

CONFERENCE 3

BODRUM SYMPOSIUM ON TURKS AND ARMENIANS IN HISTORY AND THE FACTS

(3-4 December 2005, Bodrum)

A symposium was organized in Bodrum on December 3-4, 2005, by İstanbul Marmara Education Foundation, Bodrum Chamber of Commerce and Bodrum Municipality. It was entitled as “Turks and Armenians in History and the Facts”. In the opening speech, Hüseyin Aksoy, the Governor of Muğla, stated that the Armenian question was being brought to the fore in other fields, and that the aim of this move was to sentence a nation for a crime that had not been committed. He also argued that the genocide allegations did not meet the criteria set forth by the United Nations Convention, and stressed that scientific studies should be carried out in order to ascertain whether or not the genocide claims were valid.

Following the Governor, Prof. Dr. Aytekin Berkman, the President of Muğla University, delivered a speech. He said that Turkish-Armenian relations had a long past in the respective histories of Turkey and Armenia. He also argued that Armenians had lived under various foreign rules and it had been the Seljuk Turks that freed them from the oppression particularly of the Byzantine Empire. What is more, he stated that the Ottoman Empire provided Armenians with religious freedom and established a Patriarchate in İstanbul in order to provide religious as well as social services.

The symposium was attended by various participants from academic, political and civil society circles from Turkey and Azerbaijan. The participants included representatives of political parties, such as Turhan Çömez from Justice and Development Party, Nüzhet Kandemir from True Path Party and Onur Öymen from the Republican People's Party. From the academic circles, the President of Turkish History Society, Prof. Dr. Yusuf Halaçoğlu, Prof. Dr. Enver Konukçu from Atatürk University and Prof. Dr. Aygün Attar from Dumlupınar University were among the participants. Civil society organizations were represented in the symposium as well. Sinan Aygün, the President of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce, Prof. Dr. Agah Oktay Güner, the President of Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation and Mehmet Cengiz from the National Unity Council were present as speakers in the symposium. From Azerbaijan, Sabir Rüstemhanlı, a member of Azeri Parliament and Tenzile Rüstemhanlı, the President of Azerbaijan Women's Union, attended to the symposium.

The symposium ended with a final declaration emphasizing several points:

- Between 1914 and 1922, Turkey fought a “War of Liberation” against imperialist Great Powers and their collaborators such as the Greeks and Armenians. Thus the events of 1915-1916 should be perceived as a legitimate act of self-defense sanctioned by within the framework of international law.
- Imperialist states are responsible for tragic events that took place between the Turks and the Armenians.
- These events can not be labeled as genocide since the concept of genocide had not been coined at that time. What is more, these events can not be perceived as a deliberate attempt to exterminate a group or nation.
- The Armenian question was resolved with the War of Liberation and the subsequent Treaty of Lausanne.
- The revitalization of genocide allegations is simply an attempt to carry forth aims of the past into the present day under a different guise. Since October 2000, many parliaments of the European states adopted decisions recognizing the events of 1915-16 as genocide. This is a clear indication of their animosity. These decisions bear testimony to the existence of a racist attitude towards Turkey
- A determined and effective policy based on the righteousness of our War of Liberation must be pursued.
- Turkey should prepare a “National Resistance Program” in order to face the threats directed towards Turkish interests not only regarding the Armenian question but also the Cyprus, Kurdish and Aegean problems.