

AVİM
AVRASYA İNCELEMELERİ MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR EURASIAN STUDIES

THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF ARMENIAN HISTORY

Tal BUENOS

Blog No: 11
29.04.2014

Tal BUENOS

Daily Sabah

29.04.2014

For the genocide industry, the labeling of the Armenian tragedy as genocide is a matter of life and death: If the Armenians did not suffer a genocide, then many genocide scholars would be unemployed.

In addition to asking how one feels about what happened to many innocent Armenians in Anatolia during World War I, one might find it an interesting and cerebral exercise to ask: Why is the history of these events immersed in political controversy to this day, especially on April 24?

Edward A. Freeman, who was appointed at the recommendation of Prime Minister Gladstone to chair the University of Oxford's prestigious Regius Professorship of Modern History in the late 19th century, famously announced it as true "that history is past politics and that politics are but present history." He embodied both history and politics. While Freeman failed in his three political bids for parliament, as a historian he was the progenitor for a long line of Turcophobic historians and politicians in Britain, including James Bryce and Arnold J. Toynbee, authors of the wartime propaganda that serves as the basis for the Armenian narrative today.

Freeman taught that "the Turk and the Jew are leagued against the Christian," and that

Europe is "the common possession of Aryan blood and speech." He tirelessly incited all Ottoman Christians to rebel against the Turks whom he considered to be strangers in Europe and unfit to rule, and proclaimed that "every nation has a right to get rid of strangers who prove a nuisance, whether they are Chinese in America, or Jews in Russia, Serbia, Hungary, and Romania." Freeman also held the conviction that America would be a better place "if every Irishman should kill a negro and be hanged for it." This is the man who intensified the calls for "the Turkish horde" to be "driven back to its native deserts, or else die out" in the 1860s, before inspiring Gladstone's Bulgarian Agitation and, yes, before tutoring Bryce into first problematizing the Ottoman Armenian condition in 1876.

To a great extent, Freeman, whose influence is vastly understudied, is responsible for the fact that the Armenian issue, as a subplot of Britain's Eastern Question, was fated to be a case of politicized history. However, when considering the current map of international politics, why is the history of the Armenian tragedy still politicized rather than remembered?

For Britain, the unraveling of the Armenian narrative would mean an embarrassing review of a British historiography that is based on interpersonal ties to Liberal leaders, unchecked prejudice, and the pretense of "moral" imperialism. A long list of revered politicians, scientists and historians in the late Victorian era would have to be viewed in a different light in order to fully contextualize the spirit of anti-Semitism and Turcophobia among the Liberal opposition during Benjamin Disraeli's premiership from 1874 to 1880. Understanding why certain Armenian representatives in Europe were empowered to perpetuate conflict with the Ottoman state and jeopardize the lives of many Armenian communities in Anatolia would necessarily cast a dark shadow on the memory of Gladstone, who was elected to lead Britain's government more times than any other in the kingdom's history. Moreover, an examination of the Armenian narrative would not only call into question the accuracy of Britain's wartime reports but reveal a clear British motivation to organize Armenian rebellion in World War I for the very purpose of having it result in bloodshed and effective propaganda.

For France, the position on the Armenian narrative is mainly dictated by the political commitment to please an Armenian population that is largely concentrated in certain electoral districts, and this has led to a draconian bill that was designed to force the public into accepting a biased narration of history.For instance, it is no coincidence that the main supporters of the notorious genocide bill represent Armenian constituents, be it Valérie Boyer of Bouches-du-Rhône in the National Assembly (2011) or Hervé Marseille of Hauts-de-Seine in the Senate (2012). Passing such a bill is tantamount to robbing Turks of the freedom to speak about their own history, all because of French domestic politics.

For the EU, the demand that Turkey should recognize the Armenian tragedy as genocide is one of several political options through which Brussels may deny Turkish membership and still make it seem as if it is Turkey's own doing. Thus, Turkey will be made to appear as stubborn and non-cooperative while certain European governments will continue to harbor their Islamophobic denial of Turkish progress. In truth, had there not been an Armenian issue, there likely would have been another European pretext to block Turkey out of Europe.

For Russia, the politicization of the Armenian narrative is an indirect manner of dancing around the next round of cold-warring with the West. As evidenced by Russia Today, a TV news network owned by Russia, and The Independent, a London newspaper owned by a Russian, the Armenian issue seems to resurface every time there is need to harass Turkey in hope of disrupting its NATO alliance with the West and tilting the balance of power in the Middle East.

For the U.S., when considering Turkey's pivotal role in several regions, the Armenian issue is a leverage better kept than discarded. In this fashion, the U.S. is balancing a convenient push and pull: Turkey's compliance with American interests is procured by both incentives and pressures. While there are plenty of carrots in U.S.-Turkey relations, the Armenian issue is one clear stick that the U.S. is waving at Turkey. This is achieved by the constant threat of officially labeling the Armenian tragedy as genocide in Congress or the U.N. It should seem odd that in the U.S. more scholars and politicians talk about genocide in the Armenian context than in the context of both slavery and America's indigenous population; it would only be odd if politics were not involved. Throughout this practice, Turkey is made to appear as if it was "saved" by the White House from the ramifications of international condemnation that a genocide label entails. Along these lines, it is made to appear as if the Turks are taking advantage of American pragmatic considerations of foreign policy, and as if the reason to support genocide labeling is a moral one.

For the genocide industry, the labeling of the Armenian tragedy as genocide is a matter of life and death: If the Armenians did not suffer a genocide, then many genocide scholars would be unemployed. These centers and organizations, which are dedicated to "genociding" most cases of mass deaths from famine to tsunami, may have the appearance of nonstate actors but are closely aligned with the interests of state institutions. They are programed to deny the uniqueness of the Holocaust in order to weaken Turkey's position in the international political system.

For Armenia, the genocide narrative is the foundation of its obsession with playing the role of victim. Since the 1990s, the constant networking to associate Armenians with suffering has had the deliberate effect of diminishing the level of international criticism on Armenia's vicious annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the displacement of nearly one million Azeris. In other words, for Armenia to successfully cover up its offenses against Azerbaijan it has been enough to keep parading the genocide claims as a symbol of Armenian victimhood without even having to prove that what happened in World War I corresponds with the U.N. definition of genocide. Sadly, as in the days of Armenian rebellion against the Ottoman state, decisions that affect the common Armenian in the

Caucasus are made by the diasporic Armenians of power and wealth. For the Armenian Americans, the genocide extravaganza is not only a source of identity, but the source of their political participation and relevance in Washington, D.C.

And for Turkey? Why are there calls for genocide recognition in Turkey? Many Turkish scholars and journalists, who continuously search for opportunities to showcase their Euro-lust, hear the persisting calls against their Ottoman predecessors and jump on the genocide bandwagon. Their wish to be accepted by Western intellectuals, in keeping with their imagined society, has led them to choose the cheap semblance of liberalism over the study of facts and the demonstration of loyalty to their own people's history. Should the quest for European acceptance mean that Turkey has to accept lies and derision? Truly progressive intellectuality would have the Turk debate other Europeans, equal among equals, historiography to historiography, rather than yield to political dictations of history.

* *PhD candidate, University of Utah*

http://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/2014/04/30/the-international-politics-of-armenian-history

About the author:

To cite this article: Tal BUENOS. 2026. "THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF ARMENIAN HISTORY." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Blog No.2014 / 11. April 29. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://avim.org.tr/Blog/THE-INTERNATIONAL-POLITICS-OF-ARMENIAN-HISTORY

Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Posta: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

© 2009-2025 Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM) Tüm Hakları Saklıdır