different future](#)
- [Gerard Libaridian speaking at Princeton](#)
- University of Michigan, [Armenian Studies Programm](#)

## Justin McCarthy



*Justin McCarthy*

Justin McCarthy, an American historian, made his name writing on the expulsion of Ottoman Muslims Turks from the Balkans and the Caucasus in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As he put it in the Introduction of his book *Death and Exile*:

"Not only during World War I, but all through the nineteenth century, the Muslim peoples of Anatolia, the Crimea, the Balkans, and the Caucasus had suffered overwhelming mortality. Their losses were worthy of further research ... It is a history of Muslim suffering, not because Muslims alone suffered, but because a corrective is needed to the traditional one-sided view of the history of the Turks and the Muslims of these regions."

He sets out to explore what he calls the story of one of history's great migrations:

"In 1800 a vast Muslim land existed in Anatolia, the Balkans, and southern Russia. It was not only a land in which Muslims ruled, but a land in which Muslims were a majority or, in much of the Balkans and part of the Caucasus, a sizeable minority. It included the Crimea and its hinterlands, most of the Caucasus regions, eastern as well as western Anatolia, and southeastern Europe from Albania and Bosnia to the Black sea, almost all of which was within the Ottoman Empire. ... By 1923, only Anatolia, eastern thrace, and a section of the southeastern Caucasus remained of the Muslim land. The Balkan Muslims were largely gone, dead or forced to migrate, the remainder living in pockets of settlement in Greece, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The same fate had overcome the Muslims of the Crimea, the northern Caucasus, and Russian Armenia – they were simply gone."

As a result of these events, the new Turkish Republic was a nation of immigrants whose people came from Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Armenia, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine. However, he notes, despite the historical importance of Muslim losses, they are not found in standard history textbooks.

McCarthy discussion of the destruction of Ottoman Armenians during World War one is nonetheless highly controversial among Western historians. While sometimes arguing in favour of the so-called provocation thesis (i.e. it was Armenian actions or rebellion that

provoked their destruction) at other times he presents whatever happened during World War I as inevitable, such was the spirit of the times. There are then no choices and there is no individual responsibility: he writes, Donald Bloxham points out, as if the Ottoman war-time government

"were just another government swept along powerlessly by an irresistible meta-historical force. At one point McCarthy suggest that 'imperialism and nationalism had created a state in which both Muslims and Armenians knew that they had the choice of killing or being killed. The only other option was flight.'" (Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, p. 210)

It was an era of mass-death where a state was fighting for its survival in a dog-eats-dog world. In such a world, notions of war crimes, crimes against humanity, the criminal nature of ethnic cleansing (of Muslims, Christians or Jews) make no sense, he suggests, since everybody commits them and was bound to commit them:

"In its historical context, the deportation of Ottoman Armenians was logical. In its historical context, the deportation of Ottoman Armenians is logical. This is not to pass moral judgement on deportations – the actions of all groups in the World War I period were so filled with inhumanity that no group should cast the first stone."

But when does this era of inhumanity end? Does a similar approach justify further ethnic cleansing and deportations as a "defensive measure" in the Balkans in the early 1990s

Sometimes it appears also as if, in McCarthy's reading of history, some things never change. In March 2005 McCarthy was invited to address the Turkish Grand National Assembly to speak on the Armenian issue. He encouraged Turkish lawmakers not to bend to those who claimed that 1915 was a case of genocide. To give in, McCarthy warned, would be to open the door to potentially devastating consequences, in terms of both money and territory. The Armenian nationalist agenda had not changed in more than a century:

"First, the Turkish Republic is to state that there was an 'Armenian Genocide' and to apologize for it. Second, the Turks are to pay reparations. Third, an Armenian state is to be created ... Then they will demand the Turks give Erzurum and Van and Elazig and Sivas and Bitlis and Trabzon to Armenia."

This, in turn, would have serious implications for the current inhabitants of East Anatolia:

"The population of the new 'Armenia' would be less than one-fourth Armenian at best. Could such a state long exist? Yes, it could exist, but only if the Turks were expelled. That was the policy of the Armenian Nationalists in 1915. It would be their policy tomorrow."

McCarthy once told an audience in Istanbul, almost flippantly, that by the standards of the UN Genocide Convention "Turks were indeed guilty of genocide" – and "so were Armenians, Russians, Greeks, Americans, British, and almost every people that has ever existed." The only *meaningful* use of the term, he suggested, was the Holocaust: the only reason some people would want to describe what happened in Anatolia as genocide, therefore, was "political".<sup>[9]</sup> But this view has few adherents today among Western scholars.

In the 1990s NATO stepped in, having witnessed passively three years of massacres in the Balkans and end attempts to create, through mass expulsions and genocidal massacres targeting Bosniak Muslims, new ethnically homogenous nation-states. The Srebrenica massacre was later found to be genocide by international courts. Thus Srebrenica and the

intervention which it helped trigger – the first time European and American troops fought in the Balkans to prevent the "death and exile" of Balkan Muslims – marked a turning point in the history McCarthy describes. It also suggests that calling war-crimes by their name at the time they are committed, regardless who commits them, is essential to increase the likelihood that they are brought to an end.

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[9] [Presentation made by Prof. Justin McCarthy](#) (Seminar on Turkish-Armenian Relations Organized by the Democratic Principles Association 15 March 2001 /Istanbul)

### Further reading

- Justin McCarthy, [Death and exile – the ethnic cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821 – 1922.](#)
- Donald Bloxham, [The Great Game of Genocide – Imperialism, Nationalism and the Destruction of Ottoman Armenians.](#)
- [Presentation made by Prof. Justin McCarthy, Seminar on Turkish-Armenian Relations Organized by the Democratic Principles Association 15 March 2001, Istanbul.](#)

## Guenther Lewy



Guenther Lewy

Born into a Jewish family in Breslau in 1923, Guenther Lewy escaped Germany with his family after Kristallnacht in November 1938. He first immigrated to Palestine and then to the United States, where he was to gain significant acclaim for his research on the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and genocide. Lewy is currently a professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts.

In 2005, Lewy published "The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide", a book in which he investigated rival Turkish and Armenian historiographies relating to the last decades of the Ottoman Empire.

Lewy, as the title of his book indicates, is reluctant to use the term "genocide" in reference to the Armenian massacres. Initially, he questions the very need for using any label whatsoever to describe the events of 1915. "The issue of the appropriate label to be attached to these occurrences is relevant for the ongoing polemics between Turks and Armenians," he writes. "It is of secondary importance at best for historical inquiry, because the use of legal nomenclature does not add any material facts important for the history of these events."

But Lewy himself cannot keep from entering the fray. In justifying his non-use of the genocide label in relation to the Armenian tragedy, Lewy – sometimes explicitly, sometimes not – uses the Holocaust as his only yardstick.

"The large Armenian communities of Constantinople, Smyrna and Aleppo were spared deportation and [...] survived the war largely intact [...]. These exemptions are analogous to Adolf Hitler failing to include the Jews of Berlin, Cologne and Munich in the Final Solution."

The available evidence, Lewy concludes, "does not prove that this regime intended to annihilate the Armenian community. A large death toll, no matter how reprehensible, is not proof of a premeditated plan of extermination." Genocide, Lewy argues, requires a premeditated plan of extermination.

Citing the massive suffering of Turkish civilians and soldiers during the First World War – for which the neglect of the Young Turk regime was largely to blame – Lewy points out that at least 1.5 million Muslim civilians died as a result of the war, most of them probably from disease and malnutrition or starvation. "A government as callous about the suffering of its own population as was the Young Turk regime," he then contends, "could hardly be expected to be very concerned about the terrible human misery that would result from deporting its Armenian population, rightly or wrongly suspected of treason." Lewy manages, later on, to extricate himself from the contentious logic of this argument. "The agonizing deaths of Armenian women and children during the long Marches through the desert," he writes, "find no parallel among the adversities experienced by the Turkish population."

In other sections of the book, Lewy attempts to pick apart polarized Armenian and Turkish narratives of the events of 1915. Both Turks and Armenians, he writes, "cite important documents out of context or simply ignore the historical setting all together. A polemical and propagandistic style of writing now dominates the field and for the most part has displaced of the search for historical truth." On the one hand, Lewy complains, the Turkish government continues to maintain that the large loss of life was the result primarily of disease, starvation, and inter communal warfare; on the other, Armenian historians willfully omit the killing of Turkish civilians by Armenian guerilla bands.

While he rejects the so called "provocation thesis", according to which the Armenian revolutionaries organized incidents to bring about inhuman reprisals, and to provoke the intervention of the outside powers, Lewy takes stock of what he calls "the tactical designs of the Armenian revolutionaries." To do so, he emphasizes, "does not mean to ignore or excuse the malevolent intentions and deeds of the Turkish authorities." Elsewhere, citing Armenian assistance to the advancing Russian forces during World War I, particularly during the battle of Sarikamish, he writes: "None of this can serve to justify what the Turks did to the Armenians, but it provides the indispensable historical context for the tragedy that ensued."

"Given this context, the Armenians can hardly claim that they suffered from no reason at all. Ignoring warnings from many quarters, large numbers of them had fought the Turks openly or played the role of the fifth column; not surprisingly, with their backs against the wall, the ottomans reacted resolutely, if not viciously."

"While the Armenians were victims, not all of them were innocent victims; and the disaster that overtook them therefore was not entirely unprovoked. Most importantly, while the ottoman government bears responsibility for the deportations that got badly out of hand, the blame for the massacres that took place must be put primarily on those [individuals] who did the actual killing. [...] The Ottoman government, I'm inclined to believe, wanted to arrange an orderly process but did not have the means to do so. The momentous task of relocating several hundred thousand people in a short span of time and over a highly primitive system of transportation was simply beyond the ability of the ottoman bureaucracy."

In closing, Lewy cites Turkish fears that any concession in the way of even a limited admission of wrongdoing "would initiate a chain reaction, leading to sweeping demands for financial and even territorial restitution." Reconciliation, he suggests, depends largely on putting such fears to rest:

"If the Armenians could be persuaded to forgo resort to the legal concept of genocide as a systematic and premeditated program of the destruction of the people and be satisfied with a Turkish acknowledgement of sincere regret for the terrible suffering of the Armenian people during the First World War, a path might open toward reconciliation."

## Further reading

- [Guenther Lewy, Revisiting the Armenian Genocide](#)

## Murat Belge



Murat Belge

"This is a society that specializes in forgetting rather than remembering."

Murat Belge is one of Turkey's most outspoken liberal intellectuals. Since 1996 he has been teaching literature at Istanbul's [Bilgi University](#). He has translated James Joyce, Charles Dickens and D. H. Lawrence. He has been a long-time contributor to the daily Radikal; since June 2008 he is a columnist for the daily [Taraf](#).

Belge is the son of a political journalist and the grandson of a former governor of Bursa. After the military coup in 1970 he was sent to prison. After the coup in 1980 he had to leave academia. Belge co-founded a publishing house for left-wing classics and became one of the founders of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly in Turkey.

Belge's deep interest in Istanbul's hidden multiethnic past grew out of his personal experience. As he wrote in a city guide published in 1993:

"Just imagine, the houses where I was born, where I spent my childhood, where I was during university, where I lived during my first marriage, where the children were born, where two children grew up – none of them exist anymore. [...] But the problem is not only buildings. All the people changed. In 1960 the population of Istanbul was slightly above one million. Included in that were still a measurable number of minorities... and in the blink of an eye my school friends, my friends from the neighbourhood had disappeared. We didn't really understand it while it was happening. And then a day came when we looked around and saw that no one was left."

"Economic change also brought cultural change. A new population, a new language, a new culture under new circumstances, with its face turned towards the future. In the 1980s, following the Evren coup, the meaning of "future" in Turkey changed, "lost times" immediately gained importance, and "nostalgia" set in. We all became like Proust..."

Since the early 1980s Belge has been offering interested citizens of his home town Istanbul guided tours through historic quarters of Istanbul or (by boat) along the Bosphorus. He recalls the reactions to his first walking tours through old Istanbul. People, he says, were stunned to find an incredibly rich multiethnic past ready to be (re)discovered.

"Everybody was terribly interested and surprised. This was very new. ... People in Istanbul have forgotten, because they never were reminded that this city had a very multicultural, multi-religious life."

Today Belge receives personal protection, provided by the state, due to his status as one of Turkey's most outspoken public intellectuals. He – along with Halil Berkay, among others – was one of the organizers of the first conference on the Armenian question in Turkey, which took place at Bilgi University in 2005. Belge has never been afraid of questioning taboos, from human rights violations to the cult of Ataturk, and the ideas of modern day Kemalists.

"Kemal, I'm sure, was the most brilliant man in his milieu, at the time when he lived. A brilliant strategist, a very good soldier, and a very ardent westerniser. And maybe he was too successful. Instead of putting society in a straitjacket, more care and affection could have been spared for creating a stronger civil society, rather than treating society as a child to be fed this and to be fed that. [...] Present-day Kemalism has almost nothing to do with Kemalism as it was: it is hostile to the United States, it is hostile to the European Union, it is hostile to Western democratic ideals."

## Levon Ter Petrossian (president 1991-98) on Turkey



Levon Ter-Petrossian

Levon Ter Petrossian, born in Aleppo in 1946, comes from a family of genocide survivors. A graduate of the Oriental Studies Department of Yerevan State University, Ter Petrossian was to become an eminent expert on Oriental studies. In 1966, he was arrested and detained for a week by Soviet Armenian authorities for active participation in protests commemorating the genocide.

Having worked in the Ancient Manuscripts Institute of Armenia (Matenadaran), he found himself – as of 1988 – leading the Institute's "Karabakh Committee". The Committee soon transformed into the Armenian National Movement. Its objective was twofold: Armenian independence and the liberation of Karabakh. When Armenia declared its independence, it was no surprise that Ter Petrossian – the leading light of the national movement – was elected the country's first President, winning 83 percent of the vote.

Throughout his presidency (1991-1998), Ter Petrossian attempted to establish relations with Turkey. His position was that while Armenia could not forsake the memory of the 1915 genocide, it should not make international recognition a foreign policy issue, either. Both Armenia and Turkey, he therefore argued, should refrain from making diplomatic relations subject to any preconditions.

As Ter Petrossian told the Turkish Ambassador in Moscow in 1991:

"Armenia is changing, and in this new world we should be neighbour states with new thinking. We want to become friends. We are ready for any type of mutually beneficial cooperation. Armenia has no territorial claims towards Turkey."[\[21\]](#)

In 1995, during an international conference commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the genocide, he said:

"Today, Armenia and Turkey, as neighbouring states, have to establish mutually beneficial trade and economic links. We have to overcome historical controversies and re-establish the mutual trust between our peoples through friendly relations [...]."[\[22\]](#)

From 1998 until 2007 Ter Petrossian stayed out of politics: he made few appearances and made no public statements or interviews. When he returned to politics in September 2007 – to participate in the 2008 presidential elections – it was clear that his views on establishing relations with Turkey had not changed.

In a major foreign policy speech during the presidential campaign, Ter Petrossian criticized the government's policy towards Turkey, underlining the importance he himself placed in Turkey's EU accession:

"Isn't it clear that Armenia can neither facilitate nor delay Turkey's accession to the European Union? What business then did we have sending out letters to Brussels with demands to halt EU-Turkey negotiations or make the recognition of the Armenian Genocide a pre-condition for Turkey? [...] Isn't it obvious that Turkey's accession to the EU is in Armenia's best interest in all respects – economic, political, and security? What is more dangerous – Turkey as an EU member, or Turkey that has been rejected by the West, and has turned therefore to the East? Or, what is more preferable: Armenia isolated from the West, or Armenia that shares a border with the European Union? Our country's foreign policy should have answered these simple questions long ago.

What should Armenia's authorities have done, rather than creating obstacles to Turkey's accession to the EU? They should have done exactly the opposite of what they did. Namely, they should have demonstrated goodwill, and not tried to obstruct that process in any way. Moreover, they should have urged Brussels not to misuse the question of Genocide recognition, referring the resolution of that complicated problem within Armenian-Turkish relations to the parties themselves.

It is time to finally understand that by presenting ultimatums to Turkey or pushing it into a corner, no one can force it to recognize the Armenian Genocide. I have absolutely no doubt that Turkey will do so – sooner or later. Yet it will happen not before the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, but after the establishment of an atmosphere of good-neighborliness, cooperation, and trust between our countries. Consequently, emotions aside, these relations must be built on the basis of the reality that Armenia considers the events of 1915 to be Genocide, whereas Turkey does not. The well-known offer to form a commission of Armenian and Turkish historians is unacceptable and offensive to us, first, because it casts doubt on what is for us a national conviction, and secondly, because the fact that the Genocide has been recognized by the legislatures of a number of countries makes the establishment of such a commission irrelevant and obsolete."[\[23\]](#)

Ter Petrossian was reacting to statements made by government representatives and to a negative PR campaign that targeted him for being a "pro-Turkish" politician. His speech was followed by new personal attacks, notably by Hayots Ashkharh (Armenian World), a pro-government newspaper:

"Levon Ter-Petrosian is trying to 'naively' state that only if we establish 'kind-friendly relations and atmosphere of trust' with our neighbors, will Turkey definitely recognize Armenian Genocide. A question arises here how is Levon Effendi going to establish the 'kind-friendly relations and atmosphere of trust' with our neighbors, when for Turkey the pre-condition of friendly relations is our giving up the 'Genocide allegations.'"[\[24\]](#)

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[21] Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Russian newspaper), 14 May 1991

[22] Levon Ter-Petrossian, Select Works, Yerevan, 2006, p. 480 (ESI translated)

[23] Levon Ter Petrossian's speech, entitled '[History, Ideology, Typology](#)', at Liberty Square, 8 December 2007

[24] Armen Tsaturyan, "[Levon Effendi and the Recognition of the Armenian Genocide](#)", Hayots Ashkharh (Armenian World), 11 December 2007

### **Robert Kocharian (president 1998-2008) on Turkey**



Robert Kocharian

Robert Kocharian, the second President of Armenia, began his political career in Nagorno-Karabakh where he was born in 1954. An engineer by training, he actively participated in the Karabakh movement since the late 1980s, becoming one of the movement's key figures – first heading Karabakh's defence and security structures, then moving on to become its Prime Minister and President. In 1997, Kocharian became the Prime Minister of Armenia. A year later – after a series of disagreements with Kocharian and other cabinet members on the Karabakh issue – President Levon Ter Petrossian resigned his post. In the elections that followed, Kocharian secured the Presidency.

Kocharian revised Ter Petrossian's policies vis-à-vis Turkey, adopting a more hawkish stance and decided to introduce international recognition of the Armenian genocide as the cornerstone of Armenia's foreign policy agenda. He spelled out his adopted policy line during the UN General Assembly in September 1998, on occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Genocide Convention.

Kocharian was to continue Ter Petrossian's policy of establishing relations and opening the border without preconditions – but was also intent on having the international community recognize and condemn the Armenian genocide. According to Ruben Safrastian, Director of Oriental Studies Institute at the Academy of Sciences in Armenia:

"After 10 years of re-evaluation of our approach, now I think that it was politically wrong [to make concessions]. It gave no results. And what happened in 1998-2000 regarding the toughening of the position towards Turkey was logical as we got nothing in front of our concessions."[\[25\]](#)

Kocharian believed that Turkey's policy of indexing relations with Armenia to Azerbaijan was unacceptable. The difference between Kocharian's and Ter Petrossian's approach lay in the following, according to Gegham Manoukian, ARF member and director of the "Yerkir Media" TV company:

"All of Ter Petrossian's conciliatory actions towards Turkey have remained unreciprocated. Even at a time when he closed the Armenian Revolutionary Federation party in Armenia, the Turkish position remained unaltered. Armenia could have made further concessions towards Turkey, make pressures on the Armenian diaspora, and there were not to be any results. From 1990-98 Armenia did not make any step against Turkey, it made only concessions. ... So it was clear that that policy had no perspectives. Kocharian's coming to power was a turning point in Armenia's policies toward Turkey. ... Until 1998 there was very little talk in international forums about the fact that Armenian-Turkish borders were closed and that there were no relations between those two countries. After 1998 we saw the reverse process."

In a CNN Turk interview with Mehmet Ali Birand, [Kocharian said that genocide recognition does not entail any territorial claims by Armenia](#):

"As for our relations with Turkey, we understand that relations between our two states will not lead to any new legal status after the Genocide is recognized. That's not what we're talking about. Today, we are concerned with reclaiming justice. For the Republic of Armenia, for me, personally, this is more a moral issue. I know that in Turkey some think that now, if the Genocide is recognized, then Armenia will definitely present Turkey with territorial claims... For Turkey, recognition of the Armenian Genocide will not necessarily lead to legal consequences regarding the Republic of Armenia."[\[26\]](#)

In 2005, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan sent Kocharian a letter proposing the establishment of a historians' commission to study the events of 1915. Kocharian answered with a counterproposal to establish diplomatic relations and launch an intergovernmental commission. As Kocharian wrote:

"Your suggestion of discussing the past cannot be effective if it does not include a discussion of the current situation and the future of relations between our countries...The political atmosphere should be prepared for the dialogue. To move mutual relations forward is the duty of the politicians. We cannot leave this responsibility to the historians...We can establish an intergovernmental commission to study every problem between our countries and begin the discussions without any precondition."[\[27\]](#)

In a 2007 interview with Le Figaro, Kocharian acknowledged that the prospect of EU membership makes it a more attractive partner for Armenia; and that Turkey's EU perspective is a potential catalyst of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation.

"The EU membership process would require serious reforms for the transformation of the Turkish society. This would mean a progress in the direction of a more predictable Turkey, more open, more tolerant towards minorities, more inclined to re-evaluate its history, etc. Besides with the Turkish membership we would have a border with the EU, something which is obviously very positive. But we do not want an EU membership as 'a credit'. Let us not forget that negotiations have started with a country that keeps its borders closed to its neighbor, let alone the unresolved problems in the relations with Cyprus."[\[28\]](#)

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[\[25\]](#) ESI Interview with Dr. Ruben Safrastyan, Director of the Oriental Studies Institute, Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 17, June, 2008

[\[26\]](#) [Robert Kocharyan's Interview CNN Turk](#), January 29, 2001

[\[27\]](#) Robert Kocharyan Letter to Prime Minister Erdogan, April 26, 2005

[\[28\]](#) Robert Kocharian, "La Turquie doit demander pardon" (Turkey Must Apologize), Le Figaro, 19 February 2007.

### **Serzh Sargsian (president since 2008) on Turkey**



Serzh Sarkisian

Like his predecessor Robert Kocharian, Serzh Sargsian, Armenia's third president, was born in Nagorno-Karabakh. Like Kocharian, he was born in 1954. Having graduated in philology from Yerevan State University, Sargsian was an active member of the Communist party in Karabakh since the late 1970s. In 1988, he became involved in the Karabakh national movement. After heading the Karabakh defence forces, he became the Defence Minister of Armenia. Since 1993 Sargsian has held top ministerial positions in every Armenian government and is the longest serving top official in the history of the Armenian Republic. After the sudden death of Prime Minister Andranik Margarian in the spring of 2007, Sargsian became Prime Minister and leader of the governing Republican Party. In 2008, he was elected President.

Sargsian's presidency opened new prospects for Turkish-Armenian relations. Sargsian has shown more initiative than his predecessor in pursuing dialogue with Turkey. In principle, however, his positions do not differ greatly from Kocharian's. Genocide recognition is still on Armenia's foreign political agenda. Like Kocharian, Sargsian has stuck to the "relations without preconditions" approach vis-à-vis Turkey.

On 23 June 2008, during a meeting with members of the Armenian diaspora in Russia, Sargsian made a groundbreaking statement in favour of engaging with Turkey. (Talks between Armenian and Turkish diplomats had already been under way for months.) As Sargsian put it:

"Armenia's position is clear: in the 21<sup>st</sup> century borders between neighbouring countries must not be closed. Regional cooperation could be the best means of supporting stability. The Turkish side offers to form a commission that would study historical facts. We don't oppose the creation of such a commission, but when the border between the states is open. Otherwise, it could become a matter of delaying the issue for years and a means of abuse. In the near future I am intent on taking new steps furthering the Armenian-Turkish relations. Most probably, I will invite the Turkish President Abdullah Gul to Yerevan so that we could together watch the football match between Armenia and Turkey."[\[29\]](#)

Sargsian's press secretary later clarified that "the creation of such a commission would be logical only after the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of the border between our countries. Otherwise, it could become a tool for dragging out and exploiting the existing problems."

Media outlets sympathetic to Levon Ter Petrossian were to attack Sargsian relentlessly over his speech. Anna Hakobian and her Haykakan Jamanak colleagues accused the new President of genocide denial and treason. Haykakan Jamanak soon linked Sargsian's foreign policy to the domestic political situation. Commenting on Sargsian's first 100 days in office, Hakobian wrote that the president is "rejected by everyone. And that is the reason that he is trying by all means to establish relations with Turkey. Serzh Sargsian thinks this might help distract the international community and Armenian society from Armenia's domestic problems – and to focus their attention, say, on the real possibility of opening the Armenian-Turkish border."[\[30\]](#)

After Gul's visit to Yerevan the opposition press, aggrieved at what they believed was a policy of appeasement towards Turkey, dubbed Sargsian "Serzhik Efendi".[\[31\]](#) But Serzh Sargsian stuck to his position. In an interview with Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung he reiterated his stance, with a note of optimism:

"We wish to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries without preconditions, to open the borders, and after that we can discuss on the intergovernmental level the whole range of issues existing between neighbor states. We do not put the recognition of the Genocide by Turkey as a precondition for the establishment of bilateral relations. We wish to establish relations but not at any cost. In the past the European nations did not create any commissions for the establishment of normal relations either. Such a step could also mean an attempt to mislead the international community, especially when the process could last for years."[\[32\]](#)

Meeting with the Iranian Armenian community Sargsian argued against those who attack him that the rapprochement with Turkey is being preceded at some cost:

"The Armenian-Turkish relations are being discussed in Armenian, Turkish and international media at length. Sometimes, suppositions or prognosis or good wishes are being presented as facts. The truth is we are ready to establish normal relations with Turkey without preconditions. Up to date Turkey has not been ready to do it. Now it looks like there are some possibilities of exiting that unacceptable situation when neighboring states do not even have diplomatic relations. But here, in this hall, I want to say once again that to establish relations with Turkey does not mean to abandon the Genocide issue."[\[33\]](#)

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[\[29\] Official website of the President of Armenia](#), (ESI translation)

[\[30\]](#) Anna Hakobyan, "Until August 1 and afterwards", Haykakan Jamanak, Editorial article, July 8, 2008

[\[31\]](#) Nikol Pashinyan, Haykakan Jamanak Editorial, October 29, 2008

[\[32\]](#) [Serzh Sargsyan Interview to German Newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung](#), November 11, 2008,

[\[33\]](#) [Address by President Serzh Sargsyan during the meeting with the Armenian-Iranian community](#), 14.04.2009

## Issues

### What is genocide?



Genocide Memorial in Yerevan. Photo: flickr/azkid2lt

In 2007, a publication of the Ankara-based Institute for Armenian Research noted, with perceptible resignation, that recognition of the Armenian genocide had shifted from an Armenian national agenda to a mainstream view among scholars.

"In recent years, the most salient but maybe the least noticed fact with regard to the Armenian question is that the Armenian claims are accepted more extensively by part of the Western academic society ... At the end of this process, which resembles a chain reaction, many more academics read these publications and use them in their studies."

This chain reaction was part of the emergence of genocide as a new field of study in Western academia. In 1980, the University of Montreal launched the first ever academic course on "the history and sociology of genocide". Following the publication of Leo Kuper's 1981 book *Genocide – Its Political Uses in the Twentieth Century*, the field of genocide studies expanded rapidly. Genocide research institutes were created in the US and across Europe. In 1997, an [International Association of Genocide Scholars](#) was founded. In 1999, Israel Charny produced the first *Encyclopaedia of Genocide*, which included twenty pages on the Armenian genocide. Samantha Power's 2002 book *A Problem from Hell*, on America's failure to prevent genocides in the 20th century, won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

Until 1980, genocide research had focused mainly on the Holocaust. When the Armenian historian Vahakn Dadrian first wrote on the subject of "comparative genocide", he used the Holocaust as a yardstick. So too did his detractors. Turkish scholars rejected the genocide label by emphasising the difference between Hitler's policies and those of the Young Turk government. Their arguments centred on two propositions. First, unlike the Holocaust, it was impossible to establish the "intent to destroy" the Armenians on the part of the Ottoman authorities, given that important Armenian populations in parts of Turkey were untouched. US historian [Guenther Lewy](#) underlined in a recent book that:

"the large Armenian communities of Constantinople, Smyrna and Aleppo were spared deportation and ... survived the war largely intact ... These exemptions are analogous to Adolf Hitler failing to include the Jews of Berlin, Cologne and Munich in the Final Solution."

The second proposition is that, unlike the Jews of Nazi Germany, the Armenians had rebelled against the Ottoman authorities, and therefore could not be counted as "innocent victims". As [Gunduz Aktan told the US Congress in 2000](#), "Killing, even of civilians, in a war waged for territory, is not genocide. The victims of genocide must be totally innocent." Given that the events of 1915 were not equivalent to the Holocaust, the argument went, they did not amount to genocide, and any use of the term was purely political.

What this argument overlooks, however, is that, in international usage, the term "genocide" has never been limited to "acts equivalent to the Holocaust". The starting point is the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. The Convention defines "genocide" as:

"any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."



*ICTY in The Hague. Photo: Ruhr Universität Bochum*

There is now a considerable body of court cases, official declarations and academic studies applying this definition to both historical and contemporary events around the world. In 2003, the Dutch expert [Ton Zwaan was asked by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia \(ICTY\)](#) to summarise "the main general findings and insights developed in the field of 'genocide studies'." Zwaan argued that detailed studies of specific historical cases since the early 1980s had made clear that, while the Holocaust "was undoubtedly the most systematic attempt to realise a 'total' and 'complete' genocide ever", it should not obscure recognition of other, less 'total' forms of genocide.

"In fact, all genocides have been in a sense 'partial' genocides ... There have indeed been quite important differences between the murder of the Jews, and the National-Socialist genocidal policies towards parts of the Polish and Russian populations under German occupation, but one may simultaneously acknowledge that in all three cases a genocidal policy was followed and a genocidal process took place."

The key phrase in the 1948 Convention is "in whole or in part". As the International Association of Genocide Scholars has pointed out, "Perpetrators need not intend to destroy the entire group. Destruction of only part of a group (such as its educated members, or members living in one region) is also genocide."

This has been applied in numerous findings by courts and commissions of enquiry. The [Guatemalan Historical Clarification Commission](#), looking into the atrocities of the 1970s and 80s against indigenous Mayans, concluded that "agents of the State of Guatemala, within the framework of counterinsurgency operations carried out between 1981 and 1983, committed acts of genocide against groups of Mayan people." The government's decision to designate all Maya as supporters of communism and terrorism, the report noted, had led to "aggressive, racist and extremely cruel [...] violations that resulted in the massive extermination of defenceless Mayan communities."

Similarly, the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which Bosnian Serb forces killed some 8,000 Muslim men, was found to be genocide. [In a 2004 judgment, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia \(ICTY\) concluded](#) that "the aim of the Genocide Convention is to prevent the intentional destruction of entire human groups, and the part targeted must be significant enough to have an impact on the group as a whole." It continued:

"The massacred men amounted to about one fifth of the overall Srebrenica community. The Trial Chamber found that, given the patriarchal character of the Bosnian Muslim society in Srebrenica, the destruction of such a sizeable number of men would inevitably result in the physical disappearance of the Bosnian Muslim population at Srebrenica."

Scholars and courts have also clarified the meaning of "intent to destroy." The International Association of Genocide Scholars wrote:

"Intent can be proven directly from statements or orders. But more often, it must be inferred from a systematic pattern of coordinated acts ... Whatever may be the motive for the crime (land expropriation, national security, territorial integrity, etc.), if the perpetrators commit acts intended to destroy a group, even part of a group, it is genocide."



"Trail of Tears". Photo: Max D. Stanley

Forced relocation has been described as genocide in a number of instances, including the American Indians. Scholars tell the story of "genocidal death marches, most infamously the Trail of Tears of the Cherokee and Navajo nations, which killed between 20 and 40 percent of the targeted populations *en route*." Discussing the extermination of native Americans in Spanish America, Adam Jones notes that:

"When slaves are dying like flies before your eyes, after only a few months down the mines or on the plantations, and your response is not to alter conditions but to feed more human lives into the inferno, this is 'first-degree' genocide."

A history of conflict between the two groups in question, or indeed the existing of any causal relationship between an initial aggression and subsequent retribution, does not preclude a finding of genocide. When Hutu apologists claimed that the 1994 Rwandan genocide was a continuation of civil war, and a defensive act intended to pre-empt genocide at Tutsi hands (which Hutus had suffered in neighbouring Burundi in 1972), the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda rejected the argument.

Through these interpretations, the number of episodes accepted internationally as genocide has steadily increased. Scholarly journals such as [Holocaust and Genocide Studies](#) and the [Journal of Genocide Research](#) now feature articles and debates on genocide committed by the ancient Roman Republic against Carthage in 146 BC, on the fate of the Australian Aborigines in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, on Russian atrocities against Muslims in the Northern Caucasus, and on genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, East Timor, Burundi, Guatemala, the Ukraine (under Stalin) and Bosnia. Growing international concern on the subject, particularly in the wake of the Srebrenica and Rwandan genocides, has been a significant influence on international policy. For example, it was a major factor in NATO's 1999 decision to engage militarily in Kosovo.

Genocide studies have therefore by no means "singled out the Turks", as some Turkish critics have suggested. On the contrary, research has made it clear that the 20<sup>th</sup> century – probably

the most violent in human history – saw genocide take place in almost every corner of the world.

### Further reading

- [Adam Jones's website](#)
- On Guatemala:

Guatemala witnessed the Western hemisphere's worst 20th century genocide. The Historical Clarification Commission in Guatemala established to investigate the atrocities of the 1970s and 1980s in the Mayan highlands labeled the Guatemalan government's campaign genocidal: all Maya had been designated as supporters of communism and terrorism, the report noted, leading to "aggressive, racist and extremely cruel ... violations that resulted in the massive extermination of defenseless Mayan communities." (NYT, 1999 26 February 1999). [The report concluded:](#)

"that agents of the State of Guatemala, within the framework of counterinsurgency operations carried out between 1981 and 1983, committed acts of genocide against groups of Mayan people which lived in the four regions analysed ... The CEH has information that similar acts occurred and were repeated in other regions inhabited by Mayan people." (paragraphs 122 – 123)

- For a scholarly approach to the issue look at the University of Montreal course on "[The History and Sociology of Genocide since 1933](#)".
- Kurt Jonassohn and Frank Chalk taught a course on genocide for the first time at Concordia University in 1980: "When we introduced the first half of the course, it was the first university course in the world to study genocide from ancient times to the present. This may still be the case, although there are now many universities with courses on genocides since 1900."
- On the reading list of this course you also find a good overview by Ton Zwaan: *On the Aetiology and Genesis of Genocides and other Mass Crimes Targeting Specific Groups, 2003*. The report has been written at the request of the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia:

"Its sole purpose is to summarise, synthesise and present in a condensed form some of the main general findings and insights developed in the field of 'genocide studies' over the past twenty years or so."

- Scholarly definitions

Zwann gives an overview of some of the scholarly definitions.

Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn define 'genocide' as:

'(...) a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.' [1]

Another scholar of genocide, Helen Fein, has asserted that 'genocide' is:

'(...) sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of

group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.' [2]

Yet another genocide scholar, Israel Charny, has proposed as a generic definition of 'genocide':

'(...) the mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings, when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential defenselessness and helplessness of the victims.' [3]

Webster's Third New International Dictionary can be quoted. Under the word 'genocide' it states that 'genocide' is:

'the use of deliberate systematic measures (as killing, bodily or mental injury, unlivable conditions, prevention of births) calculated to bring about the extermination of a racial, political, or cultural group or to destroy the language, religion, or culture of a group.' [4]

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[1] Frank Chalk & Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide. Analyses and Case Studies*, (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, in cooperation with the Montreal Institute for Genocide Studies, 1990), p. 23.

[2] Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*, (London: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 24.

[3] Israel Charny, "Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide", in: George J. Andreopolis (ed.), *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 66.

[4] Merriam-Webster, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language. Unabridged*, (Cologne: Könenmann, 1993), p. 947.

- Zwann also gives an overview of the development of the field of genocide studies:

"The historical and social scientific field of genocide studies, which has gradually been taking shape since the early 1980s and is still expanding today, has mainly grown out of two types of studies. On the one hand, the number of detailed in depth studies of specific historical cases of genocide and other mass crimes targeting specific groups has increased considerably over the past decades. Especially about the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman-Turkish Empire during the First World War; about the persecution and genocide of the Jews in Germany and occupied Europe between 1933 and 1945; about the genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 and 1979; and, lastly, about the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.[1] But also other cases, less widely known, have increasingly been scrutinised.[2] Most of these studies have been written by historians and are based on meticulously researched documentary and oral history sources. On the other hand, there is an increasing number of social scientists who, starting out from their own disciplines and using various theoretical approaches, are studying (aspects of) genocides and other mass crimes targeting specific groups. Among them are political scientists, sociologists, and

anthropologists, but also criminologists, psychologists and psychiatrists.[3] Furthermore, there is a vast literature written by survivors, eyewitnesses, and bystanders; and there are outstanding studies by well-informed journalists, lawyers and others about different aspects of the subject.[4]

"Without any implication of completeness, one might say that the field of genocide studies has been shaped over the past decades by (now) senior (or retired) researchers and prominent authors like Raul Hilberg, Leo Kuper, Frank Chalk, Kurt Jonassohn, Helen Fein, Robert Melson, Irving Louis Horowitz, Omer Bartov, Yehuda Bauer, Israel Charny, Ervin Staub, Norman Naimark and others ..." (page 5)

"At regular intervals international scientific conferences on the subject of genocide and other mass crimes targeting specific groups are organized, there are several professional organizations of scholars in the field, and there are two leading professional journals, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* and the *Journal of Genocide Research*."

Finally, for illustration, one of the most recognised Genocide studies programs is found in [Yale](#).

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[1] See for example, Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide. Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997 Sec. ed. (1995)); Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial. The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, (Detroit: Wayne State U.P., 1999); Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1984 (1961)); Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, (London: Weidengeld & Nicolson, 1988); Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst. The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1996); David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History. Politics, War, and Revolution since 1945*, (New Haven/London: Yale U.P., 1991); Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime. Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Kmer Rouge 1975-79*, (New Haven/London: Yale U.P., 2002, Sec.ed.); Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis. History of a Genocide*, (London: Hurst & Co., 2002 (1995)); Alison des Forges, "Leave None to Tell the Story". *Genocide in Rwanda*, (New York/London: Human Rights Watch, 1999).

[2] See for instance, Mark Levene & Penny Roberts, *The Massacre in History*, (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), and Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons, Israel W. Charny, *Century of Genocide. Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views*, (New York/London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), which documents fourteen cases.

[3] For example Barbara Harff & Ted Robert Gurr, "Toward Empirical Theory of Genocides and Politicides: Identification and Measurement of Cases since 1945", *International Studies Quarterly*, (1988), 32, pp. 359-371; Frank Chalk & Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide. Analyses and Case Studies*, (New Haven/London: Yale U.P., in cooperation with the Montreal Institute for Genocide Studies, 1990); Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*, (London: Sage Publications, 1993); Alexander Laban Hinton (ed.), *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader*, (Malden, Mass./Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Alexander Laban Hinton (ed.), *Annihilating Difference. The Anthropology of Genocide*, (Berkeley/London:

University of California Press, 2002); Alex Alvarez, *Governments, Citizens, and Genocide. A Comparative and Interdisciplinary Approach*, (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 2001); Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 (1974)); Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil. The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge U.P., 1989); Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors. Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, (London: Macmillan, 1986).

[4] Two recent such studies are: Samantha Power, *"A Problem from Hell". America and the Age of Genocide*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Nicolaus Mills & Kira Brunner, *The New Killing Fields. Massacre and the Politics of Intervention*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

## Genocide and restitution



On 24 April 2005, a group of men and women – many of whom were descendents of survivors – marched onto the desert to commemorate the Armenian genocide. Photo: 7x77 project

"First, the Turkish Republic is to state that there was an 'Armenian Genocide' and to apologize for it. Second, the Turks are to pay reparations. Third, an Armenian state is to be created [...]. Then they will demand the Turks give Erzurum and Van and Elazig and Sivas and Bitlis and Trabzon to Armenia."

Justin McCarthy

"Today, Armenian terror has completed its mission. We are aware that the second phase of the plan includes an apology and the next step will be demands for land and compensation."

Declaration of the Retired Ambassadors' Group Regarding the "Apology to Armenians"  
Campaign

The link between recognition and restitution is one of the red herrings in the genocide debate. International law makes it clear that there is no connection between genocide recognition (by Turkey and/or third countries) and restitution or compensation claims against the Turkish government.

The jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights in the area of property restitution – the Court having heard an increasing number of cases since the transition from communism to democracy in Eastern Europe – makes it clear that Armenian survivors and/or their relatives could pursue compensation or restitution claims only if the Turkish state were to establish a legal base allowing them to do so.

As the ECHR has ruled, "For a claim to be capable of being considered an 'asset' [...] the claimant must establish that it has a sufficient basis in national law, for example where there is settled case-law of the domestic courts confirming it, or whether there is a final court judgement in the claimant's favour." (See *Draon v. France* [GC], no. 1513/03, § 68, 6 October 2005, ECHR 2005-IX, and *Burdov v. Russia*, no. 59498/00, § 40, ECHR 2002-III)

Armenian claims, in other words, can only be pursued through the adoption of a binding legal act by the Turkish state and/or by way of lawsuits before Turkish courts. William Schabas, an influential international law expert, takes a similar line:

"As a general rule, it will be the citizens of the perpetrating State who will be the victims of the genocide. For example, nobody but Turkey can invoke international law before the International Court of Justice in order to claim the right to compensation for the genocide of the Armenians, something it is hardly likely to do. Of course, this does not prevent states from offering some form of relief to their own nationals who have been victims of genocide. Germany, as a matter of national policy, continues to provide compensation to Jewish survivors of the Holocaust."

On 29 January 2001, famed journalist Mehmet Ali Birand sat down for a one-on-one [interview with Armenian President Robert Kocharian](#). The discussion centred on the link (or rather, the lack thereof) between genocide recognition, property restitution and compensation. President Kocharian's arguments – highlighting the fact that genocide recognition will in no way lead to or facilitate Armenian property or land claims – are compelling enough to be quoted at length.

"For Turkey, recognition of the Armenian Genocide will not necessarily lead to legal consequences regarding the Republic of Armenia [...] The Republic of Armenia will not have the legal basis for making such demands. The question is not whether we do or don't desire to raise this issue, or whether I do or don't have such a desire. The issue is that Genocide recognition does not create the legal bases to allow Armenia to present certain demands before Turkey. I am surprised that Turkish attorneys themselves have not provided the Turkish government with such counsel and such an assessment."

"Political parties, including influential ones, can have such demands in their programs, but I repeat, it is not Turkey's recognition of the Genocide that will create legal consequences – in this case, the consequence being demands by Armenia. It is another matter whether the descendants of the victims of the Genocide can attempt to resolve compensation issues, in certain matters, through the courts. But I repeat, they can do that today as well. It is not the recognition of the Genocide that will lead to such consequences."

"The problem is that those events have taken place in Turkey, and the Republic of Armenia did not exist at that time, and today's Republic of Armenia is not the heir to those lands. I don't know under what system I can present a complaint, saying that "certain events transpired there, and you must give me those lands." I can't imagine how I am to make that formulation."

It is not that Armenia has forsaken pursuing legal consequences (such as compensation or restitution), explains Kocharian. It's just that these have nothing to do with whether or not Turkey or another state recognises the genocide. As far as territorial issues are concerned, these could only be pursued under the framework of the Treaty of Sevres – which, as Kocharian acknowledges, is a dead letter, having never entered into force.

"Territorial issues can arise only within the framework/provisions of the Treaty of Sevres which was never been enforced, in any case. However, I repeat, these issues exist on different planes."

"The question of genocide recognition is not directly tied to the Treaty of Sevres, genocide recognition will not in any way revive it. And, on the contrary, if Turkey recognizes the Genocide, and actually apologizes to the Armenian people, then I am convinced that this atmosphere of relations, this process will evolve completely differently."

"If in Turkey there is concern that genocide recognition, or that generally a more temperate, balanced approach to this matter can bring about such consequences, then I am saying that such consequences will not result from such a solution to the problem."

[An International Center for Transitional Justice \(ICTJ\) study](#) – commissioned by the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) in 2002 – is just as unambiguous on the issue. Although the events of 1915 had "all the elements of genocide", it concludes, they cannot give rise to any legal, financial or territorial claims under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

"International law generally prohibits the retroactive application of treaties unless a different intention appears from the treaty or is otherwise established. The Genocide Convention contains no provision mandating its retroactive application. To the contrary, the text of the Convention strongly suggests that it was intended to impose prospective obligations only on the States party to it. Therefore, no legal, financial or territorial claim arising out of the Events could successfully be made against any individual or state under the Convention."

The European Parliament has made this clear, as well. In an [18 June 1987 resolution](#) "on a political solution to the Armenian question", the EP recognized

"that the present Turkey cannot be held responsible for the tragedy experienced by the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire and stresses that neither political nor legal or material claims against present-day Turkey can be derived from the recognition of this historical event as an act of genocide"

#### **Further reading**

- Op-ed by Piotr Zalewski and Gerald Knaus: [Red herrings in Turkish-Armenian Debate](#)
- [ICTJ study](#)
- [CNN-Turk interview with Armenian President Robert Kocharian](#), 29 January 2001

## ARF – the Dashnaks – on Turkey



Dashnak demonstration in Yerevan. Photo: flickr/onewmphoto

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun or Dashnaks), a socialist party, was founded in 1890 in Tbilisi. Of the three oldest Armenian parties, the ARF has been the only one to retain significant strength and appeal for more than a century, both at home and in the diaspora. While the ARF does not enjoy mass support in Armenia, its popularity has grown with every parliamentary election. In 1999, the ARF won 7.86 percent of the vote and five seats; in 2003, it won 11.5 percent and 11 seats; in 2007, 12.8 percent and 16.

The ARF's original objective, as stated in its 1892 Programme, was "to attain political and economic freedom in Turkish Armenia by means of insurrection." In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the ARF fought for reforms and protection of the political and religious rights of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia.

The ARF was to become a leading force under the short-lived (1918-20) independent Republic of Armenia: all four of the Republic's Prime Ministers were ARF representatives. At the party's 9th World Congress, held in Yerevan in 1919, the ARF's programme objective officially became "the creation of a free, independent and united Armenia": a single and whole Armenian state, including the Turkish occupied [Western] Armenian territories.

In the wake of the Soviet and Turkish attacks on Armenia in 1920, the ARF fell from power; Armenia became part of the Soviet Russia.

Banned under the Soviet Union, the ARF survived in exile over the following 70 years. Preservation of Armenian identity in the diaspora – survivors of the Armenian genocide settled in places like Syria, Lebanon, Greece, Bulgaria, France, the US and Latin America – was to become a priority for the ARF. By establishing churches, schools, athletic clubs, community centres and media outlets, the Dashnaks have aimed to foster Armenian culture and a sense of homeland. Through its worldwide network of Armenian National Committees throughout the world, the ARF has lobbied extensively for Armenian genocide recognition, support for the Armenian position on Karabakh, and financial aid to Yerevan.

After the 1988 Karabakh war ARF members began to return to Armenia from abroad. The ARF was officially registered in Armenia in 1991; in the early 1990s, it was able to secure 12 (of a total of 260) seats in Parliament. The Party was closed down in December 1994, however, accused of having used its proxy "secret intelligence" organization ("Dro") to conspire against the government, commit assassinations and conduct drug trafficking. In 1995 the Armenian Supreme Court ruled to ban all activities of the ARF. A total of 31 ARF members were arrested. The ARF was allowed to return to politics in March 1998 under Prime Minister Robert Kocharian as soon as President Ter Petrossian was ousted. The Party supported Kocharian in both the 1998 and 2004 elections. Having re-entered parliament, the ARF joined the Kocharian and Serzh Sargsian governments, its members taking control of the Social Affairs, Education and Agriculture Ministries and other important posts.

In the words of Kiro Manoyan, Director of the International Secretariat of the ARF, the ARF believes that recognition of the Armenian genocide alone "would not restore historical justice and that the international community should hold Turkey accountable for the killings of 1.5 millions of Armenian in the Ottoman Empire."[\[10\]](#) Recognition by Turkey, in other words, must bear consequences. As Manoyan sees it:

"Today, Armenia is not capable of making territorial claims against Turkey. It is not capable of doing so not because of the lack of documentation, but simply because it lacks the power to do so – and because political circumstances are not fortuitous. But Armenia should avoid taking steps today that might prevent it from making such claims towards Turkey tomorrow. The issue of territorial claims does not stop other states from having more or less normal relations. [...] Armenia's weakness should not keep the Armenian people from raising their rights in various international forums. The main document confirming these rights is the Sevres Treaty, the main points of which (ones that do not concern Armenia and Kurdistan) have in fact been implemented – it is based on this Treaty that new states were founded in the Middle East, on what was previously Ottoman land." [\[11\]](#)

Precisely because they suspected it of being a means of taking the edge off the genocide recognition campaign, ARF members were deeply suspicious about the activities of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (2001-2004). It was clear from the start, the ARF announced soon after TARC's inception,

"that this Commission was to be used to undermine the efforts at gaining recognition for the Armenian Genocide. During the five months of the Commission's existence and as a direct result of its work, great losses have been registered in aspects requiring a unified and collective Armenian action, and the momentum of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in the USA and Europe has been hindered severely. All of those who participated in and assisted the Commission in its experimental and adventurous endeavor are accountable to history, as the negative impacts of this experience will undoubtedly continue to be felt for some time to come."[\[12\]](#)

Similarly, the ARF was deeply sceptical of Serzh Sargsian's policy of rapprochement vis-à-vis Turkey, organizing protests during Abdullah Gul's visit to Yerevan on 6 September 2008. Tensions between the government and the ARF came to a head on 22 April 2009, when the Turkish and Armenian foreign ministries issued a joint statement heralding an agreement on a "comprehensive framework" for the normalization of bilateral relations.[\[13\]](#) ARF members in Armenia and abroad were enraged. The statement, as they saw it, had given US President Obama a convenient pretext for avoiding the term "genocide" in his 24 April commemorative speech. In protest, the ARF quit the coalition government.

"We have been always convinced that one of the strategic directions of state's national security is Armenian Genocide's universal recognition and condemnation, in particular, by Turkey. It was considered in the context of not only restoration of historic justice, but also improvement of atmosphere of mutual confidence in the region and prevention of such crimes in the future. In that respect, as we have already declared, we consider inadmissible and condemnable adoption of a joint statement by Armenian and Turkish Foreign Ministries immediately on the eve of April 24 in the context of Turkish leaders' anti-Armenian position of dictating preconditions. We also have disagreements of principle on some provisions considered in the Armenia-Turkey negotiations."[\[14\]](#)

ARF quit all governmental positions except its chairmanship of two National Assembly committees: foreign affairs and defense, and national security and home affairs.

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[\[10\]](#) Ruzanna Stepanian, "[Dashnaks Plan Shift in Genocide Recognition Effort](#)", 3 June 2005, Radio Liberty

[\[11\]](#) Kiro Manoyan, [Yerkir Newspaper Interview](#), answers to questions sent from 24-31 January 2005

[\[12\]](#) ARF Bureau, "[About TARC](#)", 12 December, 2001

[\[13\]](#) [News from the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)

[\[14\]](#) [Noyan Tapan News Agency](#), April 27, 2009

## Asala – Armenian terrorism



ASALA terror attack on 7 August 1982 at Ankara Esenboga Airport; 9 people were killed.

Photo: Anadolu Ajansi

The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) was founded by several diaspora Armenians in 1975. Through targeted assassinations of Turkish diplomats ASALA sought to secure the international community's recognition of the Armenian genocide and to demand the return of 'Western Armenia' from Turkey.

ASALA's inspiration was Gourgen Yanikian. Yanikian's family, originally from Erzurum, managed to escape the Hamidian massacres of 1895 and moved to Kars. Nine years later, however, Yanikian's mother – with her two sons in tow – decided to visit her former home to retrieve the jewels and valuables she had left behind. There Gourgen's brother was killed in front of Gourgen's eyes by Turkish bandits. Yanikian later argued,

"The lessons of life showed me that it is only through blood that I can raise alarm and attract humanity's attention. ... Who butchered my nation, who trampled on every sanctity, every justice, and every right? I did not need much time to analyze this question to get an answer. It was the Turkish barbaric government. This is against whom I should declare war in order to get our just rights. I will come forth and act as an individual Armenian who is tired of waiting, who has been cheated of various promises."[\[15\]](#)

On 27 January 1973, the 78-year old Armenian immigrant met with two Los Angeles-based Turkish diplomats, Mehmet Baydar and Bahadır Demir, for what the pair were told would be a friendly lunch. Upon arrival, Yanikian shot both of them. Yanikian was sentenced to life but freed on parole after eleven years.

Yanikian's attack and his writings had a great impact on those diaspora Armenians bent on using radical methods to secure worldwide recognition of the Armenian genocide. When ASALA was founded on 20 January 1975 it was initially called the "Hero Gourgen Yanikian Group".

The founder of ASALA was Hagop Hagopian (1951-1988) from Mosul, Iraq, the son of a man whose large family was attacked and killed by Turkish forces in 1915. In 1968, Hagopian became active in the Palestinian liberation movement. Inspired by the Palestinians, Hagopian and a number of likeminded diaspora Armenians sought the backing of Armenian parties in Lebanon for an Armenian 'liberation struggle'. Yanikian's killing of the Turkish diplomats, Hagopian was later to acknowledge, was a watershed moment.

"I think would it not be Gourgen Yanikian's courageous act which he implemented by his own planning and individual initiation, we would not be able to make a clear decision (in forming ASALA) in 1974." [\[16\]](#)

Throughout 1975-84 ASALA assassinated 41 Turkish diplomats or officials, both in Turkey and abroad. Many of its members were captured and imprisoned in countries where they had committed terrorist acts; of these, several were sentenced to death. Many died as a result of clashes with police forces or of targeted assassinations by intelligence services. 26 ASALA members were killed during 1978-85.

ASALA's leaders justified their terrorism by arguing that the use of force against Turkish targets was the only remaining means of fighting for recognition and territorial compensation. Many in the Armenian diaspora had reservations regarding both ASALA's methods and its Marxist tilt, however. Several Armenian groups, in fact, suspected ASALA of links with the KGB.[\[17\]](#)

On 15 July 1983, ASALA carried out a bloody attack at Paris' Orly airport, killing 8 and injuring 50 people – most of them civilians – by detonating a suitcase bomb at the Turkish Airlines check-in counter. ASALA member Varoujan Garabedian noted that he had actually wanted to detonate the bomb aboard the plane, which would have caused many more deaths. The group defended the attack by claiming that its targets were Turkish intelligence officers. However, the Orly attack had grave repercussions for the group. French intelligence arrested 50 of its members – citizens of France, Syria, Iran and Brazil.[\[18\]](#) Intense crackdowns by Western and Turkish intelligence agencies followed. Garabedian himself was to serve 17 years in a French prison. (After his release he travelled to Armenia, where he was received by the then Prime Minister Andranik Margarian.)[\[19\]](#)

A split emerged within ASALA, with some members disassociating themselves from the group. ASALA did not carry out a single terrorist attack against Turkish targets between 1984 and 1991. After Armenia's independence, ASALA became even less visible: the collapse of the USSR had brought forward new approaches to the Armenian question; and the attitude towards terrorism had changed completely, particularly in the United States. A few members, based in Western countries and in Armenia, fought in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Some organized revenge assassinations of former members, "traitors" to the cause.

On 19 December 1991, ASALA failed in an assassination attempt against the Turkish ambassador to Hungary. On 21 June 1997 an ASALA faction planted a bomb in the Turkish Embassy in Brussels. It was the group's last organized attack on record. After 1997, Armenian historian Stepan Poghosian asserts, ASALA ceased to exist as an organization. This is not to say that ASALA members have given up on reminding Armenians of their existence. In 20 January 2000, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, ASALA released a statement in which it claimed:

"ASALA is entering the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation full of determination, unswerving political will and with uncompromising commitment toward the fulfilment of its programmatic aims [...]. We must prove by action and words that we are the inheritor of the Armenian cause and the claimant of our timeless rights. [...] Victory is ours!"[\[20\]](#)

Recently, an outfit called the "Society of ASALA fighters (of Karabakh) and former political prisoners" issued a warning to an Australian-Armenian academic who – responding to the Turkish intellectuals' apology campaign of 2008 – apologized to the Turks for ASALA's terrorist attacks.

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[\[15\]](#) Vladimir Petrosyan, *Armenia, Let us not forget...(the Western Armenian national-liberation struggle in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)*, Yerevan 2006 (in Armenian), pp. 168-170

[\[16\]](#) Vladimir Petrosyan, *Armenia, Let us not forget...(the Western Armenian national-liberation struggle in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)*, Yerevan 2006 (in Armenian), p. 201

[\[17\]](#) In October 11, 1998 issue of "Turkuye" Gegham Manukyan, a member of the ARF Supreme Council condemned ASALA and labeled it as "an organization collaborating with Russia and the Armenian Secret Service. In Stepan Poghosyan, *History of the Armenian Question and Armenian Genocide: Goals of Eternity*, Yerevan 2005, p. 267

[\[18\]](#) Vladimir Petrosyan, *Armenia, Let us not forget...(the Western Armenian national-liberation struggle in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)*, Yerevan 2006 (in Armenian), p. 257

[\[19\]](#) [Armenian Premier Meets with Released ASALA member](#), Radio Liberty News-line, May 7, 2001

[\[20\]](#) Araks Monthly, Iran, 1/84, January, 2000, pp. 6-8, in Vladimir Petrosyan, *Armenia, Let us not forget...(the Western Armenian national-liberation struggle in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)*, Yerevan 2006 (in Armenian), p. 803

## The 2007 Armenian parliamentary debate on Turkey



Armenian National Assembly in Yerevan. Photo: Wikipedia Commons

At the end of 2007, the Armenian Parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Relations held a series of hearings on Armenian-Turkish relations.

The Committee, chaired since 2003 by ARF representative Armen Rustamian, invited representatives from the government, the NGO sector, civil society, and international organizations to the hearing.<sup>[34]</sup> Representatives from Turkey had been invited but did not attend.

One of the issues which weighed heavily on the minds of the Armenian participants was the proposal, made by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, of a historians' commission to study the events of 1915.

Vardan Oskanian, then Armenia's Foreign Minister, rejected Erdogan's initiative.

"How can we take Erdogan's letter seriously when an article of his country's Criminal Code [art. 301] anticipates criminal punishment not only for those who dare utter the word genocide, but even for those who discuss the events of 1915? ... And lastly, that letter could not have been received seriously because, after all, conditions are not normal; there is no atmosphere for discussing such an important issue; the borders are closed, there are no diplomatic relations. Despite all this, the President of the Republic of Armenia did reply to the letter ... They are distorting the truth by saying that they got no answer from Armenia to their suggestion."<sup>[35]</sup>

Some of the other speakers, like ARF member and Deputy Speaker Vahan Hovhannisian and Ara Papian, a former diplomat, made strong arguments regarding the illegality of the Kars Treaty of 1921. As Hovhannisian said:

"It is time to assert publicly that Turkey committed two crimes against the Armenians and we should separate them from one another. First of all, Turkey committed genocide, which lasted for decades, as the Armenians were being annihilated since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; 1915

was merely the culmination. ... But then there's what happened in 1921, when the recognized Republic of Armenia with its western border, which included Kars, Ardahan, Igdir, Surmalu and Ughtis, was subjected to aggression by the Bolsheviks and the Kemalists and carved up [by Turkey and the Soviet Union], just as in the Molotov-Ribbentrop act. That was an aggression against the Republic of Armenia, and this should not be connected with the genocide."[\[36\]](#)

Ultimately, added Hovhannisian, "the internal changes in Turkish society are the only route through which we may find some beneficial solution" to Armenian-Turkish relations.

Armen Ayvazian, director of Ararat Centre, criticised successive Armenian governments for not being assertive enough in claiming territory from Turkey – and for failing to understand that Armenia's very survival was under threat.

"The Armenian Question is a question of the Armenian people's security. As such, it requires [...]: first, the creation of strong and complete Armenian statehood; and second, territorial guarantees for the security and functionality of statehood. [...] The Armenian state is not able to survive on the 29.800 sq. kilometres of the former Soviet Republic of Armenia, with its extremely vulnerable, unprotected, aggression-inviting borders; nor is it possible for the Armenian people to exist in general in the absence of an Armenian state. The solution of the Armenian Question, therefore, is not the international recognition of the Armenian genocide, as many misperceive and as the Armenians' false friends claim. The Armenian Question is first of all a territorial question."[\[37\]](#)

Historian Hayk Demoyan, Director of the Genocide Museum-Institute, joined Vardan Oskanian in voicing his opposition to the Turkish proposal of a historians' commission.

"History was written by historians a long time ago, not only by Armenian, but also by Turkish historians; it's now time to leave it to the lawyers, because the issue of Armenian-Turkish relations should be resolved on the legal and political levels."[\[38\]](#)

Shavarsh Kocharian (currently the Deputy Foreign Minister) called on the participants to acknowledge and understand the situation inside Turkey.

"Today there are two opinions about Turkey. One is that it is still the Turkey of the Ottoman Empire – a perpetual threat to Armenia – and that we need to be on our guard against it [...]. The proponents of the second approach say that we should reconcile with the past, live in the present, and establish relations with Turkey. [...] I am not claiming that Turkey has changed so much that it is a completely different state, but we need not take extreme positions. Deep changes have taken place in Turkey [...]. There is an internal debate in Turkey, a group of intellectuals are talking about the genocide out-loud [...]. In relations with Turkey we are on the losing side, but we are ready to open relations without preconditions and this is a dignified approach, which should be advanced further."[\[39\]](#)

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[\[34\]](#) The ARF quit the coalition government in April 2009 in protest against Armenia's policy vis-à-vis Turkey, but retained its chairmanship of Parliamentary committees.

[\[35\]](#) Speech by Vardan Oskanian, Foreign Affairs Minister of Armenia, December 19, 2007, National Assembly of Armenia, Hearings on the Armenian-Turkish relations, December 19,

2007, Speech available at [Ministry of Foreign Affairs website](#), and the [National Assembly Website](#).

[36] Vahan Hovhannisyan, Member of ARF Bureau, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia, December 19, 2007, National Assembly of Armenia, [Hearings on the Armenian-Turkish relations](#), December 19, 2007

[37] Armen Ayvazyan, Ararat Center, "The Foreign Policy of the Republic of Armenia", National Assembly of Armenia, [Hearings on the Armenian-Turkish relations](#), December 20, 2007, Azg Daily, 22 December, 2007

[38] Hayk Demoyan, Director of the Genocide Memorial-Institute, December 19, 2007, National Assembly of Armenia, [Hearings on the Armenian-Turkish relations](#), December 19, 2007

[39] Shavarsh Kocharyan, National Popular Party, National Assembly of Armenia, [Hearings on the Armenian-Turkish relations](#), December 20, 2007

## International recognition



On 18 June 1987, the European Parliament recognised the "the tragic events in 1915-1917" as genocide

The Armenian genocide recognition process started in 1965 in Uruguay, on occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide. On 20 April, the Uruguay Senate and the House of Representatives adopted a joint Resolution (Law 13.326) declaring "the following 24th of April 'Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Martyrs', in honour of the members of that nationality slain in 1915."[\[40\]](#) The resolution did not mention the word 'genocide'.

Other than Cyprus, no other country followed suit for the next twenty years. Turkey had a number of trump cards at its disposal: it was an important NATO ally in the Cold War, while Armenia was a Soviet Republic. Turkey, moreover, had powerful friends in the US Congress and State Department, and throughout the Western business world. Meanwhile, deadly terrorist attacks against Turkish diplomats by the Lebanon-based Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) tainted the Armenian cause.

By the 1990s, however, official apologies for historical wrongs were becoming increasingly common in Western democracies. Around the world, governments were acknowledging a moral responsibility for the acts of previous generations, whether to do with wartime conduct, slavery, or the mistreatment of indigenous populations. In the absence of movement on the issue within Turkey, the Armenian question was picked up by parliaments in a number of other countries, including the US and France, and by the European Parliament.

The following are excerpts from some of the most notable resolutions commemorating and/or recognizing the Armenian genocide.

### European Parliament

18 June 1987, Resolution on a political solution to the Armenian question:

"...Believes that the tragic events in 1915-1917 involving the Armenians living in the territory of the Ottoman Empire constitute genocide within the meaning of the convention on the

prevention and the punishment of the crime of genocide adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1948."

15 November 2000:

"...Calls, therefore, on the Turkish Government and the Turkish Grand National Assembly to give fresh support to the Armenian minority, as an important part of Turkish society, in particular by public recognition of the genocide which that minority suffered before the establishment of the modern state of Turkey..."

28 September 2005:

"...Calls on Turkey to recognise the Armenian genocide; considers this recognition to be a prerequisite for accession to the European Union;"

## **Germany**

15 June 2005, German Bundestag Resolution:

"Deplores the deeds of the Young Turks government of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the almost total annihilation of the Armenians in Anatolia. It regrets the inglorious role of the German Reich which, in the face of the wide variety of information available regarding the organised expulsion and annihilation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, did not even attempt to stop the atrocities."

"Numerous independent historians, parliaments and international organizations qualified the deportation and extermination of Armenians as genocide."

## **Poland**

19 April 2005, Parliament of the Republic of Poland resolution:

"The Parliament of the Republic of Poland pays its respects to the victims of the genocide committed on the Armenians in Turkey during the 1st World War. The memory of the victims, the crime committed and the need to condemn it is a moral obligation for the whole of humanity, all nations and people of good will."

## **France**

28 May 1998, France National Assembly Law:

"France publicly recognizes the Armenian genocide of 1915."

## **Greece**

25 April 1996, Hellenic Parliament Resolution:

"The 24th of April is established as the day of commemoration of the genocide of Armenians by Turkey."

## **Russia**

15 April 1995, State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation:

"Condemns the perpetrators of the extermination of Armenians from 1915 to 1922; Expresses its deep sympathy to the Armenian people and recognizes April 24 as a day of remembrance for the victims of the Genocide."

## **Netherlands**

21 December 2004, House of Representatives of the States General Assembly:

"Asks the government within the framework of its dialogue with Turkey to continuously and expressly raise the recognition of the Armenian genocide."

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[40] Text of resolution available on the [Uruguay Parliament website](#), English translation at the [Armenian National Institute website](#)

## The US and genocide recognition



US President Barack Obama speaking to the Turkish Parliament on 6 April 2009.

Photo: White House / Chuck Kennedy

Turkey has spent considerable political capital on attempting to block the passage of a genocide resolution in Congress. In September 2007, when the House of Representatives was poised to vote on a non-binding resolution condemning the Armenian genocide, Turkey recalled its ambassador. Turkish warnings also halted the passage of a genocide resolution in Congress in 2008. It was, [as Turkish analyst Omer Taspinar called it, a "pyrrhic victory"](#). The failure to adopt the genocide resolution "had nothing to do with the sudden discovery of new historical facts proving correct the Turkish version of history", he noted, and everything to do with purely strategic concerns – i.e., America's dependence on Turkish help and resources in the war in Iraq. Turkey failed to persuade even its allies of its version of history: as Taspinar concluded, "Turkey won an important battle but ended up losing the war."

While a number of recent US presidents have stopped short of using the genocide label to commemorate the events of 1915 – George Bush, Sr. having spoken of "the terrible massacres suffered in 1915-1923 at the hands of the rulers of the Ottoman Empire", Bill Clinton having repeatedly referred to "the deportations and massacres of roughly one and a half million Armenians", and both George W. Bush and Barack Obama having decried "the Great Calamity" (Obama using the Armenian phrase, *Mets Yeghern*, in 2009) – one did not. On 22 April 1981, Ronald Reagan proclaimed the following:

"Like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians which followed it – and like too many other such persecutions of too many other peoples – the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten."

To date, 42 states (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin), representing 85 percent of the US population, have, by

legislation or proclamation, recognized the Armenian Genocide. 8 states (Texas, South Dakota, Wyoming, West Virginia, Iowa, Alabama, Mississippi and Indiana) have not.

Following the latest US elections, all the key figures in the new administration – President Barack Obama himself, Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi – are on record calling 1915 a genocide. Samantha Power, author of *A Problem from Hell*, is a key foreign policy adviser and member of the National Security Council. Obama's campaign website stated:

"The Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence."

"As a senator I strongly support passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution," Obama announced during his campaign, "and as President I will recognise the Armenian Genocide." During an April 2009 visit to Ankara, intended to launch a new era in US-Turkish relations, Obama told journalists that his views on the Armenian genocide "had not changed and were on the record." Obama's non-use of the "g-word" during the Turkey trip was a polite and judicious way of standing by his convictions without offending his hosts. It seems only a question of time, however, before Obama and others in his administration reaffirm what they have already stated repeatedly.

### Further reading

- [Articles by Omer Tespinar](#)
- Charles Krauthammer: [Pelosi's Armenian Gambit](#), Washington Post, 19 October 2007
- [Barack Obama's statement in April 2009](#)
- Speech by Ronald reagan, [Proclamation 4838 -- Days of Remembrance of Victims of the Holocaust](#), 1981

## Germany and the debate on 1915



German Bundestag. Photo: flickr/markhillary

On 22 February 2005, the CDU/CSU parliamentary group tabled a motion on the "Commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the beginning of the expulsions and massacres of the Armenians on 24 April 1915 – Germany must make a contribution to reconciliation between Turks and Armenians". The text did not mention the word genocide, referring instead to "deportations and mass murders". Turkey, the CDU/CSU members complained, denies any intent.

"This dismissive attitude is contradictory to the idea of reconciliation that is the foundation of the community of values existing in the European Union, of which Turkey wishes to become a member."

The motion also acknowledged the role of the German Reich in the tragedy. German leaders,

"despite urgent petitions submitted to the Chancellor of the Reich by many prominent Germans from academic, political and religious spheres, failed to exert any influence on their Ottoman ally by any means other than mere diplomatic notes."

"The German Bundestag bows in commemoration of the victims of state violence, murder and expulsion among the Armenians. It regrets the dubious role of the German Reich, which had information from the Foreign Office regarding the organised annihilation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, but still did not even attempt to intervene."

No open debate on the issue is possible in Turkey, the motion lamented. Researchers trying to investigate the events of 1915 face prosecution. The motion also referred to Armenians and Turks living in Germany:

"Especially in view of the large number of Muslims from Turkey living in Germany, it is an important task to recall the past and thereby contribute to reconciliation. As Germans, we bear a special responsibility and therefore appeal to Turks and Armenians alike to seek paths towards reconciliation and understanding in order to overcome the divides of the past."

The motion ends with 5 recommendations to the Federal Government:

- "to advocate that Turkey unconditionally examine its role vis-à-vis the Armenian people, in history and in the present day,
- to advocate the granting of freedom of speech in Turkey, particularly also as regards the massacre of Armenians,
- to work towards Turkey immediately normalising its relations with Armenia,
- to make its own contribution to achieving agreement between Turks and Armenians through reconciliation and forgiveness of historical guilt,
- to make a contribution to the expulsion of the Armenians also being confronted in Germany, as it is an integral part of confronting the history of ethnic conflicts in the 20th century."

The motion was signed by 18 CDU/CSU MPs, among them the current chancellor Angela Merkel, current economy minister Karl-Theodor von und zu Guttenberg, and former economy minister Michael Glos.

On 21 April 2005, SPD MP Gernot Ehrler made a press statement on behalf of his parliamentary group. The text, entitled "Make the commemoration of the fate of the Armenians a starting point of reconciliation", called the deportations genocide.

"The Bundestag acknowledges German joint responsibility in this genocide – partly through approval and through failure of efficient counter measures – and therefore asks the Armenian people for forgiveness."

The statement also made a strong link between coming to terms with the past and the European integration process.

"The SPD parliamentary group hopes that this debate will deliver a fruitful impulse for a reconciliation process, which constitutes an important basis for the further integration process of Turkey on the way to Europe."

On 21 April 2005, the motion was discussed in the parliament plenary. As Annette Schaeffgen described it:

"Unambiguously, the MPs Markus Meckel (SPD) and Fritz Kuhn (Greens) called the crime by its name and named it 'genocide' whereas the Union parties deliberately abstained from it not to annoy Turkey."

The debate in the Bundestag put a damper on chancellor Schroder's state visit to Turkey in early May 2005. A month later, however, on 16 June 2005, the Bundestag unanimously adopted a slightly revised motion, tabled jointly by the SPD, CDU/CSU, Alliance 90/Greens and the FDP, on "Remembering and commemorating the expulsions and massacres of the Armenians in 1915 – Germany must make a contribution to reconciliation between Turks and Armenians".

The Bundestag was requested to adopt the following motion:

"The German Bundestag bows down in commemoration of the victims of violence, murder and expulsion which the Armenian people suffered before and during the First World War. It deplores the deeds of the Young Turks government of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the almost total annihilation of the Armenians in Anatolia. It also regrets the inglorious role of the

German Reich which, in the face of the wide variety of information available regarding the organised expulsion and annihilation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, did not even attempt to stop the atrocities."

The word 'genocide' is used in the resolution only once:

"Numerous independent historians, parliaments and international organizations qualified the deportation and extermination of Armenians as genocide."

Despite the cautious wording, the resolution set off a wave of angry reactions from Turkish diplomats and politicians. Mehmet Ali Irtemcelik, the Turkish ambassador to Germany, had already accused the CDU/CSU of becoming "the spokespersons of the fanatic Armenian nationalism, which is using organized terror around the world." Now Irtemcelik called the adopted resolution a "gross defamation of Turkish history". Prime Minister Erdogan decried that the Bundestag had bowed to lobby groups: "I find this very ugly." The Turkish foreign ministry warned of negative consequences for bilateral relations: "With great regret we have to state that none of our warnings were taken into account by the Bundestag." "The decision is full of mistakes," added then foreign minister Abdullah Gül. "It talks about the UN's determination concerning this issue. However, international institutions have no determination about it [...]. This decision opens the door to provoking enmity towards Turkey."

The Turkish embassy in Berlin sent material to German MPs stressing that there were victims on both sides and citing the "provocation of massacres through Armenian terrorists." It was to no avail. German Green politician Cem Ozdemir, the most prominent German politician of Turkish descent, noted simply that "With state propaganda, which has worked far too long in a closed society, you cannot continue in an international debate."



*Surviving Herero after the escape through the arid desert of Omaheke in German South-West Africa (modern day Namibia). Photo: Wikipedia Commons*

In fact, one year before passing this resolution Germany had itself overcome its hesitation – and fears of possible legal consequences – and recognised a genocide committed in 1905 in Namibia. In response to a Herero uprising that killed around 130 German settlers and soldiers, colonial troops led by Lothar von Trotha ordered the Hereros to leave Namibia or be killed. Men, women and children were subsequently massacred or driven into the desert and left to die. Of some 100,000 people, only 15,000 survived. In 2001, the Hereros filed a USD 4 billion lawsuit against the German government and two US-based German companies. The claim was opposed by the German government, who argued the international humanitarian laws on the protection of combatants and civilians did not exist at the time of the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

In August 2004, the German development aid minister Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul attended a ceremony in Okakarara, Namibia. She had come to issue a formal apology for what historians have called the first genocide of the 20th century, committed by German colonial troops during the Herero uprising of 1904:

"We Germans accept our historic and moral responsibility and the guilt incurred by Germans at that time ... The atrocities committed at that time would have been termed genocide."<sup>2</sup>

When the German apology was finally forthcoming, exactly a hundred years after the events, the court proceedings were abandoned.

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1. *Ibid.*

2. Andrew Meldrum, "[German minister says sorry for genocide in Namibia](#)", *The Guardian*, 16 August 2004.

## The French debate on genocide



French National Assembly. Photo: Assemblée Nationale / Renan Astier

The story of French recognition of the Armenian genocide dates back to 1915, when the French Foreign Office issued a joint declaration (with Great Britain and Russia) to the Turkish authorities. The declaration condemned the widespread massacres of the Armenians in Turkey:

"For about a month the Kurd and Turkish populations of Armenia have been massacring Armenians with the connivance and often assistance of Ottoman authorities. Such massacres took place in middle April (new style) at Erzerum, Dertchun, Eguine, Akn, Bitlis, Mush, Sassun, Zeitun, and throughout Cilicia. Inhabitants of about one hundred villages near Van were all murdered. In that city the Armenian quarter is besieged by Kurds. At the same time in Constantinople the Ottoman Government ill-treats the innocent Armenian population. In view of those new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization, the Allied governments announce publicly to the Sublime-Porte that they will hold personally responsible [for] these crimes all members of the Ottoman government and those of their agents who are implicated in such massacres."[\[41\]](#)

In the wake of the genocide and the collapse of Armenian statehood, tens of thousands of Armenians fled to France. Armenians arrived in Marseilles, Valence, Grenoble, Nice, Lyons and Paris. Subsequent waves of migration – from Turkey (1956), Lebanon (1975) and Iran (1979) – swelled the ranks of the diaspora even further. French Armenians such as Charles Aznavour rose to prominence by the middle of the century.

Following Armenian independence (1991) and the ensuing economic crisis the number of Armenians resident in France almost doubled, reaching 400,000 and making the French diaspora one of the biggest and most influential worldwide.

The French National Assembly held debates on the Armenian genocide topic since the mid 1990s. One of the strongest supporters of recognition has been M. Patrick Labaune of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). Rhone Aples, the district that Labaune represents, has a large Armenian constituency, having been home to many survivors of the 1915 genocide. In August 1994, during a parliamentary debate with the French Foreign Minister, Labaune made

a series of extremely harsh statements about Turkey. Referring to the upcoming 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide, he thundered:

"This odious crime against humanity, this first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, still remains unpunished. On the contrary, in Turkey monuments are erected and boulevards are baptized in the name of the Turkish Hitler, Talat Pasha [...]. Let's remember that Turkey, encouraged by this impunity, occupies Armenian territories, has invaded and occupies a part of Cyprus, exterminates the Kurdish people, has been organizing a blockade of Armenia for five years, driving three millions of Armenians to hunger, and uses dams on the Euphrates as blackmail against Syria."[\[42\]](#)

It was the French communists who emerged as the biggest advocates of recognition. In 1995, M. Paul Mercieca[\[43\]](#) raised the issue during a parliamentary debate. The Minister, Herve de Charette, replied by noting that the Genocide Convention was non-retroactive and that the French government wanted to support normalization of relations between Yerevan and Ankara.[\[44\]](#) In 1997, M. Francois Asensi from the district of Seine-Saint-Denis, himself also a member of the Communist party, argued in favour of genocide recognition in the National Assembly.[\[45\]](#)

The debate was not taking place in a vacuum. A March 1996 survey conducted by the Institut Louis Harris showed that 69 percent French respondents knew of the "Armenian genocide, which is to say the massacres in 1915 committed in Turkey against the Armenian people", while percent agreed that "it is the time that the French authorities should officially recognize the genocide the victims of which were the Armenians."[\[46\]](#)

In 1997 a proposal for a French National Assembly Law on the recognition of the Armenian genocide was made by Roland Blum of the UMP. In politics since the 1970s, Blum represents one of the country's largest electoral districts, the Bouches-du-Rhône (Marseilles), home to a sizeable French Armenian community.

A year later, a similar proposal was made by socialist Didier Migaud, secretary of the France-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group. A report by René Rouquet (a Socialist), based on Migaud's proposal, gave a detailed picture of the Armenian massacres, starting in the Hamidian period and culminating in 1915. It also described Turkey's denial campaign and cited a number of French ministers who referred to the events as genocide. The draft went on to say:

"The Republic of France recognizes that the decision by the government of the Young Turks to exterminate the Armenian people in 1915 and the ensuing massacres between 1915 and 1922 in the territory of the Ottoman Empire constitute as a crime of genocide".

François Rochebloine (New Centre) and Roland Blum tabled amendments to the draft law to the effect that:

- "The accession of the Turkish Republic into the European Union cannot be realized until it has recognized the reality of the Armenian Genocide"
- "The Government will assure that every year on April 24 our country will commemorate the Armenian genocide."
- "The Government takes responsibility to work internationally for the recognition and reparation of this crime against humanity."[\[47\]](#)

On 29 May 1998, the French National Assembly adopted a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide. The text did not, however, include any of the recommendations proposed in the reports. It merely stated:

"La France reconnaît publiquement le génocide arménien de 1915" (France publicly recognizes the Armenian genocide of 1915).[\[48\]](#)

The Senate adopted the resolution on 7 November 2000.[\[49\]](#) On 29 January 2001, the text was signed into law by the President and the Prime Minister of the Republic.[\[50\]](#)

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[\[41\] France, Great Britain and Russia Joint Declaration](#), May 24, 1915

[\[42\] National Assembly of France, Hearing on the Armenian Genocide](#), August 8, 1994

[\[43\] Paul Mercieca](#) is an honorary mayor of Vitry on Seine, home to the MAFP, the Movement of Armenians in France for Progress.

[\[44\] National Assembly of France, Hearing on the Armenian Genocide](#), June 29, 1995

[\[45\] National Assembly of France, Hearing on the Armenian Genocide](#), April 21, 1997; Seine Saint Denis hosts the building of the Armenian Cultural Center and the Nevart Gulbenkian Armenian school.

[\[46\] Claude Mutafian, "Le génocide des Arméniens, Un 'modèle' de nettoyage ethnique"](#), 1996, Autumn

[\[47\] N° 925.- Rapport de M. René Rouquet \(au nom de la commission des affaires étrangères\) sur la proposition de loi de M. Didier Migaud et plusieurs de ses collègues \(n° 895\)](#), relative à la reconnaissance du génocide arménien de 1915.

[\[48\] 29 mai 1998 Proposition de loi adoptée par l'Assemblée Nationale en première lecture, relative à la reconnaissance du génocide arménien de 1915](#)

[\[49\] La France reconnaît publiquement le génocide arménien de 1915](#)

[\[50\] Loi n°2001-70 du 29 janvier 2001 relative à la reconnaissance du génocide arménien de 1915](#)

## The TARC experience



David L. Phillips (TARC Chairman) and Ozdem Sanberk (member)

The Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission ("TARC") was formed in Geneva in July 2001 as the centrepiece of the Clinton administration's Track Two Program on Turkey and the Caucasus. "Track Two" diplomacy, which brings together civil society representatives and former officials to address issues and crises that have proven intractable at the governmental level, was expected to help improve relations between Turks and Armenians – and, as a result, between Turkey and Armenia. TARC's ten members included (from the Turkish side) Gunduz Aktan, Ustun Erguder, Ozdem Sanberk, Ilter Turkmen, Vamik D. Volkan, Sadi Erguvenç and (from the Armenian side) Alexander Arzoumanian, David Hovhannissian, Van Z. Krikorian and Andranik Migranian. The Commission was chaired by David Phillips, an American scholar and adviser to the US State Department.

In 2005, Phillips published "Unsilencing the Past", an engaging account of the birth, growth and demise of the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission.

Phillips did not shy away from citing – and criticizing – some of the taboos, entrenched beliefs and prejudices that have always obstructed Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. Most Armenians, he wrote (describing the plight of Ottoman Turks between the late 19th century and the First World War),

"have little sympathy for the historical suffering of Turks. Armenians strongly dispute Turkish claims regarding the magnitude of and scope of events, their context and intended effect, and the identities and affiliations of their perpetrators."

Turks, on the other hand,

"refuse to acknowledge the [Armenian] genocide because acknowledgment contradicts their noble self image. It is humiliating to be judged in the court of international public opinion for events that occurred before the Republic of Turkey was even born."

TARC, as Phillips describes it, was anything but a feel-good exercise. Interaction between its members, in fact, often revealed the sort of contentious issues that have made relations between Turks and Armenians so difficult throughout the last one hundred years. The debate on the Armenian genocide cast a long shadow over the Commission's entire work. Prior to TARC's formal launch, Phillips recalls, Van Z. Krikorian – one of the Armenian members – confirmed that Armenia "was prepared to participate in a truth and reconciliation process. He was, however, absolutely inflexible on one point. Its purpose was not to explore the truth of the Armenian genocide. That fact was beyond question." Predictably, Turkish members objected to any such preconditions.

As far as the Armenians were concerned, exploring the truth of the genocide was one thing; discussing it was quite another. While they recognised the importance of cultural projects – which the Turks considered especially valuable – the Armenian members of TARC preferred to focus on concrete issues like opening the border and establishing diplomatic relations. Some upped the ante. "Culture is nice but we need to come to an understanding on the genocide and other issues that divide us," Andranik Migranian once remarked. Otherwise, "we will continue to raise genocide in parliaments around the world."

The Turks often reverted to official positions, as when they tried to establish linkage between Turkish-Armenian reconciliation and the Nagorno Karabakh issue. "Ozdem Sanberk asked how TARC would handle the 'occupied territories' that had been forcefully seized by ethnic Armenians in Azerbaijan," writes Phillips. "Would TARC call for the return of Azeris displaced from their homes?"

Some of the exchanges were very tense:

"TARC interviewed retired Turkish ambassadors Omer Lutem and Mumtaz Soysal. When the Armenians tried to explain the grief of being driven from the homes, Lutem retorted, 'Turkish books do not show any Armenian presence before the Turks. Anatolia was never an Armenian homeland. You were just visitors.' When Alex [Arzoumanian] pointed out that they were in Anatolia long enough to build more than four thousand churches, Soysal added, 'We tried to destroy them all, but there were just too many.' Then Lutem threatened, 'If Armenians insist on genocide, Turkey will inflict hurt on Armenia. Is that what you want?'"

The success of Track Two diplomacy relies on the ability of participants to engage in the sort of discussions – emotionally charged and painfully frank – that professional diplomats do everything to avoid. Of these, TARC had plenty.

"Gunduz interjected, 'Do you know how we feel when you try to embarrass us by introducing resolutions in parliaments around the world? Our feelings are hurt.' 'Your feelings are hurt. How do you think we feel?' responded Alex. 'We were the ones who were genocided.'"

From the beginning, the Armenian members of TARC also had to deal with pressure from nationalist circles back home. Dashnaks questioned the very idea of sitting at the same table with Turks. "All TARC has advanced," a Dashnak mouthpiece once claimed, according to Phillips, "is the flawed notion that there are two sides to the events of 1915-1923." It was but one example of how national politicians attempted to pull the rug out from under TARC's feet.

"TARC originally emphasized small steps and practical areas for cooperation, which would build momentum toward tackling core issues," wrote Phillips. This, however, turned out to be untenable in the long run: the genocide issue, having figured in almost each and debate from

the outset, had to be addressed. To break the logjam, writes Phillips, TARC requested the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) to help provide an "independent legal analysis" on the applicability of the 1948 Genocide Convention to events which occurred during the early twentieth century.

The ICTJ report arrived in February 2003. It offered a very balanced view. Armenians could welcome the report's conclusion that the events of 1915, "viewed collectively, can be said to include all of the elements of the crime of genocide as defined in the Convention". Turks, meanwhile, could take comfort in its finding that "no legal, financial or territorial claim arising out of the Events could successfully be made against any individual or state under the Convention."

On 14 April 2004, TARC members decided that their work should come to a close. It may not have lived up to expectations (not least those of its own members) but, says Phillips, TARC did manage to pave the way for a more open debate. "Today peoples of the two nations are talking about relations more freely and with fewer prejudices," Tevan Poghosian, director of the Yerevan-based International Center for Human Development (ICHHD) was to tell Phillips. "Even though the physical border remains, the psychological barrier has been broken."

David L. Phillips, [Unsilencing the Past: Track Two Diplomacy and Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation](#). Berghahn Books: New York, 2005.

### Further reading

- [TARC terms of reference](#)
- [ICTJ report](#)