ARMENIAN–TURKISH RELATIONS: A RESPONSE TO BIRAND, OTHERS

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Category: Opinions

Hovhannes Nikoghosyan, Yerevan, Armenia, 11 December 2008

Well, Armenian-Turkish relations seem to be the urgent issue in regional politics (in the South Caucasus) and even more urgent than the conflicts in this area. Some people think, and I will rank on a par with them, that within the resolution of this old controversy between two nations – Armenians and Turks – lies the key to other conflicts as to the Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) conflict – I will say for sure.

So, what exact prejudices have been preventing the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations?

Here I want to reply to some arguments made by Mr. Birand (brought up in the TDN article on 16.10.2007) and other authors who have some judgments over the above mentioned issue.

At least under two statements by Mr. Mehmet Ali Birand I will sign in with no eye open: "Let's get rid of articles like the 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. Let's convince our Azerbaijani brothers. Azerbaijani brothers should be made to change their mind.» These are the first obstacles for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation.

Mr. Birand says that it will be defective for Turks to identify themselves as a nation who committed horrible crimes against another nation, which is defined as genocide in International Law. Of course, it is very difficult to come to this after some 70 years of «other history.» José Manuel Barroso stated in 2006 (in Harvard University) that «...the best for Turkey would be to recognize the genocide.... in Europe we do not like the statement «there was no genocide.»

Terminology not important, but..

I constantly believe that there is no real difference how we will call the huge crime against humanity committed by Young Turks. Surely. Some call it «war concomitant losses», «need to protect state unity,» «mass deportation» – the matter will remain as it is: There were over 1.5 million people dead. A well-known French scientist Jacques de Morgan wrote in 1917: «The deportations of Western Armenians are nothing but concealed race extermination. There is no language rich enough to describe the horrors of it.» So, anyone is now free to understand these words as he wishes and one can easily compare this with the statements in U.N. Genocide convention (1948). The main point is – we should recognize and condemn it once and for all, then try to move ahead with open borders, open and cooperating societies and true common economic interests within BSEC or any other organization.

Today most Turks, or even some Armenians find it very convenient to forget history after the 1909-16s. I want to remind us of the following fact: In 1918-19 the revolutionary war tribunals in Istanbul sentenced (in absentia) Talat, Enver, Cemal, Naz?m and other Young Turk leaders to death and the tribunal statement defined their crime as follows:

1. The mass deportation of Armenians was illegal;

2. They organized «deep state,» illegal organization to punish Ottoman citizens;
3. Young Turks party dragged the Ottoman state into meaningless war (WW I).

I will let you bring your judgments over this, too.

Some honorable representatives of Turkish civil society, former ambassadors Gündüz Aktan and ?ükrü Elekda? suggest that Turkey should seek international arbitration regarding this issue and solve the problem once and for all. As a precedent one can surely recall the Srebrenica massacre and the verdict brought up in this regard by Hague tribunal. But on the other hand there is no country that recognized the tragedy as genocide and more importantly no state accuses Serbia nowadays of committing such a crime.

One thing that nobody can change: Armenians and Turks will remain neighbors however that may be. So, logically we cannot afford hostility because of our common past. We need empathy and quick actions.

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