

## FROM THE HISTORY OF ARMENIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

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On April 10, 2005, the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan addressed the Armenian President with an official letter suggesting to create a council of historians to study the events of 1915. The Council, according to Erdogan, should examine the relevant materials kept in the archives of Turkey, Armenia and other countries and then present its conclusions to the international community. This letter, in fact, is a starting point for the new activation of Armenian-Turkish relations, preconditioned by the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

In this letter Erdogan states that, “the painful memories of the past have left traces in our nations’ consciousness, and today they continue to hinder the improvement of friendly relations between the two countries”, moreover, Erdogan emphasizes that “the primary duty of the leaders of the two countries is to leave a peaceful and friendly environment for the future generations, where tolerance and mutual respect will prevail”. Lastly, the Turkish Prime Minister expresses hope that his “suggestion will receive a positive response from the Armenian authorities”<sup>1</sup>.

Already on April 25, 2005, the President of the Republic of Armenia, R. Kocharyan, in response to Erdogan’s letter, expressed the opinion that, “As neighbors we should try to find ways to live in peace and harmony today and in the future”, and that’s why from the very beginning the RA offered Turkey “to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries, open borders and start a dialogue between the two countries and peoples”. In addition, the RA President emphasized the fact that, “governments are responsible for the development of bilateral relations and we are not eligible to leave it to historians”. Lastly, the RA President again suggested Turkey “establishing normal relations” between the two countries “without any preconditions”, as well as in this context creating “an

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<sup>1</sup> See Սաֆարյան Դ., Ոսկանյան Վ., Մելիքյան Գ., Սաֆարյան Ա., Լեոնային Ղա-  
րաբաղի հիմնահարցը Թուրքիայի հասարակական-քաղաքական դիսկուրսում, Ե., 2017,  
p. 78-79.

intergovernmental commission to discuss any issues or all the important issues existing between the two countries, with the aim to solve them and achieve mutual understanding”<sup>2</sup>. The US Ambassador to Armenia, John Evans, sent the response letter of the President of Armenia, published on Wikileaks, to the US Department of State, attaching his comments to it.

In his comments, the US Ambassador specifically noted that, “Erdogan's proposal is not new, and such calls had also been made by each Turkish administration in the past, aiming to counteract the Armenian Genocide recognition process”. According to Evans's observation, the news here was that “such a suggestion was made in writing and at the highest level”, which, according to Evans, “was a serious concern regarding the seriousness and sincerity of Erdogan's letter”. Evans also expressed his concern over the fact that “before reaching Yerevan, the letter had appeared in the Turkish press” and “had spread in the US Congress” aiming to show the US Congressmen that “the process of rapprochement and reconciliation was underway”, as well as that “there was no need for Congress Resolution”<sup>3</sup>.

During his meeting with the journalists of the “Milliyet” newspaper, Erdogan clarified his official statement addressed to the RA President. In this regard, the Turkish Prime Minister noted that he did not say that “only historians should deal with the Armenian issue”, in his opinion, “political scientists should join historians, but the final decision should be made by the politicians”. Then the Turkish Prime Minister expressed the conviction that he could not “accept those who misunderstand the terms and take deportation as “genocide”. Finally, reacting to R. Kocharian's response letter's offer to open the borders, Erdogan was surprised, “why do you continue the struggle for the international recognition of the genocide when you demand to open borders?”<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, if Turkey made specific preconditions for improving Armenia-Turkey relations, then the RA President both in his response letter addressed to Erdogan,

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<sup>2</sup> Հայ-թուրքական հարաբերություններ, հիմնախնդիրներ և հեռանկարներ, խորհրդարանական լուսմներ, 2007 թ., 19-20 դեկտեմբերի, Հայաստանի Հանրապետության Ազգային ժողով, Ե., 2011, էջ 414-415:

<sup>3</sup> WIKILEAKS-ը հրապարակել է 2005 թ. Ռեջեփի Էրդողանին Ռոբերտ Քոչարյանի գրած նամակը, <http://2rd.am/hy/WikiLeaky-hraparakel-e-2005-t-Rejep-Erdoghanin-Robert-Kocharyani-grats-namaky>

<sup>4</sup> “Milliyet”, 29.04.05.

and previously had repeatedly stated that Armenia was ready to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey without any preconditions and discuss any issues existing between the two countries at the highest level. Moreover, as the facts show, the RA leadership was not against and even positively reacted to Turkey's membership to the European Union (hereinafter the EU).

So, on February 17, 2007, the RA President who was in Paris, in his interview with the "Figaro" newspaper, touching upon the issue of Turkey's membership to the EU stated, "The process of Turkey's membership to the EU implies serious reforms aimed at the transformation of the Turkish society", which ultimately meant "progress towards a more predictable, more open Turkey, which is more tolerant to minorities, more prone to re-evaluate their own history". Besides, according to R. Kocharian, in case of Turkey's membership to the EU, "we will have a border with the EU, which would certainly be positive"<sup>5</sup>.

To present the position of Turkey's new leadership in relations with Armenia more fully, we find it necessary to briefly refer to the article entitled "The great Sin of the Turkish Press in the Armenian Question" published in the "Zaman" newspaper's April 16, 2007 Issue.

The author of the article, Selçuk Gultashly, touching upon the issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, notes that "the genocide is a great lie" and that "Europe and the United States well know about it but ignore it for political speculations". According to the Turkish author, "European politicians" cling to the "genocide lies" with the aim of getting the votes of the Armenians during the elections. Then, the author touching upon the idea of "not counteracting the Armenian Genocide, the world encouraged their repetition" published in the April 13 Issue of the "New York Times", qualifies it as a "disgrace"<sup>6</sup>.

We consider that both Selçuk Gultashly and other Turks were well aware that even the closest allies of Turkey did not conceal the fact that "if they do not describe the genocide of Armenians as a genocide, it is done not to lose Ankara's alliance"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ռոբերտ Քոչարյանի հարցազրույցը «Ֆիգարո» թերթին, 20.02.2007, <http://2rd.am/hy/Robert-Kocharyani-harcazy-Figaro-Tertin>

<sup>6</sup> See **Սաֆարյան Դ.**, Թուրքիայի հասարակական-քաղաքական կարծիքը հայ-թուրքական հարաբերությունների կարգավորման հիմնախնդրի մասին (2001–2007 թթ.<sup>8</sup>, «21-րդ դար», թիվ 1 (59), Ե., 2015, էջ 129–130:

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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This is clearly supported by the fact that Resolution 106 on the condemnation of the Armenian Genocide adopted by The *House Committee on Foreign Affairs of the American Congress* on October 11, 2007, despite the efforts of the Armenian lobbying organizations in the United States and the active efforts of the Committee on Armenian Issues of the House of Representatives, however, was not put to the vote at the plenary session of the House of Representatives, as the Bush Administration vetoed it into the US Senate agenda, explaining that the Turks could take action to respond<sup>8</sup>.

Ultimately, according to the Turkish reporter, Europe and the US, without believing the fact of the Armenian Genocide, were trying to put pressure on Turkey, aiming to get the votes of Armenians in their countries in that way. The fact that both the United States and the European countries have been trying to solve their own problems with the demand for the recognition of the Armenian genocide by Turkey is beyond doubt. However, the real desire of the reporter is that he was trying to deny the fact of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey, moreover, the reporter stated the wrong opinion that the United States and European countries did not believe the fact of the Armenian Genocide, but at the same time pursued certain political goals.

As we know, in 2007, early parliamentary elections were held in Turkey on June 22, with the overwhelming majority of votes cast by the JDP. Moreover, one month after the parliamentary elections the nominated candidate from the JDP, A. Gul, won the presidential elections becoming Turkey's 11th president<sup>9</sup>.

During this period Turkey's ruling JDP initiated a new draft constitution of Turkey. The discussions were not smooth, meeting the criticism of the Kemalist nationalist opposition. Under such circumstances, Turkey was also facing the necessity of making a step forward in the Armenian-Turkish relations<sup>10</sup>.

At the end of 2007, parliamentary hearings on Armenian-Turkish relations were being held at the RA NA Standing Committee on Foreign Relations. One of the issues discussed was the suggestion by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan to set up a commission to study the 1915 events.

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<sup>8</sup> The New York Times, 11.10.2007: The same in, Մամյան Լ., «Լոբբինգ»-ի դրսևորման ձևերը ամերիկահայության մեջ, «Պատմություն և մշակույթ» Հայագիտական հանդես, (գիտական հոդվածների ժողովածու), Ե., 2015, էջ 199–200:

<sup>9</sup> Թուրքիայի Հանրապետության պատմություն, Ե., 2014, էջ 320–321:

<sup>10</sup> See Սաֆարյան Դ., Ոսկանյան Վ., Մելիքյան Գ., Սաֆարյան Ա., op. cit., p. 88.

During the hearings, in his speech RA Minister of Foreign Affairs, V. Oskanyan categorically denied Erdogan's suggestion, pointing out, "how can Erdogan's letter be taken seriously when there is article 301 in his country's criminal code that criminally punishes those who dare not only pronounce the word genocide, but even discuss the 1915 events?" According to Oskanyan, Turkey's suggestion was in fact a goal to "show Europe that Turkey has a good will, and wants to enter into dialogue and solve the most central issue with Armenians". Finally, the RA Minister of Foreign Affairs concludes that "the letter cannot be taken seriously because ultimately there are no normal conditions, there is no atmosphere to discuss such an important issue, and in such circumstances suggesting that historians and scholars are involved in the discussion of this issue is incomprehensible"<sup>11</sup>.

Shavarsh Kocharyan calls on the participants to understand the situation in Turkey correctly, as according to him, "There have been deep changes in Turkey", so "we are the losing side in relations with Turkey, but we are ready to start relations without any preconditions"<sup>12</sup>.

The foreign policy efforts of the RA in the period under discussion continued to have positive results in the international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide, the testimony of which was the recognition and condemnation of the fact of the Armenian Genocide by several countries. Certainly, the contribution of the Armenian Diaspora should not be underestimated.

So, on April 19, 2005, the Polish Parliament (Sejm) officially recognized the Armenian Genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire in 1915<sup>13</sup>.

On June 16, 2005, the German Bundestag unanimously adopted a resolution on "Remember and condemn the deportation and massacres of Armenians. Germany should support the reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia". The adoption of the resolution was undoubtedly a historical, political and legally significant event in the process of the international recognition of the Armenian

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<sup>11</sup> ՀՀ արտգործնախարար Վարդան Օսկանյանի ելույթը ՀՀ ԱԺ Հայ-թուրքական հարաբերությունների վերաբերյալ լսումների ժամանակ, 2007, 19 դեկտեմբերի, <http://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/item/2007/12/19/vo/>

<sup>12</sup> **Քոչարյան Շ.**, Ազգային ժողովրդական կուսակցություն, ելույթ «Հայ-թուրքական հարաբերություններ. հիմնախնդիրներ և հեռանկարներ»:

<sup>13</sup> Հայոց ցեղասպանության միջազգային ճանաչումը, երկրների ցանկ, <http://www.genocide-museum.am/arm/states.php>

Genocide. However, in addition, the resolution also contained certain negative aspects.

First, as seen in the title of the resolution, the term “genocide” was not used here, instead the expression “deportation and massacres” was used.

The second negative aspect was that the resolution was calling for a commission of historians to study the Armenian Genocide, something that, in fact, repeated Erdogan's call to the RA leadership. In this regard, we want to emphasize that it is senseless to study something that has long been explored and proven. In addition, the suggestion to create such a committee, in some sense, discredited the legislative bodies of the countries that recognized the Armenian Genocide as an undeniable reality, recognized and condemned it. Of course, the resolution also had positive aspects from which we would like to highlight the following:

1. Germany actually admitted its guilt in the deportation and massacres of Armenians.
2. The resolution condemned the persecution of specialists engaged in the disclosure of genocide in Turkey.
3. Resolution calls on Turkey to open borders and ensure economic development of the South Caucasus countries, including Armenia<sup>14</sup>.

On July 14, 2005, Venezuela's National Assembly adopted a resolution condemning “the first consciously planned, organized and implemented genocide of human history” against the Armenian people, and decided to apply to the EU “to postpone Turkey's membership to the EU until the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey”<sup>15</sup>.

On December 15, 2005, the *Seimas* of the Republic of *Lithuania* adopted a resolution condemning “the Armenian Genocide committed by the Turks of the Ottoman Empire in 1915”, and called on the Republic of Turkey “to recognize this historical fact”<sup>16</sup>.

On January 15, 2006, Argentina adopted national law No. 26199, which declared April 24 as ““Action Day for Tolerance and Respect between People” in memory of the Genocide of the Armenian people, and with the spirit that its

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<sup>14</sup> Պատկերավոր պատմություն. «Հայաստան-Թուրքիա: Մեծ բանավեճը», Եվրոպական կայնության նախաձեռնություն (ESI) 2009 օգոստոս, էջ 121–124:

<sup>15</sup> See **Քոչարյան Վ.**, Հայոց ցեղասպանությունը միջազգային իրավական փաստաթղթերում, Ե., 2014, p. 43–44.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

memory will always be a lesson for the present actions and future goals". In addition, the law authorized all Argentinean Armenian workers, public servants, students in primary and secondary general education institutions "on every April 24 to have the opportunity to participate in the events commemorating the tragedy caused to their community"<sup>17</sup>.

On June 5, 2007, the Senate of Chile adopted a resolution condemning the genocide of more than 1.5 million Armenians "between the periods of 1915–1923" in "their ancestral lands"<sup>18</sup>.

On November 19, 2007, at the plenary session of the MERCOSUR Parliamentary Assembly in Montevideo, Uruguay, deputies representing Argentinean, Brazilian, Paraguay and Uruguay legislatures by a majority vote confirmed the decision on recognition of the Armenian Genocide unanimously adopted by the Human Rights Commission. The decision specifically states, "MERCOSUR's Parliament strongly condemns the 1915–1923 Armenian Genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire, which took the lives of 1.5 million people, expresses its support to the righteous Armenian nation". At the same time, the Parliament urges "governments and parliaments that had not yet recognized or condemned the Armenian Genocide to make such a decision"<sup>19</sup>.

It is clear that the discussions on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in different international courts and parliaments, as well as the adoption of resolutions and laws should have been painfully accepted by Turkey and met counteraction.

On October 12, 2006, for the first time, the lower chamber of the French National Assembly adopted the Bill envisaging criminal responsibility for the denial of the Armenian Genocide. The latter was put into circulation when Turkey announced that it would not open its ports for the EU member, the Republic of Cyprus, and would not trade with it. And so, in our opinion, the adoption of the Bill became an additional measure of pressure on Turkey, and already in December by the inducement of France and Germany the negotiations for

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<sup>17</sup> Հայոց ցեղասպանության միջազգային ճանաչումը, երկրների ցանկ, <http://genocide.am/news2.html?armenian>

<sup>18</sup> Քոչարյան Վ., op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> ՄԵՐԿՈՍՐ-ի խորհրդարանի կողմից Հայոց ցեղասպանության ճանաչման վերաբերյալ 2007 թ. նոյեմբերի 20-ի որոշումը, <http://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/item/2007/11/20/mercosur/>

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Turkey's membership to the EU which had been resumed by the European Council's decision in 2005 were stopped. The Bill was first introduced in the parliamentary debate in 2007, but was not adopted either by the Senate or the President<sup>20</sup>.

At first sight, the adoption of the Bill by the lower chamber of the French Parliament (similar bills were also adopted in Switzerland, Slovakia, Greece, and Cyprus) may seem to be an effective way for fight against the Armenian Genocide denial by Turkey. However, the analyses of the facts show that the bills were largely circulated in the parliament of this or that country when for solving any political issue arising from the interests of any country an attempt was made to manipulate the issue of the Armenian Genocide.

Summarizing the questions raised in the article, the following inferences can be made:

1. The letter sent by the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan to the RA President on April 10, 2005 is the basis of the new activation of the Armenian-Turkish relations.

2. Despite the RA President, R. Kocharyan's calls to Turkey to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries without preconditions and to open the borders, Turkey still continued to make preconditions for the RA.

3. Erdogan again, questioning the fact of the Armenian Genocide, diminished all the resolutions adopted by the parliaments of all countries in which the Armenian Genocide was accepted as an undeniable reality and condemned.

4. During the period under discussion, the Turkish side published articles on the pages of the press, which emphasized that both the US and Europe seemed not to believe the fact of the Armenian Genocide, and by putting pressure on Turkey in the recognition of the Armenian Genocide they only aimed to get the votes of the Armenian community in the United States and Europe.

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<sup>20</sup> Մարության Ա., Եվրոմիության դիրքորոշումը Հայոց ցեղասպանության հարցում, Լրաբեր հասարակական գիտությունների, Ե., 2016, թիվ 1, էջ 14:



## **ՀԱՅ-ԹՐԻՔԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՐԱԲԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԻՑ**

ՆԱԶԱՐՅԱՆ Մ.

### **Ամփոփում**

2005 թ. ապրիլի 10-ին Ռ. Էրդողանի՝ ՀՀ ղեկավարությանն ուղղված նամակը հայ-թուրքական հարաբերություններում կարելի է դիտարկել որպես զուտ դիվանագիտական քայլ: Նախքան այդ էլ թուրքական կողմը, նպատակ ունենալով ժխտել Հայոց ցեղասպանության փաստը ոչ պաշտոնական մակարդակով, կոչ էր անում ստեղծել պատմաբանների հանձնախումբ՝ Օսմանյան կայսրությունում 1915–1918 թթ. ողբերգական իրադարձությունները ուսումնասիրելու նպատակով: Ռ. Էրդողանի պաշտոնական գրությունը նախորդ նմանատիպ առաջարկներից տարբերվում էր նրանով, որ առաջին անգամ էր, որ թուրքական կողմը դիմում էր ՀՀ ղեկավարությանը պաշտոնական գրությամբ: Գրության բովանդակության շուրջ ՀՀ Ազգային ժողովի արտաքին հարաբերությունների մշտական հանձնաժողովն անցկացրեց հայ-թուրքական հարաբերությունների վերաբերյալ խորհրդարանական լսումներ, որոնց արդյունքում ձևավորվեց այն հստակ դիրքորոշումը, որ Ռ. Էրդողանը նման առաջարկով նպատակ էր հետապնդում ընդամենը ցույց տալ, թե, իբր, Հայաստանի և Թուրքիայի միջև պաշտոնական մակարդակով ընթանում են բանակցություններ՝ կապված Հայոց ցեղասպանության հետ: Բայց իրականում թուրքական կողմը փորձում էր հնարավորինս կանխել ԱՄՆ-ում և եվրոպական շատ երկրներում ընթացող Հայոց ցեղասպանության պաշտոնապես ճանաչման և դատապարտման գործընթացը:

## **ИЗ ИСТОРИИ АРМЯНО-ТУРЕЦКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ**

НАДЖАРЯН М.

### **Резюме**

Письмо Эрдогана от 04.10.2005, адресованное руководству РА, можно рассматривать как дипломатический шаг в армяно-турецких отношениях.

Официальное письмо Эрдогана отличается от предыдущих тем, что впервые турецкая сторона на высшем уровне обращается к руководству РА с предложением создать группу историков с целью изучения «трагических событий в Османской империи 1915–1918 гг.». Во время слушаний по содержанию письма постоянная комиссия парламента РА по внешним отношениям высказала свою четкую позицию, согласно которой подобным заявлением Эрдоган всего лишь преследовал цель продемонстрировать, будто между Арменией и Турцией на официальном уровне ведутся переговоры по вопросу геноцида армян. Однако на самом деле турецкая сторона всячески пыталась препятствовать процессу официального признания и осуждения геноцида армян рядом стран Европы и Соединенными Штатами Америки.