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# RECOGNITION OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AS PART OF SOUTH CAUCASIAN AND MID-EASTERN POLITICS

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## How the Problem is Treated within the Geopolitical Armenia-U.S.-Turkey Triangle

Since restoring their country's political independence the Armenian leaders never tire of saying how important it is to have the world recognize the existence of the Armenian genocide and to redress the huge losses it has caused. This is set forth in the Declaration of Armenian Independence. In 1992-1997, certain political figures did a lot to push the issue beyond the range of attention; what is more, there was a lot of talk about the need to establish "close friendly" or, at least, "good-neighborly" relations with Turkey in order to allegedly ensure Armenia's national independence. Later events demonstrated, however, that Turkey took these statements for signs of weakness. Ankara failed to realize that international

recognition of the 1915-1923 genocide was fraught with serious consequences and that it would be confronted with huge problems in the sphere of international relations. This explains why Turkey intensified its embargo against Armenia under the pretext of needing to resolve the “Karabakh issue” in favor of Azerbaijan.

The regime of then Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrossian was prepared to discuss the problem so as not to offend its western neighbor, which meant that the head of state was too frightened to discuss the possibility of international recognition of the Armenian genocide. The first president dismissed Foreign Minister Raffi Oganessian, who dared to mention the issue at an international conference in Istanbul. Zhirayr Liparityan,<sup>1</sup> “éminence grise” of Armenia, repeatedly traveled to Turkey to assure its leaders of his continued dedication to Armenian-Turkish cooperation. More than that, the regime went as far as trying to prevent international recognition of the genocide. Amaiak Oganessian, who headed the Union of Political Scientists of Armenia, said that while discussing the international recognition issues in the State Duma of Russia he was pestered with phone calls from certain deputies of the Armenian parliament who demanded that he stop meddling in the issue.<sup>2</sup>

“It was at that time that those who promoted Armenian independence and the heads of the Armenian national movement came to the conclusion that relations with Turkey could (and should) be normalized and that neither the genocide, nor its international recognition issue should serve as the political foundation of Armenian diplomacy in its dealings with Turkey.

“When Armenia became an independent state it was Turkey that first mentioned the issue. Its official representatives conditioned diplomatic relations between their country and Armenia by Armenia’s pledge to forget about the genocide and stop campaigning for international recognition of the fact. They went as far as suggesting that Armenia should persuade the Armenian diaspora to follow its example.”<sup>3</sup>

The very fact that the Declaration of Independence obliged the state to promote international recognition of the Armenian genocide made the document a time bomb for Turkey and a geopolitical instrument of two Armenian states (the Republic of Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic). As Armenia strengthened its defenses, the government assumed a tougher stance on the issue.

Former Foreign Minister Oganessian said the following about the first period of Armenia’s position:

- “a) the Prague meeting of the CSCE foreign ministers held in January 1992, at which Armenia was admitted to this organization, proved to be the first serious test of Armenian diplomacy. It was its principled stance that forced Turkey (which wanted Armenia to drop the genocide-related claims) not to use its right of veto;
- “b) for the same reason Turkey put pressure on the Council of Europe to deprive Armenia of the ‘special guest’ status and of possible membership. The foreign minister of the Republic of Armenia subjected this position to just criticism at the meeting of ministers of the Council of Europe held in September 1992 in Istanbul.”<sup>4</sup>

Today, the Armenian nation claims Western Armenia (now part of Turkish territory) on the strength of a legal norm which says the consequences of the genocide should be liquidated; this norm is rooted in charters of international (military) tribunals, resolutions of the U.N. General Assembly, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 9 December, 1948 (enacted on 12 January, 1951). The rich experience of international relations has demonstrated that a strong ethnic community has the best chance of controlling the territory it is living on. In other words, all historical and

<sup>1</sup> Zh. Liparityan, a U.S. citizen, filled many high posts in the Republic of Armenia and was responsible for the Armenian-Turkish relations, in particular, for political rapprochement between the two countries.

<sup>2</sup> The AR TV channel, Asparez Program, Erevan, 3 November, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Zh. Liparityan, “Revise the Past, Think about the Present: The Future of the Armenian-Turkish Relations,” the paper delivered on 17 June, 2000 at an international symposium “The Armenian-Turkish Dialog on the Armenian Issue” held in the Senate of France (see: *Problems of Historiography and History of Armenian Genocide*, Erevan, 2001, pp. 166-167, in Armenian).

<sup>4</sup> R. Oganessian’s contribution to the international symposium “Genotsid arman i istoricheskaiia pamiat: vyzov XXI veku,” Los Angeles, 8 April, 2000 (see: *Gosudarstvo i natsia: ikh rol posle ob’iavlenia nezavisimosti. Armianskiy tsentr strategicheskikh i natsional’nykh issledovaniy. Analiticheskiy vypusk No. 20*, Erevan, April 2000).

legal arguments aside, an ethnic group able to concentrate and use force and other means indispensable for establishing and preserving its sovereignty in a given country (territory) can seize power there. In view of this, the Republic of Armenia preferred to leave territorial issues alone. At the same time, the taboo on further discussions of the issue established by the first president of the RA was deprived of any meaning by the continued blockade of Armenian territory and the republic's strengthening military cooperation with the regional countries (especially with Russia).

After the "velvet coup" of 1998, the republic revised its foreign policy and changed its stance on the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire and the need to redress its consequences. These issues became the key ones in Armenian geopolitics; to my mind, this was done to address the following tasks:

- 1) put pressure on Turkey and try to relieve the military-political and economic siege which involves Armenia's Turkic neighbors;
- 2) boost the "Armenian factor" in the region; and
- 3) help the diaspora members restore their rights in the home country (Western Armenia).

It should be added that even though the RA leaders detached themselves from territorial claims to parts of the Turkish territory, they would probably like to restore Armenian control over the Armenian Plateau as the Armenians' historical homeland.

President of Armenia Robert Kocharian demonstrated much more firmness and described the issue as a foreign policy priority. Speaking at the 53rd U.N. General Assembly he said that, because of its huge moral significance, the problem should be resolved: genocide was not only a crime against the Armenians, it was a crime against humanity and should be prevented in the future everywhere in the world. By saying this the president tried to return the Armenian question to the international scene: it had been buried early in the 20th century after the genocide. Official Erevan extended its support to the diaspora, which was working toward international recognition of the Armenian genocide and international condemnation of extermination of the Armenians in their homeland, Western Armenia.

When speaking about the fact that the U.S. Congress had removed the genocide resolution from the agenda under pressure from the executive branch, Robert Kocharian pointed out: "I cannot describe this as a defeat. ...Neither the United States nor the world media have ever discussed the issue in such detail. I cannot say what is better: the failure we all witnessed, or an uneventful discussion and voting that would have taken a couple of days. The press would have remained riveted to the problem for two more days; after that people in Armenia and our supporters in the diaspora would have started working toward recognition of the fact in other countries. This is a victory—there is no doubt about it. We should look at it as another step toward much better relations with Turkey. Until the issue is settled no normal relations are possible. ...What have we gained by avoiding the issue and what could we lose? No diplomatic relations with Turkey are possible as long as its blockade of Armenia continues. We were deprived of other options. ...Our aim is to attract attention to the problem. The world community will probably recognize the fact of genocide, yet it is equally important that the Turkish nation learn the truth about the past. I am convinced that what we are doing is vitally important for the immediate and long-term future. I should say once more: we do not want to create more enemies—we want to put an end to the enmity that today crops up in the form of Turkey's blockade of Armenia and its refusal to establish diplomatic relations with us."<sup>5</sup> This describes our country's current policies and Turkey's problems created by its unwillingness to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and its continued unwillingness to discuss the genocide and its consequences.

International recognition of the Armenian genocide, which started back in the 1970s-1980s, has become Armenia's geopolitical priority. Working together with the republic's leaders the diaspora has stepped up its efforts to achieve recognition of the genocide. It has scored certain victories. Since the early 1990s, recognition of the crime committed by the Young Turks has become a fact that developed into a threat to Turkey's potential EU membership when Robert Kocharian was elected president. Here are several

<sup>5</sup> *Gayastani Ganrapetutyun* (Republic of Armenia), 8 May, 1999.

facts: on 19 April, 1990, the parliament of the Republic of Cyprus declared 24 April a Memorial Day dedicated to the victims of the Armenian genocide in Turkey and condemned the cabinet of the Young Turks. On 22 April, 1994, the State Duma of Russia issued a declaration that condemned genocide, while on 14 April, 1995 it discussed a resolution that condemned extermination of Armenians in 1915-1923. On 23 April, 1996, the parliament of Canada passed a decision to mark the period between 20 and 27 April as a memorial week to the victims of crimes against humanity. On 25 April, 1996, the parliament of Greece, on 3 April, 1997, the parliament of Lebanon, on 26 March, 1998, the Senate of Belgium, and on 30 March, 2000, the parliament of Sweden recognized the fact of genocide in the Ottoman Empire, while the parliament of Lebanon passed a resolution on 11 May, 2000 that condemned Armenian genocide. On 17 November, 2000, the chamber of representatives of the Italian parliament decided to recognize the fact of genocide and called on the country's government to demand that Turkey recognize this fact too. On 18 January, 2001, the National Assembly, the Senate, and the President of France recognized the fact of genocide; and the parliament of Switzerland did this in March 2002.

This has been instrumental in restoring historical justice and moving Turkey closer to establishing diplomatic relations and lifting the blockade. The decision passed by the European Parliament, in which this structure insisted that Turkey recognize the fact of genocide, and also its recognition by France and Russia, two states that play an important role in Europe, were especially important. Supported by Armenia certain members of the diaspora tried to push the resolution on genocide through the U.S.<sup>6</sup> legislative structure and even in Iran, where the Turkic-speaking deputies form a considerable part of the legislature.<sup>7</sup>

When talking about the Armenian bill presented to the U.S. Congress, the related events, and the position of the Ter-Petrosian regime, Oganessian, one of the most influential Armenian politicians, said: "If we want to establish normal relations with Turkey rather than settling them, if we want to leave the South Caucasian mentality of a camp inmate behind, we have to blend national security and historical justice. Proceeding from this Turkey and Armenia should not try to ignore the facts of history, but to accept the past when dealing with the current problems."<sup>8</sup> In one of his other speeches he emphasized: "Official American recognition of the Armenian genocide will be Washington's important contribution to future mutually advantageous relations between Armenia and Turkey and to future stability along the border between the two countries and, therefore, to a new system of regional security in which both countries will become real partners."<sup>9</sup>

These events affected the relations between Turkey and America: on 5 June, 1996, the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress cut down aid to Turkey for 1997 (\$25m) by \$3m, until the latter recognized the fact of genocide. Turkey was alarmed. This decision served as the starting point for further discussions of the genocide issues in a committee of the U.S. Congress. L. Barsegian, Director of the Armenian Genocide Institute-Museum, pointed out that all the recent processes in the U.S. Congress unfortunately demonstrated that as long as Turkey remained a NATO member and was closely cooperating with the United States in the military-political sphere, the issue could not be positively resolved in Washington.<sup>10</sup> This conclusion of a prominent Armenian scholar was prompted by repeated interference by the U.S. executive power in what the U.S. legislature was doing so as to prevent recognition of the Armenian genocide. This could have undermined America's relations with an ally that had the second largest army in NATO.

As soon as the issue had been removed from the Congress agenda, official Washington tried to prevent its discussion in the parliaments of certain countries where there was a high possibility of a positive decision. Being aware that recognition of the fact of genocide would echo in America's regional poli-

<sup>6</sup> The effort failed because of the U.S. president's personal interference: Turkey is one of the key American allies in Hither Asia and the U.S. cherishes these relationships.

<sup>7</sup> See: *Azg* (Nation), Erevan, 16 June, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> *Azg*, 13 October, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> R. Oganessian's contribution to the international symposium "Genotsid arman i istoricheskaja pamiat: vyzov XXI veku" (see: *Gosudarstvo i natsia: ikh rol posle ob'javlenia nezavisimosti*, p. 4).

<sup>10</sup> See: *Ayots Ashkhar* (The Armenian Country), Erevan, 10 November, 2000.

cies<sup>11</sup> (especially in its relations with Turkey), the White House tried to relieve the tension. In particular, the U.S. State Department set up a so-called Armenian-Turkish reconciliation commission with representatives of the “intelligentsia” among its members.<sup>12</sup> At the second Istanbul and the third New York meeting, it became clear that the commission had been organized according to the pattern of the Greek-Turkish reconciliation commission and according to Washington’s designs, and it would never be able to resolve any of the ethnic or state problems, at least in the interests of the Armenians. The commission’s goal was to increase its influence in Turkey and in Armenia through mutual concessions. The majority of the Armenian public condemned the commission and its activity. Public opinion would have been different had statesmen and scholars from both countries been invited to take part. I am convinced that because of the memory of the events of the early 20th century, the Armenian public will never believe that normal relations with Turkey are possible. Even though the RA political leaders knew that many of the problems would remain unresolved unless the two countries started a dialog, they had to distance themselves from the commission because of popular sentiments. In response to the “unfounded” accusation of the Foreign Ministry of Armenia, its head V. Oskanian made an official statement to the effect that the government, his ministry, and the state in general had nothing to do with the commission set up in Geneva early in July 2001. He agreed with the opinion that Turkey could use the commission as an instrument to slow down the process of international recognition of Armenian genocide. There is another side of the coin. The minister pointed out, in particular: “I am convinced, and this is the common opinion, that as a result of the commission’s activities the process will stall. Six months or a year later we shall be able to say to the world, and the U.S. especially: look, we, Armenians, have gone this far, but we have not obtained any positive results because the Turks are not ready. The United States and the U.N. should recognize the fact of Armenian genocide in Turkey. This is the only way we can make the Turks realize that they cannot oppose the process.”<sup>13</sup>

During his meeting with President Kocharian, which took place in Erevan on 22 August, 2001, American congressman Adam Schiff offered his opinion about the commission. The president, who insisted on the need to keep the dialog going, pointed out: “Taking into account that this is a subtle and sensitive problem, we should discuss the issue either at the state level, something that Armenia never tried to avoid, or among the widest possible range of political forces.”<sup>14</sup>

The Armenian leaders know that in the present international context and under current international law territorial claims and denunciation of the Lenin-Ataturk Pact are impossible. The latter specified by the Moscow Treaty of March 1921 between Turkey and the R.S.F.S.R. divided Armenian territory,<sup>15</sup> while the Kars Treaty of October 1921 imposed the Moscow Treaty on Armenia. The political elite of the West will stick an “aggressiveness” label on Armenia if it tries to revise the documents. In his interview with a Turkish journalist, the Armenian president pointed out that the country was not seeking territory—it was seeking moral, financial and property compensation for those who had suffered and for their heirs; territorial claims could have been formulated had the Sèvres Treaty of 1920 been revived.<sup>16</sup> The president was undoubtedly referring to the statement made by the leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party Abdullah Ocalan relating to the treaty<sup>17</sup> and pointed out that the issue could be discussed either if the Kurds obtained autonomy in Turkey, or if any other country gained sovereignty over Western Armenia.

<sup>11</sup> For more detail, see: L. Barsegian, *The U.S., Condemnation of the Armenian Genocide and the Opposition of Turkey*, Erevan, 2001 (in Armenian).

<sup>12</sup> See: *Protokol zasedania nauchnogo soveta Instituta-muzeia genotsida armian Natsional’noy akademii nauk RA of 24 July, 2001*, No. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Gaykakan Zhamanak* (Armenian Time), daily, Erevan, No. 175 (505), 11 October, 2001; see also: *Protokol zasedania nauchnogo soveta Instituta-muzeia genotsida armian Natsional’noy akademii nauk RA of 24 July, 2001*, No. 3, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Noyan Tapan (Noah Arc) Information Agency, Erevan, 22 August, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Independent Armenia, the territory of which was divided in violation of international laws, had no say in the issue.

<sup>16</sup> A treaty between the Entente and the Ottoman Empire which recognized the independence of Western Armenia and an autonomy of Turkish Kurdistan.

<sup>17</sup> See: Statement From Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) Leader Abdullah Ocalan, from broadcast of MED-TV, 13 December, 1998 [<http://www.hr-action.org/archive/ats080199.html>], 27 March, 1999.

Financial and property compensation amounted to 19.1 billion French francs in 1919 prices (which amounts today to about \$70-80 billion)<sup>18</sup>—a sum that Turkey cannot repay: its foreign debt is over \$100 billion.

The population of the so-called Eastern Anatolia is actively moving away; entire villages are selling their houses and leaving the economically backward territory to escape poverty, yet Ankara will not allow Armenians to buy the abandoned land. This means that if the fact of genocide is recognized and the property losses are repaid, Turkey will have to allow Armenians to buy property in the abandoned villages. It will be forced to transfer, by way of compensation, certain territory to Armenians whose ancestors lived there for thousands of years, were exterminated in their homeland, or deported from it.

Since 1998 the Republic of Armenia has been following the complementarity principle in its foreign policies, which means that while developing its relationships with Iran and the Arab world, it is offering cooperation to Israel. It seems that Israel's involvement in dealing with the genocide issues could bring the Armenian and Jewish lobbies in the United States closer together, which in turn, could promote the Armenians' interests all over the world. All attempts at rapprochement with Israel are causing a storm in Ankara; it was especially indignant about a highly placed Israeli diplomat who laid a wreath at the Memorial to the Victims of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire of 1915-1923.<sup>19</sup>

## The Armenia-Israel-Azerbaijan-Turkey Rectangular and Recognition of the Extermination of Armenians

Any analysis of the regional developments around the issue calls for a careful examination of the positions of certain countries, Israel being one of the key states. To my mind, the relations between Armenia and Israel can be much more instrumental in ensuring our security than Armenia's relations with the Iran-Syria axis. Israel's present position on the genocide issue is slowing down the process of drawing the two countries closer together; their common opinion on the issue could serve Israel's interests.

Political analysts believe that recognition of Armenian genocide by two members of the Israeli cabinet and the position on the issue by some of the Israeli political figures and members of the intelligentsia<sup>20</sup> may contribute to deciding the future of the landed possessions of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Jerusalem. (These possessions cover one-third of Jerusalem's center, while its future of belonging either to Israel or Palestine is one of the pivotal issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict.) Israel and Palestine are doing their best to draw the Armenians onto their side. So far, the Armenians are being pushed toward Palestine under the weight of the Israel-Turkey-Azerbaijan military-political triangle<sup>21</sup> and the unwillingness of the U.S. Jewish lobby to allow the U.S. legislature to recognize the fact of Armenian genocide. Tel Aviv is paying particular attention to this issue within the total range of Armenian-Israeli relations. For example, Knesset deputy Nawaf Massalah, deputy Foreign Minister of Israel, met in Erevan with the Armenian president, the foreign minister, and his deputy to discuss the present level of relations between the two countries and the future of the Armenian quarter in Jerusalem within the broader context of the situation in the Middle East. They concentrated on the settlement of the Middle Eastern conflict and the so-called "Armenian aspect," that is, the future of the Armenian quarter. It is controlled by the Armenian Patriarchate, a fact that plays an important role in Armenian-Palestine relations. President Kocharian and Yasser Arafat discussed the problem at the Millennium Summit. The Palestine leader reminded the Armenian president that their nations had been brothers at all times and that the "Armenian quarter" should not be

<sup>18</sup> The figures are based on the documents presented by the Armenian delegations to the Paris Conference on 12 February, 1919 (see: L.A. Barsegian, *The Losses of the Armenian Nation in the Genocide*, Erevan, 1999, p. 13 (in Armenian)).

<sup>19</sup> See: *Loy's (Light)*, Tehran, No. 31, 15 July, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> See: *Golos Armenii*, Erevan, 23 October, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> See: A. Veliev, "The Israel-Turkey-Azerbaijan Triangle: Present and Future," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2, 2000.

“weakened.”<sup>22</sup> This meant that the Palestine leader wanted, or insisted upon, the present status of the quarter within the Palestine part of Jerusalem: this was how all Christian communities would have acted according to previous designs. Israel wants to preserve its control over the territory.

The Republic of Armenia is not so much concerned with which of the sides will control the quarter: the issue belongs to the realm of regional relationships. Armenia, like any other country, pursues its geopolitical aims, yet being interested in good relations with the Jewish structures and the Arab world it could support neither side. The slightest contact between Armenia and Israel causes a veritable storm in the Arab world and Iran. For example, V. Oskanian’s visit to Tel Aviv in 1998 nearly disrupted partnership with Tehran; we should bear in mind that Israel, Turkey, and Azerbaijan are strategic allies.<sup>23</sup> This explains the conduct of the Jewish U.S. congressmen: their political views are formed by the Israeli cabinet. The huge sums Turkey spends on disrupting discussions of the Armenian genocide<sup>24</sup> and cooperation between Ankara and certain Jewish structures undermine the efforts of Armenia and the Armenian diaspora to push bills on the genocide through the parliaments of certain countries. What is more, some of the Israeli politicians prefer “protection of Israel’s military political interests” to the truth. Vice Speaker of the Knesset Nuwerman, who also heads the Azerbaijan-Israel parliamentary group, said in Baku that relations between neighboring states should be based on good relations rather than on resolutions recognizing facts of genocide. He added that Israel would not recognize the fact of Armenian genocide because it would cripple its relations with Azerbaijan.<sup>25</sup>

On 24 April, 2000, the day of the 85th anniversary of the beginning of the tragedy in Western Armenia, Israeli Minister of Education Yossi Sarid spoke to the Armenian community in Jerusalem. He said, in particular: “Members of the Armenian community who have gathered here on this remembrance day to mark the 85th anniversary of the genocide, I have joined you as a human being, a Jew, an Israeli, and as the Minister of Education of the State of Israel.”<sup>26</sup> On 12 May, 2000, the *Jerusalem Post* carried an article by Leor Eren Frucht.<sup>27</sup> The author wrote that the speech the minister delivered and his program manifested a U-turn in Israel’s traditional approach to the Armenian genocide, mainly because of the position of the Turks.<sup>28</sup> For many years Israel has been dominated by the Turkish position, which rejects the accusations of genocide and insists on badly organized forced resettlement. On the ground of these assertions, the Israeli government repeatedly suppressed any discussions of the black pages in the history of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the Israeli leaders’ desire to preserve close ties with Turkey urged Tel Aviv to oppose any symposia on the Armenian genocide and to ban all mention of it in educational and TV programs. On many occasions the IBA banned TV programs on the Armenian genocide, including a British documentary and several documentaries about the Armenian population of the old Jerusalem quarter. Iosef (Tomi) Lapid, the former leader of the Shinui party and a Knesset member, admitted that as the IBA general director he, under pressure of then Foreign Minister of Israel David Kimkhe, had to ban a documentary about Armenians. (The minister explained the ban by the fear that if Tel Aviv aroused Ankara’s displeasure, Israel would not be able to organize the escape of Jews from Syria across Turkish territory.)

It is interesting to note that since 1989 the Israeli Embassy in Washington has been actively preventing any discussion of the Armenian genocide issue in the U.S. Congress and, without much noise, has been keeping officials away from any discussion and condemnation of the genocide.

Yossi Sarid mentioned above was the second high official (after Minister Yair Tsaban in 1995) to take part in such event. His statement was echoed in Turkey and evoked the following statement by the Israeli Foreign Ministry: “We deeply regret that Sarid touched upon this sensitive issue without preliminary consultations with the ministry.” This is quite understandable: Israel sided with Turkey on the genocide issue and came to an agreement with the country that denied the very fact of the genocide.

Prof. Yehuda Bauer, prominent public figure and director of Yad Vashem, the core organization of the structures dedicated to the memory of the victims and heroes of the Holocaust, greeted Sarid’s state-

<sup>22</sup> *Loys*, No. 3, 15 July, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> See: A. Veliev, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>24</sup> See: L. Barsegian, *The U.S., Condemnation of the Armenian Genocide and the Opposition of Turkey*, p. 42.

<sup>25</sup> See: The Noyan Tapan Information Agency, Erevan, 19 June, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> *Azg.*, 12 May, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> See: *Azg.*, 24 May, 2000.

<sup>28</sup> The reference is to Turkish statements about the Arabian sham genocide.

ment and said: "It is true that in Israel some people want to push the Armenian genocide issue into oblivion. Certain Israelis are still defending this position, yet the unique nature of the Holocaust becomes clear only if compared with other events." Had the subject been incorporated into educational programs (something that Minister of Education Sarid promised), it could have been taught as an elective program among other 20-odd programs. Unfortunately, under enormous pressure, Sarid had to abandon these plans.

On 26 May, 2000, the Snark Agency carried information that Tel Aviv refused to recognize the Armenian genocide (a fact allegedly confirmed by an official statement of the Foreign Ministry of Israel addressed to the Turkish Cabinet).<sup>29</sup> Foreign Minister David Levi made a statement to the effect that the problem of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1923 belonged to historians rather than to politicians and diplomats, and pointed out that the opinion expressed by the two ministers was not shared by the government. This was intended to preserve friendly relations between Tel Aviv and Ankara.

In December 2000, Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel Nawaf Massalah, an ethnic Arab, visited Armenia where he visited the exhibit of the Memorial of the Genocide and the Museum of the Armenian Genocide. He wrote the following in the honorable guest book: "I am shattered by what I have seen. Nobody can remain indifferent to what is presented here. I deeply felt the sufferings of the Armenians and I sincerely wish them to remain a strong, independent, and free nation. They have survived and created a splendid culture. While expressing our sincere compassion we call on the world never to forget these lessons of history and do everything possible to prevent such things in the future."<sup>30</sup>

Normally the diplomats accredited to the Republic of Armenia deem it their duty to visit the memorial to the victims of the genocide of 1915-1923 and the museum, the exhibit in which eloquently speaks of the Armenian genocide. This is an act of courtesy which the new Israeli ambassador and officials of the Israeli embassy chose to ignore. More than that, on 8 February, 2002, the Ambassador to Armenia and Georgia Ms. Rivka Kohen, in her first interview to Armenian TV, repeated the famous words of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who related the tragedy to the realm of history; the ambassador rejected any parallels between the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide.<sup>31</sup> Earlier, on 20 December, 2001, Second Secretary of the Israeli Embassy Harry Kleiman spoke at a briefing in Erevan. While denying the fact of the genocide he said: "Israel recognizes the sufferings of the Armenian nation, yet it believes that historians should start discussing the issue of the Armenian genocide in order to verify the facts. It is hardly advisable today to move the issue to the sphere of politics. It would better remain an important academic issue."<sup>32</sup> What does this diplomat think of the Holocaust? It was because of the impunity of the criminals who had committed their crime in the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century that before the Jewish genocide in fascist Germany Hitler said: "We should use all methods and be as cruel as we choose: nobody will remember this two generations later. Who can recall now what happened to the Armenians?"

On 15 February, 2002, the Foreign Ministry of Armenia responded to the statements of Ms. Kohen and other Israeli diplomats with a note of protest addressed to the Foreign Ministry of Israel. It said, in particular, that Armenia regarded all attempts to deny the fact of the Armenian genocide or to belittle its consequences unacceptable, regardless of the reasons and aims behind such statements. The note pointed out that at no time had Armenia tried to compare the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust, because all crimes against humanity are "unique" for historical, political, legal, and moral reasons. Three days later, on 18 February, the Foreign Ministry of Israel responded with: "As Jews and as Israelis we lament the murders and the tragedies of 1915-1916. We fully understand the feelings of the sides, we know about the enormous sufferings of the Armenian people. This subject requires wide discussion by the public and historians, which should rely on facts and eye-witness accounts." The note also said that the Holocaust was a unique and planned event in the history of mankind and that "Israel recognizes the tragedy of the Armenians and the slaughter of the Armenian people, but it should not be called genocide, although this

<sup>29</sup> See: *Azg*, 27 May, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> L.A. Barsegian, *Gayots tsehaspanutyan graparakaynoren datapartman ezh chanachman zhamanakagrutyun (1915-2000)* (Chronology of Public Recognition and Condemnation of the Armenian Genocide, from 1915 to 2000), Erevan, 2001, p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> Ms. Kohen said: "The Holocaust is unique because it was planned in advance with the aim of exterminating a nation. So far, nothing can be likened to the Holocaust."

<sup>32</sup> *Azg*, 13 February, 2002.



does not belittle the enormity of the tragedy.”<sup>33</sup> The note further pointed to the fact of warm relationships between Turkey and Israel.

In its comments on the Armenian note of protest and the resulting postponement of the Israeli Foreign Minister’s visit to Armenia, the Turkish newspaper *Radikal* said that the Armenian position on the issue of recognizing the genocide has become tougher, and that a year earlier Armenia had a much milder response to a similar statement by the British Embassy in Ankara. The newspaper said that the public circles of Israel mainly “refrained from qualifying the events connected with the Armenians as genocide.”

Progressive-minded Jewish intellectuals think differently. Director of the Institute of the Holocaust and Genocide (Jerusalem) Israel W. Charny, who is also editor of the *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, sent a letter to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. He also sent letters to Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Melchior and Israeli Ambassador to Armenia Ms. Kohen, in which he expressed his concern with their reluctance to recognize the fact of the Armenian genocide. He said in particular: “As a Jew and an Israeli I am profoundly ashamed by your denial of the Armenian genocide—this denial amounts to a denial of the Holocaust.”<sup>34</sup> Prof. Charny reminded the foreign ministry leaders of the second decision passed by the European Parliament on 28 February, 2002, which recognized the Armenian genocide and shocked the Turkish delegation. He also reminded them of the recognition of the Armenian genocide by 126 experts on the Holocaust in 2000. Prof. Charny expressed his conviction that in the hard and cruel days when Israel did need the support of Turkey, its neighbor, the Jewish people could not ignore the fact of the Armenian genocide as a historical and moral issue important to all nations.

No comments are needed. The words of Pierre Garton, who in 2002 authored a paper on the Armenian genocide approved by the European Parliament, put the above in a nutshell: “If a million and a half Armenians were murdered, this is genocide.”<sup>35</sup> The diplomat added: “The international community does not look favorably on states that reject the truth.”<sup>36</sup>

The international community should recognize the fact of the genocide to prevent similar crimes against humanity in the future.

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<sup>33</sup> *Azg*, 19 February, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> *Azg*, 7 March, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> The Noyan Tapan Information Agency (Erevan) reporting from Ankara, 12 March, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> *Azg*, 13 March, 2002.