

FACTS AND COMMENTS

Ömer E. Lütem

Ambassador (Rtd)
Director of the Institute for Armenian Research
oelutem@eraren.org

Abstract:

This article examines significant developments regarding Armenian question and Turkish-Armenian relations between April-June 2007 under three main headings. First, the meeting of Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanian with his Turkish counterpart after three years from their last meeting is analyzed. Secondly, regarding Armenian genocide allegations, commemoration of Armenian 'genocide' on April 24, the resolutions recognizing genocide allegations adopted in the Chilean Parliament and local assembly of Bask region, QUID Encyclopedia case, the attempts in the EU countries for punishing genocide denial and for lightening existing punishments, the call of Nobel Laureates for development of Turkish-Armenian relations and the answer given to them and some other developments are covered. Finally, the results of parliamentary elections in Armenia held on May 12 are examined.

Key Words: *Armenian question, Vartan Oskanian, assassination of Hrant Dink, Armenian parliamentary elections, the call of Nobel Laureates.*

In this article, developments regarding Armenian question and Turkish-Armenian relations during the first six months of 2007 were briefly examined. While there was no noteworthy event in Turkish-Armenian relations except the decision on the construction of Kars-Akhalkalek railway, murder of journalist Hrant Dink and the restoration of Akhdamar church were largely discussed by national and international press. In the paper, some developments about genocide claims were also touched upon. In the case of Armenia, the parliamentary elections and commemoration of April 24 were the two important affairs dealt throughout the paper.

I. Turkish-Armenian Bilateral Relations

The relative stagnation dominating Turkish-Armenian relations continued in this period. Although foreign ministers of Turkey and Armenia had been meeting in the UN General Assembly meetings in every September, Armenians quitted such meetings since 2004. The most significant reason of this attitude is that the continuation of meetings would impede further recognition of Armenian genocide allegations and states like US or international organizations like EU would refrain to press upon Turkey for 'genocide' recognition. However, since without any meetings it would be impossible to reach a permanent resolution of bilateral problems, Armenian attitude proved to be quite unproductive.

1. Black Sea Cooperation Organization (BSEC) Summit in Istanbul

The BSEC Summit was held in Istanbul on June 25, 2007. Although Armenia has been a member of BSEC, Armenian President Kocharian did not attend the meeting. Armenia was represented by the Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, who stated that Kocharian had not attended the meeting due to lack of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia. However, if there is no diplomatic relations between turkey and Armenia then Oskanian should not come to Istanbul as well. There is no such rule in international law or in international custom. Refraining from any kind of visit and communication happens if there is no recognition of that particular state. However, Turkey is the first country that recognized Armenia and representatives of these countries came together several times, such as the visit of Kocharian to Turkey to attend the OSCE meeting in 1999.

The real reason of Kocharian's non-attendance is his impression that such a visit would neither welcomed in Armenia and by Armenian Diaspora. Genocide allegations and closure of Turkish-Armenian border has so much brought to the agenda that anti-Turkish sentiments in Armenia and Diaspora increased considerably and Armenian President preferred not to come to Turkey.

In his speech delivered in the summit meeting¹, Oskanian did not touch upon the relations between Armenia and Turkey. However, in order to legitimize Armenian occupation of Azeri territories, he argued that regarding the Karabagh question, Armenians had protected themselves against Azeri government. Azeri President Aliyev replied these charges by stipulating that history should not be rewritten and stated that all BSEC countries except Armenia had recognized territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. He also said that since the war was not over, there was no winning side as well.

Oskanian met Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül in this summit as well. In a press conference that he made after the meeting he repeated the usual Armenian point of view. If we summarize it, he first touched upon the opening of Turkish-Armenian border and repeated that Armenia was ready to initiate diplomatic relations with Turkey without any preconditions. He argued that in order to materialize Turkish offer of establishing a joint historian commission to search for genocide allegations, opening of borders and abolition of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code was necessary. While on the one hand he stipulated that he was in favor of developing Turkish-Armenian relations without preconditions, on the other hand he did not refrain to say that recognition of Armenian ‘genocide’ was on Armenian political agenda. He talked about there was no change in the Turkish foreign policy towards Armenia but he did not mention that there was no change in the Armenian foreign policy towards Turkey either.²

In sum, Armenia did not recognize Turkish territorial integrity, did not give up genocide allegations and did not end its occupation in Azerbaijan; however she demanded Turkey to establish diplomatic relations and to open its borders with Armenia. Turkish position is just the contrary of it. The attitudes of these two countries could not be reconciled in the near future, thus it is not realistic to expect normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations in short and medium term.

1 Republic of Armenia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Web Site: <http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/>, 25 June 2007

2 Noyan Tapan, “Vardan Oskanian Reaffirms”, 26 June 2007.

2. Kars-Akhalkalek Railway Project

After the closure of the Turkish-Armenian land border in 1993 by Turkey, as a reaction of Armenian occupation of Azeri territories, the railway from Kars to Armenian city Gyumri, and from there to Georgian and Russian territories, could not be used. However, increasing trade relations necessitate railway connection of Turkey to Russia and Central Asia via Northern Caucasus. These countries are also in need of a railway route as a result of their trade with Turkey.

Although Kars-Akhalkalek railway is an old project, serious steps in order to actualize the construction were taken only very recently. Because the project would render Kars-Gyumri railway inefficient and also realization of an advanced cooperation between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan keeping Armenia out, it has caused Armenian reaction for long time. EU Commission also assessed the project negatively as a result of Armenian lobbying.

Armenians, sustaining a more powerful position in US than in Europe, tried to prevent American institutions to provide credit to this project. A draft statute prepared in 2006 was lastly approved by President Bush on December 26, 2006 after passing through Senate and House of Representatives and became law. In this respect an appendix was added to US Export-Import Bank Reauthorization Act of 2006. The 11th appendix orders that the Bank would not provide credit to railway projects that connects Baku, Tbilisi and Kars bypassing Armenia.³

The main point to be highlighted in this situation is the political preference of the law, favoring Armenia. Yet, Turkey is an ally of the US. On the other hand, the US has political relations with both Georgia and Azerbaijan more intense than that with Armenia. Moreover, the law means the use of economic pressure for political targets. Despite these drawbacks of the law, American government did not oppose and three countries to whom restrictions were imposed, did not criticize it much. Possibly the main reason for this is that there was no credit demand from

3 ANCA Press Release, December 6, 2006.

US for Kars-Akhalkalek railway project, and no such a plan exists in the future. Three participant countries will finance the project by themselves.

The Framework Agreement of Kars-Tbilisi-Baku Railway Project, which is also named as “Iron Silk Road”, has been signed by related ministers of respective countries at a ceremony at Georgian Parliament with the participation of President of Georgia Mikhail Saakashvili, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliev and Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. By this way, negotiations continuing since 1993 reached an affirmative end.

As the heads of government and state indicated at the ceremony, nearby the specific importance of the railroad for three countries, a radical transformation of political and economic situation of the region is also expected. The significance of the railway arises from the fact that main transportation route between Asia and Europe collides with the railway. In other words, the railway will have critical importance in the transportation from China to Europe via Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and also from Europe to Caucasus and Far East. Thanks to this project, Silk Road Transport Corridor will be linked uninterruptedly from Turkey to Caucasus and to the Far East. It is possible that the freight passing along this corridor will reach to 30 million tones after 20 years.

The initiative towards the realization of the railway created serious fear of isolation in Armenia and the issue of isolation found its echo in international press.⁴ The statements of Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanian that the project was a political failure⁵ and would not be harmful⁶ to Armenia were not convincing. On the other hand, Armenia attempted to find compensation to the project and the idea of connecting Armenia to Iran via railway came into agenda. However, the financial cost of such a project, reaching a billion US dollars⁷ and non-participa-

4 Armenian Isolation Deepens, *Economist*, March 1, 2007.

5 *Armradio.am*, March 9, 2007.

6 *Panarmenian.net*, March 9, 2007.

7 *Armenpress*, April 4, 2007.

tory attitude to financing of US as a result of Iranian policy, impeded further development of the idea. Whereas it may be expected that Russia could support such a project in principle, no encouragement was seen by Russian side.

II. Developments in Turkey

1. Murder of Hrant Dink

Chief Editor of Agos Newspaper, Hrant Dink, was assassinated in front of the newspaper's building on Istanbul's Halaskargazi Street by a gunman on January 19, 2007. This event created a major shock in Turkey and was condemned fiercely by politicians including President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and media. Likewise, our Institute uttered affliction in the daily news bulletin published after a couple hours from the event.

Hrant Dink was the son of a poor Armenian family, born in Malatya in 1954. He grew up at an orphan asylum in Istanbul, completed university education with great difficulties and became a journalist. His newspaper Agos, which he began publishing in 1996 was different from other Armenian newspapers of Istanbul, Jamanak and Marmara, since Turkish language was being used in Agos. In a very short time, Agos reached higher numbers of dissemination than the other two papers because Istanbul Armenians, especially the younger ones, were better in Turkish compared to Armenian. On the other hand, the newspaper was discussing certain untouched problems of Armenian community and Patriarch and also events of 1915, in somewhat harsh wording.

Dink was abstaining to use the word "genocide" for 1915 events, arguing that it was necessary to approach the events with empathy and proposing that, besides commemorating the events, the future of Armenians should not be based upon these events. Furthermore, Dink was in a different behavior than Diaspora Armenians, through signing a statement prepared by some liberal intellectuals in order to criticize the French law penalizing people that do not accept Armenian

genocide claims.⁸

Dink was in disagreement with Armenian Patriarchy in various issues and also reflecting them in AGOS.⁹

Beginning from the year 2000, while reconsideration of Armenian genocide allegations by the European Union, adoption of decrees by some of European countries' parliaments and acceptance of genocide allegations by some liberal Turkish intellectuals have carried the issue to the top-agenda of Turkey; Dink's arguments were getting tougher in parallel. Meanwhile, when he was brought to a legal trial regarding an article consisting words such as "dirty Turkish blood", Dink became more famous in EU countries and began to be seen as the representative of Turkish Armenians.

To sum up, in the beginning of 2007 except a small part of the public, Dink was mostly facing negative reaction in Turkey, however he was appraised abroad. Although he was not much enjoyed by Armenian Diaspora, was a tolerated figure by them.

Who killed Hrant Dink? This question was answered in a short time. A 17 years old youngster named Ogün Samast has been arrested 32 hours after the event, as a result of information given by his father. It was understood that he was under the influence of an ultra-nationalist group in Trabzon.

Murder of Hrant Dink became a domestic political issue in Turkey very soon.

8 Ömer Engin Lütem, "Olaylar ve Yorumlar", *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Vol. 20-21, Winter 2005-Spring 2006, pp. 29-30.

9 On this subject, only for the second part of 2006, the following headings of AGOS may be presented: June 30, 2006: 'The Statements shadowing Vehepar's visit – Patriarch Mesrop claimed in the interview published in *Hürriyet* that he does not agree Vehepar and criticized his behavior in the Governate. June 28 2006: Turkish Armenian Patriarch has the directors of foundations to write his instructions: 'Don't give advertisement to Agos and Jamanak newspapers. Will you reduce us submission through this way? November 24, 2006: Threat of damn from the Patriarch. Patriarch has criticized some society leaders and benevolent without naming by saying that they were producing gossips"

Liberal intellectuals, mostly led by daily newspaper Radikal,¹⁰ opened a campaign against nationalist people and began to accuse them of being racists. On the other hand, the political circles supporting the murderer and his relatives were largely discussed. Contested sympathy of some security forces to the murderer and the possible relations of the murderer and his relatives with some political parties were carried to newspaper headlines. Meanwhile the slogans shot at the funeral of Hrant Dink such as “All of us are Armenians” and “All of us are Hrant Dink” were largely criticized. All these discussions and struggles caused Hrant Dink nearly to be forgotten and in the context of this murder Armenian problem was virtually not talked upon.

Arrest of the murderer in a very short time, and also prosecution and arrest of persons that solicited the murderer¹¹; removal of Governor of Trabzon and City Police Chief from office, participation of Ministers of Justice and Interior to the funeral, visit by the Prime Minister to Dink’s family and Armenian Patriarch, alleviated the critics and accusations sprang especially from Diaspora about this murder. The words of Italian Prime Minister, who was at a visit in Turkey at that time, reflected the case at best: “The responsible person has been caught. All these meant one thing. Public opinion is in line with the government and Turkish government has taken the right course”.¹²

Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Kirakosian who came for participation in the funeral, asserted, as a reply to a journalist’s question: “It is bothersome that we have no relations by no matter of means for 15 years; we are ready to start diplomatic without any condition”.¹³ These remarks have been reflected as if they

10 As examples we present the headings of Radikal cover page: January 20 2007: Hrant Dink, the target of racists, was terminated with three shots - Be proud of your work!. January 21 2007: Suffering, desperation and the cliché: what is necessary will be done!. January 22 2007: Violent events are all in Trabzon - Why Trabzon? People are so petulant? January 23 2007: You are not alone. January 24: Istanbul has never seen a funeral like this Hrant Dink was sent off by a hundred thousand people.

11 By the end of March 2007, twelve persons were arrested, related to this murder. BIA News Center, March 28, 2007

12 Hürriyet, January 24, 2007.

13 Zaman, January 25, 2007.

reflected a new proposal by some journalists in Turkey.¹⁴ According to them, Armenian proposal to negotiate with the aim of starting unconditional diplomatic relations might launch a new process. In order to slow down genocide claims and to break the ice in the international arena, it was necessary to make a good use of this initiative. In short, everybody was behaving as if a new opportunity had arisen. Nevertheless there was not any new proposal. All of the Armenian officials, whenever talked about Turkey during the last few years, had declared that they want to establish unconditional relationship with Turkey. It is easily possible to find two dozens of remarks of Foreign Minister Oskanian including the same proposal.

In view of this widespread misapprehension in the Turkish press, Spokesperson of Foreign Ministry in a declaratory clause released on January 25, 2007, key-noted that hence various statements have been made by Armenian government in this manner, Kirakosian's words did not denote a new expansion, Turkey kept its desire to develop relations with all neighbors on the bases of bilateral trust and respect, development of relations and cooperation in bilateral and regional context could not be depended on only Turkey's paces but on countering behest and paces of the related partners. Among other things, it was also indicated that Turkey took concrete steps during different occasions in order to advance the dialog with Armenia and proposition of establishment of a Joint Historians Committee constituted one of this concrete initiatives. Moreover, it was added that an interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia, Arman Kirakosian, took place in a constructive and positive atmosphere.

In this pretext, we try to explain what Turkey's establishment of unconditional relations with Armenia means, once again.

¹⁴ Birand asserted this proposal on Kanal D news program on January 24, 2007 as an opportunity that should not be missed. Moreover he wrote in Posta in Turkish and Turkish Daily News an article headed as "Armenian Offer Should Not Be Rejected" on January 26 2007: <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid= 64805>

It is natural to establish unconditional diplomatic relations between two states if there is no problem. However, if problems exist and the establishment of diplomatic relations will mean not the solution, but the continuation of existing problems it is also natural that one of the sides will call for the solution of the problems before the establishment of diplomatic relations.

There are three main problems between Turkey and Armenia: First is the repudiation of the territorial integrity of Turkey by Armenia. By this way, Armenia thinks to reserve its right to demand territory from Turkey in the future. Secondly, Armenia brings forward genocide allegations against Turkey and supports Diaspora's efforts for possible indemnity requests. Thirdly Armenia has occupied twenty percent of Azerbaijan territory and made approximately one million Azeri "fugitives". Turkey closed its border gate with Armenia as a reaction to the occupation of Azerbaijan territory.

In the case that Turkey unconditionally establishes diplomatic relationship with Armenia and opens up the borders, there remains no reason for Armenia to cooperate with Turkey in order to solve the aforementioned problems.

For long years, contrary to the efforts of all Turkish governments to resolve these three problems beforehand, Armenia proposed the formula of "unconditional diplomatic solution" and with the positive echo created in minds by the word "unconditional" Armenians tried to attribute the fault that no diplomatic relations were established, to Turkey.

Murder of Hrant Dink caused major reactions in Armenia too, as in the Diaspora. In the places with many Armenian inhabitants, demonstrations were arranged and meanwhile it was claimed that one hundred-thousand people participated in a demonstration in Yerevan.¹⁵

¹⁵ Milliyet, January 26, 2007.

European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy, a Tashnak inclined organization functioning to defend Armenian interests in European Union, put the heading “Turkey murdered Hrant Dink” in its declaration¹⁶ and tried to make Turkey responsible in the event.

Some of the authors attempted to present Hrant Dink as a victim of Armenian “genocide” however since nearly one century has passed over the 1915 relocation, they found a formula that murder of Dink showed that Armenian “genocide” is currently going on.¹⁷ While some argued that one other person was added to the victims of Armenian genocide¹⁸, a renowned British journalist-author, who has been always in defense of Armenian views, has written that Hrant Dink became the victim number 1,500,001 of the Armenian genocide.¹⁹

Armenian Parliament condemned, very lately, the murder of Hrant Dink in a statement published after twenty days than the event.²⁰ It was claimed that this event was the result of the anti-Armenian propaganda of certain nationalist circles and security forces did not prevent the murder despite they had the information in advance. It was emphasized that this murder had demonstrated the necessities of building bilateral confidence and Turkey’s reconciliation with its own history, recognition of 1915 Armenian genocide and revision of article 301 of Turkish Penal code.

In the international arena, the activities in European Parliament and European Council Parliamentarians Assembly attracted attention.

16 Fédération Euro- arménienne pour la justice et la démocratie, Communiqué de Presse, January 19, 2007.

17 Khatchig Mouradian, Hrant Dink (1954-1915). AWOL, January 20, 2007.

18 Edmond Y. Azadian, “One More Victim Added to the Armenian Genocide Count”, *AZG Armenian Daily*, January 30, 2007. <http://www.armeniandiaspora.com/archive/81513.html>

19 Robert Fisk, “Award –Winning Writer Shot by Assassin in İstanbul Street”, *The Independent*, January 20, 2007. <http://news.independent.co.uk/europe/article2169190.ece>

20 Armenian Parliament formal web page, “Statement of Armenian Parliament”, www.parliament.am/search.php?where=whole&what=Hrant%20Dink&lang=eng

European Parliament commemorated Hrant Dink through one-minute homage. President Hans-Gert Poettering, after stating his praise about Turkish determination to find the accused very quickly, argued that they waited for Turkey to show the same determination during the reform process and article 301 should be abrogated.

European Council Parliamentarians' Assembly condemned the murders of Hrant Dink and Anna Polikovskaya in a decision headed as "Dangers Threatening Lives of Journalists and Freedom of Expression" on January 25, 2006.

In the international press many articles on the murder of Hrant Dink has appeared that were mostly concerning the possible role this event might play a role in ameliorating Turkish-Armenian relationship, mentioning the participation of multitudinous people in the funeral.²¹ It appears that it was expected that Turkey would pursue a softer policy towards Armenia, in other words make concessions under the influence of large scale interest shown to Hrant Dink both in the country but especially outside the country. In this context, the aforementioned statement of Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesperson on January 25 2007 and observance of no change in Turkey's policy created disappointment. Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, in an article for an American newspaper²², expressed that in the days following the murder of Hrant Dink there was a hope in both Armenia and in other parts of world that there would be a crack in Turkey's policy of denial and rejection and Turkish statesmen would change their policies radically using this event. He added that it was a pity that this opportunity has been lost. After a short period in a conference delivered in Cologne, he said that the murder of Hrant Dink was supposed to change wrong policies of Turkey, however the contrary happened and Turkey had made more efforts in both Turkey and other countries, in order to prevent the recognition of Armenian geno-

21 Le Monde, "L'Assassinat de Hrant Dink crée un climat favorable au dialogue turco- Arménienne" (Murder of Hrant Dink creates a suitable atmosphere for Turkish-Armenian dialogue) January 24, 2007.

22 Los Angeles Times, February 1, 2007.

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cide.²³ In contrast to this, it was seen that Armenian President had different views on this subject than the Foreign Minister in an interview published in a French newspaper²⁴. Kocharian, after underlining the existence of different perspectives about the possible positive or negative effects of murder of Hrant Dink, stated that he conceptualized, after the first shock, this event would not effect the relations. This was obviously more realistic point of view.

A draft resolution has been given to US House of Representatives on January 29 2007, about the murder of Hrant Dink with the number H.Res.102. After two days, on February 1 2007, another resolution has been given to the Senate on the same issue numbered, S. Res. 65. These draft resolutions are not the same but treat the same subject.

In the procedural sections of the drafts, murder of Hrant Dink was condemned, continuation of investigation and prosecution of the murderers was demanded (or support for the efforts towards this direction by Turkey) and also abrogation of article 301 of Turkish Penal Code was enquired. It was obvious that the draft given to the Senate has been written down in a softer manner. Senate Foreign Relations Committee has sent the draft to the Senate after some modifications in the term of “genocide”.

Naturally, it comes to the mind that why the US Senate was so interested in murder of Hrant Dink or, if Senate interested in such events, why other murders or terrorist activities in other parts of the world such as daily murder of hundreds of people in Iraq were not been condemned.

However an in-depth investigation of the draft would reveal that murder of Hrant Dink was not interested in so much, and that the main aim was to persuade the Senate to impose other drafts by benefiting the echoes of the murder and using

²³ AZG Armenian Daily, February 15, 2007.

²⁴ Le Figaro, February 19, 2007.

the name of Hrant Dink. On the top of the list comes the recognition of genocide allegations. However the modification made in the Senate undermined these claims.

The demand enlisted in the draft that Turkey should establish all diplomatic, political and economic relations with Armenia, was not related to the murder of Hrant Dink. These are Armenian demands and also accepted by the American government. Turkey is not against establishment of relations with Armenia, in principle. However, it is expected that Armenia should leave occupied Azeri territories beforehand. Without this, establishment of such relationships with Armenia would mean the acceptance of the occupation and Azerbaijan would be up against a very difficult situation. That is what Armenians desire.

The adoption of the draft resolution was met with displeasure by Turkish Foreign Ministry. Ministry Spokesperson in declaratory clause on March 29, 2007 putting on the agenda of such a draft resolution in US Senate would cause the exploitation of the said murder for political reasons referring to 1915 events. It was also added that since US has been a country with which Turkey maintains close cooperation with a common vision on various fields, it was hoped that the US Senate would not adopt this draft resolution.²⁵

2. Restoration of Akhdamar Church

Akhdamar Church, which was built by Armenian King Gagik I at an island on Lake Van in 10th century, was in a ruinous situation after it was left. Ministry of Culture and Tourism restored the Church with an expense of 2,600,000 YTL (approximately 2 million US dollars) and opened it as a museum after a ceremony in participation by some Ambassadors coming from Ankara, Deputy Minister of Culture of Armenia Gagik Gurciyan and Turkish Armenian Patriarch Mesrop II. This ceremony caused criticisms both in Armenia and in the Diaspora.

²⁵ Formal web page of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, March 29, 2007, "Reply of the Spokesmen of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to a question" http://www.mfa.gov.tr/MFA_tr/BasinEnformasyon/SoruCevap/2007/Mart/SC14_29Mart2007.htm

Spokesperson of Armenian Foreign Ministry Vladimir Karabetyan stated in a declaratory clause²⁶ in March 28, 2007 that restoration of the Church was a positive development even without cross on the dome and added that they hope the same attitude would be shown to a dozen of Armenian leftovers in Ani and Muş.

Spokesperson also indicated that it was not accidental that the ceremony coincided the date on which Armenian genocide law proposals were being discussed at US Congress. He also said that they don't want to concede such gestures which are aimed at influencing the public and not inclined to a honest compromise; and that the international society should prompt Turkey to open Armenian border and to normalize the relations.

In a note by the Armenian Patriarchate in Etchmiyazin, who was also invited to the ceremony, it was indicated that because Akhtamar Church was not bounded to Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul and opened as a museum, Patriarch Karekin II would not attend to the ceremony.

Cilician Patriarchate, seated in Antelias close to Beirut, remarked that Patriarch Aram II would not participate the ceremony since Turkey rejects recognizing Armenian 'genocide'. Views and comments of Diaspora Armenians on the opening of the restored Church were also negative. Without asserting the restoration of the historical Church, this occasion was used to criticize Turkey. On the contrary, the reaction of the international press was more moderate.

As a result, the restoration of Akhtamar Church, which was realized as a mark of good will towards Armenia and Armenians, did not succeed in this aim. However, a relatively better impression was achieved in international public opinion. By the way, it should be noted with reference to an Armenian source²⁷, the Akhtamar restoration had increased the amount of tourists, from 5000 annually to 20,000 in only last month.

26 Republic of Armenia formal web page, "Comments by the Ministry Spokesperson on the Re-opening of akhdamar Church", <http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/news/index.html>

27 Armennews, June 13, 2007, "Aghtamar: Plus de 2000 visiteurs en un mois"

III. Developments Related to Genocide Claims

1. Draft Resolutions at the American Congress

The efforts of the Armenians and their supporters in USA for years, in order to pass a resolution in at least one of the chambers of the Congress were futile because of the possibility that such a decree might harm Turkish-US relations. In this context, President Clinton had sent a letter to Hastert, the President of House of Representatives in year 2000, in order to curb the discussions and later on, despite such a decision had passed from Committee of Foreign Relations the General Assembly did not put it on the agenda.

In the elections of November 2006, the Democrats who are more inclined to Armenian views had obtained the majority in the House of Representatives. In addition, Mrs. Nancy Pelosi who was elected from California and well known for her Armenian sympathy was elected the President of House of Representatives. She had declared before the elections that she would support the draft recognizing Armenian genocide (H. Res. 310) and that US should recognize that heinous event and that she would support all efforts for this aim.²⁸

Since the elections were renewed, the draft resolution presented previously to the House of Representatives, numbered as H.Res.316, has become void. After House of Representatives became de facto operational in the beginning of January 2007 and perhaps with the intention of benefiting the negative atmosphere against Turkey resulting from Hrant Dink's death, immediately afterwards of the commemoration day of Jewish Holocaust, a new draft was given to House of Representatives Committee of Foreign Affairs, on January 30th. On the same day a draft condemning the murder of Hrant Dink was also presented to House of Representatives.

The presenters of the draft were the members of House Representatives such as Adam Schiff, George Radanovich, Frank Pallone and Joe Knollenberg, who in

²⁸ Armradio, February 19, 2007.

every occasion take care of Armenian interests, defend Armenian views and act like an Armenian clerk inside or outside the House. Later on the supporters of the draft passed beyond 190 members.

The number of the new draft is H. Res.106. The text is same as the draft presented during previous term with the number H. Res. 310. It is clear that Armenians, by proposing a previously discussed text, wanted to prevent a new negotiation.

Nearby on March 14, 2007, a similar draft proposal was given to the Senate.

The texts of the draft are presented in Current Documents part of our journal. What is more there is information about their contents in the article by Oya Eren, entitled “A Critical Analysis of Armenian Genocide Resolutions Submitted to the American Congress and Resolution H.Res.106”

The addressee of the draft is the US President. However, in the case of acceptance, this draft will not be binding for the President, because the draft is in the form of advice. In order to be binding, the draft should be in the form of law and for this after, adoption in the House of Representatives it should also be adopted in the Senate and then sent to the President. In the case that the President does not sign the draft, it does not become a law, but a procedure to High Court may begin. The owners of the mentioned draft abstained to make a law on this issue. But, it is clear that in order to insert pressure to the President; they will try in the Senate to adopt this draft.

Although such a decision is worthless legally, it will have various unfavorable effects such as it will fortify the belief that Armenians were exposed to genocide, it will encourage some other countries for similar decisions, it will cause the continuation of Armenia’s uncompromising policy against Turkey, it will damage the reliability of scientific research in Turkey and it will make the diplomatic efforts against Armenian claims harder.

As for what Turkey did to prevent this draft, it was strived to explain to both US government and prominent people of US Congress, that the adoption of the draft would effect bilateral relations immensely negative. For this purpose Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, then Chief of General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt and later three committees of Turkish parliamentarians, on different dates, had visited Washington and explained the drawback of the draft. Finally a delegation from TUSIAD went to Washington. In this way, government, the Parliament, army and the business world behaved in one accord in this issue. Turkish reaction as a unified front might said to be influential upon Congressmen who generally supports Armenian views, and some of them came to believe in the drawbacks of the draft.

After returning from the visit to United States Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, in a commentary, said that he expressed to the counterparts that although the draft had no binding effect, it would harm the bilateral relations, all the relations of two countries, who have really strategic relations, would be captive to this issue; and added that US Secretary of State would make some initiatives in the Congress on this issue.²⁹ Indeed, an effort by US Secretary of State has been observed in order to make conscious the US Congressmen on this draft.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates in a joint letter³⁰ sent to House Representatives President of Foreign Commission Tom Lantos to which the draft has been delegated, indicated that the adoption of law draft number H. Res. 106 would damage the efforts of US directed the achievement of a reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey, and recognition by Turkey, of the “tragic events” that Armenians were exposed during Ottoman era; and would also seriously damage American national security interests in the region.

29 Cumhuriyet, February 12, 2007.

30 Associated Press, International Herald Tribune, March 14, 2007; Turkish Daily News, March 15, 2007.

While the letter has emphasized that US had never denied the horrific events related to Armenians and Turkey has always been induced to face its own history, it was also stated that Turkey's proposal of "historians committee" was being supported.

In the letter it was also added that Turkey had contributions on the national security of the USA and the security of the Middle East and, in this context, was an indispensable partner for the military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan since by opening its airspace, by giving the use of military bases and port, Turkey provided the transportation of the vital material and also Turkey's function in Afghanistan's security and reconstruction has been cited with praise.

The letter by touching upon the draft statute of French National Parliament ordering penalties to people denying genocide claims, emphasized that Turkish military offices broke off all the relations with France and declared the defense negotiations have been closed; and if House of Representatives adopts the statute, Turkish government might react in similar way and this would harm American soldiers in the war zone, make supply to American forces harder. Furthermore, because the failure of Armenian-Turkish reconciliation efforts would hamper American efforts, it was requested from the President of Foreign Committee not to send the draft statute to the General Assembly of House of Representatives.

After this letter Deputy Secretary of State Daniel Fried commented as the view of the letter in the session of House of Representatives Foreign Committee on Turkish-American relations and possible future problems.³¹ Secretary of State Rice has replied questions of Adam Schiff, who always defends Armenian views and demands, in a meeting on budget allocation. Rice did not pronounce the word "genocide" despite all demands; and after indicating that the events were defined in President's annual message and the events should be left to historians

³¹ Congressional Quarterly, March 15, 2007.

for research, she argued that US would not be an intervening party to the conflict between Armenia and Turkey and encourage both countries to search their histories.³²

The main line of American policy on this subject was placed in the above letter of Rice and Gates. The letter has been based on the argument that American interests and also American forces would be in harm in the case the draft was adopted. Because the letter has been written by two ministers responsible of the American security after the President and also it coincided in a time when American people was very sensitive in the security of American soldiers as a result of Iraq, it was not possible to overlook the letter. On the other hand, since the President of the Foreign Committee has an absolute power to decide the agenda of the Committee, he may not open the draft to negotiation. This letter and other developments proving the determination of American government, which is summarized below, show that the draft will not be voted this year and possibly remains to next year.

Coming to the attitude of Armenians regarding the said drafts, we remind that the drafts were prepared and submitted by some Congressmen who are in cooperation with American-Armenian organizations. It should be noted that Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) which is a Tashnak organization and Armenian Assembly of America (AAA) which mostly represents rich Armenians and always supports the government, have interested in the drafts closely and tried to exert pressure on Congress members. Currently House of Representatives is composed of 435 members and around 190 of them are also members of Armenian Caucus, so any Armenian draft taken into agenda of the House is for certain.

In past years it was seen that Armenia has not made much effort for such drafts and asserted these as the job of Diaspora. Visit of Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian to Washington on March 7 2007, three weeks after Abdullah

³² Gamk, March 22, 2007.

Gül's visit without a specific reason and his meeting with Condoleezza Rice and co-chairs of Armenian Caucus in Congress and declaration that the said drafts were among the issues discussed³³, showed that Armenia began to be more active in this issue.

2. The Attempt to Punish the Denial of Genocide in EU countries

Still in Europe and especially in some of the EU countries, there is an affinity of punishment for the ones who deny or condemn genocide and in some countries there are laws about this matter. Being not too common, in some people and communities in the radical right a denial or an underestimation can be seen about the Jewish genocide in Europe. The best example of this should be the well known, some countries English historian David Irving. As being one of the best experts of that period he was adjudicated many times because of having around 30 books that question the so called Jewish Holocaust, and in 2006 condemned in Austria and put in the jail, released at the end of the year.

On another note, Germany and the countries that committed or helped Germany in committing the genocide during World War II, head the list of the countries who espouse the punishment for the denial of genocide. The intention under this approach which seems like a self-accusation is actually a bowdlerizer of self from these accusations by putting an effort in the punishment for the genocide-deniers. The reason why David Irving was put in jail in Austria, who moved off Germany during the World War II, and not in his own country England, is this. In the European Union countries the topic of punishment for the denial of genocide was discussed by the organs of the European Union, but because of the huge disagreements there was no certain result. As some of the countries led by England, objected every attempt that constrains the freedom of speech, the countries we mentioned above adopted an opposite policy. In the period of EU leadership enclosing the first half of 2007, Germany took action to resolve this issue.

³³ Republic of Armenia formal web page, "Dforeign Minister Oskanian completed his visit to Washington", March 6, 2007. <http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/news/index.html>

In the draft, which was prepared by Germany, the Armenian genocide was not treated of. But the concerns about the elements that it consisted which could enclose the claim of Armenian genocide was seen by the Turkish media and the ministry, and the Minister of Justice, Cemil Çiçek went to Germany to confer this topic with the German Minister of Justice, Brigitte Zypries.³⁴ It could be understood by the press communications that the concerned Germans declared that there were no components that would disturb Turkey, but that these declarations were not found satisfying.³⁵

It is seen that the draft that Germany prepared caused huge disputes, that countries like England, Ireland, Denmark and Sweden coming out against the contentions that could harm the freedom of speech, on the other hand the countries like Germany, France, Belgium, Austria and Spain who has laws about punishment for genocide denial, stand for a harsh punishment for this denial, and on another aspect³⁶, it is seen that the Baltic countries as a result of trying to add some of the imprints of the Stalin period, agreed on an average way³⁷.

In this subject, in the framework decision³⁸ on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia that is taken by the European Union Ministers of Internal Affairs and the Ministers of Justice in 19th of April 2007, this matter draws the attention about genocide.

Denial, passing over and condescending of genocide towards a group that is determined by its race, color, religion, family or national or ethnic origin is described to be an action which needs to be punished. The foreseen condemn was between 1-3 years. The member countries are going to observe this rule in a 2 years period. On the other hand, it was emphasized that this decision was not

34 Zaman, 26 March 2007, "Ankara concerned over EU plans for genocide allegations"

35 Hürriyet, 13 April 2007, "Almanya ile 'sözde soykırım' krizi kapıda"

36 The Guardian, 20 April 2007, "EU agrees new race hatred law"

37 DPA, 19 April 2007, "EU Ministers open talks on plans to criminalize racism and xenophobia"

38 Council of European Union Document no: 8704/07, 25 April 2007.

against the fundamental rights or the freedom of speech.

According to the decision, for an incident to be accepted as genocide, the judgment of either one of the countries' national court, or an international court is required. However, the 6th article of the UN Genocide Convention mentions about the "crime-committing country's 'authorized court' or 'an international court that is authorized to judge'. The description of framework decision, without using the expressions "the country that committed the crime" and "authorized to judge", concludes that the special qualities are be taken from the courts that will decide the genocide, hence it is easier to control it.

The matter how the denial of the Armenian genocide claims effect the subject decisions and the changes in the EU legislation that will be done accordingly, is still not certain, and on this topic the EU member countries should be waiting for the changes in their internal legislation.

3. Decision of Chilean Senate

Chilean Senate recognized the Armenian genocide through a decision taken unanimously on June 5, 2007.

The important parts of the decision may be summarized as follows³⁹: On April 1915 in Istanbul the entire leading class of the Armenian communities was arrested and later disappeared; and the in the course of subsequent events 1,5 million persons were killed as a result of Armenian genocide, the first ethnic cleansing of the 20th century; the genocide was recognized by Sub-Commission of the Commission on Human Rights on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities; some countries' parliaments also recognized the Armenian "genocide" (these countries are listed), Chile should make a resolution which recognizes that the Ottoman Empire committed a genocide in Armenia (?) against defenseless people; that now cry to put for moral reparations from part of

³⁹ Armenian National Committee of America, Press Release, June 7 2007.

the international community and especially Turkey.

It is also reported that the Senate decided on these:

1. To support the Armenian nation in condemning the genocide of its people.
2. To call on the government of Chile to adhere to the 1985 United Nations decisions.

There are many factual mistakes in this decision. First of all, Armenian notables were not terminated in Istanbul on April 24, 1915, but some among them were exiled to Çankırı and Ayaş for the sake of security. Secondly, it should be indicated that Armenian relocation came to end in 1916, not in 1923. Nevermore in the last years in order to make Republic of Turkey responsible, “genocide” is argued to end in 1923. Thirdly, it was not proven that 1,5 million Armenians were dead during the relocation or afterwards, in fact, it is not possible to prove since all the Armenian population living in Ottoman Empire was this much. In the decision, countries recognizing the “genocide” were counted. But for some reason, whereas Germany, Slovakia, Lithuania and Vatican were absent in the list, Bulgaria who has not such a decision was put in the list.

The most interesting part of the decision was the claim that the “genocide” was recognized by Sub-Commission of the Commission on Human Rights on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1985 and the demand Chile government to join this decision.

The said Commission, among many other issues, also negotiated the report on genocide prepared by English specialist Benjamin Whitaker, approximately twenty years ago. In a part of the report, counting of Armenian “genocide” as an example of previous genocides was objected by Turkey, and the report was criticized in many other dimensions; then the Sub-Commission only indicated

in the decision that “the report has been noted.”⁴⁰ This means that no procedure is to follow regarding the report. As a matter of fact, the report did not follow up normal procedure and was not sent to Commission on Human Rights and from there to Economic and Social Council. Yet, Diaspora Armenians, with reference to this report, began to claim that United Nations had accepted the Armenian “genocide” and attempted to facilitate the decisions that recognize Armenian “genocide” in some countries’ parliaments. In the meantime, we should underline that the mentioned claim also existed in the drafts proposed in US Congress since 2000 to ensure the recognition of the “genocide” and despite all warnings it was left unchanged.

Turkish Foreign Ministry reacted to decision of Chilean Senate, also condemned and rejected the decision; it was stated that this decision would overshadow the friendly relations between two countries. Additionally, as the reply to the claim that the “genocide” was recognized in the above-mentioned sub-Commission of UN, Turkey noted the speech by Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon delivered April 30, 2007, stating that UN has had no policy regarding 1915 events.⁴¹

With regard to the reason why Chilean Senate interested in this issue, the only reason seems the efforts of Armenian National Committee of South America⁴² and the small but motivated Armenian minority. There is not noteworthy number of Turks in Chile. The warnings of Turkish Embassy were not taken into consideration because of the unawareness sprang from geographical remoteness.

According to the President of this Committee Hagop Tabakian, the main goal is to achieve the recognition of the “genocide” by all South American countries.⁴³

40 On this subject: What has really happened in Geneva: The Truth About the ‘Whitaker Report’ Prof Türkaya Ataöv, Ankara, 1986.

41 http://www.mfa.gov.tr/MFA_tr/BasinEnformasyon/Aciklamalar/2007/Haziran/NO89_8Haziran2007.htm

42 Armenian National Committee of South America (ANC-SA)

43 Armenian National Committee of America, Pres Release, June 7 2007.

As the conditions in these countries resembles Chile, if direct connection between decisions supporting genocide claims and bilateral relations of these countries and Turkey is not established, similar decisions at various South American countries may be expected.

4. Bask Regional Parliament's Decision

Spain's Bask Region's Parliament declared a decision that recognized the Armenian genocide on May 11, 2007.

In this decision, in summary, there are matters such as over 2 million people were killed in the genocide against the Armenian people which was committed by the Turkish Government, it was a real genocide according to the 1948 UN Genocide Convention which was signified in the decision accepted by the European Parliament in June 1987, Turkey, who denies this genocide systematically and bans the commemoration of this topic in the criminal code, and sees taking up the topics about Armenia and Cyprus as a danger to fundamental national interests, is censured, the economic and boundary blockades applied to Armenia from Turkey are rejected, the principle of the European Parliament about a country who wants to join the European Union should face with its own history firstly is espoused, forming diplomatic and good neighborhood relations with Armenia and solving the boundary conflicts in peaceful manners is wanted from Turkey.

As it can be seen, The Basque Regional Parliament espoused all the Armenian demands without any reservations.

It is known that the Armenians face with difficulties in obtaining a judgment avowing the genocide from the parliament of one of the biggest countries of European Union, Spain, and that's why they front to the regional parliaments, and that an attempt accordingly in the Catalonia Parliament, in this matter, failed.⁴⁴ The acceptance of Armenian claims by the Basque Regional Parliament is ex-

⁴⁴ Olaylar ve Yorumlar, "Ermeni Araştırmaları", volume: 23-25, p.66.

pected to strengthen the tendency to put the Armenian claims in a setback.

5. QUID Encyclopedia

Quid is a best-seller public encyclopedia in France. In the 2003 edition of this encyclopedia, in 1305th page under the heading “Turkey/Some Problems/Armenia – Turkish Policy on Armenian Problem” Turkish views against Armenian claims of genocide.⁴⁵ The Committee of Defense of the Armenian Case together with some other Armenian organizations had applied to Paris Court on May 27 2003 and made complaint that Quid Encyclopedia and Robert Laffont Publishing Company was committing “propaganda of denial”

Because the relatives and the inheritors of the Armenian Community of that period was hurt and the groups aimed at protecting the memoirs of that event were disturbed, QUID was sentenced to pay an indemnity of one euro.

The amount of the indemnity was symbolic. But this decision also dictated the removal of the views supporting Turkish view. The defendant Robert Laffont applied to Court of Appeals for reconsideration. The court trial took place on January 25, 2006 and the decision was announced after several postponements on March 7, 2006. Court of Appeals has overruled the decision of Paris Court by declaring that “a simple expression of revisionist history thesis does not make responsible the people that do not deny the reality of Armenian genocide, the people that do not embrace Turkish views, the people that do not bring forward the views of the deniers of such views and the people that do not attempt to show this attitude legitimate and just.”

In a more simple expression, according to this decision explaining Turkish views on Armenian problem does not bear any responsibility. Besides this expression, if the mentioned views were defended or espoused there might be responsibility.

⁴⁵ The factual information about QUID Encyclopedia has been derived from Comité de Défense de la Cause Arménienne’s web site (<http://www.cdca.org>)

Because France had recognized the Armenian “genocide” through a law adopted in 2001, people denying the “genocide” mean to act unlawfully. On the possible result of this unlawfulness, since no penalties limiting the freedom were foreseen, the court decides for an indemnity and determines the indemnity at the lowest level, 1 euro. However, the Court of Appeals has overruled this decision on the base of freedom of expression.

Armenian militants do not want any publication or expression that may be against the so-called Armenian genocide, even for the articulation of the views by the counter side. For the reason that the existing legislation does not enable this, there exist dense efforts for the draft to become a law that envisages sanctions to denial of genocide.

It can be understood from the press that the Armenians in France became demoralized because of the decision ordered by Court of Appeals and there are debates on applying to Supreme Court of Appeals.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the trial opened by the Committee of Défense of the Armenian Case against consul-general Aydın Sezgin about the views presented in the web site of Paris Consulate of Turkey was lost by Armenians, but then it was also brought to Court of Appeals, however, this time the Court affirmed the decision on November 8, 2006⁴⁷.

Despite these unsuccessful attempts, French Armenians continued efforts to control and change the publications according to their views.

Hachette Publishing’s Guide Bleu series (Blue Guide) have been the best-seller travel books. The information given in the section named ‘Partition of Armenia’ in the book of Guide Bleu related to Turkey was disapproved by the French Ar-

46 Armenews, March 8, 2007.

47 Hürriyet, March 9, 2006.

menian Organizations Coordination Committee (Comité de coordination des associations arméniennes de France-CCAF), the organization that asserts to represent Armenian organizations in France. The President of the Committee has written a letter⁴⁸ to General Director of Hachette Publishing and pointed out that the section uttered “the thesis of denial developed for several years by Turkey” and demanded that such publication should be halted and in place of it texts reflecting the real events should be inserted. He also requested a reply informing on the precautions concerning this issue.

When the ‘Partition of Armenia’ section of the guide, consisting of only 17 lines, was analyzed, it was seen that the events were dealt with very briefly and 1915 Armenian massacre and death of hundreds of thousands people under awful conditions were explained. It is understood that since these statements did not include the word “genocide” and the death of 1,5 million Armenians was not contained in the text, CCAF has found the text insufficient.

6. Developments in Bulgaria

Bulgarian Parliament; upon the proposal by Rupen Kirkorian, member of Parliament from National Movement Party of Ex-King Simeon and acceptance of the Parliament Spokesperson Georgi Pirinski, who was a minister during Jivkov era and achieved to stay in politics after the collapse of the communist regime, stood for homage for the victims of Armenian “genocide” on April 25 2007. Hereupon members of Movement for Rights and Freedoms, mainly composed of Bulgarian Turks, left the Parliament.⁴⁹

Ultra-nationalist ATAKA Party proposed a draft recognizing the Armenian “genocide” to be taken into agenda of the Parliament; the government objected this and in the voting the proposal was rejected 48 votes in favor against 95. This time opposition parties left the Parliament. Manalova, speaking on behalf of governing

⁴⁸ Armenews, June 8, 2007. “Le CCAF ‘crit au PDG d’Hachette Livre”.

⁴⁹ Noyan Tapan, April 26, 2005. “Bulgarian Parliament Speakers initiative...”

Socialist Party, affirmed that the same draft has been rejected last year and unless one year passed the same proposition could not be presented.⁵⁰

Bulgarian public has been conditioned against Turks and Turkey for various political reasons, both in the monarchical and Communist era. Although there has been a relative softening in this issue, the essence remained same, and especially among right wing parties there have had negative feelings about Turks and Turkey. In the periods when Rights and Freedoms Movement participate in the government or secure coalitions to have the majority presently, governments care for good relations with Turkey and ensure a good treatment to Bulgarians of Turkish descent.

Although Bulgarian Parliament has not approved any decision related to genocide claims, the homage in the Parliament implies that whenever the conditions become suitable, Armenian “genocide” claims may be accepted unhesitantly.

7. United Kingdom

United Kingdom is the only European country confirming that there was not enough proof that would lead to 1915 events to be counted as genocide. This attitude of British government directed Diaspora Armenians trying to obtain decisions on genocide claims at British regional parliaments and as happened in Edinburgh City Parliament some small tactical achievements were realized. However, facing the reality that regional Parliament decisions are not considered important, attempts for British Parliament came into their agenda again.

The resolution draft numbered EDM 357 which was submitted to the House of Commons and demanded the recognition of Armenian genocide claims, was supported by 68 members. Another resolution draft numbered EDM 344 which was formulated as the lifting up Turkish blockade against Armenia and in fact meaning that a border gate should be opened between Turkey and Armenia was

50 BIRN, May 2, 2007. “Bulgarian Opposition Protest Over Armenian Genocide”.

supported by 66 members.

Armenian Ambassador in London, Vahe Ganbrielian delivered a speech about these drafts at a session in House of Commons where Bob Spink, Nia Griffith, Quentin Davis, Paddy Tipping, Andrew Dismore and Eilian Williams and also well-known Armenian sympathizers Baroness Cox and Lord Avebury were ready. Ganbrielian, after talking about “Turkish blockade” and the importance of the recognition of Armenian “genocide”, maintained that Turkey should apologize Armenia.

It is understood that members of House of Commons recommended the Armenian Community to work for the support of their own districts’ parliamentarians for these drafts.⁵¹

Finally, in a declaration⁵² on behalf of British-Armenian All-Party Parliamentary Group 132 Members of Parliament was declared to recognize Armenian genocide and the names of the Parliamentarians were also enlisted. British Ambassador to Armenia Anthony Cantor while replying a question on this subject said that the policy of British government concerning the recognition of Armenian genocide was well-known and it was not supposed that this policy will change with the pressure of 100 parliamentarians.⁵³

8. The Call of Nobel Winner Scientists and The Reply by Turkish Scientists, Authors and Retired Diplomats

A notice text that calling for tolerance, communication and cooperation between Armenians and Turks and signed by 53 scientists and authors who won the Nobel Award was announced in Elie Wiesel Foundation on April 9 2007. Briefly, in this text, Turkish and Armenian societies were invited to pressure their governments

51 · Massis Weekly Online, March 3, 2007.

52 · Armenian Solidarity British-Armenian All-Party Parliamentary Group, June 2007 “Number of UK Members of Parliament recognizing the genocide rises three fold

53 · ArmRadio, April 4, 2005.

to cooperate in order to open up the Turkish-Armenian land border, to form bilateral confidence in the context of civil society cooperation, to increase formal contacts among two countries and to ensure basic freedoms. Furthermore it was suggested that since the “Armenian Genocide” is perceived differently by two societies, effort for compromise should be sustained.

The text prepared through an initiative of our Institute as a reply to the aforementioned text, has been signed by 86 Turkish scientists, authors and retired ambassadors.

In this reply, it was stated that the call of Nobel-awarded scientists was met with pleasure and it would help to keep communication channels open between two societies and improvement in relations among civil society organizations would be the most suitable method in this process.

It was added about genocide claims, that due to 1948 Convention of United Nations it is a must that an authorized court should decide the existence of specific intention in order an action to be counted as genocide and there was not such a specific intention for Ottoman Armenians; but it is possible to make different assertions in the perspective of freedom of thoughts.

On the issue of establishment of dialogue between two sides, it was reminded that Turkey proposed Armenia to form a Common Historians Committee and institutions such as Elie Weisel Foundation may be helpful in the exchange of views between two sides.

The call of Nobel Laureates and the reply of Turkish scientists, authors and retired ambassadors are presented in “Current Documents” section.

9. Developments Against Armenian Genocide Allegations

In some European countries the tendency that the denial of genocide would be

taken out from criminal context or the penalties envisaged regarding this issue would be lightened. Switzerland was one of the forerunner countries and according to press⁵⁴ Swiss Federal Advisor, Christopher Blocher stated that overview of anti-racist legislation has began, however certain circles were in opposition to such changes. Herein we remind that the leader of Labor Party Doğu Perinçek was sentenced due to this legislation and President of Turkish Historical Society Yusuf Halaçoğlu was investigated for the same reason.

It was seen that, in Belgium, some politicians expressed their doubts about the correctness of Armenian genocide claims. Leader of Flemish Christian Democrats and the President of the Flemish region Yves Leterme argued that nobody could make him to express the 1915 events were genocide in the absence of an international decision⁵⁵; but countering criticisms he said that he was not in doubt about Armenian genocide but in order to penalize this action of denial it should be recognized by international courts.⁵⁶ Likewise leader of Flemish Social Democrat Party Johan Vande Lanotte expressed similar views through labeling Armenian genocide as a sensitive subject and abstained calling it as genocide.⁵⁷

It is understood that Belgian politicians through such wordings, aimed at winning the votes of the Turkish electorate in the June 10, 2007, elections. Despite Armenians had more financial resources and pressure on press, since the number of Belgian citizens of Turkish origin much higher than Armenians the sensitivity of Turkish electorate was cared about by the politicians during the election period.

Pro-Armenian members of Belgian Parliament were uncomfortable with these developments. Senator François Roelants du Vivier who submitted a brief to Belgian Senate in order to ensure penalizing the genocide denial, but was not suc-

54 Armenews 1 Haziran 2007 *éLa Turquie fait Pression sur la Suisse ve* June 5, 2007. "Négationisme du génocide et racisme"

55 *Hürriyet*, June 6, 2007 "Kimse Bana Ermeni Soykırımını Dedirtemez."

56 *Sabah*, June 8, 2007. "Belçikalı Lider Ağzı Değiştirdi."

57 *Expatrica*, Belgium June 6, 2007. "Vande Lanotte wont' use "Genocide".

cessful in the attempt,⁵⁸ argued that he would submit a new brief on the same subject in the new legislative term.⁵⁹

10. Meeting of Historians

Many historians from both Diaspora and Armenia were invited to the “New Approaches in Turkish-Armenian Relations” conference organized by Istanbul University on March 15-17 2006, but only two person attended: Bogos Levon Zekiyian and Ara Sarafyan. Because historians in Diaspora and Armenia regard the “genocide” as proven, they did not want to handle the issue with Turkish scientists. So the coming of the mentioned two people to Istanbul was a courageous behavior.

Ara Sarafyan is the head of Gomidas Institute which mainly researches on recent Armenian history and especially their situation during World War I, or in other words whose main purpose is to prove the Armenian genocide. He is a specialist on the “Blue Book” the main propaganda tool of Armenians.

As a matter of fact, Sarafyan presented a paper in the conference on the “Historical Significance and Denial of British Parliament’s Blue Book headed ‘Handling of Armenians in Ottoman Empire during 1915-1916’” After the presentation President of Turkish Historical Association Prof. Yusuf Halaçoğlu proposed Sarafyan to work together on 1915 events and Sarafyan did accept this offer.

Despite no development happened in the course of one year after the Conference, Ara Sarafyan, after an interview published in Nokta journal, in a press release⁶⁰ of Gomidas Institute, proposed a “Case Study” to be arranged on Harput. He suggested that Turkish historians would display the documents on the relocation carried in this region and would display other documents that would reveal that

58 Olaylar ve Yorumlar, Ermeni Araştırmaları, Vol. 16&17, pp. 64-65.

59 ArneNews, June 8, 2007. “Le Sénateur belge François de Roelants du Vivier fait part de sa stupéfaction et de son indignation”

60 www.Gomidas.org/pres/20Deb07Pressrealese.htm

not only relocation was implemented in that region but also ill-treatment and massacre has been carried out.

The issue that is named as “Case Study” by Sarafyan is the in-depth investigation of a particular historical occasion within the framework of a region, a city, a district or even a family in spite of searching the entire event with all aspects. In general, case studies are arranged whenever the general event is well-known. Genocide claims are not a suitable subject for case study which is a partial method of research, because enforced migration should be dealt with all causes and results as a whole. Furthermore Sarafyan by declaring, without seeing Ottoman documents, that the documents he had, proved the Armenian massacre; had sabotaged the common study before it began. Nevertheless, Halaçoğlu accepted the proposal.⁶¹

Halaçoğlu in a press conference on March 9 2007, stated that Sarafyan had laid down the project via a e-mail message and showed his expressions on a TV channel declaring that “the material that Sarafyan desires would not be found in the archives” as the reason of this lay down.⁶² Halaçoğlu adding that Sarafyan possibly behaved in this way under pressure said that a good opportunity was thrown out for Turks and Armenians; maybe a new possibility of cooperation would not be founded, even they would continue to keep the door open.⁶³

As mentioned above, the reason of Armenians to reject conducting collective historical research with Turks is their fear that such a research would threaten the “genocide” claims which they treat as proven. For this reason any positive reply was shown to Prime Minister Erdoğan’s Joint Historians Committee proposal, and again for this reason no result could be got in the meetings between historians in Wien. However, since there would be no political consequence as long as genocide claims were not accepted by Turks, it seems inevitable to arrange a

61 Sabah, February 21, 2007.

62 www.habernokta.com, March 9, 2007.

63 The same resource.

common research for Armenians. But Armenian Diaspora is not ready such an attempt which threat their position.

11. Mass Graves

One of the weak points of the Armenian genocide claims is the absence of the mass graves of Armenians in Turkey. If 1,5 million Armenians were killed at the time of Armenian relocation of 1915-1916, and then the presence of the several mass graves of Armenians would be inevitable. However, as many mass graves of Muslims killed by Armenian atrocities was founded, opened and recorded in Eastern Anatolia, no mass graves of Armenians was founded, even not claimed that there was one.

Through the end of 2006 on an Armenian web page⁶⁴, with attribution to the “Ülkede Özgür Gündem” newspaper which gives voice to the separatist Kurdish views, an item broadcasted that a mass grave of the 300 Armenians those killed in 1915 discovered in the Kuru Village of Nusaybin District in Mardin province. After about a week, a newspaper⁶⁵ of Armenian Diaspora by attributing to Prof. David Gaunt in the University of Soderton in Sweden, claimed that in that mass gave there were 160 Armenian and 120 Syrian males who killed on July 14, 1915. Two days after that Syrian News Agency⁶⁶ wrote that all of the dead people were Syrians. Concisely, a divergence occurred between Armenians and Syrians about who buried in the grave.

After Turkish authorities stayed in silence about these rumors, the governor of the province Mardin, Mehmet Kılıçlar by declaring⁶⁷ that the graves were not a mess grave in which Armenians killed and buried as they claimed, instead one of the stone graves that placed on the east of the village, said it is a very old grave.

64 Armenews, October 3, 2006, Asbarez, November 3, 2006.

65 Asbarez, November 3, 2006.

66 Assyrian International News Agency, November 5, 2006.

67 Zaman, November 9, 2006.

The claims that Syrians were subject to genocide is a new claim compared to Armenians'. Some Syrians migrated to Europe in 1960s because of economical reasons settled in Sweden mostly. By taking into account that those migrants have accomodation problems with their new country and that the genocide claims caused Armenians to be sympathized, it is began to be asserted that Syrians were exposed to genocide. These assertions also adopted by various Swedish social scientists and politicians. As there is an increase in propaganda of Armenian genocide in recent years, the claims on Syrian genocide have also increased.

The discovery of a mass grave in the Kuru village of Nusaybin, reflected on the Swedish newspapers in accordance with the Syrian genocide claims. Furthermore a member of parliament requested, from Foreign Minister Karl Bilt, the investigation of the graves by an independent commission composed of scientists and historians⁶⁸.

In Turkey, the President of Turkish Historical Society, Prof. Yusuf Halaçoğlu declared on a statement and said that the mass grave in Nusaybin can be opened in the presence of Western, especially Swedish, historians even of the scientists participating from Armenia; subsequently added that aforementioned Prof David Gaunt accepted the invitation on January 12 2007, and upon his presence he could move as he wanted in the region and interview anybody he chose.⁶⁹ Prof. Gaunt, by sending a letter to Halaçoğlu, proposed April 23-25 as arrival and departure dates for these excavations⁷⁰ and despite this proposal aimed at serving Armenian propaganda for it included April 24, it was accepted by Halaçoğlu.⁷¹

During the inspection made in the cave on April 24 2007, Prof Gaunt did not want to participate to the research and take existing bones and soil for analysis, by arguing that the skulls and bones that were seen in the previously taken photo

68 Spero News, November 29, 2007.

69 Zaman, February 9, 2007.

70 Hürriyet, February 14, 2006.

71 Hürriyet, March 10, 2007.

that he had, were absent. Prof Halaçoğlu explained that as a result of rain, water and dust have covered up the bones in the cave; however Prof Gaunt did not agree to dig the cave.⁷²

Prof. Halaçoğlu, later on indicated that examples of bone and soil have been analyzed and it was seen that these belonged prior to 1800 as the closest time.⁷³

12. The Film Skylark Farm

Paolo and Vittorio Taviani brothers are famous Italian film directors who produce films together. Tavianis, who were mostly inactive in latest years possibly because of their old age, attempted to come up with a film named Skylark Farm.

The film has been prepared on a scenario which is based on a book, *La Masseria delle Allodde* (The Massacre of the Skylarks) written by an Italian of Armenian descent, Antonia Arslan. The life of Avakian family and their situation during the relocation have been carried to the scene.

According to a magazine⁷⁴, it is almost impossible to stay patient in the film because of horror stages and Tavianis had created scenes that spectators would never forget.

It seems that the Skylark's Farm has got ahead of Atom Egoyan's *Ararat* with respect to horror and enormity. It is understood that after the failure of *Ararat*, Armenian Diaspora reattempted to make the public aware of this kind of a film with through using well-known film directors. Arsinée Khanjian, Atom Egoyan's wife, who is also very renowned with her anti-Turkish attitude, was in the role of one of the daughters of Avakian family in the film and this shows the affiliation between two films.

72 Radikal, April 26, 2007. "Bu kemikler nereye gitti?"

73 Yeni Şafak, May 24, 2007: "Ermeni iddiaları yine asılsız çıktı."

74 Der Spiegel Online, February 14, 2007.

Taviani brothers expounded their sending the film to Berlin Film Festival by the existence of a large Turkish community in Berlin and claimed that Turkish people should face their past. Moreover they added that they attempted such a film also to comment on the events in Bosnia and Rwanda.⁷⁵ Evidently Tavianis assumed the task to “educate” not only Turks but also non-Turks in the subject of genocide by preparing a film. In fact, it is seen that they had a simpler task and put their art under command of Armenian Diaspora, used the images that were desired by the Diaspora and tried to give the messages that the Diaspora demanded. In this vein their expression that Turkey should be a European Union member only after recognition of Armenian “genocide” is a typical Armenian view.⁷⁶

Except the scenes of horror it was clear that the film did not take much interest, besides these scenes seemed to decrease the effect of the film.⁷⁷ The silence⁷⁸ of the spectators in the saloon may be explained by both apathy towards the film and the shock caused by horror scenes. Yet, Tavianis participated in Berlin Film Festival with the hope of winning the Golden Bear prize.⁷⁹

The film which was a French, Spanish and Bulgarian joint production, cost 9,6 million euros (16,5 million US dollars) was normally expensive for a European film.

The film was featured in May in European countries. The critics directed towards the film are negative especially in France.⁸⁰ As a journalist has put, this skylark could not fly.⁸¹

75 RFE/RL, February 14, 2007.

76 California Courier Online, February 22, 2007.

77 World Socialist Web Site, March 5, 2007.

78 Der Spiegel Online, February 14, 2007.

79 PanArmenianNet, February 13, 2007.

80 Le Figaro, May 30, 2007; Les Echos, May 30, 2007; L'Express, May 31, 2007; Télérama no 2994, June 2, 2007; Le Point, June 7, 2007.

81 Yasemin Esman, Turkish Daily News, February 17, 2007.

13. The Screamers Documentary

A documentary film named *Screamers*, after rewarded⁸² at the American Film Institute Film Festival on the date of November 2, 2006, released in Los Angeles at the beginning of December. The director of film is an Armenian-American lady Carla Garapedian, who is a former BBC anchor and who has rewards on documentary films.

Screamers handle the subject that the genocide is committed for the first time by Turkey to the Armenians as a state policy, followed by Hitler to commit the Jewish Holocaust and after that, genocides committed in Cambodia, Rwanda, against Kurds in Iraq; by showing various direful and horrible scenes like perishing bodies, cut off heads⁸³. Teen-agers younger than 17, can see the film only by escort⁸⁴.

The reason why the film was named as “*Screamers*” was that it was wanted in the film by screaming to do something about this subject from the countries that do not recognize the genocide like USA, England and Turkey.

The noisy music of the hard-rock group named System of a Down, who won a Grammy reward and sold 16 millions of CDs, was used in *Screamers*. The members of this group, who are all, of Armenian descent and asserting⁸⁵ the being of grandsons of Armenian Genocide survivors, played roles in the film.

System of a Dawn is a group which performs a kind of protest music that became popular at mid90s. System of a Dawn began performing songs that implies the assertions about genocide, and delivering brochures in their concerts, after they affected by Tashnaks who has influence on Armenians in Los Angeles; moreover they have participated in the protest demonstrations in front of the Turkish con-

82 ANCA Press Release, January 8, 2007.

83 Asbarez, December 23, 2006.

84 New York Times, January 26, 2007.

85 LA City Beat, December 7, 2006.

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sulate general on 24th Aprils of every year. The attempt of the Leader of the group, Sej Tankiyan and the drummer John Dolmayan to blame the Denis Hastert, the president of United States House of Representatives in the House building because he did not put a proposal including Armenian assertions on the agenda, gives ideas about the offensiveness of the group⁸⁶.

Screamers screened to members of the Congress in the US congress building in Washington on 17th January 2007 and Carla Garapedian made a speech and answered the questions. There are 435 representatives and 100 senators in the US Congress currently. The six of these members, who is also in Armenian “Caucus”, came, and almost 50 of these sent their officers⁸⁷. If the majority of the Armenian-sided members in the Congress taken into consideration, this disinterest in Screamers is necessarily stems from the fact that it is a propaganda film. Nevertheless, some Turkish-Americans also participated in this meeting and tried to ask questions to the director of the film but they imposed silence. This affair is important because it shows that some Turkish-Americans are beginning express their annoyance on the claims and blames about genocide.

According to news⁸⁸ in press the cost of this film was approximately 1 million dollars. Financing has been ensured by MG2 Productions, BBC, and Raffy Manoukian who is an Armenian-American businessman. In fact it is seen that this film, which consisted in some old photos and films, the videos and music of System of a Down, and interviews with Armenian-sided people, cost a great deal of money. On the other hand, it is not possible that this film, which is still being showed only in large cities, can ascertain the cost. MG2 Productions is a private company; the benefit and lost is its own problem. The loss of Manoukian can be ignored who is an Armenian. However it is difficult to understand, by taking into account that English government does not recognize the Genocide, how BBC spent the money of the English taxpayers for such a production.

86 The Washington Post, January 21, 2007

87 Armenian Reporter, January 27, 2007.

88 ArmRadio, November 8, 2006.

14. TIME Magazine

An announcement which includes Armenian Genocide assertions and given by some of Armenian Institutions published in Time, well-known American journal, on the number that sold 500,000, which has a date of 12th February, and moreover a DVD was delivered free. DVD included a documentary film presenting the Armenian Genocide claims and has been produced by French director Laurence Jourdan and an interview with Yves Ternon who is one of the most persisting defender of Armenian claims from 1980s to the present in France. Armenian sources claimed that Time took no money for the publication the announcement and deliverance of the DVD.⁸⁹

The DVDs were not put in the copies of Time which sold in Turkey and which sent to the subscribers in Turkey, to prevent the reactions against the journal in Turkey. However, deliverance of the Time that included the stated announcement and the DVD in a German Lufthansa craft by which Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül was flying to USA caused some of Turkish passengers to be offended and complained to Gül.

This action was, in fact, prepared as a reply to the announcement given to Time and deliverance of a DVD by Turkey in 2005. As we declared⁹⁰ to our reader previously, on the June of 2005, the journal of Time published a four-paper tourism-announcement titled as “Crossroad of Culture: Turkey”. Besides, a four-episode DVD was delivered. As in the first three episodes historical and natural beauties of Turkey were introduced, the fourth episode included a summary of a documentary film handling Armenian problem, named as “Sarı Gelin”. Announcement was given by Ankara Chamber of Commerce. The president of the Chamber Sinan Aygün said that the announcement and the DVD cost 1 million dollars.

89 The California Courier, Presse Release, 2 Şubat 2007.

90 Ömer Engin Lütem, “Olaylar ve Yorumlar”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, volume 18, Summer 2005, pp. 41-43.

Armenians strictly reacted against this announcement and the DVD. The Committee of the Defense of the Armenian Cause (Comité de la Défense de la Cause Arménienne) which was established by Tashnaks in France, gave out a declaration and declared that they condemned Turkey's denial campaign and irresponsible connivance of Time; and claimed that the purpose of this attempt was to create doubts about historical facts. The president of the Committee, Harut Mardirosian said that Time lost its honor and sold its credibility in the field of journalism for the sake of money. Time bounded to retreat and on the number dated 17th October 2005, published a letter which was sent by an institution named "Mémoire 2000" in the name of some institutions that struggle racism, anti-Semitism and the denial of the Genocide, and which strictly criticized the journal. Moreover, the journal declared that by an editorial note that they felt repentance, the DVD reflected a one-sided interpretation of the history, the journal did not correspond with the standards of honesty and rightness, if the content of it had been known beforehand, the DVD would not have been delivered, and they announced that editorial procedures of the journal had changed and they apologized to Armenian community and readers.

However, it is seen, that this subject is not over and the Armenian institutions wanted a DVD that prepared by themselves to be delivered by Time; and that Time delivered DVD after a time of one and a half year. Although it was asserted by Armenian sources that DVD and announcement published without charge, it is possible that the stated one and a half year period might be passed with the negotiations of the money that would be paid to Time.

IV. Developments in Armenia and Diaspora

1. Commemoration of April 24

As is known, April 24, 1915 is accepted as the date on which the so-called Armenian genocide first started. Every year on this day, both in Armenia and Diaspora large commemoration ceremonies are arranged.

It is known that, because Armenians openly collaborated with the Russian armies in Eastern Anatolia and thence constituted a threat for the security; approximately 200 of Armenian notables were arrested and sent to exile to Çankırı and Ayaş on April 24, 1915.

This event was presented by the Armenian propaganda, as if more than 2000⁹¹ Istanbul Armenians were arrested and then killed, and in this way April 24 was maintained as the first day of the “genocide”. Later on, despite some Armenian historians⁹² conceded that there were much less arrests and that there was no killing in the city the understanding of April 24 as the symbol of “genocide” did not change.

April 24 commemoration of the Diaspora consists of managing large marches in big cities such as Paris, New York, Washington, Los Angeles; demonstrating in front of Turkish representative offices if exists in that city, sometimes burning Turkish flag, solemnizing at the Armenian Churches, arranging ceremonies at Armenian schools, holding conferences and seminars, showing documentaries and films.⁹³ Moreover, in the US, some members of Congress deliver speeches on Armenian “genocide” in Senate and House of Representatives on April 24 or nearby days. Number of these activities is very high and necessitates serious expenses. When it is thought that only “Skylark Farm” cost 16,5 million \$, all the activities organized in Diaspora countries require more than a few hundred million dollars. Thinking of the size of this amount, it is possible to argue that an industry exists which tries to commercialize the Armenian genocide.

Coming to Armenia, the habitual ceremonies were also repeated this year. On the

91 One of the leading defenders of Armenian claims in France, Yves Ternon gives this amount as 2345 but does not show the resource. Yves Ternon, *L'Etat Criminel. Les Génocides au XXe siècle*, Paris, 1995, p.

92 Raymond Kevorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens*, Paris 1996 p. 315. In this book it is argued that some of the Armenians that were exiled to Çankırı and Ayaş has been permitted to return to Istanbul and some of them were killed.

93 For the films that were in vision this year please read “Screamers” and “The Skylark Farm” sections of the actual paper.

night of April 24, a public march was arranged with the participation of thousands carrying torches and Turkish flag was burnt at the Freedom Square.⁹⁴

On the day of April 24, a commemoration ceremony was held at the “genocide” monument called as Tsitsernakaberd in Armenian with the attendance of President Kocharian, Prime Minister Sarkisian, Parliament Speaker Torosian, ministers, members of Parliament and representatives of civil society organizations and also wreath was laid to the monument. Foreign country representatives in Yerevan were also attended to the ceremony and laid their wreaths.⁹⁵ (Laying a wreath to this monument by a representative of a country means that genocide claims are recognized by that particular state) During the ceremony, Armenian Head Patriarch Karekin II prayed.⁹⁶

In his message, after stating that the “genocide” was committed by Ottoman Turkey, President Kocharian claimed international society recognizes that the genocide was against to whole humanity, not a particular nation; strengthened Armenian identity, compelled Armenians to unite, directed them to independence and statehood and proposed that a prosperous Armenia will be “response to those who planned, carried out and now deny the Genocide.”⁹⁷

Prime Minister Sarkisian expressed, in his message, that lack of recognition and condemnation of Armenian genocide on time gave way to similar crimes and insisted that since genocide is a crime against humanity the condemnation of Armenian genocide is not an issue of solely Armenian people. Sarkisian also added that on the occasion of the commemoration they also commemorate Hrant Dink and support Turkish intellectuals “who strive for historical truth” Lastly he mentioned that “the issue of recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide is their foreign policy agenda” but they also “aspire to establish normal

94 Agence France Presse, April 23, 2007. “Thousands of Armenians Mark Anniversary of 1915 Mass Killings”

95 Armenpress, April 24, 2007.

96 Noyan Tapan, December 24, 2007, “ Let Our Neighbours Not Think.....”

97 Armenpress, April 24, 2007, “President Kocharian Remembers Genocide Victims”

relations” with all neighboring countries.⁹⁸

Minister of Defense General Harutyunyan said that it would be possible to prevent similar events in the future through commemorating the victims of genocide and stated that “our neighbors should know that we will never forget the genocide”.⁹⁹

As per usual, the sharpest comment was from Aram I, the Cilician Patriarch, whose center is in Antelyas, close to Beirut. Aram I stated that, the Armenian genocide is a historical fact so no longer need to refer evidence; that denial of the fate of Armenian nation would cause other genocides and “must be recognized not only by the international community but also by those whose fathers and forefathers committed the crime against humanity”; that murder of Hrant Dink and transformation of centuries old Akhtamar Church into museum showed that Turkey was not a “civilized country with a concern for human and cultural rights”. He added that compensation must be made to the victims; justice may only be real “after recognition, confession, and compensation, only then reconciliation” would be possible and furthermore, “cheap reconciliation would never establish justice”.¹⁰⁰

It can easily be seen that at the April 24 commemoration activities, well known, cliché Armenian views were repeated again. Because of this and the transformation of commemoration ceremonies to routine rituals, the April 24 ceremonies were not echoed much except Diaspora and Armenian press.

2. Message of President Bush

President Bush did not use the word “genocide” in his message¹⁰¹ for April 24, as previous years. However, to define the events of 1915, concept of “mass killing”

98 ArmRadio.am, April 24, 2007, “Serge Sarkisyan: We Struggle to Prevent Reoccurrence of Genocides”.

99 ArmRadio.am, April 24, 2007, “Homage to the Memory of the Armenian Genocide Victims”.

100 <http://www.cathcil.org>, April 24, 2007, “We Must Move Forward From Recognition to Compensation”.

101 Congressional Quarterly, CQ Federal Department and Agency Documents, Regulatory Intelligence Data, April 24, 2007.

was used which was reminding the concept of “genocide”. Moreover, that event was labeled as “one of the greater tragedies of the 20th century”, “horrific events” and “a painful chapter of history”. On the other hand, Armenians were praised of having “indomitable character” and “courage and conviction”

As in the previous years, this years’ message also contended that 1,5 million Armenians lost their lives. It was surprising that United States President used a claim that has no scientific base, no possibility to prove and was unaccepted even by Armenian authors.

Main reason directing President Bush to this behavior is the desire to satisfy American people of Armenian stock. In the knowledge that usage of the word “genocide” would create considerable problems with Turkey, White House chose to use synonym words and praises Armenians in April 24 messages, in order to satisfy militant Armenians to some extent who insists on the usage of that word.

The statements such as “we remember the past and also look forward to...future”; “we commend the individuals in Armenia and Turkey who are working to normalize the relationship between their two countries”; “a sincere and open examination of the historic events...is an essential part of this process”; “the United States supports and encourages those in both countries who are working to build a shared understanding of history” shows that United States attach importance to the reconciliation of problems between two countries and accept that examination of history may serve to this end. These statements bring to mind the indirect proposal by Prime Minister Erdoğan to President Kocharian two years ago, on the establishment of a Common Committee of Historians. In that year’s message, President Bush had cited that proposal through mentioning the name of the Prime Minister; however facing negative reactions of Armenians, this year, similar to last year, did not cited Prime Minister Erdoğan’s name and highlighted the need to make historical investigations in order to reach a common understanding.

In both 2005 and 2006 messages of President Bush there was a reference to a report prepared by an American law organization named International Center for Transitional Justice. In this report, it was proposed that as reciprocity of the recognition of the “genocide” by Turkey, Armenia would give up its land and indemnity demands from Turkey, in order to solve the Armenian problem.¹⁰² It is a positive development that such a formula, which is by no means acceptable to Turkey, was not included in this year’s message.

In the following parts of the message US-Armenian relations were praised profusely and States’ gratefulness was declared to Armenia for its struggle (?) against terror.

Another positive aspect of the message was the statement that US declared to cooperate decisively with Armenia and Azerbaijan in order to find a peaceful solution for Karabagh problem.

3. Elections in Armenia and New Government

Parliamentary elections took place on 12th May 2007 in Armenia. We will give short information about the electoral system of Armenia and how the elections take place before we go ahead the results.

There are 131 seats in the Armenian Parliament. 90 of these are distributed among the parties which win votes more than five percent, in accordance to with the proportion of their votes. Moreover, in the each one of the 41 polling districts, separate elections that participated by individuals, not by parties, won by the one at the head of the poll, takes place. Thus the electoral system of Armenia has a mixed character of electing both parties and individuals and fundamentally different from the Turkish system which provides the election of the parties.

The major problem of the Armenian elections is electoral corruptions. Threat-

102 Ömer Engin Lütem, “Olaylar ve Yorumlar”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Vol. 22, pp. 48-51

ening and collusive actions like buying votes, exchanging votes for others, voting under threat especially in small districts, taking people to the ballot box as groups, has been confronted in every elections in Armenia since the formation of Armenia, and international organizations have criticized the Armenian elections strictly for evading the existing standards, moreover, sometimes it is mentioned that the membership of Armenia to the Council of Europe is in danger¹⁰³. However by the tactic of saying that the corruption and illegal affairs are not as common as to affect the results, the elections declared as valid.

On the other hand, movements of violence have always seen in the Armenian elections. The same tendency has showed itself again at this time and Vartan Gukasyan, the Mayor of Gyumri, which is the second largest city of Armenia, injured seriously after an armed attack, at the beginning of April. According to rumors Gukasian who was the member of Republican Party, was on the edge of transferring to Prosperous Armenia Party. An attack occurred against the candidates Hagop Hagopyan and Suzanna Harutyun on 8th April in the city of Etchmiadzin and this attack attributed to a General who himself is a candidate.¹⁰⁴

After a short period, two electoral bureaus of Prosperous Armenia Party were bombed in Yerevan but the events caused no casualties. The spokesman of President Kocharian, Soghomonian declared that this attack was prepared in order to create instability in the elections.¹⁰⁵

As the day of 2007 election was coming closer, the US and the European Union warned, on several occasions, Armenian elections to be fair and also proper to the existing regulations. Moreover, USA set up the condition of equity of the elections for the establishment of the credit of 235 million dollars to Armenia within the aid program of Millennium Challenge, and the Armenian Authorities,

103 On this subject, for 2003 elections: Ömer Engin Lütem, "Olaylar ve Yorumlar", *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Vol. 9, pp. 10-12, Vol. 10, pp. 9-10.

104 Institute For War and Peace, April 14, 2007 "Violent Start to Armenian Election Campaign"

105 RFE/RL, April 12, 2007 "Tsarukian Party Office Damaged by Blast"

especially Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, declared that maximum attention will be paid to this issue. Compared with 2003, it is seen that different conditions dominated the political area in 2007 elections.

One of them was that Robert Kocharian, the most influential politician of Armenia will leave the field of politics in the course of a little time. Armenian constitution foresees the President to be elected for two terms at most. So, Kocharian whose term will end next year will not be elected again, and because not elected as a parliamentarian will not be elected to posts such as Presidency of the Assembly. Furthermore, for being not a party leader will not be able to serve as Prime Minister. However, almost everyone in Armenia is in the opinion that Kocharian will not draw away from politics and will attempt to gain an influential position. But, it is not clear how this will happen.

Despite Kocharian will leave another figure is becoming eminent in Armenian political scene: Defense Minister Serj Sarkisian. Aforementioned has entered the larger partner of the coalition government, the Republican Party, in 1998 and after the death of the party leader and the Prime Minister Antranik Markarian on March 25 2007 became the party leader first and then was appointed as the new Prime Minister by Kocharian. Rapid escalation of Sarkisian in a very short time and big success of Republican Party at the elections made him the favorite candidate for next year's presidential elections.

The leader of Country of Law Party Artur Bagdasarian who was the President of the Assembly had to resign from this post in 2006. Even though nearly all Armenian politicians tries to maintain good relations with Russia and pursues Russian support, Bagdasarian attempted to secure Western support through France and did not camouflage his desire to become the President in 2008 elections. It is possible to explain the forcing to resignation from Presidency of Parliament and expelling the party out of the coalition of the aforementioned, by his western advocacy.

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Lastly, in a speech with a British diplomat, secretly recorded and infiltrated to the press, he was demanding from European Union to criticize Armenia for the elections. This was labeled as betrayal by President Kocharian¹⁰⁶ and Bagdasarian and his party lost considerable prestige.

During last five years, Armenian political parties and politicians of pre-Kocharian era lost their significance. The leader of People's Party Stepan Demircian, who obtained 28,2% of votes in 2003 Presidential elections and Artatesh Gegemian, leader of the National Unity who obtained 17,7% of the vote, nearly lost all their support since they could not produce positive policies and solutions, except some protest movements.

One of them is the first Minister of Foreign Affairs Raffi Hovannisian's Heritage Party. Aforementioned was removed from office in 1992, by President Levon Ter Petrossian because of his pretension of a harsh politics against Turkey. For long years, since he was disenfranchised from Armenian citizenship Hovannisian could not take part in politics; only after obtaining citizenship two years ago as a result of pressure by American Armenians, founded Heritage Party. (His father is the famous professor of University of Southern California, Richard Havonnisian) With the assistance of a research institution named ACNIS and through American methods, the party attempted to disseminate views and ideas of the Diaspora in Armenia.

Second party is Prosperous Armenia which was founded by old world arm-wrestling champion, businessman Gagik Tsarukian and supposed to be controlled by President Kocharian. With the financial resources of its leader 370,000 members are said to be registered¹⁰⁷ and it seems that the party does not have a decided political program except siding market economy like the governing Republican Party.

106 Radio Liberty, April 17, 2007, "Armenian Ex-Speaker Accused of Treason".

107 Armenian Reporter, May 5, 2007, "A Look at the Electoral Train".

The oldest political party of Armenia, Armenian Revolutionary Federation or Tashnak Party, founded in 1890, which is not a revolutionary party as the name indicates but an excessively nationalist party, continues to hold an important place in Armenian politics. Party owes its position to policies defended for long years such as claims of genocide, demands of land and indemnity from Turkey, inclusion of Karabagh, Nakhichevan and Georgia's Javaheti region into Armenia.

Various forecasts and opinion polls before the elections have shown that the bigger partner of the coalition Republican Party would be the first, Prosperous Armenia would follow it, Rule of Law Party would be able to enter parliament despite some losses and Tashnaks would secure their previous position. The results substantially verified the forecasts.

1,389,521 persons, constituting 60% of all electorate of 2,300,000, voted in the elections. The names of the parties that were able to secure seats, their number of votes and percentages are as follows¹⁰⁸:

Name of the Party	Vote	%
Armenian Republican Party	457,032	32,8
Prosperous Armenia Party	204,443	14,7
Armenian Revolutionary Federation	177,192	12,7
Rule of Law Party	92,256	6,85
Heritage Party	80,890	5,82

Armenian Republican Party achieved more than being the largest party, but also was very close to absolute majority in the parliament, obtaining 64 seats of 131.

108 The Armenian Weekly On-line, Vol. 73, No.20, May 19, 2007, "The Armenians Vote for a New National Assembly"

In fact, with the joining of independent members of parliament, they are able to establish the government.

Prosperous Armenia was the second, however scored much less than forecasts and secured only 24 seats.

Tashnaks increased their seats from 11 to 16 and their rank from fourth to third party of the country.

As expected Rule of Law Party lost approximately half of its seats and could gain only 9 seats. Raffi Hovannisian's Heritage Party, despite all efforts and modern campaign methods could win only 7 seats. Old Armenian parties such as National Unity, Justice Bloc, and Armenian Labor Party could not win seats this time because of the 5% threshold. These left aside additional 14 parties also could not send deputies to the parliament because of the threshold. Unrepresented votes as a result of the threshold reached 27%.¹⁰⁹ Despite Armenia was ruled by a communist government for decades and continuing nostalgia to that era, Communist Party of Armenia obtained 8792 votes and Marxist Party of Armenia only 2660 votes. One of the historical Armenian parties, Hinchak which was the responsible of many terrorist attacks in Ottoman period scored only 989 votes.

Armenekan Party the first Armenian party of the Ottoman era and recognized by terrorist activities has changed its name as Ramgavar and adopted more moderate policies. Mainly functioning in Lebanon, this party could not attend Armenian elections. In the following chart, the number of seats obtained in 2003 and 2007 elections by various parties are shown:¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Medimax News Agency, May 13, 2007.

¹¹⁰ Election results were derived from these sources: Arminfo 14.05.2007, 20.05.2007 and RFE/RL 21.05.2007.

	2005	2007	Difference
Armenian Republican Party	32	64	+32
Prosperous Armenia Party	-	24	+24
Tashnaks	11	16	+5
Rule of Law Party	18	9	-9
Heritage Party	-	7	7
Independent and the other	36	11	- 25
Justice Bloc	15	-	-15
National Unity Party	9	-	-9
United Workers Party	6	-	-6
Armenian Labor Party	1	-	-1
Empty	3		
	131	131	

Elections were generally calm despite some claims by the opposition, of irregularity and artifice.

On this subject, head of election observation committee of Commonwealth of Independent States, Vladimir Rushailo pointed out that the elections were appropriate to the existing legislation.¹¹¹

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and related organizations The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), European Council Parliamentarian Assembly, OSCE Parliamentarian Assembly and representatives from the European Parliament confirmed in a preliminary report published on June 13th, that Armenian elections “to a considerable degree correspond” to the international standards.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Arminfo, May 13, 2007. “Parliamentary Elections in Armenia were free and transparent”

¹¹² Medimax News May 13, 2007 “European observers say Armenian election meets international standards.”

Afterwards, complimenting and congratulating messages from certain European political persons to Armenia. Among them member of European Commission Ms. Ferrero-Waldner¹¹³, Commissioner of European Union Common Security and Foreign Policy Javier Solana¹¹⁴, EU Special Commissioner for Caucasus Peter Semneby¹¹⁵, Secretary General of NATO Jaap de Hoop Scheffer¹¹⁶ should be mentioned. Deputy Spokesperson of US Secretary of State Tom Casey also praised Armenia for the elections, although in a more moderate manner.¹¹⁷ Main reason for these hasty celebrations is the belief that elections constitute the foundation of democracy and human rights. In this way, Armenia was celebrated because of the conviction that the country is closer to democratic principles and is omitted from the category old ex-Eastern Bloc countries.

In contrast to this, it was seen that almost all parties, who were the losers of the elections, complained that there were deception and irregularities in the election.¹¹⁸ Some of them applied to Constitutional Court on this subject but that attempt proved to be futile.

The interim report¹¹⁹ dated May 25 2007, by the OSCE and OSCE/ODIHR displayed that the satisfaction of various people and circles for this elections was overblown since many irregularities happened during the elections. Incoherence between information released by different Armenian official bodies about certain election results, the falsity and deficiency of election board reports, broken or unstamped seals and the delay of election results in some districts were the main defects of the Armenian elections.

113 <http://www.insideeurope.org>, May 14, 2007.

114 ArmRadio, May 14, 2007. "Javier Solana: Parliamentary elections in Armenia met the OSCE and CoE standards"

115 ArmRadio, May 15, 2007. "Armenia Passed the test"

116 ArmRadio, May 15, 2007. "Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: NATO will continue to support Armenia's reforms efforts"

117 Medimax News Agency, May 15, 2007. "US Department of State congratulates the Armenian People....."

118 RFE/RL, May 25, 2007. "Sarkisian lauds OSCE for objective election verdict"

119 A1+, May 25, 2007. OSCE/ODIHR Post-Election Interim Report No. 1.

As can be seen there are serious differences between two reports prepared by OSCE/ODHIR, the reports dated May 16th and May 25th. However the public was influenced by the first report and the irregularities did not take much attention.

As a conclusion, it is understood that irregularities existed in Armenian elections again; despite they were less than previous elections.

Before the elections parties mainly campaigned on domestic issues and economic situation in contrast to 2003 elections campaigns¹²⁰ during which mostly foreign policy was dealt. Concerning the Karabagh problem a theoretical war situation exists with Azerbaijan and a ceasefire regime still prevails. Armenian-Azerbaijan border has been closed for fifteen years. Coming to Turkey the land border has been closed for twelve years because of Karabakh issue. There is no diplomatic relation between two countries. In short, although there are fundamental problems with both Turkey and Azerbaijan; these problems were shunt backward because the opinion that these issues are not urgent, became widespread among Armenian people since no development occurred on this issues for a long time.

Similar to many countries Turkey also notified OSCE/ODIHR about the desire to send an “election observation mission” to Armenia. However Armenia did not issued visa to Turkish mission of eight persons. In the declaratory clause¹²¹ of Armenian Foreign Ministry this decision was explained by Turkey’s closing off the borders and cutting the diplomatic relations with Armenia and stated that “Turkey cannot choose and select which kind of political relations it wishes with Armenia and which it does not wishes to have”. In a reply¹²² to a question about this issue, Spokesperson of Turkish Foreign Ministry declared that the allocation of Turkish observers showed the importance and concern imputed to the normalization of bilateral relations and democratic development of Armenia. Moreover it

120 Ömer Engin Lütem, *Olaylar ve Yorumlar, Ermeni Araştırmaları*, volume 9, pp. 115.

121 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Press Release, May 9, 2007.

122 Foreign Ministry, SC.19, May 7, 2007.

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was argued that Armenia's situation, that is far from constructive dialog, isolated and entertaining itself with suspicions, prevents it to integrate into international society and establish good relations with neighboring countries.

As indicated above, although Armenian Republican Party could be able to sustain absolute majority with the inclusion of independents, they preferred to weaken the Parliamentarian opposition through establishment of a grand coalition with Prosperous Armenia and Tashnaks. The basic idea lying in the backside of such a preference is possibly to ensure a stronger position for Presidential elections of next March.

At the end of the coalition talks between three parties, Republican Party and Prosperous Armenia reached an agreement. Tashnaks did not participate in this agreement however by signing a cooperation accord, they obtained three ministries, one deputy Spokesperson post of the Parliament and two commission presidency. This accord is binding until Presidential elections.¹²³ In this manner, Tashnaks kept the opportunity to act independently in the Presidential elections.

There are 17 ministers in the newly-formed government. Ten of them were also minister in the previous government, seven of them were newly appointed. Seven ministers are from Republican Party, three from Tashnaks, two from Prosperous Armenia and six from the independents.¹²⁴ In this context it should be noted that independent ministers are people close to President Kocharian or Republican Party. Minister of Foreign Affairs Vartan Oskanian and Minister of Defense General Mihail Harutiunian are also independents that are close to the President.

123 Yerkir.am, June 8, 2007. "Cooperation Agreement between the political coalition and AFF"

124 Noyan Tapan, June 11, 2007. "7 out of 17 Ministers in RA Government are Newly Appointed"

