

## CONFERENCE 2

### INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF TURKISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS AND THE EVENTS OF 1915

(23-25 November 2005, Gazi University)

An international symposium was organized by Gazi University, Atatürk Research and Application Center, entitled as “International Symposium on the Development of Turkish-Armenian Relations and the Events of 1915”, between 23-25 November 2005.

During this three day symposium, dubbed by some as an alternative to the controversial September 24-25 Armenian Conference held at Bilgi University in Istanbul, over 50 presentations were made during 11 sessions by speakers from 7 countries, including Russia, Azerbaijan and the USA. However there were speakers neither from France or the United Kingdom, which were repeatedly mentioned during the conference as having a direct responsibility in the creation of the Armenian question. Likewise there were no participants from Armenia nor from among the Armenians residing in Turkey including the Armenian Patriarchate.

Following the opening speech made by Prof. Dr. Hale Şıvgın, the chief organizer, who touched upon the remarks made by Orhan Pamuk, Prof Dr. Yusuf Halaçoğlu, the President of the Turkish Historical Society, made a speech on the extensive history of Turkish-Armenian relations. He stated that the tragedy should be studied by scholars with different views by setting up a joint commission. What is more, he emphasized that all archives of the involved countries should be opened for their use. This was a tall order that will probably fall on deaf ears on the Armenian side, which are adamant about not listening to Turkish views and will not sit at the same table with Turks, whom they have now labelled as “genocide deniers” and thus keep their archives closed.

Deputy Parliament Speaker Sadık Yakut also made a presentation and said that the Armenian issue was a national problem which needs to be solved. Speaking on behalf of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Sadık Yakut stated that the mission of the Turkish Parliament was to express to the world that the issue did not only involve the Armenians.

The President of Gazi University Prof. Dr. Kadri Yamaç, welcoming well over a thousand participants including many university professors and students, stated that history could not be written by the resolutions passed in parliaments and city councils, as it is presently being done. Using a strong language, Prof. Yamaç said that those who welcomed these parliamentary resolutions were either Armenians or their agents. During an earlier press conference, Prof Yamaç stated that all the participants of the Bilgi University Armenian Conference were also invited, but that only Prof. Dr. Baskin Oran and Prof. Dr. Fikret Adanır agreed to make presentations.

The first session was chaired by Prof. Dr. Hikmet Özdemir where Prof. Dr. Norman Stone made interesting comments that Turkey's rapid growth disturbed several actors and that the Armenian issue was being kept on the agenda not only by the Armenian diaspora but also by those who wanted to weaken Turkey. On the Armenian diaspora, Prof. Stone remarked that the Armenian issue was being romanticized in order to keep it alive. A good example of this would be the play that was recently staged in NYC, "The Beast on the Moon". Following that, the presentation made by Alexander Dugin, "Eurasianist Response to the Greater Middle East project" was very interesting, carrying the issue of a hundred years to current times, with reference to the role of the United States in the region. Other speakers of the first session included Prof. Dr. Reşat Genç from Gazi University on "The Early Period of Turkish Armenian Relations and the Gregorian Kipchacks", Prof. Dr. Temuçin Faik Ertan from Ankara University on "Armenians in Ottoman State Cadres", and Assist. Prof. Haluk Selvi from Sakarya University on "Activities of Armenian Bands 1900-1918".

The second session was moderated by CHP deputy, Şükrü Elekdağ, where Prof. Dr. Hikmet Özdemir spoke on the "Clashes with the Armenian Militia from the Declaration of Mobilization to the Russian Occupation" and gave a detailed summary of the rebellions and clashes across the southern and eastern regions of Anatolia, identifying the time and the location of each rebellion and uprising, including those in Zeytun, Adana, Sason. Prof. Özdemir emphasized that he was presenting his paper on behalf of the "Military History and Strategic Research Department of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

The presentation by Assist. Prof. Kalerya Antonninovna from Moscow State University, "The interest of the Combatants at the Caucasian Front during World War I" was controversial and raised several questions which were elaborated on by participants from Azerbaijan and Prof. Özdemir. In this session Prof. Guen-

ther Lewy made a presentation on, "What We Know and What We Don't Know About the Events of 1915." During his presentation, Lewy stated that 40% of pre-war Armenians corresponding to roughly 600,000 people were either killed or perished. Another participant retired Lieutenant General Hasan Kundakçı, spoke about "The Law of Relocation: Its Causes and Execution", in which he stressed the reasons and implementation of this law.

The third session was moderated by Gündüz Aktan, the President of ASAM. The speakers included Prof. Dr. Sina Akşin from Ankara University, Prof. Dr. Baskın Oran from Ankara University, Assist. Prof. Dr. İnanç Atılğan from TOBB University, Ömer E. Lütem, Director of Armenian Research Institute of ASAM and Prof. Dr. Yusuf Halaçoğlu. Prof. Akşin's presentation was entitled as "The Disease of Accepting a Genocide That Did Not Happen". He stressed that due to a sense of guiltiness and inferiority some academicians, without adequate examination, preferred to state that the so-called Armenian genocide was a reality. Prof. Dr. Baskın Oran was perhaps the most controversial speaker in the conference whose speech, entitled "The Roots of the Last Taboo: Historical and Psychological Obstruction of Armenian Question", was severely criticized by the participants. He argued that the Armenian question was a taboo not only in contemporary discourse, but also in the past. Accordingly, since the establishment of the Republic, the Armenian question has always been a sacred issue which resulted in the lack of enough researches on this subject. He was followed by Prof. Halaçoğlu, who spoke on "The Claim of the Armenian Genocide: Prejudices and Approaches", and focused on the Turkish and Western historiography and stated that the events could not be labeled as an act of genocide. Ömer E. Lütem delivered a speech on "The Implications of Armenian Question on Turkish-EU Relations", in which he examined the 1987 European Parliament decision, recognizing the so-called Armenian genocide. The presentation of Assist. Prof. Dr. İnanç Atılğan, entitled as "Can a Political Controversy Be Solved by Scientific Research" was about the experiences of the speaker in several platforms of conciliation.

On the second day of the conference, the fourth session was moderated by Mr. Hale Şıvgın where Ass. Prof. Yusuf Sarıınay, Director General of State Archives, spoke about "The Armenian Relocation and Tribunals, 1915-1916". Dr. Bilal Şimşir delivered a speech on "Armenian Allegations and the Malta Deportees", followed by a presentation by Assist. Prof. Dr. Feridun Ata from Selçuk University, "Can the War Tribunals Constitute Evidence for the Armenian Allegations?" Şükrü Elekdağ spoke about "The Evaluation of Armenian Allegations from the Perspective of International Law" He said that "those who advocate the

Armenian thesis cannot prove their allegations within the context of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. According to Article 4 of the Convention legal persons and states can not be punished for committing genocide; only real persons and public officials can be guilty of or charged with this crime. Furthermore, Article 6 of the same convention states that allegations in this respect are to be determined by competent tribunals. Stating that such allegations have both political and legal implications, Mr. Elekdağ proposed that a court of arbitration should be formed to deal with this issue. Prof. Dr. Türkkaya Ataöv, complaining about not being allowed to attend the Bilgi University's Armenian conference in Istanbul, presented information on his involvement in the 1984 and 1985 Orly lawsuits in Paris and his stay there for five months in his speech, entitled "I Support Free Discussion: With My Personal Experience."

The fifth session was chaired by Prof. Dr. Yusuf Halaçoğlu where Prof. Dr. Fikret Adanır from Ruhr University-Bochum spoke about the "Armenian Genocide Arguments and Historiography." Dr. Günay Evinç made a presentation on "The Armenian Pressure on the Freedom of Expression in US and the Law Suit brought by the Turkish-Americans in Massachusetts". They were accompanied by the presentations of Gündüz Aktan, entitled as "Armenian Genocide Allegations: The Intersection Point of Legal and Psychological Approaches", Prof. Dr. Anıl Çeçen from Ankara University, entitled as "Armenian Question as a State Policy", and Gaillaume Albert Houriet, a member of Swiss Parliament, entitled as "On The Recognition of Armenian Genocide by the Swiss National Assembly and Racism". Hourite expressed his sorrow for the acceptance of the Armenian Resolution by the Swiss Parliament and apologized on behalf of the Swiss people.

The sixth session, chaired by Ömer E. Lütem, and the seventh session, moderated by Prof. Dr. Bayram Kodaman, dealt with the issue of Azerbaijan-Armenian relations where speakers spoke about the massacres committed by Armenians in Azerbaijan and the drama of the Azerbaijani refugees. The participants of these sessions and the titles of their presentations are enlisted below:

- Hakan Yavuz from Utah University – "The Concept of Genocide and Its Politization"
- Prof. Dr. Faysal Kaltum from the University of Damascus – "Minority Question in Western Politics"
- Nazım İbrahimov, State Minister of Azerbaijan Responsible for the Azeri Diaspora – "Common Concerns of Turkey and Azeri Diaspora"

- Prof. Dr. Kemal Çiçek from Turkish Historical Society – “The Conditions of Reconciliation with Turkey from the Armenian Point of View”
- Prof. Dr. Refet Yinanç from Gazi University – “Politization of Armenian Question Since 1965”
- Prof. Dr. Hasan Guliyev – “The Roots and Reasons of Armenian Nationalism”
- Sabri Rüstem Hanlı, Member of Azeri Parliament – “The Genocide Committed by the Armenians in Azeribaijan”
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vahdet Keleşyılmaz – “The Special Organization with the Context of 1914-1915 Armenian Question”
- Dr. Mihriban Elekberzade from Azerbaijan Institute of History – “Relations with Armenians: Past and Present”
- Assist. Prof. Dr. Ender Gökdemir from Gazi University – “Massacres Committed by Armenians in the Six Provinces and Azeribaijan”
- Prof. Dr. Aygün Attar from Kütahya Dumlupınar University – “The Tragedy of Azeri Refugees”

The eight session of the symposium was chaired by Dr. Bilal Şimşir where the first speaker, Prof. Dr. Stanford Shaw from Bilkent University, (who) made a presentation giving a complete overview of the tragedy. He stated that between 1911 and 1923, the Ottoman Empire was involved in five destructive wars. Referring to the “War of Independence” which took place between 1918 and 1923, Prof Shaw stated that in reality this should be called the “War of Liberation” and added that during the “The Great War of 1910-1915”, sixty percent of the Ottoman population had perished. Prof. Shaw also argued that both the US and the EU want to hold the Turkish Republic responsible for the events that took place before its founding, emphasizing that no single group should be blamed for the tragedies which cost the lives of 4 to 5 million Turks. He indicated that although the Ottoman Empire could be criticized for recruiting large number of German officers and for the establishment of the Special Organization, the Empire nonetheless could not be accused of perpetrating genocide. In order to understand the full account of events, Prof. Shaw suggested that the archives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Red Crescent, the Immigration Office and the Special Organization should also be opened. Following his speech, Aytunç Altındal talked about the “Concepts of Genocide and Holocaust” and Mehmet Yuva from the University of Damascus on “The Syrian and Lebanese Approaches to the Armenian Question”.

In the ninth session, moderated by Prof. Dr. Enver Konukcu, Assist. Prof.

Şenol Kantarcı from Süleyman Demirel University spoke about “The Second Van Insurgence: An Important Event Leading to the Decision of Relocation.” Prof. Kantarcı stated that 35-40 thousand Turks were massacred during the Van rebellion. In this session, Prof. Dr Bayram Kodaman from Süleyman Demirel University delivered a speech, entitled “Armenian Adventure”. He was accompanied by Nejla Günay from Gazi University, who talked about the “1895 Zeytun Rebellion”; Dr. Atahan Paşayev, General Director of Azerbaijan National Archives Institution, who talked about the “The Role of Armenian Nationalist Parties in the Massacres Committed against Muslim People”; and Mehmet Perinçek from Moscow State Institute on International Relations, who talked about “Tashnak-sutyun in the Soviet-Armenian Resources”.

The tenth session was chaired by Prof.Dr. Kemal Çiçek. In this session, presentations were made by the following participants: Prof. Dr. Salahi Sonyel from London Near East University who spoke on “Turkish Armenian Relations during World War I According to British Secret Documents”; Nizami Caferov, the President of Azerbaijan Atatürk Center who delivered a speech on “Armenian Question: From Etnos to Politics”; Prof. Dr. Mehmet Saray, the Head of Atatürk Research Center, who discussed “Atatürk and Armenian Question”; Prof. Dr. Süleyman Beyoğlu from Marmara University who elaborated on the “Armenian Problem in Sevres and Lausanne; and Mustafa Özbek, the Head of Turkish Metal Workers’ Syndicate, who evaluated the Armenian Genocide Allegations.

The final and eleventh session of the symposium, chaired by Prof. Dr. Reşat Genç, included the speeches of Prof. Dr. Viyaceslav Silikov on the “Armenian Millet in the First Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Its Relations With Ottoman Authorities”, Prof. Dr. Enver Konukçu from Atatürk University on “Armenians and Erzurum, 1916-1918”, Dr. Ali Güler on the “Armenian Question Within the Context of Turkish-EU Relations”. The last speech was delivered by Doğu Perinçek, the President of the Workers Party, entitled as “Evaluation of the Swiss Attitude on the Armenian Question”.

All in all, with the various speakers that participated in and the diverse subjects that were discussed during the symposium, it was very instrumental particularly with respect to providing concrete evidence as to how alternative views and arguments incongruous with the mainstream discourse could be freely expressed.