

“TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS FROM PAST TO PRESENT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH” ORGANIZED BY THE POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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Political Psychological Association (Ankara) organized a conference entitled “Turkish-Armenia Relations from Past to Present: An Interdisciplinary Approach” in 25-26 December 2009 at University of Ankara Rectorate conference room. During the conference, scholars, experts and journalists made presentations, exhibiting different perspectives to the subject. Participation to the conference and during the presentations was observably high. President of the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) Retired Ambassador Ömer Engin Lütem had also made a speech entitled “Evolution and Present State of the Armenian Problem”. This report will try to summarize presentations made by the participants in the conference.

In the first presentation entitled “Historical and Political Dimension of Turkish-Armenian Relations”, Prof. Dr. Semih Yalçın from Gazi University Department of History claimed that there has been no Armenian problem for Turkish society, since all problems concerning this issue were all resolved at Lausanne Conference. However Yalçın argued as of today that the issue is tried to be brought back as a problem. Yalçın highlighted that from the viewpoint of Turkish-Armenian relations, 77-78 Ottoman-Russian War was a breaking point, which was followed by Balkan Wars and in the First World War, the state suffered increasing number of defeats which caused the Armenian problem to reach peak levels. Underlining that Tehcir (relocation) was a precaution against losing control over Ottoman lands, Yalçın claimed that Turkish state has also ignored Armenian problem in the beginning that was brought to international attention, but soon this shortfall was overcome by amplified academic and political attention to the issue. Prof. Yalçın argued that Armenian theses that the relocation was the cause for Armenian uprisings were ungrounded and in fact these uprisings constituted the main cause for the decision to relocate in this region.

Retired Ambassador and President of AVİM (Center for Eurasian Studies), in his presentation entitled “Evolution and Present State of the Armenian Problem” presented an overall and detailed analysis of Turkish-Armenian relations and the Attitude of the Armenian society. Touching upon the critical issues of Armenian

nationalism and Diaspora nationalism, Lütem argued that the fear of assimilation which arrived in about 1946 lies at the core of the current Armenian genocide claims that became a permanent discourse among the Diaspora and Armenian society. Thus, according to Lütem, opinion leaders of the Armenian society announced that in order to be able to overcome the threat of assimilation, it is necessary to refer and emphasize genocide as a propaganda tool while expand the idea of enmity towards the Turks, and to keep Armenian identity strong. Lütem indicated that Armenian terrorism which began in the 70s aimed to bring this propaganda for the recognition of Armenian genocide into international attention, thus we see several resolutions and decisions taken by different countries all over the world began to emerge in the 80s. Lütem argued that Armenian genocide propaganda was transformed into an “Armenian Genocide Industry” when Armenian terror ended to become an international political movement. As a result of the activities of this industry, the process was politicized and especially after 2000 Armenian genocide claims were slowly beginning to gain ground in Europe. Lütem indicated that Turkey recognized Armenia, but since the mutual problems could not be resolved, diplomatic relations could not be established, since Turkey’s three demands (1. Recognition of the territorial integrity, 2. Reaching a mutually agreeable solution about genocide claims, 3. Armenia reviewing its Karabakh policies) from Armenia were not acknowledged, Azerbaijan territory was occupied and consequently Turkey closed its borders with Armenia. Lütem underlined that the signing of the Protocols would bring mutual gains for both sides, but if examined, Turkey is more advantageous compared to Armenia in this process. Moreover, Lütem argued that ant possibility of a bottleneck during the process would be more harmful for Armenia than it would possibly be for Turkey.

In his presentation entitled “Psychological War and the Armenian Problem”, Dr. Murat Köylü from the 21st Century Turkey Institute argued that in the international arena and within Turkey, a psychological war is taking place. Köylü claimed that the propaganda activities that are defined in American intelligence field manuals as “limiting enemy’s will and capacity to exploit its power by delivering intentionally selected information and resources” are used in order to inject the Armenian problem into Turkey’s and global agenda, which Köylü argues had been successful until today.

Associate Professor Vahdet Keleşyılmaz from Gazi University Department of History, in his presentation entitled “A Humanist Approach to Turkish-Armenian Relations” argued that the Armenian problem must be evaluated as a whole while humanist perspective should be highlighted. Keleşyılmaz emphasized that when looked into the past, it is observable that Armenians are “the children of this country” even if religion, belief and values may differ, and common culture and common language must be taken as the fundamental basis for communication. In that respect, Keleşyılmaz claimed that the reasons behind relocation should not be forgotten, that the Ottoman state executed a responsible and inevitable policy, and that the suffering stemmed from state’s incapability and inability. Keleşyılmaz argued that the Armenian propaganda which prioritizes Armenian psychological suffering does not take Turkish suffering into

consideration, and that the psychology of wars and defeats deeply affected Ottoman policies before and during the relocation.

In his paper themed “The Juridical Dimension of the Armenian Issue”, Başkent University, Faculty of Law, Assoc. Prof. Sadi Çaycı dealt with the juristic validity of concepts such as the “recognition of genocide claims” and “apology” in terms of judicial process and practicality of the genocide law in the Turkish-Armenian relations. Çaycı, who mentioned the “Crime of Genocide (Prevention and Punishment) Law of 1948 and the non-applicability of statutory limitations to war crimes convention of 1968, questioned the identifiability of the issue with reference to these two conventions. Hereunder, Çaycı argued that the Ottoman Empire made efforts to compensate all probable moral and material damages and losses that may occur as a result of the endeavors to defend the homeland and suppress riots, investigate and prosecute the offenders and the deportation. Çaycı added that there are evidences that the Armenian had revolted against the Ottoman Empire and collaborated with enemy forces. He also emphasized that the legal relations between Turkey and Armenia have been settled with the article 15 of the Kars Treaty, the article 5 of Ankara Treaty and the article 58 and appendix VIII of the Lausanne Treaty. Çaycı stated that the 1915 incidents lie beyond the scope of the law of genocide, issues between Turkey and Armenia have not been settled yet but the Armenian side is still trying to impose a new legal framework on Turkey.

In his presentation themed “The Moral Aspect of the Armenian Issue”, METU Philosophy Department Chief, Prof. Ahmet Inam made assessments on the issue of morality, beginning from the antic Greek period to our day. Inam stated that in the West; morality evolved on individual basis and was defined not only through actions but also through characters. He focused on the practicality of this principle -which was defined as virtue morality by Aristotle- in International Relations. Inam accordingly stated that coexistence can only happen in an ideal state; but today’s conception of an ideal state and the moral responsibilities and characters of states are defective. In this context, he also dealt with the concept of “sojourn” which is one of the most significant qualities of Anatolia and states that in contrary to the West, “sojourn” and “hospitality” have developed as common moral values in Anatolia. These concepts conjure up the mutual responsibilities in Turkish-Armenian relations. Inam concluded that free will and honesty are the only ways to develop a moral approach towards Turkish-Armenian relations.

Chief of the Department of Psychology at the Ankara University Faculty of Medicine and President of the Political Psychology Association Prof. Dr. Abdulkadir Çevik, in his presentation entitled “Turkish-Armenian Relations: Psychological Dimension” argued that common values such as language and culture exists between Turkish and Armenian societies. Çevik highlighted that today some of the common values began to be lost and reasons behind this loss must be examined. Çevik indicated that Turkish society has also experienced sufferings in the past, but these sufferings are ignored by taking pride in the victories and successes. He claimed that it would a mistake to examine the past from a modern perspective. Çevik also argued that Armenians were attracted by the sympathy

towards the Jews after the Holocaust, but still Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974 is claimed to play a huge role in the emergence of positive attitudes towards Armenian genocide claims. Çevik suggested that migrations cause national identity to suffer retrogress, desperation, marginalization and other difficulty experiences, which led to a struggle to overcome the assimilation via uniting society around hatred against the Turks. Çevik argued that Turkish society never uses otherization to define its identity or mourn the sufferings in the past, and underlined that any attempt for the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations in the 90s and after 2000. Çevik suggested that Armenia's attack against Karabakh was in fact of symbolic value that Armenians could not dare to attack Turkey but what was seen as a part of the Turkish identity, namely Azerbaijani territory.

Prof. Hikmet Özdemir from Ankara University Department of Political Science (Mülkiye) has begun his speech by commemorating Gündüz Aktan. Özdemir, who has indicated that Turkish-Armenian relations have a unique depth and complexity, has also stated that Armenians have put forth a one-sided assertion and attempted to implement the Genocide Convention for the period before the Convention was signed. Özdemir has expressed that the events taking place in Anatolia during that time was due to the Ottoman Armenians resistances taking place under the command of the general staff of the hostile states and has underlined the fact that as a result of these resistances, massacres were committed against civil Ottoman society. He has also stated that a similar relocation has taken place by the U.S. against the Japanese community against the threat of a likely Pacific operation and that similar policies are being conducted worldwide. Özdemir has emphasized that the Ottoman State had no intention of annihilation, that no document or order exists which could prove this intention, and that those being negligent have been put on trial and punished. Moreover, he has drawn attention to the fact that commissions have been established for the protection of those being relocated and that this stands as the most important evidence in showing that no deliberate negligence exists within the state. Özdemir has stated that the Armenian resistance should not exist on any platform which is not based on the principles of international law. Özdemir who has expressed that the Armenian propagandas, from 2005 onwards, have also been put on the very top of the agenda in Turkey, has emphasized that the smear campaign continues to be carried out in Turkey. He has also said that it is necessary to be careful against the activities carried out under three headings of the restoration of monuments, visiting of Turkish territories by Armenians and the historical reviews of families.

In his presentation entitled "Diaspora's View of Turkey", director of International Strategic Research Organization, Assoc. Prof. Sedat Laçiner has characterized the Armenian Diaspora as one of the most influential Diasporas in the world. Laçiner has drawn attention to the idea that the Diaspora has been concentrated upon a case which holds them so close together that they could shed blood for this cause and that the emigration the Armenians have been exposed to and the events before and after 1915 have caused the creation of today's Armenian Diaspora. He has said that the Armenian society is based on the Anatolian culture; therefore, the divergence taking place after

1915 has led to a heavy destruction for the Armenians. Thus, Laçiner who has emphasized that the Armenian identity has been reformed after the emigration, has described Armenian nationalism as a “malcontent nationalism”. He has stated that the Armenian community has no story of victory and that generally they remember grievances and losses, therefore statelessness exist at the center of this dissatisfaction. Laçiner who has stated that the Armenian political parties, by using these emotions, have started creating new political identities for the Armenian community being exposed to assimilation, has also expressed that this hatred exists at much higher levels within the 2nd and 3rd generations. He has indicated that this hatred of the Armenian Diaspora against Turks will only be abolished if communication channels open between the two sides and that the base of the Armenian identity will also be gotten rid of. Laçiner has also stated that he is hesitant of the abolishment of this psychological barrier between the Turks and Armenians and has reacted because of this reason.

Member of Linguistics, History and Geography Faculty (DTCF), Ankara University, Prof. Dr. Birsen Karaca, in her presentation entitled “The Contributions of Armenian Scriptwriters to the Efforts in Establishing a New Social Consciousness”, has analyzed the references existing in the Armenian literature and media during the process of creating a social consciousness. Within this framework, Karaca has based her research on the reason for including the Armenian allegations, these allegations showing a continuity and targeting Turkey. In her research, she has examined the Turkish image within the Armenian social consciousness being described as representing all bad characteristics not belonging to Armenia within the scope of cinema, literature and articles published in the media. Karaca has stated that after the second half of the 20th century, “genocide” has been used instead of the word “relocation” found in all these articles. This way, Karaca has emphasized that the relocation has started to be explained in a way that is far from the historical truth. Karaca who has put forth that the Armenian social memory is focused on the 1915 relocation, has also stated that the Armenian terror has tried to be justified by asserting that it has arisen due to the 1915 events and that rather than regretting the Armenian terrorist activities, grudge and revenge has been brought forth.

TURKSAM Coordinator Asst. Prof. Dr. Şenol Kantarcı in his speech entitled “The Role of Armenian Diaspora in Turkish-Armenian Relations” suggested that Armenians had been one of the most loyal and progressive part of the Ottoman Empire. But with the role of major developments in international politics such as the emergence of Industrial Revolution that was followed by the emergence of nationalism, nationalities in the Ottoman Empire were attracted by the national and independent state idea, which lead to revolts and dissolution. Armenians were among the sympathizers of the nationalism movements, which were soon induced by countries such as Russia, France, Britain, United States and Germany. According to Kantarcı, these states had ambitions in the Ottoman lands and they aimed to gain more influence in the region. During the World War I, Ottoman Empire found itself encircled and fighting in several fronts, which forced the state to take precautions against the internal conflicts that may have harmful effects

on the integrity of the state. Kantarcı argued that the relocation of the Armenians took place in extraordinary conditions, but still Ottoman state successfully relocated these Armenians by making huge efforts. He argued that today Armenian problem is a reflection of the past experiences, as foreign involvement in the problem, such as an alienated and marginalized Diaspora has an active role today in Turkish-Armenian relations. Moreover, Kantarcı argued that unless Karabagh problem is resolved Armenia's aggression could not be tolerated.

Murat Yetkin from the Radikal Newspaper has shared his views about the process starting with his interview conducted with the Armenian President Sarkisian in 2008 to the signing of the Protocols. By touching upon the fact that Armenia does not have the luxury to ignore Turkey, Yetkin has conveyed that Armenia must develop its relations with Turkey.

Prof. Dr. Temuçin Faik Ertan, Director of the Institute of Turkish Revolution History has touched upon the problems existing during the process of explaining and examining the Armenian question. According to him, the education system in Turkey has not been able to provide enough information to the students at the sufficient level and depth. By criticizing the defensive approach taken by academicians and politicians in Turkey against Armenian allegations, Ertan has underlined that Armenians must prove their allegations. Ertan has stated the Ittihat and Terakki have made a difficult decision during that period under strained political and military conditions. He has emphasized that today Armenian question is a political subject being based entirely on global and regional origins.

Ercan Çitlioğlu, the Director of the International Security and Strategic Research Center of Bahçeşehir University, has assessed the decision, draft and other documents which have brought the genocide allegations on the agenda. When examined historically, Çitlioğlu has expressed that the U.S. has been the greatest supporter of the Armenian allegations both on the provincial level and within the international sphere. Moreover, he has drawn attention to the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation which has been a breakthrough for the U.S. in bringing the international recognition of the Armenian genocide allegations on the agenda. Çitlioğlu who has expressed that the Armenian terror starting in 1975 has been a result of this breakthrough, has also stated that during the same period, draft resolutions in the U.S. have started to be put on the agenda on 24 April. By drawing attention to the American activities in Anatolia before the First World War, Çitlioğlu has said that the U.S. has always been at the center of the Armenian question before 1915 when the problem first arose, and after. Stating that the Treaty of Lausanne is a victorious document, Çitlioğlu has emphasized the necessity to review the Lausanne records in depth in order to bring light upon the process of reaching this victory. Çitlioğlu, reading extracts of the dialogues of Dr. Rıza Nur with the foreign representatives found in the records of the Minority Commission, has expressed that Turkey's proud and honorable attitude displayed during the victory of Lausanne has been forgotten today.