

## DOCUMENTS 3

### THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY FOREIGN MINISTER, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER ABDULLAH GUL AT THE TURKISH GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE ON THE ARMENIAN CLAIMS

13 April 2005

Mr. Speaker, esteemed deputies,

I think it is highly useful that this august Assembly is having a general debate on the Armenian claims that constitute an issue on which we are highly sensitive as a nation.

This year anti-Turkey activities have been intensified on the grounds that this is the 90<sup>th</sup> year of the so-called genocide.

I believe that this general debate, coming at such a time, will be a significant contribution to the struggle our country is waging against these claims.

Esteemed deputies,

There is a point I want to underline before everything else.

With the description “Armenian” I will be using in my speech I do not mean in any way at all our citizens of Armenian origin. They are our fellow citizens who are loyal to our state from the heart, citizens who fulfill all their civic duties and do not refrain from making a social contribution to ensure that their country will be carried into better days.

On this occasion I commemorate respectfully the Armenians that have contributed in many areas such as arts, science and trade to our over 800-years-old shared life extending from the Seljuki and Ottoman periods into the time of the Republic.

Also, among the Armenians who live outside Turkey, there are so many brave and wise Armenian friends of ours who care about their friendship with the Turkish people and make efforts to this effect, striving to maintain their cultural and

humanitarian ties with Turkey. From here I would like to express our feelings of appreciation and friendship for them.

Mr. President, Esteemed Deputies, for a long time Turkey has been faced with a well-organized campaign regarding the genocide claims; and those who carry out this campaign have not refrained from exploiting any opportunity that has presented itself. This organized campaign is based on the anti-Turkish and anti-Turkey prejudices, slanders, lies, exaggerations and distortions the fabrication of which began about a century ago.

For example, you all know about the renowned Blue Book issued by the propaganda office of the British War Ministry during the First World War --disseminating the propaganda that Armenians were being massacred— in an effort to ensure that the United States of America would take part in the war.

Similarly, on the basis of the information he had received from a number of Armenian extremists working for him, the US ambassador in Istanbul of the time published his memoirs that were full of lies in order to create for himself a bright political career. Thus he contributed to the sprouting of prejudices against our people and country.

It is grave that these claims are still being considered valid though their inconsistencies, their being fabrications, and the aims for which they were written, are quite obvious. It is graver that these publications have formed the source or basis of a number of so-called scholarly books.

On the other hand, certain foreign academics have, as a result of their objective and honest investigation, determined the exaggerations and errors in these claims. And they have presented to the world the balanced assessments they have made accordingly.

Esteemed deputies,

I think that to be able to make a sound analysis of the incidents that took place in 1915 one has to examine well what had transpired prior to the year 1915.

Turkish-Armenian relations developed on the basis of peace and mutual trust for over 800 years, that is, since the 11<sup>th</sup> Century when Turks stepped into Anatolia until late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

After Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror took Istanbul the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were organized under the name “nation”. They began to live under the administration of their religious leaders, enjoying the peace and freedom provided by the state. The Armenians, whom the Ottomans saw as “the loyal nation”, were brought to high positions in the Ottoman bureaucracy, serving as Cabinet ministers, pashas, ambassadors, governors and judges. They were not discriminated against at all.

However, as of the 1820s Tsarist Russia and the British and French governments of the time saw the Armenians as a major element to be used against the Ottomans as they vied with one another for influence and interest. These powers promised the Armenians an imaginary Armenia in East Anatolia. The developments experienced in the Balkans towards independence too boosted the efforts in the same direction. As a result of the provocations of these states various Armenian committees began to be formed as of the 1880s. The Hinchak Committee made its appearance in Geneva in 1887 and the Dashnak Committee in Tbilisi in 1890. The common goal of these two committees was to set up an Armenian state that would include those Ottoman lands where the Armenians lived.

Later, these committees came to be organized inside the Ottoman Empire too and, at the incitement of these committees the Armenian rebellions against the Ottomans began.

With the methods of assassination and bank robbery they employed they became the forerunners of the terrorism that has become a plague for the world and for the humanity by now.

Some Armenian groups rebelled in various parts of Anatolia, mainly in Erzurum, Kayseri, Yozgat, Corum, Merzifon, Van and Adana. The rebellions were initiated by the Armenian committees and the main aim was to encourage the big western powers to intervene in favor of the Armenians by portraying as massacres any move the Ottoman Empire would make to suppress the rebellions. When the First World War began and the Ottoman State joined the war, confronting the Allied Powers, the Armenian extremists saw that as a big opportunity. The regiments of Armenian volunteers created in this framework attacked the Turkish cities, towns and villages that had been left without defenses since the Russians entered East Anatolia and started massacring the civilian population, women and children included. They stabbed the Ottoman forces in the back. They obstructed

the operations of the Ottoman military units. They blocked their supply routes. They ambushed the convoys of wounded Ottoman soldiers. They destroyed bridges and roads. By rebelling in cities they facilitated the Russian invasion.

Under the circumstances, the Ottoman Government summoned the Armenian Patriarch together with Armenian deputies and other Armenian dignitaries and informed them that the government would take due measures if the Armenians continued to massacre the Muslims. When that warning did not lead to any result the government dissolved the Armenian committees on 24 April 1915 and arrested 235 people for anti-state activities. The date (April 24) Armenian circles mark every year as the anniversary of the so-called “Armenian genocide” is in fact the anniversary of the arrest of the Armenian committee members.

Due to this big internal and external threat it was faced with the Ottoman Government took on 27 May 1915 the kind of defense measure that no other country hesitates to take in a similar situation. It decided to send to the southern parts of the empire those Armenians who were living in the war zone. The Armenian population was informed of the forcible relocation decision duly in advance. The transfer began after due preparations were made. Also, the Armenians living in Istanbul and in those parts of Anatolia that were far from the war zone were left outside the scope of the forcible relocation decision.

The Ottoman Government gave instructions to the effect that security measures should be taken to ensure that the Armenians to be resettled away from the war zone would not come to harm during the transfer. The orders issued to this effect are in the Ottoman archives. These are the tangible proof of the situation. On one hand the First World War was continuing and there was a certain climate arising from the war and, on the other hand, there was a domestic uprising, a rebellion; and the resulting local feelings of hate and revenge caused the convoys to come under attack during the transfer. The government tried to prevent that situation. In fact, the Armenian convoys came under very few attacks in those areas where the state authority was strong. Some 1,390 people were put on trial for maltreating the Armenian travelers or for failing to comply with the government orders. Most of them received sentences including the death penalty.

Here, I want to ask the following question: Would a state that wanted to destroy the Armenians put on trial and punish its own officials and citizens for treating the Armenian travelers badly? Besides, the death toll rose also because of the wartime shortage of vehicles, fuel, food and other facilities and due to the harsh

climate and epidemic-causing diseases such as typhus. That was an era during which the entire Anatolian people shared the same fate.

Throughout the First World War and the Turkish War of Liberation the imperialist powers kept up their efforts to incite the Armenians. The French forces that occupied Cilicia and part of Southeast Anatolia reached an agreement with the Armenians, promising them that an Armenian state would be founded in the region. First the Armenian battalions of volunteers were formed and then an Armenian Legion affiliated with the French Foreign Legion. Under French command, these Armenian troops staged bloody massacres in the region until 1921. That aspect has been put on record in the French documents.

Esteemed deputies,

Distorting all these historical facts, efforts being made to portray the 1915 incidents as a genocide to the world public opinion; however, these claims do not have a legal basis. The Article 2 of the "Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime Genocide" describes the term: "genocide". According to that, "genocide" means:

"any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to the members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

Only those acts that fit this description can be called genocide. The part of this description on which one should focus carefully is the part concerning the "intent to destroy", in whole or in part, people who make up a certain a group "because they are members of that group". It is all too obvious that no such intent was present. Destruction of a group of people only because they are members of that specific group can be made possible only with the accumulated effect of centuries old prejudices. Anatolia has been a piece of land where widely different identities have lived together in peace. Unlike what we see elsewhere people do not harbor prejudice against one another. Despite all the efforts they have made over the past 90 years the circles that put forth the genocide claims have failed to

find even a single piece of document that would demonstrate that the Ottomans had any intention of destroying the Armenians. And the papers they call documents have been found out to be fakes.

In reality, the Armenian claims were judicially investigated immediately after the First World War. The British, who occupied Istanbul at the end of the war, exiled to Malta and put on trial there 144 Ottoman administrators—including Cabinet ministers and other high level civilian and military officials—whom they held responsible (on the basis of the reports they received from the Armenian Patriarchate) for massacring and for a number of other crimes. However, despite the fact that they had the Ottoman archives in their hands, the British could not, despite all their efforts, find even a single piece of evidence that would support the charges against the people in question. As a result, they released all of the “exiles of Malta”. Thus, the invalidity of the Armenian genocide claims was determined even at that time.

Esteemed deputies,

After the Republic was founded the Armenian claims were not put on the agenda for roughly half a century. These claims have been seen to have gained momentum and turned into a campaign as of the year 1965. Views and speculations on the motives behind that campaign vary.

Some Armenian groups have opted for terrorism as a method of promoting in the world their genocide allegations. Those who have been, since the beginning of the last century, raised their new generations with prejudices, instilling in them feelings of hate against our people and our country, initiated in 1973 terrorist attacks on Turkish diplomats and other Turkish targets via a number of terrorist organizations such as ASALA. Over 200 attacks were staged on Turkish targets. The attacks took place in 21 countries on four continents. In these terrorist attacks more than 30 of our diplomats, public officials and their family members were martyred by the beginning of the year 1985.

On this occasion I commemorate our martyrs yet another time respectfully. Let them rest in peace.

You will remember that when reporting on these murders foreign press and broadcasting establishments would refer only briefly to the murder itself, merely saying that a Turkish diplomat was killed. Then they would proceed to dwell on

the 1915 incidents at length, relaying to their readers or listeners the story from a one-sided, almost racist perspective. Although some members of these terrorist organizations were captured they were not punished. Those who knew about the activities of the terrorist organizations became inclined to prevent these activities only when their own citizens too came to harm.

Now we would like to ask a question: If these terrorists had been apprehended and brought before justice in time would the plague called terrorism constitute such a big threat today?

However, having realized that they would not be able to get results by way of terrorism, the militant Armenian circles changed the tactics they had been using in the anti-Turkey campaign. This time they tried to put pressure on Turkey by having the national or regional parliaments of various countries recognize the so-called genocide. After Armenia gained independence efforts in that direction expanded to a great extent. To date, groundless communiqués or resolutions regarding the so-called genocide have been adopted by the parliaments of Argentina, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, Canada, Lebanon, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Uruguay, Greece, Greek Cypriot Administration as well as by the European Parliament. Furthermore, decisions of this kind have been passed by a number of regional parliaments in the USA, Canada, Argentina, Australia and Switzerland. History itself is bound to condemn these decisions that totally ignore the historical realities, decisions that do great injustice and disrespect to the Turkish nation.

In the latest instance, a draft resolution on the Armenian claims was presented to Germany's Federal Parliament by the main opposition Christian Democratic Parties Union (CDU/CSU) parliamentary group in the Federal Parliament on 22 February 2005. Lately in France three different drafts of this kind were presented to Parliament. Furthermore, the Diaspora has waged for a long time a campaign to elicit from the US Congress a decision recognizing the so-called genocide. Also, efforts are reportedly underway to present to the US Congress a draft resolution concerning the alleged genocide prior to April 24. Efforts made to this effect by certain Armenian circles have failed to attain the desired goal until now thanks to the determined stance taken by a succession of US administrations. Similar attempts are being made in other countries as well. We are waging an active diplomatic struggle at various levels to counter all these attempts.

From this platform I want to address the authors of these attempts yet an-

other time: Parliaments are not institutions that can possibly take decisions and deliver judgment on historical events. History can be assessed only by historians. Regardless of their motives all drafts presented to foreign parliaments in support of the Armenian genocide allegations hurt our feelings and raise question marks in the minds of the Turkish people as to the intentions of certain countries that the public sees and knows as allies, making no positive contribution at all to the future of our relations with Armenia. I am inviting our colleagues, fellow parliamentarians, to abandon attempts of this kind. What they do does not serve any useful purpose.

Another major aim of the Armenian extremist circles is to ensure that the recognition by our country of the so-called genocide would be turned into a precondition for the Turkish entry into the European Union. As you know, prior to the Dec. 17 summit Armenian President Kocharyan sent a letter to the heads of state/government of the EU countries, asking them not to start negotiations with Turkey. We welcome the fact that the EU heads of state/government did not take that letter into consideration with some of them even displaying a negative reaction to it.

Well, how could the parliaments of certain countries describe as genocide the 1915 incidents in sharp contrast to the historical facts? The main reason is the extensive efforts made all these years by the Diaspora that has been so well organized and has great financial resources. The activities of the Diaspora are supported by the Armenian state sometimes overtly and sometimes in a covert fashion. Armenian ambassadors have made overt efforts aimed at making the parliaments of various countries recognize the so-called genocide. The Diaspora ensures that numerous books on the genocide issue get published every year and that articles written by writers that stand close to the Armenian views appear in major newspapers and magazines. So many conferences and symposiums are being organized and lectures given on the alleged genocide. Efforts are being made to keep the issue always alive on the agenda by ensuring that those researchers and academics that stand close to the Armenian views take part in these events. Similarly, the Diaspora ensures the production of films, mostly documentaries, on the alleged genocide theme. It encourages the airing of these in numerous cinemas and on TV channels. In the latest instance, "Ararat", the film made by Atom Egoyan, a Canadian of Armenian origin, was shown in many countries. The film reportedly brought in some three million dollars while the production costs amounted to 15.5 million dollars. With propaganda purposes, the Diaspora manages to spend so much on a single film. I think this figure gives us all an idea about the

propaganda power of the circles we are faced with. The public opinion in many countries, western countries especially, is being influenced by the new books, articles and films appearing every year. As a result the parliaments of these countries come under serious pressure to recognize the alleged genocide.

Esteemed deputies,

At this point I think I must engage in self-criticism. Unfortunately, all these years Turkey has pursued a mainly defensive policy in the face of the Armenian claims. The archival work needed to explain the facts to the public opinion in the world, was not done in time. Services rendered in that area have not been at the desired level because the infrastructural work and the classification of the documents have not been completed. This has created abroad the impression that Turkey might be hiding something. The financial resources needed for that purpose have not been made available. This struggle has been kept up with a small budget provided mostly by the state. While we have failed to teach our youth the historical facts on this issue at our schools, in our universities for example, the Armenian Diaspora has ensured the inclusion in the textbooks of many countries issues related to the alleged genocide. It has thus covered a lot of ground in creating prejudices in the minds of the new generations.

I am not saying that nothing has been done to date to counter these. If I said that I would be doing an injustice to our valuable individuals and institutions that have put up a valiant struggle against the groundless allegations. However, today what we need to base this struggle on is a well-prepared, consistent and active new strategy.

Esteemed deputies,

Due to all these reasons, I attach great importance to the general debate we are holding today. Including the Turkish Grand National Assembly all of our establishments and institutions concerned have started displaying towards this issue the sensitivity required. The efforts of the government alone would not suffice to ensure success in the face of the Armenian claims. We can be successful in this field only through a joint effort of all segments and individuals of our society. The joint announcement made by our prime minister and the chairman of the main opposition party on 8 March 2005 was an important turning point in that it manifested our resolve to wage a struggle against the Armenian claims. Turkey has shown the entire world that it will initiate a joint struggle – with its govern-

ment and its opposition. The prime minister and the main opposition leader have issued an historic call for creation of a group consisting of Turkish and Armenian historians and other experts to look into the archives—our own and the archives of all of the other countries concerned—to study the 1915 period and bring the facts to light.

I would like to announce that Turkey has taken a step even farther in order to display its seriousness and honesty on this issue. Our prime minister is relaying our proposal on this issue to Armenian President Kocharyan as well in an official letter. In his letter our prime minister not only relays our proposal for creation of a joint commission but also says that if our proposal got accepted we would be prepared to discuss with Armenia the creation and the operational methods of such a commission and that such an initiative would be a step that would serve the cause of normalization of the relations between the two countries. From here, I want to stress that we expect—especially those countries whose parliaments have adopted resolutions saying that they recognize the alleged genocide—to encourage Armenia to respond favorably to this call. I think this is a responsibility the countries in question should fulfill.

Esteemed deputies,

At this point I want to refer briefly to our relations with Armenia. Western countries especially are suggesting that we establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and open up the border. As you know, Turkey recognized Armenia as an independent state along with all the other former Soviet republics. It has provided humanitarian aid to Armenia when, upon gaining independence, it met with economic difficulties. Turkey made another significant gesture as well to Armenia: When initiating the Black Sea Economic Cooperation process it invited Armenia into that organization as an exception though the latter does not have a coastline on the Black Sea. In fact, Armenia is still represented at the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization based in Istanbul. However, due to the policies of distorting the facts that Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora have persisted in pursuing, it has not been possible for Turkey to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia. Is this normal behavior for a state that desires to form normal, neighborly relations? Which state can be expected to normalize its relations with a state that fails to clarify that it officially recognizes the aforementioned country's national borders? Furthermore, failing to comply with the relevant UN Security Council decisions, Armenia continues not to recognize the territorial integrity of our sibling, Azerbaijan. It continues to keep 20 percent of

the Azerbaijani soil under occupation. Hundreds of thousands of Azeri refugees are still living in destitute in camps.

Turkey is actively striving to bring this conflict to an end. We have met and had talks with our Azeri and Armenian colleagues many times over the past two years. Our efforts will continue.

Turkey wants normalization of its relations with Armenia. However, that country's stance that goes against the basic principles of international law and UN Security Council resolutions and its failure to act in ways compatible with goodneighborly relations, make it impossible for Turkey to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia.

Despite all these, Turkey has allowed charter plane services between Turkey and Armenia. Thousands of Armenian citizens have been able to come to Turkey and work here. Contacts at the nongovernmental organizations level exist.

If Armenia responds favorably to our call—which would ensure that historical facts would be brought to light—that will undoubtedly make a positive contribution also to the process of normalization of the relations between the two countries. From here, I reiterate yet another time our call to Armenia.

Esteemed deputies,

There is a certain issue put forth by those who, due to a variety of reasons, put before us the Armenian claims: They claim that Turkey should be reconciled with its past. Turkey is at peace with its past. Turkey does not have any problem with its history. No one should doubt that. It is true that we may have deliberately left certain pages of our history dim. For example, we have not cried out to the world loudly enough about the way masses of our co-ethnics in the Balkans were forced to migrate from these lands—where they had lived for centuries—during the final century of the Ottoman Empire, about the massacres they were subjected to in the Balkans or about the other tragedies, about the ratio of those who had been exiled from the Caucasus into the Ottoman lands or about the ratio of the hundreds of thousands of Turks and other Muslims that lost their lives in the First weakness. This has been done for a noble cause, that is, to enable the young generation to grow not with the sorrows of the past but with the hope of a World War. We have not dwelt in detail on the massacres and cruelty our people were subjected to during our War of Independence in those Turkish towns that had

remained under [foreign] occupation. There are some other aspects as well of our history that we choose not to focus on adequately: the way the missionaries sent to the Ottoman Empire –which was a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religion empire-- by the mighty powers of the time had divided the non-Muslim population in order to accelerate the decline and disintegration of the empire, and how, once these peoples divided among themselves, each segment was used as a tool to further each [foreign] country's own political interests. This has not resulted from a bright future where peace and friendship would reign. This has been done with the assumption that with the founding of our Republic and the signing of the Lausanne Peace Treaty a new page was turned. The knowledge of all these sufferings does exist in memories and on documents. I repeat that we are at peace with all pages of our history.

We believe that a certain point must be carefully stressed. What stands in the heart of the issues we are discussing here is human beings and their sufferings regardless of the reasons --the loss of lives. We would respect the commemoration in dignity of the pain suffered mutually by the Muslims and the non-Muslims who lived on these lands during that era, sufferings that have given us all sorrow. However, we would never accept the exploitation of that pain for political purposes by those that are not directly involved, by those that have nothing to do with it at all. We would never accept any attempt to fan feelings of revenge through an exploitation of these sufferings as a tool to spread lies and slander and to foster prejudices and hate against our people and our country.

Esteemed deputies,

Regarding the Armenian claims, Turkey will pursue a policy of taking the initiative and making all kinds of efforts to bring the historical facts to life. Turkey is always ready to face up to its past and there has never been a shameful era in our history. In this struggle we are determined to go all the way. How, under which conditions did the country arrive at the 1915 incidents? What exactly happened in 1915? What were the consequences of the forcible relocation? All these issues will be researched by historians in greater depth. Our work will be carried out through extensive and effective coordination and coordination among our institutions. The infrastructure for that is being created. Our people will be informed about the facts and their awareness will be raised. In parallel with the work to be done on the domestic plane, we will actively strive abroad to promote the truth and to fight against injustice. During that process some other countries will have to face up their own pasts as much as Turkey will – maybe even more. They will

find it hard to explain to today's generation some of the policies they had conducted during that era. This process will require an all-out struggle. We will wage this struggle as a nation as the august Assembly, the government, bureaucrats, scholars, press and broadcasting establishments and businessmen. In unity and togetherness the Turkish nation will prove successful in this struggle as well. I have full faith in that.

I salute the august Assembly with deepest respect.