

## THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT PROCESS OF INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AND CONDEMNATION

Melkonyan A.A.  
*Academician of NAS RA*

The historical facts presented below spread light on the actual reasons of the Armenian Genocide and its pre-planned nature which has so far been and is still being officially rejected by the Turkish authorities of today.

The Armenian Genocide - extermination of the Armenian nation in its Motherland (Western Armenia and Cilicia) is the most horrific act in the history of humanity.

Most part of the 400, 000 sq. km. historical Armenia - Western Armenia, appeared under the cruel domination of the Ottoman Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Eastern Armenia first appeared under the rule of Persia and then, in 1830s - under the rule of the Russian Empire.<sup>1</sup> At the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, when most of the Western Armenian provinces formerly occupied by the Russian Empire again passed to the Ottoman Empire, pressured by Russia and then by the great European powers, a special provision was introduced in the peace treaties of San Stefano and Berlin in 1878. According to the provision the Turkish Government was under the obligation of undertaking and carrying out reforms for the Western Armenians who had remained under the Ottoman yoke. In international diplomacy the question of these reforms was termed as “the Armenian Question”.

However, very soon the Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid II not only forgot about the Berlin Congress provision 61 but also offered a unique way of implementation of the provision - he chose to “solve” the Armenian Question by annihilating the Armenians. Hamid was the first to make Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism a state ideology: the first assumed unification of all Islamic and the second - of all Turkic peoples under the flag of Turkey and waging “a holy war” against “infidel” Christians. Armenians who geographically stood in the way to the plans of Pan-Turkism were targeted in particular.

In order to “solve” the Armenian Question Hamid instigated the contumacious nomadic Kurdish tribes to assault Armenians. In 1891 he established special Kurdish cavalry regiments and named after himself - *Hamidiye*. The Hamidiye members received government salaries and were authorized to freely plunder and loot the Armenian population. A brutal regime of terror was set up in the country. Strict censorship was imposed.

The years of 1894-1896 witnessed the assaults of the *Hamidiye* troops upon the villages and towns of Western Armenia. Mass slaughters of Armenians were organized throughout the Ottoman Empire, 300,000 Armenians perished. Thousands of Western Armenians emigrated to different countries; about 100,000 - to Russia, 200,000 to

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<sup>1</sup> See: Melkonyan A. A., The 1915 Mets Yeghern (genocide) of Armenians: history and contemporary problems, - Armenian Folia Anglistika, Internationaljournal of English Studies, 1(13)/2015-Yerevan, pp. 180-185.

Europe and America. To escape the pogroms many Armenians were forced to adopt Islam. These violent actions committed by Turkish authorities and subsequent tragic events, were the first manifestations of genocide (*geno*-race, tribe/ethnos, *cide*-killing) in the world. Genocide is a state-organized mass crime against a nation or a religious community, aiming at a total annihilation of the given ethnic or religious group.

In July, 1908 the Young Turks seized power in a coup. A constitutional monarchy was established. Promises of ethnic and social equality were made. But soon the Young Turk government showed its real racist tendencies, actually adhering to the chauvinistic policy of Hamid. 30,000 Armenians fell victim to massacres organized in Adana and other parts of Cilicia in April, 1909.

In the secret meeting held in the Greek city of Thessaloniki in 1911 the Young Turks adopted a resolution which stated the intention of turning Turkey into a Turkish state and the necessity of ethnic cleansing. A decision was made under Talaat (the Interior Minister), Enver (Minister of Military Affairs), Jemal (Minister of Maritime Affairs) to try, in case of war, to finally “resolve” the Armenian Question by completely annihilating the Armenian nation and realizing Pan-Turkish plan of establishing “Great Turan”.

Representatives of different nationalities were killed during World War I (1914-1918). However, considering the population density, no other nation suffered so many losses as the Armenians did, particularly in their Homeland - Western Armenia and Cilicia. It was the world’s first organized mass crime - a genocide.

On April 15, 1915 the Young Turk committee adopted an anti-Armenian resolution intending

- to disarm the Armenian soldiers of the Ottoman army accusing them of high treason;
- to arrest and exile Armenian intellectuals from all Armenian-populated regions;
- to deport the Armenian civilian population and to exile them to the Syrian deserts on the pretext of physical and property security reasons;
- to send the copies of the resolution to governors.

The copies of the command were sent to all governors. Those who refused to carry out the above-mentioned orders, regardless of nationality, were subject to liability.

April 24 (morning of 25), 1915 saw the arrest of numerous Armenian intellectuals (according to official Turkish data 2345 people); political, national, religious leaders, teachers, doctors and other professionals in Constantinople. Among them were Grigor Zohrap and Vartkes - members of the Ottoman Parliament, the writers Daniel Varuzhan, Ruben Sevak, Siamanto, Telagadintsi, Yerukhan and others. Nazaret Chaush in Zeitoun and Vramian in Van fell victim to the plot.

Armenian intellectuals were exiled in three directions - Chankri, Chorum, Ayash. Varuzhan and Sevak were killed near Chankri, Zohrap - near Edessa-Urha (Urfa). Approximately 200 thousand Armenians in the Turkish army were disarmed and

executed by firing squad. The famous Armenian composer Komitas who witnessed the Turkish atrocities and miraculously escaped death, became mentally disabled.

A Special Organization for deportation (Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa) was set up. Young Turk Committee member Behaeddin Shakir coordinated special *chete* forces consisting of intentionally released convicts to raid on Armenian villages and displace the population. Mass deportations started in May, 1915. From May to October native Armenians of Karin-Erzrum, Trabzon, Van, Baghesh (Bitlis), Amid (Diyarbakir), Sebastia (Sivas), Adana, Iconium, Aleppo and other provinces were killed or deported.

On June 15 twenty Armenian Hnchak party members, among them the famous activist Paramaz (Matheos Sargsian) were hung in Sultan Bayazid Square, Constantinople.

The whole Armenian population of Cilicia, with the exception of the Musa Ler resisters, were deported.

The caravans of Western Armenian deportees stretched to Erzinka (Erzincan), Derjan, Kharpert, Malatya, Aleppo, Der Zor. The worst massacres took place when crossing the Euphrates - near the town of Kamakh and in the Syrian desert of Der Zor.

From 500,000 Armenian deportees in Der Zor only 10-20,000 survived the disaster. Hundreds of thousands people left their Motherland and found refuge in different countries of the world.

According to the German humanist Dr. Johannes Lepsius an estimated 1.5 million Armenians perished in the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide. Apart from this, immense material losses were caused - 15 million francs. The Armenian districts of 170 towns, 2800 villages, 2350 churches and monasteries, 1500 schools and colleges were destroyed.

When the US Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau expressing his complaints on the mentioned atrocities to Talaat Pasha said that he would have to be answerable to the Armenians for what he had done, the latter replied cynically that there were no more Armenians to be answerable to, and that he had done more in three months than Sultan Hamid did in three decades.

Turkey's ally Germany constantly backed and encouraged the Young Turks<sup>2</sup>. Famous humanists Y. Lepsius, A. France, F. Nansen, V. Bryusov, A. Block and others raised their voices in defence of Armenians.

The Armenian avengers (Soghomon Tehlirian, Arshvir Shirak, Aram Yerkanian, Artashes Gevorgian and others) committed assassinations of the Genocide orchestrators Grand Vizier Talaat, Minister of Maritime Affairs Jemal, leader of *chete* regiments Behaeddin Shakir, Prime Minister Said Halim, governor of Trabzon Jemal Azmi and others. The operations are known as "Nemesis" (in classical mythology the Greek goddess of vengeance).

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<sup>2</sup> A hundred years later, in 2016 German Parliament recognized the Armenian Genocide (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/03/world/europe/armenian-genocide-germany-turkey.html>)

Thus the Armenian Question was “resolved” through the Genocide of Armenians. The Armenian people not only suffered tremendous physical and material losses but also were deprived of the Motherland, the historic Homeland - Western Armenia and Cilicia. Later the issue of the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the compensation for it was formulated as the Armenian Cause (Hay Dat).

As Armenia lacked independent statehood, for seventy years (1921-1991) the pursuit of the Armenian Cause was mainly carried out by the Armenian Diaspora. Noteworthy are the years of 1945-1947 when, on behalf of the Armenians, the issue of the Western Armenian lands was again raised but this time within the frames of the Soviet foreign policy. However, it was strongly opposed by the Anglo-Americans. Soon the issue faded into oblivion in the USSR. Moreover, the Khrushchev regime of 1950s declined any territorial claim to Turkey. The Armenian Cause became a taboo in the Soviet Union.

Since 1965 (after the official commemoration of the semi-centennial of the Armenian Genocide) Armenia has participated in the pursuit of the Armenian Cause.

According to Armenia’s Declaration of Independence (August 23, 1990), the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR

“Expressing the united will of the Armenian people;

Aware of its historic responsibility for the destiny of the Armenian people engaged in the realization of the aspirations of all Armenians and the restoration of historical justice;

Proceeding from the principles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the generally recognized norms of international law;

Exercising the right of nations to free self-determination;

Based on the December 1, 1989, joint decision of the Armenian SSR Supreme Council and the Artsakh National Council on the "Reunification of the Armenian SSR and the Mountainous Region of Karabakh:

Developing the democratic traditions of the independent Republic of Armenia established on May 28, 1918”;

#### **DECLARES**

“The beginning of the process of establishing of independent statehood positioning the question of the creation of a democratic society based on the rule of law:

1. The Armenian SSR is renamed the Republic of Armenia (Armenia)<sup>3</sup>. The Republic of Armenia shall have its flag, coat of arms, and anthem...”

The Declaration had twelve points; according to the 11<sup>th</sup> point: “The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> On September 21, 1991 the Republic of Armenia declared its independence.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gov.am/en/independence/> It was signed by: L. Ter-Petrosyan, President of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia and A. Sahakyan, Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia. On October 16, 1991 L. Ter-Petrosyan was elected the first President of the Republic of Armenia (<http://www.president.am/en/levon-ter-petrosyan/>).

The President of the Republic of Armenia R. Kocharyan raised the issue of the Armenian Genocide in September 1998 at the UN General Assembly session<sup>5</sup> and a year later, in October 1999, at the OSCE Summit. Then the issue of the Armenian Genocide several times was raised in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The question was also touched on in different speeches of the RA Minister of Foreign Affairs and other officials.<sup>6</sup> The issue is a serious argument against Turkey (its government is engaged in a well-financed campaign of denialism and distortion of history)<sup>7</sup> and in favour of Armenia in various international organizations. Actually many countries, official institutions and organizations as well as individuals started to condemn the Genocide.

Since 1965 until the present, the Armenian Genocide has been recognized and condemned by Uruguay, Cyprus, Argentina, Russia, Greece, Canada, Belgium, France, Italy, Vatican<sup>8</sup>, Lebanon, Switzerland, Netherlands, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Venezuela, Chile, Sweden, Bolivia, Austria, Germany, Luxemburg, Brazil, Bulgaria,<sup>9</sup> Paraguay<sup>10</sup>. Regions or provinces recognizing the Armenian Genocide include: parliaments of several regions of Spain (Basque Country, Catalonia, Balearic Islands, Navarre, and the city of Burjassot), United Kingdom (Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) and Australia (New South Wales, South Australia); the city councils of Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor of the Syrian Arab Republic; the Tehran regional government; the State Assembly of São Paulo, the Legislative Councils of States of Ceará and Paraná (Brazil); Quindío department (Colombia); 45 U.S. states, etc.

Among all these resolutions adopted by the mentioned countries,<sup>11</sup> the document passed by the State Duma of the Russian Federation in April 1995 mentions the historical Homeland of Armenians - Western Armenia<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> President Kocharyan denoted in his speech: "The fact that some of the parliaments have recognized that the Armenians were subjected to genocide and condemned it is a sign of the growing realization that this evil should be fought against" ([http://www.ca-c.org/journal/2000/journal\\_eng/eng06\\_2000/14.shah.shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/journal/2000/journal_eng/eng06_2000/14.shah.shtml)).

<sup>6</sup> Fundamental Armenology, 2015, N 1, pp. 57-62 <http://www.fundamentalarmenology.am/datas/pdfs/4.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE Historical Background and the Aftermath of Genocide, p.3 <http://www.ancawr.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/3-Historical-Background-and-the-Aftermath-of-Genocide.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> "Pope Francis, during a meeting Monday with a delegation led by Nerses Bedros XIX, Catholicos Patriarch of Cilicia of the Armenian Catholics at the Vatican reiterated his earlier recognition of the Armenian Genocide... This recognition of the Armenian Genocide as the first genocide of the twentieth century reaffirms the statements of John Paul II [which were made] upon his arrival in Armenia on September 25, 2001, demonstrating that more and more states, parliaments and international organizations are adopting this position against the denial of history perpetrated by the Turkish State" (<http://asbarez.com/110442/in-vatican-pope-recognizes-genocide/>)

<sup>9</sup> <http://hraparak.am/?p=78106&l=am/bulxariayi+xorhrcdarany+chanachel+e+hayoc+cexaspanutyuny>

<sup>10</sup> <http://asbarez.com/142147/turkey-threatens-paraguay-for-armenian-genocide-recognition/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/states.php>

Thus, it is evident that the existence of independent Armenian statehood and its activities in foreign policy along with the organizational activities of Hay Dat (the Armenian Cause) have had a paramount importance in international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide<sup>13</sup>. As follows from the “Pan-Armenian Declaration on the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide”, the State Commission<sup>14</sup> on the Coordination of Events Dedicated to the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide, in consultation with its regional committees in the Diaspora, “considers the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide an important milestone in the ongoing struggle for historical justice under the motto “I remember and demand”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.151/current\\_category.7/affirmation\\_detail.html](http://www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.151/current_category.7/affirmation_detail.html); [http://www.genocide-museum.am/rus/Russia\\_Duma\\_Resolution.php](http://www.genocide-museum.am/rus/Russia_Duma_Resolution.php)

<sup>13</sup> Melkonyan A. A., The Armenian Genocide: from international recognition and condemnation to reparations and restitution. -Fundamental Armenology, Issue 1, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> The Chairman of the Commission is RA President Serzh Sargsyan (<http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2014/05/27/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Commission-on-coordination-of-activities-dedicated-to-100th-anniversary-of-Armenian-Genocide/>).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/29.01.2015-hrchakagir.php>