# LIVE TV DEBATE: 32ND DAY "ON THE APOLOGY STATEMENT" ON KANAL D, TURKEY (TURKISH) 19 DECEMBER 2008

*Posted on December 28, 2008 by Keghart*



**Category:** Opinions

*While every effort is made to accurately reproduce the statements of participants and give the exact back and forth exchange during the debate, some omissions are made and the statements that the same person uttered at slightly different points of the conversation are occasionally combined for brevity. Any comments and corrections regarding the translation and/or the transcript are welcome.*

Mete Pamir MA, Ottawa

*While every effort is made to accurately reproduce the statements of participants and give the exact back and forth exchange during the debate, some omissions are made and the statements that the same person uttered at slightly different points of the conversation are occasionally combined for brevity. Any comments and corrections regarding the translation and/or the transcript are welcome.*

Mete Pamir MA, Ottawa

## Live TV Debate: 32nd Day "On the apology statement"
## Kanal D, Turkey (Turkish) 19 December 2008

**Moderator:** Mehmet Ali Birand **Producer**: Ridvan Akar
*While every effort is made to accurately reproduce the statements of participants and give the exact back and forth exchange during the debate, some omissions are made and the statements that the same person uttered at slightly different points of the conversation are occasionally combined for brevity. Any comments and corrections regarding the translation and/or the transcript are welcome.*
Mete Pamir

***Participants***:
For: Dr. Cengiz Aktar; Ret. Ambassador Temel Iskit and Journalist Oral Çalislar
Against: Ret. Ambassador Sükrü Elekdag MP CHP, Ret. Ambassador Deniz BölükbaSi MP MHP, and Ret. Ambassador Candan Azer

**Birand**: Welcome. Tonight, we're going to discuss a very important issue that is older than the Republic, a discussion that is condemned to irresolution for 93 years. A group of our intellectuals have started a campaign regarding what Ottoman Armenians went through in 1915. We are going to talk about their apology statement in which they apologize to our Armenian brothers and sisters. At the root of the issue lies what happened to the Armenians in 1915: is this a catastrophe, genocide or deportation? Should we apologize? To whom and for what should one apologize? We have representatives in our studio who defend two opposing viewpoints: those who say yes, one should apologize and those who say no, there is no need for it. I want to begin by asking Cengiz Aktar first: why are we supposed to apologize, to whom and for what?

**Aktar**: The apology is already made. 230 intellectuals and opinion-makers started this campaign and 13.500 citizens of Turkey have already apologized in two-three days. We apologized for not being

able to talk about this for many years, because it was a monologue for so long, because we looked at this matter from only one perspective. We are also apologizing for not being able to share the pain of our Armenian brothers and sisters to a sufficient extent. This is a very gentle, altruistic and compassionate message (*müSfik, digerkâm*, and *duygudaS*). We don't address ourselves to anyone , we are addressing the apology to ourselves.

**Birand**: Yes, a lot of people are asking: are they saying that we have committed genocide and apologizing for it? Oral Çalislar you are one of those who signed.

**Çalislar**: Genocide term is not used in the statement. Among the signatories there are also persons who don't think this was genocide. The apology is about a great catastrophe and pain; it is directed to those who are not with us any more, to those who cannot live in Turkey. We apologize for the pain caused to hundreds of thousands of Armenians, to their children and grandchildren. We are not saying everyone should share the pain, it is not obligatory: those who want to share do apologize, those who don't want to don't. The apology is because this issue could not be discussed for so long. We lost Hrant Dink for this reason. He was condemned because he said in the end that there was genocide. He was declared an enemy by certain quarters in front of the public opinion. And we lost him. It is not unproblematic in Turkey to say that this was genocide. There are people who cannot express their opinions and those who, like Dink, expressed themselves recently and those who expressed themselves also in 1915.

**Birand**: Let me read the statement for our viewers: "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." The important term here is Great Catastrophe. Armenians say that Great Catastrophe is genocide.

**Iskit**: I signed the statement hoping that it was a non-political statement. I signed this as a matter of personal conscience, aa a matter of freedom of expression and a debt that I felt I owed. I particularly wanted to show my reaction to the denial. This is a civil society movement; it is different than the political sphere. This is not an issue about whether this was a genocide or not… This statement does not represent a compromise. In that case it would have been political.

**Elekdag**: Firstly, they are referring to Great Catastrophe; this is *Metz Yeghern* in Armenian. This word is a synonym for genocide. The difference between the two words is as little as the difference between mass slaughter and mass killing (*kitle katliami*" and *kitlesel öldürme*). There is no difference between them. When *Metz Yeghern* is used, Armenians understand genocide. When some official person goes to Armenia, visits the Monument and wishes to condemn genocide as well as not to offend the Turkish Republic they use *Metz Yeghern*; and Armenians accept this. This statement is

tantamount to supporting the genocide campaign of the Armenian Diaspora. It would have been alright to use terms like great tragedy or pain. The concept of Great Catastrophe is an established term; it has a loaded meaning which is very difficult to change. Therefore, it naturally causes reactions. Secondly, it is important that the statement uses the word "denial." The word "denial" is commonly used by the Armenian Diaspora and in Armenia against those who say that there was no genocide. "Denying" is not a normal word; when "denialist" is used, those with opposing viewpoints are meant. This is not an innocent word either. It is part of the jargon used by Armenians…

**Aktar**: *Metz Yeghern* is a word from the time of 1915. The term genocide and its basis in international law is from 1948. From 1915 until 1948, the Armenian people who were subjected to this were of course going to give a name to it. We used the name that they themselves used . This is not a discussion about genocide . Temel Iskit is spot on about this. We are not going to discuss genocide here, are we? If you are going to boil down our discussion tonight to whether there was genocide or not, let's not talk further; let's just end the discussion right here and go home.

**Azer**: Of course, it is fortunate that the word genocide is not used in the apology statement. However, as Mr. Elekdag mentioned, even today in Armenian there is not such a word as genocide. They use *Metz Yeghern* instead. For example, when previous Pope went to Armenia and visited the Genocide Monument, he used the word *Metz Yeghern* while signing the memorial book. We were happy about this. Armenians were even happier.

**Producer Akar**: What does the US President use in April 24? Does he not use Great Catastrophe?

**Elekdag**: No, he mentions a tragedy. It is not like Great Catastrophe has never been used in USA. In fact, it was used. But at that time, these things were not established to such an extent. There might have been points of time in the past that Turkey neglected to pay attention. Today, *Metz Yeghern* is a totally established term. And it is synonymous with genocide. It is not possible to understand this statement any differently. If they don't want this statement to be interpreted in this way, I think it will be a good idea for them to prepare an additional statement and declare that they did not intent to say that it was genocide. The intended meaning in this version is genocide; it is impossible to understand it otherwise.

**Çalislar**: We're not in a position to give an account of anything to state officials here (*devlet büyüklerine hesap vermek*). We're not on trial here. I can state whatever I like as a citizen. It is up me alone to decide my intended meaning. Mr. Elekdag can interpret it his way. This is my right as a citizen. It is important to stress this because people have been put on trial for these things in this country. Turkey has done shameful things about these issues (*ayipli ülkedi*). Hrant Dink was put on trial and condemned for violating Article 301, and look what happened to him in the end. This is very recent history, not old history.

**Elekdag:** We're not talking about Hrant Dink. Dink was not only your friend. He was our friend as well.

**Birand:** Mr. BölükbaSi, Devlet Bahçeli said that he is ashamed of the individuals who signed the statement. Are you also ashamed of them?

**BölükbaSi**: Yes, I too am ashamed of them. I should start by giving an exposition and concrete examples about the wider meaning, goals and consequences of this initiative. This is not just a one time or sporadic initiative. It is a new stage in a process that has been developing for the last two-three years. In tandem with the "virtual" membership accession to EU, a class of persons who are on staff to make statements has emerged in Turkey (*kadrolu bildiriciler*). We are seeing the same persons again and again in such initiatives regarding Turkish history, national identity and state structures. They are on commission to make these things. They are volunteering for these. For these people, it has been a status symbol to blacken our history -- i.e. a symbol of proving how Western and modern they are. It has been an academic and political career path to run after the lie of Armenian genocide. At one time, Armenia officially demanded that Article 301 was removed so that there could be a lobby to discuss genocide within Turkey. This was set as a pre-condition for starting negotiations. Armenia officially forwarded this request to Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs. Look, secret negotiations have been going on with Armenia in Bern for the last two years. At this stage, Armenia is not putting forward genocide recognition as a pre-condition; they are calculating that recognition will come in any case during the EU process; for this reason they are thinking that it is enough to take steps so that Turkish society itself can face its past. Therefore, to say that genocide is not used in this statement in no way changes the meaning and goals of this statement. I want to ask Ambassador Iskit: among the Armenian brothers to whom he apologized, are members of ASALA included? And also how did he manage to repress his opinions during all his 40 years in service?

**Iskit**: I don't think I'm obliged to give an account about my feelings to my colleague Mr. BölükbaSi. But, let me explain to you why I oppose the denial. It is not like I repressed this for years. In my diplomatic career I gradually realized that there was a big denial and concealment. I realized that some pages of our history were missing.  It was as if some events had never happened. I did not read anything about these things in any book or newspaper until the 1980s. Our thinking in Foreign Affairs developed through stages over several years. It didn't happen all of a sudden: First, there was a big silence about these things in the Ministry. I strongly reacted against this. The total silence about the events evolved into mutual killings (*mukatele*) by the slow opening of new pages. My conscience is clear . The ASALA question: this is an issue that is continuously brought forward in other contexts as well, but we shouldn't confuse these two issues. ASALA is a great tragedy for me personally and for my professional community; but this is not a matter of two accounts, one offsetting the other (*mahsup meselesi degil*). It is not a matter of one tragedy here, another there balancing each other; it

is not a matter of how many people were killed on our side, and how many on their side. I of course condemn terrorism; I of course wish that the whole world apologizes for ASALA killings; but here I'm apologizing for the Great Catastrophe in 1915.

**Aktar**: There is nothing to respond to in Mr. BölükbaSi's comments. You are asking me to respond to his comments about EU? You, Mehmet Ali Birand, would be much more qualified than me to speak about EU. But there is a real sociological basis to the observation that these things are related to the EU process. This is important and pertains to our recent history. Turkey is in a process of change since the 1980s, since late Özal. Turkey was a closed and inward-looking country until 1983. Especially after 1999, Turkey opened to the world, the country literally blossomed (*kabak çiçegi gibi açildi*). And EU process greatly contributed to this. The djinns are out of the bottle, and it is not possible to put these back in. People started putting taboos into question. This is not only the case for the Armenian issue. It is also true for the rights of women, homosexuals, Alevis. It is also about honour killings; about Kurdish issue and democratization. For this reason, we need to look forward, not back. I did not prepare this statement. 250 people prepared it. This is not a campaign or petition; it is a statement. Apology statement is the voice of conscience, because they were not able to speak about this for 90 years. How else could 13.500 Turkish persons (*Türk insani*) come out and apologize in just three days? Everyone should ask this important question: these people said that they behaved shamefully. These are important concepts in Anatolia: shame/disgrace (*ayip*) and sin (*günah*). Intellectuals do not know to a sufficient degree. Anatolians know it. These people came out into the open.

**Elekdag:** 30.000 other people came out and said that there is no such thing. It was in fact possible to discuss a great many of these issues previously.

**Aktar:** Let it be so . What is important is for these things to be discussed. No, it wasn't possible to discuss these before.

**Azer**: Mr. Iskit told us that our history was "concealed" from us (*saklandi*). I don't think concealed is the right word. Of course, the events of 1915 were not taught to us neither in primary school nor at the universities. It is more correct to say that we did not know our history. They did not teach our history because it was something we left behind and moved beyond. The last years of Ottoman were not told because we were going forward in the years of Republic. We started learning and teaching our history when our classmates started getting killed. Then, we scientifically proved that all the allegations were false one by one: such as the telegram of Talat Pasha, the quote that is attributed to Hitler, the actual numbers that were deported or were subject to genocide as Armenians say. When the terror stopped, we unfortunately stopped showing attention to our history once again. For example, when Mr. Elekdag was Washington ambassador in 1985, 68 scientists signed a statement and said that 1915 could not be characterized as genocide. But we didn't follow

up. We don't pursue the matter consistently, our interest flares up when there is a vote in Congress, and after the vote we lose interest. We should know our history. Our history is no longer hidden; it is out in the open.

**Çalislar**: Let me give you an example. At a symposium in Kayseri University, an Associate Professor said that Mimar Sinan was Turkish. I asked the symposium what is the point of claiming this, everyone knows that he was Armenian; he came from the Armenian village Agirnas . There is no need to distort history; this may also show the superiority of Ottomans in incorporating minorities to culture of the Empire. The professor approached me during the break and told me that he had actually written what I told to the symposium, but that they had removed those pages . We still think that we can change history just by tearing some pages. You can't change history like this. The world understands the truth in the end. The real question is how we are going to understand and see ourselves. We see the lived pain when we travel in Anatolia. I personally know tens of people whose paternal or maternal grandmothers are Armenian. Where did these people come from, did they come from outer space? Obviously, these have stayed there as a result of a great pain and tragedy. The female children who were left behind became grandmothers to a great many of us. We started learning these recently, after terrorism started and our diplomats got killed. And I also have classmates among those who were killed. This is something that should be condemned. But these are two different matters.

**Azer:** Yes, many people have died at that time. A minute ago I mentioned 68 scientists' statement. They have also established that. Many people have died due climate conditions and malnutrition.

**Çalislar** No, dear sir, there is a crime perpetrated by the state here (*devlet suçu*). There was first a CUP decree sent to all provinces, these instructions said to deport the people and take them to such and such places. Then, there was a law. A few individuals in CUP decided this, and then a law was passed in the Ottoman Parliament. There was a state decision. Let's agree on this.

**Azer**: Yes, there was a state decision for the deportation.

**Elekdag**: We're not going to enter into those debates here, are we? You are only telling part of what happened. There is a deportation decision, of course. But this is done in legitimate self-defense (*meSru müdafaa*) during conditions of war. Russian army was advancing. Armenians took up arms and joined that army. There were chetes behind the front attacking the convoys. The greatest historians in the world, like Bernard Lewis, Avigdor Levy, and Stanford Shaw say that this was in self-defense. There was a state decision for deportation, but there were also state decrees to act honestly and protect the convoys. The state has shown "due diligence," but the state could unfortunately not succeed in preventing all actions to the contrary.

**Aktar**: OK, would you agree that we apologize just for this, just for what you pointed out now ?

**Elekdag**: That's OK. But in that case, one should apologize from both sides.

**Aktar**: In that case, excuse me, one should invoke this criterion: Turks and Kurds are still living in the geographic area they used to live, but Armenians are not there any more. There is an abnormality here. This is not normal.

**Elekdag**: This is not a legitimate argument. Let me ask you: do you know how many Turks and Muslims there were in Armenia and Yerevan in the 1990s? Are there any left? These events are related to each other.

**Aktar**: Two wrongs do not cancel each other, and make it right. There may have been wrongs done over there; and of course there is a relation between the two. But this issue is our problem. I'm not talking about Azerbaijan or about Armenia. I'm talking about our own problem, about Ottoman Armenians. We're the grandchildren of Ottomans, and I'm apologizing for the things that happened to them on the roads during the deportation to Der Zor. Is it so bad to apologize for this?

**Elekdag**: In that case, one should look into the context of the deportation decision. Between the end of 1914 and May 1915, Armenian chetes killed 122.000 Turks. They annihilated these people. Then there was a rebellion in Van. In one night, Armenians annihilated 35.000 Turks. Russian Czar sent a congratulations telegram to the head of the Armenian resistance group (*komita*) for handing the place to the Russian army. Did these things not happen?

**Producer Akar**: Now that we're talking about history, why were people deported from Kocaeli, Kütahya and Usak. As far I know, there was no chete activity in those places. Were these places in the battle front too?

**Elekdag**: Armed resistance movements (*komitacilar*) had started preparations there as well. We shouldn't forget that there were Armenian craftsmen in towns; hundreds of Armenian doctors were ranked officers in Ottoman army. Many villages were exempt from the deportations. In the place of my ancestors, Kastamonu, the Armenian population was untouched because they were not involved in this business. In Istanbul, Armenians continued their duties as civil servants.

**Producer Akar:** Please allow me to make a modest reminder about history, Mr. Elekdag. In a report that CHP's 9$^{th}$ division, what is known as the Bureau on Minorities, prepared in 1944, there is mention of discomfort due to too much concentration of Armenian population in Kastamonu. There are recommendations for sending them to Istanbul. In other words, the same issue continued.

**Elekdag**: Please, don't interpret this in this way. If there is discomfort, the intention of the recommendation there is to protect those people.

**Aktar**: Especially women . There is not one Armenian left in Anatolia. OK, let's accept that people left. Do you think we could have protected churches and buildings better?

**Elekdag**: Now, who is able to protect such sites better in other places (*nerde korunuyor ki*)? There are many Turkish buildings in Armenia and Yerevan, are they being protected?

**Aktar**: I see, you're saying that others are not protecting such sites in their countries, we shouldn't protect ours either. Right, right! My god! (*Hey Allahim*).

**Elekdag:** No, I'm not saying that.

**Azer**: If I may, I want to ask something to Mr. Aktar. Did you visit Ani?

**Aktar**: I visited in 1978.

**Azer:** I visited in 1992, also later, as part of my duties. There are ruins in Ani. Parts of the ruins are over on the other side of the river Arpaçay, inside the borders of Armenia. They have not protected them.

**Aktar**: They have a stone quarry.

**Azer**: We are protecting better. There are even fewer ruins inside Armenian borders.

**Aktar, Çalislar and Iskit**: But we are calling it Ani instead of Ani, we are changing the name, we're not calling it Armenian.

**Azer**: No, I'm calling it Ani.

**Iskit**: We are not protecting it as an Armenian site. When I was talking about denial earlier, I was also talking about the denial today. I'm against using Ani instead of Ani. I'm against the fact that the word Armenian today is used almost as an insult word. All of these are part of the same issue.

**Elekdag**: In this statement you're referring to denialism. This is a concept; and genocide concept is behind this denialism concept. Let's talk about how we are going to solve this problem. Diaspora is calling this genocide. Turkey is not calling it a genocide. Genocide belief is intrinsic to the identity of Diaspora Armenians. It is impossible to change this belief. In Turkey, there is a great mass of people

who oppose this. And they are not going to change their beliefs either. They see this as an international plot against them. Is this mutual animosity going to continue for generations with no solution in sight? You cannot solve the issue like this. The only solution is to conduct scientific research by staying away from emotions and away from hatred. Turks and Armenians should establish an international scientific commission comprising jurists and historians; an internationally-recognized figure whom both sides will accept can head this commission. I made this proposal years ago in diplomatic service. Nobody listened inside the bureaucracy. Then, when I became MP, I took the initiative … and on 8 March 2005 Baykal and PM made the joint proposal regarding the commission of Turkish and Armenian historians. PM declared that he will be ready to accept the results of commission's discoveries whether they are for us or against us. This is a great risk that we were not able to take until now. Naturally, this proposal is about opening the archives mutually. We have opened all the historical archives. Armenia is not opening all the archives. We expect them to open. This is the way to a solution. We would have expected our intellectuals to make a statement supporting this proposal.

**Çalislar**: The state and the politicians can make these proposals, and we would respect such proposals. But we are citizens. We are offering citizens' statements: we are saying that we don't want to continue not sharing the pain. We are showing a humanistic response. As a citizen, I don't feel myself bound by the decisions of Mr. Elekdag or the PM.

**Elekdag**: But you are sharing the pain of one side.

**Çalislar**: I'm sharing the pain of one side because I'm on one side. If Armenians want to say they share the pain, it is up to them. I'm doing my duty as a Turkish citizen. When I go to other countries and meet with Armenians, I feel sad. I wish that these painful events didn't take place. I put myself in their shoes, I feel worse.

**Elekdag**: By doing that, you are acting against the interests of the country. By doing what the Diaspora wants, you're acting against Turkey's interests.

**Çalislar**: You don't have the sole right to define what is and what is not in Turkey's interests. I think an apology is in Turkey's interests (*Türkiye'Nin çikari da özürden geçiyor*). You are talking about Turkey's political interests. I'm not bound by them. I'm a citizen and free individual. This is my perspective.

**Elekdag**: Then let me ask you this. Of course, I wouldn't want to put you on the spot.
But, are you saying that you weren't aware you are signing under a document which says genocide?

**Çalislar**: I have the right to my own opinions in this matter. When I want to express them, I can express them anytime I want.

**Elekdag**: Are you not in a position to say whether there was one or there wasn't?

**Çalislar:** I signed this statement without any preconditions about whether there was a genocide or not. Each individual may have signed it with different assumptions. Among the people who signed there are those who say it was genocide and those who say it wasn't.

**Elekdag**: In that case, this helps the case of those who say it was genocide. Does it not?

**Çalislar:** By the way, genocide is not such a brutal word that we should be afraid of. Genocide is just another opinion.

**Azer**: Don't you feel the pain of those who were massacred by the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia during World War I? Aren't you sorry for the children, women and old people who were killed? Why didn't you include them in the statement? If you had done that, then perhaps I too would have signed it. This is a matter of balance. You cannot walk on one foot; all you can do is jump.

**Çalislar:** This is not issue whereby you add one account on top of the other. We are changing rehearsed mantras (*ezber bozuyoruz*). If you repeat that nothing has happened continuously for 93 years, then I'll say that these things have happened. We, of course, know that history as well, people were massacred by Armenians. The people killed are our mothers and fathers.

**Birand**: I want to give the word to Mr. BölükbaSi. He has been very patient. In the second part of the program, we should talk about what to do if we are going to break this vicious circle.

**BölükbaSi**: I will briefly touch upon some of the issues your valuable guests mentioned. I'm not sure how credible it is to have 13.500 signatures in "virtual" space. I would suggest that you leave the virtual space of the Internet, and come to the public spaces and squares in Erzurum, Erzincan, Igdir, Van and Kars, and gather signatures there. Then, you will perhaps increase the number above 13.500. You are saying that history was concealed from you; the genie is out of the bottle in the EU process. Mr. Aktar used the phrase blossoming. OK, but where do you think you get the authority to make statements about 1915. You are not a historian, you are not a jurist. You are saying that you don't use the term genocide. But, you are using the terminology used by Armenia when you say Great Catastrophe. It fits the theses of Armenia perfectly in terms of historical and political goals. It is not credible to defend this as a voice of conscience. Mr. Çalislar is even saying that genocide is not such a terrible word to use. Genocide is in fact the most degrading of crimes against humanity. And you're being a spokesperson for those who accuse the Turkish nation of genocide.

**Çalislar**: I'm saying no such thing (*ne alakaSi var*). This was a CUP decision, a decision by CUP clique.

This is not a crime that can be attributed to a nation. This is not a national crime. Why should it implicate my whole nation (*niye bütün milletimi baglaSin*)?

**BölükbaSi**: President Gül came out and said that this would be a contribution to a lively debate environment. PM said he is against it. I guess AKP is playing good cop bad cop. I want to focus on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry has given many martyrs, many who lost their lives while serving the country overseas. The Ministry is second only to the Armed Forces. And Minister Babacan is at the head of such a Ministry. The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the statement yesterday saying it was a democratic expression. It is impossible to understand this attitude.

**Çalislar**: The Ministry is doing what it should do. The statement is not political. It does not address the Ministry.

**BölükbaSi:** Let me tell you what the Ministry should do. I invite Foreign Affairs Minister Babacan to support the campaign,. Babacan should sign the statement as well. It would be fitting for him to sit among you (*araniza* yakiSir).

**Çalislar**: We will be glad if he signs the statement.

**Birand**: Let's take a break. We'll be back.

**Birand**: I have a question to Mr. BölükbaSi because I believe he was there during this incident. In the Foreign Relations Committee of the Parliament, CHP Izmir MP Canan Aritman said that the intellectuals who signed the statement were on bribe. She also claimed that President Gül was Armenian on his mother's side. Were you in the Commission? What do you say to Ms. Aritman's response to the President?

**BölükbaSi**: Yes, I was there… But none of the statements about Mr. President's family were made in the Commission. Such statements are disgraceful, ugly and very wrong.

**Elekdag**: I agree. I denounce her remarks and I reject them. One should not say these words against the President. I also apologize to our Armenian citizens…

**Çalislar**: Aritman's remarks also show that being Armenian is used as a derogatory term . It is used to put down people (*aSagilayici; hakaret eden*). Her bringing up the ethnicity of the President's mother also shows her racist attitude…

**Elekdag:** We're discussing these things in our society. I'm opposing the views expressed by an MP

from my own party. Can you discuss these things in Armenia, France or USA? Look, we are discussing these issues freely. My friend mentioned a statement during my time as US Ambassador that 69 scientists signed. You know what happened? These persons were threatened one by one, their families were intimidated. Their houses were bombed.

**Çalislar:** Do you think it is easy to discuss these issues in Turkey? Many people are threatened. Hrant Dink was killed. You give the impression that these things are discussed in Turkey in a totally democratic fashion.

**Elekdag:** But we can discuss freely. I'm listening to you respectfully.

**Çalislar:** Article 301 is still a big problem. Just the other day, Minister of Justice released the figures: there were 348 applications from prosecutors to open lawsuits for Article 301 violations during the last 6 months alone; the Minister was saying that it was a good expression of democratic governance that he *only* allowed 48 lawsuits to go through with further prosecution. Please be reasonable when you compare us to USA. Don't ignore the reality.

**Azer:** No, we are not saying that there are no difficulties in Turkey. But, at least we can openly discuss these issues. For example, in Switzerland I can't openly declare my opinions.

**Çalislar:** It is not possible to do it freely here either. Hrant Dink was condemned for saying genocide. I can bring you the cases of 50 lawsuits; people receive punishments for using the word genocide.

**Elekdag:** You always give the example of Dink being killed to point out that we are not able to discuss. Let's not disturb his soul .

**Aktar**: But you don't even tolerate an apology statement, not even such a compassionate campaign. Signatories are giving expression to their conscience. They are speaking most sincerely ("from their lungs," *cigerlerinden*). But you are saying how dare them (*ne hakla diyorsunuz*). There was no concept of genocide in 1915. We used *Metz Yeghern*, i.e. the expression Armenians used at the time. You are claiming that it is synonymous with genocide, i.e. a term that was coined in 1948. You are bringing this up, you are the one who is making demagogy. You are taking a later term and equating it to an earlier term which we used.

**Iskit**: We should clarify an issue about genocide that Mr. BölükbaSi brought up. He was angrily asking us how we can attribute this crime to the nation. According to 1948 Convention, only persons can commit genocide. Indeed, just yesterday a Colonel was sentenced for his role in Rwanda genocide. It is not possible at all to condemn nations and societies because of the crime of genocide.

**Elekdag**: But there is a big flaw in your argument. True, Article 4 of 1948 Genocide Convention reads as you suggested right now. But there has been a change in the interpretation of 1948 Convention. International Court of Justice (ICJ) has given a verdict on 27 February 2007 in the case of Bosnia vs. Serbia; and according this verdict ICJ has stated that states are also responsible if they have not taken necessary precautions to prevent the genocide. The Court has set out certain important criteria to make such a determination. In other words, states are also responsible if they are not preventing genocide.

**Iskit**: Yes, this is true. The state can be held responsible for genocide. But the nation cannot be held responsible. This is an important . CUP, the state or individuals can be held responsible, but a nation cannot be held responsible.

**BölükbaSi**: It is regrettable that the persons who have signed the document don't realize what they've formulated. There is no legal basis to this. The state is the target of such international court cases as Mr. Elekdag mentioned. The case Bosnia vs. Serbia is the latest example of this. Moreover, such court cases are not only about the determination of crime; they also aim to determine compensation claims against states. In this apology campaign, you make a determination about the events of 1915, you are also determining that there is a crime that needs an apology, and also that there are perpetrators. You are apologizing on your part. It is another matter who you represent but you are contributing to putting the Turkish nation on trial for the greatest crime against humanity; you cannot blacken Turkish nation and history, and put our ancestors on trial.

**Çalislar**: There is no sense to what you're saying. The three leaders of CUP ordered the deportation, what does this have to do with the nation?

**Aktar**: It is well-known that many have hid their Armenian neighbors.

**Birand**: What is this we hear about the site being blocked?

**Aktar**:The Internet site is under constant attack for the last 3 days. There is no tolerance despite the statements of Mr. President. Computers which are so powerful that they can only be located at a few locations are sending over a million access requests per second and blocking the site. I cannot say where these attacks originate from because I'm not sure. Despite the claims, there is no tolerance for this. It seems that it is forbidden to apologize.

...

**Birand:** Can such campaigns make a positive contribution to a solution? This is a very complex

problem that involves Armenia, the Diaspora, and US Congress. Public opinion is now taking this step . Don't you think this will be helpful?

**Elekdag**: This campaign cannot serve a useful purpose. There are secret negotiations going on between Turkey and Armenia. The proposal about a historians' commission is part of these negotiations. It is impossible to move forward without such a commission. The questions revolve around the conditions of this commission. Armenians do not want such a commission under no conditions. They are thinking that they have the upper hand both on moral and political grounds. Their way is to use US and EU and world parliaments to exert pressure on Turkey.

**Çalislar**: Negotiations between governments are going on based some calculations that we don't know anything about. I'm not in a position to follow those details. My concern is to have a stance as a human being. There may be persons on the Armenian side interested in such a stance.

**Iskit**: We need to distinguish between the state and civil society. The state can evaluate what is in its interests. It is up to my colleagues among the government negotiators to make those evaluations. Mr. Elekdag thinks that this campaign will have a negative effect. If you ask me, we don't know that. The campaign may make positive contributions. Let me give a concrete example. There was a conference about Armenians two years ago at Bilgi University. A scandal broke out.

**Elekdag**: It was organized behind closed doors. No, there wasn't a scandal. We allowed it. It was good that it was held.

**Iskit:** It didn't have a negative effect. These things are related to one another.

**Elekdag:** This is a different issue. Right now, there are negotiations going on. When there are such voices in Turkey, this is something that makes Armenia's position stronger. This is clear.

**Iskit:** I don't think this is the case.

**BölükbaSi**: This is, of course, something that will make Armenia's position stronger. It is not possible to think otherwise. The basis of Armenia's strategy is to use third country parliaments' genocide recognition to create a suitable foundation; to create legal processes for individual compensation claims. Let me read what Foreign Affairs Minister of Armenia says: similar to the Holocaust, they aim that Turkey will recognize genocide and apologize, then compensation will follow. There is no one in Turkey who is naïve enough not to see that this is the aim. AKP government is getting ready to open the border based solely on the agreement to establish a common historians' commission. They are going to do this even if Armenia continues not to recognize the common border, or remove her territorial claims from their Constitution and Declaration of Independence; even if Armenia continues

to regard Mount Agri as a national symbol. They are also getting ready to establish diplomatic relations by accrediting the Embassy in Tbilisi. According to my information, the point of contention in historians' commission is this: Armenians are going to use the argument that this is a historical fact beyond dispute and that it has even supporters in Turkey. They don't want a separate historians' commission; they prefer a supra-commission, and several sub-commissions about tourism, trade, transportation. According to this, the historians' commission will be one among as many as 20-25 such sub-commissions. They think it is in any case useless because this is an established historical fact. This movement, whatever they are calling it, a movement of intellectuals based on conscience or some such thing, cannot make a positive contribution to this process.

**Iskit** The issue of Armenian genocide is, in fact, a political issue – i.e. an issue to go on to the stage in world public opinion. Turkey has a thesis; Armenians put forward another thesis. We have followed one path until now. And this path does not seem to work. We can look at this way: will such an apology statement soften or harden the world public opinion? One might also make such an evaluation: such apology statements may soften the public opinion; they might serve to give an image of more plural and free society, in this way they might make a positive contribution to the state's interests. If Turkey respects minority rights, not only the rights of Armenians but all minorities, no one can condemn such a country .

**Aktar**: There are in fact several positive responses along these lines. This campaign does not address itself to the Armenian government or Turkish government. The positive responses from individual Armenians in Turkey, in the Diaspora or in Armenia are positive, but not for the reasons you might imagine. They are not saying 'oh, how happy we are, they have recognized the genocide'. They are giving a positive response with tears in their eyes because they are seeing a compassionate response after 90 years. These responses are not because of bi-lateral negotiations or what they might lead to. This is the crux of the matter. And speaking of national interest, if we are going to speak reason and rationality, the truth of the matter is Deportation is one of the biggest calamities that have ever happened in Anatolia. It is a totally irrational decision. Anatolian economy collapsed because of this decision. The economy of Eastern Anatolia totally collapsed. And from that time until today, the economy has not been able to revive itself. At the roots of what we call Kurdish rebellion, there is also the destruction of Armenians. If we are talking interests and reason, this decision was not rational (*akılsa, akılci degildir*). Ottoman state had lost control to such an extent that it wasn't able to follow its interests. Mr.BölükbaSi said that I wasn't a historian and jurist, I'm saying if you're talking about reason, this business is not even rational. And, as a matter of fact, we are not talking about reason, we are talking from the heart and "lungs" (*kaldi ki biz akildan degil, kalpten cigerden bahsediyoruz*).

**Azer**: I don't think this statement will soften anything. Armenian goals do not have a one, two or ten year perspective. Their goals are long-term. The goals of genocide recognition by parliaments and

the creation of an environment where there can be no talk of claiming there was no genocide, like Switzerland. We'll see what will happen in France. What is worrying for me is this: I wasn't able to prevent this abroad and now it is inside my borders. This is making my hand weaker in negotiations.

**Çalislar**: What this means is this: you are not successful in Armenian policy. These are the calculations that the states can make. This does not concern me as a citizen. I'm expressing myself as a citizen. As a citizen, I'm against several policies of the state. I'm against coup d'etats, against Article 301, against how Armenians are treated. I'm also against the policies of other states. I'm against US invasion of Iraq. There is no such thing as the state equals the citizen. So what if secret negotiations are being conducted with Armenia? There is no such thing that dictates citizens are going to stand obediently behind the state (*vatandaS devletin arkaSinda hazirolda duracak*).

**Elekdag**: I believe that Çalislar is sincere. He says that this is a personal stance based on his conscience. I respect his position. However, dear friends, and I am addressing myself to all of you sitting on the opposite end of the table, we should think about how this is going to be perceived around the world… They are going to perceive it such that a group of people in Turkey are supporting Armenian genocide claims. You are going to see that I'm right when you read world press.

**Çalislar**: The world can also think that there are righteous Turks (*vicdanî Türkler*).

**Aktar**: There are already reactions in the world press but not in the way you imagine.

**Azer**: Check out the website of Asbarez Newspaper, and you'll see what I mean.

**Aktar:** I'm talking about NY Times, Washington Post, Liberation, Le Monde, Figaro, The Guardian and Financial Times. I don't know the newspaper you mention. I'm talking about world press… And we forgot to mention the German press.

**Elekdag:** We asked a moment ago how we are going to solve this problem. There is a political dimension to this business. This is a historical and legal issue. At the end of the day, the issue will come down to the genocide term. And the only way to approach genocide is a legal approach. The first thing to do is to establish a historians' commission; and then to evaluate the historical discoveries.

**Producer Akar**: I believe Mr. BölükbaSi is going to have some comments about our discussion. After his comments, can he also offer us his thoughts about Defense Minister Gönül's statements last month? Minister Gönül had asked in a commemoration event in Brussels : "Could Turkey have been the same nation-state it is today had the Greek community still lived in Aegean or had Armenians

lived in many parts of the country?" Mr. Aktar also stressed that it was against Turkey's national interests that almost 3 million Greeks and Armenians were removed from Anatolia. Do you agree with Mr. Gönül's assessment?

**BölükbaSi**: Before coming to Mr. Gönül's statements, let me make my last comments. They are saying the apology statement pertains to civil society, not to the political sphere. But, in fact, the issue at hand is political, historical and legal both in its nature and in its consequences. The important thing is even Sarkisyan would sign this statement because the apology statement serves the interests of Armenia. I would not automatically claim that this is the intention of individuals preparing the statement. But, the consequence of their statement serves this purpose. The signatories may have eased their conscience. My concern is that while trying to create empathy, they may have made a statement that will invite tensions and activate a clash dynamics. One cannot rationally defend this statement in a context where all the clash dynamics in Turkish society are active.

**Birand**: I think Mr. Aktar says that this is not their problem. They are just giving expression to their opinions.

**BölükbaSi:** Of course, they may think like that. I am just pointing out that this will increase the tensions in society. I don't expect that everyone will think responsibly.

**Çalislar**: Why would it increase tensions? You can just say that you don't agree. You express your opinion, and you can allow us to express ours. Why should we get tense ?

**Aktar**: There is no reason that we should get tense as a society because of this (*gerilmeyelim*). As a party, for example, you can say to the MHP organization that the signatories are just expressing their opinions. That would be good.

**BölükbaSi:** Anyway. And don't think that I'm being disrespectful, but I have to say this: I don't think there is any importance to this initiative other than it being an expression of the mentality that it represents (*temsil ettigi zihniyet diSinda bir önemi yoktur*). I would not say it would serve any purpose. You're showing empathy only to the Armenians. You neglect the invasion of Azerbaijan, the brutality of Armenia. You neglect the brutality of Armenians during the same period in Anatolia. I won't mention the martyrs of Foreign Affairs because I see that even some of my colleagues seem to have forgotten them. Thank you very much.

**Producer Akar**: I believe Mr. BölükbaSi did not want to enter into a polemic about Mr. Gönül's statement last month. I want to ask you too Mr. Elekdag: what are your comments to Defense Minister Gönül's statements?

**Elekdag**: I find his remarks very unfortunate. His remarks make reference to some unfortunate events in our recent history. I was very uncomfortable with his statement. Population exchange is naturally a mutual agreement. I cannot accept his statement. His statement is a gaffe for a politician to make.

**Aktar**: It is a fact that the common denominator of Turkish nationhood is Islam. Non-Muslims naturally and historically fall outside this definition. This is not something one can question, it is a fact that each of us knows and feels. These are the facts of Turkish nation-building process.

**Çalislar**: We have the example of 6-7 September events.

**Aktar:** Yes, and these events are the last stages of this process.

**Iskit**: This country has not been able to tolerate minorities (*hazmedememiStir*). We couldn't take care of the minorities when laying the foundations of the nation-building. They were just included in the constitution. That's all.

**Azer**: I cannot agree to Mr. Aktar's definition of Turkish nation. That religion is the essential building block. This is not true because Turks pre-dated Islam. And they will continue after Islam as well.

**Aktar**: It is not only Islam, but Sunni Islam. The understanding of the nation even excludes the Alevis. It is not possible to dispute this. It is a fact. Before the 1870s, out the 13 million living Anatolia, almost half of the population did not know Turkish.

**Birand:** We're approaching the end of the program. Let's have the last comments.

**Elekdag:** Let me repeat that genocide issue is a political, legal and historical issue. Law will have the last word about this issue. Genocide term is coined in 1940s by Raphael Lemkin. 1948 UN Convention has codified it, and set definite criteria for its determination. It can be determined either by national courts where the event took place or an international criminal court, or the International Court of Justice. This is the only way to solve this issue.

**Çalislar**: When dear Hrant Dink was brutally murdered, the human face of Turkey also became visible after the murder (*insanî yüzü ortaya çikti*). Not only the 150.000 people at the funeral but also the millions watching on TV in tears, showed their reaction to the world. This was Turkey's human face. Even though we lost Hrant, our very important intellectual, the world witnessed the conscience of Turks (*dünya Türklerin vicdanini gördü*). The latest statement is also a small expression of conscience. We are showing the same human face of Turkey to the world. I see this as part of the

same sentiment that was there in Hrant's funeral. I believe that the world is going to perceive this in a similar light.

**Aktar**: The world is already seeing it in this fashion. We really need to calm down . And politicians, CHP and MHP, have important roles to play in this process. They need to express that this is a citizens' movement based on conscience. Politicians owe it to our soceity to express that this initiative does not aim to create tensions.

**Iskit**: I want to express similar thoughts. Turkey is becoming more democratic. This statement is also meaningful in the sense that Turkey is pluralistic, that it has freedom of expression.

**BölükbaSi**: I believe this initiative is an unfortunate move. It serves the goals of Armenians by blackening the history of Turkey.

**Azer:** We had started the second part of the program by asking where we go from here. We will continue the negotiations. We will stress the historians' commission. But it won't be just another commission among numerous other commissions. We will have them recognize our borders. We will solve these issues before establishing diplomatic relations. Lastly, we will go to International Court of Justice and accept their verdict about the genocide issue. There is no risk in this. English and Russian archives are open. French archives between 1914-18 are closed. I believe that the evidence supports us and that's why they are not opening it. Armenians will also open their archives…

…

**Birand:** This was a rare 32nd Day Program. Everyone expressed their opinions very respectfully. Perhaps because we had many diplomats in our show tonight… Let's end our program on this note.