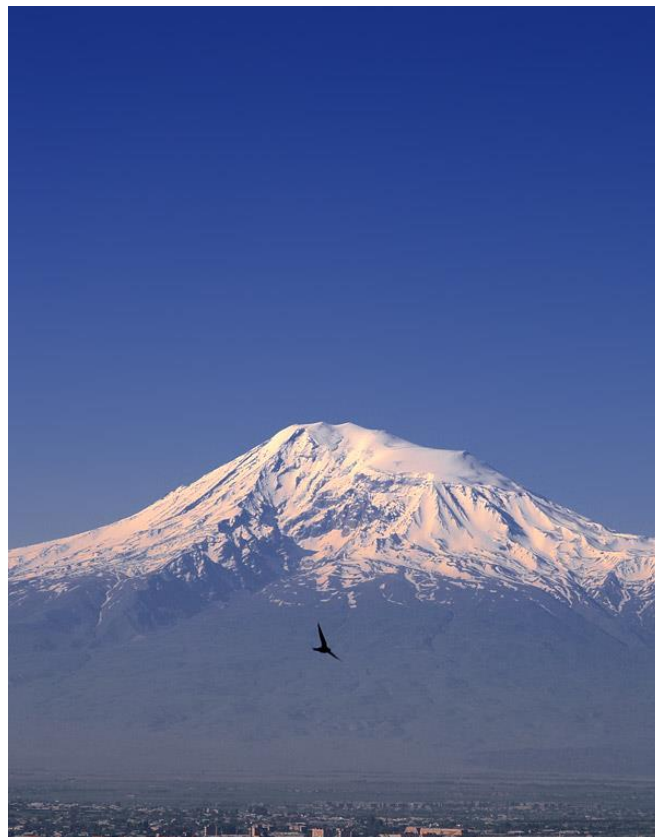


Noah's Dove Returns

Armenia, Turkey and the Debate on Genocide



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Executive Summary

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. 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, both sides will have to overcome some deeply entrenched prejudices.

Turkey has gone through profound changes in recent years under the influence of the EU accession process, reforming its constitution and reducing the role of the national security establishment in civilian affairs. Democratisation has enabled, for the first time, an open debate in Turkey on the Armenian question. For years, official Turkish history asserted that the rebellious Armenian population, siding with the Russians during World War I, was the main aggressor and the architect of its own destruction. Those who questioned the official line were labelled traitors and risked criminal prosecution. Since 2000, however, Turkish civil society has begun to look at the history of Ottoman Armenians in a new light, in the process breaking numerous taboos.

Over the same period, Turkey's foreign policy has evolved dramatically. Under the motto "zero problems with neighbours", the current Turkish government has moved to resolve a series of long-running disputes, cementing Turkey's position as a strategic player on the regional and international stage. So far, however, Armenia has remained a blind spot in this vision. Turkey also continues to invest considerable political capital in resisting international recognition of the Armenian genocide.

Yet this is a battle that Turkey cannot win. Resolutions commemorating the 1915 genocide have now been passed by more than 20 countries, including many of Turkey's close allies. With the new US President and most of the senior figures in his administration on record recognising the Armenian genocide, it seems only a matter of time before the US follows suit. Contrary to the fears of many Turks, however, this is not a sign of growing anti-Turkish sentiment or of the lobbying power of the Armenian diaspora. More than anything, the growing tide of recognition reflects an evolving understanding of genocide among scholars and legal experts. The consensus is now that genocide – attempts to destroy, in whole or in part, a distinct national or ethnic group – was committed on numerous occasions during the 20th century, in almost every corner of the world. There are hardly any reputable scholars in the field of genocide studies who doubt that what happened to the Armenians in 1915 constitutes genocide. However, it is also clear that modern-day Turkey is not legally responsible for genocidal acts committed nearly a century ago, and that acknowledging the genocide would not bring into question the established Turkish-Armenian border.

This is also a time of intense debate among Armenians. For decades, anti-Turkish sentiment and dreams of a Greater Armenia have been unifying themes among many Armenians, both in the republic and the diaspora. Since the early 1990s, however, maximalist demands for return of historical lands have had to compete with a more pragmatic official view that recognises improved relations with Turkey as a strategic imperative for the isolated and landlocked Armenian republic. Successive Armenian governments have called for a normalisation of relations with Turkey without preconditions. Armenians today face a choice: either treat Turkey as an eternal enemy, or re-engage with its western neighbour in the hope of one day sharing a border with the European Union.

This is a critical period for both countries. Restoring diplomatic relations and opening the border, though only first steps towards reconciliation, would marginalise extremist voices on both sides, enabling a more reasonable and measured debate to go forward. Turkey should stop trying to stifle discussion of the Armenian genocide both at home and abroad – and avoid over-reacting if, as might well happen, any more of its allies recognise the events of 1915 as genocide. For their part, Armenians must accept that recognition of the genocide will never pave the way for challenging a territorial settlement that has stood for nearly a century.

“At the end of 150 days the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. For 150 days again the waters receded, and the hilltops emerged. Noah sent out a raven which went to and from the Ark until the waters were dried up from the earth. Next, Noah sent a dove out, but it returned having found nowhere to land. After a further seven days, Noah again sent out the dove, and it returned with an olive leaf in its beak, and he knew that the waters had subsided.”

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I. Football Diplomacy

At 16:45 on Saturday, 6 September 2008, an Airbus 319 touched down at Yerevan's Zvartnots airport.¹ Abdullah Gul, president of Turkey, stepped out of the plane and onto the tarmac, where he was greeted by Armenia's foreign minister, Edward Nalbandian. The red-blue-and-orange Armenian flag flew alongside the Turkish crescent and star. Two helicopters hovered above. An armoured car, brought to Armenia from Turkey via Georgia, waited for him. Gul was in Yerevan to watch a World Cup qualifying game between the Turkish and Armenian football teams. It was the first visit ever by a Turkish president to Armenia.

The decision to accept Armenian president Serzh Sarkisian's July 2008 invitation did not go down well with everyone in Ankara. Deniz Baykal, the leader of the opposition CHP (Republican People's Party), was caustic in his criticism: "Did Armenia recognize Turkey's borders, did it abandon genocide claims, is it pulling out of the Karabagh lands it occupies? If these things did not happen, why is he going?"² Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the second largest opposition party, the nationalist MHP, accused Gul of caving in to foreign pressure, calling the visit a "historical mistake" that would "damage Turkey's honour".³

As Gul's motorcade entered the centre of Yerevan, protesters held up signs – "I am from Van", "Accept the truth", "We want justice" and "Turkey, admit your guilt" – in English, Armenian and Turkish. The flags of countries that had recognised the 1915 massacres of Armenians in Anatolia as genocide (among them France, Canada and Argentina) were displayed prominently along the road. The protests were organized by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), or Dashnak Party.⁴ Established in 1890 in Czarist Russia, the Dashnaks' very first proclamation warned that "Turkish Armenia, enslaved for centuries, is now demanding its freedom ... The Armenian is no longer imploring – he now demands with gun in hand."⁵ In 1918, the ARF formed the government of the first Armenian republic. When independent Armenia was invaded by Soviet troops in 1920, the Dashnak leaders escaped, going on to create a powerful network within the Armenian diaspora, from Beirut to Los Angeles. The ARF is currently a junior partner in Armenia's coalition government.

The Turkish president's car reached the city centre via Marshal Baghramian Avenue, named after a leading Armenian general in the Soviet army during World War II. It crossed Victory Bridge, built in 1945 to commemorate the end of a war in which 450,000 Armenians fought in the ranks of the Red Army against Nazi Germany.⁶ Although Yerevan recently celebrated its 2750th anniversary, very few of its buildings predate the communist era. The motorcade continued along Mesrop Mashtots Avenue, named after the 5th-century monk who invented the Armenian alphabet, before arriving at the newly built Golden Palace Hotel, where the Turkish football team was staying.

Looking west from the top floor of the hotel, over the Ararat plain, one can easily make out the contours of Mount Ararat on the other side of the Turkish-Armenian border. The biblical resting place of Noah's Ark is a holy site for Armenians. Ararat appears everywhere in

¹ The Armenian Reporter, "[Armenia receives Turkey's president for six-hour visit](#)" 12 September 2008.

² *Sabah*, "[Baykal: Bari soykırım anıtını da ziyaret et](#)" [Baykal: You might as well visit the Genocide Memorial], 5 September 2008.

³ Akif Arslan, "[Abdullah Gul, Erivan'a gitmeli mi?](#)" [Should Abdullah Gul go to Yerevan], *kanal46*, 4 September 2008.

⁴ Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF).

⁵ Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians – From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*, 2006, p. 156.

⁶ Gerard Libaridian, *Modern Armenia – People, Nation, State*, 2004, p. 24.

Yerevan: on mineral water bottles, company logos, hotels and shops, and on the Armenian coat of arms. A few days before the arrival of the Turkish team, Ararat still featured on the kit of the Armenian football team – until the Armenian football federation decided to change the logo, replacing the image of Mount Ararat with a ball. Facing a storm of criticism, the head of the federation reacted defensively: “I admit that we made a mistake. However, it does not mean that I should be blamed for every sin. I did not sign either the Treaty of Kars or the Treaty of Alexandropol.”⁷

After some words of encouragement for the Turkish team, Abdullah Gul left the hotel and drove to the presidential palace, a white Soviet-era building guarded by two marble statues. One is of Tigran the Great (95-55 BC), the Armenian ruler whose kingdom reached from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean (and whose capital Tigranocerta was in today’s Turkey). The other is of the patriarch Noah, whose great-great-grandson Haik, according to legend, is the founding father of the Armenian nation. After a rebellion against the evil leader of Babylon, Haik is said to have brought his people back to the land of the Ark near Mount Ararat, and defended the Armenian homeland in a final battle between good and evil. The Armenians still refer to themselves as *Hayk* in his memory.⁸

Inside the palace, the two presidents held a private meeting followed by dinner. The presidents then gave a joint press conference. “This visit will create a good opportunity for normalising bilateral relations,” said Gul.⁹ “I saw a willingness, a desire to establish stability and peace in the region, for which I am very happy,” Sarkisian told journalists.¹⁰

At the stadium, flags of friendship bearing the words “Armenia-Turkey” fluttered in the wind. Both national anthems were played: the Turkish beseeching the crescent on the red flag to “smile upon my heroic race / this blood of ours which we shed for you shall not be blessed otherwise”; and the Armenian asserting, “Blessed is he who sacrifices his life for the liberty of his nation.” On a hill across the stadium, protesters had lit candles and torches in front the Armenian genocide memorial. Kick-off was at 9 pm. The match was fair but unspectacular, with the Turkish guests scoring two goals in the second half to secure a 2:0 victory.¹¹ By midnight, after less than eight hours on Armenian soil, Abdullah Gul had gone back home. The visit had passed without incident.

Some in Yerevan had high expectations: “Mainstream pundits and the media predicted an instant blitz solution to long-estranged Turkish-Armenian relations,” wrote Hayk Demoyan, director of the Genocide Institute in Yerevan.¹² But no solutions emerged, no groundbreaking declarations were made. The borders remained closed, and diplomatic relations suspended. Three days after the visit, the Dashnaks were referring to the meeting as “propaganda opportunities for Turkey.”¹³

⁷ The [Treaty of Alexandropol \(1920\) and the Treaty of Kars \(1921\)](#) established the Turkish-Armenian border, placing Mount Ararat in Turkey. One month after the qualifying game Mount Ararat was put back in the logo with a new design.

⁸ Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians*, p. 51.

⁹ Hasan Cemal, “[Gül ve Sarkisyan: İyi bir başlangıç yaptık](#)” [Gul and Sarkisyan: We made a good beginning], *Milliyet*, 7 September 2008.

¹⁰ *Armenian TV H1 Channel*, “Haylur” News, 6 September 2008.

¹¹ *TribunTV*, “[Ermenistan-Türkiye Macı](#)” [Armenia-Turkey Match], 6 September 2008.

¹² Hayk Demoyan, *Museum G-Brief Vol 3*, No.1.

¹³ *Yerkir online*, 10 September 2008; www.yerkir.am; ARF-Dashnaksutyun Press Office, [10 September 2008 Statement](#) (in Armenian).

But a shift *had* taken place. On the flight back to Ankara, Gul told journalists that Turkey and Armenia needed to “take advantage of the dynamics that were triggered by the visit to Yerevan” or else “wait another 15-20 years for the next opportunity.”¹⁴ Foreign Minister Ali Babacan did not leave Yerevan with Gul. He returned to the Foreign Ministry on Republic Square, where he talked with Armenian foreign minister Edward Nalbandian into the early hours of the morning. The two ministers would meet another seven times between September 2008 and April 2009.

No one could tell, at the time, whether this football qualifying match would be a major step towards a truly historic reconciliation.

II. Treason and apology

A. *The first cracks in the wall*

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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

Never before had a respected Turkish academic spoken so openly in the mainstream press about Ottoman responsibility for the Armenian massacres.¹⁷ The reaction, says Berktaş, 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.”¹⁸

One of Turkey’s most influential columnists, Emin Colasan, attacked Berktaş on the pages of the country’s then best selling daily paper, *Hürriyet*, with an article entitled “Those who stab us in the back.”¹⁹ Colasan accused Berktaş of treachery and demanded his dismissal from Sabancı University for “inciting his students against the fatherland and filling their young

¹⁴ Quoted in Cengiz Candar, “Gül’un umudu bayramda yumuşama ve barışma” , [Gul’s hope is softening and reconciliation at the bayram], *Referans*, 22 September 2008.

¹⁵ Nese Duzel, “[Ermenileri özel örgüt öldürdü](#)”, [A special organization killed the Armenians], *Radikal*, 9 October 2000.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The first book in Turkish to argue that the Ottoman leaders committed genocide against the Armenians was written by Taner Akcam in 1992. He was living in Germany at the time.

¹⁸ Interview with ESI, March 2009.

¹⁹ Emin Cölasan, “Bizi icimizden vuranlar”, [Those who stab us in the back] *Hürriyet*, 18 October 2000. Quoted in Guenther Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey – A Disputed Genocide*, 2005, p. 271.

minds with lies.”²⁰ When Berktaý 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.”²¹

Conventional Turkish history holds that the bloodshed in Anatolia in 1915 was triggered by an Armenian uprising in support of Russia during its battles with the Ottoman Empire during World War One. The Ottoman authorities responded to the rebellion through mass deportation of the Armenian population. Armenian deaths, according to this narrative, were primarily the result of disease and starvation during the deportations. As former Turkish ambassador Gunduz Aktan stressed, “the Armenians lost a civil war which they themselves had started.”²²

Already in 1985, Kamuran Gurun, undersecretary at the Foreign Ministry following the 1980 military coup, explained in his book, *The Armenian File – The Myth of Innocence Exposed*, that the deportation of more than a million Armenians was a measure that any state would have taken:

“The Armenians were forced to emigrate because they had joined the ranks of the enemy. The fact that they were civilians does not change the situation. Those who were killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War were also civilians [...] Turkey did not kill them but relocated them. As it was impossible to adopt a better solution under the circumstances, it cannot be accepted that those who died because they were unable to resist the hardship of the journey were killed by the Turks.”²³

The Turkish Historical Society (TTK), set up in the 1930s, established the “correct” national line on the events of 1915. Its long-serving director, Yusuf Halacoglu, referred to “519,000 Muslims the Armenians killed”, underlining that “most Armenians died from disease Those who were slaughtered were about 8-10,000 according to the numbers we obtained.”²⁴ He also argued in 2007 that Armenians continued to pose a mortal threat to Turkey until today since “most of the people” in the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) were actually Kurds of Armenian origin.²⁵ This, too, was a nationalist obsession. In March 1994 national television TRT had claimed that PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan (Apo) was an Armenian named Artin Hakobian.²⁶

Throughout the 1990s court cases were repeatedly launched against those who challenged the official line, using the Anti-Terror Law as well as the Turkish Penal Code. When Belge Publishing released Yves Ternon’s *History of The Armenian Genocide*,²⁷ the publisher was sentenced to two years imprisonment (later reduced to six months).²⁸ In 1994, when the same publisher issued a translation of Vahakn Dadrian’s *Genocide According to International and*

²⁰ Emin Colasan, “Bizim enteller uzuldu” [Our intellectuals were upset], *Hurriyet*, 21 October 2000.

²¹ Quoted in Mehmet Necef “The Turkish Media Debate on the Armenian Massacres”, in: Steven Jensen (ed.), *Genocide. Cases, Comparisons, and Contemporary Debates*, 2003.

²² [Presentation by Ambassador Gündüz Aktan](#) at the House Committee on International Relations on September 14, 2000.

²³ Kamuran Gurun, *The Armenian File – The Myth of Innocence Exposed*, 2007, p. 276.

²⁴ *True Dergisi*, “[A Documented Defense against the Genocide Lie!](#)”, 10 December 2006, published by Turk Tarih Kurumu (Turkish Historical Society).

²⁵ Gökce Gündüç and Ayşe Sah Bozdoğan, “[Historian Halacoglu's Comments ‘Racist’](#)”, *bianet*, 21 August 2007.

²⁶ Tessa Hofmann, [Armenians in Turkey today – A critical assessment of the situation of the Armenian minority in the Turkish Republic](#), EU Office of Armenian Associations of Europe, October 2002.

²⁷ It came out under the title *The Armenian Taboo* in 1993.

²⁸ Celal Baslangic, “[Tabu'ya ilk yumruk!](#)” [The first blow to the taboo!], *Radikal*, 3 October 2005.

National Law: The Armenian Example, the book was banned.²⁹ In 1995, the publisher's office was bombed by unknown assailants.³⁰

In 2001 Deputy Prime Minister Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the MHP (National Movement Party), spearheaded the creation of an inter-ministerial *Coordination Committee Against Baseless Genocide Claims*.³¹ One of its aims was to “ensure that young people are informed about the past, present, and future of unfounded allegations of genocide.”³² It called for, and procured, new material for the teaching of history in Turkish schools – including a 2002 textbook claiming that genocide allegations were a plot to weaken Turkey by Western powers that “cannot tolerate a strong Turkey either in the short or long term.”³³

In 2003, Turkish state television (TRT) aired one of the most ambitious documentary projects ever made in Turkey.³⁴ In six 40-minute episodes produced over three years and filmed across 13 countries, “Sarı Gelin [Yellow Bride] – the true story” meticulously sets 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.”

In March 2007, the *Coordination Committee Against Baseless Genocide Claims* sent the series to the General Staff, Ministry of National Education, Foreign Ministry and intelligence services “for use when required.”³⁵ In July 2008, the Ministry of National Education distributed it throughout Turkey, following up with a February 2009 circular reminding schools to show it to students and report back to the Ministry. For a number of Turks, however, the film's racist tone was insufferable. Columnist Ahmet Insel wrote that “watching this documentary you feel as if you are watching a classic Nazi propaganda film.”³⁶ Turkish Armenians reacted with an open letter to the Prime Minister:

“We cannot understand what objectives of the General Staff or the Education Ministry would be served by fuelling hatred and animosity against Armenians and by instilling anti-Armenian sentiments in our children's minds.”³⁷

Serdar Kaya, a Turkish father of a fifth-grade pupil, filed a complaint with the public prosecutor's office in Uskudar (an Istanbul district). “My daughter was extremely disturbed and frightened by the film,” he said, “and she asked me questions like ‘Did the Armenians

²⁹ Ragıp Zarakolu, “[Ayşe Nur Zarakolu: Bir Yayıncının Portresi](#)”, (Ayşe Nur Zarakolu: The Portrait of a Publisher) *bianet*, 3 December 2005.

³⁰ In 1997 [Belge published Franz Werfel's “The Forty Days of Musa Dagh”](#).

³¹ Mehmet Zarif, “[Kompozisyon Genelgesinin Sır Yönetmeliği](#)” [The secret regulation of the essay circular], *bianet*, 10 December 2003.

³² Sadullah Özcan, “[Ermeni Ust Kurulu oluşturuldu, başkanı Devlet Bahçeli](#)”, [Armenian higher council formed, head is Devlet Bahçeli], *Zaman*, 18 May 2002.

³³ Yavuz Ercan, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda bazı sorunlar ve günümüze yansımaları” [Some problems in the Ottoman Empire and their reflection today] in: MEB Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı, Ankara, 2002, p. 65.

³⁴ Aykut Kansu, “[Sarı Gelin belgeseli üzerine](#)”, [On the Blonde Bride documentary], *Radikal*, 4 May 2003.

³⁵ Ragıp Zarakolu, “Tezgaah işlemeye devam ediyor” [The conspiracy continues], *Evrensel*, 24 February 2009.

³⁶ Yildirim Türker, “[Çoktandır sıra çocuklarda](#)” [The time has long come for the children], *Radikal*, 23 February 2009.

³⁷ *Hyetert*, “[Sayın Başbakan'a Açık Mektup](#)” [Open letter to the Prime Minister], 11 February 2009.

slaughter us?’” Following the public outcry, the Ministry of National Education withdrew the documentary, noting that it had “also heard” that the documentary was “in some cases” used “outside its intended purpose”.

B. Taboos and national security

Founded in 1961, the National Security Council (NSC) has for decades been one of the most powerful institutions in the country, particularly following the military coup in 1980, dictating a range of foreign and domestic policies to forestall potential threats to the Republic. Though formally an advisory body, the NSC served as a conduit for the military establishment to express its views on a broad range of policy matters.³⁸

The NSC has consistently portrayed Turkey as surrounded by hostile forces bent on its destruction. Its then general secretary, Tuncer Kilinc, asserted in Brussels in April 2003:

“Since the conquest of Istanbul, the Europeans have viewed us as their foes ... Europe brought up the Armenian question in the 1850s. After World War One they turned the Armenians against us and created the foundation for dozens of horrific events that followed. The PKK is an organization that the EU has established. The EU is the reason 33,000 of our people were killed. The EU secretly and openly supported terrorist organisations in Turkey.”³⁹

However, over the past decade, a new, more liberal Turkey has begun to emerge. Under the influence of the EU accession process, it has become increasingly difficult for people of Kilinc’s point of view to influence national policy. Since the December 1999 decision to grant Turkey EU candidate status wide-ranging constitutional and legislative reforms have reinforced civil and political rights and strengthened the democratic process.

On 23 July 2003, the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed a law limiting the role of the NSC. It was made a purely consultative body with a civilian majority. It lost the authority to demand that the president and the prime minister follow its “recommendations”. There was no longer to be an NSC representative on the Supervisory Board of Cinema, Video and Music, the High Board for Radio and TV (RTUK) and the Higher Education Board (YOK). In August 2004, the first civilian Secretary General of the NSC was appointed.

As the political environment moderated, Turkish intellectuals became increasingly willing to challenge historical taboos. For many of them, discussing the events of 1915 came to be seen as a way of tackling the obstacles to genuine Turkish democracy – including, first and foremost, the “deep state”, said to be a highly influential network of elements in the Turkish military, nationalist organizations and the criminal underworld. This was also the view of Taner Akcam, the first Turkish academic to call on the state to recognise the 1915 events as genocide.⁴⁰ Akcam contended that Turkish political elites inherited a tradition of impunity from their Ottoman predecessors. The use of torture by the police and the lack of civilian scrutiny over military expenditure, he pointed out, had long been justified by the elites on the grounds that Turkey was surrounded by enemies bent on its destruction. Akcam drew a direct link between the debate about 1915, the anti-Western attitudes of the security establishment

³⁸ Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, 2003, p. 76.

³⁹ Taner Akcam, *From Empire to Republic – Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, 2004, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Mehmet Necef, “The Turkish Media Debate on the Armenian Massacres”, in: Steven Jensen (ed.), *Genocide. Cases, Comparisons, and Contemporary Debates*, 2003, p. 232.

and Turkey's authoritarian tendencies: "Speaking openly about the Armenian genocide in Turkish society, which means incorporating the Armenian genocide into Turkish historical writing, has a direct impact on pushing Turkey towards becoming a truly democratic state."⁴¹

In 2004, as Turkey's AKP government worked to fulfil the political preconditions for opening EU membership talks, human rights lawyer Fethiye Cetin published *Anneannem* (My Grandmother), in which she described her discovery that her grandmother was Armenian. Cetin's grandmother had been taken away from her parents as a child during the 1915 deportations, to be raised as a Muslim girl. The book became a bestseller. Many similar cases – including that of the adopted daughter of Atatürk, Sabiha Gokcen, Turkey's first female pilot and a national heroine – were discussed. *Agos*, a Turkish Armenian weekly in Istanbul edited by Hrant Dink, provided a platform for these revelations. The Sabiha Gokcen case in particular quickly turned *Agos*, and Dink, into a target of a ferocious nationalist backlash.

In 2005, a group of Turkish intellectuals, including Halil Berktaş, organised a conference to debate 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."⁴² Bosphorus University decided to postpone the conference,⁴³ but then chose to reschedule it after 110 of its academics issued a joint statement calling for it to go ahead. Last minute injunctions issued by an Administrative Court in Istanbul prevented two universities (Bosphorus and Sabanci) from hosting the event, but could not prevent it from going ahead at a third (Bilgi) in September 2005.

The 270 participants were well aware of the political significance of the occasion. The literature professor Murat Belge, who had spent two years in prison following the 1971 military coup, noted in an opening address: "This is directly related to the question what kind of country Turkey is going to be." Halil Berktaş underlined: "What happened in 1915-1916 is not a mystery ... The issue is liberating scholarship from nationalist taboos." A number of respected Turkish academics stated openly that the events of 1915 should be recognised as genocide. *Agos*-editor Hrant Dink spoke about how attached Armenians are to the Anatolian soil. "We Armenians do desire this land because our roots are here. But don't worry. We desire not to take this land away, but to come and be buried in it."⁴⁴

The event was widely interpreted in the Turkish press as heralding the end of an era of stifled debates. The daily *Milliyet* wrote, "Another taboo is destroyed." *Radikal* announced on its front page: "The word 'genocide' was spoken at the conference, yet the world is still turning and Turkey is still in its place." In the months that followed, the debates continued. The 2005 book *What happened in 1915?*, edited by *Hurriyet* columnist Sefa Kaplan, carried the full range of views that could now be heard among Turkish intellectuals, from those who denied that any massacres had taken place to those who openly called the events genocide.

⁴¹ Taner Akcam, *From Empire to Republic – Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, 2004, p. xi.

⁴² *Hurriyet*, "[O konferans Türk halkını hançerlemektir](#)" [That conference strikes at the Turkish people], 25 May 2005.

⁴³ *turk.net haber*, "[Ermeni Konferansı ertelendi!](#)" [Armenian Conference postponed!], 25 May 2005 (Source: Anadolu ajansı).

⁴⁴ Hrant Dink, "[When the water finds its crack](#)", Presentation at the Armenian conference in Istanbul on 23-24 September 2005.

A nationalist backlash was gathering strength, however. The ultra-nationalist Grand Union of Jurists association came to increasing prominence. Its leader, Kemal Kerincsiz, shared Kilinc's view of the world.

“History has taught us that we cannot trust these Europeans. Look at what happened in 1920: they divided up the Ottoman Empire, even though they had pledged not to. People call us paranoid, but we are not.”⁴⁵

Following the Armenia conference, Kerincsiz filed a suit against 17 individuals, including Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul, who had in the end supported the conference taking place.⁴⁶ Kerincsiz filed charges under the Turkish Penal Code against more than 40 Turkish journalists and authors for “insulting Turkishness”.⁴⁷ He filed a complaint against the novelist Orhan Pamuk for comments he had made in an interview with a Swiss newspaper on the killings of Armenians and Kurds. In September 2006, Kerincsiz brought proceedings against the writer Elif Safak, claiming that her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* was Armenian propaganda. The charges stemmed from statements made by fictional characters. “Characters in a novel may be fictitious, but the authors are real,” said Kerincsiz. “In our culture, no-one can brand their ancestors murderers.”⁴⁸ When Pamuk was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature later in 2006, Kerincsiz saw it as yet another sign of the international conspiracy against Turkey.

“This award is a reward for the lies he says about the so-called genocide ... It is all part of Europe's plot to partition Turkey, as they did 90 years ago. They want to give our land to Armenians, Kurds and Greeks. Pamuk and the Europeans he loves so much are the enemies of Turkey.”⁴⁹

But Kerincsiz's most bitter attacks were reserved for the Turkish Armenian journalist and editor Hrant Dink, who had long called for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. The nationalist media launched a vicious campaign against Dink, “an enemy of Turks”. He received a flood of death threats. In October 2006, following a case brought by Kerincsiz, Dink received a 6-month suspended sentence for “denigrating Turkishness”. (Kerincsiz appealed the sentence; it was, he believed, too lenient.)⁵⁰

Dink recognised the prosecutions as part of a wider response by “that great force which had decided once and for all to put me in my place ... to single me out, render me weak and defenceless.” Dink told friends that he felt especially intimidated by Veli Kucuk, a former general and radical nationalist who appeared at his trials alongside Kerincsiz. He contemplated leaving Turkey, but decided not to do so “out of respect for the thousands of friends in Turkey who pursued a struggle for democracy and who supported us. We were going to stay and we were going to resist.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ Andrew Purvis, “[Continental Divide](#)”, *Time*, 2 October 2005.

⁴⁶ *haber7*, “[Konferans bitti tartisma bitmedi!](#)” [Conference is over, the debate is not!], 27 September 2005.

⁴⁷ Article 301 of the Penal Code states: “A person who publicly denigrates Turkishness, the Republic or the Turkish Grand National Assembly, shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months to three years.” The provision was amended in 2008 under heavy pressure from the EU, but insulting the “Turkish nation” remains a crime. Under the Turkish system, any citizen can initiate a complaint under the Penal Code.

⁴⁸ Sarah Rainsford, “[Turkish novelist case collapses](#)”, *BBC News*, 21 September 2006.

⁴⁹ Dorian Jones, “[Nobel Prize angers Turkey's nationalists](#)”, *Network Europe*, 20 October 2006.

⁵⁰ Robert Mahoney, “[Bad Blood in Turkey](#)”, *cpj*, Spring | Summer 2006.

⁵¹ Hrant Dink, “A pigeon-like unease of spirit”, *Open Democracy*, 22 January 2007.

Dink was scheduled to appear in court once again in March 2007. In January 2007, he was murdered in front of the *Agos* office. It was one in a series of murders of Christians, including that of an Italian priest in Trabzon (2006), and a German and two Turkish Protestants in Malatya (2007).

The public response to Dink's murder showed that Turkey had changed. In 2002 Turkish Armenian journalist Hrant Dink had been put on trial in Urfa for stating at a conference: "I am not a Turk ... but an Armenian from Turkey."⁵² Now the slogan "we are all Armenians" became an expression of solidarity of hundreds of thousands of citizens of Istanbul. Huge demonstrations took place in Istanbul. Dink's funeral procession was followed by a large crowd, with Turks, Kurds, Armenians and other groups marching shoulder to shoulder.

C. *Towards a sober debate?*

The threat to Turkish democracy at the time was in fact far more severe than anyone had suspected. In January 2008, news broke of a major operation by Turkish police against a secret ultra-nationalist network known as Ergenekon. The investigation had begun in the summer of 2007 with the discovery of arms in a house in the Umraniye district of Istanbul, leading to the indictment of 142 individuals (to date) on charges of plotting to overthrow the government. These include prominent right-wing journalists and academics, retired generals and figures from the security services – among them the people who had most intimidated Hrant Dink, Veli Kucuk and Kemal Kerincsiz. A number of journalists have claimed that the Dink assassination was one of a number of murders linked to Ergenekon, part of the organisation's strategy to pave the way for a coup d'état. The investigation is on-going.

The nationalist backlash suffered further setbacks. Emin Colasan was dismissed from *Hurriyet* in August 2007. The government removed hardliner Yusuf Halacoglu from his position as head of the Turkish Historical Society in August 2008.⁵³ With the Ergenekon trial under way, Turkish civil society became ever bolder. On 15 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."⁵⁴

Beginning with 230 signatures of prominent intellectuals on the website [ozurdilivorus](http://www.ozurdilivorus.com) ("we apologise"),⁵⁵ the campaigners so far collected almost 30,000 signatures from the public. The campaign triggered the usual denunciations. "I am ashamed of the persons who initiated the campaign," said Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). General Metin Gurak, chairman of the General Staff Communication Department, told the press on 19 December 2008: "This apology is wrong and it may lead to harmful consequences." A group of retired ambassadors announced: "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." Prime Minister Erdogan distanced himself from the

⁵² Hrant Dink, "A pigeon-like unease of spirit", *Open Democracy*, 22 January 2007.

⁵³ *Today's Zaman*, "[Ali Birinci new TTK president](#)", 2 August 2008.

⁵⁴ Homepage of the campaign: <http://www.ozurdilivorus.com/foreign.aspx>.

⁵⁵ See for an evaluation of these positions, Yasemin Congar, "Özür Diliyorum, çünkü..." (I apologise because...), *Taraf*, 12 December 2008.

apology campaign: “We did not commit a crime, therefore we do not need to apologise.”⁵⁶ However, the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office declined to prosecute those who joined an Internet campaign.⁵⁷ President Abdullah Gul underlined that “everybody is free to express his opinion.” 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.”⁵⁸

Turkey’s domestic transformation remains incomplete. The interministerial *Coordination Committee Against Baseless Genocide Claims* still exists. Monuments and museums commemorate World War I massacres of Turks by Armenians – but not one monument in Anatolia commemorates Armenian victims. In 2009 publisher Ragip Zarakolu was sentenced to 5 months imprisonment (converted to a 400 TL fine) for publishing the Turkish translation of *The truth will set us free*, a book written by an Armenian about his Anatolian family story in 1915. Zarakolu is appealing to the European Court of Human Rights.⁵⁹ Finally, the Ergenekon trial has only just gotten under way; and it remains unclear if those responsible for Hrant Dink’s murder will ever be found.

But the debate has already changed dramatically. Murat Bardakci, a Turkish author and columnist, published “The Remaining Documents of Talat Pasha” in early 2009. The documents – which once belonged to Mehmed Talat, the most important architect of the Armenian deportations and massacres – indicate that the number of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire fell from 1,256,000 before 1915 to 284,157 just two years later: 972,000 Ottoman Armenians disappeared from official population records between 1915 and 1916.⁶⁰ As *The New York Times* wrote in March 2009:

“Mr. Bardakci said he had held the documents for so long – 27 years – because he was waiting for Turkey to reach the point when their publication would not cause a frenzy.”

Murat Bardakci also told the paper that “I could never have published this book 10 years ago, I would have been called a traitor. The mentality has changed.”⁶¹

In 2004, Taner Akcam could still write that “it is generally accepted that debates on violence against Greeks, Armenians and Kurds are under a taboo in Turkey ... Any attempt to break through the wall of silence is felt to incur the most severe judgement imaginable.”⁶² Just five years later Halil Berktaç can note:

“The peak of extreme nationalism (*ulusalcılık*) has passed. A coup was prevented. Yusuf Halacoglu is gone [from the Historical Society], which is very important. The Ergenekon inquiry also has an effect. The position of the US and the EU has had an effect. Then there was Hrant Dink’s death and the funeral. Today we have a totally different Turkey. I write columns in *Taraf* about the genocide. There is no noise. There is no psychological terror in public when you carry out a sober debate. Silently, a profound normalisation is underway.”⁶³

⁵⁶ *Hurriyet*, “[Turkish PM says apology campaign to Armenian unacceptable](#)”.

⁵⁷ *Bianet*, “[Investigation Ruled Out for Signatories to The Apology to Armenians](#)”; 27 January 2009.

⁵⁸ Published in *Agos* on 24 February 2009.

⁵⁹ Erdiñç Ergenc, “[Değişen 301 sonrası ilk ceza Zarakolu’na](#)” [First penalty after 301 amendment goes to Zarakolu], *Sabah*, 19 June 2008.

⁶⁰ The original title of the book is: *Talat Paşa'nın Evrak-ı Metrukesi*, 2008.

⁶¹ *New York Times*, “[Nearly a Million Genocide Victims, Covered in a Cloak of Amnesia](#)”, 8 March 2009.

⁶² Taner Akcam, *From Empire to Republic*, 2004, p. 209.

⁶³ Interview with ESI, March 2009.

III. Success and Failure of Turkish Diplomacy

A. “Zero problems with neighbours”

“History,” British academic Philip Robins once wrote, “tells Turks to be suspicious, especially of their neighbours, who covet their territory or seek to erode the greatness of the nation through devious means.”⁶⁴ In 1995 Sukru Elekdag, a former Foreign Ministry undersecretary, concluded that “there are valid reasons for Turkey’s regarding other neighbours with scepticism and as a source of threat. Two countries among these neighbours, namely Greece and Syria, who have claims on Turkey’s vital interests, constitute an immediate threat for Turkey.”⁶⁵ In 1998 the impression of increasing cooperation between Armenia, Greece and Iran caused such irritation in Turkey that Foreign Minister Ismail Cem travelled to Tehran and accused Greece of attempting to “recruit Muslim soldiers to take part in new Crusades.”⁶⁶ Nahil Senoglu, General and Commander of a military academy, told a crowd of young officers in the late 1990s that “Surrounded by the largest number of internal and external enemies,” Turkey is “the loneliest country in the world”.⁶⁷

At the turn of the decade there was little to suggest that the EU, much less Greece, would embrace Turkey as a prospective EU member state; or that Turkey could dramatically improve its relations with Syria. At the beginning of 1999 relations between Ankara and Athens had reached a nadir. On 14 February 1999, US president Bill Clinton went so far as to speculate that the two NATO allies might go to war over the violence in Kosovo, given their mutual distrust. The very next day, a team of Turkish commandoes captured PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Nairobi, Kenya, exposing, in the process, Athens’ role in sheltering Turkey’s “public enemy number one”. Ocalan had been hiding in the Greek embassy.

Things could not get much worse – and didn’t. The Greek foreign minister responsible for handling the Ocalan affair was sacked, his place taken by a long-time supporter of Greek-Turkish rapprochement, Giorgios Papandreou. In August 1999, a huge earthquake hit the Marmara region in Turkey. In September, a smaller one struck Athens. The earthquakes produced an unprecedented show of solidarity by ordinary Turks and Greeks. The response to the earthquakes provided domestic cover for a series of diplomatic initiatives: a series of meetings between Papandreou and Cem paved the way towards a new spirit of détente.⁶⁸ At the Helsinki summit of 10-11 December 1999, Greece formally withdrew its long-standing opposition to Turkey’s accession to the European Union. Turkey became an official EU candidate.

The Helsinki summit became a turning point in Turkey’s relations with the outside world. EU candidate status not only spurred a domestic democratisation process, but also helped to reorient Turkish foreign policy away from a focus on hard security to soft power. In what Ihsan Dagı calls the “Europeanization” of Turkish foreign policy,

⁶⁴ Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, 2003, p. 135.

⁶⁵ Sükrü Elekdag, “[2 1/2 War Strategy](#)”, *Perceptions*, Volume1, March-May1996.

⁶⁶ Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, 2003, p. 171.

⁶⁷ Quoted in <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cp092.pdf>.

⁶⁸ F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser. *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*. Rand: Santa Monica, 2003.

“a paradigm shift occurred from pure power politics motivated by a search for survival in a hostile environment to a liberal foreign policy agenda seeing the countries of the region not as adversaries, but as partners, prioritizing cooperation over conflict and soft power over military might and bullying.”⁶⁹

The European Union, wrote Kemal Kirisci, “succeeded in having an impact on Turkey’s ‘culture of anarchy’, moving the country out of a Hobbesian world toward the Kantian one.”⁷⁰

The AKP government, in power since 2002, also perceived that Turkey’s multiple disputes with its neighbours were diminishing its ability to play a greater role in international affairs. One of the party’s key international policy thinkers, Ahmet Davutoglu, wrote already in 2001,

“It is impossible for a country experiencing constant crises with neighbouring states to produce a regional and global foreign policy ... Particularly in our region, where authoritarian regimes are the norm, improving transport possibilities, extending cross-border trade, increasing cultural exchange programs, and facilitating labour and capital movement [...] will help overcome problems stemming from the role of the central elites.”

The AKP government realised that soft power offered a more effective means of advancing the national interest. Prime Minister Erdogan announced a policy of “zero problems” with neighbours – or, as he put it in November 2008, “winning friends, not enemies”.⁷¹ This has proved to be no empty rhetoric. In the past few years, Turkey has improved its relations with almost all of its neighbours – most notably Russia, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Greece. Turkey and Syria put an end to a half-century-long land dispute, thanks to an agreement signed in May 2008.⁷² Even on Cyprus, Turkey offered its support to the Annan Plan for a federal solution in 2004, only to see it be rejected by Greek Cypriots.

In parallel, Turkey has launched a number of ambitious and praised mediation efforts – between Lebanese factions; between Iraq and its neighbours; between Pakistan and Afghanistan; between Syria and Israel. A tangible shift in trade patterns, a sign of a diversified foreign policy portfolio, has also taken place. Since 2002, exports to neighbouring and Black Sea countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Romania and Ukraine) have risen year after year – from 11 percent of total exports in 2002 to 20 percent in 2008. Imports from these countries, over the same period, have jumped from 15.5 percent to 27.6 percent.

Turkey’s foreign policy achievements have improved both its international reputation and its global influence. It is a reflection of this position that the new US President chose to visit Turkey on his very first foreign trip in April 2009.

In principle, a policy focused on active engagement with all neighbouring states would also have dictated the normalization of relations with Armenia. It has not. “Turkey wants to see peace, stability, security and prosperity in its region,” as Ali Babacan once put it, “but as you know our relations with Armenia do not fit into that formula.”⁷³ Talks on establishing

⁶⁹ Ihsan Dagi, “[The liberal turn in Turkish foreign policy](#)”, *Today's Zaman*, 23 February 2009.

⁷⁰ Kemal Kirisci, “Turkey's foreign policy in turbulent times”, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) Chaillot Paper – n°92, September 2006.

⁷¹ Address by H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of Turkey on “[The Future of Turkish-American Relations: Acting Together with a Common Vision](#)”, 14 November 2008, The Brookings Institution.

⁷² Ercan Yavuz, “Turkey and Syria settle decades-old property dispute”, *Today's Zaman*, 3 March 2009.

⁷³ “[Turkish FM invites Armenia for renewed dialogue](#)”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 21 April 2008.

diplomatic relations – already under way in 1992 – first fell victim to the Armenian-Azerbaijani war over Nagorno Karabakh. In February 1992, after an Armenian attack on the town of Khojaly, Turkish President Turgut Ozal openly considered coming to Azerbaijan’s aid and using military force to “halt the Armenian progression.”⁷⁴ Less than three months later, after the Armenian capture of Shushi, Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel warned that “Turkey can not act as a bystander to the conflict.” In April 1993, in response to Armenian occupation of further regions surrounding Nagorno Karabakh, Ankara suspended the talks on diplomatic relations and border issues.

For the last fifteen years the unresolved conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia has developed into an obstacle to Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. Turkey’s closing the border with Armenia has done little to help resolve the problem of Nagorno Karabakh. It has not helped Azerbaijan, and has diminished Turkey’s role in the region. It has also undermined Turkey’s soft power. According to Armenia’s National Statistical Service 2007 exports to Turkey amounted to a paltry \$3 million and imports to \$131 million (4 percent of Armenian imports).⁷⁵ The standoff between the two countries remains damaging for both – for the landlocked Armenian Republic as well as for the impoverished eastern provinces of Turkey. So why has Turkish policy on Armenia so far been out of step with its regional vision?

B. Genocide diplomacy

In March 2005, the American historian Justin McCarthy, who had made his name writing on the expulsion of Turks from the Balkans and the Caucasus in the 19th and early 20th centuries, was invited to address the Turkish Grand National Assembly. McCarthy 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.”⁷⁶

McCarthy’s speech was received with loud applause. It was, after all, an affirmation of one of the basic tenets of Turkey’s foreign policy. For the past three decades, Turkey has made a sustained effort to convince its allies that international recognition of the Armenian genocide would amount to not only an insult to Turkey, but a threat to its territorial integrity.

⁷⁴ *Hurriyet*, 5 March 1992.

⁷⁵ 2008 Statistical Yearbook of Armenia, <http://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99456368.pdf>

⁷⁶ Justin McCarthy, “[The Reality of Armenian Issue](#)”, Presentation at the TGNA Conference on March 24, 2005.

Since the 1980s, the Turkish state has invested significant amounts of political capital in promoting its views on the Armenian question on the international stage. It has financed and enlisted research institutions – such as the Institute of Turkish Studies in Washington D.C. – to promote its agenda. It has reached out through the print media. When a resolution referring to the Armenian genocide was tabled in the US Congress in 1985, for instance, Turkey took out full-page advertisements in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Times* to publish a declaration – signed by sixty-nine scholars – that “statesmen and politicians make history and scholars write it” and that “much more remains to be discovered before historians will be able to sort out precise responsibility between warring and innocent.”⁷⁷ In 2005, the Ankara Chamber of Commerce paid for 600,000 copies of the documentary series *Sarı Gelin* to be sent out across Europe as a *Time Magazine* supplement, in English, German, French, Spanish, Polish and Russian.⁷⁸ (The magazine later apologised for distributing the film without reviewing the content.)

Until the mid-1980s, the Turkish campaign appeared to be working. In 1965, the Uruguayan parliament was the first to adopt a resolution in honour of the “Armenian martyrs slain in 1915”. 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. The Lebanon-based Armenian terrorist group ASALA (the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia), responsible for a series of deadly attacks against Turkish diplomats around the world, linked the Armenian cause with Middle Eastern fanaticism. Turkey had powerful friends in the US Congress and State Department, and throughout the Western business world. For geo-strategic reasons, it had the support of the pro-Israeli lobby. In addition, as Adam Jones pointed out, “a tacit understanding prevailed among politically powerful sectors of Turkish and Israeli society to marginalise the Armenian genocide by proclaiming the uniqueness and incommensurability of the Jewish Holocaust.”⁷⁹

However, in the 1990s 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 developments 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, some of which issued declarations using the word “genocide”.

Successive Turkish governments treated these declarations as hostile acts. Threats were issued against countries debating genocide resolutions. For example, during a 2000 hearing in the US Congress, former Turkish ambassador Gunduz Aktan warned that a resolution on genocide could lead to the closure of the US air force base in Incirlik (southern Turkey). Armenia would also suffer:

“By insisting on the recognition of the genocide, the Armenian leadership and the diaspora will finally silence the few remaining voices favourable to them in Turkey. This

⁷⁷ Quoted in Guenther Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey – A Disputed Genocide*, 2005, p. 261.

⁷⁸ The head of the chamber, Sinan Aygun, later described this as a coup: “We scored a goal against the Armenian lobby and in the goal was Time Magazine.” *Aksam*, “[Time’la Sarı Gelin Kavgası](#)” (Conflict with *Time* about Sarı Gelin”, 13 November 2005.

⁷⁹ Adam Jones, *Genocide – A Comprehensive Introduction*, 2006, p. 360.

will effectively result in sealing the border. Given the situation in Armenia this attitude of the Armenian government is akin to suicide.”⁸⁰

Yet Turkey’s genocide diplomacy has been almost entirely unsuccessful. The tide of international opinion has clearly and irrevocably shifted towards acknowledging the Armenian genocide. Barack Obama may not have used the word during his April 2009 visit to Turkey, but he has done so in the past, and it is very likely that he and other world leaders will do so again in the future. Yet contrary to the fears of the Turkish establishment, this is not a sign of anti-Turkish sentiment, but rather a reflection of a global change in the way genocide itself is understood.

C. *A century of genocide*

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.”⁸¹

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.⁸² 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 an “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

⁸⁰ Presentation by Ambassador Gunduz Aktan at the House Committee on International Relations, 14 September 2000.

⁸¹ Serdar Palabiyik, “[Literature between Scientificity and Subjectivity: A Comparative Analysis of the Books Written on the Armenian Issue](#)”, *Review of Armenian Studies*, Number 11-12, Volume 4 – 2007.

⁸² Core texts include: Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn’s *History and Sociology of Genocide*; Samuel Totten et al. *Century of Genocide* both appeared in the early 1990s. Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*, 1993. Robert Gellately and Bein Kiernan, ed., *The Spectre of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, 2003. And recently Adam Jones, *Genocide – A Comprehensive Introduction*, 2006.

“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.”⁸³

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.⁸⁴

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.”

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’.”⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶

“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.”⁸⁷

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

⁸³ Lewy, p. 251.

⁸⁴ [Presentation made by Prof. Justin McCarthy](#) (Seminar on Turkish-Armenian Relations Organized by the Democratic Principles Association 15 March 2001 /Istanbul.

⁸⁵ Zwaan lists as pioneers in the field researchers and prominent authors like Raul Hilberg, Leo Kuper, Frank Chalk, Kurt Jonassohn, Helen Fein, Robert Melson, Yehuda Bauer, Israel Charny and others. In: Ton Zwaan, “[On the Etiology and Genesis of Genocide and Other Mass Crimes Targeting Specific Groups](#)”, A Report presented to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Amsterdam: Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. University of Amsterdam/Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, November 2003. P. 5.

⁸⁶ Cf. Robert Cribb, “Genocide in the Non-Western World: Implications for Holocaust Studies”, in: Steven L.B. Jensen (ed.), *Genocide: Cases, Comparisons and Contemporary Debates*, 2003, pp. 123-140.

⁸⁷ Zwaan, p. 12.

the entire group. Destruction of only part of a group (such as its educated members, or members living in one region) is also genocide.”⁸⁸

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.”⁸⁹ 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.”⁹⁰

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.”⁹¹ 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.”⁹²

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.”⁹³

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*.”⁹⁴ 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.”⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Website <http://www.genocidescholars.org/aboutgenocide.html>.

⁸⁹ Report, Paragraphs 122 – 123, <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/toc.html>.

⁹⁰ New York Times, 26 February 1999.

⁹¹ ICTY, [Krstic Judgement](#), 2004.

⁹² ICTY, [Krstic Judgement](#), 2004.

⁹³ International Association of Genocide Scholars website, <http://www.genocidescholars.org/aboutgenocide.html>.

⁹⁴ Adam Jones, *Genocide – A Comprehensive Introduction*, 2006, p. 75; James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*, 1998.

⁹⁵ Adam Jones, *Genocide – XXX*, p.83.

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 20th 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 20th century – probably the most violent in human history – saw genocide take place in almost every corner of the world.⁹⁶ Against this background, there are hardly any reputable scholars in the field of genocide studies who doubt that what happened to the Armenians in 1915 constitutes genocide. To deny it is to take on an international consensus supported by countless scholars, commissions, courts and governments. It is a consensus that Turkey's diplomats have struggled – and failed – to overcome.

D. *Abandoned by its allies?*

Resolutions commemorating the 1915 massacres as genocide have now been passed in more than 20 countries, leaving Turkish politicians and diplomats baffled by their inability to win over even the staunchest of Turkey's allies. Turks have felt themselves outmanoeuvred and outspent by an Armenian diaspora with apparently unlimited resources and political clout. The memory of Turkish diplomats killed by ASALA terrorists in the 1970s and 80s adds bitterness to the defeat, reinforcing the sense that it is Turkey that is the victim of an injustice.

When the French National Assembly adopted a single-sentence law in May 1998 – “France publicly recognizes the Armenian genocide of 1915” – French Armenians were identified as the culprits.⁹⁷ Many of the parliamentarians who first proposed the law did represent constituencies – in suburban Paris and Marseille, for instance – with high concentrations of French Armenians. One Turkish writer, Gurbuz Evren, speculated that if all the Turkish residents in France had French citizenship “the French parliament would pass a resolution claiming that it was not Turks who murdered 1.5 million Armenians but on the contrary the Armenians who massacred the Turks.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, 2003, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Assemblée Nationale, “[Proposition de Loi adoptée par l'Assemblée Nationale en première lecture relative à la reconnaissance du génocide arménien de 1915](#)”, 29 May 1998.

⁹⁸ Mehmet Nefef, “The Turkish Media Debate on the Armenian Massacres”, in: Steven Jensen (ed.), *Genocide. Cases, Comparisons, and Contemporary Debates*, 2003, p. 247.

The Armenian diaspora is seen by Turks as a formidable opponent. The largest Armenian communities outside of Armenia are in the US (over 1.5 million, half of which reside in California), Russia (more than 2 million), France (450,000), Georgia (460,000) and Lebanon (234,000). There are also substantial communities in Syria, Iran and Argentina.⁹⁹

However, many of these resolutions cannot be explained by Armenian lobbying, or indeed by any apparent anti-Turkish sentiment. Genocide resolutions have passed in countries with small Armenian populations – in Poland, a long-time ally of Turkey, in Italy, in Lithuania and in Slovakia.¹⁰⁰ The Netherlands, home to one of the largest Turkish communities in Europe, adopted a genocide resolution in 2004, at the very time that the Dutch government, in its position as EU president, was trying to secure a date for Turkey’s EU accession talks. In June 2005 Germany, with Europe’s largest Turkish population, unanimously adopted a parliamentary motion on “Remembering and commemorating the expulsions and massacres of the Armenians in 1915.”

Germany, governed at the time by a Red-Green coalition under Social-Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schroder and Green Party Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, was one of Turkey’s closest European allies. Berlin had pushed for Turkey to become an EU candidate in 1999; in 2000, it amended the German citizenship law to make it easier for hundreds of thousands of long-time Turkish residents to become German citizens (and thus voters); in 2004, it strongly supported opening accession talks with Ankara.

The text adopted by the Bundestag – and sponsored jointly by the parliamentary groups of the SPD, CDU/CSU, the Greens and the FDP – was nonetheless unambiguous:

“The German Bundestag ... deplores the deeds of the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the almost total annihilation of the Armenians in Anatolia.”¹⁰¹

The resolution includes a reference to genocide: “numerous independent historians, parliaments and international organisations recognised the deportation and extermination of Armenians as genocide.”¹⁰² Turkey’s policy of denial, it concludes, was “contradictory to the idea of reconciliation that is the foundation of the community of values existing in the European Union.”¹⁰³

Rarely have the shortcomings of Turkish genocide diplomacy been more obvious than in its efforts to block this resolution. The Turkish ambassador in Germany, Mehmet Ali Irtemcelik, accused its supporters of acting as “spokespersons of fanatic Armenian nationalism, which is using organised terror around the world.” The Turkish foreign ministry noted with regret that “none of our warnings were taken into account by the Bundestag.”¹⁰⁴ Parliamentary Speaker Bulent Arinc sent a letter to his German counterpart, saddened by “this one-sided decision by

⁹⁹ <http://www.armeniadiaspora.com/followup/population.html>.

¹⁰⁰ There are some 92,000 Armenians in Poland, some 2,500 in Italy and in Lithuania and even fewer in Slovakia. <http://www.armeniadiaspora.com/followup/population.html>.

¹⁰¹ German Bundestag, 15th electoral term, Motion tabled by the parliamentary groups of the SPD, CDU/CSU, ALLIANCE, 90/THE GREENS and the FDP, “[Remembering and commemorating the expulsions and massacres of the Armenians in 1915 – Germany must make a contribution to reconciliation between Turks and Armenians](#)”, 15 June 2005.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ German Bundestag, [Motion by the CDU/CSU group](#), 18 February 2005.

¹⁰⁴ *Handelsblatt*, “[Spannungen zwischen der Türkei und Deutschland](#)” [Tensions between Germany and Turkey], 17 June 2005.

the parliament of a friend and allied country.”¹⁰⁵ 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.”¹⁰⁶

Even in the United States – where some Turks still feel that the recognition game is theirs to be won – the failure of Ankara’s genocide diplomacy is all too obvious. US president Ronald Reagan referred to the “Armenian genocide” in a speech in 1981.¹⁰⁷ George Bush Sr. has spoken of “the terrible massacres [the Armenians] suffered in 1915-1923 at the hands of the Ottoman rulers.”¹⁰⁸ To date, 42 US states (representing 85 percent of America’s population) have recognised the Armenian genocide, either by legislation or proclamation.¹⁰⁹

Turkey has spent considerable political capital on attempting to block the passage of a genocide resolution in the US 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 halted the passage of a genocide resolution in Congress also 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. Charles Krauthammer, an influential commentator who had sided *with* Turkey in opposing a resolution, also wrote at the time: “That between 1 million and 1.5 million Armenians were brutally and systematically massacred starting in 1915 in a deliberate genocidal campaign is a matter of simple historical record.”¹¹⁰ In short, 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.”¹¹¹

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.¹¹² 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.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ *Stern*, “[Unfreundliche Töne vor der Kanzler-Visite](#)” [Unfriendly sounds before the chancellor’s visit], 3 May 2005. TGNA Announcements: “[Arinc: ‘Türkiye tarihiyle her zaman yüzleşmeye hazirdir ve tarihimizde utanacagimiz hicbir sayfa bulunmamaktadır’](#)” (Arinc: Turkey is always ready to face its history and there is no page of our history to be ashamed of), 22 June 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Jörg Lau, “[Deutsche Schmerztherapie](#)” [German pain therapy], *DIE ZEIT*, 21 April 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Ronald Reagan, “[Proclamation 4838 – Days of Remembrance of Victims of the Holocaust](#)”, 22 April 1981.

¹⁰⁸ George Bush senior in April 1990. Quoted in Torben Jorgensen, “Turkey, the US and the Armenian Genocide”, in: Steven Jensen (ed.), *Genocide. Cases, Comparisons, and Contemporary Debates*, p. 218.

¹⁰⁹ The eight who have not [yet] done so are Texas, South Dakota, Wyoming, West Virginia, Iowa, Alabama, Mississippi and Indiana.

¹¹⁰ Charles Krauthammer, “[The Razor Is Out](#)”, *National Review*, 17 October 2007.

¹¹¹ Omer Taspinar, “[The coming storm with Washington](#)”, *Today’s Zaman*, 15 December 2008.

¹¹² Armenian National Committee of America, “[Hillary Clinton supports adoption of Armenian Genocide Resolution; Pledges to recognize Armenian Genocide as President](#)”, 24 January 2008.

¹¹³ *Armenians for Obama*, “[Barack Obama: Supporting US-Armenia relations](#)”.

“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.”¹¹⁴ 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.”¹¹⁵ 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.

E. The consequences of recognition

In August 2004, the German development aid minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-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.”¹¹⁶

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.¹¹⁷ When the German apology was finally forthcoming, exactly a hundred years after the events, the court proceedings were abandoned.

Turks have long argued that international recognition of the Armenian genocide would single them out as a “genocidal people”, placed on an equal moral footing with Nazi Germany. But as it happens, the same trends in international thinking that have led to widespread recognition of the Armenian genocide have made it a less singular episode than it might have appeared a few decades ago.

The pro-Turkish historian Justin 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.”¹¹⁸ His remarks, though intended to ridicule the Genocide Convention, actually point to a deeper truth: there have been all too many genocides around the world, implicating both Western and developing countries.

¹¹⁴ Obama News and Speeches, “[On the importance of US-Armenian relations](#)”, 19 January 2008.

¹¹⁵ Al Jazeera, “Obama: 'US not at war with Islam'“, 7 April 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2009/04/20094611538303268.html>.

¹¹⁶ Andrew Meldrum, “[German minister says sorry for genocide in Namibia](#)”, *The Guardian*, 16 August 2004.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ [Presentation made by Prof. Justin McCarthy](#) (Seminar on Turkish-Armenian Relations Organized by the Democratic Principles Association 15 March 2001 /Istanbul).

However, recognition of historical genocides predating the 1948 Convention have been largely symbolic acts, without any of the dire consequences feared by Turks. The growing number of resolutions on the Armenian genocide since 2000 have also done little to undermine Turkey's international prestige. The same period has seen the opening of EU accession talks, a Turkish non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council (the first since the 1960s), exponential increases in foreign investment, and widespread international praise for Turkey's domestic reforms and foreign policy initiatives. Barack Obama's visit in April 2009 is yet another sign of Turkey's rising star on the international stage.

The genocide resolutions have not drawn any link between acknowledgement of genocide and either reparations or territorial concessions. In fact, the trend towards international recognition has not carried any material consequences for the Turkish state. The European Parliament resolution of June 1987 explicitly stated that, while "the tragic events in 1915-1917 involving the Armenians living in the territory of the Ottoman Empire constitute genocide [...] the present Turkey cannot be held responsible for the tragedy experienced by the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire."¹¹⁹ In 2002, the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission sought the views of the influential International Centre on Transitional Justice in New York on the question of legal responsibility for the genocide. An opinion drafted by independent counsel stated:

"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 [of 1915] could successfully be made against any individual or state under the Convention."¹²⁰

Leading international scholar of genocide and international law William Schabas also wrote:

"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."¹²¹

A non-binding resolution mooted in the US Congress – the Damoclean sword Turkish policy makers see hanging over their heads – would not alter this. Nor would a statement by president Obama.

This is the paradox of Turkey's genocide diplomacy. A growing number of Turks have realised that their country's international position on the Armenian question has only generated tension with important allies, while utterly failing to persuade them. At the same time, vague but powerful anxieties remain as to the consequences of any change in the official line. So long as Turkey's political leaders and opinion makers continue to stoke fears of loss of territory and reparations Turkey will continue to respond defensively. By continuing to treat every mention of the 'g-word' as an attack on national honour, Turkey's foreign policy

¹¹⁹ *European Parliament*, "[Resolution on a Political solution to the Armenian Question](#)", Doc. A2-33/87, Official Journal of the European Communities, No. C 190/119.

¹²⁰ See: <http://www.american.edu/cgp/track2/data/ICTJreportEnglish.pdf>, p. 4. Elsewhere, the ICTJ report concludes that "the Events" did in fact "include all of the elements of the crime of genocide as defined in the Convention, and legal scholars as well as historians, politicians, journalists and other people would be justified in continuing to so describe them."

¹²¹ William A. Schabas, *Genocide in international law: the crimes of crimes*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 443

has become hostage to events beyond its control, particularly when dealing with the Caucasus. It is now readily apparent that this particular policy has become a national liability.

IV. The Fading Dream of Greater Armenia

The wallpaper on Kiro Manoyan's computer in his Yerevan office tells part of the story. It features a picture of Harput, the former hometown of Manoyan's grandparents – a part of South East Anatolia which became known in 1915 as a “slaughterhouse vilayet”. At the beginning of 1915, the region was home to some hundred thousand Armenians. On 30 December 1915, the US consul in Harput reported that “there are probably not more than four thousand left.” The intervening period saw a reign of terror described in detail by US historian Guenther Lewy:

“Several hundred Armenian men had been seized, including nearly every person of importance. Almost all of them were being tortured in order to reveal hidden weapons and seditious plots ... In early July the authorities began to empty the prisons. Batches of men were taken away at night and were never heard of again. It soon became known that they had all been killed.”¹²²

Manoyan's grandparents managed to escape, having found shelter with Turkish friends (this despite the fact that sheltering Armenians constituted a capital offence at the time).

Kiro himself was born in Lebanon, home to a large number Ottoman Armenians who survived the deportations. The diaspora in Lebanon, like many other Armenian communities around the world, was “a broken refugee population with little or no political consciousness, with strong regional and religious identities, a weak pan-national sense of belonging and even limited or no Armenian language skills.”¹²³

Attitudes towards Soviet Armenia, already highly polarised, were exacerbated by divisions within the Armenian Apostolic Church. During the Cold War, the Cilician See, based in Lebanon and allied to the Dashnak cause, took a fiercely anti-Soviet stance. The Etchmiadzin See (in Armenia), supported by other diaspora political parties, supported the Soviet authorities. In the Lebanese civil war of 1958, the Armenian community split into two factions, each supporting a different side.

On 24 April 1965, on the 50th anniversary of the 1915 massacres, a crowd of 200,000 Armenians gathered outside the opera building in Yerevan. The protestors, throwing stones, cries of “Justice” and “Our Lands” on their lips, demanded that Turkey return all territories where Armenians used to live, and called on the Soviets for help. Two years later, construction of the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan, listing the Armenian-populated cities now inside Turkish borders, was completed.

The 1965 anniversary was also to become a turning point for the huge Armenian diaspora. A new group of ARF (Dashnak) leaders began to use anti-Turkish sentiment to forge a rallying platform for Armenian unity and patriotism. The call for justice, reparations, and restitution mobilised the scattered communities as never before. Genocide and the campaign for its recognition became central to Armenian national consciousness. As Razmik Panossian put it,

¹²² Guenther Lewy, *The Armenian massacres in Ottoman Turkey – A Disputed Genocide*, 2005, p. 169.

¹²³ Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians – from Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*, 2006, p. 294.

“The genocide itself (including its denial) became the defining moment – the founding ‘moment’ – of contemporary Armenian identity. Post-1915 Armenians, particularly in the diaspora, saw themselves as ‘the first Christian nation’ and ‘the first victims of genocide in the twentieth century’.”¹²⁴

As opposition to Turkey grew, demands for a Greater Armenia – the unification of historical Armenian territories through revisions of the Turkish border – supplanted the goal of liberation from Soviet rule. Increasingly, the diaspora political parties began to shelve their divisions to adopt a united front towards Turkey.¹²⁵ A memorandum submitted by the three main diaspora parties to the UN in 1975 demanded “the return of Turkish-held Armenian territories to their rightful owner – the Armenian people”, along with “moral, financial and territorial reparations.”

Like many Armenians, Kiro Manoyan and his family fled Lebanon during the civil war and emigrated to Canada, where he became active in the ARF network, now energised around a common cause. In 2000, he came to Armenia and became the ARF’s spokesperson for foreign policy. To this day, Manoyan continues to reject the current border with Turkey. In an interview with the Armenian daily *Yerkir* in April 2005, Manoyan explained that Armenia will bring up the territorial dispute with its vastly more powerful neighbour as soon as the opportunity to do so presents itself.

“We believe that Armenia is unable to make such demands today. But this doesn’t mean that it will be unable to do so tomorrow. So it must not take any steps that would hamper or inhibit us tomorrow.”¹²⁶

This remains the official ARF position. In a parliamentary debate in Yerevan in 2007, Vahan Hovhannisian, then deputy speaker of parliament and a leading ARF politician, described the 1921 Treaties of Kars and Moscow, which define the current border, as “illegal” (despite their having been ratified) and called for “very serious diplomatic, legal work” to revise them. Speaking at the same debate, Ara Papian, previously Yerevan’s ambassador to Canada, also rejected the validity of the two treaties, arguing instead that the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, which awarded Armenia a substantial part of eastern Anatolia (but was never ratified), remained in force.¹²⁷ Papian even calculated a precise figure, USD 41,514,230,940, to be paid by Turkey in reparations for damages inflicted during World War I.¹²⁸

According to Armenians like Manoyan and Papian, the unresolved territorial issue is an insurmountable obstacle to normal relations between the neighbouring countries. Armen Ayvazian, director of the Yerevan-based strategic research institute ‘Ararat’, for his part, argues that Armenia – if it is serious about pursuing its territorial demands – should not engage with Turkey at all.

¹²⁴ Razmik Panossian, p. 242.

¹²⁵ SDHP: Social Democratic Hnchakian Party – founded in 1987 in Geneva – Hnchaks;
ADL: Armenian Democratic Liberal Party – founded in 1908 in Egypt;
ARF: Armenian Revolutionary Federation – founded in 1890 in Tbilisi – Dashnaks.

¹²⁶ <http://www.armenialiberty.org/armeniareport/report/en/2005/04/7f7e75bf-dac4-42a0-9931-0803a9415cf2.asp>.

¹²⁷ In 2007 he produced a book *Legal Bases for Armenian Claims; collection of articles*, Yerevan 2007 (in Armenian) where he outlines his solutions.

¹²⁸ Azg Daily, April 24, 2007.

“The solution to the Armenian question is not the international recognition of the Armenian genocide, as many misperceive it and as Armenia’s false friends are suggesting. The Armenian Question is first of all a territorial question There is only one solution to the Armenian Question: to restore Armenian statehood, if not in the entirety of Armenia (350,000 sq/km), then at least on a substantial piece of it, such that the safe and long-term existence and development of Armenian civilisation can be secured.”¹²⁹

Ayvazian likens present-day Armenia (29,800 sq/km) to a “lonely castle”, offering no place for the nation to retreat and regroup its forces. This can never be accepted.¹³⁰ Ayvazian also harshly criticises the Armenian authorities for being too soft on Turkey, particularly in light of President Gul’s 2008 visit to Yerevan.

“While Israel confronts a Holocaust-denying Iran by all possible means, the Armenian government invites the Armenian Genocide-denier Abdullah Gul to Armenia and prompts our people to respect the flag and anthem of the enemy.”¹³¹

Maximalist positions like Ayvazian’s are still common among Armenians, both at home and abroad. As part of a political platform, however, they appear increasingly bankrupt, offering no effective strategy or realistic perspective for advancing Armenian territorial claims. What is more, they have ceased to be effective as a tool for uniting Armenians, either at home or in the diaspora.

At home, the ARF has never been able to win more than 14 percent of the vote. A junior coalition partner in the current government, their influence on foreign policy is limited. Tellingly, every Armenian government since independence has been in favour of opening diplomatic relations with Turkey without any preconditions.

Even in the diaspora, positions are divided. While some Armenians oppose any contact with Turks whatsoever until Turkey admits the genocide, pays reparations, and returns territory in “Western Armenia”, others are open to engagement. The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), a network affiliated with the ARF, regarded the 2001 Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission, an effort by the US State Department to bring prominent Armenians and Turks together, as “a Turkish ploy intended to derail international recognition of the Armenian genocide” and “a barrier to the genocide recognition campaign.”¹³² The Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), on the other hand, took part in it.

International recognition of the genocide, meanwhile, has not translated into international support for changing the borders, one of the ARF’s major aims. Third country resolutions and proclamations, acknowledged Simon Payaslian, a diaspora historian, “neglect the issues of retribution, compensation and restitution; and they particularly ignore the fact that as a result of the Genocide, Armenians lost their historic territories.”¹³³ As a result, Armenian hardliners are questioning the wisdom of fighting so hard for genocide recognition throughout the world. As Papiian put it:

¹²⁹ Armen Ayvazian, “The Unimplemented consequences of the Sevres Treaty for the Middle Eastern and international politics”, Yerkir, 13, January, 2006.

¹³⁰ Armen Ayvazian, “Western Armenia vs. Eastern Anatolia”, *Europe and Orient*, no. 4.

¹³¹ Armen Ayvazina, “[The number of the Turkish scores on the diplomatic goal of Armenia may increase](#)”.

¹³² David Philips, *Unsilencing the past*, p. 83.

¹³³ Simon Payaslian, “After Recognition”, *The Armenian Forum*, Vol. 2, No.3, (The Gomidas Institute, Princeton University), Winter 1999, p.49.

“All of our resources went to the genocide. Well, it is all too obvious, if people were massacred for their ethnicity that is genocide. It is senseless to argue whether this happened or not”.

The Armenian nationalists’ “coarse and indiscriminate” discourse, writes Gerard Libaridian, a leading American Armenian intellectual and a former advisor to Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrossian, “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.”¹³⁴ 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.”¹³⁵

Asserting outright that “there is no logical connection between the cause of genocide recognition and that of retrieving land from Turkey,” historian Donald Bloxham has also challenged the Armenian nationalists to answer the fundamental question “whether recognition is really going to open the door to healing wounds and reconciliation, as we are often told, or whether it is a means of redressing nationalist grievances. Is it an issue of historical truth, morality and responsibility, or of unresolved political and material claims?”¹³⁶

V. Birds with Wings

In December 2007, Levon Ter-Petrossian (Armenia’s first president from 1991 to 1998) delivered a major policy speech at Yerevan’s Liberty Square as part of his presidential election campaign. After reminding his audience of his personal background – “I am a descendant of Genocide survivors. My grandfather fought in the heroic Battle of Musa Dagh. My seven-year old father carried food and water to the positions. And my mother was born in those days in a cave. Had the French Navy not happened to have been sailing by the shores of Musa Dagh I would not be alive now” – he set out the case for improving relations with Turkey:

“It is time to finally understand that by presenting ultimatums to Turkey or pushing it into a corner, no-one can force it to recognise the Armenian Genocide. I have absolutely no doubt that Turkey will do so – sooner or later. Yet it will not happen before the normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations, but after the establishment of an atmosphere of good-neighbourliness, 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.”

Ter-Petrossian did not object to Armenians in the diaspora working to achieve genocide recognition. As he put it, “The sons and daughters of the Armenian Diaspora, as citizens, taxpayers, and voters of different countries, have the right to exert pressure on their governments.” Armenia’s interest, however, was not in lobbying against Turkey abroad, but

¹³⁴ Gerard Libaridian, *Modern Armenia*, p. 191.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, 2007, p. 232.

in seeing Turkey succeed in becoming a prosperous European democracy. Armenian authorities' attempts to undermine Turkey's EU accession process were thus a sign of "incompetence":

"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."¹³⁷

Even before Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union, Ter-Petrossian liked to evoke the fate of the first Armenian republic, which lasted less than two years between 1918 and 1920. To avoid this fate, he believed that Armenia needed a balanced foreign policy, and in particular good relations with Turkey. Six months before Armenia's independence, Ter-Petrossian met with Volkan Vural, the Turkish Ambassador to Moscow, assuring him that:

"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."¹³⁸

In the end, however, Ter-Petrossian did not succeed in establishing diplomatic relations with Turkey. When he was pushed out of office by Robert Kocharian, the former leader of the break-away republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, many among the new leadership in Yerevan wrote off the former president's policy of accommodation as a failure. Kocharian brought the ARF (Dashnak) party, which had been outlawed, into his government, and decided to work more closely with the Armenian diaspora. He organised the first big Armenian diaspora conference in Yerevan in September 1999. He also made the issue of international genocide recognition a priority of Armenian foreign policy. While assuring Turkey that genocide recognition would not give rise to territorial claims, he made few efforts to reach out to Turkey – pointing out, at the same time, that "it is not us keeping the Armenian-Turkish border closed."¹³⁹

In April 2008, Robert Kocharian was succeeded by his former prime minister, Serzh Sarkisian, who had defeated Ter-Petrossian in the polls. During the election campaign, some media outlets had portrayed Ter-Petrossian as a Turkophile, referring to him as 'Levon Efendi'.¹⁴⁰ However, once elected, Sarkisian decided to seek engagement with Armenia's Western neighbour. Addressing Armenian diaspora representatives on 23 June 2008 in Moscow, he noted:

"Armenia's position is clear; in the 21st century between neighbouring countries there must not be closed borders. The regional cooperation could be the best means supporting stability. The Turkish side offers to form a commission that would be studying historical facts. We don't oppose the creation of such a commission, but when the border between the states is open."¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Levon Ter-Petrossian, speech entitled "[History, Ideology, Typology](#)" in Liberty Square, Yerevan, 8 December 2007.

¹³⁸ Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Russian newspaper), 14 May 1991.

¹³⁹ SNARK, News Agency, 19 June 1999 (reprinted from Interview with Cenk Baslamis, *Milliyet* daily, 16 June).

¹⁴⁰ "Efendi" in the Ottoman empire meant an Ottoman official or literate person.

¹⁴¹ [Official website of the President of Armenia](#) (ESI translation).

It was then that the new Armenian president invited his Turkish counterpart, Abdullah Gul, to Yerevan. In an article in *The Wall Street Journal* on 9 July 2008, Sarkisian explained his position in more detail:

“The time has come for a fresh effort to break this deadlock, a situation that helps no one and hurts many. As president of Armenia, 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 ... There is no real alternative to the establishment of normal relations between our countries.”¹⁴²

When President Abdullah Gul decided to take up Sarkisian’s offer and visit Yerevan, the opposition Armenian National Congress led by Ter-Petrosian postponed a planned rally to protest against president Sarkisian on 5 September. “We are supporters of the normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations,” said the ANC in a statement, “and we do not wish in any way to overshadow any event supporting the perspectives of those relations.”¹⁴³ It was Kocharian who expressed his disapproval. Asked, back in July 2008, to respond to allegations that he was still “ruling the country” behind the scenes, he responded that “if that were true, Levon Ter-Petrosian, most likely, would now already be in jail for criminal activity ... and the Turkish President would not be invited for a football match to Yerevan for sure.”¹⁴⁴ It was now Sarkisian’s turn to suffer charges of appeasement. *Haykakan Jamanak*, an opposition daily, accused the new president of making too many “concessions” to Turkey. Its cover featured Sarkisian – “Serzhik Efendi”, as the newspaper called him – wearing an Ottoman fez. It asked: “What should one call such behaviour? Is it flattery, flirtation, self-interest or simply treachery?”¹⁴⁵

Some Armenians still believe that Turkey cannot change. Suspicion of Turkey’s motives and fear of its true intentions are widespread, both on the street and in the media. In a 2004 opinion poll, 68.7 percent of Armenian respondents, when asked to characterise Turks in a single word, came up with negative descriptions – among them, “bloodthirsty” (6.4 percent), “enemy” (10.1 percent), “barbarian” (9.1 percent) and “murderers” (6.4 percent). Only 6 percent of respondents cited positive characteristics.¹⁴⁶ When Turkish intellectuals launched the 1915 apology campaign, a number of Armenians questioned their intentions out of fear that the initiative was designed to hinder the Armenian campaign for genocide recognition.¹⁴⁷ Some analysts and politicians stressed that “the number of signatories is too small to speak of public support to the initiative and the authors of the petition did not use term Genocide.”¹⁴⁸

Memories of 1915 came to the fore once again with the murder of Hrant Dink in January 2007. Many protests and commemorative events were held simultaneously across Armenia. The ARF Youth branch held a protest march on 22 January in front of the Council of Europe office in Yerevan. Their posters read: “The genocide is continuing”, “Turkey, your hands are bloody!”, “Restrain the Turks!”, “Demand the truth of the Dink murder”. On 24 January, a

¹⁴² http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121555668872637291.html?mod=googlenews_wsj.

¹⁴³ [Statement by the Armenian National Congress](#), 29 August 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Mediamax news agency, 9 July 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Nikol Pashinian, *Haykakan Jamanak* Editorial, October 29, 2008 (ESI translated).

¹⁴⁶ Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) – Sociological and Marketing Research Center (HASA Armenia), “Armenian-Turkish Citizens’ Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project,” Project directors: Dr. Ferhat Kentel, Dr. Gevorg Poghosyan, Editing: Volkan Aytar (TESEV), Yerevan-Istanbul, 2004.

¹⁴⁷ Alla Serobian, “Initiation or imitation?,” *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun* (Republic of Armenia), 20 December 2008.

¹⁴⁸ [“Turkish apology campaign proved that public fear wanes”](#), PanArmenian, 22 December 2008.

rally organized by the Yerevan Mayor's Office and the Writers' Union of Armenia marched on the Genocide memorial in Yerevan to denounce the assassination, with up to 100,000 participants according to news reports. "Genocide is continuing," one of the participants was quoted as saying.¹⁴⁹ During a parliamentary debate, former Prime Minister Khosrov Harutyunian (1992-93) recommended that "Armenia should do everything to show the international community that Turkey had not changed at all."¹⁵⁰

At the same time, however, many people in Yerevan – impressed by images of Dink's huge funeral procession in Istanbul and news of many Turks' genuine grief – were coming to exactly the opposite conclusion. As *Haykakan Jamanak* columnist Anna Hakobian wrote,

"The scene on TV was really impressive. The waves of hundreds of thousands of people accompanying Hrant Dink's coffin were impressive; the applause that was audible from time to time was impressive; "We are all Armenians, we are all Hrant Dink", "Stop Article 301", "Shoulder to shoulder against Fascism" posters and similar sounding calls were impressive ... Even before Hrant Dink's burial ceremony, the Turkish authorities managed to make an unprecedented step towards reconciliation, addressed to the Armenian authorities."¹⁵¹

A new consensus on the wisdom of reaching out to Ankara, supported by Turkey's recent liberalisation, has opened up a window of opportunity for a historic rapprochement. It has also had a tangible impact on the way that Armenian society perceives Turks and Turkey. A series of IRI-supported polls recently revealed that in March 2007, following Dink's assassination, 89 percent of Armenians cited Turkey among the most significant threats to their country. By January 2008, the figure had dropped to 56 percent.¹⁵²

In a December 2006 interview, Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian argued that a commission of historians from Armenia and Turkey, as proposed in 2005 by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, would produce no results. Turkish historians, he said, would be unable to pronounce the word "genocide".

"How can they speak with the Armenian historians? There are prohibiting laws in Turkey. This is like releasing a bird from its cage while breaking its wing."¹⁵³

Today, however, this is no longer true. In the new climate, the broken wings are healing, creating an opportunity for both Turkey and Armenia.

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"?¹⁵⁴ The coming months are the right time for an answer to this question. As Ter-Petrosian put it,

"Many nations and states, under differing circumstances and for different reasons, have found themselves on the verge of national catastrophe. Armenians and Jews were subjected to Genocide. Germany and Japan, having suffered devastating defeat, were

¹⁴⁹ [Susanna Margarian in Azg Daily](#), 25 January 2007, ESI translation.

¹⁵⁰ National Assembly of Armenia, [Hearings on the Armenian-Turkish relations](#), 19 December 2007.

¹⁵¹ Anna Hakobian, "Everything is heading to reconciliation", *Haykakan Jamanak*, 24 January 2007.

¹⁵² All available at the International Republican Institute relevant section, <http://www.iri.org/Polls.asp>.

¹⁵³ Noyan Tapan, 13 December 2006.

¹⁵⁴ Gerard Libaridian, *Modern Armenia – People, Nation, State*, 2004, p. 280.

utterly destroyed. Ottoman Turkey, Britain and Russia lost their all-powerful empires. Every nation believes in the uniqueness of its own tragedy ... However, almost all of these nations and states, having suffered national tragedy, have turned that tragedy into a tool of healing and strength, rather than one of hopelessness and inferiority. They have found the internal strength not only to heal their wounds and rid themselves of historical complexes, but also to undergo revival and join the community of the world's most vibrant and flourishing nations. What prevents us from following in these nations' footsteps?"¹⁵⁵

VI. Instead of a conclusion: the light of Ararat

His village, Lusarat, is only a stone's throw away from the Turkish border, but it is the first time that Hayk has ever invited a Turk into his home.¹⁵⁶ Lusarat, "the light of Ararat", lies near Khor Virap, one of Armenia's most famous churches, perched on a small hill right on the border. It was here that St. Gregory the Illuminator was held prisoner for 13 years before curing Armenian King Trdat III of a disease and converting him to Christianity. Armenia, as a result, became the first officially Christian nation in the world in 301.

But Khor Virap, more than providing a history lesson, also offers a view of the green belt along the Araxes river and the Ararat mountain, on the western – Turkish – side of the border. On a clear day one can even make out the shape of a factory, a mosque, a moving car.

Despite its name and location, however, Lusarat is a rather grim place. In Soviet times, when Lusarat was a special security zone on the border between NATO and the Soviet Union, only the locals could enter the village. Today it is run down, its houses more like huts, its school in ruins, broken windows and tin roofs everywhere. The barbed wire – the border zone – is just a hundred metres away.

Hayk and his wife, Lusine offer their Turkish guest (an ESI researcher) home-made cheese, Armenian coffee, and eggs. In the background, on the satellite TV – turned to a Turkish channel – Turkish pundits are discussing Ergenekon. The family discusses Turkey:

"Dink was not murdered by that boy, it was the state. We have a deep state experience too. You know about our parliament attack in 1999, don't you? We fear the state here."

Hayk finds it "wonderful that so many people spontaneously went out onto the streets after Dink's murder." Lusine does not believe the show of solidarity was sincere. They argue awhile, before Hayk continues:

"My father was from around Diyarbakir, he spoke Kurdish. He was deported to Syria and came back to Armenia in 1966. My wife was born in this village but her family origins are in Mus, they came across the border in 1923.

We used to be able to talk over the border. I am OK with the Turks on the other side. They are different from the people at whose hands we suffered. Of course, we will not forget history, but we should have neighbourly relations with an open border. There is no reason we cannot get along.

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.levonforpresident.am/?catID=20&contID=85>.

¹⁵⁶ On request, the villagers' real names have not been used.

Gul's visit to Armenia was the first really good development. Our president's invitation was honoured. It made us very happy. A majority of us did not believe he would come. Everything happens for a reason. Maybe football will lead to other things. We care more about the border than the important people in Yerevan do. Having a Turk in our house already makes us see more than anyone else. Many people come to the Khor Virap church, but no one comes to our village.

About the border opening: I will believe it when I see it. Of course I want to go see where our ancestors come from ... which Armenian doesn't? In my dreams, I want to see that place just once. Tell me about Akhdamar if you have seen it.¹⁵⁷ I want to eat fish from Lake Van.

In Soviet times I worked at a factory. It was wonderful. We had free education and health care and I had a steady job. There are no factories now. I have been sitting around doing almost nothing for six months. I have land that I work in season. But I cannot do much with my land because I don't have any capital to invest in machines. If I borrowed money, I probably could not pay it back – and then I would lose my land to the bank. So I don't take that risk.

Gas, electricity and water are getting more and more expensive. Food is much cheaper here than in Yerevan, but we still cannot afford it. Cash is hard to come by. Without my relatives sending us money from abroad, we could not live. I have a brother in Western Europe. My eldest son is studying to be a dentist. My younger son is in school.

The government does not perform its duties. They take from us and do not give. We have to pay to get treatment at the hospital. Some people's lands have been confiscated and given to people close to the administration. Corruption is rewarded in this system. The honest ones lose their job. If there were just one factory, it would be enough to make our life good. We do not want much.

Life would have been much better if there hadn't been the Karabagh problem. For years after the war, we suffered. There were Azeris living in this village, around 500 of them, we lived well together. Now there are around 1,100 Armenians here in total. When the conflict hit our village, the Azeris were forced to flee. One was very sick and could not leave. He came to my doorstep. I took him in. My house was surrounded. They said I should not help him. I took him to the hospital, they turned him back. He died in my house. I had seen the Muslim rituals after death. I washed him. I called my friend, a priest. We buried him, abiding as much as we could to Muslim practices.”

By now Hayk had tears in his eyes. It might seem an unlikely place to dream of reconciliation. And yet, in the living room of an impoverished family in Lusarat, it becomes possible to imagine a different future for the troubled Caucasus.

¹⁵⁷

A famous medieval Armenian church in Van.