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BE READY FOR WAR IF YOU WANT PEACE AND SECURITY

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Abstract: *The historical and contemporary evolution of the Armenian issue within Turkish politics and international relations, tracing its transformation from a diplomatic affair to an ongoing public and academic debate. It analyzes state and societal responses to the Armenian question, the propagation of genocide claims, and recent normalization initiatives between Türkiye and Armenia following the Karabakh conflict. The research highlights the role of publications, public opinion formation, and bilateral diplomatic developments while addressing persistent challenges in regional reconciliation. It concludes that the normalization process remains fragile, influenced by historical grievances and external actors, necessitating a continued and pragmatic approach to maintain peace and stability.*

Keyword: *Armenian Issue, Türkiye-Armenia Relations, Genocide Claims, Karabakh Conflict, Normalization Process*

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Öz: *Türk siyasetinde ve uluslararası ilişkilerde Ermeni meselesinin tarihsel ve çağdaş evrimine odaklanarak, meselenin diplomatik bir boyuttan günümüzdeki kamuoyu ve akademik tartışmalara dönüşümünü incelemektedir. Araştırma, devlet ve toplumun Ermeni meselesine verdiği tepkileri, soykırım iddialarının yayılımını ve Karabağ çatışması sonrasında Türkiye-Ermenistan arasındaki normalleşme girişimlerini analiz etmektedir. Yayınların, kamuoyu oluşumunun ve ikili diplomatik gelişmelerin rolüne dikkat çeken bu çalışma, bölgesel uzlaşmadaki süregelen zorlukları da tartışmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, normalleşme sürecinin tarihi anlaşmazlıklar ve dış aktörlerin etkisiyle kırılğan olduğu; barış ve istikrarın sürdürülmesi için sürekli ve gerçekçi bir yaklaşım gerektirdiği ortaya konmaktadır.*

Anahtar Kelime: *Ermeni Meselesi, Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri, Soykırım İddiaları, Karabağ Çatışması, Normalleşme Süreci*

This phrase is not a call to war. It implies that peace can only be achieved by being prepared for battle, or, more accurately, by being ready. It says that if you do not have the power to fight, you cannot survive by relying on the mercy and understanding of others. With this understanding, states allocate the largest share of their budgets to defense.

The Armenian issue has been before the Turkish nation for a century and a half. It became an international issue with the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano and the Treaty of Berlin at the end of the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War. Since then, it has hung over the heads of Turks like the sword of Damocles, in different forms and with varying content. For nearly 40 years, it was perceived only as a political and diplomatic issue, and no publication activity aimed at informing the public on this subject was deemed necessary. When it became apparent during World War I that the Armenian relocation was being used as a means of propaganda against the Turkish nation and state, *“The Armenian Committees’ Revolutionary Activities and Operations”* was published in 1916 to show the reasons for the relocation.¹ Besides, *“Documents sur les Atrocités Armeno-Russes,”* showing the atrocities committed by Armenian committee members against the Muslim population, was published in 1917.² *“Information Based on Documents About the Atrocities Suffered by the Islamic Population”* was published in 1918 in different languages. Even amid the chaos of the armistice period following the defeat in World War I—particularly in 1918 and 1919—publications aimed at enlightening the domestic and international public continued.³ Almost all of these publications consist of documents compiled from the field and eyewitness accounts relating to the Armenian events that occurred during those years. The Commission prepared them. Some books written by commanders and diplomats, such as Kazım Karabekir and Ahmet Rustem Bey, were also compiled by the authors, adding their personal experiences and observations to the documents above.

With the successful outcome of the National Struggle and the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the Armenian issue was considered resolved. Şinasi Orel, a former Minister of National Education, described the situation as follows: “We assumed that this issue was now closed and did not concern ourselves with it. Although we sometimes heard about Armenian activities,

1 The Armenian Committees’ Revolutionary Activities and Operations (Constantinople: [Publisher], 1916).

2 Documents sur les Atrocités Arméno-Russes. Constantinople: Société anonyme de papeterie et d’imprimerie, 1917.

3 Information Based on Documents About the Atrocities Suffered by the Islamic Population. Constantinople, 1918.

we did not take them seriously because we believed that history would decide. We assumed that history could not be distorted by propaganda and political maneuvers in line with Armenian claims.”⁴ Acting on this understanding, no publications were made, nor were any experts trained. In the early years of the Republic, writings in this field remained at the level of chapters in books and memoirs.

While Türkiye thought the Armenian issue had been closed in this way, Armenian institutions and organizations developed new strategies. They tried to resolve their conflicts of interest and differences in religious beliefs and political views. They kept the Armenian issue alive. They established parties, foundations, associations, and research centers in the countries where they lived. They published books and magazines. They published articles in newspapers. They made films and staged plays. They organized Armenian memorial days and meetings, and erected monuments. They aimed to establish the Armenia promised in the invalid Treaty of Sèvres. To this end, they appealed to the Potsdam Conference and the United Nations, demanding their imaginary ancestral lands. They harbored hostility toward Türkiye and the Turkish people. They collaborated with states and groups hostile to-Türkiye. They shaped international public opinion in this direction and conditioned Armenians worldwide to adopt these views.

Türkiye’s approach mentioned above continued until 1950, when Esat Uras’s book, *Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, was published.⁵ The book is a first in Türkiye. Unlike previous works, it does not merely list documents related to events. Using Armenian sources, it examines the history, identity, language, and culture of Armenians in Anatolia; it reveals the Armenian reforms, organizations, and rebellions in the late Ottoman period and the role of the great powers; it recounts the Armenian relocations during World War I and how the issue was addressed at Lausanne. This research work, based on solid sources, is not only the first of its kind but also the last. There has been no follow-up, nor could there be. Ahmet Esat Uras served as the city’s governor when the Treaty of Kars, which defined Türkiye’s eastern borders, was signed in October 1921. In subsequent years, he worked on these issues as a bureaucrat in the Ministry of the Interior. In other words, he was a civil servant who was directly involved in the events of World War I and the

4 Şinasi Orel and Süreyya Yuca, *The Talat Pasha Telegrams: Historical Fact or Armenian Fiction?* (Nicosia: K. Rüstem & Brother, 1986).

5 Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, trans. Süheyla Artemel, ed. Tülay Duran (Istanbul: Documentary Publications, 1988).

years of the National Struggle. He is the last example of a generation that both lived through and wrote about these events.

On the 50th anniversary of the events of 1915, meetings and demonstrations against Türkiye were held in many parts of the world. Conferences and panels were held at prestigious universities worldwide. No work was written that addressed the allegations made and explained the subject in scientific terms. When our first diplomats were martyred in 1973, the assistant district attorney in Santa Barbara, who was handling the case, requested a publication from our Los Angeles Consulate General to learn the Turkish perspective after the killer stated that he had killed our diplomat to take revenge for the Armenians. A conference text by one of our ambassadors in Ankara was found and sent. That was what was available.

In January 1973, the murder of our Los Angeles Consul General, Mehmet Baydar, and Consul Bahadır Demir by an Armenian named Mıgırdıç Gorgan Yanıkyan, a former member of the Hınçak Committee and the new Armenian Secret Army, was the flare-up of a fire that had been burning for half a century without being extinguished. The murder was presented as an act of heroism. And it was accepted as such. Thus, a new era began. Numerous acts of terror were carried out, ranging from hijacking planes to taking people hostage, bombing, and occupying Turkish diplomatic missions abroad. Dozens of Turkish diplomats were martyred. As we have previously stated, the public opinion formed tolerated these activities as a means of “making its voice heard.” The perpetrators of these acts and the killers of our martyrs were either not punished or were practically encouraged with the lightest of sentences.

Under these circumstances, Kamuran Gürün’s *Armenian File* was finally published in 1983. This book is also a first in its own way. It was written by another bureaucrat, or rather diplomat, based on documents and literature compiled from various archives. It was written to inform the public, especially our diplomats who had to explain the problematic period of Turkish-Armenian relations to their foreign counterparts. It covers Armenian history, Turkish-Armenian ties during the late Ottoman period, and the years of the National Struggle, including Armenian organizations, uprisings, and deportations. It focuses on the role of imperialist states in these developments. In the following years, French and English editions of the book were published.

The 1980s saw significant activity on this subject. Conferences were held one after another at universities, and papers were published. Documents in

the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives relating to the Armenian uprisings and relocations in the late Ottoman period were classified and made available to readers. A significant portion of these documents was published. The publication of some documents from the Military History Archive followed this. Documents selected from British and French archives were even published with Turkish summaries. In the 2000s, institutes were established and journals were published to research these topics. The journal you hold in your hands and the publishing organization are the products of these efforts. Master's and doctoral theses are written at universities. As of October 2025, their number has reached 725. Naturally, many books are also published within this framework. The content and quality of the theses and books are a separate subject of evaluation. It would be painful to say "Ba'del harabel Basra" (after the ruins of Basra), but it would not be wrong. To date, all Western European countries except Spain, the vast majority of states in South America, the Russian Federation, Canada, and almost all US states have recognized the Armenian genocide. One or two countries are added to the list every year.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, developments in Karabakh played a key role in Turkish-Armenian relations. After the occupation of Karabakh, Türkiye severed diplomatic ties with Armenia. Azerbaijan's recapture of Karabakh in 2020 changed the balance of power in the region. A normalization process began in Türkiye-Armenia relations. Retired Ambassador Serdar Kılıç was appointed on behalf of Türkiye, and Parliamentary Deputy Speaker Ruben Rubinyan on behalf of Armenia to carry out the process. The parties held their first meeting in Moscow in January 2022. At the sixth meeting held in Yerevan in September 2025, they agreed to accelerate the previously reached agreements on border crossings, the rehabilitation of the Kars-Gyumri railway and the electricity interconnector, the renovation of the historic Ani Bridge, and the provision of scholarships to university students. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's remarks in January 2025 questioning the genocide were welcomed in Türkiye. Some interpret the decision to open the Zangezur Corridor connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan and to have it operated by United States companies as a sign that peace has come to the region and that the Turkish-Armenian conflict has ended.⁶

The end of Armenia's occupation of Karabakh, the return of Azerbaijani Turks from Karabakh to their homes after 30 years of exile, the opening of the

6 "Türkiye, Armenia Vow to Pursue Normalization without Preconditions," Daily Sabah, September 11, 2025, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-armenia-vow-to-pursue-normalization-without-preconditions>.

Zangezur corridor, and thus the establishment of an uninterrupted highway between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, as well as between Türkiye and the Turkic world, is a cause for celebration for all of us. However, there is still a long way to go. Five years have passed since the Second Karabakh War, yet a peace agreement has not been signed. It is unclear when the Zangezur corridor will open and how it will be operated. Iran is not enthusiastic about this route. Russia's discomfort at being left out of the process is no secret. There is serious opposition to the Pashinyan government in Armenia. Diaspora Armenians are known to be hardline. Even Armenia's decision to send a relief team to the earthquake that struck southeastern Anatolia two years ago was met with opposition both in Armenia and among the diaspora. In the United States, an Armenian-American professor's attempt to explain the situation by stating that aid was provided to Alevis, Arabs, and Kurds who were under pressure from the Turkish state in the earthquake zone was met with astonishment.⁷

The Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul is at a critical juncture in this process. Patriarch Sahak II told journalists from Armenia that he desired the normalization of relations between the two countries and supported this process. However, when Pashinyan, who is working towards normalization, came to Istanbul, the Patriarchate's doors remained closed, giving the impression that it was opposed to the process. The Patriarch's closeness to Catholicos II Karekin of Echmiadzin, who is hostile to Pashinyan and opposed to the process, reinforced this perception.

As can be seen, Pashinyan's government faces a long and challenging road ahead. The recent decision to remove Mount Ararat from the stamp on the Republic of Armenia passport was described as an effort to rid itself of emotional symbols and avoid sending dangerous messages to neighboring states. This is noteworthy. We hope that the removal of the genocide allegations from the Armenian constitution will follow this. Armenian textbooks contain "information" that harbors hostility towards Turks, such as the claim that Turks committed genocide not only against Armenians but also against other nations. Removing such statements from textbooks is essential for raising new generations with pure feelings and for peace to take root in their minds.

We cannot say that all of this will put an end to the accusations of genocide against Türkiye. Even if Armenia withdraws from this case, it is clear that

7 AVİM, "Racism and Bigotry in Academia: The Elyse Semerdjian Case," 2023, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://www.avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/RACISM-AND-BIGOTRY-IN-ACADEMIA-THE-ELYSE-SEMERDJIAN-CASE>

people, forces, and states will continue to make claims of genocide against Türkiye against the Turkish state and nation, and will not refrain from poisoning innocent masses with false, distorted, and misleading information. This is because they are waging their struggle against Türkiye not for the Armenians, but for themselves. Appearing to defend the Armenians is a means to an end for them. In this way, during the final period of the Ottoman Empire and the years of the National Struggle, they incited the Armenians against the Turks, attempting to weaken the Turkish state and plunging the region into bloodshed. In subsequent years, they continued to vilify Turks by appearing to defend Armenians. They have made significant progress in this regard. The claim of Armenian genocide has been included in textbooks in almost all states in the United States. In Europe, some parties do not include Turkish-origin candidates who do not accept the Armenian genocide on their lists. The situation in academia is no different.⁸ Those who oppose these claims lose their positions, while those who defend them in some way are given platforms. Even in Türkiye, some have been influenced by this propaganda and those who write and publish in this vein.

We support the normalization process in Türkiye-Armenia relations. While hoping for the success of this slow-and-steady process, we do not forget that only six meetings have been held over three years, that diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Armenia have not been established, and that no peace agreement has been signed, even though five years have passed since the Second Karabakh War.⁹ Optimism is good. Realism is better. The allegations of Armenian genocide are not just a matter between Turks and Armenians. Even if the Armenians give up, many will continue. Türkiye must never forget this reality, evaluate what has been done and what will be done periodically, and continue its efforts uninterrupted to thwart these moves against our existence and unity.

8 "A Deceitful Attempt to Tarnish Atatürk's Legacy at Princeton University," Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), accessed November 21, 2025, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/A-DECEITFUL-AT-TEMPT-TO-TARNISH-ATATURK-S-LEGACY-AT-PRINCETON-UNIVERSITY>.

9 "No: 186, 12 September 2025, Regarding the Sixth Meeting of Special Representatives for the Türkiye-Armenia Normalization Process," Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 12, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-186_-turkiye-ermenistan-normallesme-sureci-ozel-temsilciler-inin-altinci-toplantisi-hk.en.mfa.

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