

# WESTWARD HO!

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 **Editorial**, 31 August 2015

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That pattern remained unchanged until 1980 when the population shift towards west began in earnest. By 2000 the west had 44% of the population; the centre had 30% and the east 26%. Three years ago there was a further shift towards the west: the latter's share increased to almost half (49%) of the population; the centre declined from 30% to 28% while the east shrank to 23%. Bottom line: since 1965 western Turkey's share of the population has increased by 15%.

The two main reasons for the population shift are industrialization and urbanization. Some 75% of Turkey's population lives in cities. As well, Diyarbakir (Dikranagerd), Van, and Sanliurfa (Urfa), Gaziantep (Aintab), and Kahramanmarash (Marash) are the only eastern cities which have populations of more than 1 million. In the west Istanbul has a population of 14,500,000, Ankara (5,200,000), Izmir (4,200,000), Adana (2,200,000), Antalya (2,250,000), Konya (2,100,000), Bitlis, Kocaeli, and Mersin each 1,800,000, and Kayseri (1,350,000).

Turkey has a population of close to 80 million. About 18% (14,500,000) are Kurds. The latter estimate they make up 20% (16 million). Non-Turks and non-Kurds are, according to the *CIA World Fact Book*, 7% to 12% of the population. The majority of the Kurds live in eastern Turkey (Western Armenia). During the recent presidential elections they demonstrated their clout by winning about 13% of the votes and scuttled Erdogan's plan for greater presidential powers. In big eastern cities Kurds almost monopolized mayoral seats and administer more than 110 municipalities.

What does the population shift mean to the future of Turkey, Turkish Kurdistan, and to Armenian demands for Western Armenia?

If the westward migration continues, it will probably be so at a faster pace than in the past: Eastern Turks becoming a minority would be more eager to move west. The violence between Kurds and Turkish army would be another incentive for Turks to leave the east.

Many Turkey experts believe the recent increased violence between the army and the Kurds (engineered by Erdogan who, considering his Pinocchio proclivities, should be called Erdocchio) could well result in the president's victory in the snap elections in early November. His AKP party would then form a single-party government at the expense of the HDP (the mainly Kurdish party) and encourage Erdogan to impose harsher measures against the Kurds. Thus more violence. But now the Kurds aren't the Kurds of the 1990s. They're more sophisticated politically, are better organized and armed. The world knows about their plight more than it did in the past. They can also call upon their brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria for military and financial help.

The emptying of Turks from the east will make state administration there more vulnerable as Ankara tries to control millions of restive Kurds. Turkey will probably play the autonomy card. Some Kurds will be content while most will continue to demand independence. Turkish leaders know that Kurds are aiming for full independence, but no Ankara administration wants to be the one which "lost Kurdistan".

What about the Armenians and their land demands?

That's the 46 Million Dollar Question.

Certain Diaspora Armenians and Armenian organizations (the National Congress of Western Armenians, for one--NCWA) believe that the best way to recover some of the occupied Western Armenian lands is through dialogue with Ankara and by waiting for Turkey's democratization. The thesis is that as a democratic Turkey allows its citizens to know the truth about 1915, Turks will concede to some Armenian demands. Other Armenians believe they should help the Kurds gain independence with the obvious promise of the return of some Western Armenia lands to Armenia when Kurdistan is born. These lands would presumably be contiguous to the Republic of Armenia. The guilt many Kurds feel for the Kurdish participation in the Genocide would also help the Armenian Cause, the second group likes to believe.

If Turkey continues its occupation of Western Armenia, the strategy of, for example, the NCWA seems more practical. But the second, which advocates an Armenian/Kurdish alliance, has to become proactive. Panel discussions, cordial meetings, photo ops, recognition of the Genocide of the Armenians by the Kurds (and the admission of their participation in it), and goodwill will achieve only so much in building strong bonds with the Kurds.

The second 60 Million Question is how can the Armenians assist the Kurds in a robust manner? More intensive, organized and focused efforts have to be made by the Armenian Diaspora to support the Kurdish independence. Through dialogue with the Kurds Armenians have to learn what the Kurds need and whether Armenians are in a position to provide it. While doing so, Armenians should also obtain Kurdish commitment for the return of certain/to be negotiated Western Armenian lands.

This all sounds like counting the eggs before they're hatched. However, one can feed the hen before it lays the eggs and hope the fowl will remember its benefactor after the chicks are born. Although Britain and France did not solicit Italian help, Italians volunteered to fight, along with the British and the French, in the Crimean War. After the war, grateful Britain and France became godfathers to independent Italy and discouraged Austria from obstructing the birth of the new state. There are too many examples of such give-and-take in international affairs to cite.

