

# CONFERENCE 4

## SYMPOSIUM ON HISTORICAL FACTS RELATING TO TURKISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

(15-16 December 2005, Istanbul Technical University)

**O**n December 15-16, a symposium on Turkish-Armenian relations was held at the Maçka campus of Istanbul Technical University. The Conference was organized by the Union of Non-Governmental Organizations, composed of 37 NGO's. The Chairman of the Union, Aysel Ekşi, invited a broad spectrum of scholars both native and foreign with contrasting views to attend the symposium in an attempt to foster intellectual exchange and collaboration.

Various aspects of Turkish-Armenian relations were discussed during the symposium, though the events of 1915 were allotted considerable attention. In reference to these events, the Chairman of the Turkish Historical Society, Prof. Dr. Yusuf Halaçoğlu, stressed how Armenian genocide allegations were devoid of scientific essence and was being abused for political purposes. On this point he drew attention to how these allegations were made despite only 10% of the pertinent Ottoman archives having been thoroughly analyzed to this date. Furthermore, as pointed out by Prof. Dr. Türkkaya Ataöv, another speaker present at the symposium, it has been established that 50 of the documents ascribed to Ottoman leaders were forged by the Armenians.

The Chairman of the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies, Gündüz Aktan, elaborated on the necessary conditions for events to be designated as genocide. Considerable emphasis was placed on how the wording 'the intent to destroy a group as such' embedded in the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide necessitates the existence of a purely racist motive for acts to be designated as genocide and that psychoanalysis is the discipline to ascertain the nature and intensity of racism necessary to carry out such acts. Drawing a comparison between the atrocities in Darfur (Sudan) and Srebrenica (Bosnia-Herzegovina), he mentioned how due to the element of racial hatred and genocidal intent being present in the latter it qualified as an incident of genocide whereas the former, as established by the U.N., did not. Furthermore, he added that at the time of the Armenian relocation there existed, neither among the administration nor the Turkish society intended to destroy the Armenians as such.

The Republican Peoples Party deputy chairman, Onur Öymen, argued that the reason why the events of 1915 were brought to the fore stemmed from a desire to divert attention away from other pressing issues. In this context he placed particular emphasis on the terrorist activities of ASALA and the crimes against humanity which took place at Nagorno Karabagh. With respect to the latter he mentioned that as a result of an Armenian act of aggression 18,000 Azeris were killed, 50,000 were wounded, 44,000 were held captive, and 1 million were obliged to flee from Armenian occupation. Furthermore, he pointed out how 6 Azeri provinces remain under Armenian military occupation to this day.

The Republican People's Party deputy Şükrü Elekdağ, stated how there existed two main reasons precluding Turkey from effectively countering Armenian allegations. The first, he explained, is that the true nature and scope of the threat resting behind Armenian genocide allegations has not been fully understood by Turkish luminaries, the Turkish public, and political leaders. On this point he stated how the ideology the Armenians have coined as "Hay Dat" foresees the establishment of a Greater Armenia which envisages the annexation of a significant portion of the lands of Eastern Anatolia. The second reason stems from the lack of a long term strategy and master plan regarding this issue. The nonexistence of such a strategy, he explained, greatly impairs the ability of Turkey to defend its stance over this issue. As regards this matter he stressed two points: the necessity of an umbrella organization which would coordinate the activities of institutions working towards countering Armenian allegations and the importance of admitting all military and public archives to the General Directorate of the Archives of the Prime Ministry.

Prof. Dr. Norman Stone member of the teaching staff at Koç University emphasized that the manner in which Turkey continues to defend itself with respect to the events of 1915 remains inadequate. Making an allusion to the same point, the Chairman of the Turkey in the 21st Century Institute, Ümit Özdağ, maintained that the Turkish people were not abreast with psychological warfare, nor propaganda making, and added that defending the case against the so-called Armenian genocide was incumbent upon non-governmental organizations and not states.

Stressing that genocide was a legal term, the Director of the Topkapı Palace Museum, İlber Ortaylı, maintained that Turkish lawyers and the Turkish peoples were caught off guard in respect to this issue. He continued by stating how the classification of historical documents in the archives of the Prime Ministry has

been greatly delayed and that there existed among them newly emergent documents of a striking nature. These documents unearthed new facts pertaining to Armenian acts of aggression and revealed how Armenians carried out massacres in Eastern Anatolia appealing to a mentality of how these lands belonged to their forefathers despite not constituting a majority over them. In his concluding remarks he emphasized how the assertion that the events of 1915 amount to genocide is politicization, and that this claim is devoid of historical insight and a legal basis.

Other participants of the symposium included Nazan Moroğlu, member of the Board of Directors of the Istanbul Bar Association; Dr. Abdullah Kehale, member of the teaching staff of Mimar Sinan University; Former Ambassador Bilal Şimşir; and the Istanbul Technical University rector Prof. Dr. Faruk Karadoğan.

A central message reiterated throughout the symposium was that genocide was not only a social phenomenon but that it was a legal concept and needed to be evaluated as such. Furthermore, there appeared to be a broad consensus regarding the necessity to raise the level of awareness among the Turkish public at large with respect to the events of 1915. The symposium can be viewed as an important step towards this end.