TURKS CANNOT BE WITHOUT ARMENIANS, ARMENIANS CANNOT BE WITHOUT TURKS!

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By Ayse Hür, Published in Taraf Newspaper, Istanbul, 1 September 2008

In the interests of promoting dialogue between Turks and Armenians, the Zoryan Institute has arranged a translation of the following article from Turkish into English. In so doing, it does not necessarily endorse any of the statements or views of the author.

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While waiting for President Gul to make a decision on whether to attend the Yerevan soccer game on September 6, I tried to assemble all the facts, and I wonder if you agree with them. We still could not agree on how to define the events that befell on the Armenians 93 years ago. In the 85-year history of our Republic, we found only four Armenians deserving to enter the Parliament. We were unable to see any Armenians in the public and military sectors. We tried to erase the names and memories of Armenian settlements and locations, Armenian authors, artists, architects and statesmen. We converted Armenian cultural institutions and churches into mosques, military buildings, and if not feasible to do so, into animal stables, and if that did not work, we demolished them. We ruined the Armenian businessmen in 1942 with the Capital Tax, and then on 6-7 September 1955 with wholesale plunder. We repossessed the Armenian charitable foundation buildings in 1974. At last we succeeded in reducing the Armenian population of Turkey to 70,000.

Terminology Wounds

We filled the school history books with definitions of the Armenian enemies. We forced Armenian students to write compositions derogatory to the Armenians. We witnessed government ministers, religious and intellectual leaders, soccer fans and historic society presidents using derogatory terms such as “from Armenian seed,” “Armenian bastards,” “unfortunately Armenian.” We also witnessed the secret investigation of converted or crypto Armenians since the 1930s to the 1980s. We saw persons are set free with suspended sentences after sending death threats to the Armenian religious leaders or community newspapers. We saw the most peaceful leader of the Armenian community shot to death from behind, as well as the murderers protected by the state at various levels. We observed the numerous lame excuses brought forward by a country of 70 million people in order not to open borders with a tiny country of 3 million.

Definition of an Event

As we conduct ourselves in such a manner toward a minority and toward a tiny country, do we really think that the world would believe our version of the 1915 events? Forget the world, can we believe ourselves? In my opinion, the word “genocide” is not only a legal term defining the 1915 events, but is also an all-encompassing definition of our behavior toward the Armenian minority, their culture, history, state, diaspora, our denial, exclusion, hatred and animosity toward the Armenians. The level of civilization in a society should be seriously questioned if there is complete indifference or lack of empathy to other people’s griefs. Therefore, I see a lot more benefits than strategic advantages in President Gul’s acceptance of Yerevan’s invitation, including the possible unlocking of 90 years of barriers.

Children of These Lands

The historic Armenian kingdoms stretching from Cilicia to Caucasus were quite advantageous as far as rivers are concerned, but quite the contrary geopolitically. These lands were repeatedly the scene of endless battles and occupation in wars between Rome, its successor Byzantium and Persians and Arabs, resulting in Armenians being massacred, prosecuted and deported. The Cilician Armenian kingdom did achieve its golden age during the 10th and 11th centuries, partially with the support of the Crusaders, maintaining continuous independence for more than three centuries. Although this last kingdom ended in 1375, the Catholicosate of the Armenian Apostolic Church continued to exist in these lands until 1441. After the fall of the kingdom, although some Armenians chose to stay in these lands, others settled in Italy, Russia, Syria and France.

Birth of Nationalism

After 1453, the country of Armenia was split between the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Safavid Empire. The Ottoman Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror invited the Armenians living in Cilicia, Western Anatolia and Bulgaria to his capital city, and established a policy combining assimilation with recognition of an Armenian *millet* – "community" in the Empire. Starting from the 17th century, Armenian merchant communities started to appear in various parts of the world. The first nationalist ideologies started to take root at this phase. Armenian dictionaries, literature, history books started to appear, mostly through the efforts of Catholic Mkhitarist religious organizations. The first Armenian printing house and newspaper was established in Madras, India in 1794. Unfortunately, the awakening of Armenian nationalism within the Ottoman Empire had tragic consequences. The failure of implementation of reforms in Anatolia brought clashes between the Armenians and the Ottoman government, resulting in the 1894-1895 Sasun-Urfa and 1909 Adana massacres.

Abandonment of Ottoman Identity

The proclamation of the 1908 Constitutional government in the Ottoman Empire was greeted with enthusiasm by all minorities and the non-Muslims; however, once the non-Muslims realized that the governing Ittihat Terakki Party would continue the Sultan Abdulhamid's policies of Pan-Islamism and even replace it with a Pan-Turkism, they started moving toward independent nation-state ideals, following European trends. During a Samatya-Istanbul mass meeting before the Balkan Wars, the Finance Minister Cavit Bey stated that "Even if our Armenian citizens have complaints about our government, they are always ready to help the fatherland. I assure you, Armenians cannot be without the Turks, Armenians are the true blood brother of the Turks;" however, the 1912 Balkan War, which started with slogans of "We Ottomans will terrorize the whole world," "Long live the Army, long live our War," "Ottomans all the way to the Danube," "Sofia will be ours, Philippopolis will be ours," resulted in huge land and people losses and the Ittihat Terakki leaders, mostly originating from the Balkan territories, went into a shock. The participation of a few Caucasian Armenians in the ranks of Bulgarian and Serbian armies started to ring the alarm bells for the Armenians.

The Ottoman Armenians were encouraged by the support and promises of protection by Russia, as well as the weakened state of the Ottoman government after the Balkan War. In a rare state of unity, the Dashnak and Hnchag leaders of the Armenian community sent a letter to the Sadrazam – Prime Minister, demanding the arrest and punishment of the officials and civilians involved in the massacre and plunder of the Armenians in the Eastern Provinces. In the end, on January 8, 1914, the Ittihat Terakki government relented to implement a reform plan for the Eastern Provinces, under pressure from the European powers. Although this reform plan was much needed, it had become a mechanism of manipulating the

Ottomans and aligning the interest of the individual European States.

The complete breakdown came about six months later. The Central Committee of the Ittihat Terakki Party sent Bahadin Shakir, Omer Naci and Hilmi Bey to the 8th World Congress of the Tashnag Party in Erzurum, on August 14, 1914. They tried to convince the Armenians to side with the Ottomans against the Russians in the event of a possible conflict, promising Armenian independence. The Armenians refused, sensing positive international sentiment on their side. The Armenian leaders, swollen with nationalistic ideas under the Europeans' influence, had a plan similar to the one that would shape the nationalistic goals of Mustafa Kemal five years later – to sever the ties with the dilapidated, weakened Ottoman Empire and to found a nation-state.

Zeytun and Van Events

The Ittihat Terakki leaders who had given up on the Ottoman multinational ideology and had adopted the Turkish nationalism principles, had finally realized that there is no hope of getting the Armenians' support; in fact, they completely understood that the Armenians would pose a big problem for them. Therefore, they started looking for pretexts to force them to leave their lands. The events of Zeytun (Suleymanli district of Kahraman Marash province) happened at this time. According to the Ottoman sources, about 60 draft dodgers had arrived in Zeytun on August 30, 1914, and along with 500-600 other Armenian youngsters, had barricaded themselves in the most secure building in the region, at the St. Mary Monastery. The army had ordered the arrest of these Armenians by Major Hursit Bey, who organized attacks by four army units, two cavalry units and two cannons. The battle of the uneven forces, which lasted all day on March 25, 1915, resulted in 37 dead and 100 wounded by the Armenians, and 8 dead (including the Major) plus 26 wounded by the Turkish army. The Armenian mayor of Zeytun, Sergeant Nazaret was also among the dead and his corpse was brought to Marash to be exhibited.

The Van events followed immediately thereafter. Although the cruel conduct of the young and inexperienced Van Governor, Cevdet Bey, is widely accepted by even the Turkish sources as a trigger for the Armenian revolt in Van, the Armenians helped the surrender of the Van Fort to the Russians in March 1915. These two events initiated the activation of a long prepared Ittihat Terakki plan. First, a large group of Armenian intellectuals from Istanbul were arrested and sent to Ayas and Chankiri, then others followed and eventually the entire Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire was driven toward the Syrian Desert.

We will not go into the details but we can categorically state that these politically initiated deportations were not limited to the Armenians in the "war zone" or only in the Eastern Provinces, but covered all regions of the Ottoman Empire. Contrary to Turkish allegations, there were also deportations from Istanbul and Izmir. Not only nationalistic Armenians were deported, but also all loyal Ottoman subjects. Not only able bodied Armenians were deported, but also newborn babies, the sick and elderly in their deathbeds. Not only the Gregorian-Apostolic Armenians were deported, but also the Catholics and the Protestants. In some regions, the Armenians were given 15 days notice prior to the deportations; in most regions, they were deported immediately, without even being allowed to carry anything other than what they were wearing on themselves.

The toll of these deportations over a period of 17 months was immense. Even Talat Pasha, the architect of the deportations, admitted in his memoirs, "The essentially militaristic prevention project had become a tragedy in the hands

of officials with no conscience and no character." (*Talat Pasha Memoirs*, published by Alpay Kabacali, Istanbul, Turkiye Is Bankasi Cultural Publications, 2006, p. 72). According to the War Crimes Committee formed by the Ottoman Interior Ministry after the war under the direction of Mustafa Arif Deymer, the number of Armenian victims was 800,000 (*Vakit* newspaper, March 15, 1919). The Army Chief of Staff indicated in a 1928 document that "The Eastern Provinces of Anatolia lost 500,000 Moslems during the war; another 800,000 Armenians and 200,000 Greeks died due to massacres and deportations." (Hikmet Bayur, *Turk Inkilap Tarihi*, v. 3, part 4, Ankara, Turk Tarih Kurumu Yayinlari, 1991, page 787). The semi official "state historian," diplomat Kamuran Gurun significantly discounted these numbers by stating, "Therefore, no matter how we estimate, the number of Armenians that lost their lives due to various reasons does not exceed 300,000." (*Ermeni Dosyasi*, page 27).

Formation of Diaspora

The Armenian survivors of the deportations eventually travelled to all four corners of the world. At present there are communities with a population of 2 million in Russia, 800,000 in the USA, 320,000 in Georgia, 350,000 in France, 150,000 in Ukraine, 110,000 in Lebanon, 100,000 in Iran, 80,000 in Syria, 60,000 in Argentina, 60,000 in Turkey, 100,000 in Canada and 60,000 in Australia. There are also smaller communities ranging from 3,000 to 25,000 in England, Greece, Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Sweden, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Italy, Holland, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Venezuela, Uzbekistan, Ethiopia and Switzerland. (There are claims of Armenian communities in 60 or even 85 countries). It is estimated that about 5 to 6 million Armenians live in the Diaspora.

In Turkey, the term Armenian Diaspora is automatically and negatively defined as "hated for Turks" or "confrontation." The word Diaspora is made up of the Greek roots speiro – distributed seeds, and dia – from head to head. The word was first used to describe the Jews driven from Babylon as they were dispersed all over the world, as well as the Greeks' various colonies. At present, all communities that had to leave their fatherland due to conditions related to war, famine, torture, economics, etc. are defined as "diaspora communities." It is said that in the future, diasporas will become "a force without a state," as the history, area and population of diaspora people will be greater than nation-states. There are more than 150 diaspora groups in the USA alone, and some political scientists have re-named the EU as DiasEuropa.

Regardless of their origins, all diaspora groups have some common characteristics. First of all, they keep memories of the fatherland alive, they create myths around the home and the old country, and they pass these along to the next generation. Secondly, they have a mistrust that their new adopted country will truly accept them, they feel discriminated against, they still feel strong ties toward their first country and therefore, they condition the next generation to return to their home country once the conditions are right. Third, they do their utmost helping the home country. Lastly, in order to keep their ethnic identity until it is time to return to their home country, they organize and maintain events of cultural, historic and artistic heritage. The Armenian Diaspora fully displays all these common traits. It is obvious how much effort is spent by the Armenian Diaspora in maintaining their identity when faced with forces of globalization, which is even wiping out nation-states.

Policies of the Turkish Republic

Even though we cannot decide today how to define the 1915 events as "deportation," "massacres," "murders," "destruction" or "genocide," it was not that difficult to talk about these events just when they happened. But after the

1920s it became increasingly impossible to open this subject. Certain people got annoyed when this subject came up. Who were these people? Falih Rifki Atay, who stood by Mustafa Kemal throughout his life, states in his Cankaya book that all those Ottoman officials that the Allies started to investigate and prosecute for the Armenian deportations and war crimes took up arms and joined Kemal's resistance forces. In fact, "National War Heroes" such as Yenibahceli Sukru, Nail, Deli Halit, Kucuk Kazim, Ipsiz Recep, Dayi Mesut, Kara Aslan, Kel Oglan, Giritli Sevki, Cerkez Ethem, Serezli Parti Pehlivan, Topal Osman, Yahya Kahya are all organizers of Armenian massacres.

What is more, Ottoman officials involved with the Armenian deportations such as Deportation and Immigration General Director Sukru Kaya, Bitlis and Aleppo Member of Parliament Mustafa Abdulhalik Renda, Public Health General Inspector Tevfik Rustu Aras (in charge of mass burial of Armenians), Security Director Ahmet Esta Uras, Van Gendarmerie Commander Kazim Ozalp, Ittihat Terakki Party Aegean Inspector Celal Bayar, have all moved on to hold government posts in the new Turkish Republic, such as member of parliament, governor, minister, security director, speaker of parliament and president. Obviously it is unrealistic to expect these officials to freely talk about or admit to the "1915 events."

Mustafa Kemal's Attitude

What was Mustafa Kemal's opinion about these events, who was also a member of the Ittihat Terakki Party but was pushed to the sidelines by Enver Pasha in the leadership struggle? It is a well accepted fact that Mustafa Kemal himself was not involved in the Armenian deportations. But it is uncertain what he "really" thought about these events. When he was asked about the Armenian massacres by American General Harbord in Sivas in September 1919, he responded that the Armenian massacres and deportations were the action and responsibility of a small committee that controlled the government, and that he himself "criticized and blamed" them. (Rauf Orbay, *Rauf Orbay Memoirs*, Yakin Tarihimiz Dergisi, v. 3, page 179). In his April 24, 1920 dated speech in the Parliament, he named the 1915 actions against the Armenians as "a shameful act in the past." (*Ataturk'un TBMM Acik ve Gizli Oturumlarindaki Konusmalari*, V.1, Ankara Kultur Bakanligi Yayinlari, 1991, page 59).

After General Kazim Karabekir's 15th Army defeated the Armenians and took back Kars, and after the Armenians gave up all their land claims with the Gumru Treaty dated December 3, 1920, his interpretation about these events changed. In an interview dated February 21, 1921 to a reporter of Public Ledger – Philadelphia, his response is clear: "World opinion which is indifferent to Great Britain's wartime and peace time actions in Ireland, cannot find any valid accusation against us for our decisions about the Armenians. Contrary to allegations against us, the deportees have survived and most of them would have returned to their homes, if the Allies had not started another war with us." (*Ataturk'un Milli Dis Politikasi 1919-1923*, C.1, Ankara, Kultur Bakanligi Yayinlari, 1981, page 273).

Bury the Past

As we know, the toughest negotiations for the Turkish delegation at the Lausanne Peace Conference were about the subject of trial and prosecution of the officials accused of the Armenian deportations. In fact, the re-opening of this subject was undesirable not only for the Turks, but also for the Allies, who could have been held indirectly responsible. More importantly, the interests of Great Britain and the new Soviet Union coincided in having a strong Turkey acting as a barrier in between. Throughout the discussions, the Armenian deportations were defined as a blot against civilization, their pain and suffering were continuously brought forward but in the end, it was decided to forgive all war crimes committed

between August 1, 1914 and November 20, 1922 in a desire to bury the past. What is worse, a whole series of legislation followed preventing the Armenians from returning to their homes.

It was not only the Kemalist elite and government circles who desired to bury the past, but also the Turkish merchant bourgeoisie, which enriched itself on Armenian properties and possessions, many Turks and Moslems who plundered the abandoned Armenian homes or seized Armenian boys and girls, as well as people who moved into the void left over by Armenian craftsmen, tradesmen and businessmen. Therefore, a consensus was formed first to forget about the wrongful actions against the Armenians, and then, to forget about the Armenians themselves.

The Crisis of "The Forty Days on Musa Dagh"

But within ten years, an incident made obvious that the victims' memory would be different than the perpetrators' memory. The alarming incident was the news that Prague born Jewish intellectual Franz Werfel's book, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (Belge Yayinlari, Istanbul, 2007), would be made into a US movie. Werfel's novel described the resistance and rescue of a group of 5,000 Armenians near Antakya during the 1915 deportations, who went up the mountain of Musa Dagh under the leadership of Gabriel Bagratyan and fought the Ottoman army until rescued by a passing French warship.

The novel had created real interest when first published in March, 1933 in Vienna, but Turkey did not realize the impact until nine months later. In response to Turkish government and media pressure, Nazi Propaganda Minister Goebbels prohibited the publication of the book in Germany. However, the book had already become the favourite bedside novel in every German Jewish household. Turkey started to really panic when the book broke all records in the US by selling 35,000 copies in two weeks and when the Viennese publisher convinced Werfel to sell the movie rights for 20,000 dollars to the movie giant MGM. Led by the newspapers *Cumhuriyet* and *Ulus*, the media kept printing reports that MGM was a "Jewish company" and that there was an "Armenian-Jewish conspiracy." In a few days, the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate Council members were forced to give a statement denouncing these developments. A group of Armenians gathered on December 15, 1935 at the Istanbul Pangalti Armenian Church and burnt copies of the book "full of false accusations against the Turkish nation," while singing the Turkish National Anthem (Rifat N. Bali, *Musa'nin Evlatlari Cumhuriyet'in Yurttaslari*, Iletisim Yayinlari, Istanbul, 2003, Page 109-140).

When MGM announced in 1936 that they had decided not to pursue going into movie production of this book, Turkey appeared to have won the first "lobby" victory. But this incident made the Turkish statesmen suspicious, defensive and apprehensive toward international opinion, because they started thinking that they would be held accountable if not too careful.

The Yerevan Monument

While the minorities in Turkey were being harassed and weakened by the 1942 Wealth Tax and the 6-7 September 1955 plunder incidents, the Armenian Diaspora communities worldwide started gathering strength economically and politically. Another development was the relationship between Armenia and the Diaspora. The Tashnags driven out of Soviet Armenia in 1921 had attempted to prevent the influence of Soviet Armenia over the Diaspora Armenians and as a result, most Diaspora communities, especially in Lebanon, Iran and Greece, had become extremely nationalistic in the 1950s. Combined with the worldwide trend of emerging independence movements, the Armenian nationalists in various countries also adopted a new model.

Due to intense pressure by Armenians both within Armenia and outside, the Soviet regime in 1965 allowed for the first time the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the 1915 events. The mass meetings brought together hundreds of thousands in Yerevan. On April 24, 1967 a Memorial Monument for Genocide – *Medz Yeghern* – was opened. Prominent Armenian participants in the ceremony included all Armenian Communist Party leaders, the Armenian Catholicos and Patriarchs, World Astronomical Society Chairman Viktor Hampartsumyan, Soviet Atomic Energy Committee Chairman Antranig Bedrosyan and MIG Warplane Company Chief Designer Artem Mikoyan. The spontaneous gathering of 100,000 people outside the State Academy Theatre during the ceremony, with chants of "We want back our lands, our fatherland," and protests of the Ittihat Terakki Party, surprised and alarmed the Armenian Communist government, and they had to rely on the Armenian Catholicos to calm down the masses. The protests lasted all day in Yerevan, expanding to most side streets. On the same day, hundreds of Armenian university students in Moscow marched on to the Turkish Embassy and lowered its flag (Haig Sarkissian, "50th anniversary of the Turkish Genocide as Observed in Yerevan," *Armenian Review* 19, no. 4, Winter 1966, pages 23-28).

Turkish Reaction

The Hurriyet newspaper reported on April 9, 1965: "The April 24 Armenian massacre commemorations organized all over the world with encouragement of the Greeks are being condemned by tens of thousands of our Armenian citizens living in Istanbul. These commemorations appear to be a conspiracy by the Cyprus Foreign Minister Kiprianou and unfortunately, some Armenian groups have unknowingly become instruments of his work. The Turkish Armenians have forgotten the past and at present enjoy a completely happy and peaceful life."

The interesting aspect of this news item was the attempt to use the Turkish hatred for the Greeks due to the Cyprus issue to mobilize the masses against the new Armenian nationalism. This was a logical tactic because without the benefit of Cyprus as a catalyst, the Turks could not be brought to hate the Armenians, as the Turkish people could not understand the reasons for the Armenian nationalism after decades of conscious attempts to make them forget about the Armenians and their causes. Realizing the extent of the potential threats to the Turkish Armenian community, Armenian leaders including The Armenian Catholic Bishop Bogos Kirecyan, community leader Dr. Garabed Arman, former Senator Berc Turan, Armenian Patriarch Shnork Kalusdyan and Nubar Gulbenkyan – son of Calouste Gulbenkyan, also known as Mr. Five Percent of British American oil companies, decided to have a joint declaration pledging their allegiance and loyalty to the Turkish government. After this declaration, *Milliyet* newspaper chief editor Refii Cevat Ulunay wrote: "As stated by Ahmet Refik Altinay in his book, the issue is two massacres by two parties, by Ittihat Terakki and by the Tashnags. Nobody, not even historians needs to re-open these issues." (Rifat Bali, *Turk Basininda ve Turk-Ermeni Toplumunda Ermeni Kiyiminin 50th Yildonumunun Yansimalari*, Toplumsal Tarih, Mart 2007, No. 159, Page 62-65).

Shock of ASALA

All of Turkey was shocked when Gourgen Yanikian, an elderly Armenian rug merchant who had immigrated from Turkey to the US, assassinated the Turkish Consul in Los Angeles and his assistant in 1973. Although the killings were not political, they inspired future activities of ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia), which lasted from 1975 to 1985. This organization, which was probably founded in 1972, in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon in cooperation with PLO and PFLP terror groups, had the objective of publicizing the years of Turkish silence and denial of Armenians' demands and it

chose a ruthless method of assassinating Turkish diplomats starting from 1975 in 35 different operations against Turkish embassies and Turkish Air Lines offices. Although it received clandestine support both from Western and Eastern Bloc countries, France withdrew its support in 1983 when French citizens were hurt in the ASALA attack on Turkish Airline offices at the Paris Orly Airport. ASALA wound down when its leader, Agop Agopyan, was murdered and world opinion also turned against it in 1985; however, it achieved its objective of bringing the Armenian Genocide issue to international attention. But it also left a deep mark in Turkish public opinion, with increased hatred of the Western countries as enemies supporting ASALA. In fact, it reinforced the idea that Ittihat Terakki had been right in eliminating the dangerous Armenians.

Another result of the ASALA activities was that the Turkish Foreign Ministry staff, known as the most level headed and experienced public sector employees in Turkey, converted to become the most reactionary and vengeful, as the issue became revenge for personal attacks on its members.

Parliamentary Decisions

Starting from the 1980s, many countries with active Armenian diaspora communities started commemorating April 24 as Genocide Memorial Day, which increased the Turkish paranoia in looking for Armenians behind every negative international decision. Turkey felt cornered when, one by one, many parliaments started recognizing the Armenian Genocide. In such an atmosphere, the Soviet Union broke up and Armenia declared independence on August 25, 1990. Turkey recognized Armenia after one and a half years, on December 16, 1991, but without any active diplomatic relations as the existence of Armenia seemed to be the reincarnation of ghosts which were supposed to be buried. The borders were kept closed, apart from a few short exceptions, in order to prevent any potential warming up relations between the two people. The reasons for not opening the borders were given as Armenia's non recognition of the 1920 Gumru Treaty, Armenia's mention of the Genocide in the 11th clause of the 1990 dated constitution, and the existence of Mount Ararat on the state coat of arms. Although Armenian government leaders repeatedly stated that they had no objections to the Gumru Treaty and no land claims, they could not convince the Turkish leaders. In 1992, the Armenian lobby in the US succeeded in limiting US aid to Azerbaijan by amending the Freedom Support Act. This further incensed the Turkish nationalists who regarded the Azeris as their blood brothers. The growing influence of the Armenian lobby within the US Congress and the media increased the Turkish hatred toward the Armenians. The Nagorno-Karabagh issue aggravated the situation even more. But what is Turkey's involvement with this issue, you may ask? None, except for the ties with brotherly Azeris.

The Nagorno-Karabagh Issue

The Nagorno-Karabagh region, with an area of 4.400 square kilometers, came under Russian control at 1828. At that time the Azeri population was slightly more than the Armenians, but soon after the Armenians started to surpass the Azeris. Especially after 1915, when some Armenian groups deported from the Ottoman Empire also settled here, the Armenian population increased to 80-85 % of the total. A meeting of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia Communist Party leaders was convened on December 1, 1920 to decide the fate of Nagorno-Karabagh. Despite the Azeri leader Nerimanov's objections, it was decided to annex Karabagh to Armenia. This decision was relayed to Lenin and Stalin by the Russian Caucasus representative Orkhonokidze, and this decision was also published in the December 4, 1920 *Pravda* state newspaper as a confirmation by Stalin. Based on the Moscow Treaty between Soviet Russia and Turkey a few months later, the region of

Nakhichevan was annexed to Azerbaijan as an autonomous region. When the Armenian Tashnags started a revolt in Armenia's Zangezur region a month later, the Russians divided Zangezur between Armenia and Azerbaijan and in addition, gave Karabagh to Azerbaijan. Zangezur is today Armenia's border to Iran, the only friendly neighbour, and Azeris still complain that they have lost half of Zangezur because of the Russians.

The Armenian communist leaders and intellectuals gradually started to vocalize their historic arguments and rights on Karabagh and Nakhichevan after 1965. This was also a test of Soviet Russia's abilities to resolve issues related to nationalism.

The Soviet Supreme Communist Party did not interfere in the arguments between Armenia and Azerbaijan until 1967. But when an Armenian boy was murdered by an Azeri in Karabagh in August 1967, followed by non-punishment of the murderer by the Azeri authorities, the Armenians revolted. The situation could only be calmed down by the Soviet Army moving in. This was followed by the overly enthusiastic greetings in Baku for the Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel during 19-29 September 1967. These two events were interpreted by the Armenians as signs of negative change in the Soviet Russia and Azerbaijan foreign policies. Azeri historian Ziya Punyatov's statement that "Karabagh Armenians were originally Azeri Christians who had first became Georgians in the 11th century and then had become Armenians," created more controversy. This was followed by various Turkish writers claiming that the Soviet Union intended to create a new Israel in Armenia. It became obvious that the Soviets could not resolve nationalistic issues (R.H. Dekmejian, "Soviet-Turkish Relations and Politics in the Armenia SSR," *Soviet Studies* 19, no. 4 April, 1968, pages 510-525).

The Armenian leaders were disappointed as these issues were shelved and frozen for the next few decades. When the Eastern Block was about to break down during the years 1987-1991, armed conflicts between Armenians and Azeris resulted in numerous deaths and the seriousness of the situation became apparent. The Azeris murdered Armenians in Sumgait and Baku, while the Armenians committed murders in Khojali. As Armenia occupied Nagorno-Karabagh starting from 1989, nearly 200,000 Azeris became refugees, still living in subhuman conditions in camps in Azerbaijan.

The EU has tried to resolve the situation by using the Minsk Group organization to put pressure on the Armenians. Meanwhile, Turkey, which faces similar ethnic conflict situations, has refused to enter into diplomatic relations with Armenia until this 200-year old conflict is resolved. But many people think that Turkey could facilitate and mediate if it agrees to start relations with Armenia.

The Creation of the "Alleged" Terminology

If we leave the Nagorno-Karabagh issue and return to the taboo subject of the historical Armenian Question, Taner Akçam's 1992 book was the first time that the official denial policy could be questioned (*Turk Ulusal Kimligi ve Ermeni Sorunu*, Iletisim Yayinlari, Istanbul). Although this book did not sell in large numbers, Taner Akçam and subsequent historians and researchers provided documentation that the main objective of the deportations was "to destroy the Armenian ethnic existence," regardless of the disputed number of victims. According to them, there was a crime of "genocide" and as per international law the numbers were not an issue in proving the crime of genocide. The Turkish state countered that since the term "genocide" was first used in 1944, it could not be used to describe the 1915-1917 events. They also created a strange new terminology defined as "the alleged Armenian genocide," so that it became impossible to refer to this subject without adding the term "alleged" to the words Armenian genocide.

History Falsification

Next came the revision of numbers. Kamuran Gurun's number of 300,000 got reduced to 100,000, then to 6,000, and eventually the thesis became that it was the Armenians who had committed genocide against the Turks. When these arguments were based on evidence from massacres committed by Armenians in the Erzurum region returning with the Russian armies in 1916, or by Armenians in the Antep region returning with the French armies in 1919, the masses found them believable without understanding the cause-effect or chronological sequence of events. Next came many monuments erected in various parts of Turkey, in memory of Turks genocidally massacred by the Armenians.

As per Article No. 305 of the Turkish Penal Code, it is a crime to state that "a genocide of Armenians occurred during the First World War." A conference titled "Ottoman Armenians during the last years of the Ottoman Empire: Responsibility and Democracy Issues," was organized by Bosphorus University on May 25, 2005, but had to be cancelled after the Justice Minister Cemil Cicek declared that this conference was tantamount to "stabbing Turks in the back." These examples proved the emptiness of official statements such as "Let us leave the Armenian issue to the historians." Hrant Dink's murder also demonstrated the deadly consequences of getting involved with this issue. When and how will we be able to open the 90-year old rusty lock on this issue?

Ayse Hur

While waiting for President Gul to make a decision on whether to attend the Yerevan soccer game on September 6, I tried to assemble all the facts, and I wonder if you agree with them. We still could not agree on how to define the events that befell on the Armenians 93 years ago. In the 85-year history of our Republic, we found only four Armenians deserving to enter the Parliament. We were unable to see any Armenians in the public and military sectors. We tried to erase the names and memories of Armenian settlements and locations, Armenian authors, artists, architects and statesmen. We converted Armenian cultural institutions and churches into mosques, military buildings, and if not feasible to do so, into animal stables, and if that did not work, we demolished them. We ruined the Armenian businessmen in 1942 with the Capital Tax, and then on 6-7 September 1955 with wholesale plunder. We repossessed the Armenian charitable foundation buildings in 1974. At last we succeeded in reducing the Armenian population of Turkey to 70,000.

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