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## **ARMENIAN PRESSURE ON 1915 TO REMAIN FRUITLESS: EXPERTS**

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History of Truth

'Nothing positive will come out of pressuring governments to legislate the history,' says one professor

Ahead of the 101st anniversary of the 1915 events, experts agree that Armenias pressure on governments to describe the events as genocide will not yield results.

For more than a hundred years, exactly what unfolded in 1915, continues to be a contentious issue between Turkey and Armenia that has proven to be a spoiler in relations between the two neighboring states.

While Armenia and the Armenian diaspora claim that nothing short of genocide occurred at the hands of Ottoman authorities under a relocation order of some ethnic Armenians, Turkey says Turks and Armenians died during clashes between Ottoman forces and armed Armenian gangs backed by Russia.

Since, Armenia is trying to put pressure on other governments to describe the events as genocide and do not back the idea of looking into the archives as the Turkish government has been suggesting for almost two years.

Professor Christopher Gunn from Coastal Carolina University, whose studies focus on the Ottoman history, told Anadolu Agency that Armenia is not at a point to change its approach to the issue and was not interested in true reconciliation".

Nothing positive will come out of pressuring governments to legislate the history, Gunn said, adding that history should be the business of historians and not foreign legislation.

If Armenia is interested in reconciliation and resolution of the issue, they need to come to the table and be willing to discuss and debate with Turkey, Turkish academics, etc."

According to Edward Erickson, a professor of military history at the Command & Staff College at the Marine Corps University and author of *Ottomans and Armenians: A Study in Counterinsurgency*, the recognition of the events of 1915 by other countries as genocide only advantaged the Armenian diaspora, many of whom desire financial compensation and property restitution.

The country of Armenia, in my view, derives no advantage from such recognition, he said. The main problem between Turkey and Armenia is Nagorno-Karabakh. The 1915 events are only a distraction for the country of Armenia.

Armenian militia has occupied the Azerbaijan Karabakh region since 1993, similar to pro-Russian militia that have illegally occupied parts of Ukraine since 2014. Turkey stands by Azerbaijan -- whose people are ethnically Turkic.

Erickson added that every scholar working on the issue knew that the Turkish national and military archives were already open and that the Armenian national archives were closed.

Professor Justin McCarthy from Louisville University described Armenia's efforts to put other governments under pressure as a terrible mistake and that this approach was partly pretty political.

Armenian organizations feel that they have to do that to keep their people together but partly they hope that the EU would force Turkey to do something, he said.

But that's not going to happen ... I think ultimately they have to fail.

He also stressed that Armenia should start to act like a responsible party and leave at least most of the land they have taken from Azerbaijan, referring to Karabakh.

If they do that then Turkey can open the borders and they can trade with Armenia. Armenia really needs that, he added.

Political Science professor Michael Gunther, from Tennessee Technological University and author of two academic books and scholarly articles on the Armenian issue, noted that Armenians and their supporters continue to benefit from the impression that only they have suffered from the 1915 events.

So why should the Armenians compromise on this issue despite the conciliatory statements by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan made in 2014, he said.

Gunther added that the reason why Armenia continued to place pressure on other governments and indeed escaped the calls for any dialogue was that benefit.

The Turkish government has been telling the international community since 2014 that Turkish national and military archives about the 1915 events were ready to be opened.

President Barack Obama had described the events of 1915 involving Armenians within the Ottoman Empire as "Meds Yeghern," an Armenian term meaning "great calamity". He once more refrained, as in previous years, from describing the events as "genocide", which he did during his first presidential campaign.

Each year, worldwide rallies are staged by the Turkish people to reject Armenia's thesis. A huge peace and solidarity walk will mark one of the biggest events this year on April 24 by the Turks, where thousands of supporters are expected to walk from the White House to the Turkish embassy in Washington DC.

What happened in 1915?

World War I was a global disaster that left 15 million people dead and another 20 million injured.

The empires of the Ottomans, Austria-Hungary and Russia collapsed and boundaries were remapped.

Millions of people had to leave their homes -- a common fate for the people who formed the Ottoman Empire, including Armenians.

- [ ] the war, some Armenian nationalists took advantage of the fact that the Ottoman and Russian forces were fighting each other and collaborated with the Russian army, with the aim of creating an ethnically homogenous Armenian homeland.

When the Russian army invaded eastern Anatolia, some volunteer Armenian units in Russia and the Ottoman Empire supported the invasion. Some Armenian officials in the Ottoman army switched sides and joined the invading Russian army against the Turks.

Also, some Armenian armed groups massacred civilians during the Russian invasion. In response, the Ottoman government tried to convince Armenian representatives and opinion leaders to stop the violence, but result in favor came out of it.

The government then decided to shut down the Armenian revolutionary committees and arrest or deport some well-known figures on April 24, 1915 -- a date that would later be selected to hold activities commemorating the so-called "Armenian genocide."

On May 27, 1915, the Ottoman government ordered the Armenian population residing in or near the war zone, as well as those collaborating with the Russian army, to be relocated to the southern Ottoman provinces.

- [ ] conditions, famine, epidemics, ongoing internal conflicts and local groups seeking to take revenge, left a number of Armenians dead, although the Ottoman government had made careful plans for their safe transfer and tried to meet their humanitarian needs.

Historical documents clearly show that the Ottoman government, not only did not intend for these tragedies to take place, but also punished offenders who committed crimes against the relocated Armenians.

## Need for empathy and fair memory

Armenia and the Armenian diaspora have demanded an apology and compensation for the 1915 incidents.

- . [111] have also advocated for the recognition of the events as genocide, a term defined in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.

Turkey objects to the presentation of the incidents as genocide and describes the 1915 events as a tragedy for both sides.

Turkey argues that the issue should be handled from a perspective of just memory, by respecting the memory of both sides, understanding what each nation experienced and taking a non-political, non-biased approach to history.

The Turkish government has repeatedly proposed the creation of a joint commission of historians from both countries that includes international experts in order to tackle the issue in a scientific manner.

The commission is proposed to conduct its research, not only by using Turkish and Armenian archives, but also by using the relevant archives of other countries.

## Armenia did not use opportunity to normalize relations

- . [11] most significant development in the normalization of relations between the two countries was in October 2009, when two protocols were signed to rebuild diplomatic relations and improve bilateral relations.

The protocols proposed an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives and the mutual recognition of boundaries in order to restore confidence between the two nations and find solutions to existing problems.

. [11] protocols also included cooperation in a wide range of areas including tourism, economy, transport, communication, energy, environment, high-level political consultations and student exchange programs, which could all help in normalizing relations.

The Turkish government sent the protocols directly to parliament for approval, while the Armenian government submitted the protocols to the constitutional court, which ruled that they did not abide by the nature and wording of the country's constitution.

The constitution refers to the "Armenian Declaration of Independence," in which an item reads: "The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia."

The declaration also names the eastern part of today's Turkey as "Western Armenia."

. [12] January 2010, the Armenian government announced that it froze the approval process of the protocols. Five years later, the protocols were withdrawn from the Armenian parliament.

Turkish authorities believe that in order to overcome the historical and political bitterness, all sides must be honest and open-minded.

Turkey's then foreign minister and incumbent Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said in December 2013, following his visit to Armenia, that one-sided approaches and conjectural evaluations should be avoided in order to find a solution. He added that history could only be built with a "just memory."

In 2014, when incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was prime minister, he expressed his condolences for the first time to all Ottoman citizens who lost their lives during the 1915 events, including Armenians.

. [13] offered a hand of friendship in 2014 to Armenia, but, unfortunately, it came to nothing," Erdogan said in a recent speech.