

# FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

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**Abstract:** *This article deals with the development that occurred from December 2012 to the end of April 2013 on Turkey-Armenia relations, the 18 February 2013 Armenian Presidential Election and the commemoration and other activities in France, Armenia and Turkey, including President Obama's declaration on the occasion of 24<sup>th</sup> of April in the US.*

**Keywords:** *Turkey, Armenia, United States, France, Armenian Diaspora, Catholicos of Etchmiadzin and Antelias, Presidential Election in Armenia, 24<sup>th</sup> of April commemoration activities, Serge Sarkisian, Edward Nalbandian, Raffi Hovannisian, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Vincent Peillon, Ara Sarafian, Alexis Govcian*

**Öz:** *Bu makale Aralık 2012'den Nisan 2013'ün sonuna kadar Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkilerinde devam eden gelişmeler, 18 Şubat 2013'te gerçekleşen Ermenistan Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimi ve Fransa Ermenistan, Türkiye'de gerçekleşen anma etkinlikleri ile ABD Başkanı Obama'nın 24 Nisan'da olaylar hakkında yaptığı konuşmayla ilgilidir.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Türkiye, Ermenistan, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Fransa, Ermeni Diasporası, Antelias ve Eçmiatzin Apostolik Kiliseleri, Ermenistan Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçimi, 24 Nisan anma etkinlikleri, Serj Sarkisyan, Edward Nalbadian, Raffi Hovannisyan, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Vincent Peillon, Ara Sarafyan, Alexis Govcian*

ARTICLES

## I – TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS

### 1. The Genocide Issue coming to the Forefront in Armenia's Policy towards Turkey

Lack of progress on the Karabakh conflict caused non-ratification of Turkey-Armenian Protocols and therefore no implementation. By bringing the genocide allegations to the forefront, Armenia has tried to show its reaction to this situation and attempted to persuade Turkey to abandon its policy on the Karabakh conflict, or at least convince Turkey not to be insistent on this issue. For this purpose, President Sarkisian has started asking Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide allegations. Recalling that the ex-presidents of Armenia Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan were cautious not to make any open requests from Turkey regarding the genocide issue in order not to add a new problem to the essentially tense relations, this approach of Sarkisian presents a change in the policy pursued towards Turkey.

On the other hand, it can be seen that the Armenian President has not only brought the recognition of the genocide allegations forth, but has also tried to make it into one of the main issues of Armenia's foreign policy. In his speech delivered at the Armenian Haigazian University during his visit to Lebanon at the end of November 2012, Sarkisian has said "Social and economic problems are important, but the most important are vital issues - the right of Nagorno-Karabakh's people to self-determination, the recognition of the Armenian genocide by Turkey"<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, Sarkisian attaches the same importance to the Karabakh conflict as much as to the genocide allegations.

The same issue has also been expressed by Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian not so with the following statement: "The issue regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and regulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are links of the same chain"<sup>2</sup>.

### 2. Weakening of Genocide Allegations within Some Diaspora Circles and in the International Sphere

While the recognition of the "genocide" by Turkey is prioritized as part of Armenia's foreign policy, there are indications that the "genocide

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1 "President: Armenia has two Important Tasks- Karabakh Issue and Genocide Recognition", *News.am*, 27 November 2012.

2 "The International Community Must Recognize the Armenian Genocide, as to its Organizers They Must Show Repentance: The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia", *Armenpress*, 27 November 2013.

recognition” has begun to lose its importance within the Diaspora and in the academic field.

Harut Sassounian, who is the most read journalist in the US, began to argue that rather than asking for the recognition of the genocide, fulfillment of justice shall be demanded from Turkey. According to Sassounian, the “genocide” has indeed been recognized in the international sphere. However, it is not possible to obligate Turkey for this recognition. Therefore, Armenians shall now focus on fulfillment of justice<sup>3</sup>. This can only be accomplished through the returning of Armenian territories, reparations and the preservation of the Armenian cultural heritage<sup>4</sup>. Armenians should seek their rights in courts<sup>5</sup>. Until now, the dominant discourse within the Armenian Diaspora was that if Turkey recognizes the “genocide”, its consequences will be reparations, returning of the Armenian properties and even of the territories to Armenia. Now, by putting aside the recognition of genocide, which is the first step, Sassounian suggests directly making demands and to utilize courts for this purpose. Whether or not this is possible is a separate issue that requires long explanations. We should immediately note that there is almost no possibility for such a course to achieve success.

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William Schabas is the most recognized and respected among the “genocide scholars”. In his book<sup>6</sup>, he considers the 1915 events as genocide without any discussion and uttered the Armenian genocide allegations at every available opportunity, despite the fact that his own criteria - as defined in his book- to define an event as genocide are not applicable to 1915. On the other hand, he has also served as President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars financed by the Armenian Zoryan Institute. However, in an article published at the end of 2012<sup>7</sup>, he mentioned the difficulty of classifying the 1915 events as genocide due to

3 “Restauration de la Justice Plutôt que Reconnaissance; Harout Sassounian Suggère une Formulation Nouvelle”, *Radiolour*, 9 October 2012.

4 “U.S. Based Publisher Urges to Demand For Justice in Genocide Issue”, *Panarmenian.net*, 9 October 2012.

5 “Diaspora Scholar Advocates Push for justice Over Armenian Genocide”, *RFE/RL*, 8 October 2012.

6 William A. Schabas, *Genocide in International Law*, Cambridge 2000.

7 William A. Schabas, “Crimes Against Humanity as a Paradigm for International Atrocity Crimes”, *Middle East Critique*, Volume 20, Number 3, Fall 2011

the necessity of proving there was special intent and has argued that the perpetrators of this event have died, therefore it would be more correct to recognize the 1915 events as a crime against humanity.

It is also seen that the genocide thesis is losing ground in the international arena. Despite all attempts by the Armenians, no resolution has been adopted in the US Congress concerning the genocide allegations. Contrary to what happened in the previous years, the European Parliament has not made any reference to the Armenian “genocide” in its resolutions for the last six years. Again within the last six years, the parliament of only one country (Sweden) has adopted a resolution on this issue and lastly, despite all attempts in France, no law has been adopted concerning the punishment of those denying the Armenian genocide allegations.

Without doubt the genocide allegations have not disappeared and for some time, perhaps for a long time, these allegations will continue to be put forward and will be supported by a great majority of the Armenians. However, it is also clear that these allegations have begun to dissolve and obviously this situation will continue. In such a situation, Armenia’s prioritization of the subject of genocide as the core subject-matter of its foreign policy will create problems for the country itself, because Armenia will have difficulties in finding countries that will support these allegations.

### **3. President Sarkisian and Relations with Turkey**

During the period that we’ve analyzed, President Sarkisian has frequently referred to relations with Turkey in his statements.

After President Sarkisian’s speech delivered at the Beirut Armenian Haigazian University in which he brought the genocide issue to the fore as mentioned above, perhaps under the influence that the genocide issue is no longer among the EU’s issues of priority, has not referred to this issue in the European People Party’s meeting held in Yerevan on November 30 2012 to which President of the EU Commission Manuel Barroso has also attended. However, by indicating that borders with Turkey remain closed, which will be examined in more detail below, he has said that Turkey, seeking membership to the EU, is maintaining an illegal blockade against Armenia and that they are sure that the “last closed border in Europe” must be opened immediately and without preconditions<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> “The Last Closed Border of Europe Should be Opened Immediately and Without Preconditions, Serzh Sargsyan”, *Armenpress*, 30 November 2012.

President Sarkisian, as the commander-in-chief, has organized a meeting at Armenia's Ministry of Defense on January 15 2013 to which almost the entire state dignitaries have attended, and in that long speech, has given priority to Armenia's defense and the Karabakh conflict, and has also talked about relations with Turkey, the Middle East, Diaspora, Syrian Armenians, Russia and NATO.

By taking its importance into consideration, we are providing the part that concerns Turkey in Sarkisian's speech below<sup>9</sup>.

*Speaking about Azerbaijan we shouldn't forget that there is a country in the region which supports unequivocally Baku's anti-Armenian propaganda. The Turkish-Azeri tandem formed under the "One nation, two states" slogan, for over twenty years through the blockade, deepening of the lines of division and rejection of cooperation has been trying to compel Armenia to make unilateral concessions. They have failed and they will fail again.*

*As a peace-loving, progressive and farseeing nation, we realize the importance of the establishment in the region of the atmosphere of mutual trust to be able to coexist peacefully with our neighbors and develop naturally. With this very comprehension, we initiated the process of normalization with Turkey. Everyone is aware now how it ended and how Turkey withdrew from the assumed obligations, persisting in keeping the last closed border in Europe tightly sealed.*

*Tension in Turkey is building up. The policy of "zero problems" with the neighbors yielded zero results. It is happening because Turkey is trying to solve all problems with the neighbors at the expense of the neighbors. Today, Turkey is a rapidly developing country which is making impressive progress; however that progression will be deficient and may be dramatically stalled if the Turkish authorities do not seriously review their attitude towards the history of their state and their people. That progression is seriously endangered even now, since Turkey is repeating the same mistakes it made in the past.*

*Recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide is Turkey's duty before the victims of the Genocide, those who survived and their descendants, before the entire human kind but first of all, it is a duty before its own people. Today, the people of Turkey albeit slowly but*

<sup>9</sup> "President Serzh Sargsyan Held a Meeting in the Extended Format at the RA Ministry of Defense", Press Release, 15 January 2013, <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2013/01/15/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-participated-at-the-meeting-Ministry-of-Defense/>

*have started to question the bogus version circulated by the Turkish authorities for decades, while the most progressive and courageous segment of the Turkish society is speaking out loud about the Armenian Genocide.*

*For the Republic of Armenia, the recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide is not just a matter of justice and retribution or a moral debt to be paid to our ancestors: it also has a security dimension. I trust without Turkey's sincere repentance and elimination of the repercussions of the Genocide, Armenia's safe existence in the region is endangered.*

Let us try to analyze Serge Sarkisian's statements.

It is true that Turkey and Azerbaijan have closed their borders with Armenia and have left this country outside of regional cooperation (i.e. the route of the gas and oil pipelines, the construction of new railroads etc. and the construction of new transit routes in the future) between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey in the South Caucasus. The reason for Azerbaijan acting in this manner is Armenia's occupation of 20% of Azerbaijan and causing approximately one million Azerbaijanis to become refugees by taking advantage of the confusion created by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and of the situation where Azerbaijan failed to fully maintain its national unity. On the other hand, Turkey is complainant of Armenia attempting to indirectly reignite the issues that were settled with the treaties of Moscow and Kars in 1921 and with the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 and of bringing forth new demands such as the recognition of the "genocide". Moreover, Turkey strongly supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan with which it has close relations. In short, both Turkey and Azerbaijan have justifications for closing their borders with Armenia and not entering any regional cooperation with this country.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan's application of peaceful methods such as closing the border or bereavement of Armenia from regional cooperation, rather than using force, are all in Armenia's benefit.

Secondly, we must note that it is not correct that the process of normalizing relations with Turkey did not begin by Armenian initiatives. This process has begun with President Gül's congratulatory message sent on 21 March 2008 to Serge Sarkisian after he was elected as President<sup>10</sup>. Some expressions in this message, not generally found in usual congratulatory messages, have clearly showed that Turkey wishes the normalization of relations between

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10 For the full text of the statement see: Ermeni Araştırmaları, No. 29, pp. 7-8.

the two countries. On this matter, President Gül has said the following: “*I hope your new position will permit the creation of the necessary environment for normalizing relations between the Turkish and Armenian peoples, who have proven over centuries they can live together in peace and concord. I sincerely wish that an atmosphere based on stability, reciprocal trust and cooperation can be established that will contribute to regional peace and prosperity*”. It is after this message that negotiations between the two countries have gained momentum and at the end, on 10 October 2012, the Protocols have been signed in Zurich.

In his speech, Sarkisian expressed that Turkey withdrew from its obligations. With this he must have meant that the Turkish Grand National Assembly has not yet ratified the Protocols. It is noteworthy to shortly dwell upon this problem of ratification that has been quite abused by the Armenians. According to international rules, for an agreement to enter into force, the following stages must be passed. First of all when negotiations end, agreement text is initialed by those conducting the negotiations. Secondly, the agreement text would be signed by the executive power (Governments). Third of all, this text must be ratified by the Assemblies (Parliaments) of the concerning countries. Only when this ratification process comes to an end obligations -in other words, the obligation to conform to the provisions of the agreement- arise. Since the Protocols have neither been ratified by Armenia’s Parliament nor of Turkey’s, at the moment there is no obligation that must be fulfilled.

Turkey sees the normalization of relations with Armenia as “a part of the perspective of providing the region with a complete and comprehensive normalization” and links the normalization process to “concrete steps being taken in the Caucasus towards comprehensive peace”<sup>11</sup>. Although what these concrete steps were not determined, it could be understood that the evacuation of some of the “rayons” surrounding Karabakh and currently under Armenian occupation will be considered as a sufficient step. On the other hand, Armenia regards normalization of relations with Turkey as a problem existing only between the two countries and does not consider this issue to be related to peace being obtained in the South Caucasus.

Armenian President describes the Turkey-Armenia border as the “last closed border in Europe tightly sealed”. This description, used frequently within the Diaspora press, is not correct. Only in that region apart from the Turkey-Armenia border, the Armenia-Azerbaijan border is entirely shut, the

11 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *2013 Yılına Girerken Dış Politikamız*, (The booklet prepared for the Foreign Ministry’s 2013 Financial Year Budget Bill to be Presented to the Turkish Grand National Assembly), p.79



Georgia-Russia border is partially closed and the Azerbaijan-Iran border is still (as of April 2013) closed.

In his speech, Serge Sarkisian refers to Turkey as a country that is rapidly developing and is making impressive progress. However, he makes unclear statements that rather reflects his obsession with genocide such as that if Turkey “do not seriously review its attitude towards the history of their state and their people” this development can be stalled and that its progression is seriously endangered even now, since Turkey is repeating the same mistakes it made in the past. There is no relationship between Turkey not recognizing the genocide allegations and its development. The most striking evidence of this is that Turkey has developed rapidly the most in the last ten years and just as before, has continued rejecting the genocide allegations.

Another point that is unclear is his statement that Turkey’s recognition of the Armenian “genocide” is its duty before its own people. The Turkish nation has become quite susceptible to the genocide accusations that are constantly brought forth by various circles and is able to display strong reactions to those trying to impose these allegations. In Turkey, where democratic conditions are dominant, it does not seem very likely for a government that would embrace the genocide thesis to win the election or to even remain in power.

In this situation, Sarkisian’s statement that “today, the people of Turkey - albeit slowly- have begun to question the bogus version circulated by the Turkish authorities for decades, while the most progressive and courageous segment of the Turkish society is speaking out loud about the Armenian genocide” is quite exaggerated. Currently, two groups in Turkey support the Armenian genocide allegations. The first of these are some former leftist and newly liberal intellectuals. When observing what is written by this group, it could be seen that since the view that there was no Armenian genocide is defended by “nationalist” circles, the Armenian genocide thesis is utilized as an instrument for the struggle carried out against these nationalist circles. In other words, it is difficult to say that a great majority of the “liberal intellectuals” are actually concerned with the Armenian genocide issue except for this struggle. In fact, it could be seen that some of the liberals try not to use the word “genocide” by taking into consideration the reactions this word creates within public opinion. The second group that supports the Armenian allegations exists within the pro-Kurdish BDP Party. In particular, Ahmet Türk mentions this issue from time to time and apologizes to the Armenians for what the Kurds did in the past. It could also be seen here that rather than entirely embracing Armenian views, they try to utilize the Armenian question in their struggle carried out against the Turkish



Government's unitary Turkish state policy. It is possible that if the efforts towards the settlement of the Kurdish question reach a positive outcome and Turkey obtains internal peace, the support given by the Kurds to Armenian views will disappear or will at least very much weaken.

The weakest aspect of the genocide allegations, in terms of influencing public opinion, is that the concerning events had taken place approximately a century ago. From that date until the present, political order in the region has changed three times, after the First World War, Second World War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Attempting to revitalize the Armenian question after a century, which was settled after the First World War and which threatens the peace in the region, as with the Karabakh conflict, is not an approach that is generally accepted. Therefore, the support given to the Armenian genocide allegations in Europe and in the US generally carries a "moral" aspect. In other words, it is the expression of sympathy felt towards the Armenians who have been removed from the territories they lived on by being relocated and apart from suffering many losses, have also spread to many countries. However, both the Armenian Government and the Diaspora have expectations much beyond "sympathy". These entail Turkey paying compensation for the relocation and also returning the Armenian properties being seized and giving some territory to Armenia. Being able to receive support for these claims is only possible with accepting that the Armenian question is not historical, but also has a "contemporary" significance. Therefore, it has begun to be conveyed recently that the recognition of the Armenian "genocide" also has a security dimension to it. Sarkisian has expressed this point by saying "I trust without Turkey's sincere repentance and elimination of the repercussions of the genocide (compensation, returning of properties and perhaps giving territory), Armenia's safe existence in the region is endangered".

*While the recognition of the genocide allegations was in no way mentioned in the Protocols, the parties had recognized the existing border, had established the grounds for extensive cooperation between them and an organization had even been set up that would provide this.*

However, there is no connection between the recognition of the genocide allegations and Armenia's safety. The settlement of problems with Armenia will provide security even without the recognition of the genocide allegations. By signing the Protocols, Armenia has already accepted this. While the recognition of the genocide allegations was in no way mentioned in the Protocols, the parties had recognized the existing border, had established the grounds for extensive cooperation between them and an

organization had even been set up that would provide this. But, when it was understood that the Protocols cannot be implemented independently from the Karabakh conflict, Armenia has conveyed the view that if the genocide allegations are not recognized, Armenia's safety will be in danger. Presumably what is expected from this is for some countries and the US in particular to put pressure on Turkey to make some gestures in order to eliminate Armenia's security concerns like for instance, Turkey to open its border without linking it to the Karabakh issue.

In conclusion, the Armenian President's speech of 15 January 2013, which we mentioned and tried to analyze above, does not help in the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations due to the extreme and negative views it entails. In fact, insisting on these points can cause relations to become tense even more.

Following the speech mentioned above, the Armenian President has also made statements that refer to Armenia's relations with Turkey. These are shortly addressed below.

By delivering a long interview on 20 January 2013 to the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)<sup>12</sup>, Sarkisian has addressed many issues including the Presidential election nearing by, the economy, migration from Armenia to foreign countries, and Karabakh and in the meantime, has also mentioned Turkey in connection to the genocide allegations. The important parts of Sarkisian's response to the question that the big plans for the centennial of the Armenian "genocide" is compared to a tsunami within the Turkish media, the Turks are in for hard times and is such a tsunami really expected, are provided below:

*I have no doubts that the Turks are really in for hard times, because having no desire to face up to history and at the same time showing European ambitions (becoming a member of the EU) cannot be combined easily. If the Turks have the courage and recognize the Armenian genocide as soon as possible, I think our people could have some understanding toward the people of today's Turkey. But as long as the Turks refuse to admit the genocide, moreover continue to deny it, the Armenian people will always bear in mind and constantly consider this fact in its actions. It's not only that we must respect the memory of the victims. The thing is first of all that by admitting the genocide, future genocides are prevented, and also a possibility is created for eliminating the consequences of this genocide. The elimination of the consequences of genocide is not a matter of one day, a year or even 10 or 20 years.*

12 "Interview: Sarkisian On Upcoming Vote, Turkish Relations, Nagorno-Karabakh", RFE/RL, 20 January 2013.

In connection to the recognition of the genocide allegations by Turkey, Sarkisian has also said the Turks, indeed, have a complex and don't want to face up to history; they have a complex because of their fraternity with the Azerbaijanis, but their fraternity with Azerbaijan is an obstacle for them.

Regarding the tsunami, he has said,

*I don't think it is appropriate to compare the genocide to a tsunami. I don't think that the 100th anniversary is a watershed and I don't think that we are in a 100-meter race, covering a distance of one meter a year, and that upon reaching the 100th meter we will stand or expect any big victory. This is a landmark and we, of course, will reach this landmark. The state of Armenia and the pan-Armenian organizations worldwide will naturally become more active in connection with this anniversary. But to say that we are going to make a storm in the world...it isn't our goal. Our goal is for the Turks to admit the Armenian genocide. I am convinced it will happen. But the sooner it happens, the better, because denying the genocide means continuing to commit genocide.*

In a statement issued in the city of Vanadzor during his presidential election campaign<sup>13</sup>, again by referring to the genocide issue, Sarkisian has put forth that Turkey cannot change the process of international recognition of the genocide and condemnation of the world, while in another statement<sup>14</sup> has expressed that he does not expect Turkey to recognize the Armenian “genocide” before the 100th anniversary and has indicated that as long as Turkey continues the policy of denial, they cannot say that there is no danger on the part of Turkey.

During his statements, the Armenian President has also made a mention of the Protocols saying that Yerevan will reject protocols signed with Turkey if Ankara continues protracting ratification of the documents and that in this situation new talks and preconditions are required if Ankara expresses willingness to conclude a new agreement<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, in terms of the ratification of the Protocols, Sarkisian has said that Armenia will not take any initiative on the development of Turkey-Armenia relations in the near future<sup>16</sup>.

13 “Blackmailing Armenia Will Not Work – President”, *News.am*, 30 January 2013.

14 “Serzh Sargysyan: Turkey Will Once Recognize the Armenian Genocide”, *Radiolur*, 31 January 2013

15 “Yerevan May Reject Protocols Signed With Turkey – Armenian President”, *News.am*, 16 February 2013.

16 “Armenia Will Not Take Any Initiative on the Development of Armenian-Turkish Relations in Near Future”, *Armenpress*, 21 January 2013.

Explanations must be provided on some of Serge Sarkisian's views.

The first of these is his statement that Turkey's refusal of the genocide allegations does not combine with its desire to become an EU member or in more simple words, Turkey cannot become a member of the EU unless it recognizes the "genocide". The recognition of any genocide does not exist within the Copenhagen criteria which must be fulfilled in order to become an EU member. On the other hand, genocide has not been brought to the agenda during the negotiations held until now with EU officials regarding membership. Although a resolution of the European Parliament in 1987 had indicated that Turkey's non-recognition of the Armenian genocide could form an obstacle to Turkey's EU membership and there was a reference to this issue in some resolutions of the Parliament from 2000 to 2006, these resolutions are not mandatory, but rather display the Parliament's tendency. Therefore, expecting Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide allegations with the hope of becoming a member of the EU is too much optimism. Moreover, it is difficult to say that the current condition of the EU makes membership to this organization desirable.

The second point is the belief that the recognition of the Armenian "genocide" will prevent other genocides from taking place in the future. This view, brought forth for many years, has a more demagogic value to it, because despite the Holocaust was recognized and strongly condemned by almost all countries in the world, genocides have occurred in Rwanda and Bosnia. Rather than through the recognition and condemnation of past genocides, the prevention of future genocides is possible through democracy, respect to human rights and individuals being educated in the area of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Sarkisian's statement that does not give much hope for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the relocation also requires explanation. With the influence of some Turkish writers, there truly is an expectation, especially within the Diaspora, that Turkey is scared of the Armenian activities to be held for 2015 and under this effect, could recognize the Armenian genocide allegations. However, for most of Turkish public opinion, 2015 does not evoke anything else besides the Dardanelles victory.

In Armenia, the coordination of the commemoration activities for the relocation's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary has been given to a committee personally chaired by Serge Sarkisian. Despite a period of two years remaining, what kinds of activities this committee will organize is uncertain. The general conviction is that activities similar to those organized each year but more widespread and greater in numbers will be performed. President Sarkisian's

statement regarding this issue that “the State of Armenia and Armenian organizations worldwide will naturally become more active in connection with this anniversary, but to say that we are going to make a storm in the world...it isn’t our goal” confirms this conviction.

During the period being examined, Foreign Minister Nalbandian has also made some statements regarding Turkey-Armenia relations. However, rather than the genocide issue, Nalbandian has dwelled upon the Protocols and has repeated the desire for Armenia to normalize relations with Turkey without any preconditions (in other words, without being linked to the Karabakh conflict) and has also argued that since Turkey did not ratify the Protocols, international law is functioning contrary to the rule of “*pacta sunt servanda*” (agreements must be respected)<sup>17</sup>.

A news item in the Zhoghovurd newspaper that Armenian-Turkish negotiations have resumed for quite a long time and are being held secretly with Switzerland’s mediation has been disclaimed at the end of November 2012 by the Spokesperson of the Armenian Foreign Ministry<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, press news that Turkey has proposed to Armenia a transportation project that would link Europe and Asia together if a development takes place on the Karabakh conflict has also been denied by the Armenia Foreign Ministry by indicating that Armenia is not conducting negotiations with Turkey in any format<sup>19</sup>.

Armenia’s stance on Turkey assisting in the resolution of the Karabakh conflict is also negative. Regarding this issue, Foreign Minister Nalbandian has said that Turkey cannot assume the role of a mediator in the Karabakh conflict settlement and it should not get involved in the process if it seeks to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict<sup>20</sup>.

The views of the Armenian President and Foreign Minister mentioned above explain the essence of Armenia’s policy towards Turkey in the upcoming period. In order for them to be remembered better, we are providing them below in short summaries. We have separated these under two headings as the genocide allegations and other issues.

17 “Turkey Rejects Key Precept in International Relations – Armenian FM”, *News.am.*, 27 February 2013.

18 “Armenian, Turkey in No Secret Talks – MFA Says”, *Tert-am.*, 28 November 2012.

19 “MFA: Yerevan Not Holding Talks With Ankara”, *Lurer.com*, 25 February 2013.

20 “FM: Turkey Shouldn’t Get Involved in Karabakh Settlement”, *PanArmenian.Net*, 27 February 2013.

## A. Views Concerning the Genocide Allegations

- 1 Turkey's recognition of the genocide allegations is the most important and prioritized issue of Armenia's foreign policy.
- 2 If Turkey recognizes the genocide allegations, the Armenian nation will show understanding towards the Turkish nation. Or else, it will always take genocide into consideration in all its actions.
- 3 Recognition of the "genocide" is Turkey's duty. A segment of the Turkish nation has started believing in the "genocide".
- 4 Turkey is a rapidly developing country. However, that progression can be stalled if Turkey does not review its attitude towards history (if it does not recognize the genocide allegations).
- 5 As long as Turkey does not recognize the "genocide" and eliminate the "consequences of the genocide", Armenia's safety is endangered.
- 6 The recognition of the "genocide" creates the opportunity for its consequences (compensation, territorial claims and returning of properties) to be eliminated.
- 7 Turkey's recognition of the "genocide" cannot be combined with its desire to become an EU member.
- 8 The recognition of the Armenian "genocide" will prevent other genocides from taking place in the future.
- 9 The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1915 is not the point where the struggle ends. Attempts for Turkey to recognize the genocide allegations will continue from then on.
- 10 The reasons for Turkey not wanting to recognize the "genocide" are it having no desire to face up to history and its fraternity with Azerbaijan.
- 11 Turkey will not be able to change the process of the genocide allegations being internationally recognized and condemned.

## B. Other Issues

- 1 By closing their borders and rejecting cooperation, Turkey and Azerbaijan compel Armenia to make unilateral concessions.

- 2 Armenia has initiated the normalization process with Turkey. But, this process has ended due to Turkey not fulfilling its obligations.
- 3 As long as Ankara continues protracting ratification of the Protocols, Armenia can withdraw its signature. New talks are required from now on for the Protocols which will entail new preconditions.
- 4 By not ratifying the Protocols, Turkey has acted against international law's rule of "pacta sunt servanda" (agreements must be respected).
- 5 Armenia is not conducting any (secret) negotiations with Turkey.
- 6 Armenia will not take any initiative on the development of Turkey-Armenia relations in the near future.
- 7 Turkey cannot assume the role of a mediator in the Karabakh conflict settlement and it should not get involved in the process of resolution of the conflict.

#### 4. Turkey's Stance and Its Proposals

Turkey has not responded to President Sarkisian's statements explained above. This way, it has prevented Sarkisian from gaining an advantage during the election period through demagogic issues being discussed.

On the other hand, Turkey has tended towards resolving the problems that Armenia created with its neighbors not within a bilateral framework, but as a whole with the participation of all concerning countries and through the help of the benefits which will be created by economic cooperation that would be established between them. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, in a speech delivered in December 2012 in a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, has said that the BSCE is making efforts to achieve peace, stability and welfare in the region through enhancement of economic relations and that the more economic relations among member states are strengthened, the easier it will be to solve the frozen conflicts in the region. Davutoğlu has also expressed that they want the UN and the OSCE to be more active for Armenia's withdrawal from the occupied Azerbaijani territories<sup>21</sup>.

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21 "Ahmet Davutoğlu: We Want the UN and OSCE to be More Active So That Armenia Withdraws from the Occupied Azerbaijan, Territories", *APA*, 15 December 2012.



The idea of resolving the conflicts by strengthening economic relations has turned into a concrete proposal in Turkey's Integrated Transportation Corridors Project<sup>22</sup>. Before everything else, this project will be implemented in a time of peace. Within this framework, Armenia must evacuate the 7 Azerbaijani rayons (districts) surrounding Karabakh. After this, Turkey-Armenia and Azerbaijan-Turkey relations will turn back to normal. In other words, diplomatic relations will be established and the borders will be opened.

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Concerning the project itself, Turkey, Azerbaijan and the Federation of Russia will be connected to each other through the unused railways and new railways to be constructed, while at the same time a highway will also be constructed between these countries. New logistical centers and residential areas are also to be built along these routes. Turkey envisages to link regional countries to Europe and Asia. A transportation line between London and Beijing will soon be possible with the conclusion of the Marmararay Project and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad.

Turkey has presented this project to the Minsk Group in Vienna on 8 November 2012 and has received positive reactions.

Turkey has also provided information to Azerbaijan on this project and has emphasized that the project will be implemented after Armenia moves towards peace.

It is understood that the project has also been conveyed to Armenia through the Minsk Group but has not yet received any official response. Armenia still attempts to achieve the North-South line (Russia-Georgia-Armenia-Iran-the Persian Gulf line) in the area of transportation. However, this is not an obstacle to the construction of the East-West line going to Europe.

On the other hand, Armenia has always accepted that the seven rayons surrounding Karabakh belong to Azerbaijan and has indicated that it has

22 For information on this project see: "Turkey Eyes Karabakh Step from Armenia to Open Ways", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 23 February 2013.

occupied these regions for Karabakh's security. Therefore, its withdrawal from these regions should not, in principle, create any problems.

It has not been indicated in the project what kind of status is foreseen for the Karabakh region. Most likely it is planned for the future of this region to be addressed at a later date following the establishment of peace. In essence, the Minsk Group's suggestion is also in this direction.

## 5. The Joint Statement of the Armenian Archbishops

Within the Gregorian sect to which a great majority of the Armenians belong, the title Catholicos is given to the highest spiritual leader holding the religious post. This title corresponds to the Pope among the Catholics.

The Gregorian Armenians have two Catholicos. The first is residing in Etchmiadzin near Yerevan. The other in Antelias near Beirut.

Both in the area of protocol and religious rank, Etchmiadzin has a priority. However, Antelias does not depend on Etchmiadzin in administrative matters. In reality, there is competition between these two churches in sharing the congregation. Furthermore, while Etchmiadzin gives support to the Armenian Government's policies, Antelias, which is a Diaspora church, is more under the influence of the Dashnaks.

These two churches, whose coming together and working together is not generally seen, surprisingly issued a joint statement on the occasion of April 24 in order to express demands to Turkey to return the confiscated churches and church properties<sup>23</sup>.

After shortly summarizing the 1915 events from the Armenian point of view, the statement expresses that the Armenians living under the Ottoman Empire have lost all their personal belongings along with churches, monasteries, holy places, religious and educational centers, cultural and religious artifacts of great value, cross-stones, manuscripts and holy pictures and that Turkey appropriated all of these belongings under the pretext that they were "abandoned properties". By also indicating that 98 years after the Armenian genocide, the current Turkish authorities, the legal successors of the Ottomans, not only deny the genocide, but continue to hold on to the confiscated church properties and religious treasures, they put forward the following requests:

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<sup>23</sup> Press Release, *Catholicosate of Cilicia*, 24 April 2013.

1. That Turkey recognizes the Armenian Genocide.
2. That Turkey compensates Armenians for all their losses in human lives and human rights.
3. That Turkey returns the Armenian churches, monasteries, church properties and all spiritual and cultural monuments to their rightful and legal owners, i.e. the Armenian people.

In the statement, it is expressed that they are grateful to all those people and governments who have assisted the deported survivors of the genocide and to all those governments, which have condemned the inhuman acts of the Ottoman Turks and have formally recognized the Armenian genocide.

The statement ends by indicating that on the threshold of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian genocide, they shall pursue together the rightful and legal demands for justice for the Armenian people.

As we mentioned above it has been observed that recently a movement has emerged especially among some Diaspora circles that the genocide is sufficiently recognized in the international area and therefore, the time has come to demand the elimination of the consequences of genocide (returning of properties and paying compensation etc.) from Turkey. We see above, without going into details, that even President Sarkisian had also referred to the elimination of the consequences of genocide.

The significance of the joint statement of the two Catholicos in this context is that for the first time, detailed and concrete demands were made from Turkey. This way, a new problem has been added to the already loaded agenda of the problems existing between Turkey and Armenia.

## **II – THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

### **1. Presidential Candidates and the Results of the Election**

The Presidential Election in Armenia was held on 18 February 2013 and as anticipated by everyone, Serge Sarkisian had easily won the election.

The reason for this is Sarkisian not being faced with any strong rival. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first President of Armenia, who had run as candidate again in the 2008 election but had not won, had not participated in the election this time by expressing that he is old. However, it is quite obvious that Petrosyan, who is 68 years old and seems healthy, has another reason and has most likely

decided not to participate in the election after his party received only 7.8% of the votes in the parliamentary election held in May 2012.

Sarkisian's second serious rival could have been Prosperous Armenia Party leader Gagik Tsarukyan. Having participated in the coalition government after 2008 for a long time, having achieved great success by increasing its votes in the May 2012 Parliamentary Election and also gaining great sympathy through his gestures, Gagis Tsarukyan, although conveying the belief that he wants to be candidate, has at the end not stood as one. A meeting held with Sarkisian could have played a role in this situation. There are rumors that Sarkisian warned him on running as candidate because of some problems of his commercial affairs. Tsarukyan being an "oligarch"<sup>24</sup> creates the conviction that these rumors could be true.

The Dashnaks, who have participated in almost all elections, have also not presented a candidate this time since their efforts to form a unified political agenda and to have a joint oppositional candidate with other parties did not deliver results. Dashnaks have urged their supporters to go to the polls, not to vote for the ruling party candidate, but to vote according to their conscience or to make their ballot invalid<sup>25</sup>. However, it could be understood that this party, whose votes had decreased by more than a half (5.6% in the previous parliamentary election) after withdrawing from the government coalition by opposing the Turkey-Armenia Protocols, has not nominated a candidate in order not to be completely defeated in the presidential election.

The percentage of the votes the candidates have received in the election that was held without any incidents, but in which many irregularities had taken place, are provided below<sup>26</sup>:

- 1 President and Head of the Republican Party of Armenia Serge Sarkisian 58.64%
- 2 Head of the Heritage Party Raffi Hovannisian 36.75%
- 3 Former Prime Minister Hrant Bagratyan 2.15%
- 4 Head of the National Self-Determination Party Paruyr Hayrikyan 1.23%

24 Oligarch: Some kind of a businessman who emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the countries forming this Union, who became rich very fast, who gained his wealth partially through illegal methods and who uses this wealth for also political purposes.

25 "ARF Says Vote no for Sarkisian", *Asbarez*, 15 February 2013.

26 "Serj Sargsyan Wins Second Term as President of Armenia", *Panarmenian.net.*, 19 February 2013.

- 5 Political scientist and Director of Hay Radio Andreas Gukasyan 0.57%
- 6 Writer Vardan Sedrakyan 0.42%
- 7 Former Foreign Minister of the Karabakh Region Arman Melikyan 0.24%

As could be seen, five of the seven candidates (Bagratyan, Hayrikyan, Gukasyan, Sedrakyan and Melikyan) have received very few votes. The person among them known to some degree by the public is Hrant Bagratyan, having served as Prime Minister from 1991-1993. However, due to lacking the necessary financial support and organization required for an election, his votes have been few. For not being known or known very little, the others have also not received the necessary support. It must be for this reason that they have resorted to unaccustomed methods in order to draw attention. Andreas Gukasyan has staged a hunger strike, Paruyr Hayrikyan has faced an armed attack, while another candidate, Vardan Sedrakyan, has been arrested for encouraging this attack<sup>27</sup>.

The candidate drawing the most attention with his conducts and statements has been Head of the Heritage Party Raffi Hovannisian. Hovannisian, being an American Armenian, is Armenia's first Foreign Minister. He has drawn attention with his radical approaches, harsh statements and particularly his hostility towards Turkey while serving as minister. At a time when the Karabakh conflict, which gradually kept increasing and turning into a war, was the most intense, acting in a manner that provokes Turkey rather than trying to prevent this county from totally taking Azerbaijan's side as much as possible has been met with Levon Ter-Petrosyan's reaction and Hovannisian has been removed from duty. After this, Hovannisian has wanted to continue his political life, but has experienced the difficulties of not being an Armenian citizen. Years after he obtained Armenian citizenship during Robert Kocharyan's presidency and then by forming the Heritage Party, has been able to receive 5.76% of the votes in the 2012 election. It is obvious that a leader of a party, who is not even able to receive 6% of the votes during the parliamentary election, has no chance in the presidential election. In this situation, as mentioned above, as a result of Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Gagik Tsarukyan not participating in the election and the Dashnak Party not nominating any candidate, Raffi Hovannisian has received almost all the votes of those opposing Serge Sarkisian.

Concerning why Sarkisian has won the election, it could be seen that just as

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<sup>27</sup> "New Charges Brought Against Former Presidential Candidate In Armenia", *RAPSI (Russian Legal Information Agency)*, 17 April 2013.

in many countries forming the Soviet Union, the President in power being re-elected as long as he does not encounter great criticisms or opposition has almost become a tradition. This must arise from the fact that the politicians during the Soviet Union held their position for many years. However, apart from this, we must also mention the fact that since the independence of Armenia, Serge Sarkisian has occupied the highest ranks concerning the country's internal and external security, has played a significant role in the Karabakh conflict, and has served as Prime Minister shortly before becoming President; in short, has become a person truly having influence in Armenia within the last twenty years. In the first period of his Presidency (2008-2013), Sarkisian has not had any great successes or had made great mistakes. Although a decline in economic terms has occurred in Armenia, this is a result of the world economic crisis and it seems that Armenia has overcome it. In the area of foreign policy, although Sarkisian, just as his predecessor Kocharyan, has maintained close relations with the Minsk Group Co-Chairs in the Karabakh conflict, he was not able to reconcile with Azerbaijan. On the other hand, he has sought the opening of the borders by establishing normal relations with Turkey and has concluded the Protocols for this purpose despite the Diaspora's opposition, but when Turkey linked the implementation of the Protocols to a positive development taking place in the Karabakh conflict, he had opposed Turkey also. Furthermore, it could be seen that Sarkisian has further improved the already close relations with the Russian Federation, he has extended the duration of the Russian military base in Gyumri to 2044, while on the other hand has attached importance to relations with the European Union and has reached the point of signing an Association Agreement.

## **2. Foreign Policy Issues during the Election Campaign**

As a result of Armenia attempting to occupy the Karabakh region before gaining its independence and entering into a non-declared war with Azerbaijan after its independence, not being able to normalize relations with Turkey due to the genocide allegations and several claims like explicit or implicit territorial claims that come from history and are not valid today and not being able to reach an agreement with its two neighbors in the past twenty years, security and issues of foreign policy have become very important for Armenia today. Despite this, foreign policy issues have almost never been addressed in the presidential election campaigns. The main reason for this is all parties and presidential candidates to a great degree carry the same view regarding foreign policy. This view is that Karabakh is entirely Armenia's territory, or it should be an independent state or be annexed to Armenia. On the other hand, the view that Turkey should recognize the genocide

allegations and should pay compensation for this event, the Armenian properties should be returned and some part of territory should be given to Armenia is generally accepted.

Due to this policy, issues exist such as the border with Turkey that would connect Armenia to Europe remaining closed, the borders with Azerbaijan that would connect it to the Caspian Sea also remaining closed, and Armenia being left outside of oil and natural gas lines and railways and highways projects despite being a country in the region. This situation being to Armenia's disadvantage in economic terms and the harms to Armenia increasing in the following years have almost never been discussed despite their importance. It is inevitable for this situation that could be considered as irrational to create serious problems for Armenia in the future.

President Sarkisian's greatest rival in the election Raffi Hovannisian's views on this matter, apart from those mentioned above, could be summarized as Armenia should officially recognize the Karabakh State and moreover, the Protocols being signed with Turkey in 2009 should be rejected.

### **3. Irregularities and Frauds in the Elections**

The irregularities and frauds taking place in elections in Armenia since gaining its independence is a matter that has been determined by independent international observers. Yet, none of the elections being declared as invalid could be explained by indicating that the irregularities and frauds are not at a level that could change the results of elections. This situation has been criticized by the European Union, member states and the United States and on various occasions, hopes for elections in Armenia to be duly held have been conveyed. Under the influence of these, President Sarkisian has stated many times that utmost attention will be paid during the presidential election for these kinds of incidents not to occur. However, the situation in the current election has also not changed.

Meanwhile, we should note that the irregularities and frauds in the elections can only be to the benefit of the candidate supported by the Government, because all processes concerning the casting of votes is under the inspection of official authorities; in other words, in principle, candidates of opposition cannot benefit from these frauds.



The main irregularities and frauds seen in the presidential election are the following:

- a. Armenian citizens not living in Armenia being included in the voter list

As known, numerous Armenian citizens live and work in foreign countries, particularly in Russia. It is understood that about 1.260.000, a significant portion of them, have not erased their records in Armenia<sup>28</sup>. According to press news, 500.000 to 700.000<sup>29</sup> Armenians' names are found in the voters lists and votes are casted for these individuals also. This takes place with either some individuals, after casting their own votes, casting votes for these people also (multiple vote) or filling the ballot boxes with the same number or fewer number of votes of these individuals (ballot stuffing).

- b. Some individuals casting votes in exchange for money

It seems that this method is used more in rural areas. Some people sell their votes for 1000 Drams (18 Euros)<sup>30</sup>.

- c. Officials participating in the election campaign and governmental sources being utilized for election campaigns

According to press news, some officials have actively participated in Serge Sarkisian's campaign. However, in order for it not to be illegal, they have temporarily gone on leave. Within this framework, it has been published in the press that nine of the ten deputies and many mayors have left their office during the election, but they have continued to work for Sarkisian to be elected<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, some civil servants and students have also participated in the demonstrations organized for Sarkisian<sup>32</sup>.

Although these irregularities and frauds in the election in Armenia have been conveyed in the press, no definite information has been provided concerning the proportion of these. This situation makes proving illegal acts more difficult.

28 *Les Nouvelles d'Arménie*, No. 194, p.25

29 "Arménie, Terre d'Eviction", *Libération*, 17 February 2013.

30 Ibid

31 "Les Observateurs de l'OSCE/ODIHR Expriment leurs Préoccupations Concernant l'Utilisation des Ressources Administratives", *Armenews*, 15 February 2013.

32 "Armenia Strange Presidential Campaign", *RFE/RL*, 18 February 2012.

#### 4. Election Observation Groups and Their Reports

As in many countries, elections in Armenia are also monitored by local and more by foreign observation missions. The main missions present in this year's presidential election are the following: CIS Monitoring Mission, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), PACE (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), ICES (Expert Center for Electoral Systems), Independent US Center for Political Monitoring the Choice is yours. Apart from these, the Armenian Bar Association in California shortly known as ABA has also closely monitored the election. Furthermore, some journalists have also closely observed them.

Although it is not possible to give a definite number, it is possible to say that the number of observers have exceeded a thousand. However, it could also be seen that it is not very likely for the observers to easily determine the irregularities and frauds. For the foreigners who do not know Armenian, a great difficulty exists. Moreover, it is seen that many of the irregularities and frauds do not take place during, but after the elections. But still, the observers have witnessed many events.

We must note that the observation missions that are connected to an international organization and submit reports to it, are more influential compared to the others. In this context, the most important organization is the OSCE/ODIHR. This organization has worked together with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the observers of the European Parliament under the name "International Election Observation Mission". The main issues existing in the Post-Election Interim Report issued on February 26 by this mission<sup>33</sup> are the following: Elections were generally well administered and characterized by a respect for fundamental freedoms, contestants were able to campaign freely, media provided balanced coverage, at the same time a lack of impartiality of the public administration, misuse of administrative resources and cases of pressure on voters were of concern. While Election Day was calm and peaceful overall, it was marked by undue interference in the process, by proxies representing the incumbent and some serious violations were observed. It has also been indicated in the report that the voting process was orderly and well organized in majority of the polling stations observed, but observers assessed negatively in 5% of these stations and assessed positively all but nine of the 106 vote counts. Later on in the report, the objections and initiatives of especially the Chairman of the Heritage Party Raffi Hovannisian in the days following the election are

33 "Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions", OSCE/ODIHR International election Observation Mission, Republic of Armenia, Presidential Elections, February 18, 2013 <http://www.osce.org/ohchr/elections/99675>

addressed and by mentioning the recounting of voting in some ballot boxes, it is stated that minor discrepancies exist. The complaints made following the election and their assessments are also provided in the report. Another interesting point of the report is that the number (proportion) of those voting for Sarkisian at some polling boxes from which Sarkisian won has been higher than the other boxes. This can be interpreted as these boxes being filled later on with ballots that are to Sarkisian's advantage, but since this cannot be proven, the report only mentions this situation.

Another observation mission, the CIS Monitoring Mission, has said that the Armenian elections were free, open, competitive, and met demands of international norms, that no facts casting doubts in legitimacy of the elections have been registered, but that some minor violations happened<sup>34</sup>.

In general, the other observation missions also carry this view; in other words, they express that the election has been held legitimately and in accordance with the rules, but that some violations have taken place. The approaches of non-observer groups are more different. For instance, Amnesty International has dwelled upon the irregularities and frauds taking place without questioning the legitimacy of the election and has demanded them to be investigated<sup>35</sup>.

## **5. The Stances of Some Countries and International Organizations towards the Presidential Election in Armenia**

The congratulation messages sent to President Sarkisian by the presidents of other countries is particularly important in terms of showing that they accept Sarkisian as being the legitimate president of Armenia.

The first congratulation message has been sent by President Putin right after the election where he has conveyed that there is active support by the public for Sarkisian's socioeconomic and foreign policies and has expressed his confidence that Russian-Armenia relations will continue to be strengthened<sup>36</sup>.

Catherine Ashton, representative of EU's foreign affairs and security policies, together with Commissioner for Enlargement Stefan Füle, by making a joint statement, have expressed that they welcome progress made by the Armenian authorities in their efforts to hold the presidential election in line with

34 "CIS Monitoring Mission Calls Armenian Presidential Legitimate", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 19 February 2013.

35 "Amnesty International Demande Une Enquête Sur Des Cas De Violence Lors Des Élections Présidentielles", *Armenews*, 9 March 2013,

36 "Putin Congratulates Sarkisian", *RFE/RL*, 19 February 2013,

international standards. Also, by referring to some of the irregularities taking place in the election, have expressed their hope for these not to occur again in the future<sup>37</sup>. On the other hand, by sending a congratulation message to Serge Sarkisian a week after the election, President of the EU Commission Jose Manuel Barroso has said that he welcomes further progress to bring elections into line with international standards and has also indicated that the EU looks forward to develop and strengthen relations with Armenia in the context of negotiations of the EU-Armenia Association Agreement including comprehensive Free Trade Area<sup>38</sup>.

However, the US's process of congratulating Sarkisian has taken longer.

Right after the election, Spokesperson of the US State Department Victoria Nuland has said that they support the conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR observe mission; in other words, that the election was generally well administered and characterized with respect for fundamental freedoms, but has indicated that there was a lack of impartiality on the part of public administration officials and a misuse of administrative resources<sup>39</sup>.

At a second stage, US Secretary of State John Kerry has congratulated President Sarkisian for being elected, but has also indicated that they support the conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR report and that they expect the deficiencies of the election to be eliminated. Kerry has mentioned that during Sarkisian's second term as President, the US and Armenia can work together to pursue the democratic and economic reforms critical to increased bilateral trade and investment, has urged Sarkisian to give full support to efforts to resolve the Karabakh conflict spearheaded by the Minsk Group and has also expressed that they cannot be satisfied with the status quo<sup>40</sup>.

At the third stage, President Obama has shortly repeated the points mentioned above by sending a congratulation letter on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013. What is new in the message was the President's words that "we also want to continue our work to promote the eventual normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations"<sup>41</sup>.

Therefore, in the area of foreign policy, two important messages and in fact some kind of a warning has been conveyed from the US to Armenia. The

37 "Hovannisian Rallies Thousands Against 'Stolen Election'", *RFE/RL*, 20 February 2013,

38 "EU Chief Congratulates Sarkisian", *RFE/RL*, 25 February 2013.

39 "US State Department: Blurred Distinction Between Activities of State and Those of Ruling Party", *Largir*, 20 February 2013.

40 "US Salutes Sarkisian Reelection", *RFE/RL*, 25 February 2013."

41 "Obama Congratulates Sarkisian Re-election", *The Armenian Weekly*, 4 March 2013.

first is the statement that the US Government cannot be satisfied with the status quo despite Armenia's policy of almost not showing any efforts towards the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. The second is the importance President Obama attaches to the issue of normalization despite Sarkisian taking the normalization of relations with Turkey off the agenda and replacing it with the policy of making demands to Turkey such as the recognition of the genocide allegations.

With the French President François Hollande being at the forefront, presidents of some other countries have also sent messages of congratulation to Sarkisian.

While many countries have ignored or underestimated the irregularities taking place in the Armenian presidential election, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt has stated, with his outspokenness unique to him, that the quality of the election was well below expectations, whereas the Armenian Foreign Ministry has indicated that the quality of information the Swedish Minister possesses is disappointing<sup>42</sup>.

President Gül sending a congratulation message to Sarkisian two days following the election has been criticized in Azerbaijan. While the Azerbaijani Government has remained silent on this issue, voices of objection have been raised from the Azerbaijani Parliament. Deputy Executive Secretary of the New Azerbaijan Party Mubariz Gurbanlı has said that the hasty congratulation amounted to a show of moral, political and ideological support for Sarkisian<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, Deputy Ceyhun Osmanlı has stated that it is somewhat strange that a man whose hands are stained with blood of women and children is being congratulated<sup>44</sup>, while Gudrat Hasanguliev has expressed that Turkey supports Armenia, that Sarkisian is one of the perpetrators of the Khojaly genocide and that they will raise the issue (the issue of congratulating) at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, Speaker of the Azerbaijan Parliament Oktay Asadov has said that this event has hurt them, but it should not be exaggerated and that they do not agree with Gudrat Hasanguliev, and that Turkey is a main partner and ally of Azerbaijan<sup>46</sup>.

The reason for the reactions of Azerbaijani statesmen towards President Gül's congratulation message must be that the congratulation message sent to

42 "A Virtual DEbate Between Swedish FM and Armenian Foreign Ministry", *Medimax*, 21 February 2013.

43 "Baku Slams Turkey Over Armenia's Congratulations", *RFE/RL*, 21 February 2013.

44 "Abdullah Gül Acted At Least Naively", *News.Az*, 22 February 2013.

45 "Abdullah Gül Congratulations Causes Discontent at Azerbaijani Parliament", *APA*, 22 February 2013.

46 Ibid

Sarkisian after his election in 2008 had started the process of the Protocols. As known, the Azerbaijanis have opposed the Protocols with the thought that it leaves Azerbaijan on its own to face Armenia.

Ankara has been swift in responding to the reactions received from Azerbaijan. The Foreign Ministry has replied to a question of Azerbaijan's APA Agency regarding this issue in the following manner:

*Turkey's President Abdullah Gul's congratulation letter to Serge Sarkisian on his re-election as President was realized in accordance with national traditions. Congratulatory letters were also sent before after the announcement of the results of elections in other countries. Messages in mutual form may be sent in the framework of international rules of politeness. It will be useful to assess the issue as part of its content<sup>47</sup>.*

## **6. Objections Raised Towards the Results of the Election and Its Consequences**

As explained above, Sarkisian's election was accepted, although with some hesitations, by the observation missions and presidents of foreign countries have acted in the same manner by sending congratulation messages.

In Armenia, besides those voting for Sarkisian, Sarkisian's election was not considered as valid by arguing that irregularities and frauds have taken place in the election. The strongest objections have been raised by Raffi Hovannisian. Moreover, an important part of the Diaspora has also opposed Sarkisian's election.

Starting with Armenia, these objections are examined below.

### **a. Raffi Hovannisian's Objections, Claims, Decision of the Central Election Commission, Decision of the Constitutional Court**

Right after the election, Raffi Hovannisian has rejected the results of the election by putting forth that it was fraudulent and has insisted that he has won the election<sup>48</sup>. Furthermore, he has wanted President Sarkisian to hand

47 "Türk Dışişleri Cumhurbaşkanı Gül'ün Serj Sarkisyan'a Gönderdiği Tebrik Mektubu Konusunda Açıklama Yaptı" (The Turkish Ministry Made a Statement on the Congratulation Letter President Gül Sent to Serge Sarkisian), A1News, <http://www.1news.com.tr/turkiye/20130222105003946.html>, 23 February 2013

48 "Hovannisian Rejects Official Vote Results", *RFE/RL*, 19 February 2013

power over to the people<sup>49</sup>, for Sarkisian to admit his mistake<sup>50</sup>, and for the votes to be recounted<sup>51</sup>. He has also expressed that he is concerned about his family's security<sup>52</sup>.

On the other hand, Hovannisian has started organizing demonstrations in the main Armenian cities and in particular in Yerevan<sup>53</sup>. He began conducting visits called "victory tours" in the country<sup>54</sup>.

Hovannisian has requested to meet Sarkisian and this meeting has taken place on 21 February 2013. Upon news being published that in this meeting that the President proposed a ministerial post like the Diaspora Ministry to him, Hovannisian has denied them. During the meeting it could be understood that when Hovannisian said that he has won the election, Sarkisian has suggested for him to continue his struggle until the next election<sup>55</sup>. Furthermore, Hovannisian's suggestions for a second round of the presidential election to be held, resignation of the government and the holding of early parliamentary election have also not been accepted by Sarkisian<sup>56</sup>.

Upon reminding Hovannisian through the press that presidents of foreign countries have sent congratulatory messages to Sarkisian, after saying "they can say whatever they want", Hovannisian has indicated that he will continue to consider himself the rightful winner of the February 18 election<sup>57</sup>. Meanwhile, the objection raised by Hovannisian to the Central Election Commission towards the results of the election has also been turned down<sup>58</sup>.

On 10 March 2013, Hovannisian has started a hunger strike to support his demand for the presidential election to be held again. Moreover, he has asked Sarkisian to cancel the starting date of duty of the President that should take place on 9<sup>th</sup> of April<sup>59</sup>.

49 "Opposition Candidate Calls on Armenia's Incumbent President to Hand Power over the People", *tert.am*, 19 February 2013.

50 "Heritage Leader Urges President-elect Sargsyan to Admit His Mistake", *panarmenian.net*, 19 February 2013; "Heritage to Demand Vote Recount", *Panorama.am.*, 19 February 2013.

51 "Heritage to Demand Vote Recount", *Panorama.am*, 19 February 2013.

52 "R. Hovannisian Concerned About His Family Security", *Panorama.am*, 19 February 2013.

53 "Hovannisian Rallies Thousands Against 'Stolen Election'", *RFE/RL*, 20 February 2013.

54 Press Release Raffi Hovannisian Headquarters, 23 February 2013

55 "Hovannisian: We Did Not Speak About Any Post at the Meeting", *aysor.am*, 25 February 2013.

56 "OSCE/ODIHR Publishes Interim Report", *Armradio*, 2 March 2013.

57 "Hovannisian Condemns West for Congratulating Sarkisian", *RFE/RL*, 26 February 2013.

58 "Hovannisian Condemns West for Congratulating Sarkisian", *RFE/RL*, 26 February 2013."

59 "R.Hovannisian Déclenche une Nouvelle Grève de Faim", *Armenews*, 11 March 2013.



Hovannisian, together with another presidential candidate Andreas Gukasyan, have demanded to invalidate the official results of the presidential election by appealing to the Constitutional Court of Armenia. The court's decision, declared on 14 March 2013, has stated that Hovannisian and Gukasyan have failed to substantiate their allegations. The court has also rejected Hovannisian's demand to declare him the high full winner of the vote<sup>60</sup>.

Hovannisian has not refrained from making statements and organizing press conferences at the Liberty Square where he continued his hunger strike. Meanwhile, he has indicated on 22 March 2013 that the people will rise to change the government and in a letter sent to the President, has asked for the immediate conduct of a new presidential election or the sharing of power between the authorities and the people and has requested for the prosecution of election falsifiers and the appointment of his own candidates to some offices<sup>61</sup>. By replying to this letter, President Sarkisian has said that he is ready to form a dialogue with Hovannisian, but that his requests is not in conformity with state authority and has asked him to end his hunger strike<sup>62</sup>.

In response, Hovannisian has suggested to meet with Sarkisian in a square in Yerevan to discuss Armenia's problems in front of the public<sup>63</sup>. Then, he has started insisting that Sarkisian visits him at the Liberty Square where he continues his hunger strike, but this has also been rejected. Eventually, he has ended his hunger strike on 31 March 2013<sup>64</sup> and has attended the Armenian Easter ceremony in which Sarkisian and other statesmen were also present.

#### b. The Diaspora's Approach Towards the Election

The Armenian Diaspora displays an approach that supports Armenia in all areas. This support not only emerges particularly in Armenia's claims from Turkey (recognition of genocide, paying compensation, giving territory etc.) and its claims from Azerbaijan (recognition of the Karabakh region's independence), but also becomes apparent in financial aid being provided to Armenia. The Armenians living in Western countries have adopted democracy and human rights principles of these countries. However, it is difficult to say that much importance is attached to these values in Armenia,

60 "Constitutional Court Rejects Opposition Election Appeals", *RFE/RL*, 14 March 2013.

61 "Hovannisian Calls For Comprehensive Power Sharing", *Asbarez*, 22 March 2013.

62 "La Communication épistolaire entre... Sarkisian et R. Hovannisian Se Poursuit", *Armenews*, 27 March 2013.

63 "Sarkisian Insists on Hosting Talks with Challenger", *RFE/RL*, 27 March 2013.

64 "Sarkisian Ally Upbeat on Dialogue with Opposition", *RFE/RL*, 1 April 2013.

under the influence of the period of the Soviet Union. The dominance of oligarchs in economy and the irregularities taking place in the elections are clear proofs of this situation. Despite this, the Diaspora Armenians have preferred until recently not to openly criticize Armenia in these areas.

As mentioned above, Raffi Hovannisian, who had criticized President Sarkisian with a harsh language and argued that he actually won the election, being American in origin, his criticisms received more attention in Western countries' Armenian Diasporas. A demonstration has been held in front of the Armenian Consulate General in New York to protest the election and those participating have carried posters stating "Diaspora is With the Armenian people" and "No to Election Fraud"<sup>65</sup>. Glendale in California has organized a demonstration protesting the irregularities and frauds in the election and Raffi Hovannisian has spoken to the public through "Skype"<sup>66</sup>.

With a letter sent to President Sarkisian, American rock singer Serj Tankian, who has also composed songs on "genocide", has said "like most diasporan Armenians I have always been reluctant to criticize your government directly and openly but the avalanche of people suffering under your rule due to corruption and injustice is tipping the scale" and has challenged the legitimacy of Sarkisian's victory in the presidential election and has accused him for tolerating corruption. Moreover, Tankian has asked from Sarkisian to make comprehensive reforms, to punish those who committed frauds, to dissolve the Parliament and to make sure that future elections are fair. In an unexpected manner Sarkisian has replied to him in a short time and in summary, has indicated that he is the rightful winner of the election and that the irregularities could not have any significant impact on the outcome of the vote<sup>67</sup>. In the same context, Tankian has sent a second letter to the President, in response the President has almost repeated the same points, while at the same expressing his hope that Tankian will give a concert in Yerevan on the occasion of the Armenian genocide's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary<sup>68</sup>.

Opposite to the American Armenians' criticizing attitude, the main Armenian organizations in the US, ANCA (Armenian National Committee of America), which has a Dashnak tendency, and the AAA (Armenian Assembly of America), which represents the wealthy Armenians, have displayed a heavy silence regarding the election<sup>69</sup>.

65 "New York Armenians Protest Fraudulent Elections in Armenia", *Hetq.am*, 24 February 2013.

66 "Overflow Crowd in Glendale Voices Support for People's Movement", *Asbarez*, 4 March 2013.

67 "U.S. Rock Star Questions Armenian Poll Result", *RFE/RL*, 26 February 2013.

68 "Échanges Vigoureux Entre Serj Tankian Et Serge Sarkissian", *Armenews*, 28 February 2013."

69 Thomas de Waal "Political Tremors in the Caucasus", *Foreign Policy*, March 2013.

The Coordination Council in France, which incorporates the Armenian organizations in the country within its own scope<sup>70</sup>, without criticizing Sarkisian and openly referring to the irregularities taking place in the election, by mentioning that political and social difficulties exist in Armenia, which is subjected to the Turkish-Azerbaijani blockade whose economic consequences have started being felt and where one-third of its population is below the poverty line, has indicated that France is in solidarity with Armenia and its people. Furthermore, by expressing his commitment to Armenia, has called for unity to resolve the problems of the country through peaceful and democratic means<sup>71</sup>. Despite the organizations only indirectly conveying their reactions, a group called the Armenian Renaissance has organized demonstrations on 8 March 2013 in front the Armenian Embassy in Paris for frauds being committed in the election<sup>72</sup>. With the same purpose, the same group has conducted another demonstration on April 7 in front of the Armenian Embassy in Paris to give support to Raffi Hovannisian<sup>73</sup>.

The Diaspora's reaction has not only been restricted to the US and France. The Armenian Community in Germany, who generally remains "silent", has issued a declaration that condemns the frauds taking place in the presidential election, indicates that these and some other illegal acts have remained with impunity and states that they are in solidarity with Raffi Hovannisian<sup>74</sup>.

## 7. Sarkisian Took Office

Sarkisian has assumed office, after taking oath, on 9 April 2013 during an extraordinary session of the National Assembly which took place at the Karen Demirjian Sport and Concert Complex. In the beginning of his long speech delivered there, he has thanked those who cast their votes for other candidates and has said that thereby they have expressed their discontent with the problems existing in the country and by doing so, they have sent a clear message to the authorities, demanding more efficient work and that the message was duly received<sup>75</sup>.

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70 Conseil de Coordination des organisations Arméniennes de France

71 Conseil de Coordination des organisations Arméniennes de France, 9 March 2013

72 "Manifestation Devant l'Ambassade d'Arménie A l'Appel de "Renaissance Arménienne", *Armenews*, 7 March 2013.

73 "Communiqué de Renaissance Arménienne", *Armenews*, 27 March 2013.

74 "Armenian Community of Germany Criticizing Armenian Authorities and Expressing Solidarity with Raffi Hovannisian", *Arminfo*, 3 April 2013.

75 "The Newly Elected President Serzh Sargsyan at the Extraordinary Session of the RA National Assembly Assumed the Office of President of the RA", 9 April 2013 <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2013/04/09/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-assumed-the-office-of-President-of-the-Republic-of-Armenia>

On the other hand, Hovannisian has taken his own presidential oath on the same day at the Liberty Square to which thousands of people attended and with his hand on a copy of the Armenian Constitution, has stated that he would keep working to return power to the people. After the ceremony, Hovannisian has marched towards the Presidential Residence and when the police blocked access, amid clashes 20 people were taken into custody. Later on, Hovannisian and his entourage have proceeded to the “Genocide Memorial” and prayed<sup>76</sup>.

### III – COMMEMORATION OF 24 APRIL

As in the previous years, April 24 has also been celebrated this year around the world by the Armenians through various ceremonies and activities.

It is important to emphasize and even to make a separate research on these ceremonies and activities which continues each year without any decreases despite almost a century passing after the 1915 events. Regarding this issue, we can say the following very shortly:

Since almost all the Armenians subjected to the 1915 relocation have died, no personal interests or the necessity to remind the events through the people who experienced the events exist. These activities can only create some psychological relief for the descendants of some of those who were relocated.

*For the Armenian Government's political parties and media, 24 April serves as an excuse to criticize Turkey due to historical reasons and for supporting Azerbaijan on the Karabakh conflict and furthermore, to express demands like compensation and others from Turkey.*

Except the emotional domain, 24 April activities provide the opportunity to the Diaspora Armenians, who are subject to assimilation in almost all places of the world, to remember or confirm their Armenianness.

24 April creates the opportunity for the Armenian churches within the Diaspora, the political parties and charity organizations to establish close relations with the Armenian communities and also to express their claims from Turkey.

On the other hand, for the Armenian Government's political parties and media, 24 April serves as an excuse to criticize Turkey due to historical reasons and for supporting Azerbaijan on the Karabakh conflict and furthermore, to express demands like compensation and others from Turkey.

76 “Armenia: After Duelling Ceremonies, Opposition at Crossroads”, Eurasianet.org, 9 April 2013.

The 24 April activities conducted this year will be examined by addressing four main countries. These are the US, France, Armenia and Turkey.

## **1. Commemoration Activities in the US and President Obama's Statement**

We will address this issue under two separate subjects as commemoration activities of 24 April and President Obama's 24 April Statement.

### **A. Commemoration Activities of 24 April**

In all places in the US where Armenians live and particularly in California and Massachusetts, 24 April commemoration ceremonies are conducted. Apart from these, demonstrations are organized especially in front of the Turkish Embassy and Consulates General and liturgies are held in Armenian churches. Furthermore, many articles repeating the well-known Armenian views are published in the local press on this occasion. The reason for these activities being so intense is that it gives individuals the opportunity to express and confirm their Armenian identity.

We do not have enough space to provide further information on these activities and since they are repetitions of the already known views, this is not really necessary. However, by taking into consideration its significance, we will shortly address the commemoration ceremony held on April 24 in the Congress.

As each year, a ceremony under the heading "Armenian Genocide Commemoration Day" has been conducted in the US House of Representatives on April 24. It is understood that this ceremony has been organized by the Armenian Caucus in the Congress, main Armenian organizations, the Armenian Embassy in Washington and the Office of the Karabakh Representative<sup>77</sup>. The session of the House of Representatives has started with the prayer of Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, Prelate of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Eastern United States<sup>78</sup>. Choloyan has expressed that 24 April is the beginning of the genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and the first genocide among so many that followed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, Representatives in the House of Representatives who embrace Armenian views have delivered statements regarding the meaning

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77 "Power Speaking Truth: Members Of Congress Condemn Armenian Genocide Denial", *ANCA Pres Release*, 2 May 2013.

78 "Archbishop Choloyan Offers April 24 Opening Prayer For House of Representatives", *Asbarez*, 30 April 2013.

of 24 April. It could be understood that these statements have continued in the following days, that speeches have also been delivered in the Senate, although fewer in numbers and that around 30 Congress members belonging to both parties have spoken.

Since these commemoration ceremonies are held each year, they actually do not have special importance. However, the number of those speaking and their influences in the Congress determine the outcome of the resolutions submitted to the House of Representatives and/or to the Senate. From this aspect, no significant change has been observed compared to the previous year.

A draft resolution numbered H.RES.227 was submitted to the House Committee of Foreign Affairs on May 20, 2013, entitled “Armenian Genocide Truth and Justice”. As remembered, a resolution has been submitted to each House of Representatives since 2000. None of them were adopted, due, mainly to Armenian governments and relations with Turkey becoming very important for American policies concerning the Middle East. Most probably the fate of H.RES.227 will be the same.

*Since these commemoration ceremonies are held each year, they actually do not have special importance. However, the number of those speaking and their influences in the Congress determine the outcome of the resolutions submitted to the House of Representatives and/or to the Senate. From this aspect, no significant change has been observed compared to the previous year.*

## **B. President Obama’s 24 April Statement**

The US President issued his traditional statement again this year on 24 April for the occasion of the “Armenian Remembrance Day” and as expected, did not use the term genocide. However, just as in the previous years, by using “Meds Yeghern” (great tragedy), understood to be one of the Armenian words corresponding to genocide, he wanted to at least partially satisfy the Armenians.

The statement made this year shows similarities with that of last year in terms of context and sometimes even word to word and depicts the same themes. Although not directly using the word genocide, by indicating that a full, frank and just acknowledgment of the facts are in the interests of all and that nations grow stronger by acknowledging painful elements of the past, it is indirectly suggested for Turkey to recognize the genocide allegations. On the other hand, it is expressed that the US recognize those “courageous” Turks

and Armenians who have already taken this path and encourage more to do so, with the backing of their government and the US President. What is unclear at this point is which event of the past the Armenians must recognize. Actually, on the path to 1915 and following 1915, the Armenians have committed shameful acts on a broad basis extending from their atrocities in Eastern Anatolia to political crimes. The recognition of these could contribute to a possible Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. However, Armenian public opinion is very far from such an idea.

Armenian atrocities are either ignored or underestimated. On the other hand, political crimes, contrary to all legal rules, are considered as justice being administered.

Despite President Obama's soft language, his statement has received negative reactions from both the Turks and the Armenians.

Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of America, a Dashnak organization, has put forth that the President's retreat under Turkish pressure comes despite his own pledges to acknowledge the Armenian genocide and that he has worked together in Turkey's denial of truth and ongoing obstruction of justice.

On the other hand, Ergun Kırlikovalı, Chairman of the Assembly of Turkish-American Associations, after providing brief information on historical events in a letter sent to President Obama, has indicated that they mourn the loss of lives of both Turks and Armenians and they do not deny that massacres occurred, but disagree that massacres constitute genocide as defined by the UN Convention. Moreover, it is expressed in the letter that Parliaments of Turkey and Armenia should ratify the Protocols of 2009 and normalize relations between the two nations, parallel with the removal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijan and the return of over one million Azeri refugees to their homes.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry, by issuing a statement whose complete text is provided below, has indicated that they regard the President's statement which distorts the historical facts as problematic in every aspect and deeply regret it.

*No: 119, 24 April 2013, Press Release Regarding the Statement of US President Barack Obama on the Occasion of 24 April*

*In his statement issued on 24 April 2013, US President Obama has unfortunately demonstrated this year once again a one-sided approach*



*which reflects the Armenian views regarding the dispute between Turks and Armenians on the painful part of their common history.*

*We regard this statement, which distorts the historical facts, as problematic in every aspect and deeply regret it.*

*Issued under the influence of domestic political considerations and interpreting controversial historical events on the basis of one-sided information and with a selective sense of justice, such statements damage both Turkish-American relations, and also render it more difficult for Turks and Armenians to reach a just memory.*

*Our expectation from an important ally of Turkey such as the US is not to further deepen the problem, but to provide constructive contributions for its resolution, and to encourage the Armenian side, which avoids objective and scientific research of the issue, to be more realistic and conciliatory.*

*It should also be known that the pain experienced during the World War I is a shared one and the memory of that period is as sensitive for the Turkish people as it is for the Armenians. Despite the prejudiced attempts to hinder a correct understanding of history, Turkey approaches the issue with self-confidence and an open-mind, and wants the truth to be investigated in all its aspects.*

Armenia has shown no reaction to Obama's statement. However, it is normal for the word genocide not being openly expressed in the text to annoy them just as it has disturbed the Diaspora.

This way, just as President Obama's 24 April statement has not pleased the Turks and Armenians owning American citizenship, it has also displeased Turkey and most likely Armenia.

We hope that the issuing of these presidential statements, which puts forth the same views each year, has no function anymore, does not please any of the concerning parties and in fact deepens the disagreement between them, and moreover causes the US President to be criticized. It would be better that these statements be abandoned for the coming years.

## **2. Commemoration Activities in France**

It has been observed that 2015 relatively being a close date and the presidential election in Armenia being held shortly before 24 April, more

importance has been attached to the 24 April commemoration activities in France this year. As a matter of fact, commemoration ceremonies have been organized in almost all places where Armenians live, although the numbers of participants vary, and among them, the ceremonies held in Paris, Lyon and Marseille have been crowded just as in the previous years.

The unpleasant surprise for the French Armenians this year is that President François Hollande, despite the promise he made last year<sup>79</sup>, has not attended the ceremony held in front of the Genocide Memorial (Composer Komitas's Statue) in Paris. Speaker of the Élysée Palace has announced that the President has not been able to attend due to his visit to China. However, the Armenian press has determined that the President had enough time to attend the ceremony on 24 April<sup>80</sup>.

On the other hand, the French Armenians are not pleased with President Hollande, who, despite his promise, is still not taking any initiative for the reenactment of a law that foresees the punishment of those denying the Armenian "genocide". As could be recalled, the main difficulty was that the law adopted in 2012 was cancelled by the French Constitutional Council on grounds that it contradicted the Constitution. Since what kind of a formula the Council will accept on this issue is unknown, no initiative to pass a law is made.

Minister of Education Vincent Peillon, attending the ceremony in front of the Memorial on behalf of President Hollande, has delivered a statement. In short, Peillon has said that 24 April 1915 forms the beginning of the horrible tragedy that struck the Armenian community, that Sultan Mehmed V<sup>81</sup> had given the instruction for the massacre to start against the Armenians, that in a few months two-thirds of the Armenian population had lost their lives, and that this programmed barbarity and the first initiative for systematic annihilation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could not be erased from history. He has also said that France characterizes this event as "genocide", that denying this genocide is an insult for the Armenian community, that the French Government does not want anyone to deny what happened and seeks a legal solution for this and that President Hollande has confirmed again his will to continue to work with the Armenian community to fulfill his commitment on this issue. Furthermore, Peillon has indicated that Armenia's children has

79 As the former French President N. Sarkozy had made, François Hollande also visited the Genocide Memorial on 24 April 2012 and delivered a statement there, expressing that if elected as President, he would attend the commemoration ceremony for April 24 each year. See: *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 41. Facts and Comments, p.51

80 "Questions sur l'Absence de François Hollande à la Commémoration", *Armenews*, 25 April 2013.

81 For the first time, it is seen that it has been expressed in a text that Sultan V. Mehmed (Mehmed Reshat) is held responsible for the Armenian relocation. As known and as generally accepted, this responsibility belongs to the Committee of Union and Progress.

become the children of France and that their memory is also France's memory and that it is necessary to transfer this memory to future generations, that school education must assume this transfer.

This speech, which entirely reflects Armenian views and insults Turkish history, has been met with reaction in Ankara. The text of the statement issued by the Turkish Foreign Ministry on this issue is provided below.

*No: 124, 26 April 2013, Press Release Regarding the Speech Made by French Minister of National Education Vincent Peillon on 24 April 2013*

*The speech delivered by the French Minister of National Education Vincent Peillon concerning the events of 1915 in a rally organized in Paris on 24 April 2013 is unacceptable in every aspect.*

*We strongly condemn the statements of the French Minister of National Education which takes as a basis Armenian allegations regarding 1915. It is particularly unfortunate that such statements which unfairly slander our history and breed hatred belong to a member of the government who is in charge of education.*

*Politicizing history and the notion of justice in such a way runs counter to the universal values that France itself has played a part in developing and to its own practice of democracy. The French Government's attempt to pass judgment on a nation's past, disregarding the principles of fairness, common sense, impartiality and freedom of expression, can be qualified as a summary execution at the very least. The persistent attitude in France consisting of preventing the expression of other opinions on this matter is highly regrettable.*

*Our primary expectation is that common sense and political wisdom prevail, bringing to an end the current approach which deals a blow to the long-standing Turkish-French relations and friendship.*

It is presumed that the reason for François Hollande not to attend the 24 April commemoration ceremony was to not offend Turkey to which he particularly attaches importance to maintaining good relations. However, the statement made by the Minister of Education, which Hollande sent on his behalf, was perhaps harsher than what Hollande would have said and has drawn a strong Turkish reaction. Therefore, the benefit which Hollande expected from not attending the ceremony has turned into harm. In short, the Armenian Question continues to be detrimental for Turkey-France relations.

### 3. Commemoration Activities in Armenia

Commemoration ceremonies in Armenia for April 24 are although held all over the country and those in Yerevan are the most important. The same program is repeated each year.

In the evening of April 23<sup>rd</sup>, a torchlight procession is organized by the Dashnak Party, but to which everyone attends and therefore has somewhat lost its qualification as being Dashnak. A few thousands of people, mostly the youth, march to the Genocide Memorial with torches in their hands. Meanwhile, for certain, Turkish flags are burned. In the previous years it has been observed that Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Gül's pictures have also been burned down. The Armenian police do not interfere in these acts.

The next day, in the morning of 24 April, the President, with all state dignitaries, visit the Genocide Memorial, stand in a moment of silence there and Archbishop Karekin II says a prayer. Then, the Memorial is opened to public and people, most of the time with flowers in their hands, make this visit. How many persons have visited the Memorial cannot really be determined, because different figures like tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands are expressed in the Armenian press. But, what is certain is that a great number of individuals visit the Memorial. Sometimes Turks are also among them. Some Turks make this visit out of curiosity while some have political reasons. For instance, it has been published in the Diaspora press that this year Yıldız Onen from the DurDe! (Say Stop to Racism and Nationalism) movement has visited the Memorial and placed a wreath<sup>82</sup>.

After the Memorial is visited, the Armenian President either delivers a speech or issues a written statement regarding the meaning and significance of 24 April.

The commemoration ceremony and activities this year have occurred in the same manner. The only significant difference was that the written statement issued by President Sarkisian entailed more important, but more negative points compared to the previous years.

Sarkisian has indicated that one of the native and ancient people of the region has been exterminated or sent into forced exile and that the great majority of them did not even have graves, that the spiritual and cultural assets accumulated through the millennia have been lost. Furthermore, after also saying that material assets have been appropriated by the Turkish state and its peoples and that because of the genocide the Armenians have lost their

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82 "International Delegation Commemorates the Armenian Genocide in Istanbul", *AGBU Pres Office*, 30 April 2013.

right to live in their homeland, Sarkisian has expressed that the denial of genocide constitutes direct continuation of that crime and that denial is being carried out in modern Turkey, that it is the duty of the Armenians to realize this matter and bring it to the attention of the international community. Going further, Sarkisian has said that he suggested not to re-open old wounds but to look forward, that their response to this is that Orhan Pamuk and Hrant Dink were not brought to trial a hundred years ago, but were tried right before their eyes and that for the Turkish as well as the Armenian society this problem (genocide allegations) is current and urgent. Sarkisian has ended his statement by indicating that Armenia, as a state and as a nation, in every corner of the world have been and will be fighting against all and every manifestation of the genocide, be it xenophobia, extermination, nonchalant silence and denial.

It will be useful to further dwell upon the Armenian President's statement. The point drawing the most attention is the effort to accuse modern Turkey of genocide. For this, Sarkisian has adopted the arguments used by the Diaspora for many years. According to this, denial of "genocide" constitutes a continuation of genocide and since Turkey does not accept the genocide, it continues this crime. However, the crime of genocide ends when the acts of exterminating a certain group ceases. The denial of genocide (if such genocide exists) constituting the continuation of genocide cannot be found in any text of international law. This is a formula fabricated by the Armenians and their advocates in order to be able to accuse modern Turkey with genocide, because without accusing Turkey with genocide, the necessary legal basis to claim compensation and if possible territory from Turkey does not exist.

*The denial of genocide (if such genocide exists) constituting the continuation of genocide cannot be found in any text of international law.*

*This is a formula fabricated by the Armenians and their advocates in order to be able to accuse modern Turkey with genocide, because without accusing Turkey with genocide, the necessary legal basis to claim compensation and if possible territory from Turkey does not exist.*

On the path to 2015, Sarkisian's statement is important for displaying what kind of a policy Armenia will pursue towards Turkey.

#### **4. Commemoration Ceremonies in Turkey and the Armenian Question and the BDP**

##### **A. Commemoration Ceremonies**

It could be seen that the 24 April commemoration activities in Turkey have

two differences this year compared to those of the previous years. The first is that by inviting some foreigners, an attempt was made to bring an international aspect to these activities. The second is increasing the number of cities in which the commemoration activities are organized and therefore to try to give the impression that the number of those condemning the Armenian “genocide” in Turkey is increasing.

According to a columnist, commemoration activities have been organized this year, in alphabetical order, in Adana, Ankara, Batman, Dersim (Tunceli), Diyarbakir, Istanbul and Izmir<sup>83</sup>. However, the leading newspapers have reported the activities in Istanbul. On the other hand, it is understood that the number of people attending the activities in other cities were quite low.

According to the press<sup>84</sup>, 21 “activists” and also some organizations from various countries have been invited to the activities in Turkey. We could mention the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), the European Grassroots Antiracist Movement (EGAM) and the Gomidas Institute in London. The Turkish Human Rights Association organized the activities in Istanbul, together with the Stay Stop to Racism and Nationalism Movement<sup>85</sup>. On the other hand, a French source gives the number of foreigners coming from France as 23 and indicates that apart from the organizations whose names are mentioned above, the organizations of SOS Racisme, UEJF (Union des Etudiants Juif en France = the Jewish Students Union in France), the European Union of Jewish Students, and Collectif VAN (Vigilance Arménienne Contre le Négationnisme = Vigilance Against Denial) have also come to Turkey. A newspaper has written that apart from the French, representatives from Germany, Bulgaria, Romania and the Netherlands also came to Turkey<sup>86</sup>.

Among the foreigners coming to Turkey, Director of the Gomidas Institute in London Ara Sarafian, AGBU Europe Chairman Alexis Govcian, Nicolas Tavityan as representing the Central Office of this organization, EGAM’s Chairman Bejamin Abtan and Chairman of Collectif VAN Séta Papazian’s names draw attention<sup>87</sup>.

In terms of program, the activities held are similar to those organized last year<sup>88</sup>. At noon, a meeting was held in front of the Turkish-Islamic Arts

83 Cengiz Çandar, “24 Nisan Nedir?” (What is 24 April?), *Taraf*, 23 April 2013.

84 *Taraf*, 23 April 2013

85 “Yüzyıllık Yalnızlık Bitiyor” (Loneliness of a Century is Ending), *Taraf*, 24 April 2013.

86 “Taksim’de Anma” (Commemoration at Taksim), *Milliyet*, 25 April 2013.

87 “Communiqué de Presse. “Reconnaissance du Génocide Arménien: Quand la Turquie s’aveillera”, *Collectif VAN*, 26 April 2013.

88 *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 41, pp. 68-41

Museum at Sultanahmet and the Armenian names of the places in Anatolia where the Armenians lived were read there, while Eren Keskin from the Human Rights Association has delivered a speech in Turkish and Director of the Gomidas Institute in London Ara Sarafian has delivered one in Armenian<sup>89</sup>. Approximately 100 individuals have watched this meeting. The second and the main activity in Istanbul was the sit-in at the sidewalk at Taksim Square where the pictures of those being arrested on 24 April 1915 and of some other Armenians were displayed and a declaration was read out in Turkish and Armenian. Around 30 individuals belonging to the People's Liberation Party have protested them at a place nearby<sup>90</sup>.

The number of people attending the activities is important in terms of determining to what extent these activities draw the attention of the public opinion. Although it could be seen that there is more participation compared to the first commemoration meetings organized four years ago, there is no significant difference between the number of people attending this year and last year's meetings. It seems that several hundred people (maybe 500 people) have attended the meeting at Taksim. The pictures published in the press do not support the allegation that the numbers of participants increase each year and that this year it has reached some 2.500 to 3.000<sup>91</sup>.

Concerning who have participated in these activities, one could say that as in last year, the former leftists, new liberals, the PKK and some individuals on the same line and a low number of "religious people"; in other words, those giving priority to religious values were present. It could be understood that a few Armenians of Turkey have participated in the activities. This situation has also drawn the attention of UGAB Europe Chairman Alexis Govcian<sup>92</sup>.

Another activity that was organized for 24 April in Istanbul was, just as last year, the visit made to Sevag Şahin Balıkcı's grave, a person of Armenian origin who was murdered while performing his military service. It could be understood that this gesture is made in order to support the view that Sevag was killed for being Armenian and that a link, some kind of a similarity is tried to be drawn between the genocide and this incident. However, the court had ruled that Sevag was not murdered intentionally, but by fault<sup>93</sup>. It would have been a more correct move to respect the court's decision, to wait for

89 "Names of the Lost Armenian Villages Read in Istanbul Sultanahmet Square", *The Armenian Weekly*, 25 April 2013.

90 "Taksim'de Anma" (Commemoration at Taksim), *Milliyet*, 25 April 2013.

91 Ibid. Also, the number of people participating has been said to be "approximately 2000" in AGBU's declaration of 30 April entitled "International Delegation Commemorate the Armenian Genocide in Istanbul".

92 "Interview avec ... Govcian", *Les Nouvelles d'Arménie*, 24 April 2013.

93 "Er Sevag davasında karar çıktı" (Decision Declared in Er Sevag's Case), *Hürriyet*, 29 March 2013.



the decision of the Court of Appeal and meanwhile, not to abuse the issue from a political aspect. The murder of an elderly Armenian woman in Istanbul last year and some attacks taking place towards the elderly Armenian women in Samatya at the beginning of the year have been introduced by some local and foreign media as an intentional act by Turkey towards the Armenians. Eventually it has been understood that these attacks have been made by a deranged Armenian.

In terms of the activities, what is new this year was declaring Faik Ali Bey, who was Administrator of Kutahya<sup>94</sup> in 1915, as the “Good Turk”. According to Armenian propaganda, the “good Turks” are those who helped the Armenians and prevented them from being relocated by either hiding them or providing shelter for them or their children depending on the circumstances. It is known all along that these kinds of people exist. The reason for continually placing more emphasis on these individuals is generally to ease the negative reactions created by the hostility towards the Turks and Turkey which sometimes reaches the extent of racism among the Diaspora Armenians and to underline the misdoings of the relocation by indicating that “good Turks” exist also. For this purpose, Faik Ali Bey<sup>95</sup> who, while serving as Administrator of Kutahya, refused to implement the relocation decision since the Armenians of that town had no harmful activities, has been included among the “good Turks” by his grave in Zincirlikuyu being visited on 24 April.

Among the activities held in others places besides Istanbul, Diyarbakir comes to the fore. For the first time, a ceremony has been organized in this city by the Municipality and the Bar Association in order to commemorate 24 April<sup>96</sup>.

Also, a panel discussion has been held to which Ara Sarafian, Director of the Gomidas Institute and Tahir Elçi from the Bar Association have attended. Elçi has said that shortly after the Armenians were arrested in Istanbul on 24 April 1915, a similar process unfolded in Diyarbakir. According to Elçi, the Kurds also participated in these events confronting the reality of the genocide by them today is inevitable and that the Kurds should support Armenians in the struggle against the state’s ideology and denialism. On the other hand, Ara Sarafian has focused on the process of the destruction of the Armenians

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94 Tenant is the authorized person heading an administrative division between a Governor and District Governor that no longer exists today.

95 Faik Ali (Ozansoy), 1878-1950. is the son of Sait Pasha, was born in Diyarbakir. He has served in various administrative duties. Among them are the Administrator of Kütahya and Governor of Diyarbakir. Also, he has served as Undersecretary of the Minister of Interior for some time. Rather than for these duties, Faik Ali Ozansoy is known in Turkey by his poetry. Well known writer Süleyman Nazif (1870-1927) is the elder brother of Faik Ali Bey. Munis Faik Ozansoy (1911-1975), a well-known author and poet of the Republic period and a high rank official is the son of Ali Bey.

96 “Genocide Commemorated in Diyarbakır For The First Time”, *The Armenian Weekly*, 23 April 2013.

of Diyarbakır in 1915 and has noted that he came to Diyarbakır to conduct research on the genocide, and that locals had been very helpful.

According to a Turkish newspaper<sup>97</sup>, Sarafian has made a statement at the Armenian Cemetery in Diyarbakır and then in an interview has said “I can talk freely, I can say whatever I want, no one interferes”. Sarafian, who has indicated that he could not even imagine these from happening a few years ago, has said that Turkey has entered the path of abandoning its policies of denial.

In the meantime, in an interview delivered to the *Hürriyet Newspaper*<sup>98</sup>, AGBU Europe Chairman Alexis Govcian has raised interest. In response to the question of “what kind of statement by Turkey could be considered acceptable in order to close the case (Armenian Question)”, Govcian has said “only saying ‘yes a genocide occurred’ will be enough. That is all. Then we will forgive”. Then, to clarify his statement, he has added that “what we will forgive today are anyhow not the Turkish people. We have no problems with them. What we will forgive is the past events. Our problem is with the period of the Committee of Union and Progress”. Therefore, Govcian has defined the Armenian question as a problem concerning history. Therefore, the “Commission of Historians” which Turkey proposes since 2005 emerges as the most appropriate place where the existing problems will be addressed. However, Govcian has not referred to this commission.

Govcian, who puts the recognition of genocide at the top of Armenian claims from Turkey, concerning the other claims has said it is not necessary for the genocide to be recognized for compensation to be paid, that currently compensation processes are continuing in the US, Germany and even in Turkey, that the state could be called upon on the condition that a title deed and document is shown. (For the moment there is no “compensation process” in Turkey. Some initiatives are observed in the US to start this kind of a process). Concerning Armenia’s territorial claims from Turkey, Govcian has indicated that based on international law, only a state could perform this, that no one in the Diaspora could make such a claim and that Armenia has no such claim at the moment. Concerning territorial claims, Govcian’s statements are correct in the legal area. However, the problem does not lie in the legal, but in the political area. While the Armenian State has no such claim from Turkey, public opinions of Armenia and the Diaspora believe that Eastern Anatolia, which they consider as Western Armenia, should belong to Armenia and they expect this to become true. This issue is the greatest obstacle to peace or reconciliation between the two nations and states.

97 “Ermeni Asıllı Tarihi: Türkiye’de Yaşadıklarım Devrim” (Historian of Armenian Origin: What I Experienced in Turkey is a Revolution), *Hürriyet*, 3 May 2013.

98 *Hürriyet*, 29 Nisan 2013.

The counter demonstrations or activities taking place against the 24 April activities in Turkey which we tried to summarize above were very few. As mentioned above, the small People's Liberation Party has organized a counter demonstration at Taksim. The same party has also opposed the demonstrations in Izmir by carrying the poster "the Armenian Genocide is a Lie". A short quarrel has occurred between the two sides and has been appeased with the intervention of the police<sup>99</sup>. Although not being directly concerned with 24 April, it has been declared that the International Foundation to Combat the Groundless Armenian Allegations (ASIMDER) organized a rally in the village of Alican on the Armenian border in order to draw attention to the massacres of 1915-1918 committed by the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia<sup>100</sup>.

On that subject we would like to emphasize the Turkish Foreign Ministry's reaction shown to the statements delivered on 24 April or to the messages issued. As explained above, the Foreign Ministry has displayed a rather harsh reaction to President Obama's statement whose language was mild and whose content was the same as that of the previous year. The response given to French Minister of Education's statement also carries the same feature. However, no reply has been given to President Sarkisian's 24 April statement that accuses Turkey of committing "the crime of genocide denial" and also to his previous statements that Turkey must recognize the genocide allegations.

The last point we would like to underline concerning the activities in Turkey commemorating 24 April is that despite most of these activities contradicting the beliefs and ideas of a great majority of the Turkish public opinion and also conflicting with official views and policies, they have been carried out by utilizing freedom of expression. Although we have no objection to this, this situation inevitably brings to mind the conditions in Armenia. One wonders, is it possible for a group consisting of Turkish nationalist intellectuals to go to Yerevan and sit by the Liberty Square and commemorate the half million Turks and other Muslims who have been massacred by Armenian gangs in 1914-1920? Can such a meeting be organized in Switzerland? Will it be possible to hold these kinds of meetings in member countries after the European Union Framework Decision is implemented? To what extent does crying for what the Armenians suffered while ignoring the disasters the Turks and other Muslims have experienced comply with a "just memory"?

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99 "İzmir'de Soykırım Gerginliği" (The Genocide Tension in Izmir), *Cumhuriyet*, 25 April 2013.

100 "Ermenistan Sınırında Miting Düzenlenecek" (A Rally Will be Organized on the Armenian Border), *AA*, 21 April 2013.

## B. BDP's Stance

Despite the highly harmful acts of the Kurds against the Armenians during the 1915 events, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), accepted this situation and stance that embraced the Armenian allegations and with Ahmet Türk being at the forefront, some prominent figures from the BDP had apologized from the Armenians. This approach had created the belief that the BDP, who has almost declared war to the current Turkish Government due to its nationalist thoughts and also the struggle it carries out against the PKK, acted with the purpose of receiving the Armenians' support. While it was expected for the BDP to review its stance mentioned above on the Armenian question or to at least soften it under the influence of the agreement reached recently between the BDP and the Government and the positive atmosphere this created, the opposite has happened and this Party has further emphasized its policy of closer relations with the Armenians.

In a statement issued on 24 April 2013 by the BDP Headquarters, it has been expressed in summary that “today is the day the 1915 Armenian genocide, one of the greatest tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is commemorated. 98 years ago, on 24 April 1915, one of the greatest genocides of human history started with the Armenian people being exiled. The Armenian people, due to the dark policies of the mindset of the Unionists of the period, suffered great pain and were taken away from the peoples of Anatolia and Mesopotamia and from their homes”. In the statement it has also been indicated that the pain of this event has continued until today by forming great wounds in the conscience of brotherly peoples and the international community conscience. It has also been said that “the traumas and grievances of the genocide are still fresh in the societal memory, because Turkey has not yet confronted one of the biggest genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to purify society's conscience, it has not come to terms with its own history and has not apologized to the Armenian people by admitting the reality of genocide. One should not forget that confronting and coming to terms with history will also guarantee that the pains will not be suffered again”. Furthermore, it has been indicated in the statement that “the historical consequences of confrontation and coming to terms have been heavy. But, the common will of the peoples of Turkey regarding peace, fraternity and freedom is an expression of hope that similar events will not be experienced. We call upon Turkey to confront its own history, to come to terms with its past and to apologize to the Armenians who have lived in great pain and with the hope that new pains will not be experienced, we pay tribute to the victims of the Armenian genocide”<sup>101</sup>.

The themes and expressions used in this statement are the same with those of the Armenian militants and create the conviction that most likely, the BDP

101 “Meclis’te İlginç Teklif: Türkiye Soykırım İçin Özür Dilesin!” (An Interesting Proposal at the Assembly: Turkey Must Apologize for Genocide!), *Yeniçağ*, 25 April 2013.

has been inspired or has been suggested by the Armenians. The most important point in the statement is that the BDP has officially described the 1915 events as “genocide”. The second important point is that as a party, it has embraced the idea of apologizing to the Armenians. This way, BDP has arrived to the line desired by the Armenians.

However, regarding the issue of apologizing, it is useful to keep one point in consideration. As known, apologizing does not create a consequence for the apologizing side beyond the moral area. Therefore, Armenian militants do not find apologizing on its own sufficient and also wants Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide allegations. If this recognition takes place, a legal basis will be formed that will support Armenian claims of the returning of properties, paying of compensation and not very likely, but also its territorial claims. It comes to mind that another purpose for the BDP to only apologize is to escape the returning of Armenian properties which it is said a significant amount is in the hands of citizens of Kurdish origin.

On the other hand, BDP, with the signatures of the Parliamentary Group Deputy Chairman Idris Baluken and of some other deputies of the same party, has proposed to the Turkish Grand National Assembly for a commission to be established in order for the 1915 Armenian genocide allegations to be researched. In the justification of the proposal, it has said that the Republic of Turkey has for a long time refrained from taking the necessary steps that will research what happened. As a result, discussions on what happened have always remained on the agenda and an understanding has failed to be reached on the subject and rather than revealing the truth, all sides have used the grievances as an instrument for their own political statements. As long as the necessary steps are not taken regarding a historical confrontation and researching the truth, these grievances will be used for this purpose. It is also clear that the dilemma the state experiences politically will be overcome by confrontation and fulfilling what is necessary. Based on all these, revealing what happened in 1915 require a comprehensive study by the Parliament<sup>102</sup>.

The point that needs to be paid attention to is that the BDP has not only submitted a proposal to the Turkish Grand National Assembly regarding the Armenian allegations, but has also another proposal on the researching of unsolved murders. Moreover, by classifying Turkey’s combat against terror as war, it has requested for an article on the determining of war damages and their compensation to be included in the Constitutional draft<sup>103</sup>.

102 “BDP: Soykırım İddiaları İçin Komisyon Kurulsun” (BDP: A Commission Should be Established for the Genocide Allegations), *Milliyet*, 25 April 2013.

103 “BDP Ermeni Tehcirini ‘soykırım’ Olarak Niteledi” (BDP Classified the Armenian Relocation as ‘Genocide’), *Zaman*, 25 April 2013.

In a manner that completes this initiative, in a speech delivered at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Mersin Independent Deputy Ertuğrul Kürkçü, who acts together with the BDP, has given statements that reflects the views of the Armenians regarding the relocation and has moreover offered his condolences to the inheritors of those being subjected to “Meds Yeghern”. He has also indicated that they are determined in revealing the historical events concerning these massacres, that freedom of speech and conscience must be achieved in Turkey and by this way the young generation will escape this burden. Moreover, he has said that it is necessary for the fraternity between the Kurds, Turks and Armenians to be developed and new ways to be found for reconciliation. Furthermore, Kürkçü has also expressed that the Kurds, Turks and Armenians have suffered from the massacres, atrocities and deportation and that the main reason for these cruelties is the policies of great powers to obtain zones of influence. Kürkçü has also said that the activities held in Turkey for April 24 are the beginning of a period of mutual understanding in Turkey<sup>104</sup>.

In Kürkçü’s statements, two points in particular draw attention. The first is that he has not uttered the word “genocide” and instead, just like President Obama, has said “Meds Yeghern”. However, BDP uses the word genocide. The second point is that it has referred to a historical truth that is no longer much dwelled upon, the policies of great states to obtain zones of influence, an issue that should also exist among discussions on “genocide”.

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104 “Un Député Turc Veut Faire la Lumière Sur le Génocide Arménien”, *Armenews*, 3 May 2013.

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