

# FACTS AND COMMENTS

(OLAYLAR VE YORUMLAR)

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**Abstract:** *This article addresses the period of August 2011-May 2012, including Turkey-Armenia and Diaspora relations, the stances of the US and France on the Armenian question, parliamentary elections in Armenia and the commemoration of April 24 in Armenia and Turkey and provides some comments concerning these issues.*

**Key Words:** *Turkey-Armenia relations, US, France, Armenian Parliamentary Elections, 24 April 2012, Abdullah Gül, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Serge Sarkisian, Edward Nalbandyan, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama*

**Özet:** *Bu yazı, Ağustos 2011-Mayıs 2012 döneminde, Türkiye-Ermenistan ve Diaspora ilişkilerini, ABD ve Fransa'nın Ermeni sorununa ilişkin tutumlarını, Ermenistan'da parlamento seçimlerini ve 24 Nisan'ın Ermenistan'da ve Türkiye'de anılmasını incelemekte ve bu konularda bazı yorumlarda bulunmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri, ABD, Fransa, Ermenistan Parlamento Seçimleri, 24 Nisan 2012, Abdullah Gül, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Serj Sarkisyan, Edward Nalbantyan, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama*

## I. TURKEY-ARMENIA AND TURKEY-DIASPORA RELATIONS

In this section of our article, we will address the main developments, approximately within the last ten months (August 2011-May 2012), in the relations between the two countries and also in Turkey's interactions with the Diaspora.

## 1. The Official Statements of the Parties

Previously, we had mentioned that President Sarkisian had provided rather harsh and uncompromising messages concerning Turkey.<sup>1</sup> He has also continued to criticize Turkey during his speech delivered on 23 September 2011 in the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

In his speech, the President has alleged that the normalization process of Turkey-Armenia relations has been initiated by them and has put forth that the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of the borders could become the first steps in overcoming the mistrust, suspicion and uncertainty existing between both sides and that although this initiative of Armenia was supported by the international community, Turkey has prevented the ratification and implementation of the protocols.

First we should note that the argument on Armenia initiating the normalization process of relations between the two countries is not true. Turkey has made contacts with Armenia many times in the past for normalization and has proposed a “Commission of Historians” in 2005 which could have resolved the issue of genocide once and for all, but refraining from the reactions that could arise from negotiations with Turkey, President Kocharian has preferred to remain inactive on this issue or to delay it. However, acting more boldly, Sarkisian has accepted to hold talks with Turkey after being elected.

On the other hand, Sarkisian’s belief that “the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of the borders would become the first steps in enabling us to start a dialogue and overcoming the air of mistrust, suspicion and uncertainty existing” also draws attention. Generally, after the Protocols have been ratified and the border is opened, other steps to be taken and especially initiatives to be taken towards eliminating the “results of genocide” appear in the minds of the Armenians. These include the returning of properties (to the inheritors) of those being relocated and also paying compensation to them. In the moral aspect, Turkey is expected to apologize to the Armenians for the relocation. The Dashnaks and other radical Armenians also include Turkey giving territory to Armenia among these steps. There is no consensus on the size of this territory. Various views exist, ranging from Wilsonian Armenia to only giving Mount Ararat.

President Sarkisian’s speech delivered in the UN General Assembly has mostly emphasized the prevention of genocide as if the threat of genocide exists in the region where Armenia is located and has said that in order to

1 Ömer Engin Lütem (2011) “Facts and Comments” *Review of Armenian Studies*, Number 23, p.19

2 “Speech by Serzh Sargsyan, the President of the Republic of Armenia in the 66th session of the General Assembly” September 23, 2011 <http://www.president.am/events/statements/eng/?id=107>

prevent this, (past) genocides must be recognized and condemned. It is noteworthy to indicate that this conviction, which has been put forth for many years by Armenian writers and politicians, is actually incorrect, because almost everyone in the world recognizes that the Jews have been subjected to genocide and fiercely condemns it. However, this recognition and condemnation have not been able to prevent the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides and similar events to genocide such as Darfur taking place.

In his speech, President Sarkisian has also expressed that the genocide perpetrated in the Ottoman Empire against the Armenians has been recognized and condemned by numerous country parliaments, international organizations and genocide scholars' community, but that the same does not hold true for Turkey, which continues to engage in a policy of denying this atrocious crime committed against humanity. After understanding that Turkey will not ratify the Protocols unless positive developments take place regarding the Karabakh issue, Sarkisian's statements comprise a new manifestation of his approach, which could be summarized as criticizing Turkey on every opportunity and even vilifying it.

The constant accusations of Armenian officials towards Turkey has also drawn the attention of the US and Russia. As will be seen below, while the US has utmost effort for a dialogue to be re-established between the sides, Russia has conducted a similar initiative.

After Dmitri Medvedev, the President of the Russian Federation has called President Gül and expressed his condolences for the earthquake that occurred in and surrounding the city of Van, has said that he is with Armenian President Serge Sarkisian and has led to a phone conversation being held between them. While Sarkisian has indicated that they are ready to provide assistance for the earthquake and that they could immediately send a search and rescue team if allowed, President Gül has thanked him and has indicated that international assistance is not required at the moment.<sup>3</sup> Turkey, which had turned down the offers for aid by foreign countries right after the earthquake, had later on accepted these aids due to the size of the damage. However, Armenia's (and Israel's) insistent offer for assistance has been understood more of an initiative for propaganda in Ankara after the Foreign Ministry spokesman expressed that they do not mix humane gestures up with political responsibilities and that these aids do not mean a positive development in the existing problems.<sup>4</sup> Later on, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu has also confirmed this by saying that the

3 "Gül'e Sürpriz Telefon (Surprise Call to Gül)", *Hürriyet*, 25 October 2011.

4 "Editorial". *Stupeur et Tremblement. Ayrıca Armenews*, 30 October 2011; "Ankara Salve l'Aide d'Israel et de l'Arménie, Mais Pas de Détente en Vue" *Armenews*, 30 October 2011 [http://www.armenews.com/article.php3?id\\_article=74152](http://www.armenews.com/article.php3?id_article=74152)

assistance received from Armenia and Israel could not play a role in reconciliation with those countries.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, it has been seen that taking advantage of this event, the Diaspora press has emphasized that the earthquake took place in the historical lands of Armenia and moreover, aid was delivered by plane since the border remained closed.<sup>6</sup>

The positive atmosphere created by the aid for the Van earthquake has lasted for only a short period. When French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé's words during his visit to Turkey in November that he supports Turkey's proposal for a joint commission of historians with Armenia<sup>7</sup> is reminded to Edward Nalbandyan, he has considered these statements as an attempt to put under doubt the reality of France and many other countries officially recognizing and condemning the Armenian genocide<sup>8</sup> and has once again rejected the proposal for a Commission of Historians which could contribute greatly to the resolution of most of the problems existing between the two countries.

On the other hand, in a statement issued by Prime Minister Erdoğan, together with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, at the opening of a plant at Petkim Aliaga facility, the words "Just as we are one nation in two states, we have one heart. This is why we will carry on fighting hand-in-hand with Azerbaijan until Karabakh is freed from occupation"<sup>9</sup> has put forth that no change should be expected in Turkey's approach.

Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış is a figure in the government who is closely interested in the Armenian question and who delivers statements on this issue. He has mentioned several times in April that the Ottoman Deputies have been deported to Malta in 1920, were supposed to be brought to trial there for their treatment of the Armenians, but that this was not possible due to lack of evidence. Moreover, by referring to Prime Minister Erdoğan's proposal for a Commission of Historians in 2005, he has called on those possessing documents (regarding the genocide allegations) to come forth and for this issue to be addressed in an international commission.<sup>10</sup>

5 "Davutoğlu Confirmed No New Shifts in Armenian-Turkish Process", *News.am*, 12 November 2012.

6 Ibid

7 Ömer Engin Lütem (2011) "Facts and Comments", *Review of Armenian Studies*, No. 24. p. 15

8 "Tarihçiler Komisyonuna Ortak Tepki (Mutual Reaction Against the Commission of Historians)", *Agos*, November 25, 2011.

9 "President of Azerbaijan, "Ilham Aliyev and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended the ceremonies to open the AYPE-T factory and to lay the foundation for the Heydar Aliyev vocational lyceum and the Star refinery of Petkim" November 25, 2011. <http://en.president.az/articles/3387>

10 "Bağış'tan Ermeni Çıkmışı (An Armenian Outburst by Bağış)", *CnnTürk*, 15 April 2012.

Meanwhile, MHP Leader Devlet Bahçeli has also addressed the Armenian question in a speech delivered in April in the French city of Metz and by saying that “the genocide allegations are baseless, nonsensical, and nothing like that has ever happened”, “people within the Diaspora who tried to put our nation in the defendant’s chair will experience embarrassment”,<sup>11</sup> he has repeated once again his own and his party’s recognized approach.

Within the period under observation, Armenian President Sarkisian has spoken many times on Armenia’s relations with Turkey and the genocide allegations.

In a speech delivered to the Armenians during his visit to Marseille in December, with the excuse of attending the 20th Congress of the European People’s Party, Sarkisian has put forth that they preach neither hatred nor revenge, that in this context Talat Pasha’s murderer Tehlirian acted not in a rapture of revenge but in the rapture of justice, that now they are strong enough to demand justice and has also indicated that as long as they are united, they will never allow the elimination of the memories of the Armenian genocide.

Then, Sarkisian, who has addressed relations with Turkey, has said the following:

*We have no doubt that Turkey will repent. It is neither a precondition, nor an attempt to fire revenge. Turkey must face its own history. Sometime, the Turkish leadership will find strength and will reevaluate its approaches toward the Armenian Genocide. Our position has not altered and it is precise: We are ready to have normal relations with Turkey as it befits neighboring states. Neighboring states such as, for instance, Poland and Germany, whose Chancellor Willy Brandt, realizing the crimes of his own country, went down on his knees in the Warsaw Ghetto. Sooner or later, Turkey, which views itself as a European country, will have a leadership which will be worthy of being called European and which will bow head at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial. The sooner, the better, however it's a prerogative of the people of Turkey. We don't obligate them; they should do it for the benefit of the Turkish people, just as Willy Brandt did for the German people.<sup>12</sup>*

11 “Soykırım İddialarını Fransa’da Reddetti (The Rejection of the Genocide Allegations in France)”, *Habertürk*, 7 April 2012.

12 “The full text of the speech could be found on the website of the Armenian President” <http://www.president.am/events/visits/eng/?visits=1&id=344>

In this speech of the Armenian President, the following points draw attention:

First of all, he does not see Soghomon Tehlirian as a murderer, but as a person administering justice. Despite openly confessing in a German court that he murdered Talat Pasha, the biased jury's decision of his acquittal has led to this conviction among Armenians. However, what does not legally change is that Tehlirian is a murderer. Armenian public opinion may not believe this. What is important here is that the Armenian President, who is in a position having most responsibility, has also ignored the principles of law and has not regarded Tehlirian as a murderer.

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Secondly, he expresses that Armenia is now strong enough to demand justice and this also shows that he accepts the Diaspora's statements as it is. Of course, how strong Armenia is could be debatable.

If these issues are brought to the agenda in the future by Armenia, they will become the source for new disagreements between the two countries.

Concerning the Armenian President's statements which directly refers to Turkey, Sarkisian's words that he does not doubt that Turkey will repent, that Turkey must face its own history, and that sooner or later Turkey will have a leadership which will be worthy of being called European and which will bow head at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial, have never been mentioned before by any Armenian President. Putting forth points which are impossible for Turkey to accept and characterizing the individuals governing Turkey today as non-European actually shows that Sarkisian is not willing at all to reach an agreement with Turkey. It could be understood that this harsh stance of Sarkisian is based on the fact that he does not want to reach an agreement in any area with Turkey before the presidential elections to be conducted in February 2013, because he believes that each agreement will be criticized and this will be to his disadvantage in the elections. In fact, even if Turkey ratifies the Protocols without any preconditions, as Armenia has always wanted, there is no guarantee that Armenia will also ratify these documents. On the other hand, if Sarkisian faces difficulties in winning the presidential elections, it is possible that he would denounce the Protocols which was essentially taken off the Parliament's agenda.

Reaction against Sarkisian's rather negative speech from Turkey has come from European Union Minister and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış. Apart from referring to Sarkisian as the "presumptuous president", he has said that no one could dare to bring the Turkish people to their knees. Furthermore, he has stated that "you already brought your nation to a point where they no longer have any strength left within them because of famine and poverty. Armenia's population fell from 4 million to 2 million. People are running away to all parts of the world. Some of them also came to our country".<sup>13</sup>

It could be seen through other occasions also that the Armenian President, who generally uses a moderate language, attempts to speak in a harsher language when Turkey is the subject. For instance, in his speech delivered on 10 March 2012 at the Congress of the Republican Party,<sup>14</sup> which is the Leader of, he has put forth that although the initiative of the Protocols didn't develop in the way desirable for Armenia, it still created some important results. He has said that first it has solidified the process of the international recognition of the Armenian genocide, secondly that it showed that the only obstacle for establishment of relations between Armenia and Turkey rest with Ankara and another capital, and third of all that Turkey was compelled to sign an international document (the Protocols) which rules out any precondition for establishment of the relations. Furthermore, by indicating that the denial of the Armenian genocide constitutes the prolongation of that crime, he has supported the views of the Dashnaks, which they have conveyed all along, and has tried to accuse the Turkish Republic of also participating in the "genocide" and later on, has repeated his last view in some of his election speeches.<sup>15</sup>

What has caused Serge Sarkisian to act this way is that he had formerly defended the Protocols both in Armenia and within the Diaspora. Now with more of a royalist approach than a king, he is attempting to prevent the criticisms that could be directed towards him regarding this issue.

Also in some of his statements provided due to the parliamentary elections, President Sarkisian has addressed Turkey-Armenia relations. In one of them, he has indicated that the Republican Party is resolute in the issue of struggling for international recognition of the Armenian genocide,<sup>16</sup> while in another statement he has put forth that in advance of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary

13 "Egemen Bağış'tan Sarkisyan'a: Haddini Bilmez Cumhurbaşkanı (From Egemen Bağış to Sarkisian: Presumptuous President)", *IHA*, 11 December 2011.

14 <http://www.president.am/events/statements/eng/?id=123>

15 "Republican Party of Armenia Considers any Denial of Genocide Direct Continuation of the Crime", *Armenpress*, 19 April 2012.

16 "Deniers of the Armenian Genocide Trespasped All Admissible Limits", *Armenpress*, 14 April 2012.

of the Armenian genocide, they will redouble their efforts at its international recognition and condemnation.<sup>17</sup> According to a Turkish source,<sup>18</sup> in a speech delivered a week before the parliamentary elections, the President has adopted a harsher language by saying that they are living alongside a country which denies the genocide against the Armenians and distorts its history everyday, that the crime continues today through the denial of history, that their claims for justice and compensation will continue and that they do not accept Turkey's insolent and arrogant policy.

The approach of Foreign Minister Nalbandyan is not any different. First, he clearly rejects a link being drawn between the Protocols and the Karabakh Conflict and also by repeating at every opportunity that "the ball is now in Turkey's field", he conveys that Armenia will not take any new initiative to revive the Protocols and calls on Turkey to ratify and implement the Protocols without linking it to the Karabakh issue. Meanwhile, he tries to undermine Ankara's efforts to revive the Protocols through Switzerland,<sup>19</sup> despite some news that Switzerland has accepted to play such a role again. Nalbandyan has conveyed his stance on negotiating again with Turkey by saying that neither direct nor mediated talks are underway today with Turkey and that this will only be possible when Turkey becomes ready for some practical steps.<sup>20</sup> It is unclear what these practical steps are, but it could be seen that in order to negotiate again with Turkey, Armenia tries to gain some concessions from Turkey. We must note here that Prime Minister Erdoğan had confirmed, through Swiss Foreign Minister, that an initiative was started with Armenia concerning this issue, but has said that "it was the other side which also ran away from this initiative. We always remained at the table but they fled".<sup>21</sup>

The Armenian Foreign Minister has not only criticized Turkey for its relations with Armenia, but also for the problems existing with its other neighbors. In response to a journalist's question during the Foreign Minister of Uruguay's visit to his country, he has said that Davutoğlu stated about Turkey's willingness to have zero problems with its neighbors, but the result was the increase of the problems with those countries, that they know from experience that it is very difficult to reach an agreement with Turkey and

17 "Sarkisyan Vows Greater Efforts at Genocide Recognition", *Azattyun*, 19 April 2013.

18 "Sarkisyan'dan Türkiye'ye Ağır İthamlar (Harsh Accusations from Sarkisian to Turkey)", *Haber7*, 30 April 2012.

19 "Signes de Relance des Protocoles" *Nouvelles d'Arménie Magazine*, No. 182, January 2012.

20 "No Talks are Underway With Turkey, Armenian FM", *News.am*, 30 January 2012.

21 "Erdoğan: "Umarım Hollande'ın AB üyelüğimizi Ermeni Sorununa Bağladığı Doğru Değildir (Erdoğan: I Hope It Is Not True That Hollande Has Linked Turkey's EU membership to the Armenian Question)", *Euroactiv.com.tr*, 8 May 2012.



that Turkey created difficulties not only during the negotiations, but even after the signing, and rejects to ratify and implement those agreements.<sup>22</sup>

In a press conference given together with US Foreign Minister Hillary Clinton, during her visit to Yerevan on 4 June 2012, Edward Nalbandyan<sup>23</sup> has said that concerning relations with Turkey, their position remains the normalization of relations without preconditions.

In response to the Dashnak organ Yerkir newspaper's question of "Turkey insists on highest level that negotiations over the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations are underway. Are these claims true?", he has said "Negotiations are not conducted, negotiations cannot be conducted, as negotiations are over and they resulted in signing of the protocols, which Turkey refuses to respect and implement, trying to put forward preconditions" and has indicated that Armenian-Turkish relations should be normalized without preconditions, that this is the approach of the international community, as was stated by Madame Secretary as well.

As could be seen, the Armenian Foreign Minister does not seek to restart negotiations with Turkey. The US Foreign Minister also emphasizing that they have urged the ratification of the protocols without preconditions and that there is no linkage between the protocols process and the Karabakh negotiations has encouraged the Armenians.

It is for sure that just as with President Sarkisian, the parliamentary elections also lie at the basis of Foreign Minister Nalbandyan's uncompromising approach. In fact, this issue has also been presented by Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu to Hillary Clinton, who seems persistent on talks being held between the two sides, and it has been declared that Turkey is always ready to normalize relations with Armenia, but the Yerevan government must get rid of domestic policy concerns and abandon its genocide allegations.<sup>24</sup> However, following the parliamentary elections that was held on May 6, the presidential elections, which is much more important for Armenia, will be held in the beginning of next year. Then, activities for the commemoration for the 100th anniversary of 1915 are expected to intensify. In short, it is not expected for Armenia's "domestic policy concerns" to come to an end in a short time.

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22 "The address and answers of the Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandian and Luis Almagro, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay during the joint press conference" 04 May 2012  
[http://www.mfa.am/en/interviews/item/2012/05/04/nalbandian\\_almagro/4](http://www.mfa.am/en/interviews/item/2012/05/04/nalbandian_almagro/4) May 2012

23 "Press conference - Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian's and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's statements and answers during joint press conference" - 04.06.2012 -  
<http://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/item/2012/06/04/clinton/>

24 "Clinton'a 3 Açık Mesaj (3 Open Messages to Clinton)", *Hürriyet*, 4 April 2012.

On the other hand, it could also be observed that there is no change in Turkey's policy towards Armenia. This has been indicated by Prime Minister Erdoğan's statement issued to President Obama during the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul that "I said that it is not possible for us to take a step back".

From the information provided to the press by the Prime Minister, it could be understood that he has also discussed the following points with President Obama.<sup>25</sup>

The Prime Minister has expressed that although Turkey has worked together with the Minsk Group's three members (the US, Russia and France) on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict for 20 years, it has not obtained any result and that Turkey is ready to do their share of work regarding the Karabakh issue. This point is particularly important because it is possible for Turkey to ratify the protocols and/or open the border if significant steps are taken towards the resolution of the Karabakh conflict.

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Second of all, it could be understood that the Prime Minister has conveyed to President Obama his concern with the draft resolutions in the US Congress and in return, has been met with understanding.

Last of all, Prime Minister Erdoğan has explained the Armenians in Turkey and what has been done for the Armenian citizens working in Turkey to President Obama. (In summary, these include restoration of some Armenian churches in Turkey by the state, returning of some properties to Armenian foundations and providing education for the children of the Armenian citizens working in Turkey.)

## **2. Relations with Turkey in the Armenian Parliamentary Elections and the Karabakh Conflict**

It could be seen that relations with Turkey during the Armenian parliamentary elections has not been addressed much. In essence, this also holds true for relations with Azerbaijan. The reason for this situation is not that importance is not attached to relations with Turkey, but because there is no serious divergence of opinion that exists between the parties. In other

<sup>25</sup> "Obama'ya 24 Nisan Uyarısı (24 April Warning to Obama)", *İhlas*, 26 March 2012.

words, there is no issue to be discussed in a situation where everyone believes that an Armenian genocide took place and that Turkey must recognize this genocide, give compensation to the concerning parties and return the properties. Since this also holds true for the Karabakh Conflict where no one supports Karabakh joining Azerbaijan, the Karabakh issue has also not been addressed much.

It could be seen that Ter-Petrossian has addressed these two issues the most. Based on the WikiLeaks documents, he has accused the Government of accepting Turkey's proposal for a Commission of Historians and also the Madrid principles in the Karabakh issue. However, Armenia has not accepted the proposal for a Commission of Historians. Regarding the Karabakh Conflict, it is difficult to say that Armenia has completely accepted the Madrid Principles whose full text has not been declared.

Although the genocide allegations have not been mentioned much during the election campaigns, it could be understood that the issue has been addressed in the parties' election programs.

At a time when the 100th anniversary of 1915 is drawing near, the Republican Party has indicated that people's unity is necessary for the international recognition of the genocide and that it will continue the efforts on keeping the issues on its recognition and condemnation in the agenda of the international community.

The parties of Prosperous Armenia, Heritage and Armenian National Congress have expressed that they attach great significance to the international recognition of the genocide and have also stressed the importance of the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations without preconditions and the necessity of the opening of borders.

While the Rule of Law Party has also stressed the international recognition of the genocide, it has attached significance to the establishment of good neighborly relations with Turkey without preconditions.

Armenia's Democratic Party, which has received 0.37 percent of the votes in the elections, has said that relations with Turkey cannot be settled at the cost of refusal of Armenia's legal demand. What these legal demands are have not been explained.

The United Armenians Party, which has received 0.2 percent of the votes, also after rating high the recognition of the genocide allegations, has stressed the necessity of reviewing the 1921 Moscow and Kars treaties.

Armenia's Communist Party, receiving 1.5 percent of the votes, has indicated that it is unequivocally against establishment of any relations with Turkey and will demand from the world recognition of the Armenian genocide.

On the other hand, the Dashnak Party which has a special place in relations with Turkey, demands that no documents be signed that would question the legitimacy of US President Woodrow Wilson's Arbitrary Verdict of the Treaty of Sevres of 1920 which has left 120.000 km<sup>2</sup> of today's Turkey to Armenia and the signature of the Armenian side should be recalled from the Turkey-Armenia Protocols.

Some Turkish journalists travelling to Yerevan in order to follow the elections have spoken with some Armenian statesmen concerning relations with Turkey. Below, we are providing very briefly some of these individuals whom we deem significant.<sup>26</sup>

Samvel Nikoyan (Speaker of the Parliament): Recognition of the genocide is necessary for Armenia's security. (This view is common both in Armenia and among the Diaspora. However, it cannot be understood how a link has been drawn between the recognition of the genocide allegations and Armenia's security.) Turkey having close relations with Azerbaijan and supporting it creates fear in Armenia. The proposal for a Commission of Historians is like trying to re-discover whether or not the sun rises from the east. All of us heard from our families what happened in 1915. The Protocols must be implemented without any preconditions (without linking them to the Karabakh conflict), but Turkey views the Armenian Question from the perspective of Karabakh. It conducts economic relations through Georgia.

Galust Sahakyan (Leader of the Ruling Republican Party of Armenia): Turkey thinks like the Ottomans. It continues the ideas of Abdülhamit and the Young Turks. There is no need for historians in order to understand what happened in 1915. For us, a joint commission of historians is where joint works could be conducted in the areas of education, culture, art and history and a commission which will write history books that will instill friendship among the young. Turkey is becoming more democratic. There are those who also address the genocide. The other parties used to say "Turkey should first recognize the genocide and then establish relations with this country". But, we say that first relations could start and then the problems could be resolved. We are not going to take any steps back within the Karabakh issue.

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26 "Sınır Açılıp İlişkiler Başlarsa Sorunlarımız da Çözülür (Our Problems Will Be Resolved if the Border Is Opened and Relations are Established)", *Stargazete.com*, 14 May 2012.

For us, the Karabakh problem and the genocide issue are more important than an establishment of relations with Turkey. Turkey is a great state, the Turks are a great nation, but the Azerbaijanis are not like that. The numbers of Azerbaijanis in Karabakh have never exceeded 150 thousand. Azerbaijan is an artificial country created by the USSR. Azerbaijan does not exist in historical sources, but Armenia exists within works belonging to the period before Christ; it has an alphabet and architecture, but the Azerbaijanis do not. It is natural for territorial claims to follow the recognition of the genocide. The situation of the Turks killed in the war in Eastern Anatolia (the Turks who have died as a result of the Armenian atrocities?) is not the same with the situation of the Armenians who were murdered by the government in a planned manner. The Armenians have been forced to relocate.

Vartan Oskanyan (Former Foreign Minister): I do not believe in the necessity for a Joint Commission of Historians. This means that history, which we know very well, will be researched all over again. All researches define 1915 as genocide. First we should normalize our relations. Turkey showed that it considers Karabakh more important and more of a priority than opening of the Armenian border. Turkey will not take any steps; the border will not be opened unless the Karabakh issue is resolved. I do not foresee a settlement in a short period.

Raffi Hovhannisyan (Armenia's first Foreign Minister and Leader of the Heritage Party): We did not only lose our people in 1915, we also lost our original homeland. We lost our homes, churches, traditions and culture of living. Those responsible for this are the Young Turks and the Europeans. This problem is a great burden for both nations. We must overcome this. I am against the Protocols. For me, what is essential are Turkey-Armenia relations, Karabakh is secondary in importance. We lost so much after the genocide that we were only able to preserve Karabakh. Together with Turkey, we want to become EU members and a part of European values. There is a slight change within the Turkish community, but the main trend is not changing, politics is not changing.

Giro Manoyan (Member of the Dashnak Party): In our opinion, there is no problem that exists between the two communities. The problem is in the Turkish state ignoring the genocide. Turkey's recognition of the genocide is a security matter for us (why?), it is not correct to separate the Ottomans from the Turkish Republic. I believe that it is a continuation of the Kemalists and Young Turks. Nothing new exists in the Protocols for the Armenians. The Armenian government was wrong in signing the Protocols; it must withdraw its signature. Both sides should start diplomatic relations

without preconditions, the border should be opened and the problems between the two countries should be settled according to international norms. We have lost so much that we cannot give up Karabakh.

Two of the five individuals, Nikoyan and Sahakyan, whose statements we have provided examples from, are from the same party. The other three figures are from different parties. Despite this, their views on relations with Turkey and the genocide allegations are almost the same. On the other hand, these views contradict a majority of the views in Turkey. This situation clearly displays why problems existing between Turkey and Armenia fail to be resolved.

### **3. Some of Turkey's Initiatives**

Right after the signing of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols, Turkey linking the ratification of these documents to significant developments taking place within the Karabakh conflict and in return, Armenia making the Protocols null and void through the decision of the Constitutional Court have not only prevented a normalization of relations between the two countries, but have also caused them to enter a period of tension. It is still possible to say that current relations are still worse than relations during the period before the Protocols were signed. As mentioned above, particularly due to domestic policy reasons, Armenia does not seem willing to change its approach without receiving important concessions from Turkey such as the border being opened. On the other hand, again as mentioned above, the Turkish Prime Minister has indicated that Turkey is not ready for a change in policy. From this, it could be assumed that the current situation will continue for some time.

When observing more closely, it could be seen that Turkish-Armenian relations is not based on Turkey-Armenia relations. Truly, Turkey-Diaspora relations and the situation of the Armenians in Turkey are also on the agenda. It could be understood that since progress has not been achieved in Turkey-Armenia relations, Turkey has tried to become more active in these two areas mentioned.

#### **a. Efforts to Settle Some of the Problems of the Armenians in Turkey**

First of all, we must note that the Armenians in Turkey are not a part of the problem concerning Turkish-Armenian or Turkey-Armenia relations. However, there is the possibility that some problems of this community will be exaggerated by the Armenian Diaspora or by Armenia itself and will be

used against Turkey as an instrument of propaganda. But beyond this, it is the natural right of the Armenians, as citizens in Turkey, to expect the Government to settle their problems. It is not possible to provide detailed information on these problems within the framework of this article, but in summary we could say that these problems comprise properties of the Armenian Foundation, restoration of the Armenian religious and other monuments in Turkey and some problems regarding schools.

The Turkish Government has started the process of resolving these problems by deciding on the restoration of the Akhtamar Church in Van. As known, after its restoration, the church has been opened as a museum. Moreover, religious liturgies take place at least once a year. The restoration of some Armenian churches, especially the one in Diyarbakır, continues.

Second of all, the Government has decided, through a decree law in 2001, on returning some properties belonging to non-Muslim foundations which were confiscated for various reasons. With the regulations being implemented on 1 October 2011, there have been applications by 26 foundations, belonging to 10 Greek, 9 Armenian, 3 Jewish, 2 Syrian, 1 Chaldean and 1 Bulgarian community, for the returning of 78 immovable properties<sup>27</sup> and procedures for returning them have started. Therefore, one of the most important complaints of non-Muslims has reached a solution.

### **b. Turkey's Initiatives to Establish Contacts with the Diaspora Armenians**

In Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's opening speech on 23 December 2011 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Ambassadors Conference in Ankara,<sup>28</sup> it has been indicated that the concept of Diaspora must be changed, that each person migrating from the lands of Anatolia is the Diaspora of Turkey regardless of their religion and sect, and therefore it is important to go and talk to Armenians wherever they are and address their common history. Furthermore, he has signified that they should win the hearts of the Armenians by explaining to them that they have lived together for 10 centuries, but that some colonialists created trouble between them in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

27 "Azınlık Cemaatleri Vakıflarından 78 Taşınmaz Gayrimenkul için Başvuru" *Hristiyan Gazete*, 13 April 2012  
<http://www.hristiangazete.com/2012/04/azinlik-cemaatleri-vakiflarindan-78-tasinmaz-gayrimenkul-icin-basvuru/>

28 "Dışişleri Bakanı Sn. Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun IV. Büyükelçiler Konferansı Açılış Konuşması" 23 December 2011  
[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sn\\_-ahmet-davutoglu\\_nun-iv\\_-buyukelciler-konferansi-acis-konusmasi\\_-23-aralik-2011.tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sn_-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-iv_-buyukelciler-konferansi-acis-konusmasi_-23-aralik-2011.tr.mfa)

On the other hand, some news were come across which put forth that contacts had started with some of the Diaspora Armenians.<sup>29</sup>

An Armenian newspaper<sup>30</sup> had written that the Turkish diplomats worldwide were instructed to invite and involve the Diaspora Armenians in Turkish events, to participate in Armenian community activities, invite to Turkey those Armenians who harbor anti-Turkish sentiments, to establish good relations with Armenian diplomats, to deliver speeches to explain Turkey's position on Armenian genocide claims, to establish contacts with local academics, to familiarize diplomats of countries neighboring Turkey with Turkey's position on Armenian genocide claims, to advocate the creation of a joint commission of historians, to promote normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations and to emphasize that the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict would benefit Turkey-Armenia relations.

The same source has also indicated that Foreign Minister Davutoğlu had spent several hours in Washington in March 2012, meeting privately with several Armenians from the Los Angeles area to discuss Turkey-Armenia reconciliation and had invited the attendees to come to Ankara.

This development has created a rush among the Diaspora Armenians in the US. The same source also expressed that the Armenians who choose to get involved in Turkish recruitment schemes could well be seeking fame or fortune, or is well-intentioned, but naïve do-gooders and they should be mindful of the consequences of their actions. Furthermore, it wrote that the Turkish government would exploit such efforts to create the false impression that Armenians and Turks are in the process of reconciling, so only Armenian officials and credible leaders with diplomatic expertise should be negotiating with shrewd and skilled Turkish diplomats.<sup>31</sup>

Last of all, some Turks and Armenians favoring a dialogue met in Washington at an institution called HasNa.<sup>32</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, an executive board member of HasNa, after emphasizing in his speech delivered for this occasion that the only real hope towards a solution in the long term within the Turkish-Armenian dispute was to go from “people to people”, he has said that the Armenians experienced a ‘trauma’ due to the 1915 events, while the Turks experienced it because of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and called on the parties to refrain from actions that would trigger

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29 *Milliyet*, 12 April 2012.

30 “Sassounian: Turkey’s Foreign Minister in Search of ‘soft ‘ Armenians”, *The Armenian Weekly*, 10 April 2012.

31 *Ibid*.

32 “Uzlaşmacı Ermenilerle Türkler, Washington’da buluştu (Compromising Armenians and Turks Met in Washington)”, *Zaman*, 14 April 2012.



these traumas. Taşpınar, who also indicated that the hints of some Armenians that they will first make Turkey recognize the ‘genocide’ and then make financial compensation and territorial demands has fueled the ‘threat perception’ in Turkey, has said that in the first stage, the dialogue could first start between those Turks ready to recognize the genocide allegations and the Armenians who do not find the 1915 events similar to the Holocaust.

Although Taşpınar has received reproachful and criticizing comments from some Armenians in the room, US Armenian Mary Anne Kibarian, member of HasNa who is originally from Harput, has said that she supports dialogue between people and that the recognition of genocide should not be set as a precondition for this. Kibarian, who also indicated the significance of engagement between people through trade, called on the opening of the border between Turkey and Armenia.

The Armenian National Committee of America, which is the most important Armenian institution in the US that has a Dashnak tendency and the Armenian Assembly of America, which much rather represents the prosperous Armenians have chosen to remain silent for the time being concerning this issue. However, the journalist/writer read the most by the Armenians in the US Harut Sassounian has suggested that the major Armenian organizations should start drafting a common strategy and a list of demands from Turkey. Moreover, he has put forth that no Armenian organization or individual should be involved in separate negotiations with Turkey, denying Ankara the opportunity to create disunity in the Diaspora. On the other hand, he called on the diasporan representatives to coordinate their negotiation positions with leaders of Armenia and Karabakh to assure a common stand vis-à-vis Turkey.<sup>33</sup>

Establishing direct contacts with the Diaspora Armenians is a display of goodwill. On the other hand, it is an action which will contribute to surpassing some biases and extreme stances of the Diaspora Armenians. Even though obtaining a result in the short term is very difficult, it is beneficial to follow this path.

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33 Harut Sassounian. “How Should the Diaspora React to the Turkish Overtures”, *The Armenian Weekly*, 23 May 2012.

#### 4. Efforts to Revive Turkey-Armenia Relations

As briefly mentioned above, Turkey-Armenia relations have currently seem to have entered a period of tension which is beyond only suspension. The main reason for this is, Armenia is still in an atmosphere of elections. Following the Parliamentary Elections held on May 6, the Presidential Elections are now expected in February next year and it could be understood that within this timeframe, President Sarkisian, seen as the main person responsible for the signing of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols, will not take any initiative to restore relations with Turkey. On the other hand, it is also assumed that in order not to seem as making concessions, Sarkisian will remain passive regarding the Karabakh Conflict. When considering that Turkey sets significant developments taking place within the Karabakh Conflict as a precondition for the ratification of the Protocols by the Turkish Grand National Assembly, it could be better understood that relations between the two countries are still at a stalemate.

Meanwhile, it could be seen that some articles have been published in the Turkish press that this static situation is not to Turkey's advantage, that at a time when 2015 is drawing near, the various activities which the Armenians will organize for its anniversary will harm Turkey and therefore, Turkey should not wait and take some measures.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, some suggestions on what Turkey could do regarding this issue have not come from the Turkish press or writers, but from David L. Phillips who is known for holding close contacts with the US Foreign Ministry, at least during the Republicans' period.

Phillips has dedicated the final section entitled "The Way Forward" of his research published on March 2nd 2012 by Columbia University, Institute for the Study of Human Rights and known shortly as "Diplomatic History: The Turkey-Armenia Protocols"<sup>35</sup> to what could be done for the normalization of relations between the two countries.

Phillips has been frequently mentioned in the past years on issues concerning Turkey-Armenia relations and the Armenian Question. Through

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34 Mehmet Ali Birand has led this movement in Turkey. Look at his following articles published in Hürriyet Newspaper articles on this subject: "Gelin Geçmişimizle Kendimiz Hesaplaşalım" (Come, Let's Settle with Our Own Past) *Hürriyet*, 26 January 2012; "ABD Raporu: Ermenistan ile İlişkiler Açılmalı" (US Report: Relations Must Resume with Armenia) *Hürriyet*, 2 March 2012; "Kendimizi 'soykırım'a Teslim Ediyoruz (We Are Surrendering to 'Genocide')" *Milliyet*, 24 April 2012

35 *Diplomatic History: The 2009 Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey and the 2009 Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia*. Columbia University, Institute for the Study of Human Rights in collaboration with the Future of Diplomacy Project, Harvard Kennedy School, March 2012

the initiative of the US Foreign Ministry, he has established the “Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission” in 2001 comprised of some Turkish and Armenian individuals and has served as its coordinator (moderator) until the Commission ended in 2004. Although the members of this Commission were important personalities at one time, they had no official position; in other words, the members did not represent the governments of Turkey or Armenia. This Commission was an implementation of the US method known as “track two” diplomacy in which non-official individuals or non-governmental organizations come together in order to contribute to or make the resolution of some international issues easier. It has been observed that “track two” dialogues have been beneficial for the development of cultural, scientific, sportive and even economic relations. However, in cases where serious divergences in political issues exist, it is very difficult for these kinds of dialogues to produce tangible results; in other words, to achieve what the governments have failed in doing so. In fact, the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission has also experienced this course.

The event which brought the end of the Commission is that upon Phillip’s proposal, the ICTJ (International Center for Transitional Justice) was asked whether or not the 1948 UN Genocide Convention could be applied to the 1915 events. In the ICTJ’s response, it was indicated that the 1948 Convention cannot be applied retroactively and therefore compensation and territory could not be claimed from Turkey. But ICTJ also addressed an issue which was not asked from them and expressed that if the UN Convention was applied retroactively, then the 1915 events would be considered as genocide. Since this response also implied that Turkey would not pay compensation or give territory if it recognizes the Armenian genocide allegations, it had drawn the objections of its Turkish members. On the other hand, the Dashnak Party, which had no members in the Commission, was not at all pleased with this response which did not take into consideration their territorial claims and passed an order to a jurist named Alfred de Zayas to write a report indicating that the 1948 Convention may be applied retroactively. Righteously, Phillips was held responsible for this event which caused displeasure on both sides and the Commission disbanded when it was no longer able to continue with other members.

The talks in the Commission were confidential. In 2005, by writing a book entitled “Unsilencing the Past”, Phillips disclosed these talks and tried to settle accounts with some of its members.

Meanwhile, President Bush has expressed in his 24 April statements in 2005

and 2006 that the analysis of ICTJ, while not the final word, has marked a significant step towards reconciliation. Therefore, it has been understood that the formula of “not paying compensation or giving territory if genocide is recognized” put forth by Philips is also supported by the US Government and most probably inspired by it.

On the other hand, the governments of Turkey and Armenia have preferred to avoid “track two” activities which are out of their control.<sup>36</sup>

The quite important proposals mentioned at the end of Phillips’s research, which we mentioned above and which was published in the beginning of March under the title “Diplomatic History: The Turkey-Armenia Protocols”, are provided below in summary without changing its contents and gathering them under certain headings so that they will be understood better:

#### **a. Proposals on Intensifying Civil Society Activities**

At the top of Phillips’s proposals come the “track two” activities, which is his area of specialization; in other words, the activities between the civil society organizations and professional associations of Turkey and Armenia. Phillips finds “track two” activities necessary when there is absence of progress at the intergovernmental level. He complains that there are not enough funds and that the EU should participate in these activities and should establish a “Turkey-Armenia Opportunity Fund”. Moreover, he calls on the Swedish International Development Agency, which we believe has funded some activities, to organize a “Track Two Implementation Review Conference”.

Phillips’s concrete proposals on civil society activities could be summarized as follows.

1. Civil society organizations should prepare a “Friendship Treaty” enumerating principles of good neighborly relations and collectively identifying areas of common endeavor.
2. Another proposal for think tanks of both countries is to conduct a public opinion survey on social attitudes of Turks towards Armenians and of Armenians towards Turks and the results of it to

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36 Extensive Information was provided in our past Journals on the Works of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission, ICTJ’s report and within this framework, David L. Phillips’s activities. On this issue see: *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 2, pp. 15-22; No. 3, pp. 23-25; No. 4, pp. 15-18; No. 16-17, p. 57; No. 20-21, pp. 49-51; No. 25, p. 14 and No. 33-34, p. 51

be used to inform future Track Two activities, shape public policy and encourage intergovernmental contact.

#### **b. Proposals for Economic Cooperation**

1. Restoration of the Ani Bridge across the Akhurian River (Arpaçay) between Turkey and Armenia as a symbol of Armenia's cultural presence in modern Turkey or at least opening it for tourism,
2. Rebuilding of the "Statute of Humanity", which was dismantled in Kars on grounds that it was unwanted by the population, as "a symbol of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation" with input from Turkish and Armenian artists,
3. Establishing "Centers of Excellence" in fields such as cancer research in Armenia as a magnet for Turks and other international experts and Armenia relaxing visa processing for Turks who are visiting for academic meetings,
4. Increasing new charter flights between Van and Yerevan in order to expand people-to-people and commercial contacts and Turkish Airlines opening an office in Yerevan for this purpose,
5. Ankara opening the border for Armenian tourist buses and allowing pilgrim groups and cultural tours to travel,
6. Within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, 200 Armenian trucks have been allowed to travel through Turkey. Thus, Armenian trucks should also be allowed to off-load in Turkey,
7. Turkey importing electricity from Armenia in order for the economic development of its provinces bordering Armenia,
8. Establishing a "Qualifying Industrial Zone" in the Armenian region of Kazakh bordering Turkey which consists of an industrial park and a free-trade zone. Qualifying goods would have access to the US market without tariffs or quotas,
9. Turkey has a fiber optic cable that extends all the way to Kars. A feasibility study should be conducted on the opportunities of this cable being used in Armenia.

### c. Proposals on Reviving Intergovernmental Contacts

1. Phillips puts forth that the conclusion reached in the report of the ICTJ, which we mentioned above (Turkey will not pay compensation or give territory if it recognizes the genocide allegations), should be used as a road map in intergovernmental contacts and rapprochement between the two countries.
2. Another important proposal is for Turkey and Armenia to recognize and open the existing border. For this, diplomatic notes reaffirming commitments in the 1921 Treaties of Moscow and Kars should be exchanged. Therefore, the free transit of commodities will also be guaranteed. An exchange of diplomatic notes does not require parliamentary authorization.
3. Inspired from Armenia's assistance during the Van Earthquake, Turkish-Armenian cooperation in the field of emergency preparedness must be achieved,
4. Turkish citizenship should be offered to the descendants of relocated Armenians.
5. Taking into consideration that Prime Minister Erdoğan apologized for those who died in Dersim and depending on timing and circumstances, he puts forth that apologizing for the suffering of Armenians may be in Turkey's national interest.
6. Before considering a Joint Historical Commission proposed by Turkey, a research committee of Turkish, Armenian and international historians could be established to focus on methodology of archival research.
7. A joint committee of Turkish and Armenian restoration experts should identify monuments and cultural sites for rehabilitation.
8. An exhibition which displays the role of Armenians in the Ottoman Army should be opened.
9. The names of the "Righteous Turks" who sheltered and saved Armenians from relocation should be profiled in the Armenian Genocide Museum in Yerevan.
10. The Obama Administration should conduct a policy review exploring innovative approaches co-mingling Turkish and Armenian

interests. Meanwhile, whether US recognition of the genocide allegations would create conditions for reconciliation should be discussed.

11. Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code should be abolished.
12. Another one of Phillips's proposals concerns Azerbaijan. According to this, if Baku shows that it lacks the political will to make progress in the Karabakh issue, the Minsk Group co-chairs should suspend negotiations after announcing Azerbaijan's obstructionism.
13. Prime Minister Erdoğan should issue an executive order in the name of humanity to open the Turkey-Armenia border and submit the Protocols for ratification by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. This magnanimity is in accordance with Islamic principles and helps to realize Atatürk's ideal of "Peace at home, peace abroad".

From Phillips's proposals on what could be done for the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations, the following conclusions have been reached:

First of all, it could be seen that Phillips attaches too much importance on the activities of civil society organizations shortly referred to as "track two". Although the idea of intensifying civil society activities when there is absence or minimization of contacts on an intergovernmental level is accurate in essence, it is difficult to receive positive outcomes from the activities and initiatives of civil society organizations during a period when serious disagreements exist between the two countries, especially concerning the genocide allegations, inviolability of borders and the Karabakh issue.

Within this framework, as Phillips has proposed, although preparing a "Friendship Treaty", as a result of "track two" activities, is possible in principle, it should not be expected from the governments of any of the two countries to adopt texts prepared by individuals and/or institutions lacking both competence and responsibility.

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Therefore, there will be a greater chance for “track two” activities to be successful if they deal with more moderate concerns and emphasize issues such as science, culture, sports and economics in particular.

When observing Phillips’s proposals, it could be seen that almost all of them are to Armenia’s favor. It is obvious that a person who acts as a mediator must remain “neutral” as possible. However, just as he did with the works of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission, this time he has brought forward proposals which please the Armenians. But, by doing this, he reduces the possibility of these proposals being taken into consideration by Turkey.

As known, the Turkey-Armenia Protocols have failed to be implemented due to the Karabakh issue and the border between the two countries continues to remain closed. Phillips proposes for the bridge across the the Akhurian River (Arpaçay) to be restored and at least opened for tourism, the border to be opened for Armenian tourist buses, pilgrim groups and cultural tours, new charter flights between Van and Yerevan to be increased in order to expand people-to-people and commercial contacts and Armenian trucks to be allowed to off-load in Turkey. If all these are realized, then to a great extent the border will be opened; in other words, the Protocols will partially be implemented through some kind of a method as a “bypass”.

There are some speculations, mostly based on Armenian/US sources that the eastern provinces of Turkey needs energy, that Armenia is capable of selling electricity and therefore, such a great trade-off will contribute to the development of relations between the two countries. Phillips repeats these speculations. However, when examined closely, it could be seen that Armenia does not possess reliable resources for producing electricity. The Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, which is the main source of energy, has already lived out its lifespan and is closed frequently for restoration. Other sources of petroleum and natural gas in producing electricity are also imported by Armenia. Due to some security issues, importation through Georgia is sometimes ceased. In this situation, experiencing problems is inevitable when receiving electricity from Armenia.

Some of Phillips’s proposals under the heading of reviving intergovernmental contacts would not lead to a revival of these contacts, but on the opposite would cause their failure from the very beginning if they are insisted upon.

The ICTJ’s famous formula of Turkey not paying compensation and not giving territory to Armenia if it recognizes the genocide allegations



completely contradicts Turkey's policy which it has followed until now and which has no reason to not continue from now on. When remembering the great reactions of governments and public opinion in Turkey towards the US genocide resolutions, there is no possibility that US recognition of the genocide allegations will lead to reconciliation over time between the two countries. The proposal that Prime Minister Erdoğan should apologize to the Armenians just as he did for the Dersim events is based on a very incorrect, but common belief that only the Armenians have suffered during the First World War. The fact that 518.000 civilian Muslims were slaughtered by Armenian gangs during the war has been proven by the Ottoman official documents recently published. Therefore, it is evident that unless the Armenians and their advocates possess a "just memory", it will not be possible for true reconciliation between Turkey-Armenia and the Turks and Armenians to be reached.

Phillips is not realistic at all on the Karabakh issue. He proposes that if Azerbaijan does not show the political will necessary in resolving this issue; in other words, does not make concessions to Armenia, the Minsk Group co-chairs should suspend negotiations. When considering the criticisms of Azerbaijan together with Turkey towards the Minsk Group, we do not believe that they will complain if this Group ceases to function.

Phillips's most constructive proposal is the one regarding the recognition and opening of the border between Turkey and Armenia. He states that this could be done through exchange of diplomatic notes and that this does not require parliamentary authorization. Technically this is possible. However, it seems that he has forgotten that the border remains closed because no progress has been achieved in the Karabakh issue.

Last of all, Phillips calls on Prime Minister Erdoğan to issue an executive order "in the name of humanity" to open the Turkey-Armenia border and submit the Protocols for ratification by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. However, it is difficult to understand what the benefit will be of the Turkish Prime Minister abandoning its policy, which Turkey has followed for years, and giving Armenia such a gift by ignoring its relations with Azerbaijan.

We believe that Phillip's proposals essentially reflect Armenian views and therefore, there is no possibility for it being accepted and implemented as a whole. Perhaps it might be possible to dwell on some of them which do not have a political aspect (such as extending the Turkish optic cable to Armenia) if Armenia is still interested after it is rid of the election atmosphere it currently is in.

Let us also note that proposals towards reviving relations between Turkey and Armenia have not only come from Phillips. Richard Giragosian, an American Armenian who is the Director of the Regional Studies Center in Yerevan and therefore, who has come to Turkey many times in the recent years, has listed the measures that could be taken as follows:

- The Embassy of Turkey in Georgia being accredited by Yerevan
- Opening of the border for a certain period of time (once a month?) for trucks and also for tour (tourism) buses
- Turkish Airlines opening an office in Yerevan

*Apart from Turkey's strategic position, the US Government also seeks to maintain friendly relations with Turkey due to its influence over the Middle East countries.*

Giragosian has said that these proposals have been conveyed to Turkish officials and are being evaluated and that furthermore, 2015 forms a pressure upon Turkey, therefore the Turkish Government could take some of these steps.<sup>37</sup>

The interesting point here is that these kinds of proposals indirectly aim towards partially implementing the protocols. The Turkish Embassy in Tbilisi opening an office in Yerevan will mean diplomatic relations being established, while opening the border for a certain time or on certain days for trucks and tour buses will constitute the means towards the border being opened completely.

In conclusion, since Turkey still links the ratification of the protocols by the Turkish Grand National Assembly and their implementation to positive and significant developments taking place within the Karabakh Conflict, it is possible to say that the proposals mentioned above have been put forth in order for Turkey to at least partially change its policy.

## II – THE US AND THE ARMENIAN QUESTION

The US continues to be the most active country within the Armenian question. Apart from Turkey's strategic position, the US Government also seeks to maintain friendly relations with Turkey due to its influence over the Middle East countries. As seen so far, a great majority of the US Congress also embraces and supports this policy. On the other hand, a Group exists in both houses of the Congress which supports extreme Armenian views

37 "Sınırlar Ayda Bir Gün Açılabilir (Borders Could Be Opened Once a Month)", *Taraf*, 27 April 2012.

although contradicting US interests and which is far from being a majority, but still cannot be underestimated.

Below, we will summarize the main developments on the Armenian question that occurred in the US starting from approximately the end of 2011 until today (May 2012).

### 1. Vice President Joe Biden's Visit to Turkey

The US Government's desire to maintain friendly relations as much as possible with Turkey has clearly been displayed during Vice President Joe Biden's visit to Ankara in the beginning of December in 2011.

Biden, who is a senator in the Congress since 1973, had especially supported the Armenian allegations without any refrains while he was Chairman of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee. Trying not to openly contradict the President's policy after becoming Vice President, he has worked towards maintaining the same approach in a reasonable manner.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, it is known that Biden was also close to the Greek lobby in the past and had openly disputed with Prime Minister Ecevit and Foreign Minister İsmail Cem in the 1990's when crises like Kardak with Greece had occurred.<sup>39</sup>

In the talks held with President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan during Biden's visit, the situation in Iraq has been addressed in detail and the issue of PKK has been stressed. The subjects of Iran and nuclear weapons have also been important matters of discussion during the talks. The issues of the situation in Syria and Turkey-Israel relations, the elections in Egypt, and Libya, Kosovo and Bosnia have also been mentioned. By remaining under the influence of the Greek lobby, Biden has also conveyed his hope towards the Greek Theological School in Heybeliada being reopened and has praised the steps taken towards returning of the properties of minorities in Turkey.<sup>40</sup>

Concerning the Armenian Question, which was not emphasized much during the talks, news were published in the press that he was concerned over the steps taken towards the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia<sup>41</sup> and that he hopes Turkey will take steps in the upcoming months regarding the Protocols.<sup>42</sup>

38 See: *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 23-25, p. 18; No. 30, p.26; Sayı 31, p. 27; No. 32, p. 37 and 40

39 "12 Yılda Biden'e Ne Oldu ? (What Happened to Biden in 12 Years?)", *Hürriyet*, 7 December 2011.

40 "Erdoğan, Biden Discuss Iraq, Cooperation Against PKK in Istanbul", *Today's Zaman*, 4 December 2011.

41 "Eskiden Sevmez di, Şimdi Türkiye'ye Aşık (He Did Not Like It in the Past, Now He Adores Turkey)", *Milliyet*, 3 December 2011.

42 "Erdoğan'dan ne İstedi? (What Did He Want From Erdoğan?)", *CNN Türk*, 4 December 2011.

These statements of Biden do not reflect the policy of the US on Turkey-Armenia relations. This policy could be summarized as follows: The US does not find it convenient for Turkey to link the ratification of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols by the Turkish Grand National Assembly to significant developments taking place in the Karabakh Conflict. However, it also understands that it is not possible for Turkey to ratify the Protocols and especially to open the border by disregarding the stance of its public opinion and relations with Azerbaijan. On the other hand, when considering that Armenia did not want to be active regarding the Karabakh issue during the parliamentary and presidential elections, together with Turkey's approach, a static situation emerges and this creates concern that the normalization process of Turkey-Armenia relations will be negatively influenced.

In order to eradicate the drawbacks of this situation within a range of possibilities, the US wants contacts between Turkey and Armenia to continue and for the Turkish border to be temporarily opened under certain circumstances and moreover, in order to make it easier for public opinions to come close to each other, the US promotes the NGOs of both countries to make contacts with each other.

On the other hand, in order to fulfill Turkey's most important request, the US Government objects to the initiatives in the Congress which foresees the recognition of the Armenian genocide allegations or which tries to offend Turkey in other areas. From this aspect, as will be seen below in connection with the criticisms directed towards Hillary Clinton, it could be understood that it is also not against the genocide allegations being studied by historians and other scholars.

## **2. Statements of Chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Ileana Ros-Lehtinen**

As has tried to be explained above, it could be seen that in general, the US recently needs Turkey's cooperation concerning issues that relate to the Middle East and that within this framework, relations which seem to have developed between the two countries have influenced the Congress and also the Republicans within the opposition. On the other hand, although there are those among the Republican members of the Congress who support the Armenian views, their numbers are approximately 1/3rd less compared to the Democrats.

At a conference held in Washington at the beginning of December, with the cooperation of the Turkish-American Association and the Turkish

Confederation of Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists, the Republican Chairwoman of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee Ileana Ros-Lehtinen had said that the 1915 events were a tragedy, but giving those massacres a correct historical recognition is a very delicate topic and that she believes it is inappropriate for the Congress to deal with their recognition. Furthermore, she has indicated that Turkey and Armenia could directly deal with the issue instead and that she strongly supports the proposal for Turkish and Armenian historians to examine those tragic events.<sup>43</sup> Also by repeating that she is a strong supporter of the lasting value of the ties between Turkey and the US, she had stressed that as the Chairwoman of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee, she will work towards strengthening and sustaining this significant tie for generations.

The interesting point here is that Ros-Lehtinen has found it inappropriate for the 1915 events to be classified; in other words, being determined whether they constitute genocide or not within the Congress and supporting this issue being addressed by Turkish and Armenian historians. This approach is in complete accordance with Turkey's views.

### 3. The US Armenians Criticizing Foreign Minister Hillary Clinton

A response which US Foreign Minister Hillary Clinton had given in reply to a question posed on 26 January 2012 caused her to be strongly criticized by the Diaspora Armenians. This question was on why the US does not recognize the 1915 events as genocide while France has adopted a law which punishes those denying the Armenian genocide allegations.

By referring to freedom of speech in her response, Clinton has said that one of US's great strengths is, it does not criminalize speech and that the US will never go down that path to criminalize it. Then, by going to the core of the issue, she has indicated that this (genocide allegations) has always been viewed as a matter of historical debate rather than political and that to try to use government power to resolve historical issues opens a door that is a very dangerous one to go through. On the other hand, she has expressed that she thinks the free market of ideas, the academic community, and the open architecture of communication which is even great now than in the past, are the proper fora for this kind of engagement and that's where it's worked out.<sup>44</sup>

43 "Dünya'yı Şaşırtan Ermeni Çıkışı (Armenian Outburst Which Surprised the World)", *Kanal A Haber*, 2 December 2011.

44 "Clinton Calls Genocide Recognition a 'Dangerous Door'", *Asbarez*, 26 January 2012.

We must elaborate on these statements of Clinton. She has first openly criticized the French law which foresees the punishment of those denying the genocide allegations and has emphasized that such a law will never take place in the US. Secondly and more importantly, she has considered the genocide allegations as a matter of historical debate rather than political and has supported the idea of this issue being addressed and resolved through scientific research. This way, Clinton has opposed the Armenian views which relentlessly stress that the genocide allegations is not historical, but a political issue. Therefore, if the genocide allegations are considered as a current issue and not a historical one just as the Armenian circles have put forth, then matters like returning the properties left behind in Turkey to the descendants of the relocated Armenians, paying compensation and giving some Turkish territory to Armenia will have to be addressed for the resolution of this issue. However, these kinds of results will not be obtained from historical discussions.

On the other hand, Francis Ricciardone, the US Ambassador to Ankara, has said in response to a question that Turkish and Armenian historians must come together.<sup>45</sup>

Armenian organizations have immediately shown reactions to US Foreign Minister's statements. One of the two largest Armenian organizations in the US, the Armenian Assembly of America's Executive Director Bryan Ardouny, in a letter sent to President Obama, has complained about Hillary Clinton and then referring to the President's promises made during the election campaign, has urged him to unequivocally affirm the Armenian genocide.<sup>46</sup> (By means of responding to this letter through Hillary Clinton, President Obama has expressed his displeasure.) On the other hand, Ara Hamparyan, Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of America, the most important Dashnak organization which has been established second, has said that it is a sad spectacle to see Secretary Clinton appeal to scholars, the overwhelming majority of whom have already spoken against Turkey's denial of the Armenian genocide.<sup>47</sup>

By sending a long letter to Clinton on 9 February 2012, Ken Hackikian, Chairman of this organization has protested her dismissal of the Armenian genocide as a "matter of historical debate" on 26 January and indicating that this description is factually inaccurate and morally offensive, has put forth that as Clinton herself, President Obama and Vice President Biden had

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45 "Türk ve Ermeni Tarihçiler Artık Bir Araya Gelsin (Turkish and Armenian Historians Should Come Together)", *Milliyet*, 1 February 2012.

46 Armenian Assembly of America, Press Release, 2 February 2012

47 "ANCA Condemns Clinton Complicity in Genocide Denial", *The Armenian Weekly*, 17 January 2012.

stated multiple times and as the International Association of Genocide Scholars has unanimously affirmed, the Armenian genocide is a matter of settled history. On the other hand, he has indicated that Clinton's idea that further study is needed to determine whether the Armenian genocide was in fact genocide is a shameful suggestion and that this proposal will only embolden Ankara's efforts to derail a truthful and just resolution of this crime. In his letter, Hachikian also posed ten questions to Clinton in order to support Armenian views.<sup>48</sup>

In order to show what kinds of arguments have been used against the increasing Armenian criticisms, the full text of Clinton's response on March 1st 2012 to this long letter<sup>49</sup> is provided below:

*The issue you raise is a serious one. On April 24, 2011, President Obama memorialized the 1.5 million Armenians who, in 1915, were massacred or marched to their death in the final days of the Ottoman Empire, resulting in one of the worst atrocities of the twentieth century. During my visit to Armenia in 2010, I visited the memorial at Tsitsernakaberd as a sign of respect for those who lost their lives during this tragedy. In his statement, the President also noted "History teaches us that our nations are stronger and our cause is more just when we appropriately recognize painful pasts and work to rebuild bridges of understanding towards a better tomorrow." In support of the President's policy, I continue to urge Armenia and Turkey. Only by working together to address these horrific events can they achieve a full, frank, and just acknowledgment of the facts.*

*In addition to my ongoing dialogue with Armenian and Turkish officials, the United States will continue to support the courageous steps taken by individuals in Armenia and Turkey to foster a dialogue that acknowledges the history they share in common as part of efforts to move forward. It is my belief that their efforts are laying the foundation for a more prosperous and peaceful future for the peoples of both countries and the region as a whole.*

By utilizing some of Clinton's explanations provided in the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on State-Foreign Relations, member of the House of Representatives Adam Schiff, together with some other members, have tried to pressure her on this issue. Clinton has said that her comments

48 "ANCA: Ten Questions For Hillary Clinton", *Asbarez*, 9 February 2012.

49 "Clinton Responds to ANCA; Continues to Characterize Genocide As 'A Conflict'", *Asbarez*, 7 March 2012.

of January 26 were in reference to the French Parliament's recent legislation on the Armenian genocide and have mostly provided her responses within the framework of President Obama's 24 April statements.

Meanwhile, Adam Schiff and Robert Doyle (they are the co-sponsors of H.Res.304 which relates to the recognition of the genocide allegations in the US) have opened for signature, by the members of the House of Representatives, a letter they had written to be sent to Hillary Clinton. In summary, in this letter, they have objected to mischaracterizing the Armenian genocide as a historical debate and have indicated that this is a thoroughly documented "crime" and was previously condemned by President Obama, Vice President Biden and Hillary Clinton. Also by expressing that the inaccurate description of the Armenian genocide as an open question provides American encouragement to Turkey in its shameful campaign of denial, they have conveyed their hope that the Obama Administration will seize the opportunity to make an unequivocal recognition this April 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>50</sup> 61 members of the House have signed this letter.<sup>51</sup>

46 of the House members who signed the letter are Democrats, while 15 of them are Republicans. Almost half of the 61 representatives (26 members) are from California. 6 representatives, each from New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts, have signed the letter. The other signatories are from Illinois (4 members), two each from Rhode Island, Maryland and Michigan and one member each from Florida, Iowa, Arizona, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and Virginia. The following conclusions are drawn from this information. First of all, the letter has been signed by 14% of the members of the House of Representatives and this is very far from the absolute majority (218) of the House which holds 435 seats in total. Furthermore, those who have signed the letter are from states, especially from California, where the Armenians are densely populated. No one has signed from 35 states. In conclusion, it could be said that the number of those supporting Armenian interests is quite low and some of them are more concentrated in some states.

On the other hand, it has been seen that the Armenian press in the US has also strongly criticized Hillary Clinton. Harout Sassounian, a popular author known for his extreme views and for telling everybody what to do, has written that regarding the genocide allegations, Clinton had supported Armenian views when she was Senator, but that after becoming Secretary

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50 "Over 60 Reps. Press Clinton to Disavow Dismissal of Genocide", *The Armenian Weekly*, 29 February 2012.

51 "60 U.S. Representatives Urge Clinton to Disavow Genocide Statement" *The Armenian Reporter*, March 10, 2012.



of State, Mrs. Clinton suffered from total amnesia, that the events have not changed and that she should resign for making offensive remarks about the Armenian community.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, columnist Igor Muradyan of the Dashnak newspaper *Lragir*, which is published in Armenia, has characterized Clinton as “Talat Pasha in Skirt”.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. Initiatives of Armenian Advocates in the Congress

Decrease in the number of those supporting Armenian views in the US Congress during Obama’s period had caused Armenian advocates to seek a new strategy. It could be seen that this strategy entailed cooperation with the Greek lobby and bringing forth some of the problems that relate to the Christians in Turkey, in order to win the support of the religious groups whose numbers are quite high in the US. Although it was assumed that the US Jews would also take part in this strategy after the “Mavi Marmara” incident, there has been no observation that the Jews have given more support than before to the Armenians.

Within the framework of this strategy, the draft resolutions that have been submitted to the House of Representatives or to the Senate last year and this year are provided below in chronological order: (the number of co-sponsors of these resolutions do not give any idea concerning the possibility of their adoption. This number could change over time. The numbers of co-sponsors provided below are as from 14 May 2012.)

a. Draft Resolution H.RES.180 dated 3 March 2011

Urging Turkey to respect the rights and religious freedoms of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

Number of co-sponsors 23

b. Draft Resolutions S.RES.196 dated 24 May 2011

Calling upon the Government of Turkey to facilitate the reopening of the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s Theological School of Halki without condition or further delay

Number of co-sponsors 5

52 “Clinton Should Resign for Making Offensive Remarks”, *The Armenian Weekly*, 14 March 2012.

53 “Talat Pahsa in Skirt”, *Lragir*, 20 April 2012.

- c. Draft Resolution H.RES.304 dated 14 June 2011

Affirmation of the United States record on the Armenian Genocide resolution (recognition of the genocide allegations by the US)

Number of co-sponsors 90

- d. Draft Resolution H.RES.306 dated 15 June 2011

Urging the Republic of Turkey to safeguard its Christian heritage and to return confiscated church properties

An amended version of it has been adopted on 13 December 2011.

- e. Draft Resolution H.RES.506 dated 20 December 2011

Calling upon the Government of Turkey to facilitate the reopening of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Theological School of Halki without condition or further delay. It is the same as the resolution in article b.

Number of co-sponsors 27

- f. Draft Resolution S.RES.399 dated 19 March 2012

Affirmation of the United States record on the Armenian genocide resolution (recognition of the genocide allegations by the US). A slightly amended version of the resolution in article c.

Number of co-sponsors 12

- g. Draft Resolution S.RES.392 dated 8 March 2012

Urging the Republic of Turkey to safeguard its Christian heritage and to return confiscated church properties. It is the same as the resolution in article d which has been adopted on 13 December 2011. It is understood that the same text must now also be adopted by the Senate.

Number of co-sponsors 2

Besides only one of these draft resolutions, a voting was not held for any of the others. This situation shows that from the date they were presented until now, there is no chance for them to be adopted. Under normal conditions, it is difficult for such a possibility to also emerge in this year of elections.

Most likely in order to please the Armenian lobby, one of these draft resolutions have been amended and adopted at the end of 2011. This resolution is H.Res.306 dated 15 June 2011 which has been mentioned above urging Turkey to safeguard its Christian heritage and to return confiscated church properties. This resolution, which also contains a statement on the intentional destruction of much of the Christian populations in Turkey, had been submitted in order to constitute an alternative to the resolution on the recognition of the genocide allegations which has been tried to be adopted for the last twelve years but has failed each time. With the support of US public opinion which is highly sensitive towards religious freedoms, it was believed that it would be easier for this resolution to be adopted and therefore, that the Armenian genocide allegations would indirectly be recognized. Truly, the statement of “intentional destruction” in the resolution carried a meaning with equal worth to genocide. The resolution was adopted by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 20 July 2011.<sup>54</sup> However, when it was understood that it would be difficult to be accepted by the Full House due to the above-mentioned statements which evoke genocide, a consensus was reached among the concerning members of the House of Representatives for the adoption of only the final section (section on procedures). We had provided the text of the resolution adopted by the House of Representatives on 14 December 2011 in the previous edition of our Journal.<sup>55</sup> In summary, this resolution seeks to end all forms of religious discrimination, to return to their owners all Christian church properties, to allow them to be repaired and for Christian churches and other places of worship to organize and administer prayer services, religious education, clerical training, appointments and succession, religious community gatherings and social services.

Although the genocide allegations do not even indirectly exist in the resolution adopted, it could be seen that the final section criticizes and even offends Turkey. It urges Turkey to end all forms of religious discrimination as if religious discrimination exists in Turkey and to not prevent prayer services, religious education and clerical training in churches as if Turkey prevents these from taking place. Moreover, it urges Turkey to return to their owners all Christian churches and other places of worship, monasteries, schools, hospitals etc. as if all of these have been confiscated and also to allow for them to be preserved, reconstructed and repaired.

Although it is true that some Christian properties in Turkey have been confiscated, particularly for not being in accordance with the provisions of

54 Ömer Engin Lütem (2011) “Facts and Comments” *Review of Armenian Studies*, Number 23, p. 47

55 Ibid

the Law of Foundations, these are only an exception. Also, the reopening of the Greek Theological School at Heybeliada, where religious men are trained, is only possible if the Turkish education legislation is fully complied with and the problems of the Turks of Western Thrace are mutually resolved. On the other hand, following his meeting with Prime Minister Erdoğan in March at the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, Barack Obama has told the journalists “I congratulated the Prime Minister on the efforts that he’s made within Turkey to protect religious minorities. I am pleased to hear his decision to reopen the Halki Seminary”.<sup>56</sup> The US President’s statement makes us think that in principle, Turkey has taken the

decision to open the Heybeliada Greek Theological School. However, no step being taken by Greece towards the resolution of the problems of the Western Thrace Turks could delay the opening of the Theological School.

*Since this and similar resolutions of the House of Representatives concern issues that fall within Turkey’s area of sovereignty, they do not create legal results.*

*However, when they denigrate Turkey and its administration, it serves the propaganda against the country.*

On the other hand, concerning the Christian heritage in Turkey, the restoration of Armenian places of worship having artistic value, such as Akdamar Church in Van, have taken place in the recent years and has been opened for religious services at least once a year. Rituals have also been allowed at the

Greek Sumela Monastery in Trabzon and some metropolitan bishops abroad connected to the Ecumenical Patriarchate have been granted the right of Turkish citizenship. Furthermore, numerous religious immovable properties confiscated in the past due to legal conditions not being fulfilled has started being returned to their owners with a decree law adopted in August 2011. This implementation has been highly embraced by the non-Muslims in Turkey and has also been welcomed by foreign circles.

Meanwhile, it should be recalled that during the voting in the House of Representatives, only three people were present and two of them voted in favor while the other voted against the draft resolution which was eventually only adopted by two votes of the total number of 435 members of the House of Representatives.

Since this and similar resolutions of the House of Representatives concern issues that fall within Turkey’s area of sovereignty, they do not create legal results. However, when they denigrate Turkey and its administration, it

<sup>56</sup> “Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey after Bilateral Meeting”, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 25 March 2012.

serves the propaganda against the country. But, it is highly difficult for this resolution, which is quite ridiculous for only gaining two votes, to serve any kind of propaganda.

### **5. Prime Minister Erdoğan's Meeting With President Obama**

By utilizing the occasion of the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, Prime Minister Erdoğan has met with President Obama in March. We had mentioned part of the meeting concerning the Heybeliada Theological School above. In their joint press conference, both Obama and Erdoğan have indicated that they addressed the Armenian question in their meeting. However, from a statement provided by Prime Minister Erdoğan later on to Turkish journalists, it has been understood that he has opened the subject of the Armenian question to the US President.<sup>57</sup> It could be understood from this that most likely by linking the ratification of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols to developments taking place in the Karabakh issue, the Prime Minister has said that the mediating role of the three groups of Minsk has continued for 20 years, but has failed to achieve any results so far and has suggested that in order to near a settlement, Turkey should make an effort over Azerbaijan and the Minsk Group members (US, Russia and France) should show effort over Armenia.

On the other hand, regarding these draft resolutions submitted to the US Congress, the press has shown that the Prime Minister told President Obama that congresses and parliaments, in short politicians, should not be put in place of historians, that if the Republicans or the Democrats come to power in the US, the situation will still be the same for these drafts and that the issue of Armenia should not be addressed every April, whereas Obama has expressed that he is displeased with the draft resolutions in the Congress.<sup>58</sup>

### **6. President Obama's 24 April Statement**

Since Bill Clinton, US Presidents issue a statement each year on 24 April regarding "Armenian Remembrance Day" and in order not to offend Turkey, do not characterize the 1915 events as genocide, but instead use some other words which carry a similar meaning. Barack Obama, while he ran as presidential candidate, had expressed both written and orally that if elected he would use the term "genocide". However, he found himself in a

<sup>57</sup> Newspapers *Milliyet*, *Hürriyet* and *Zaman* dated 26 March 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

difficult position when it was explained to him how sensitive Turkey is towards the use of this term and he found the solution to this issue by using the words “*Meds Yeghern*” in his 24 April statements, which means “great tragedy” in Armenian and is also used with regard to the 1915 events.

This term has been used again this year in his 24 April statement. Moreover, by referring to the 1915 events as “one of the worse atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” and “unspeakable suffering” and by putting forth that 1.5 million Armenians were brutally massacred, the President has alluded to genocide without labeling it. This also gives him the opportunity to state that his view of that historical event has not changed (that his thoughts while he was presidential candidate has not changed) and therefore, tries to show that there is no difference between Obama as Presidential Candidate and Obama as President.

By expressing in his statement that a full, frank and just acknowledgment of the facts is in everyone’s interests and that moving forward with the future cannot be done without reckoning with the facts of the past, Obama has implied that Turkey should recognize the Armenian genocide allegations. He has also declared that some Turks who have already done this have been applauded.

At the end of his statement, by praising the US Armenians as he has done in the past years, President Obama has tried to gain their votes during elections.

Although President Obama’s statement this year, just as in the previous years, is delivered in a moderate language, in essence it reflects the views of Armenians. However, this has not pleased most of the Armenians and especially the Dashnaks at all, hooked so much on the term genocide, and US Chairman Ken Hachikian of the organization, using a harsh language, has accused President Obama for surrendering to Turkey and not keeping his promise to the Armenians.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, it has been observed within the Turkish press that President Obama’s choice of words, i.e. not using the term genocide, has been met with pleasure.

However, the press release of the Turkish Foreign Ministry on this statement carries a complete opposite characteristic. In this statement, it has been expressed that the President’s statement reflects only the Armenian views, distorts the historical facts and therefore it is regarded as problematic and is

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59 “ANCA Chairman: Obama Completed His Surrender to Turkey”, *PanArmenian.Net*, 24 April 2012.

deeply regretted. Furthermore, it has put forth that the President's statement is issued upon domestic political considerations, renders the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia difficult, damages Turkish-American relations and that the US should encourage the Armenian side to be more realistic and conciliatory. The full text of the statement is as follows:

*No:116, 24 April 2012, Press Release Regarding the Statement of US President Barack Obama on the Occasion of 24 April*

*In his statement issued on 24 April 2012, US President Obama demonstrated this year once again an unfounded approach which reflects the Armenian views regarding the dispute between Turks and Armenians on the painful part of their common history. We regard this statement, which distorts the historical facts, as very problematic in every aspect and deeply regret it.*

*Issued upon domestic political considerations and interpreting controversial historical events with a selective sense of justice, such one-sided statements are not only misguided, but also render the normalization of the relations between Turkey and Armenia difficult.*

*What should be done by the US, as an important ally of Turkey, is not to further deepen the problem with such an approach, which also damages Turkish-American relations, but to provide constructive contributions for its resolution and, in this regard, to encourage the Armenian side, which avoids joint historical research, to be more realistic and conciliatory.*

*It should also be known that the pain experienced during the World War I is a shared one and the memory of that period is as sensitive for the Turkish people as for the Armenians. Despite all the prejudiced attempts to interfere with the writing of history, we will maintain our efforts to reach a just memory.*

In conclusion, while the US President's 24 April statement this year, just as in the previous years, attempts to please both sides, it has failed in doing so and on the complete opposite, has caused quite strong reactions to develop.

## **7. US Supporting the Contacts of Non-Governmental Organizations of the Two Countries and Unofficial Proposals for the Normalization of Relations**

US Governments have supported all along contacts being made between non-governmental organizations, professional associations, journalists and

artists between Turkey and Armenia. In order to indicate that these kinds of contacts and dialogues are not part of official talks, they have been classified as “track two”. Apart from some diplomatic contacts which are generally carried out for the last twenty years in private and are not continuous, it could not be said that much contacts exist between Turkey and Armenia. This situation makes the approaches of the two sides, which are essentially opposite to each other, more uncompromising. However, it should not be expected for “track two” dialogues to especially resolve political issues. These kinds of talks could be beneficial for the development of cultural, scientific, sportive and even economic relations.

The most important “track two” dialogues between Turkey and Armenia was the meetings of the “Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission”, which was active from 2001-2004 through the encouragement and even financial aid provided by the US Government and was comprised of Turkish and Armenian individuals. David L. Phillips has been the moderator of this commission. This commission had no official position; in other words, its members did not represent the governments of Turkey or Armenia. No consensus was able to be reached in this commission regarding the genocide allegations which form the basis of the Turkish-Armenian disagreement.

Following this incident, some Turkish and Armenian non-governmental organizations, professional associations, journalists and artist have organized meetings especially through the initiatives of the US. Apart from being confidential, not much other information exists. This situation most likely arises due to significant results not being obtained from the meetings.

It would have been expected for these contacts to have achieved some cooperation between the two countries in specific fields or at least to have promoted it. However, no such result has been observed. After the failure of official contacts between Turkey and Armenia, it is believed that the “Track Two” activities will have the same outcome. It should not be expected for Track Two dialogues to create serious benefits when there has been no development in the issue of the genocide allegations which constitutes the main dispute between Turkey and Armenia.

Despite this situation, the US Government continues to support these kinds of contacts. According to Phillips’s lengthy research published in the beginning of March this year and entitled “Diplomatic History: The Turkey-Armenia Protocols”,<sup>60</sup> 2.4 million dollars has been allocated in the US Aid

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60 *Diplomatic History: The 2009 Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey and the 2009 Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia*. Columbia University, Institute for the Study of Human Rights in collaboration with the Future of Diplomacy Project published on the internet (<http://hrcolumbia.org>), Harvard Kennedy School, March 2012



Mission in Yerevan, while the US Embassy in Ankara has allocated 2.3 million dollars for Track Two dialogues. In a research published by TEPAV in January,<sup>61</sup> it has been indicated that 47.3% of the Track Two activities have been financed by the US, but that this number is greater when considering that the US also contributes to the funds supplied by other sources. Some institutions of Germany, Sweden and Switzerland could be considered among the other countries. Which institution or individuals will attend the meetings from Turkey and Armenia will be determined by those providing financial aid. Since a significant amount of money exists, it could be understood that the number of those wanting to participate in these activities is quite high.

It is difficult to think that these kinds of dialogues will harm Turkey-Armenia relations. However, what matters is what kinds of benefits these will bring to relations and so far, no such benefit has been observed.

## 8. The US Stance towards the Turkey-Armenia Protocols

It is known that Armenia's view on the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations and that in this respect, the protocols should be ratified without any preconditions, is also supported by the US. This approach has been confirmed with US Foreign Minister Hillary Clinton's speech delivered on 4 June 2012 during her visit to Armenia. In Clinton's joint press conference with Nalbandyan,<sup>62</sup> she has said "we are committed to seeing Armenia and Turkey normalize relations, because we think this is a path forward to a better future for the citizens of both countries and we strongly support ratification of the Turkey-Armenia protocols without preconditions. We commend Armenia and President Sarkisian for the leadership they have shown on this issue". Moreover, in response to a question she has expressed "our greatest interest is to see Armenia and Turkey move together toward normalization. We strongly support the efforts that have been made. We have urged the ratification of the normalization protocols without preconditions". In relation to Karabakh, she has said "there is no linkage between the protocols process and the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations. Those are separate".

Therefore, the US Foreign Minister has entirely embraced Armenia's view that the Protocols should be ratified and implemented without preconditions

61 Esra Cuhadar, Burcu Gültekin Punsman "Reflecting on the Two Decades of Bridging the Divide: Taking Stock on Turkish-Armenian Civil Society Activities." *TEPAV*, January 2012.

62 Press conference - Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian's and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's statements and answers during joint press conference - 04.06.2012 - <http://www.mfa.am/en/press-conference/item/2012/06/04/clinton/>

and that they are not linked to the Karabakh issue. This support of the US is one of the main reasons why Armenia is reluctant to resolve problems with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Also by addressing the countries in the region, Clinton has said “We believe that these are countries that should have open borders, should work together, should trade, should have people-to-people exchanges, because we think that it would be mutually beneficial to all concerned”. These are undoubtedly her kind wishes. However, it is unclear how the borders could be opened when a de facto war exists between Armenia and Azerbaijan and in a situation where there is no normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia. Despite the closed borders, Turkey tries to conduct trade with Armenia and to increase contacts between the people.

### III – FRANCE AND THE ARMENIAN QUESTION

A law has been adopted in France on 23 January 2012, foreseeing the punishment of those denying the Armenian genocide allegations with a prison term of one year and a fine of 45.000 Euros, but on grounds that the law is contradictory to the constitution, 71 parliamentarians and 77 senators had appealed to the French Constitutional Council to repeal the law.

On 28 February 2012, the Constitutional Council announced its decision<sup>63</sup> and found the law to be contradictory to the Constitution.

In order to ease the great disappointment the decision of the Constitutional Council created among the Armenian community and in order to console them, President Sarkozy has visited the Armenian community in Marseille and repeated to them that this issue will be re-addressed after the elections. Moreover, by receiving the prominent figures of the Armenian community in the Presidential Palace in Paris, Sarkozy has also made promises to them on this issue.

The first round of Presidential elections has taken place on 22 April 2012 and as expected, although with a small difference in votes, President Sarkozy has been second to François Hollande.<sup>64</sup> Since public opinion polls have shown that François Hollande will also win the second round of

63 “Loi visant à réprimer la contestation de l’existence des génocides reconnus par la loi” Décision n° 2012-647 DC du 28 février 2012 <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/les-decisions/acces-par-date/decisions-depuis-1959/2012/2012-647-dc/decision-n-2012-647-dc-du-28-fevrier-2012.104949.html>

64 The proportion of votes the candidates received in the first round is as follows: François Hollande % 28,63; Nicolas Sarkozy % 27,18; Marine Le Pen (National Field) % 17,90; Jean-Luc Melenchon (Leftist Field) % 11,11; François Bayrou (Democratic Field) % 9,13. *Milliyet* 24 April 2012. “Sandıkta Kozlar Le Pen’in Elinde Le Pen Holds the Leverage in Elections”

elections, Sarkozy has started pursuing each and every vote he could gain. Within this framework, by doing what none of the other French Presidents had done, Sarkozy has attended on April 24 the commemoration ceremonies of the Armenian “genocide” in Paris accompanied by the “Republican Guards” dressed in fancy uniforms dating from the 19th century, has placed a wreath at the Memorial and has delivered a speech. Sarkozy who had indicated last year during his visit to the Genocide Memorial in Yerevan how touched he was, has said that those not showing the confidence to look back into their past cannot be a great country, that he wants Turkey to do what France did by facing its history, that this should not be considered a weakness, that accepting mistakes will pave the way to being forgiven and that he is sure there are individuals within the Turkish community who recognize the mistakes of their ancestors and desire the forgiveness of today’s people (the Armenians). Therefore, Sarkozy has indirectly called on Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide allegations and to apologize to the Armenians. Furthermore, he has also repeated that if elected, a draft law foreseeing the criminalization of those denying the genocide allegations will be prepared again in June.<sup>65</sup>

François Hollande, who has been informed of the President’s visit to the Memorial beforehand, has been obliged in conducting the same visit and in his speech delivered there, has repeated that if elected, a new bill will be drafted which punishes those denying the genocide allegations, but that the issue must first be addressed in the best possible way so that the same will not happen as with the law that was repealed; in other words, to prevent the law being repealed a second time by the Constitutional Council. Furthermore, he has promised to attend the 24 April commemoration events each year if elected as President.<sup>66</sup>

The speeches of both Sarkozy and Hollande have created strong reactions in Ankara. In a press release by the Foreign Ministry whose text is provided below, it has been stated that controversial historical issues are abused for internal political calculations, what is expected from French politicians is not to foment hatred, but to act with the responsibility of statesmen to encourage the Turks and Armenians to reach together a just memory, that it is not possible to obtain results through artificial external impositions on issues between countries.<sup>67</sup>

65 “Discours De M. LePrésident De La République À L’occasion De La Cérémonie De Commémoration Du 97ème Anniversaire Du Génocide Arménien” <http://www.collectifvan.org/article.php?r=0&id=63401>, 24 April 2012,

66 “Historique Commémoration Du Génocide Des Arméniens”, *Armenews*, 24 April 2012.

67 “No: 117, 24 April 2012, Press Release Regarding the Statements Delivered by the President of France Sarkozy and Presidential Candidate Hollande in Paris” MFA Turkey [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_117\\_-24-april-2012\\_-press-release-regarding-the-statements-delivered-by-the-president-of-france-sarkozy-and-presidential-candidate-hollande-in-paris.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_117_-24-april-2012_-press-release-regarding-the-statements-delivered-by-the-president-of-france-sarkozy-and-presidential-candidate-hollande-in-paris.en.mfa)

*No: 117, 24 April 2012, Press Release Regarding the Statements Delivered by the President of France Sarkozy and Presidential Candidate Hollande in Paris*

*The statements delivered by the President of France Nicolas Sarkozy and by the Presidential candidate François Hollande on the occasion of the commemoration ceremony in Paris on 24 April and which apparently reflect electoral considerations in the country, provide the latest examples of the abuse of controversial historical issues for the purpose of internal political calculations.*

***There is no doubt that the President and the Presidential candidate visiting the Armenian Memorial on 24 April and offering their condolences there and indicating that the law on “punishing denial” will be redrafted has created great pleasure among the French Armenians and has caused them to be proud of the two leaders.***

*Politicization of history for different motivations is highly unfortunate. Prejudiced and discriminatory approaches can serve neither justice nor a correct understanding of history. What is expected from prominent French politicians is not to foment hatred, but to act on the basis of facts and in accordance with the responsibility of statesmen by giving messages to encourage Turks and Armenians to reach together a just memory.*

*It is not possible to obtain results through artificial external impositions on an issue which should be settled between the concerned countries. Such statements also impede efforts to establish peace and tranquility in the region.*

There is no doubt that the President and the Presidential candidate visiting the Armenian Memorial on 24 April and offering their condolences there and indicating that the law on “punishing denial” will be redrafted has created great pleasure among the French Armenians and has caused them to be proud of the two leaders. This event is a great success for the Armenians who constitute less than 1% of the entire population in France.

However, this event has also left the French Armenians in a dilemma. Since both Sarkozy and Hollande are almost competing for satisfying the requests of the French Armenians, who will they give their votes to? In this situation, it could be understood that the French Armenians will give their votes according to their political preferences; in other words, by putting aside the Armenian Question and the genocide allegations as its inseparable aspect, the more conservatives will vote for Sarkozy, while those with a more leftist tendency will vote for Hollande.

The second round of Presidential elections in France has been held on 6 May 2012 and François Hollande has been elected as president by winning 51.62% of the votes. In the elections, 37,016,982 people have cast their votes and the proportion of those voting in the elections has been 80.34%. As mentioned above, since the Armenians have voted in accordance with their political tendencies, the Armenian votes have not benefited either of the candidates.

On this point, assuming that it will also be useful for future parliamentary or local elections, we would like to provide some information concerning the Armenian votes in France.

There is a general conviction that the total number of Armenians in France is approximately 450,000. If it is assumed that children who have not yet reached the age to vote is 10%, the conclusion could be reached that the number of those who could cast votes is approximately 400,000 maximum. Since 20% have not voted in the last elections in France, the potential Armenian votes could be calculated as 320,000. When considering that 37,016,982 people voted in the last elections, the Armenian votes are around 8 per thousand of the total votes. This proportion is insignificant in the presidential elections where regional votes are not taken into consideration.

On the contrary, it is relatively significant in the parliamentary and local elections where regional votes are necessary. The Armenian votes could truly be effective during these elections in parts of Paris, Lyon and Marseille. In order to give an idea regarding the influence of the Armenian votes, we should note that no Armenian has been able to be elected as deputy or senator due to being Armenian. The election of Patrick Devedjian, who is Armenian in origin, has not been because he is Armenian, but because he is an important member of the UMP Party. Despite not being deputies or senators, Armenians are represented in local councils.

Since the Armenian votes have no significant role in the Presidential elections, then why do both candidates put so much importance on the Armenians?

First of all, as with all the other nations, the French also have the feeling of pity and helping or caring for the weak. The genocide allegations, intensively put forth for many years, have displayed the Armenians in France as some kind of an oppressed community. Helping such a community and trying to fulfill their requests are considered as actions that are highly appreciated within public opinion. In short, the candidates being

advocates of Armenians could allow them to gain some votes of non-Armenians. On the opposite, remaining indifferent to Armenian requests could cause them to lose some votes of non-Armenians.

Second of all, it concerns Turkey and the Turks. Millions of North African Muslims live in France. Most of them are not able to adjust to the French community for various reasons and this creates some problems. These problems, along with the reflections in the US of September 11, have created a fear of Islam (Islamophobia) which is increasingly generally spreading in Europe and particularly in France. A part of this phobia is fear against the Turks, originating from the possibility of Turkey becoming an EU member. Within this framework, criticizing Turkey or opposing Turkish initiatives on the Armenian or on another issue gains the appreciation of extreme rightist circles in particular. It should not be forgotten that the extreme rightist party of National Front has gained more than 17% of votes in the first round of the Presidential elections.

The hostility towards Turkey during the French Presidential Elections has caused President Gül to classify this situation as unbelievable and to repeat the proposal for a commission to be established to determine whether or not the 1915 events constitute genocide.<sup>68</sup> Earlier, Prime Minister Erdoğan had said during his Party's Assembly Group meeting the following: "we expressed that Sarkozy making the 1915 events an instrument of elections is a racist approach and a very dangerous and discriminatory initiative for France and the EU. Inciting xenophobia, particularly Islamophobia, to win elections is very irresponsible. We expect and remind European leaders and institutions to be aware of this dangerous increase and take precautions".<sup>69</sup>

Regarding what kind of policy the new French President will adopt on the Armenian question, the first indications have been understood from his response on May 2nd to a letter concerning the issue of "Laws of Memory" written to him by Chairman of the Anatolia Cultural Center in France Demir Önger a few days before being elected.<sup>70</sup>

The first issue that Hollande has emphasized is that if elected (which he has four days later), a bill in accordance with the French Constitution would be drafted which penalizes the denial of genocide. He has also indicated that this bill would be in conformity with France's international commitments and the European Union Charter. It could be understood that he believes that a text carrying these properties will not be rejected by the French Constitutional Council.

68 "Le Président Turc Pointe une "Incroyable" Hostilité française", *Armenews*, 3 May 2012.

69 "Sarkozy'ye sessiz Kalmayın" (Don't Remain Silent Towards Sarkozy), *Hürriyet*, 14 March 2012.

70 "La lettre de François Hollande au négationiste Demir Önger", *Armenews*, 9 May 2012.

The second important section of Hollande's letter to Önger entails his statements concerning Turkey. He has emphasized that together with the Socialists, he is committed to Turkish-French friendship and that he will strengthen relations with Turkey, which is a great country, if elected.

There are two points in François Hollande's letter which contradict each other. The first is drafting a bill on punishing denial which Turkey completely opposes and the second is establishing friendly relations with Turkey. It is unclear how friendly relations will be established if this law is adopted.

Despite this uncertainty, it has been observed in Turkey that after Hollande was elected as President, relations with France have tried to be restored and as Deputy Foreign Minister Naci Koru as expressed,<sup>71</sup> there has been hope for a new page being opened for relations between the two countries. By recalling that Turkey-France relations date back to history, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has also said that he believes France will take positive steps in its transformation process.<sup>72</sup> In President Gül's letter of congratulation sent to François Hollande, it has been stated that he hopes his election as President will contribute to the development of Turkish-French relations.<sup>73</sup> Prime Minister Erdoğan has also called Hollande and congratulated him and has expressed that he hopes his election as president will start a new era in Turkey-France relations.<sup>74</sup>

*Despite this uncertainty, it has been observed in Turkey that after Hollande was elected as President, relations with France have tried to be restored and as Deputy Foreign Minister Naci Koru as expressed, there has been hope for a new page being opened for relations between the two countries.*

On the other hand, from an earlier statement, it could be seen that Prime Minister Erdoğan was cautious in his approach towards France. During his visit to Slovenia, he had told the journalists that it is not possible to accept the stance that Turkey cannot become an EU member until the Armenian issue is resolved and that if this stance is true and a policy is to be pursued within this framework, then Turkey will also have to reconsider the situation.<sup>75</sup>

71 "Turkey Hopes to Restore Ties With France Under Hollande Presidency", *Armradio.am*, 10 May 2012.

72 Ibid

73 "Abdullah Gül "L'administration française doit être plus Prudente Sur les Questions Sensibles", *Armenews*, 11 May 2012.

74 "Erdoğan Apelle Hollande, Souhaite une "Nouvelle Ère", *AFP*, 11 May 2012.

75 "Prime Minister Erdoğan receives an award from Slovenia", *Sabah*, 8 May 2012.

It could also be seen that Turkish Ambassador to France, Tahsin Burcuoğlu has also approached François Hollande's term with caution. Regarding relations, he has said "insistence on the negation bill could take Turkish-French relations to a blockage. We warned France to abandon it before it's too late, but if the same road is taken despite everything, as a state, nation and the Turkish community in France, we will continue to resist by utilizing all the opportunities we possess". Furthermore, Burcuoğlu has also indicated that opposite to Sarkozy's statement regarding Turkey's EU membership that "Turkey has no place Europe", Hollande has no such statement and that Hollande supports the negotiation process with Turkey to continue objectively and that this will be a long-termed process.

Meanwhile, perhaps due to the resentment towards Nicolas Sarkozy, although it cannot be characterized as purely sympathy, it has been seen within within the Turkish press that some kind of tolerance exists towards Hollande. However, when looking at the past, it is difficult to say that France's new president is worthy of this.

When the past is truly observed, we could see that Hollande has almost always supported Armenian views. Let us provide some examples. While serving as General Secretary of the Socialist Party, Hollande, together with Chairman of the French Dashnak Party Mourad Papazian (who is still Hollande's special advisor), had signed a declaration on 3 June 2004 regarding the idea that Turkey must recognize the Armenian genocide allegations before the membership negotiations with the EU begins.<sup>76</sup> In the following years, he had always advocated Armenian views and within this framework, had shown great efforts for the bill on punishing those denying the Armenian genocide allegations to be submitted and adopted to the National Assembly and Senate. He had visited Yerevan in September 2007 upon the invitation of the Armenian Dashnak Party, had paid homage at the Genocide Memorial and in his speech delivered there, had put forth that recognition of the Armenian genocide allegations must be a precondition for Turkey's membership in the EU.<sup>77</sup> During the presidential elections campaign this year, he had continued his pro-Armenian stance without any reservations and had delivered a speech at the genocide memorial in Paris on April 24.

During this campaign, he had promised the Armenians that if elected, he would fulfill the following:<sup>78</sup>

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76 Ömer Engin Lütem (2007) "Facts and Comments" *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 13-14, p. 22.

77 "French Socialist Leader Visits Armenia, Urges Genocide Recognition", *RFE/EL*, 6 September 2007.

78 "François Hollande Reçoit le CCAF" *Zaman*, 15 March 2012; "Türkiye'nin AB Üyelğine 'Soykırım' Vaadi ('Genocide' Promise for Turkey's EU Membership)" *Armenews*, 13 March 2012,



- During the first months of his presidency, he would work towards the re-drafting of the bill regarding the punishment of those denying the Armenian genocide allegations, which was previously annulled by the Constitutional Council,
- He would support the stipulation of the recognition of the Armenian genocide allegations as a criterion for Turkey to become a member of the European Union,
- For the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the genocide allegations, he favors the establishment of a memorial-museum of the Armenian “genocide” in Paris, which would be funded by the State,
- He will show “special efforts” for the prevention of further conflicts in Karabakh (if we recall President Aliiev’s statement that Azeri territories could be liberated through force if all peaceful measures fail, it could be understood that Hollande would support Armenia in the Karabakh conflict).

With the exception of the re-drafting of a new bill, all the other points were not addressed by Nicolas Sarkozy. From this aspect, Hollande has gone way further than Sarkozy in his pledges made to the Armenians.

Will these promises be kept? Or will Hollande behave as President Obama has? As could be remembered, while President Obama was emphasizing before the presidential elections that he would recognize the Armenian genocide allegations, after being elected he conducted his first visit to Turkey and refrained from openly recognizing the genocide allegations despite all insistences.

It is not possible to say at the moment how much of his promises Hollande will keep. However, it seems almost certain that a new bill will be drafted and submitted to the National Assembly on the punishment of those denying the Armenian genocide allegations. However, this does not mean that the bill will be adopted. The composition of the Parliament after the elections in June will play a determining role in this issue. Under normal conditions, there is a high possibility for such a bill to be adopted by the National Assembly; however, as has taken place in the past, it could be much more difficult for it to be adopted by the Senate which is against “Laws of Memory”. If the Senate adopts it and the bill becomes a law, upon the appeal of 60 deputies or 60 senators, as the Constitutional Council has at the end of February, it could reject the bill again on grounds that it contradicts the Constitution. In short, adopting such a law does not seem as an easy task.

When evaluating Turkey-France relations purely from a political aspect, it could be seen that France has no benefit from continuing a policy of hostility towards Turkey. However, also due to problems of internal politics they have created, the French governments have somewhat put their relations with Turkey in pledge. As a matter of fact, although they harm French interests, France is not in the position of overcoming the obstacles created by Turkey's EU membership and the Armenian genocide allegations. In this situation, it is likely that it will not rush the resolution of the problems and leave them to time.

Another point which must be taken into consideration is that in principle, presidential and parliamentary elections will not be held during the next five years in France. In other words, during this period, there will be no need for the Armenians within the political field and this shows that in the upcoming period, the possibility of the Armenians putting pressure over President Hollande and the Socialist Party is limited.

After the excitement of the presidential elections fades and the parliamentary elections are held, Hollande and his government will try to determine a new policy against Turkey in order to repair as much as possible the damages done during the Sarkozy period. Right now, the most important issues are Turkey's EU membership process and the Armenian genocide allegations. Regarding the EU issue, the new French government could develop a formula through which France would accept the negotiation of some chapters and in return expect Turkey not to object to the fulfillment of the promises Hollande made to the Armenians. However, when taking into consideration the policy Turkey has followed until now concerning the Armenian question, it could be understood that there is no chance for such a formula being accepted.

A last development has been the meeting of President Gül with François Hollande during the NATO Summit held on 20-21 May 2012 in Chicago. During this meeting, Gül has said that there was no conflict of interests between France and Turkey and that they want to open a new chapter in relations and bring them back to their former level, whereas Hollande has said that Turkey will never be a matter of internal politics and that they should not waste time with past misunderstandings. Hollande has also indicated that it is also his desire to bring relations to their former level and that Turkish and French ministers should come together often.<sup>79</sup>

This meeting displays that the two sides desire to end the crises experienced during Sarkozy's period. However, no progress has been made in the main problems between the two countries regarding Turkey's EU membership and the Armenian genocide allegations. In this situation, it could be understood

79 "Gül, Hollande seek to reset strained ties at NATO summit", *Today's Zaman*, 21 May 2012.

that restoring Turkey-France relations to its former level will remain outside these two problems. It is possible to freeze the two problems for a certain time. However, when recalling that Hollande had promised the Armenians for a redrafting of a new law which would punish those denying genocide during his first months of presidency, it is likely that the positive atmosphere within Turkey-France relations will not last long if this promise is kept.

#### IV – PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA

The Parliamentary Elections in Armenia has been held on 6 May 2012. As the public opinion polls had shown before the elections, the Armenian Republican Party, which is the Government Coalition's main party, has been first, while the other coalition party of Prosperous Armenia has emerged as second. These parties have been followed respectively by the Armenian National Congress, Heritage Party, Dashnak Party and the Orinats Yerkir (Rule of Law Party).

##### 1. Results of the Elections

Compared to the elections of 2007, the percentage of votes and the number of seats gained in the current elections by the parties has been provided in the table below.

#### PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA IN 2007 AND 2012<sup>80</sup>

Party Name	2007 Elections		2012 Elections		Deputies +, -
	%	Deputies	%	Deputies	
Republican Party of Armenia	32,8	64	44,02	70	+5
Prosperous Armenian Party	14,7	24	30,12	37	+13
Armenian National Congress	-	-	7,8	7	-
Orinats Yerkir (Rule of Law) Party	6,8	9	5,51	6	-4
ARF Dashnaktsutyun Party	12,7	16	5,67	5	-10
Heritage Party	5,82	7	5,76	5	-1
Independent	-	11	-	1	-10
TOTAL	-	131	-	131	-
62,3% have voted in the elections. The number of electorates has been determined as 2.501.597. 1.573.053 people have cast their votes.					

80 Sources for the 2007 elections see *Ermeni Arařtırmaları* No. 25, pp. 34-36. For the 2012 elections see "Central Electoral Commission Issues Final Vote Results", *Massis Post*, 14 May 2012.

At first glance, these results create the conviction that the elections have not brought a change to the political situation in Armenia. As mentioned above, the main parties of the Government Coalition have been victorious in the elections. These two parties held together 88 seats in 2007 in the parliament holding a total of 131 seats. This number has currently increased to 106. In short, it is seen that these parties has enough majority to be able to govern Armenia for the next five years as long as they come to an agreement between themselves.

If they fail to come to an agreement, since the Republican Party has the absolute majority in the Assembly with 69 deputies, it will be able to form a government on its own. But, since it just exceeds the absolute majority with only four seats, this government will not feel insecure. In this situation, it will be possible to reach a majority with Orinats Yerkir and even the Heritage Party entering the government with 80 deputies.

This is also important since forming such a coalition is a precondition for Serge Sarkisian to win the presidential election to be held in February.

## **2. The Political Parties Entering the Parliament**

9 parties have participated in the 2012 parliamentary elections. Since the Armenian Democratic Party, the Armenian Communist Party and the United Armenians Party have not been able to exceed the threshold of 5%, they have not been able to enter the Parliament. Information is provided below on the six parties that have entered the Parliament.

### **a. The Armenian Republican Party**

This party, which was established in 1990, was the first party formed in independent Armenia. From that day onwards, it has been present in many of the governments and has become the first party of the government coalition after 2000 from which the prime minister has been elected. After Prime Minister Andranik Makaryan's death in 2007, Serge Sarkisian, who was then the Party's Chairman of Council and at the same time the Minister of Defense, had first been elected as Chairman of the Republican Party and then had been elected as Prime Minister. Approximately ten months later, he had been elected as President. Unlike in Turkey and many other countries, the Armenian presidents could also be members of political parties. Therefore, Serge Sarkisian has maintained his position as Chairman of the Republican Party and has actively participated in the election campaigns

this year. The Republicans, increasing their votes in the current elections from 32.8% to 44.02% and holding 69 deputies, won a great success in the elections. Therefore, as mentioned above, the Republicans are in the position to form a government on their own if necessary.

### **b. The Prosperous Armenia Party**

The Prosperous Armenia Party has been established shortly before the 2007 elections. According to a widespread belief, it has been established by wealthy businessman Tsarukyan upon the advice of President Robert Kocharian, who not being able to be elected as president a third time based on the Constitution, would be able to return to politics when necessary. Although existing conditions have prevented Robert Kocharian from having an active role in internal politics during the period of 2007-2012, this party, constituted mainly of wealthy businessmen, has gained praise through Tsarukyan's sympathetic behaviors and aid provided to the poor communities. In fact, the Prosperous Armenia Party, which had carried out a successful introduction campaign and had also increased their aid to the poor, has achieved a great success in the 2012 elections by increasing their votes from 14.7% to 30.12% and their number of deputies from 24 to 37.

*The Republicans, increasing their votes in the current elections from 32.8% to 44.02% and holding 69 deputies, won a great success in the elections. Therefore, as mentioned above, the Republicans are in the position to form a government on their own if necessary.*

However, it has started acting as more of an opposition party by not withdrawing from the government coalition following the elections. There have been some speculations to explain this approach. At the top of these speculations is that this party will leave Sarkisian in a difficult position by not joining the government coalition and this will therefore make it easier for Kocharian to be elected as president again in the 2013 elections. The second speculation is that as partner of coalition, apart from some ministries, the party also wants the Presidency of the National Assembly and Deputy Prime Ministry. On the other hand, Vartan Oskanyan, who served as Foreign Minister for approximately ten years during Kocharian's Presidency, becoming a deputy of this party, has also created the idea that this ministry is desired.

### c. The Armenian National Congress

Levon Ter-Petrosian is an important figure who had assumed the main role during Armenia's independence and who had become Armenia's first president from 1991-1998. In 1998, he had supported the significant proposals of the Minsk Group regarding the Karabakh issue, but had resigned from Presidency when Prime Minister Robert Kocharian, who was originally from Karabakh, followed by the Armenian Assembly, had opposed these proposals.

Ter-Petrosian, who was away from politics for almost ten years, had participated in the presidential election in 2008, but when Serge Sarkisian had received 52% of the votes when he only received 21.5%, he was not able to win the elections. 10 people had died as a result of the intervention of law enforcement officers during the demonstrations taking place right after the elections and this incident had occupied Armenia's agenda for months. By taking advantage of this situation, Ter-Petrosian had for a long time made sure that demonstrations were held against the Government and the President. Then, together with some small political institutions, he had founded the Armenian National Congress (Party). The Congress has become Armenia's main opposition party within the last four years. However, only receiving 7.8% of the votes and only gaining 7 deputies have created doubts on the political future of this party and Ter-Petrosian.

### d. The Heritage Party

The Heritage Party has been established by a US Armenian named Raffi Hovannisian before the 2008 elections. Hovannisian is Armenia's first Foreign Minister. He is known for his extremist nationalist stance and statements. Opposite to Ter-Petrosian, the first President who had paid attention to not create problems with Turkey, when Hovannisian had continued displaying an approach that could be said to be aggressive against Turkey, Petrossian had discharged him from office. From then on, Hovannisian has not been able to return to politics and in fact, has not even been able to gain Armenian citizenship. Years later, most probably upon the insurances of the Americans, he has gained Armenian citizenship and has right after formed the Heritage Party. By gaining 6% of the votes and 7 deputies in 2008, this party has relatively achieved success. Hovannisian, trying to gain the attention of public opinion by staging hunger strikes before the elections this year, has not created any benefits and the Heritage Party has entered the Parliament by gaining 5.7% of the votes and 5 deputies in the elections.

### **e. The Dashnak Party**

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, known as Dashnak or Dashnaks, has been established in 1890 and is still Armenia's oldest party represented in the Parliament. It has maintained its secret and terrorist activities until recently. The first Armenian Republic existing in 1918-1920 was essentially ruled by Dashnaks and has eventually joined the Soviet Union without achieving any success in almost any fields. From then on, the Dashnaks have organized themselves within the Diaspora and have become the main political power there. Their domination of the Diaspora still continues. Meanwhile, the terrorist activities of the Dashnaks particularly draw attention. At the basis of most of all the Armenian revolts during the Ottoman Empire lies the provocation of the Dashnaks. The Dashnaks are also mostly responsible for the atrocities committed against the Muslims in Eastern Anatolia during and right after the First World War. During a conference held after the war, the Dashnaks have reached a decision on killing the prominent figures of the Unity and Development Party and have caused Talat, Sait, Halim and Cemal Pasha, together with some other people, to be murdered. More recently in 1973-1986, the Dashnaks together with ASALA, another terrorist organization, have caused the murders of 31 Turkish diplomats serving abroad and some members of their families. After Armenia gaining independence, they have become active again in the country only to be banned during Ter Petrossian's presidency due to their harmful activities. As they have helped Kocharian to be elected as president, they have joined the government coalition during Kocharian's presidency and have continued to do so during Sarkisian's presidency. However, by objecting to the signing of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols, they have withdrawn from the government.

While serving in the government, the Dashnaks had gained 11% of the votes and 11 deputies in the 2003 elections. In 2008, they had gained 16 deputies with 13% of the votes. In the current elections, they have experienced a great regression by only gaining 5.7% of the votes and 6 deputies. From what could be understood, taking part in the opposition has not been beneficial for the Dashnaks.

### **f. Orinats Yerkir (The Rule of Law) Party**

Since 1998, Artur Baghdasaryan has been the chairman of this party, whose Armenian name is Orinats Yerkir and is known as the Rule of Law Party, wanting to stress the idea of "superiority of law". He is known as an advocate of the European Union and particularly of France. Over time, quite

great changes have been observed in the party's percentage of votes and the number of deputies. According to this, it had gained 4 deputies in the 1999 elections, 18 in 2003, 9 in 2007 and 5 deputies in 2012. This party, which has shown regression in the recent years, must enter the parliament in order to exist within the government. There are some rumors that in order to gain votes in the last elections, the party had distributed mobile phones and then wanted them back when it failed to receive votes.<sup>81</sup>

### 3. Irregularities in the Elections, Statements of the Electoral Observers

The final point we would like to address in relation to the Armenian parliamentary elections is the irregularities and frauds. We must note that since its independence, electoral frauds and irregularities have taken place in all elections held in Armenia which have also been recorded in the reports of international observers. However, none of the elections have been cancelled. Based on Armenian press, this year casting votes in return for money has been experienced the most. The amount paid is generally 10.000 Drams (approximately 25 dollars). A newspaper has put forth that 2.5 million dollars might have been distributed in total.<sup>82</sup> Based on a public survey, 20% of the voters are ready to sell their votes in exchange for money.<sup>83</sup>

Secondly, there is the incidence of ballot boxes being filled with voting papers beforehand. However, there are some articles that argue that this fraud has been seen less this year compared to the previous years. Another and rather common irregularity is the parties carrying the voters by bus to the voting places and providing them with foods and beverages. There are also incidents in which some people have voted more than once.<sup>84</sup>

Some parties have objected to the irregularities and frauds, in fact, the Armenian National Congress has appealed to the Constitutional Court regarding the number of votes it has received in the elections.

Numerous observers have watched the Armenian elections. Despite some irregularities taking place during the elections, acts of violence not being observed much has pleased them. In a joint statement issued right after the elections, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and OSCE/ODIHR have

81 "Yerkir: Orinats Yerkir Wants Mobile Phones Back", *Panorama.am.*, 8 May 2012.

82 "Sociologist Claims UDD 2-2,5 Mln Spent as Electoral Bribes", *PanArmenian.net*, 8 May 2012.

83 "Sale of Votes Has Become a Tradition in Armenia", *Arminfo*, 14 April 2012.

84 "Widespread Irregularities Mar Armenian Election", *Asbarez*, 7 May 2012.



indicated that the drawbacks registered during parliamentary elections won't significantly affect the outcomes.<sup>85</sup> Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs, along with Commissioner Stefan Fülle responsible for enlargement, have expressed their pleasure in the elections being held in a peaceful atmosphere and has thanked the Armenian authorities for holding these transparent and competitive elections.<sup>86</sup> Sharing these views, Spokesman of US Foreign Ministry has indicated that before the elections, there has been an incident of buying votes and applying improper pressure against the constituents.<sup>87</sup>

In conclusion, since no events resulting in deaths have taken place as in the 2008 presidential elections and since the current elections have been conducted in a rather calm atmosphere, the observers have agreed that the elections are valid despite some irregularities.

#### 4. Objections to the Elections

Despite the stances of the observers which accept the results of the elections, three of the parties participating in the elections have issued a joint statement in which they have indicated that the election results “do not reflect the real picture of support given to various political forces” and that many irregularities, especially vote-buying, have taken place. These parties are the partner of Government Coalition the Prosperous Armenia Party, the Dashnak Party and the main opposition party of the Armenian National Congress.<sup>88</sup>

The coming together of these three parties is much more surprising. Government partner the Prosperous Armenia Party has emerged as the most profitable party from the elections. It has increased its votes by approximately a fold (from 14.7% to 39.12%) and by gaining 13 more deputies compared to the previous election, has earned a total of 37 seats in the Assembly. In other words, the party which should be the least complaining is Prosperous Armenia. It is possible that the questioning of the election results arises from the idea of increasing bargaining power while the government is being formed.

The Armenian National Congress had not participated in the 2007 elections,

85 “EU Observers Report Progress During Election Campaign”, *AMT*, 7 May 2012.

86 “Elections Législatives – L’UE Félicite l’Arménie”, *Armenews*, 9 May 2012.

87 “US State Department Comments on Armenia’s Parliamentary Elections”, *News.am*, 8 May 2012.

88 “Elections 2012. Armenian Main Opposition Parties Unanimously Decry Outcome of Parliamentary Poll”, *Global Insight*, 14 May 2012.

but the chairman of this party and Armenia's first president Levon Ter-Petrossian had received 21.5% of the votes during the 2008 presidential elections. Only being able to receive 7.7% of the votes during the parliamentary elections indicates a serious regression for the Armenian National Congress. Moreover, as mentioned above, this party has also appealed to the Armenian Constitutional Court regarding the elections.<sup>89</sup>

The Dashnak Party has lost the most deputies during the elections. While there were 16 deputies in 2007, now they have only been able to gain 6 deputies. Therefore, it is quite normal for it to bring forth irregularities during the elections. But, the interesting point is that they have signed the same declaration together with the Armenian National Congress, because as mentioned above, the president of that time Levon Ter-Petrossian had closed the party in 1994 on grounds that it was preparing a coup. Time will show whether a serious cooperation will take place between the Dashnaks and the Armenian National Congress.

## V – COMMEMORATION OF 24 APRIL

The 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 24 April 1915, which is recognized as the remembrance day of the Armenian “genocide” that is actually the date where around 200 prominent Armenian figures have been arrested in Istanbul and sent to Ankara, Ayaş and Çankırı with no deaths taking place, has been commemorated worldwide where there is a sufficient number of Armenians by organizing many meetings and demonstrations mostly in Armenian churches. As always, these commemoration ceremonies have taken place the most extensively in the US. The ceremonies were essentially the same as those in the previous year.

The only difference this year was that French President Nicolas Sarkozy attended the ceremony in Paris and delivered a speech. Therefore, for the first time in the world, apart from Armenia, a president had attended the 24 April ceremony. This gesture of Sarkozy caused François Hollande, who was presidential candidate back then (and became president after the elections), to also attend the 24 April ceremony in order not to remain behind Sarkozy. Hollande had said that if elected, he would attend the ceremonies in the coming years. (We had addressed this issue separately above under the title “France and the Armenian Question”)

Apart from ceremonies, demonstrations that protest Turkey are also organized in foreign countries. These are mostly tried to be organized in

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89 “Armenian National Congress Appeals to Constitutional Court”, *News.am*, 18 May 2012.

front of Turkish Embassies and/or Consulates, but local security forces generally take precautions to prevent these diplomatic missions from being harmed.

Since there is not enough space to address the ceremonies conducted in different parts of the world and in order not to repeat the same points which will not be of any interest, we will only refer to the ceremonies organized in Armenia and in Turkey.

### 1. Commemoration Activities in Armenia

We must base the ceremonies in Armenia on Yerevan since it is the capital and the “genocide” memorial is established there.

These ceremonies start with a torchlight procession in Yerevan on the evening of 23rd April. Just as in the previous years, the peak point of the march, to which generally the youth attends and shouts slogans against Turkey, has been the burning of the Turkish flag. According to a newspaper, the posters of President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu have also been burned.<sup>90</sup> Another newspaper has written that slogans of “We want compensation, we want territory” have been shouted.<sup>91</sup> It is known that this march has been organized by the Dashnak Party. Therefore, there are doubts on to what degree it is “official”. However, since no one has prevented it and a significant number of people (a couple of thousand) have attended, it is not important whether or not it is official.

The actual ceremony takes place on April 24 at the Genocide Memorial in Yerevan. All high states officials including the President, the Supreme Patriarch in Etchmiadzin, Speaker of the Assembly and the Prime Minister attend the ceremony. The Memorial is then opened to visits. Although there is no doubt that the Memorial is visited by numerous people, there is always uncertainty concerning the number of visitors. Sometimes hundreds and as in this year, sometimes thousands of individuals are mentioned.<sup>92</sup> A Turkish newspaper<sup>93</sup> has broken the record of exaggeration by stating that one million people have marched to the Memorial.

In his statement issued for 24 April, President Sarkisian has emphasized that

90 “Erivan’da Türk Bayrağı Yakıldı” (The Turkish Flag Was Burned in Yerevan), *Vatan*, 25 April 2012.

91 “Acı, Öfke ve Temenni” (Pain, Rage and Wish), *Radikal*, 25 April 2012.

92 “Armenia Marks Genocide Anniversary”, *RFE/RL*, 24 April 2012.

93 “Neroğutyun” (Özür Diliyoruz) (We Apologize), *Taraf*, 25 April 2012.

what happened in 1915 should not be forgotten and has said that April 24<sup>th</sup> is not only the day of our nationwide grief but also the day of our stubborn passion for life and our moral character. He has also said that 2015 commemorates not only the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide; it will also commemorate the anniversary of our memory and our resolve to live many more millennia and a hundred years.<sup>94</sup> Sarkisian has not referred to Turkey in his statement. Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisyan has made up for this “deficiency” by stating that sooner or later Turkey will face the dark pages of its history.<sup>95</sup>

It is seen that some embassies have also issued statements this year for 24 April. While US Ambassador John Heffern has said that all Armenians should come to the Memorial so that the memory of the events would not vanish,<sup>96</sup> Ambassador Vyacheslav Kovalenko of the Russian Federation has stated that the whole world must recognize this phenomenon as a genocide, the people who deny genocide must not be accepted by the society.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, German Ambassador Hans-Jochen Schmidt has expressed that if Turkey is longing to join the European Union family, the country must face with its history.<sup>98</sup>

## 2. Commemoration Activities in Turkey

The commemoration activities in Turkey have mostly taken place in Istanbul and have been similar to the activities of last year.<sup>99</sup>

As last year, the “Say No to Racism and Nationalism” initiative has also organized an activity this year at 7:25 P.M. at Taksim Square on 24 April to which a rather more crowded group attended compared to last year. Those who attended sat in silence around a poster with “some wounds won’t heal with time” and “this pain belongs to all of us”. In the statement issued, it was expressed that “it was not forgotten as it was kept silent, but it did not fade away as it was denied. On the opposite, the wound turned into an infection, the deadlock prevailed. Hand in hand, we have much to do for the future. Let us mourn this grief of the past together”.<sup>100</sup>

94 “President Serzh Sargsyan’s Address on the Occasion of the Armenian Genocide Commemoration Day”, *Armradio*, 24 April 2012.

95 “PM Confident Turkey Will Face Dark Pages of Its History”, *PanArmenian.Net*, 24 April 2012.

96 “April 24 Important Day for Armenians- Us Ambassador”, *News.am*, 24 April 2012.

97 “Russian Federation Ambassador to Stress the Important Role of International Community in Genocide Recognition Issue”, *Armenpress*, 24 April 2012.

98 “Hans-Jochen Schidt: Turkey Must Face With Its History”, *Panorama.am*, 24 April 2012.

99 *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, No. 39, pp. 51-55

100 “Acıya Yasla Karşı Çıkalm” (Let Us Mourn This Grief), *Taraf*, 25 April 2012.

The low number of Armenians who had attended these kinds of ceremonies in the last and previous years had drawn attention. This time, a group of Armenians called on individuals to attend the ceremony.<sup>101</sup> However, we can assume from the low number of those attending the demonstration at Taksim that the Armenians of Turkey have not esteemed much to this call. However, observing that some BDP deputies, with Sırrı Süreyya Önder being at the forefront, participating in the demonstration, has shown that individuals of Kurdish origin were also present among the attendees.

On the other hand, in a press conference in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Sırrı Süreyya Önder has said that she prepared a bill to declare April 24 as the national day of sharing the grief, commemoration and pains of the Armenian community and also by indicating that facing the Armenian genocide allegations is important in creating a peaceful future, has called on the Assembly to address the issue.<sup>102</sup>

The second demonstration was organized by the Istanbul Bureau of the Human Rights Association. A group gathering in front of the Turkish Islamic Artifacts Museum, which was alleged to be a prison in the past, read out a statement. In the statement, by expressing that 24 April continues to be a taboo in Turkey and that the 1915 events was genocide against the Armenians and Syrians, the joint declaration accepted in 2010 by Armenian and Turkish organizations was repeated. Meanwhile, like Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Law, it called on the obstacles of freedom of expression which restricts Turkey-Armenia dialogue to be eliminated and the protocols on the normalization of relations to be implemented by opening of the borders. Furthermore, in order to maintain permanent peace and to prevent all kinds of disagreements that could arise in the future, it also called on both states to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. On the other hand, the Government was invited to act in accordance with the text of this declaration and to start the process of facing the crimes against humanity, and in particular genocide, experienced in history.<sup>103</sup>

During this demonstration, Director of the Gomidas Institute in London, Ara Sarafian also delivered a statement in which he expressed his views regarding 1915 and said that they still face the pressures of the Turkish state

101 <http://www.agos.com.tr/24-nisan-anmalarina-turkiyeuermenilerinden-birgrup-dacagrıda-bulunuyor-1279.html>

102 "24 Nisan Yas Günü İlan Edilsin Teklifi" (Proposal to Declare 24 April as Mourning Day), *Radikal*, 26 April 2012.

103 "Ermeni Soykırımını Üzerine" IHD [www.ihd.org.tr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2531:ermenisoykirim-i-uzerine&ca...](http://www.ihd.org.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2531:ermenisoykirim-i-uzerine&ca...)

104 "Soykırım kurbanları için karanfiller bırakıldı" 24 April 2012 <http://www.demokrathaber.net/guncel/soykirim-kurbanlari-icin-karanfiller-birakildi-h8425.html>

and that the works they conduct is to reveal the truth and that Turkey is now also aware of this.<sup>104</sup>

This group has then gone to the Sirkeci Post Office and sent a letter each to the Etchmiadzin Supreme Patriarch (Catholicos) Karekin II and the Catholicos of Cilicia Aram I located in Antelias in Beirut. In the letter to Karekin II, it was said that the letter was written to bow in shame and in respect before the memory of the Ottoman Armenians who were massacred and dispossessed of all their riches and all their richness of every kind, and effectively, even of the vestiges of their past. In the letter to Aram I, after reminding him that he had sent a letter to Prime Minister Erdoğan in 2011 declaring that the Armenians are the rightful owners of the religious and public properties confiscated by the Turkish state in 1915 and that he had called on Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide allegations, they wrote that his demands are also their (Human Rights Association's) demands.<sup>105</sup>

Last of all, the grave of Sevağ Şahin Balıkçı, who had been killed last year in April 24 during his military service, was visited.<sup>106</sup>

These demonstrations, which we have tried to summarize above, have taken place calmly. Although a group of members of the People's Liberation Party has protested the demonstration at Taksim near by, security forces have prevented any incidents from taking place.<sup>107</sup>

On the other hand, other demonstrations have also been organized against 24 April outside of Istanbul. News in the press have shown that former CHP deputy Canan Arıtman, together with the Turkey-Azerbaijan Friendship Association of the Talat Pasha Committee and the Labor Party, has organized a march to the Monument for Martyred Diplomats in Izmir,<sup>108</sup> while in Ankara Lobisav has laid a black wreath at the embassies of those countries adopting resolutions in their parliaments which recognize the 1915 events as genocide along with a "civilian protest note" signed by 14 thousand.<sup>109</sup>

Although the Say No to Racism and Nationalism Initiative has declared that it will also hold demonstrations for 24 April outside of Istanbul in Ankara,

105 "Turkish Human Rights Group sends letters to Etchmiadzin, Antelias", *tert.am*, 25 April 2012.

106 "Acıya Yasla Karşı Çıkalım" (Let Us Mourn This Grief), *Taraf*, 25 April 2012.

107 Ibid.

108 "Talat Paşa Komitesi Şehit Diplomatlar'a Yürüdü" (Talat Pasha Committee Marched to the Martyred Diplomats), *Aydınlık*, 25 April 2012.

109 "Profesör de imzaladı çoban da, ev hanımı da muhtar da..." *Hürriyet*, 23 April 2012

Izmir and Bodrum,<sup>110</sup> no information has been received, at least from the greater press, concerning them.

Concerning this issue, we would like to address one final surprising event. Istanbul deputy of the Justice and Development Party İsmet Uçma has said in a statement that the 1915 events was “a tragic deportation of ancestors”. By expressing that the Committee of Union and Progress was responsible for it, Uçma has “personally” apologized to the Armenians and by saying that “their pain is also ours”, has indicated that the Armenians living in Armenia must be supported in reaching “comfort and peace”. Moreover, he has also put forth that Sabiha Gökçen was of Armenian origin.<sup>111</sup> Then, by making an explanation, Uçma has said “I separate the Armenians into three; the Armenians living in Turkey, the Armenians living in Armenia and the Diaspora. Those living in Turkey are our citizens. Those living in Armenia are not in a very good condition. I said that we must apologize to innocent, blameless people. Apologizing is self confidence, greatness. However, the Diaspora is no different than the PKK. It conducts several works by forming a lobby. I believe that the Diaspora was also responsible for Hrant Dink’s murder. I also condemn the Khojaly Massacre and Armenia’s pressures over Azerbaijan”.<sup>112</sup>

The demonstrations and other small activities that we have tried to summarize above have been small-scale and have not left a certain mark on public opinion or created any other significant reactions. However, it has been seen that similar to last year, some columnists have written about 24 April. An important part of them are distant from the views of the nationalist segment and the official discourse on the Armenian question and are more close to the Armenian views. The most stressed issue in these writings is that Turkey should face its history. Some of them also state that Turkey or the Turks should apologize to the Armenians. Writings which address Armenians claims of properties being returned, compensation being paid and territory being given to Armenia are few. As far as we see, none of them support territory being given to Armenia.

The important point here is that these kinds of writings were rarely seen within the Turkish press seven or eight years ago. But now, addressing the Armenian question is considered as some kind of a “progress” among those who support leftist ideas and liberalism, as being understood to be a more modern version of it, and religious values. This constitutes the main reason

110 “24 Nisan anma programı” <http://www.durde.org/2012/04/24-nisan-anma-programi#more-5374>

111 “AK Partili Milletvekili Ermenilerden Özür Diledi” (AKP Deputy Apologized to the Armenians), *Radikal*, 25 April 2012.

112 “AK Parti’li Uçma: Diasporadan Değil Masum Ermenilerden Özür Dilenmeli Dedim” *Sondakika* <http://www.sondakika.com/haber-ak-parti-li-ucma-diasporadan-degil-masum-3568101/>

for the number of these writings to increase. As mentioned above, the main theme in these writings is for Turkey to face its history and this, rather than being interested in the Armenian question, reflects the efforts to struggle with nationalist thoughts and actions, which are the majority in Turkey, by giving historical events as an excuse.

Concerning how this segment, which partially supports Armenian views, is considered in Armenia and within the Diaspora, reactions are rarely seen and sometimes they are praised with moderate statements. The reason for this is most likely that these writings are not considered as sufficient or effective. In regards to this, the words of a French author of Armenian origin are quite meaningful: “The number of Turks and Kurds who want to face their history is very low in Turkey. It is impossible to change public opinion in Turkey through only the efforts of leftist institutions”.<sup>113</sup>

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113 Jean Eckian, “Les Tendances Modernes de la Politique en Turquie”, Armenews.com, 20 May 2012.



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