

# BONES TO PICK

*Posted on October 15, 2009 by Keghart*

Economist.com

Category: [Opinions](#)



 [The Economist](#), Der Zor, Syria, 8 October 2009

### **A new deal, but the old quarrels persist**

Armenians say the mass extermination of their forebears was genocide. Members of the Armenian diaspora believe that justice will not be done until the world, and above all Turkey, accepts this. And that is why many viscerally oppose a landmark deal between Turkey and its landlocked neighbour, Armenia, due to be signed this weekend in Switzerland.

Serzh Sargsyan, Armenia's president, has been blasted by nationalist opponents and greeted with howls of "traitor" by thousands of Armenian protesters in France, America and Lebanon where he has (unsuccessfully) lobbied the diaspora's leaders for support. Websites with names like "stoptheprotocols.com" abound.

 [The Economist](#), Der Zor, Syria, 8 October 2009

### **A new deal, but the old quarrels persist**

Armenians say the mass extermination of their forebears was genocide. Members of the Armenian diaspora believe that justice will not be done until the world, and above all Turkey, accepts this. And that is why many viscerally oppose a landmark deal between Turkey and its landlocked neighbour, Armenia, due to be signed this weekend in Switzerland.

Serzh Sargsyan, Armenia's president, has been blasted by nationalist opponents and greeted with howls of "traitor" by thousands of Armenian protesters in France, America and Lebanon where he has (unsuccessfully) lobbied the diaspora's leaders for support. Websites with names like "stoptheprotocols.com" abound.

The draft agreement calls for diplomatic ties and the reopening of Armenia's border with Turkey, sealed by the Turks in 1993 in solidarity with their Azeri cousins after Armenia occupied chunks of Azerbaijan following a nasty war over the mainly Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. Diaspora Armenians are especially incensed by a plan for a joint commission of historians to investigate the events leading up to 1915. They fume that this calls the genocide into doubt and may make it harder to seek compensation. Most historians agree that there were as many as 1m Armenians living in Turkey before 1915, compared with 60,000 today. Much of their wealth went to Muslim Turks.

William Schabas, a professor of human rights in Galway, Ireland, says the 1915 killings constituted genocide. But he also argues that "there is no solid legal precedent for a right to compensation with respect to events that took place nearly a century ago." In Turkey, too, there are deep misgivings about peace with Armenia. Opposition parties have accused Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the prime minister, of "carrying out America's orders" and "selling the country". They will fight the agreement if it is put to a vote in parliament.

Mr Erdogan (whose ruling Justice and Development Party has a clear majority in parliament) has made clear that Armenia needs to cede some of the occupied territories around Nagorno-Karabakh before the agreement can be approved. That is because Azerbaijan, which sells large quantities of oil and gas to Turkey, threatens to turn to Russia should Turkey abandon its cause. The Turks pin their hopes on a meeting due soon between Mr Sargsyan and his Azeri counterpart, Ilham Aliev, in Moldova. Mr Aliev claims that a deal is imminent. But Mr Sargsyan has said that he won't be "signing anything".

The concern for Turkey may then be that merely signing a deal with Armenia without ratifying it will not be enough to stave off threats by America's Congress to pass a bill labelling the Armenian tragedy as genocide. The past week's events show that, even if Turkey and Armenia shake hands, the diaspora will keep to its cause. But the question Turkey should ask itself is how long it can evade the ghosts of its bloody past.

