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Beyond 1915: Mutual hopes and reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia

On April 15, the European Parliament adopted a resolution which states that "the tragic events that took place in 1915-1917 against the Armenians in the territory of the Ottoman Empire represent a genocide." While the Armenian government praised the Parliament's efforts to promote human rights, Turkey's Foreign Ministry issued a written statement to reiterate that "we do not take seriously those who adopted this resolution by mutilating history and law." Considering that the debate will presumably remain at the top of the world's political agenda for the next couple of weeks, we would like to call on the governments of Turkey and Armenia, along with the international community, to revive the hope of former Ottoman nations for reconciliation and to promote peace and stability in the region.

In recent years, the Turkish government developed a positively constructive approach to the 1915 events and called for open dialogue regarding the allegations. From the mid-2000s onwards, the public has engaged in a healthy debate about the human cost of World War I. Last year, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan offered his condolences to the Armenian people and called for open dialogue and cooperation between Turkey and Armenia. On Monday, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu expressed Turkey's deepest condolences to the grandchildren of the deceased Armenians, adding that Turkey will honor deceased Armenians during a ceremony which will be held on April 24th at the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul. These efforts, which would have been unthinkable just a decade ago, not only reflected the country's eagerness to build stronger ties with a Caucasian nation but also demonstrated its government's commitment to celebrating the nation's ethnic, religious and cultural diversity by healing old wounds.

Now more than ever, the people of Turkey and Armenia must defend their hopes for peace and reconciliation to honor the memory of generations of Turks and Armenians who lived peacefully for centuries. We hereby call on President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia to act responsibly and lead his nation to a brighter future by working with Turkey and preventing the genocide industry from hijacking dreams of reconciliation. We also call on President Erdoğan and the rest of Turkey's political leadership to maintain their commitment to continue pursuing closer ties with Armenia.

PHOTO: SABAH



AKDAMAR CHURCH: SYMBOL OF HOW FAR TURKEY HAS COME

THE HISTORICAL Cathedral of the Holy Cross on the Akdamar Island in Lake Van has come to symbolize Turkey's efforts to address the many grievances of minorities. The medieval 10th century Armenian Church of the Holy Cross fell into disuse in the 1920's. The church had suffered decades of looting and was in ruins and on the verge of collapse when the Ministry of Culture and Tourism initiated a restoration project. In 2007, the historical church was reopened as a museum and since 2010, an annual mass is held every September.



Armenian Patriarchate in Kumkapi, Istanbul

Turkey expresses condolences to deceased Ottoman Armenians' grandchildren

NEJAT BAŞAR / ISTANBUL - DAILY SABAH

PRIME Minister Davutoğlu expressed Turkey's deepest condolences to the grandchildren of the deceased Armenians in a press statement released on Monday, to mark the 100th anniversary of the deaths of Armenians who died during their compulsory deportation from Anatolia in World War I.

TURKEY'S 1915 PARADIGM HAS SHIFTED

“We should overcome this 100-year-old feeling of being downtrodden. Our past and our names should not be associated with death anymore. A black hole deep down in history should not exhaust all our strength. We have other values. We have so many things to maintain and revive, so it is not for these revived people to shed tears on the past things we can never change, to arouse pity for ourselves, or to narrate the incidents to the entire world as if they happened just yesterday. We will not forget it and make it forgotten, but we will also set sail to new beginnings and new friendships. Turkey is our home and our state. Here we live with our Turkish, Muslim, Kurdish, Circassian and Bosnian neighbors. The burden of the incidents that took place 100 years ago should not overwhelm us. On the contrary, we should not repeat the mistakes that were committed a century ago. The compensation for the bloodshed and lost lives should be a more beautiful Turkey today. It should be a Turkey where people live happily and peacefully. I am sure that none of the deceased, including both Christians and Muslims, prays to God for revenge. I am sure they cry to God in this way, ‘May you gift more reason and wisdom to the living ones, so that they can share this great world. This world is more than enough for everyone. May you give understanding to these people. They will not be able to carry anything with them; they will not end up bringing even a handful of soil with them, they should learn to love.’”

These words are from a sermon of a religious functionary. The crowded audience that listened to the sermon at the church during the Dzununt (Easter) ceremony, including me, were both moved and found solace. They were moved because it is the 100th anniversary of the great torment the Armenian people suffered. They found solace because these words acted like an antidote to the burden we have been shouldering for 100 years.

Last year on April 23, the democratic masses, particularly the Armenians living in Turkey, were pleasantly surprised. It was one of the most exciting and uplifting days of my life. Everyone was



Markar Esayan*

rushing around with a text in their hands; TV channels, newspapers and news agencies were constantly calling my phone. Then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued an official statement of condolence for the great tragedy that Armenians experienced in 1915. Some lines of this historic statement were as follows:

“April 24 carries a particular significance for our Armenian citizens and for all Armenians around the world, and provides a valuable opportunity to share opinions freely on a historical matter.

“Any conscientious, fair and humanistic approach to these issues requires an understanding of all the suffering endured in this period, without discriminating as to religion or ethnicity.

“Certainly, neither constructing hierarchies of pain nor comparing and contrasting suffering carries any meaning for those who experienced this pain themselves.

“As a Turkish proverb goes, ‘fire burns in the place where it falls.’

“It is a duty of humanity to acknowledge that Armenians remember the suffering experienced in that period, just like every other citizen of the Ottoman Empire.

“The incidents of the First World War are our shared pain. To evaluate this painful period of history through a perspective of a just memory is a humane and scholarly responsibility.

“Millions of people of all religions and ethnicities lost their lives in the First World War. Having experienced events which had inhumane consequences - such as relocation - during the First World War, should not prevent Turks and Armenians from establishing compassion and mutually

humane attitudes towards one another.

“In today’s world, deriving enmity from history and creating new antagonisms are neither acceptable nor useful for building a common future.

“It is our hope and belief that the peoples of an ancient and unique region, who share similar customs and manners will be able to talk to each other about the past with maturity and to remember together their losses in a decent manner. And it is with this hope and belief that we wish that the Armenians who lost their lives in the context of the early 20th century to rest in peace, and we convey our condolences to their grandchildren.”

This message is a milestone that officially ended the denial policies of the unionist and Kemalist mindset. If we really attach importance to a genuine resolution, it should be admitted that this statement has created a paradigm shift in Turkey with regard to the Armenian issue.

Lately, an editorial published in the New York Times partially and unfairly alleged that those pronouncing the word “genocide” are assaulted in Turkey. They probably do not know how difficult it was to live in Turkey as recently as 12 years ago. Back then, Armenians had to hide their names and identities, let alone discuss the 1915 incidents. And this was imposed by the unionist state apparatuses mostly controlled by the Republican People’s Party (CHP), which regarded itself as secular and modern.

The living conditions of Armenians have radically changed during the period of Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AK Party). However, this positive transformation has been underestimated due to the cut-throat fight for sovereignty ongoing in the country. The alliance of old Turkey, which endeavors to overthrow the AK Party and Erdoğan at any cost, approaches the problems of Kurds, Alevis and Armenians from a pragmatist and manipulative point of view. The elite media outlets, which used to write captions such as “the best Kurd is a dead Kurd” and “Armenian dogs,” now seem to be supporting Kurds and Armenians. They even use the wounds and nerves of those communities by provoking maximalist demands. Since these circles interact with

the foreign media much more, the West interprets - or wants to interpret - Turkey by means of their propaganda.

Formerly, even driving a nail into our own church walls was forbidden, but now our churches, such as Ahtamar, were reclaimed by the state budget, our cemeteries are being restored by the AK Party municipalities and the properties of our foundations that were seized by the state during the CHP period are now being returned to us with the new Foundations Law thanks to the AK Party. While this law was being democratized, the CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu argued against this regulation and filed an appeal for the repeal of the legislation.

Thanks to the new paradigm that has been introduced by the AK Party, even the CHP had to nominate an Armenian woman deputy candidate for the upcoming elections. And the person penning this very article has also been nominated as a deputy candidate for Istanbul from the AK Party.

Our goal is to found a strong and democratic country and to lead an honorable life in this country. There has been great progress within the last 13 years. Turkey is getting rid of the unionist mindset thanks to the AK Party. Kurds and Armenians are being liberated. The opposition, on the other hand, tries to hamper the New Turkey by allying with the Gülen Movement, while their media outlets try to represent this reactionary attitude as a democratic opposition by distorting the facts. But the public interprets all the incidents correctly. If only the diaspora could also form a close relation with this political movement, with which it could speak and negotiate on every subject. Because I find it dishonorable to focus on how the U.S. president, the pope or the European Parliament would define the 1915 incidents. For the memories of our ancestors that suffered a great torment and lost their lives in 1915, we must keep our distance from approaches that manipulate our pain.

* Journalist, *Yeni Şafak Daily*

TURKISH LEADERS EXTEND A HAND FOR PEACE

NEJAT BAŞAR / ISTANBUL – DAILY SABAH

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“During the Ottoman Empire’s final years, many citizens of various ethnic and religious backgrounds, who had long lived together in peace and brotherhood, suffered great pains that left deep scars,” Davutoğlu said in his message. “It is a historic and humanitarian responsibility of Turkey to protect Ottoman Armenians’ remembrance and cultural heritage.”

He said, “We do not discriminate among pains,” pointing out that downsizing everything to one word is conscientiously problematic, also emphasizing that the 1915 events should be confronted with an unbiased perspective. “To reduce everything to a single word, to put responsibility through generalizations on the Turkish nation alone, moreover to combine this with a hate speech is legally and morally problematic.”

Turkey will honor deceased Armenians during a ceremony which will be held on April 24th at the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul, he said in his message, but the commemoration would be more meaningful if Turkey and Armenia were to honor the Ottoman Armenians together, according to Davutoğlu. He said, when history stops becoming a tool of politics, this will hopefully come about. “Ancient Anatolian culture thought us to own our history, to commemorate our joy and pain together, and to heal our wounds and look to the future together,” he stated. Davutoğlu’s message came one year to day after the then prime minister, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, offered condolences to the descendants of the victims of the mass killing of Armenians during World War I. Erdoğan’s statement, on the eve of the 99th anniversary of the start of mass deportations of Armenians in 1915, was the first such overt comment by a Turkish leader over the killings.

In the statement, Erdoğan said: “The 24th of April

carries a particular significance for our Armenian citizens and for all Armenians around the world, and provides a valuable opportunity to share opinions freely on a historical matter. It is indisputable that the last years of the Ottoman Empire were a difficult period, full of suffering for Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Armenian and millions of other Ottoman citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnic origin.” He went on to say: “It is a duty of humanity to acknowledge that Armenians remember the suffering experienced in that period, just like every other citizen of the Ottoman Empire. The incidents of the First World War are our shared pain. To evaluate this painful period of history through a perspective of just memory is a humane and scholarly responsibility.” Erdoğan ended his statement with, “And it is with this hope and belief that we wish that the Armenians who lost their lives in the context of the early twentieth century rest in peace, and we convey our condolences to their grandchildren.”

The statements of condolence released by President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Davutoğlu in the past two years show Turkey’s desire to establish a sound and honest relationship with Armenia

The definitional ambiguity of genocide: Its implications for the Armenian tragedy

Much confusion exists about what is meant by the term "genocide," because the word has come to have at least two different meanings, a precise, international, legal one and a non-legal, popular one. The two different meanings have been conflated by some, either by mistake or on purpose, to confuse the world and accuse Turkey of being legally guilty of genocide for the Armenian massacres that occurred 100 years ago in 1915. Given this confusing situation, a brief analysis of these two different meanings of the term genocide is in order.

Legally, genocide is defined by the Genocide Convention that was signed in 1948 and then ratified in 1951 when it went into effect. The Genocide Treaty, in part, legally defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Therefore, for genocide to have legally occurred, there must have been intent on the part of the perpetrators to wipe out an entire ethnic group or a part of it, and this act must have been committed since 1951 after the Genocide Treaty went into effect. Neither requirement is fulfilled in regard to Ottoman Armenians.



Michael M. Gunter*

Despite what many Armenians and their supporters claim, there is no authentic document that proves that the Ottoman authorities intended to wipe out the Armenians. Indeed, many Armenians living in western Anatolia who were deemed no threat to Ottoman supply lines and security were not relocated in 1915. Is it possible to imagine Hitler sparing any Jews from his genocidal rampage because they were not threatening his supply lines or security? In view of this fact, without proven intent, legally there can be no genocide.

In addition, of course, even if intent could be demonstrated, which it has not, genocide legally could not have occurred before the Genocide Treaty was ratified and went into effect in 1951, because it would constitute an ex post facto law expressly prohibited by Article 11 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, Article 15 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article One, Section Nine of the U.S. constitution. An ex post facto law of course makes some actions a crime, which when it was originally committed, was not a crime.

Furthermore, for the U.S. Congress to pass any resolution declaring that the Armenian tragedy was genocide would be analogous to a bill of attainder – a legislative act that punishes somebody without a fair judicial trial – which is also specifically prohibited by Article One, Section Nine of the U.S. constitution. Therefore, applying the Genocide Treaty to the Armenian tragedy by using an ex post facto law or bill of attainder would be a clear violation of due process of law, which is specifically prohibited by the Fifth and 14th amendments to the U.S. constitution, as well as through implication by Article Seven of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Articles 14 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Armenians and their supporters are trying to get around these major international legal and U.S. constitutional safeguards by confusingly conflating the legal definition of genocide with the more general popular one that equates geno-

cide loosely with any large-scale killings that has occurred, either before 1951 or after that date when the Genocide Treaty went into effect. By this second, non-legal definition of genocide, of course, Armenians suffered from large-scale killings or "genocide." However, so did Turks and other Muslims who were killed as a result of inter-ethnic violence during World War I. By this non-legal definition of genocide, both Muslims and Armenians committed genocide against each other. To accuse only one side of this situation ignores what happened to the other and is patently unfair.

However, the many Armenians and their supporters who accuse Turkey of genocide, either through simple lack of the complete facts or on purpose in order to malign Turkey for their own reasons, continue to try to piggyback these two definitions of genocide. It is time for governments, scholars and the intelligent lay public to stop conflating these two different definitions of genocide and get their facts straight, so we will not continue to dishonor the memory of those who so tragically died on both sides during World War I.

**Professor at Tennessee Technological University and advisory board member at Turkish Institute for Progress*

New York Times' willful amnesia

According to a New York Times editorial entitled "Turkey's willful amnesia," "the Turkish government and the majority of Turks continue to furiously attack anyone who speaks of genocide."

The claim that the AK Party government attacks anyone who speaks of genocide is preposterous, considering that the AK Party has opened its doors to such Turkish-Armenian intellectuals as Etyen Mahcupyan, who was appointed Chief Advisor to Prime Minister Davutoğlu, despite the fact that he had been arguing for years that the 1915 events constitute a genocide, and Markar Esayan, who was nominated as deputy candidate, although he also had been over-sensitive on Armenian issue for years. It appears that the NYT itself is afflicted with "willful amnesia," and so perhaps it would be helpful to remind the NYT of a few points.

You could not even mention that the 1915 events constituted genocide in Turkey, even as a thesis, before the AK Party government came to power. Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was targeted and eventually murdered for this reason. However, it was the freedom of expression enabled by the AK Party government that allowed for the free and frank discussion of the 1915 events in Turkey after the murder of Dink.

For example, for the first time in Turkey's history, a group of intellectuals launched a petition in 2008 entitled "We Apologize," in order to say sorry to the victims of the 1915 deportation, and they managed to garner more than 30,000 signatures.

Again, from 2008 onward, commemorations of April 24 could be held publicly for the first time, with the title "We commemorate the genocide," in Taksim Square, accompanied by police officers assigned by the government to protect the attendants from ultranationalist protesters.



Hilal Kaplan*

These commemorations can be held across the country in more than 10 provinces.

Besides, on April 23 of last year, the prime minister at the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, released a statement of condolences to the victims of the 1915 events. It was the first such statement by the Turkish government. Following that statement, commemorative ceremonies and prayers were held in churches on April 24.

In 2005, a planned conference on "genocide" had to be cancelled due to protests by secular ultranationalists. Now, however, conferences on the genocide thesis are held almost every year. This year's conference will be hosted by Boğaziçi University, which is a state university.

Moreover, books openly defending the genocide thesis have been freely discussed in newspapers and TV programs for the last five years. Further, some of them became bestsellers and appear on bookstore shelves.

All these developments point to a transformation that Turkish people have undergone during AK Party rule. So what other actions did the government take, apart from bringing about an atmosphere of free speech?

Before AK Party rule, there was a well-planned and systematic state policy to usurp the properties of Armenians, ethnic Greeks and Assyrians. The AK Party passed

a special law to return the properties of non-Muslims, who had seen even their private properties confiscated with the 1936 and 1974 laws. The strongest opposition to this law came from "secularists." The law was vetoed by "secularist" former President Ahmet N. Sezer. And the "secularist" main opposition party, the CHP, applied to the Constitutional Court, with the signature of its leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, to have the law repealed. But the AK Party insisted on passing the law and eventually put it into force.

Thanks to this law, reparations to minority foundations have been made with a compensation package of \$2.5 billion (TL 5.5 billion), according to 2014 figures. The property return process continues.

Moreover, minority schools and newspapers have been financially supported. The Armenian Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Akdamar Island, the historical Sümel Monastery, and the Grand Synagogue of Edirne, which is the largest synagogue in Europe, have been reopened for religious services. Additionally, tens of religious shrines like Gökçeada Saint Nicholas Church, Hatay Iskenderun Assyrian Church, Surp Giragos Armenian Church in Diyarbakır, Gaziantep Nizip Fevkanı Church, and Gaziantep Şahinbey Synagogue have been restored and reopened for religious service. Currently, many churches and synagogues are being renovated and restored. Top government officials participated in Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies on Jan. 27 and memorial services for the Struma disaster.

Turkey is much more self-confident and inclusive than it used to be. This is accompanied by facing up to the past. Therefore, we can say that what we see in Turkey is not amnesia but rather the opposite: the "encouragement to remember."

**Journalist, Sabah Daily*

The change in the Turkish state's narrative concerning the 1915 events since the Ak Party came to power is ignored by the New York Times

'We should try to not turn past tragedies into present-day hatred and conflict,' says top academic

While Armenians fail to distance themselves from an identity defined on genocide, Turks are increasingly able to access all thesis, pro or anti-genocide, and can freely discuss what all relevant issues, says University of Utah's Professor Hakan Yavuz

Hakan Yavuz is a professor of political science at the University of Utah. His current projects focus on transnational Islamic networks in Central Asia and Turkey; the role of Islam in state-building and nationalism; ethnic cleansing and genocide; and ethno-religious conflict management. Mr. Yavuz answered Daily Sabah's questions.

■ **What do you think the Republic of Armenia and Armenian diaspora are doing for the centenary of the 1915 events? Do you think they are effective?**

It depends on what they want to achieve. The main aim of Armenians and pro-Armenian academics is to frame the 1915 events as genocide and to mobilize the international community to recognize it as such. I don't think they have achieved their goal. They only added Bolivia as a new state that recognizes the events as genocide. The number of parliaments that recognize the events as genocide is now 23. Only three countries - Switzerland, France and Slovakia - criminalize the alternative description of the 1915 events as genocide. So, as far as public opinion is concerned, there is some success, but not a great deal. As far as academic publications are concerned, the genocide camp has produced five books for the centenary. However, the major success of the Armenian side has been the mobilization of an anti-Islam mood in Europe and the U.S. for the cause. They succeeded to get the pope to deliver a radical, highly polemic speech to frame the events as the "first modern genocide of the 20th century." This past weekend there was an article in The Guardian by David Olusoga, who titled his piece "Dear Pope Francis, Namibia was the 20th century's first genocide." As Olusoga argues, what we have is that Pope Francis has become a new actor who refuses to see in equivalent terms the destruction and massacres in Africa or Asia that were carried out by Christian imperialist powers. Another area we see some limited success of the genocide camp occurs among the small circle of alienated liberal scholars in Istanbul. Yet this also has rejuvenated a backlash from other groups of scholars who refuse to endorse or justify the argument for genocide. Thanks to de-



mocratization in Turkey, today, almost every book, either pro- or anti-genocide in thesis, is published in Turkey and issues are openly discussed. This candid debate is extremely important to test and evaluate some of the arguments of those who support the recognition of genocide.

■ **When did Armenians reframe the events of 1915 as genocide? Would you shed some light on that? Isn't there any other concept to narrate these dramatic events?**

The process of defining the events of 1915 as genocide started after 1965. Before then, the 1915 events in Armenian historiography were referred to as deportation (darakrutun), catastrophe (aghd) and massacre (yeghern). The rapprochement between the Dashnak Party and the Soviet Union post-1965 was crucial. With the help of the Soviet Union, the events of 1915 were presented as genocide and the campaign was unleashed to turn the "terrible Turk" into a "genocidal Turk." Turkey was an important member of NATO and the USSR sought to push Turkey into a defensive position. Moreover, Armenians wanted a new glue for the diaspora to define themselves as Armenian. Genocide was the most effective way to define Armenian identity and keep the separate communities together. Genocide as a new discourse was chosen because it served as a compelling unifying factor among new generations who distanced themselves from the Armenian Apostolic Church as a result of secularization. In other words, the claim of genocide was turned into a church, a religious

common ground for the perpetuation of Armenian identity. It is for this reason that calling the 1915 events genocide became a matter of faith. The condition for being considered Armenian was predicated on accepting the 1915 events as genocide. Armenians embraced the concept of genocide as a saving gesture by extremely dramatizing their past and victimizing themselves. As a corollary, some states that want to bully Turkey in the international arena have turned the claims of genocide into an instrument for their foreign policy and have worked to gain some concessions from Turkey.

■ **You say that historical events were made out to be genocide. What is genocide? Is there a discipline called genocide studies?**

Yes, now there is an area of study called genocide studies. This is a newly emerging interdisciplinary field. Unfortunately, there is no such field or center that focuses on genocide studies in Turkish universities. Genocide studies are very problematic and they trouble the responsible craft of writing history. Genocide, a legal term that refers to a criminal act, was coined by Raphael Lemkin, who was of Polish origin, and was under the influence of racist and cultural values of his own time. For instance, in an article that was published in the Journal of Genocide Studies in 2005, Dominik Schaller illustrates how Lemkin used racist language for Africans in general, and for the people of Congo in particular. He used the term genocide in his first

book, "Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress," which was published in 1944 as a reflection of atrocities committed against Jews in WWII. Contrary to the claims made by some, there is no mention of Turks, Armenians or Ottomans in that book. Let's recall that in the Perincek case, Switzerland claimed that Lemkin came up with the concept of genocide because he was inspired by the 1915 events. However, Tal Buenos, who studied Lemkin very closely and worked in Lemkin's archives, demonstrated that the claim made by the Swiss government was unfounded and the government did not repeat this misinformation upon the appeal stage. In his personal correspondence and archives, Lemkin used this concept in a very broad sense and even categorized the atrocities committed by Greeks against Muslims as genocide. In some correspondence in his archives, it appears that he saw the revolutionary reforms made by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as cultural genocide. He came up with different categories and typologies for genocide, listing 41 different kinds of genocide in modern times in which the Armenian issue appears as the 39th item.

■ **How should we frame 1915 events?**

The point when I say the 1915 events are not genocide does not mean that I conveniently forget or ignore the great tragedies and casualties that occurred. Anatolian Armenians experienced great tragedies and we must

share their tragedies and say we are sorry. And these actions have already been done. With the protocols and normalization period, a hopeful process had started, but this was aborted by proud Armenian nationalists. We should try to not turn past tragedies into present-day hatred and conflict. Unfortunately, the Republic of Armenia has embraced a racist and nationalist attitude and language concerning the 1915 events, presumably in order to justify the occupation and ethnic cleansing of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. As for your question, I want to say that the 1915 events were a total massacre. There were also mutual massacres. It also means an unintended consequence of a decision for deportation made by a failed and helpless state. These tragedies should not be ethnicized, and they should be seen as collective tragedies.

■ **Where are we today? In other words, what is the current status of protocols signed between Armenia and Turkey?**

The two protocols signed on Oct. 10, 2009 had several goals such as starting diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey, recognizing the current borders and opening them for trade and establishing a commission of historians to study and discuss the 1915 events. These protocols are the Protocol for Enactment of Diplomatic Relations and the Protocol for the Progress of Bilateral Relations. If these two protocols could be realized, the détente between Armenia and Turkey would come into being. However, the Dashnak Party in Armenia and the Armenian diaspora oppose these protocols. At that time, Armenian President Serj Sargsyan visited the major diaspora countries in Lebanon, France and the United States and talked with leaders of the diaspora. He was protested almost everywhere he visited. As a result, these two protocols were sent to the Armenian constitutional court for approval. Yet, the court's opinion on Jan. 12, 2010 interpreted these protocols as being against the goodwill language of the agreements, and stated that Armenia would not give up promoting genocide discourse in the international community. The idea of Great Armenia as stated in the introduction of the Armenian constitution was emphasized as well. As this interpretation by the court was sent to the national parliament for approval, Sargsyan postponed the protocols due to pressure. As a result, Sargsyan withdrew these protocols from the national parliament last February. In 2015, the Armenian government has made some decisions with hostile intentions against Turkey. On Jan. 20, 2015, Sargsyan announced a document titled the Pan-Armenian Declaration on the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. In this document there are territorial demands and redresses from Turkey in addition to the demand of recognizing the genocide. In a nutshell, Armenia is a state that occupies 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory and has conducted a forced migration of around 1 million people in this area. In other words, Armenia is making the possibilities of normalized relations with Turkey harder through these aggressive steps. Overall, the Armenian state utilizes genocide discourse to mobilize the Armenian public with nationalist ideology against Azerbaijan to justify its territorial occupation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and to neutralize international pressures on this issue.

1915 events were a total massacre, an unintended consequence of a failed and helpless state. These tragedies are collective, should not be ethnicized

■ **Aren't there any groups in Armenia who oppose these aggressive and hostile policies of the Armenian state?**

Of course there are. The most important opposition to this recent declaration came from Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who was in office from 1991-1998. He said that these policies would weaken the chances of reconciliation with Turkey, increase poverty in Armenia and push Turkey for more pro-Azerbaijani policies. The population of Armenia is 3 million. Poverty is massive. The state is in the hands of oligarchs who are mostly dependent on Russia. There is a Russian military base in Armenia and Russians always boost fear-inducing scenarios for Armenians to keep their influence intact.

■ **What should Turkey do?**

Turkey is presently being subjected to a pre-planned attempt to provoke an emotional response that can then be magnified in the press by Armenian nationalists. First, all Turkish officials should be reading strictly from one script in response, and it should never become a football for domestic politics. The claims and charges should not be treated as being hugely significant. Responses must never be emotional or angry and nor should they threaten retaliation. Instead, they should be labeled as one sided and not taking into account the suffering of Ottoman Muslims in the Balkans and Caucasus who were subjected to a systematic program of ethnic cleansing from Serbia and Greece at the beginning of the 19th century and continuing to the Caucasus in 1858 and the Balkan Wars of 1911-12. Turkey should respond to specific countries that want official Turkish recognition of genocide against Armenians by saying that France, the U.S., Britain and the Vatican would have credibility only when they also officially acknowledge genocidal onslaughts linked to their countries in Algeria, Croatian-occupied Bosnia, Tasmania, North America, Vietnam, Central America and Iraq, respectively. Their collective failure to do so means that they lack the proper credibility to interrogate Turkey on the matter. **ISTANBUL / DAILY SABAH**

TURKS AND ARMENIANS: GHOSTS OF THE PAST AND PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE

World War I left deep scars on the lives of the people of the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus. Although it was a worldwide war that influenced the lives of hundreds of millions people, the epicenter of tragedies and conflicts was mostly in these regions that suffered the aftershocks. That is, the fault lines that the war created were felt more frequently and strongly in these regions. Millions of residences of these regions died and tens of millions of them were displaced. The stories of these tragedies spread to different parts of the world as a result of people who fled abroad. They carried these tragedies in their hearts to their new homes, while those who remained reproduced these memories every day in their stories, elegies, arts and prayers. Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks and all the other subjects of the Ottoman Empire experienced similar pains and traumas, and felt the same nostalgia and melancholy in different ways. The scars of World War I have never really healed. They have become part of the collective memories of these people.

The inability of the countries that were formed out of the former territories of the Ottoman Empire to reconcile their national histories led to the constant inflammation of revenge politics in these countries and poisoned their foreign relations with one another. Instead of contributing to the restoration of relations and formations of ties, many politicians preferred to constantly reopen past wounds and incite hostilities toward one another, mostly in order to gain legitimacy and domestic support. International polarization, such as the ideological divisions that the Cold War brought to this part of the world, together with a lack of democratic regimes and open societies, contributed to the consolidation of taboos, opportunistic uses of past traumas and mobilizations of the public in these countries against each other.

Revenge seeking and opportunistic groups made the tragedies and pain of World War I a rallying ground for their self-serving ideologies, and lobbyists made it a source of revenue for their companies. Different historical narratives prepared and taught by different countries educated generations, instilling prejudices and xenophobia. While some gained legitimacy, others gained money and self-satisfaction from these disputes, but meanwhile, ordinary people always lose the opportunities of friendship and neighborly relations. The ambitions of some constrained the freedom of others to abandon misperception, misunderstandings and mischaracterization of one another. The traumas that could bring countries together and should become lessons in order to prevent the emergence of another set of tragedies and conflicts in the region are instead used by some to feed hostilities.

While these historical problems have become undisputed sources of animosity in the region, and while they already shape and control foreign relations, important developments have taken place in Turkey over the last two de-



Kılıç Buğra Kanat *

acades, mostly as a result of the increasing opening up of public space, which opened a window of opportunity for a new era for the politics of the region.

One of the first steps that challenged the role of historical disputes to shape relations took place between Turkey and Greece. It took another major tragedy to bring these two countries together. Greece and Turkey started to improve their ties in the aftermath of the earthquakes that took place in these countries one after another in 1999. The support of Greek rescue teams for Turkish victims and the rapid assistance by Turkish aid workers for Greek victims demolished misperceptions and stereotypes that were established between the two countries during their respective formation process of their modern nation-states. In a very short period of time, people on both sides of the border started to understand that the ghosts of the past should not lead or shape foreign policy. The two countries improved their ties and social and cultural interactions dramatically increased. People realized that they were struggling with enemies that they had created in their imaginations through heavy indoctrination. Both Turks and Greeks won from the new state of relations.

Later, another major break that would challenge one of the most established misperceptions took place during Turkey's opening toward the Middle East. For decades Arabs considered Turkey an imperialist power and Turkey never forgot the "betrayal by the Arabs" of Turks in World War I. The ideological polarization in the world and the constant reproduction and remembrance of the traumas of the past kept these societies, which suffered equally during the war, apart from each other. Turkey's opening up to the Middle East, which has accelerated over the last 13 years, destroyed most of these misconceptions and stereotypes. Again, in a very short period of time, people from both

The break up of the Ottoman Empire left behind a poisoned atmosphere that should no longer influence the relationship between region's countries

side of the border realized how political borders established artificial boundaries between people. Trade and social relations improved rapidly between the countries. Turkish soap operas, even those based on the Ottoman Empire and the lives of Ottoman sultans, became some of the most watched shows in the Middle East. Tourists, students, businessmen and investors started to travel across these borders. Again, both Turks and Arabs benefitted from this new opening. These openings took place even between Serbia and Turkey, despite the tragedy in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars and the more recent instances of tragic events in Bosnia and Kosovo. The opening brought increasing social and economic interactions between the countries, which could not be even contemplated a decade or so ago.

Of course these openings and changes in relations did not cause people to forget the past or stop remembering their tragedies. Instead, they began to remember them together. They became more open to understand and recognize the other's pain. In the most part, they stopped comparing each other's pains and grievances. Instead, the concept of shared pain started to circulate around the region.

All of the improvements in relations of these countries, despite serious historical disputes, generated a win-win situation for all countries involved and the region as a whole. These openings did not take place at the expense of a different country or group of people. For instance, while restoring relations with the Arab world, Turkey did not make this restoration at the expense of Turkey's relations with Israel. Until 2009, Turkey was actually trying to mediate disputes between Israel and Syria and was facilitating indirect talks. Again, while Turkey was improving relations with Serbia it also brought benefits for the resolution of some of the disputes between Bosnia and Serbia. Both people and countries won greatly as a result of

the openings. Neither Serbian nationalism nor anti-Turkish Arab nationalism disappeared totally. There are some people in Turkey who still use the discourse of the previous decades in their approach to Turkey's neighbors. However, as these openings brought new groups of people together with constant interactions, people who can challenge misconceptions and decrease misunderstandings, these groups are becoming more marginal and less relevant in determining bilateral relations between countries.

Now, in the 100th-year anniversary of major events for both Turks and Armenians, it is time to follow this process and try something different in the relations between these two countries and people. The pattern of the last century brought no benefits for either one. The status quo of the debates on history only led to fighting by lobbyists and the estrangement of societies. The revenge-seeking groups on both sides ran the show and encouraged the majority of the public to rally around their flags. Now it is time for moderates and for those who want to have a new phase of relations between Turkey and Armenia, and Turks and Armenians, to be at least as courageous, at least as persistent and at least as powerful as the groups that hijacked their histories and relations. Instead of creating barriers and boundaries, and instead of being a foreign policy tool for third parties, history should be a bridge to bring countries in this region closer to each other.

It is important to say one more time that the statement of condolence by the then prime minister and current president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, needs to be remembered and utilized in the reconciliation of Armenians and Turks. A positive response to this statement will empower and mobilize those who are trying to change the course of events. If Turks and Armenians take these steps together, the two countries can form a strong relationship with their cultural affinity and geographical proximity. And who knows, if things go well with the help of courageous politicians and an active and dedicated civil society, the issue may become a source of inspiration in the future for other countries that suffer from similar historical antagonism. There is nothing bad about being an optimist, especially when there are so many opportunities.

* Assistant Professor of Political Science, Penn State University

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Headquarters
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THE ARMENIAN ISSUE AND THE PUBLIC FIGURE EFFECT

Ignorance of truth, selective view of history and national interest seem to have more influence on the public perception of the 1915 events rather than the views of qualified professionals due to the way U.S. has manipulated the matter to its own advantage

TAL BUENOS *

Turkey might be portrayed as a raging bull in the context of the Armenian issue, but a closer look would show that in the field of public opinion regarding the issue, it has been more like a sitting duck. It has to suffer through widely disseminated misrepresentations of Ottoman history, accusations of genocide, calls of denial and depictions of reactionary anger without being able to do much about it.

The U.S. government's ability to frame the agenda by affecting public opinion domestically and internationally without being seen as doing so, is known as soft power. As defined by American political scientist Joseph Nye, soft power is only effective when the information that reaches the public is not thought to be controlled by the government. Otherwise, it will be considered propaganda and thereby rendered ineffective.

Concerning its control of the genocide discourse, the U.S. government began this process by nurturing the Armenian national narrative at Harvard University in the 1950s and then at the University of California, Los Angeles in the 1960s before cultivating a field of genocide study that features the Armenian tragedy as the prototypical case of genocide in the 20th century. "Prototypical," so as to make the accusations against an American-perpetrated genocide in Vietnam forgotten, and "20th century," so as to make the history of Anglo-American colonialist massacres in the 19th century more forgettable. Since then, not only have particular cases of massacres against natives been suppressed, but it has been found that accusations of genocide against Turkey presents Washington and Brussels with political leverage that affects Turkey's decision-making in a way that is favorable to the West.

There had to be academic literature that describes the Armenian tragedy as genocide to lend credibility to this anti-Turkish propaganda. After the U.S. made a substantial investment in the Holocaust's memorial and education in the late 1970s, it could utilize the consensus on the Holocaust to cultivate a seemingly credible scholarship of genocide. Decades later, there are now centers of Holocaust and genocide studies placed across the U.S. and in many Western countries. As a result, the word "genocide," while used in different contexts, is now mainly associated with the Armenian case.

To create even further distance from any visible U.S.-government control, the more effective genocide accusations now

appear in popular forms. They appear in mainstream media outlets such as The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times, where writers can claim that "scholars agree" it was genocide, under headlines that themselves present the genocide label as a given. A recent development, special to this month of April being 100 years removed from the events of 1915, is the influence that public figures are having on public opinion on this issue.

It begs the question of what to do when public figures affect public opinion on history more than historians. This being a political issue of mass mobilization, public opinion has no interest in the detailed historical analysis by Ottoman historians who sit in library dungeons. This being a political issue aimed at Turkey, it seems that the Turkish government is forced to react to the influence of world-known public figures without being able to generate influence to match it.

The effectiveness of Kim Kardashian's visit to Armenia just two weeks ahead of April 24 was not about her intentions or thoughts regarding the Armenian tragedy, but about the ability through her visit to frame the agenda. The many news items about her visit presented a platform for controlling the popularly-consumed information on this issue, not only to promote the association of genocide with 1915, but also to give the semblance of distance between these public opinion maneuvers and the U.S. government. This is mainly done by referring to the U.S. government in these articles as if it is resisting the wave of public opinion on the issue.

In other words, the U.S. government is using its own influence on the media to lead the public into thinking that there is a consensus on the label of genocide, and that the only reason why President Barack Obama avoids the term, is because of Turkish political pressure. This is how the American threat of using the term "genocide" against Turkey is sustained. It would be foolish of anyone to think that the U.S. government does not set out to control public opinion as long as it can get away with it. The American coverage of the Kardashian visit was not spontaneous, but rather looked to maximize its public figure effect on public opinion.

Furthermore, when considering the framed agenda, it is no accident that Pope Francis was acting more like a public figure and less like a religious leader when he spoke on the issue. By describing the events of 1915 as "the first genocide of the 20th century," he showed less sensitivity to Christian-Muslim relations, and more commitment to a political dictation. Why else would he highlight the

Armenian case and fail to address similar relocations and massacres where Muslims were victims?

Raphael Lemkin, the man known for coining the term "genocide" in 1944 while employed by the U.S. government, later listed the Armenian case as number 39 on a list of 40 other cases that he called genocide in modern times. Why then would this one case be on the lips of Pope Francis? Did he choose to emphasize the 20th century so as to erase from memory the many massacres in history that were committed in the name of Christianity or by colonizers of Christian faith?

This same structuring of genocide history through a focus on the 20th century has been followed by many in American-based discourse, most notably Samantha Power in her 2002 work, "A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide." In this book, she begins her genocide narrative with a chapter titled "Race Murder," aimed at showing Turkish perpetrators as the prototypical mass-murderers of the 20th century. The convenience with which she absolves the U.S. from responsibility in known cases of massacres throughout the century cannot be ignored by careful readers of her book. However, what cannot be ignored by Turks in particular is that she legitimizes WWI propaganda in order to label Turks as race murderers.

Currently the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Power is a public figure thanks to the success of this book. In view of the fact that she is now enjoying the status of being a public figure, undoing her vilification of Turks could go a long way in correcting public perceptions on the Armenian issue. If the Turkish government were to demand a public apology from Power, then the ill effect of public figures could be turned around. The apology would be for unabashedly using a biased selection of questionable sources to cast a terrible shadow on the Turkish nation, especially having a negative effect on the lives of Turks in Western societies.

Through her influential bestseller, Power has had more effect on public perceptions of Ottoman history in the West than skilled Ottoman historians have. She did this without any credentials in the field of Ottoman history and with an utter reliance on the information provided by a web of Anglo-American wartime propaganda. To this day she has not shown any remorse for disgracing and implicating an entire people just so that she could frame an agenda. It is high time for her overdue apology.

*PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Utah

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SUPPLEMENT

POLITICIZING 1915 INCIDENTS WILL HARM ARMENIA DIASPORA THE MOST

MEHMET ÇELİK / ISTANBUL – DAILY SABAH

President Erdoğan lambasted the EP for 'politicizing' the 1915 incidents by labeling the loss of Armenian lives as 'genocide'. He added that the Armenians will suffer most from the move and that Turkey is ready to reconcile with Armenia.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended an inauguration ceremony for various educational, medical, and sports facilities in Turkey's western province of Kocaeli, where he harshly criticized the European Parliament's (EP) adoption of a resolution urging all member states to recognize the 1915 incidents as "genocide."

The president refuted the EP's decision, accusing them of using Armenia against Turkey, saying, "We know that their intention is not to protect the rights of Armenians."

Erdoğan said that Turkey is ready to open its archives to investigate the matter and that the incidents should be investigated by historians, not politicians. He also called on Armenia and other countries to open their archives, if they had any. Erdoğan further added that Turkey has no problems with Armenians, and the fact that 80,000 Armenians live in Turkey

is a proof of that.

"I call on the world, especially Armenians, that politicizing the matter will harm Armenians the most," Erdoğan said.

President Erdoğan also spoke on the issue of Nagorno Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan saying, "Our doors are still open to Armenia. We are ready to establish all kinds of co-operation with them, as long as they take positive steps towards the claims of so-called 'genocide' and the issue of Karabakh."

The dispute over Nagorno Karabakh is rooted in the 1990s war, which left at least 30,000 people dead as a result of attacks by Armenian separatists, who seized the territory from Azerbaijan and drove out the Azeri population. The dispute between the two countries has not yet been resolved, although a cease-fire has been established since 1994. The Karabakh regions have been internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan.

The 1915 incidents have been a source of dispute, disagreement and the reason for decades of strained relations between Turkey and Armenia. Armenia claims that 1.5 million people were deliberately killed. However, Turkey denies these claims, saying that historical facts do not reflect such an intention and that the deaths

were a result of deportations and civil strife. The 1915 events took place during World War I when a portion of the Armenian population living in the Ottoman Empire sided with the invading Russians and revolted against the empire.

The Ottoman Empire relocated Armenians in eastern Anatolia following the revolts, and there were Armenian casualties during the relocation process.

Armenia demands a formal apology and compensation, while Turkey has officially rejected Armenian allegations over the incidents, saying that although Armenians died during the relocations, many Turks also lost their lives in attacks carried out by Armenian gangs in Anatolia. Furthermore, the Turkish General Directorate of State Archives last week began to open the state archives over the 1915 incidents between Turkey and Armenia to the public via Twitter, following scores of unanswered calls by the Turkish side to open the archives.

Posted by the @devletarsiv Twitter account with the #Ermenimeselesi (Armenian issue) hashtag, the documents aim to reveal the facts over the decades-long dispute on the 100th anniversary of the incidents.

In a telegram sent by the governor of the eastern province of Bitlis to the

interior ministry dated September 18, 1914 regarding the stance to be taken by Ottoman Armenian citizens during the war, it reads: "The recent decision and suggestion by Armenian thinkers is to stay calm and bow to the state [Ottoman Empire] until the declaration of war, to change the enemy party if war is declared, to stay calm and bow to the state if our army gains ground and to arm themselves and hamper the army's route if it withdraws. This information is declared by the Muş Governorate to be from trustworthy intelligence. The Third Army Command is [also] informed."

Another published document also revealed that attacks by Armenian rebels increased in February, 1920 and 28 Islamic villages were destroyed with more than 2,000 Muslim villagers killed by Armenian rebels. A subsequent letter to the Interior Ministry on March 7, 1915 stated that 30,000 Muslim men in the eastern provinces of Kars and Ardahan were killed by Armenian rebels, and the letter also warned against some Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army refusing to fight against the enemy, making themselves captives to the enemy side deliberately in order to leak information.

Turkey's willingness to mend fences with Armenia is constantly blocked by the Armenian Diaspora, which will eventually lose out due to its intransigence and focus on punishing Turkey

Armenian artist star of Turkish pavilion at Venice Biennale

ZEYNEP ESRA KOCA / ISTANBUL – DAILY SABAH

» **TURKISH-BORN** Armenian conceptual artist Sarkis Zabunyan's work will be showcased at the 56th edition of the International Venice Biennial under the title 'Respiro', which means 'breath' in Italian.

Curated by Defne Ayas and coordinated by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSÜ), the installation of Sarkis, titled "Respiro", will be displayed at the Turkish Pavilion from May 9 to Nov. 22. The Turkish Pavilion will be at the Sale d'Armi building in biennial's main venue Arsenale. The outline of the Turkish Pavilion of the 56th International Venice Biennial was announced during a press conference at the Salon İKSÜ on Feb. 10 with the participation of artist Sarkis and curator Defne Ayas. "We will go back to the beginning of time, the first rainbow in other words, the first time when the light broke. Instead of being fixed to certain moments

in history, we will make a claim to today and ancient history at the same time," Sarkis said during the press conference. Through his project, titled "Respiro," which means "breath" in Italian, the artist will arrange for the Turkish Pavilion to be set up as a theater stage. Sarkis will put objects and visuals together with thoughts and codes and continue to examine the idea of eternal dialogue and the transformation that creates the essence of his artworks. Curator Ayas said that Sarkis is one of the rare artists who can present their stance on art and the universe. "The architectural editing, signals that are encoded to stained glasses and hidden frames will bother us at first however, we will have a chance to recover with the light," Ayas said.

The announcement, which heralded that the installation of Sarkis, who has been living in Paris since the 1960s, will represent Turkey at the 56th International Venice Biennial, caused a stir in art circles. It is impor-

tant that an important artist like Sarkis will open the permanent Turkish Pavilion in the biennial. Sarkis will also participate in the group exhibition at the Armenian Pavilion. Sarkis believes that there is progress regarding the Armenian issue. "The books that are being published and the existence of Hrant Dink, the Armenian-origin journalist, who was assassinated, are very important. Personally, I learnt so much from him," the artist said. He said he does not consider himself from the diaspora because of his devotion to his mother. "My mother lived and died as an Anatolian woman," he noted, adding he still preserves her house. He went on, "Dink said 'Diaspora is a huge village in Anatolia.' This is a beautiful image. This gives us hope. It does not mean that there will not be other attacks against us. We should be prepared for these kinds of things. We have never talked about these things among us but I think there might be fanatical people."

