



AVİM

Türkmeneli İşbirliği ve Kültür Vakfı
AVRASYA İNCELEMELERİ MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR EURASIAN STUDIES

TURKISH-ARMENIAN DIALOGUE



26 April 2014, İstanbul



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İstanbul, 26 April 2014, The Marmara Hotel



Alev KILIÇ

(Ret. Ambassador, Director of AVİM)

Today, we will start our session and at the beginning, I would like to introduce our two prominent key-note speakers.

Mr. Richard Giragosian is the founding director of the Regional Studies Center, an independent think-tank in Armenia. He also serves as a visiting professor at Yerevan State University's Center for European Studies (CES) and he is a contributing analyst for Oxford Analytica. He previously served as the Director of the Armenian Center for the National and International Studies (UPNIS) from 2009 to 2011 and was a regular contributor to Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) which we follow regularly. He also has publications from 1999 to 2008 covering political, economic and security issues in the South Caucasus, Central Asia and the Asia Pacific region which actually overlaps with the area covered by our institute, Center for Eurasian Studies. He has worked as a consultant for the OSCE, the U.S. Department of Defense and State, the UN and the World Bank and the EU.

To my left is Retired Ambassador Ömer Engin Lütem, who has served over forty years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As Ambassador to a number of countries, his

last post was France, not bilateral, but UNESCO, the multi-lateral. He founded, for the very first time in Turkey, the Armenian Research Institute under the umbrella of a think-tank, Avrasya Stratejik Arařtırmalar Merkezi (ASAM). ASAM was disbanded and the Armenian Research Institute developed into the Center for Eurasian Studies, covering Armenia again but in a broader scope. I must also mention, in this context, that Ambassador Lütem is the Honorary Chairman of the Center for Eurasian Studies.

Today, AVİM is the major institute that specializes on the Armenian studies in Turkey, and has periodicals that have been going on since 2001 and 2002, the "Review of Armenian Studies" in English, "Ermeni Arařtırmaları" in Turkish. They are not necessarily the translations of each other. A third periodical is "International Crimes and History". These three publications I would say, in Turkey's conditions, represent a success story because there are very few institutions that have kept up their periodicals since the years 2001 and 2002 up till now uninvolved or unbroken.

Today, we have great pleasure and privilege to host Mr. Richard Giragosian. AVİM has been organizing what we call brain-storming sessions monthly on a number of issues, not all on the Armenian issues but rather on the Eurasian topics. However, from some angle, from some point we try to see how they affect Turkey, how they affect Armenia and how they affect Turkish-Armenian relations. Today, it is the first time as AVİM that we are having a guest from Armenia to talk directly on the Turkish-Armenian dialogue issues. We think, this is a long overdue initiative and what we believe in AVİM is that, to have reconciliation, we need dialogue and this dialogue starts with first getting to know each other's views. So we do not expect any restrictions in terms of positions to be expressed here. We are ready to respect all views. But we are also expecting that, both sides will evaluate what has been said and whether we can, at the end of this session, draw some conclusions or recognize common denominators on which we can further proceed.

So with these words, Mr. Giragosian should I give first word to you? Ambassador Lütem then.



Ömer Engin Lütem (Ret. Ambassador, Honorary President of AVİM)

The Armenian question, it's a huge one. That is why it's always a problem deciding where to begin. Not to waste time, I prepared a paper which focuses on the main issue, namely the genocide allegations. But then, our Prime Minister surprised everybody very much by his message on 1915 events and changed the topic of the agenda. So after a few words about the Armenian issue I will speak a little bit about the Prime Minister's message, then to revert to the genocide allegations and finally some words about another important development, European Court of Human Rights verdict on Perinçek Case.

Let's begin with what the Armenian issue is. About 32-33 years ago, for the reasons beyond me, I was obliged to deal with this issue and astonished to discover that, except some few boundary conflicts in Latin America there is not such an old question existing in international relations. Today this question has become a century-old; there is no other question at least in Europe which dates from the First World War and all the problems that this war caused were solved by agreements and treaties concluded after the war.

This is the same for the Armenian question. The frontiers between Armenia and Turkey have been fixed by Kars and Moscow Treaties that both concluded in 1921 and the rights of the Armenians who stay in Turkey has been determined by the Lausanne Treaty. So on the legal ground or from international law point of view, there is no Armenian problem. But in political field Armenian problem exists especially since 1965.

Because it's a very old question and the Armenian claims are also very old, it's time, I think, to resolve this question once and for all taking especially into consideration that it's preventing the establishment of normal relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Now some words about Prime Minister's message. This message addresses the human or moral aspect of the Armenian problem neglected up to now by us. As 24 April is a day of remembrance of the Armenians who died during the First World War, the message was very timely.

The essence of the Prime Minister message is that relocations of the Armenians had inhumane consequences; therefore, he conveys his condolences to the grand children of the Armenians died at that time. But the Prime Minister speaks also about "just memory" which means that one should take into considerations the suffering of the others. This is especially important because Armenians tend to have a one-sided memory, they mention only their own memories and neglect those of the others.

Another important point of the message is that it repeats the Turkish proposal of 2005 about the creation of a historical commission. You know that this commission exists in the protocols as "the sub-commission on the historical dimension". But the decision of the Armenian Constitutional Court stating that the genocide could not be discussed rendered this sub-commission useless. It is a pity, because if we will be able to restart negotiations one day, we will be obliged to discuss the historical facts. Not discussing the genocide issue would lead most probably to not discussing other historical issues and also their consequences. So, knowingly or not, the Armenian Constitutional Court created a major obstacle for the reconciliation process.

Now, I will speak about the Turkish views on the genocide allegations.

First of all, I should say that the big majority of the Turkish politicians and the Turkish scholars believe that the events of 1915 do not constitute genocide. But a minority of politicians, most of them with Kurdish origins with PKK tendency and some Turkish scholars, former leftists who changed into liberals, believe the contrary and support the Armenians views. For them the problem is that they do not have a real influence on Turkish public opinion and most probably in the future this situation will not change. So expecting that the Turkish public opinion will one day adopt the Armenian genocide allegations is not realistic.

There is another element that one should take into consideration. The activities of the Diaspora and the Armenian government for 2015 commemorations could trigger strong reactions in Turkey, which could further strengthen the majority views.

To prove that an event is genocide became extremely difficult after the International Court of Justice's verdict concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina case. The court gave much attention to the intention of destroying a given group. The court concluded that first of all this intention should be proven beyond doubt and approximation, presumptions, deductions, hearsay or even circumstantial evidence will not suffice. Under these circumstances, there is practically no way to prove that an Armenian genocide happened and Armenian genocide allegations have practically no chance to be accepted in an international court of justice.

I can briefly summarize why the Ottoman government's intent in taking the decision of relocation was not to destroy the Armenians as a group by the following arguments:

1. There is no document which shows that Ottoman government has a genocidal intent. As you know some fake telegrams were published afterwards but it has been proved that they were not authentic.
2. The Ottoman government took a number of measures and allocated some funds so that the relocations operations should take place orderly and smoothly and if possible without casualties, but it was not often the case.
3. In 1915-1916 about 1660 Ottoman officials (military and civilian), were put on trial for the crimes of maltreatment and murder of the Armenians. Over 500 people were charged with prison sentence and 67 were sentenced to death. This is also one of the main evidences that the relocations were not aimed to be a genocide.
4. Not all the Armenians were relocated. A book published about three months ago, by American military historian Edward Erickson states that about 350.000 Armenians were not relocated: This is a huge number, almost one quarter of the Armenian population. Armenians living in the provinces of İstanbul, İzmir and Edirne and in some other smaller places were not relocated. This is due to rather good security conditions in these provinces. If we apply this to the Jewish holocaust, it would mean that the Jews living in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich would not have been sent in concentrations camps. This is one of the main evidences which show that the intention of the Ottoman Empire was not to annihilate the Armenians.
5. Unlike what happened in Nazi Germany, there were no special installations like gas chambers and crematoriums to destroy the Armenians.

6. Unlike what happened in Nazi Germany, there was no special organization dealing with relocations; the famous "Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa" was transformed to regular troops in 1915 and fought against Russian in the Eastern Front.
7. Religious or racial hatred is the basis of the genocide acts. In all the genocides you can find this element. For Jews, anti-Semitism has a history of about ten centuries. Bosnians were hated because they become Muslims five centuries ago etc. Turks and other Muslims of the Ottoman Empire never had feelings of hatred toward the Armenians. The fact that an Armenian served as the Foreign Minister 2-3 years prior to the relocation is a good example of this.
8. If 1.5 million or even less Armenians really had died during and after the relocations, there should have been several mass graves. For example 1.5 million casualties require 150 mass graves of 10.000 people or 300 mass graves of 5000 people. However no mass graves belonging to the Armenians are reported. Some Armenia scholars like Mr. Sarafian from London are searching for these graves apparently with no tangible results.

Lastly I would like to draw your attention to the verdict of European Court of Human Rights on the Perinçek Case. The verdict does not deal directly with the genocide issue but as the Swiss Court decision speaks about genocide, the European Court of Human Rights has expressed some opinion on this subject. Firstly, it is stated in the verdict that what happened to Armenians is very different from the Holocaust. Secondly, there is no consensus among scholars that the events of 1915 are a genocide. Thirdly, contrary to the Armenian case there are court decisions for Jewish, Rwanda and Bosnia Herzegovina cases. These findings of the Human Rights Court are weakening the Armenian genocide claims and will be important for future discussion on that subject.



Richard Giragosian

(Founding director of the Regional Studies Center)

Thank you both ambassadors, but thank you AVİM for hosting us today and thank you all that have come. To be honest, what I will be presenting is something perhaps you are neither expecting nor used to. It is a view from Armenia, but as a think tank in Armenia we are emphasizing on thinking, not tanks!

We are an independent think-tank working with and advising both the Armenian and the Turkish governments on normalization, yet our approach is somehow different. We do not work on the genocide; we do not engage in genocide issue. We are working on what we call normalization of relations. From our perspective, the genocide issue arises in terms of reconciliation which is a much longer process, perhaps generational, much more complex and deeper. What we are engaged in is a much more immediate process of normalization, more specifically opening borders and establishing diplomatic relations as a foundation for reconciliation.

Prime Minister Erdoğan's recent statement -which I welcomed- creates steps forward. This is a gesture of goodwill to the Armenian diaspora, to the Armenian government, and to many within Turkey in terms of the freedom of expression, in terms of how we approach to 1915.

But in general, our approach is to become less of a prisoner of the past and to work in the present based on a shared future. To be honest with you, what we're working in Ankara today is reinforced by the Armenian government's policy of no preconditions. It's refreshing to have a willingness or political will of no preconditions. In other words, the issue of genocide recognition is no longer a prerequisite or a demand or a precondition from the Armenian side.

The second refreshing element from the Armenian side is the need of recognition of the current borders of the Republic of Turkey and not any kind of territorial demand or concession.

From the Turkish side, what's refreshing is the new level of sincerity, to not only addressing the past but in dealing with the present. In fact, what we are working on now in the aftermath of what I would call the suspension of the normalization process, is no longer limited to the protocols. In other words, to be quite honest with you, where we are today between Ankara and Yerevan, the protocols are dead and they are not coming back, especially to parliamentary ratification. What we focus on is a much more realistic implementation of the terms of the protocols and it is based on a "lesson learned" from the earlier round of the protocols. That "lesson learned" is the recognition of what was largely Turkey's strategic mistake to underestimate Azerbaijan's reaction and frankly to overestimate Ankara's ability to persuade Baku. To be fair however, what we share with the Turkish government is the sense of frustration that Turkish policy options in the broader Caucasus have become far too limited on Azerbaijan's ability to veto or to say "no". In other words, it is unfortunate that little brother of the relationship has gained too much when handed over what Ankara can do in the region. But, the mistake we have learned from is this time to consult and brief Azerbaijan on every step of the way. In other words, what we are seeking in the normalization of relations should not be misconstrued as some kind of a reward to Armenia, just the opposite. It's the basic minimum behavior of neighbors, open borders and diplomatic relations. And to be honest, what is also important is, I don't share the concept of "Armenian problem"; to be honest we don't have to be such a problem. Despite the fact that we have closed borders, minds have been opened and we are getting to know one and other again, and we are building almost an attraction on grassroots level from the bottom-up. A new recognition has appeared of what we were missing and what opportunities have come and gone.

More important is the fact that we have a shared future as well. What's also

important though, is in terms of what we are achieving diplomatically; Turkey has a new timetable from Ankara which is realistic. It is deferral, delay; it is waiting to implement normalization of relations until after elections in Turkey and until after next year's one hundredth years of anniversary. The approach from Turkey is basically to whither the storm from the next year's anniversary; the Armenian reciprocity, the move by Armenia in turn, is actually to have less of a state-push for events of commemoration next year and rather delegating this to the diaspora.

The Armenian government wants to send a gesture of good-will to the Turkish side, not provoke or inflame in overreaction: the renewed attempt to restart and to resume diplomatic engagement.

Having said that, we are working now on several ideas and steps that maybe implemented, prior to opening of the border if you will. One is, perhaps, selling Armenia electricity from Turkey prior to the opening of the border. Another would be, for example, the establishment of a Turkish Airlines office in Yerevan. More facilitation, in terms of civil aviation. Other areas of cooperation include cooperation between ministries of energy of Turkey and Armenia, and perhaps on a broader regional context over nuclear safety because of the Armenian nuclear power plant just across the border. Other areas include more people-to-people contact and what I hope this represents today the first in a new level of collaboration and cooperation between research institutes and think tanks.

Our think tank works actively with Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı (TESEV), Türkiye Ekonomi Politikaları Araştırma Vakfı (TEPAV) in Ankara, Global Political Trends Center (GPOT) and are quite willing to deepen our research collaboration especially on Eurasian issues with AVİM.

At the same time, we do believe that the Azerbaijan factor is also indirectly essential to this normalization process. Therefore, our think-tank is actively engaged in what we call one and a half effort, working with Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy and with Stratejik Araştırmalar Mərkəzi (SAM) which is the think-tank of President Aliyev in Bakü. It is rather quiet, but it's an ongoing process, where over Nagorno-Karabakh we agreed to disagree, but work on a number of other issues from regional trade and development to energy etc.

We also would like to highlight how far we have come in Armenian-Turkish normalization, in other words, even though the process itself is now suspended. Despite the fact that the borders are not open and we don't have diplomatic relations, both Turkey and Armenia have gone too far to go back at this point.

Prime Minister Erdoğan -most recently for the first time in history- as sitting Turkish

Prime Minister has issued a statement on this issue one day before the remembrance. This also raises expectations and willingly sets the standard higher on the Turkish side. A similar statement, maybe, will be now expected every April 24th.

But, what is also interesting as well is a second historic first. President Abdullah Gül's visit to Armenia. As the first ever, the head of Turkish state coming to "Ermenistan" (Armenia). Why this is especially important in my opinion is because the minute President Gül arrived, it was a victory for the Armenian side not in a zero-sum ping-pong match with Turkey, but in terms of regaining the initiative for Armenian foreign policy and taking back the initiative from the diaspora. In other words, with President Gül's visit, with the normalization process, Armenia was able to assume the primary role in negotiating and in dealing with Turkey bilaterally on the state level.

The diaspora was relegated to a secondary role. This is very important. In terms of foreign policy, this places the bilateral relationship where it should be on state-to-state level. What is also important, in terms of normalization is, despite the constitutional court ruling, despite the temporary suspension, we are honestly hostage to Turkish domestic politics right now. In terms of the Armenian issue, what happened in terms of the normalization diplomacy, was unexpectedly Azerbaijan's very strong reaction, which was actually capable of returning the Armenian issue from a foreign policy agenda issue into one of the domestic politics in Turkey, where the PKK was accused of betraying the concept of one nation two states. But there is a new sincerity and willingness fortunately on both sides, which is rare. Because we have often in recent history found sincerity on the Turkish side and the willingness on the Armenian side, but usually, never at the same time. This is where the stars have aligned and hopefully can be realigned.

The other key factor, from AVİM's point of view also, is Russia. What's very important here is in many ways surprisingly in the earlier period of diplomatic engagement between Armenia and Turkey. Russia allowed it to happen for one clear reason; honestly it is so firmly entrenched in Armenia that there is little danger of it losing Armenia. There is little danger of Armenia being drawn to NATO or becoming an EU member. It was from a Russian perspective, stage managed, with Russian consent, but the other reason is about Russian national interests. The opening of the Armenian-Turkish border is seen by some in Moscow perhaps inevitable, better to have achieved with Russian management and control. One of the two goals from Russian viewpoint of national interest in terms of an open border between Armenia and Turkey is that it allows Russia to further isolate and marginalize Georgia which would be much less important for Armenia as an outlet etc.

Secondly, it is the Russian-owned sectors of the Armenian economy that would benefit and profit first and foremost with an open border. Railway, telecommunications



and energy specifically. And third, it is a reflection on the deepening Russian-Turkish relations. What is most interesting in post-Crimea, is not Russian support, but also no Russian opposition. We don't see them opposing the normalization efforts.

The other real reason is something that is not well-known publicly in Turkey, but several years ago, during the protocol process; there were Russian-Turkish negotiations, for air flight permission for Russia to use Turkish airspace to resupply the Russian base in Armenia. Because of the Georgian situation, Russia has a great challenge in its military link to its base in Armenia in terms of airspace. And currently, Turkey denies airspace access as do Azerbaijan and Georgia. Russian air force uses Iranian airspace which is very unreliable and very expensive. So this is something that Russia has been seeking from the Turkish side.

The Americans have been looking the other way. In other words, Turkey is a NATO member, but the Americans have been looking the other way during the negotiations understanding the value. What we also see as the reason is optimism because of the new attitude from the Turkish side and from the Armenian side. But more importantly, it's a commitment to a new reality. In other words, the Turkish side is approaching the normalization with Armenia not to please the Americans and not to appease Europeans. In other words, this is very sincere recalculation of Turkish national interest and a reorientation of Turkey.

Well, at the same time, I am optimistic that it can work, precisely because the Americans are not directly involved and the Europeans are not directly involved. We may have needed this -we still do-, to hold our hands between Armenia and Turkey, and to mediate and to provide their good offices. But what we don't need is the Americans or the EU. In fact, this is our shared history, shared present and shared future. We don't need the American Congress or the French Parliament, the Swiss Parliament to use the genocide issue to hit Turkey over the head. That is counterproductive for all of us. This is a bilateral source of engagement.

One should understand the Armenian diaspora in terms of not a monolith, and it is something that Yerevan, the Armenian government has no secret hotline or magic button to push to control the diaspora. In fact, it's just the opposite.

In many ways, I am diasporan, I am as much Turkish diaspora as much Armenian diaspora. In other words, as my Grandfather is from Elazığ, I have the right to be a Turkish diasporan as much as Armenian diasporan. My point is actually understood in Ankara. Meaning that, this is one of the negotiating points in Switzerland. They offer citizenship for people like me. They actually have the documents, Ottoman era documents, in other words, there is much more flexibility, much more innovative and creative diplomacy. Although, I don't yet see zero-problems with zero-neighbors. This is the significant step in the right direction and in conclusion. It is important to note that there is not yet a conclusion. But we have come so far, that this is very difficult for either side to go back from this point.

In fact, even if you notice the diaspora, the diaspora itself is changing. More and more coming to Turkey as tourists are seeing a new face of a new country. To be honest with you, being raised in diaspora, the Turkey of mythology, the narrative has been challenged, it has been changed. This is important for both sides. Just as on the Turkish side, there is an exaggerated paranoia or perception of threat or force from the diaspora. It is exaggerated as well. But at times we see sometimes loudest voices on the both sides are usually a vocal minority. It is actually the silent majority of the public opinion that we're anxious to reach. Part of our think-tank's efforts as well is to broaden the constituency for normalization. Both geographically, within Turkey and but also in terms of demographics and across the political spectrum. That is also why I may not embrace or agree with my friend and colleague's view of 1915, but one-word litmus test does not get us anywhere. Thank you.

Ömer Engin Lütem:

Some of the issues raised by Mr. Giragosian are not directly related to the Turkish-Armenian relations although they could influence them. Naturally it's possible to

discuss them but as they are extremely complicated, the discussions will take too much time and I am afraid will last may be until tomorrow.

So to be brief I will touch upon two differences of views between ourselves. I see that for Mr. Giragosian the most important problem is the normalization of relations between the two countries. I agree that normalization is important, but for us the most important issue is to resolve the Armenian problem with its main component, the genocide allegations. I know it's extremely difficult to try to solve this so deep-rooted and so emotional problem. But without reaching at least a kind of understanding on that subject I do not think it will be possible to normalize our relations; or if the relations are normalized formally, it will not be easy to sustain them.

The second difference is related to the first one. Mr. Giragosian is making a distinction between normalization and reconciliation, and is advocating that normalization should be followed by reconciliation. This question was discussed during the negotiations of the protocols and generally speaking, the Armenian view, with the exception of sub-commission on historical dimension, prevailed.

It's very easy to normalize in a formal way the relations: We open the borders and both sides exchange ambassadors. But in that case, the main issue, i.e. genocide allegations, remains and continues to poison relations. I do not want to imagine that the two countries, after normalizing relations, instead of starting a much needed



cooperation, continue to quarrel every day. So the logical thing to do, although it's very difficult to achieve, is to normalize relations and at the same time, to start a reconciliation process. Even in that case without significant developments on Armenian Azerbaijani relations I do not think that normalization, and therefore reconciliation, has much chance to be realized.

If there will be progress in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations would be easy. But for the reconciliation, which is much difficult to reach, we should not wait for the normalization taking place and should immediately try to have at least an understanding what to do together in that area.

The Prime Minister's message is opening the door for reconciliation. Why not enter from that door and make some substantial progress on this issue?

Richard Giragosian:

What is important in here, first if we look closely to protocols that we have signed, what's the most important thing is not just what's in the protocols but what is "not" in the protocols. There is no reference in the protocols whatsoever either to Nagorno-Karabakh or to the Armenian genocide.

In fact, in my very unpopular view in Armenia, I defend the section about historical sub-commission. But maybe not for your reason, in other words, I argue that it is too premature to condemn or criticize the idea without knowing the mission or the mandate or the members of such a historical sub-commission. It doesn't necessarily have to start from an assumption that there was no genocide which is what the Armenian critics fear. But, what is also important is to understand that the Armenian genocide is an identity issue. In other words, for over 65 percent of the Armenian population in Armenia proper and for the diaspora, much of our identity is shaped by the events of 1915. And as a diasporan, to be honest, my identity until moving to Armenia was that one issue. It was the only issue bringing together the likes of Kim Kardashian, as bad as they are, with the other Armenian Americans for example.

In other words, we all came together as Armenians, in the United States, without speaking the language very well, perhaps a shared identity based on April 24th where we came together. Every other day of the year, our identity was eating "şiş kebab". In other words, eating Anatolian foods. What is also interesting, other than the genocide issue, is a weak sense of identity. What needs to change is that Armenia actually needs to become more the center of gravity, more the center of identity for the diaspora or human rights, democracy and economic development of the country should be equally important with the genocide. My unpopular view is, as important as the genocide issue,

there are many important issues and we do not have to overlook in terms of a process of engagement.

We do not have to wait for “the big victory” first. I would prefer building smaller steps of cooperation of engagement as a foundation of normalization for reconciliation. Because from our side, we are not ready for the demands that reconciliation requires, in terms of compromise discourse of changing narrative, and many in Turkey too are not ready. But we are moving in the same direction and we are both moving in the right direction, especially demographically. To be honest, I measured it personally. I am a former columnist for the Turkish Newsweek. I have been doing interviews and cooperation with media outlets in Turkey for over a decade. What I can say and how I can say it is greatly freer and more expanded. For the same reason, what I say in Armenia, is actually more embraced as it once was, in terms of the moderate voices are now crowding out the militants, on both sides. We need to actually foster this. That is why in my writings, in my presentations both in Armenia and in Turkey, I rarely talk about the genocide. Because actually we don’t work on the genocide, I am not a historian, I am not an Ottoman scholar and nor do I claim to be. And at the same time in dealing with today’s Turkey it is increasingly less relevant for me.



Questions & Answers

Maxime Gauin:

First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. Kılıç, because you mentioned Russia and I will not mention Russia—and I regret it. I will try to propose an angle, that I hope, could be accepted by both sides whatever you think about 1915. My doctoral thesis will be not about 1915. You say Mr. Giragosian that the Diaspora is not monolithic. That's true. You mention the silent majority. Regardless, there is no strong structure in the Diaspora, I will take the examples of France and US, whatever its opinion on 1915 could be, that is advocating views similar to yours, who is sincerely working for reconciliation or at least making an attempt for reconciliation. I will say further the interest of at least some of them, survival of the main Diaspora structure is conditional on pursuing war against Turkey [When I say war, I don't exaggerate, in their mind, it is war - I mean the Armenian Weekly, France Arménie etc, this is taken literally]. To continue with France and the US, in France, the manpower of Armenian nationalists is reducing, the number of people, the number participating to demonstrations is very low, the number of French citizens of Armenian heritage who don't share the [nationalist] views is much bigger [than the number of extremist demonstrators] I totally agree, but these [moderate] people are not organized at all and these people are increasingly assimilated. I have nothing against assimilation, it is just that when you are assimilated

you cannot go on the street and say "I feel Armenian. I think maybe it was genocide, maybe not. But I don't agree with violence, racism, etc. [against Turks]." There is no organization. And in the US, it is different but it is not better, in the sense that the Armenian National Committee of America is still strong and there is nobody in front of the ANCA.

The last remark if I can speak a little bit more, maybe it is just an idea I submit, and once again, I hope it could be accepted whatever you think about 1915, the disappearance of Armenian communities in Anatolia is not only due to events of 1915-1916 whatever you call that. You have to look at the Turkish war of independence and the French withdrawal from the cities. I was the first to write an academic paper on that, and the Greek withdrawal from western Anatolia, and I found –just to give an example- in both French and American archives, testimonies of Greek and Armenian refugees- it is not Turkish sources- say that "the Greek army forced us to leave our villages". And the Greek army destroyed everything in 1922. And during the French withdrawal of Cilicia, the official representative of all the Christian communities of Cilicia told the French chief negotiator, "OK you want us to block the immigration of Armenians to Syria but we can't because any people who attempt to prevent [the mass migration] would be threatened to death by the Dashnaks, Hunchaks, etc." It is the official report of the evacuation commission. I just wanted to bring a proposition to a different angle. Thank you."



Aslan Yavuz Şir:

Actually when you were talking about these steps taken by Armenia, I understand that there is an incremental approach to reconciliation or normalization. And I noticed that you used this term “there was a storm coming in 2015”. We are very well aware of this storm, but what I derived from it is that there is a line of argument. Your conclusion is the question itself and to you this begins with the Armenian dependence on Russia, which is increasing. We are all aware of Armenia’s decision to join Eurasian customs union and today the crisis in Ukraine. I have another line of argument that these processes are increasing the need for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation process. Thus this process includes, most of all, the opening of borders. And I think this is a very particular thought which was assumed and promoted by the American view on this process, and which sees also includes the Karabakh problem as an obstacle to the opening of borders.

So you can see that there is a line of argument developing here. It might be seen as being too deterministic for you, but you know in Turkish we have a saying: “aklın yolu bir” (reason has a common path), and I think another line of argument is that Armenia is very concerned, very worried about the independence issue. I think there is a problem of independence for the Armenian state, the government. Today, it may not seem very obvious from the outside. So in this line of argument, on the one hand we have Turkey

which introduces some of the first initiatives for reconciliation, the first of which is the recognition of the independent Armenian state in 1990s. It was a vital step. And it was followed in the 2000s by football diplomacy. And today, we have the Turkish Prime Minister's message. So, I can at least count 3 steps. In return, we see Armenia, which did not take any steps, not with regard to bilateral relations, nor with the Nagorno-Karabakh and others. Actually, I am not aware of any steps and I think -pragmatically speaking- Turkey has nothing to lose in this relation. Russia is a manageable partner for Turkey, and not a direct threat.

Turkey has another stronghold in Turkish–Armenian relations, namely the decision by the European Court of Human Rights on the freedom of expression, i.e. on the so-called “denialist” arguments. So we have this advantage. Thus, in the international area, you are very well aware that out of 190 states, only about twenty of them just recognized genocide resolutions in their parliaments and did this politically, not with reference to international law.

Turkey is also keeping two things in mind for the sake of future relations, first of which is the “citizenship” issue which was only talked out loud in recent weeks, but it has been discussed for some time now. And another thing is the return of the Armenian foundation properties.

So we are taking like five, six steps and nothing in return from Armenian side. Pragmatically speaking, we are reaching to the conclusion that Turkey is taking a lot of steps and Armenia is not and Armenia is in a hard situation, but they do not want to lose anything and they want to gain everything by no concessions. So this is very deterministic line of argument. But you may add to Armenian view, so, this is the question itself, actually. Why do you still think and argue that Turkey is the one to take steps, open borders etc., and gain from this initiative, considering the fact that we've already been taking steps and Armenia did not?

Richard Giragosian:

Briefly, what we see, first of all, is in general the asymmetry of the relationship, Armenia and Turkey. Turkey is much more confident, much stronger economically, much more stable, and in many aspects, more democratic. From the Armenian side, we have two interesting trends. One is the Armenian government cannot match Turkey, in terms of being creative and innovative, in terms of highlighting the gestures of goodwill from the Armenian side. It prefers to keep that low profile or secret. Perhaps, fearing reaction within Armenia or by the diaspora. The other important thing is the one, main, major public concession was reiterating three times, recognition of current borders of Turkey. In other words, fully ruling out as a policy of preconditions, territorial

claims, which for the Armenia side is a big deal. In other words, is a larger concession and it may sound in today's modern world. But, having said that, you are right, the Armenian side, in terms of its small gestures. For example, all humanitarian aid shipments into Syria were specifically sent through Turkey with the cooperation in terms of inspecting what was on board as well as intelligence sharing on the PKK by the Armenian side. Much of this because of the repercussions are not public knowledge. But more needs to be done even in terms of public diplomacy.

The second observation is the Armenian government's perception. Right or wrong, I am only reporting the perception. Which you must know that, as Washington chairs, as Hillary Clinton has said, despite those moves that you listed, the ball is in Turkey's court. In other words, the Armenian government position with U.S. backing is, Turkey has to make the first move. In terms of opening the border or border crossing points and establishing diplomatic relations. Right or wrong, that's the perception. In the words of Davutoğlu, the current situation is abnormal. What we all trying to do is to normalize this abnormal situation. But, it also shows that, despite even my optimism, despite half an hour we have come, it's difficult. And my opinion though, is a little different than yours. I argue that this process of engagement was never supposed to be quick and never supposed to be easy. In other words, that is why we are looking toward the next five years or even the coming decade. Which is still a lot faster and a lot sooner compared to the several decades that of past. But, I am sometimes, like you, frustrated at the lack of progress and regarding Armenia you are right. The threat to Armenia is not from Turkey and not even from Azerbaijan; the threat to Armenia is isolation when borders never opened and the threat is insignificance and no one cares anymore except the diaspora. In other words, lack of democracy is actually the real impediment to the unresolved conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Having said that, Armenia should learn to mistrust Russia much more. There is over reliance especially on today's Russia, which knows no limit and no restraint. Russia after all, in reality, is the number one arms provider to both Armenia and Azerbaijan. In fact, many in Azerbaijan, actually resent Turkish influence. In other words, Azerbaijan we see, is number one investor in Turkey. Beyond energy, they are going into media. But, what is interesting is that, Turkish military advisors were dismissed from Azerbaijan years ago and have not been allowed back.

Secondly, what is also important is in many ways diplomatically, Armenia and Turkey have been cooperating. Behind the scenes, whether it is in Basic Energy Sciences Advisory Committee (BESAC) about resolutions or diplomatically, warning Azerbaijan against the threat of war or resumed military hostilities. But that is why I argue, Armenian and Turkish normalization will help Azerbaijan. Because, in other words, it will deconstruct the siege mentality of the Armenians, it will deconstruct the

demonization of the other, of the Turk and it will help in terms of compromise. Regarding Azerbaijan - Armenia as well. I have more than answered to be honest.

Aslan Yavuz Şir:

Actually no one can answer this specific question: why should Turkey act first? What is the reason behind it? Just talking pragmatically, why should Turkey act first? Why is the ball in our court? While we are taking a lot of steps and having no responds from the other side?

Richard Giragosian:

My honest answer that -which you won't like- is because the protocol process, the engagement was actually suspended by the Turkish side not the Armenian side. The constitutional court, with all respect, is the pretext. Because, to be honest, the Constitutional Court ruling is not legally binding. In fact, the Armenian Constitutional Court is required by the constitution to either approve or overturn the protocols. It approved the protocols. Unfortunately for the Armenian government, because the court is not independent, they (the court) wanted to [what they thought] would please the Armenian President and to issue an opinion that is not legally binding. They thought, because they are all compliant and subordinate. They are doing the Armenian President a favor. In reality their opinion was unwelcomed as well as not binding. It hurt the process and it provided a very good pretext. But the real obstacle is not Ankara or Yerevan. It is Azerbaijan, it is Baku. And, in terms of why Turkey should take the first step, maybe I am more American in this but opening the border, establishing diplomatic relations is something very easy to do, not even requiring protocols and to be honest, I think Turkey would heap diplomatic dividend, far away of any kind of shortcoming. The problem is no longer the fulfilment, it is the timing. That is why the Turkish side tells us privately it's all about timing. We need something, give us something to justify in return. But Ankara, to its credit, is very creative. Its so-called demands over Nagorno-Karabakh are increasingly less and much more creative in terms of giving us an opportunity to do something from the Armenian side, saying "That's progress guys, wow!"

Haykak Arshamyan:

I would like to add something on manageable Russia-Turkey relations argument, because I am sure you know what happened in case of Kessab recently. Surprisingly, Russian leading media or mainstream media was involved there. There was even talk



of a new genocide in Kessab. We all know that no one was killed there. It was Russian provocation and many people in Armenia started to believe that. Even on Facebook there were a lot of smart people, educated people who got this provocation message as reality. Only later on, serious people -politicians, people from media- who were there already started saying that, "No one was killed there, what are you talking about?" So Russia can always use either Armenia-Turkish conflict or just their relations for its purposes. I don't think that Russia can be manageable for Turkey. They are always playing games between Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and as Mr. Giragosian mentioned, the arms which were sold to Azerbaijan is worth 3-4 billion dollars.

Alev Kılıç:

It transpires that Armenians, the Republic of Armenia and the west did miss a chance for reconciliation for a better future for Armenia in the past, let's say since the independence of Armenia.

Indeed, had the chance for a better future of things been taken, we would not have been discussing today the basics and the necessity of establishing good relations. For example, when President Sargsyan went to Moscow and said we cannot see any benefit in the Customs Union or the Eurasian Union because we have no borders with any of the members. The Russian counterpart most probably must have retorted, "Have you got any borders with any EU countries?" Then, the answer was again, "No." But, Turkey would be the country to provide, being a Customs Union member, such a connection.

Turkey would be the bridge, the nexus. This has not been perceived since the independence neither by the West nor by the Republic of Armenia. Because we never in Turkey observed any reconciliation efforts or moves either on part of the West or the Republic of Armenia. So, this is a lost chance. Today, what we see is, it has become even more difficult to reconcile, to normalize the relations. Because, now Russia would be less interested in it. Armenia now is a very good trump card for the Caucasus and the near abroad for Russia, because now they feel that Armenia need have no other option but to strictly attach to Russia.



Mehmet Oğuzhan Tulun:

I have a question that is about exactly that topic. I am a specialist at AVİM. You said that Russia is very confident about its entrenched position in Armenia. So wouldn't they have every reason to sabotage Turkey's reconciliation with Armenia? I am asking this because such reconciliation would break Armenia's dependence on Russia. Once Armenia reconciles with Turkey, it creates another avenue for interaction with the world. So wouldn't they have sabotage such reconciliation? I keep reading news about people in Armenia fearing that Russia is literally beginning to own the entire country.

I have another question. I don't want to keep bringing up 1915, so I will ask it this way. I keep following news written by Armenians to see how they view us. I keep getting this notion that [I mean I lived in Canada so met Armenians there as well], Armenians are completely fixated on 1915. It shapes their perceptions of Turks. How

can we get it across to them that; just because I don't agree with their notion of 1915, it doesn't mean I am racist, it doesn't mean I hate Armenians? How are we going to get that idea across to them, because the minute they hear such opinions they turn their back on us. I experienced this; I keep hearing stories about this. I don't know if we even have the kind of power to break such a perception, but is it possible to break such a perception?

As a Turk [as a human being], I feel compelled to communicate with them. I specifically had this kind of an episode. I met a man, I didn't know he was Armenian, he didn't know I was a Turk, we conversed like gentlemen. Then he found out I was a Turk and he literally ran away. I was known in my circle of friends as a good person, but he didn't want to communicate with me.

Richard Giragosian:

What we see is actually just the opposite. In terms of Russia in the beginning, the protocol process, I hate to admit it but it's a fact that Sargsyan's invitation to Abdullah Gül was made not from Yerevan, but while he was sitting in the Presidential Office in Moscow. The symbolism is sad. Because, one fear many have in Armenia is that Armenia will no longer matter in some point. Turkey and Moscow will negotiate about Armenia, and Armenia would be out of the loop. In other words, it is an exaggerated fear, but in other words, it shows something. To be honest what we see is, Russia's strength in Armenia has allowed it to start a new trend over the past two years. Improve relations with Azerbaijan and increase, because it is lack of leverage with Azerbaijan. It may even shift away from pro-Armenian position on Nagorno-Karabakh which is interesting. But, at the same time, we are still not seeing any obstacles or the hesitations from the Russian side regarding normalization. Mainly, because again, open borders and diplomatic relations in general are not seen such a breakthrough. And for the Russians, it is profit for the energy, railway and the other sector of the Armenian economy that they already own out right. And there is little danger of Armenia leaving. In other words there is no threat to Russian strength. In fact, dependence will just be that formally entrenched even with a normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey, unfortunately. But, at the same time, I reiterate this, is the one issue where we work in close cooperation and in support of the Armenian government. But, I will be honest with you, it is the only issue, in other words, the lack of democracy, the state of human rights in Armenia or the existence of opposition in other words are deplorable. We cannot support the government in any other area. It is only Armenia-Turkey developments. The role of a think-tank like AVİM, like us is actually, just to be objective, there are areas of public policy we support the government and others we don't. In our case, it is only one area we support. But, my point is, the real threat to Armenia

again, isolation and insignificance, to put it politely. The rude threat is Armenia becomes nothing more than a Russian garrison state.

Russia-Armenia relationship is not seen as the problem, even by me. It is the terms of the relationship. The problem is the asymmetry in the relationship and the behavior of the Russians. But having said that the good news is this; the backlash in Armenia, because of the situation, has actually enhanced and increased the importance of normalization with Turkey in order to counter that.

Alev Kılıç:

The very last sentence is a very promising and very encouraging one. The backlash, this is what we understand, what we would try to work on. I hope that, with this meeting we can take it as a starting point.

Richard Giragosian:

It is true, from an analytical perspective, as think-tanks, the real issue here is increasingly the Russian and Eurasian situation and much less 1915.

Alev Kılıç:

Yes, but 1915 is used as a vehicle, as an instrument to undermine any possible normalization [Giragosian: then we have to prevent that], exactly, this where we come to a common understanding. We need to strive for bilateral ties as well as for South Caucasian stability and cooperation.

We need to get the message across that our disagreement with the Armenians on their interpretation of the historical events of 1915 does not mean being racist, that it does not carry a racist or negationist attitude. Is it possible?

Richard Giragosian:

You may not agree with what I am about to say. The first is, who says that this is your burden? In other words, maybe it is our burden. Maybe it is up to us to change. To be honest, Armenian perception is already changing. And you will notice a very different view, there is a disparity growing within Armenia and among Armenians in the diaspora. But even in terms of the Armenian diaspora, I am always shocked anytime I am in Taksim, running into Armenian diasporans visiting Turkey as tourists, going to

Eastern Turkey and it is much less about “Whooh, Turks are going to eat us!” It is now much more realistic and human. But at the same time, I also think that for Armenia proper it is no more a big deal when we have Turkish journalists coming into Yerevan. It is almost the same kind of normalcy that we need with Azerbaijan which we do not have. But at the same time, if you get that kind of reaction from the Armenians in Ottawa or Montreal [as Oğuzhan mentioned], maybe that’s their problem too.

But don’t forget that I am not the mainstream; first by moving to Armenia as diasporan, second because of my views. The last time when I was with Hrant Dink before he was killed, we were laughing at how popular, well how unpopular, we are. In other words, for Hrant Dink, the ultimate hypocrisy was the day after his death. When all the Armenians said “oh, he is ours”, these are the same people who hated his messages and hated him.

Alev Kılıç:

What we do not see and what we wish happen would be the establishment of an interaction of think-tanks between the two countries. From our perception, the Armenian think-tanks, intellectuals are discouraged to take any share, any part in any open discussion, not even on third country grounds and those who do take part are being accused of treason.

I appreciate that you are open to such contacts. Would there be more think-tanks in Armenia that could do likewise?

Richard Giragosian:

Well, I can find other people; there are many think-tanks in Armenia. The other important thing is to give a Turkish example. The one person I worked with in Brussels on this issue was Cengiz Aktar. My point is this; we do not need to limit our contacts for preaching to the converts. Cengiz Aktar is more pro-Armenian than I am. In other words, my point is, [from a professional perspective] we need to actually broaden the constituency and understand each other even on points where we disagree.

Alev Kılıç:

Thank you very much for accepting and coming to this meeting. Maybe, between our two think-tanks we can think of improvising ways and means to initiate more of such contacts to serve a dialogue.

Ömer Engin Lütem:

Next year will not be very suitable for reconciliation or normalization. Why? Next year, there will be the centennial. Turkey will be so much criticized that, we should not expect something official. We can go on speaking to each other etc. But, let's say that it is not suitable to prepare another piece of paper on the official side. As far as the Armenian concerns, there is something similar. President Sargsyan was so much criticized during 2009-2010 that I do not think during his presidency, in the two or three years coming, he would like to sign anything with Turkey, if it is not in favor of Armenia. We should not expect something spectacular. I have the feeling, just a feeling that there would not be any signatures.

Alev Kılıç:

I thank you all for participating this meeting and of course I refer first and foremost to our key-note speakers Mr. Richard Giragosian and Ambassador Ömer Lütem. I think this has indeed been very, I dare say forward-looking-meeting giving us much food for thought but also a feeling of optimism for the future. I think, neither people nor the states can live in constant hate or enmity, consuming their potentials on zero sum efforts or on tit-for-tat differences. So, we should find a way for better relations and we do not challenge the fact that normalization and reconciliation are steps in the right direction. I hope that, our think-tanks, yours Mr. Giragosian and ours, can contribute in whatever small manner to such developments. Thank you very much.





