



## ARMENIAN QUESTION AND ITS EVALUATION IN THE TERMS OF REGIONAL SECURITY\*

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### **Abstract**

The Armenian genocide lies not only pits Turks and Armenians against each other but also increases the possibility of investor powers intervening in the region. At the center of the problem, there are the Armenian allegations regarding the 1915 events. The most important factor that keeps these allegations on the agenda of international public opinion is the Armenian lobby, which has spread almost all over the world. These two elements not only propagate the Armenian claims regarding the 1915 events but also openly support activities that will put Turkey in a difficult situation in the international arena. Armenian Question; Although it has undergone some formal changes since the first time it emerged, it has developed by constantly preserving its basic dynamics and has become a threat that significantly affects Turkish foreign policy and the region today.

This study involves a regional evaluation by emphasizing the effects of Armenia and the Armenian lobby on Turkish foreign policy, and also tries to seek the historical foundations of this so-called Armenian genocide.

**Keywords:** Armenia, Genocide, Foreign Policy, Security.

### **Introduction**

There are the Armenian claims regarding the 1915 events on the basis of the issue mentioned as Armenian Question or so-called Armenian genocide. It is seen that these demands of Armenians were also accepted by the Western states, with the support they gave to Armenian claims regarding the 1915 events. Today, struggling with the Armenian Question which has reached such dimensions as to threaten national security of Turkey is essential. The chain of events occurred as continuation of Western countries' policies of breaking up and sharing the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern Question, caused Armenians, the loyal nation (*millet-i sadıka*),

\* This study is an extended version of the text presented in the panel Armenian Genocide Lies Historical Facts and The Repercussions of The Future.



to rebel against the Ottoman Empire, to be persuaded to found the Independent Armenian State, and bloody conflicts between the Turkish and Armenian sides. In consequence of disorder and internal rebellions arose due to the war, the forced migration occurred which the Turkish side regards as relocation, and the Armenian side regards as genocide.

With the Treaty of Lausanne, Armenians and Armenian Homeland stopped being problem in terms of the State of the Republic of Turkey. However, according to Turkish people, Armenians falsified the history by politicizing the issue especially after the World War II, and brought the question before the world public opinion again by starting a new terror movement against Turkish diplomats.

### Armenians in the Ottoman Empire

Armenians lived in peace and prosperity, under the Ottoman Empire. Their merchants and craftsmen had a serious economic power. In addition to bringing life to the economic life of the Empire, and having critical services on the culture, Armenians had various services in the state institutions from the beginnings. Their appointment to important positions in the state services coincides with the periods after the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, especially the II. Mahmut period.<sup>1</sup> Armenians coming to the forefront with their loyalty to the state, earned the trust of Sultans of Ottoman in a short period with the title "Loyal Nation (Millet-i Sadıka)", and as result of this, they started to take up important positions in the state administration.<sup>2</sup>

With the Ottoman Empire entering a rapid decline period in the 19th century, affairs of Ottoman – Armenian relations changed. Reformative measures could not be taken in a weakening empire, and a general unrest spread among the people. Religious cult struggles started among Armenians as in every part of society, and Gregorian Armenians, who constitute the majority held the governors of Ottoman Empire responsible for this struggle. This situation caused Armenian National Constitution which was claimed to be another factor speeding up the problem, to be approved by the Ottoman Empire<sup>3</sup>. After long discussions in 1857, 1859 and 1860, Armenian National Constitution was prepared and it was involving important bases for Armenians.<sup>4</sup> Armenian National Constitution of 99 articles announced with minor regulations, authorized the Armenian Patriarchate with broad authorities for managing the Armenian community, and also provided this community an opportunity to form a general assembly constituting of 140 members just like Armenians are an independent nation.<sup>5</sup> Within the time, the situations changed with the weakening of the Ottoman Empire. Ideas such as nationalism, equality, freedom spread with the French Revolution, extremely mustered up support among Armenians especially after Greece achieved its independence. Ottoman – Armenian relations started to be destroyed rapidly when imperialist policies of England and Russia, the great powers of the period, were added to all this.

In the 20th century, these rebellions and massacres attempts of Armenians who lived in peace and prosperity for centuries as Ottoman subjects in the lands of Ottoman Empire struggling to survive during the World War I, forced the Ottoman to take measures. Within this purpose, the government firstly closed the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, then, approved the law on transfer and resettlement of Armenian population known as Temporary Law of

<sup>1</sup> İhsan Gencer, "Ermeni Sorununda Dış Etkinlerin Rolü", İstanbul Üniversitesi Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu Bildirileri, (der. Selçuk Erez ve Mehmet Saray), İ. Ü. Basımevi, İstanbul, 2001, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Onur Çelebi, "Ermeni Ruhiyatında Bağımsızlık Fikri", Hoggöründen Yol Ayrımına Ermeniler, Vol. III, p. 392.

<sup>3</sup> Esat Uras, Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi, İstanbul 1987, p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> Özen Tok, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Millet Sisteminin Çözülmesi Bağlamında Ermeni Milleti Nizamnamesi", Hoggöründen Yol Ayrımına Ermeniler, Vol. III, p. 447.

<sup>5</sup> Tok, op.cit, p. 447.



Deportation (Law on sending and relocating the people of villages and towns, individually or collectively, to other places, whose espionage and treachery they sense or due to military requirements) in May 1915.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Armenians did not revolt against introducing of the Relocation and Resettlement Law, quite the contrary, they were subjected to relocation and resettlement due to their rebellion.<sup>7</sup> Majority of Armenians were immigrated to Mosul, Halab, and Syria outside of the war zones. Exact number of the Armenians subjected to immigration could not be determined, this number is evaluated to be around 500.000.<sup>8</sup>

Ottoman Empire defeated in the World War I, had to accept the Treaty of Sevres including issues related to Armenians in 1920. With this Treaty, it predicted establishment of an independent Armenia in Eastern Anatolia Region where borders would be determined under arbitration of the president of the USA, however, did not answer the question of how these lands would be given to Armenians.

None of the Western countries that had heavy losses in the World War I, took the risk of fighting against Turks for Armenians, and therewith, Armenians who entered Eastern Anatolia to occupy the lands promised to them by the Treaty of Sèvres were repelled by Turkish army, and Treaty of Alexandropol forming the present Turkish-Armenian border was signed in December 1920.<sup>9</sup> Shortly after signing this treaty, Armenia was occupied by the Red Army, thus, Treaty of Alexandropol could not enter into force. However, the borders agreed in the Treaty of Alexandropol were accepted with minor changes with Treaty of Moscow signed between Soviet Russia and Turkey on 16 March 1921, and Treaty of Kars signed between Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey same year in October.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the Treaty of Alexandropol, Treaty of Moscow and Kars are still valid today.

Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923, which ended the Turkish National Struggle Period and provided Republic of Turkey recognized by the whole world, became a new milestone in the Armenian question. Neither Armenian nor Armenia words are included in the final text of this treaty. Even though, from the point of Turkey, this situation was interpreted as the question was ended de facto<sup>11</sup> it was not interpreted so by neither Armenians nor other countries. In the period after Treaty of Lausanne, it is hard to say that the Armenian Question took place in international relations until the end of the World War II. In this period, as the Armenians immigrated from Anatolia were in the rush of getting used to their new homeland, could not make their presence felt. On the other hand, because it was isolated from the rest of the world just like other Soviet Republics, Armenia under the domination of USSR, faded from the scene of international politics.

In the period after the World War II, Armenian nationalism is considered to be revived with the reasons such as USSR, which came out of the war greatly strengthened; demanding a share for the Armenians from the lands of Eastern Anatolia, launching a campaign to enable Armenians living in various countries to settle in Soviet Armenia, and allowing Dashnaks to operate within the country, whose activities are prohibited. Also, the fact that the Armenians who were immigrated by the law of relocation and resettlement began to dissolve in the society they lived in from the second generation, endangered the future of Armenian church and political organizations. To avoid this situation, Armenian youth were brainwashed with Armenian genocide claims, and Anti-Turkish sentiment was used as a tool to hold Armenians together.

<sup>6</sup> Tolga Başak, İngiltere'nin Ermeni Politikası (1830-1923), IQ Kültür Sanat Yayınları, İstanbul 2008, p. 183-188.

<sup>7</sup> Başak, op.cit, p. 187, 188.

<sup>8</sup> Yusuf Halaçoğlu, Ermeni Tehciri, İstanbul, Babıali Kültür Yayıncılığı, 2007, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Halaçoğlu, op.cit, p. 30-35.

<sup>10</sup> Hamza Eroğlu, Türk İnkılap Tarihi, Ankara, Savaş Yayınları, 1990, p. 163.

<sup>11</sup> Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri I, Maarif Matbaası, İstanbul, 1945, p. 226

### Reflection of Armenian Claims in Foreign Policy

Armenian claims regarding the 1915 events were recognized by parliaments of 19 countries,<sup>12</sup> including 10 EU member, and European Parliament up till today. Countries such as Switzerland and France not only recognized these claims, but also used the claims as political tool by strongly supporting, and made decisions to impose criminal sanction.

Today, in order to understand the effects of Armenian question in Turkish foreign policy, it is essential to analyze activities of the Armenian lobby which is a party to this question today, and the foreign policy Armenia is carrying out, in addition to its historic background. Efforts of Armenians living in various countries of the world to impact the foreign policy of the country they live in via the organizations they established, and especially, the role of organizations that are unique to the Armenian community and describe themselves as parties in the international arena, are the important issues to discuss in context of Armenian lobbying activities. Besides, the Armenian dimension of the Armenian question came to the fore with the independence of Armenia in 1991.

Independency of Armenia matters on two points. First, relation of this country with Turkey and effect of the Armenian question on this relation; secondly, connection of Armenia with Armenians living in other countries and their efforts of leading the foreign policy of Armenia. It is a fact that the policies carried out by Armenia and the Armenian lobby on the basis of their claims regarding the 1915 events, directly effect Turkey's European Union membership process, its bilateral relations with EU member countries and the United States of America, and the South Caucasus Policy. Both Anti-Turkey EU environments and the Armenian lobby in Europe, stack the Armenian question against Turkey which makes efforts for EU membership. For Turkey's full membership, EU has not yet stipulated the recognition of Armenian claims regarding the 1915 events, however, it is a fact that must be considered that this can be changed.

Armenian claims regarding the 1915 events also plays a significant role on Turkey's bilateral relations with the USA. In the USA where a dense Armenian population lives, Armenian claims were not recognized in the Federal Parliament, however it was accepted many times by House of Representatives Lower Houses most recently on 10 October 2007. In addition to this, decisions recognizing the Armenian claims were taken in the parliaments of 41 of the 50 states that constitute the USA. Lastly, discussion of Armenian claims in the House of Representatives in October 2007, and Turkey's decision to send army to the north of Iraq under the USA occupation coinciding in the same period put the Turkish - American relations into a highly sensitive situation.

The Armenian question from its earliest days to the present, although it has undergone some shape changes over time, it has developed by constantly preserving its basic dynamics, and became a threat with potential to significantly affect Turkish foreign policy. Armenian claims regarding the 1915 events are kept on the agenda as a result of the effective activities of Armenia and the Armenian lobby, as well as a trump card used by some states against Turkey. Revealing the relation between these two approaches is also important in terms of correct identification of the question. All the propounded claims are made-up lies. It accuses Turks and Muslims with the lies of committing genocide.<sup>13</sup> It is an unquestionable fact that the discourse built with made-up lies threatens the safety of the region. Made-up Armenian Genocide lie question includes some issues on its own.

<sup>12</sup> These countries: Uruguay 1965, Southern Cyprus 1982, Argentina 1993, Russia 1995, Canada 1996, Greece 1996, Lebanon 1997, Belgium 1998, Italy 2000, Vatican 2000, France 2001, Switzerland 2003, Slovakia 2004, Netherlands 2004, Poland 2005, Germany 2005, Venezuela 2005, Lithuania 2005, Chile 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Justin M. Carthy, "Armenian Terrorism: History as Poison and Antidote", *Ulusallararası Terörizm Sempozyumu*, Ankara Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1984, p. 81-87; Justin M. Carthy, *Armenian Terrorism: History as Poison and Antidote International Terrorism and the Drug Connection*, Ankara, (Ankara University Press), 1984, pp. 85-94. Carthy, Those who talk about the



Armenian community was respected as a loyal community toward the Ottoman Empire and Turks from the establishment years, and this loyalty continued until the 19th century. Thus, relation between topline and public of Armenian community and Turks and Ottomans was good for centuries.<sup>14</sup> There was no problem between the two parties. However, relations between the two communities based on trust and goodness, were changed and destroyed in the 19th century due to the attacks by fanatical, racist and violence prone Armenian groups against the Ottoman State and its institutions.

It is seen that the attacks of fanatical Armenian organizations against the Ottoman Empire and the Turks, which took place simultaneously with the imperialist states, are not encouraged by historical and traditional Armenian culture, but encouraged by separatist Armenian movements, and ideologies of imperialist countries. Thus, it is a necessity to see the attacks of Fanatic Armenian organizations against Turks and Ottoman Empire as part of attacks of foreign imperial countries. It is not possible to consider these attacks within the humanitarian demands and culture of the Armenian people.<sup>15</sup>

Today, Armenian diaspora communities name this forced migration decision the Ottoman Empire took against Armenian attacks behind the front as a genocide against Armenians. It must be remembered that not all the Armenian people were involved in the deportation decision. The Temporary Law of Deportation was involving the Armenians only in the war and war adjacent areas.

The Ottoman Empire was defeated in the World War I, its homeland was split and shared between several countries. Historically, we know that, victorious countries occupied the Ottoman Empire in that period, and the same countries judged the authorizes of Ottoman Empire that took deportation decision regarding Armenians in the war period. This court did not take decision that genocide was committed against Armenians. Such a term is not

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Armenian Genocide accusations speak without knowing the demographic structure of the Ottoman Empire. I am a demographer. I have researched on demographic structure of the Ottoman Empire. I have reached official and scientific statistical resources that register the population of the region before the Armenian question occurred. I witnessed them. According to the statistical data on the mentioned resources, the total Armenian population in the six Eastern Anatolian provinces, which are stated to be the most densely populated, was 870,000. This means Armenians constitute 20% of the total population of six provinces. However, Armenian claims rely on the assumption that 1.5 million Armenian in total were killed during the World War I. According to the statistical data above, there is no possibility that Armenian claims are true. This shows that the Armenian claims are incompatible with the facts and consist of made-up lies. [https://www.tc-america.org/files/news/pdf/terrorism\\_mccarthy.pdf](https://www.tc-america.org/files/news/pdf/terrorism_mccarthy.pdf), 17.08.2021

<sup>14</sup> Armenian society was known as "Milleti Sadıka (Loyal Nation)". This situation continued until the end of 19th century. In the Ottoman Empire governance, 29 pashas, 22 viziers, 18 members of parliament, 18 ambassadors were Armenians. Other than these, there were many Armenian businessmen, artists in many public offices, and media circles. Şenol Kantarcı, April 2003, "Tarihi Boyutuyla Ermeni Sorunu: Başlangıçtan Lozan'a" Ermeni Sorunu El Kitabı, Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Milli Komitesi (TEİMK) ve Ermeni Araştırmaları Enstitüsü (EREN) Yay., Ankara, 2003, p. 1-43; The loyalty between Turks and Armenians began after days of oppression and violence by the Byzantine Empire on Armenians. Byzantines debarred Armenians from their freedom of religion due to denominational differences. Thus, Armenians, Muslims and Turks were helping against Byzantium to ensure religious freedom since the beginnings of the 11st century. This helping situation among Turks and Armenians continued for eight centuries in the political, social and economic fields. Both peoples lived together all over the country. Thus, Turks named Armenians as "Milleti Sadıka (Loyal Nation)". Fatma İnce, "Selçuklu-Ermeni İlişkilerinde Milleti Sadıka'nın İzleri", Uluslararası Türkçe Edebiyat Kültür Dergisi, Issue 5/1, p. 488-514, Rize Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi Yayınları. "Before the pressure exerted on them by Rome, Armenians sometimes lived under Persian rule. Violence and pressure applied by Persians to Armenians was too much. Persian Kings banished Armenians to deserts of Persia. They forced them to worship fire depending on Zoroastrian beliefs. Armenians got their freedom after Turks and Muslims defeated Persians and Romans. Armenians returned to their homeland after Muslims defeated Persians". Yıldız Deveci, "Bir Başka Açıdan Ermeniler'de Din", Ermeni Araştırmaları, Issue 6, EAE Yayınları, Ankara 2004, p. 14,15.

<sup>15</sup> Terrorist Armenian organizations acted with Russia, England and France, who attacked the Ottoman Empire during the World War I, and these organizations were not dedicated to traditional Armenian community and church. These Armenian organizations were underground and private organizations. They were attacking to the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim people in war zones like hired soldier of France, Russia, and England. Hacı Duran, "Muhayyel Ermeni Soykırım İkonasının Kurbanı Olarak Türkler" Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi, İstanbul 2008, p.175.

included in the relevant court decision. This means as the Armenian question was determined in that period after the war by the court constituted on this purpose by victorious countries. The genocide claims raised by Turkish Armenian Diaspora and imperialist countries do not comprise peace and security demands. Contrarily, there are grudge and incitement to hatred against against Turks and Muslims. In the establishment days of Republic of Turkey and after the war, Treaty of Alexandropol was signed between Turkey and Armenia, and it is seen that a question such as Armenian genocide was not addressed. *As a question such as Armenian genocide did not come to the agenda in the treaty signed between Turkey and Armenia after the war, there was not such a question in that period. This situation means that the Armenian genocide question was raised afterwards with artificially made-up lies. Despite all the historical truths, Armenian diaspora accusing Turks of committing genocide actually means that the Armenian diaspora thinks its their right to attack Turks. Accussing Turks with committing genocide shows that the Armenian diaspora does not want peace and treaty. On the contrary, this situation explains that they would like to get revenge on Turks. With this attitude, they are trying to procure acceptance of their right to attack and kill Turks.*<sup>16</sup> *It is perhaps because of these claims, Armenians killed Turkish diplomats and subjected Turks in Azerbaijan Karabagh to genocide.*

Organizing, working quietly and using opportunity process of Armenians outside Turkey, especially said to be seen in the USA, France, Lebanon, and some South American countries after the Treaty of Lausanne, passed through certain phases and gained a significant power, and turned into international actions after 1964.<sup>17</sup> Since 1965, it has been commemorated by Armenians all over the world, classical claims have been repeated, and also as in every Armenian meeting, Turks were continued to be denigrated.<sup>18</sup>

Armenia's oftenly reviveing the genocide claims, not only prevents normalization and cooperation in Turkey-Armenia relations, but also directly effects Turkey-Russia-Georgia-Azerbaijan relations. Above mentioned countries' not to going normalization through Armenian claims, or not to develop cooperation, directly effects the regional security. Armenia is already a country that is directly an actor in not providing security in the region. Therewith, it increases tension in regional relations with the Armenian genocide claims.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

From its earliest days to the present, the Armenian question, although it undergone some formal changes, developed by constantly preserving its basic dynamics in the course of time, and became a threat that has the potential of effecting Turkish foreign policy in a considerable extent. Armenian claims regarding the 1915 events are kept on the agenda as a trump card used by some states against Turkey, as well as a result of the effective activities of Armenia and the Armenian lobby. Revealing the relation between these two approaches is also important in terms of correct identification of the question.

Turkey, being a bridge between Asia and Europe, attracts the whole world with its straits connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and its geopolitical position where natural energy resources in the Middle Asia, Caucasus, and Middle Eastern met. In the past the Ottoman Empire, and today Turkey have been an area of various intrigues due to their geopolitical and geostrategic positions. In Turkey, it is a popular opinion that the countries

<sup>16</sup> Hacı Duran, "Muhayyel Ermeni Soykırım İkonasının Kurbanı Olarak Türkler" *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, İstanbul, 2008, p. 175.

<sup>17</sup> Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi*, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul, 1987, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Azmi Süslü, "Lozan Antlaşması'ndan Günümüze Ermeniler", *Türk Tarihinde Ermeniler*, Kars Kafkas Üniversitesi Yayını, Ankara 1995, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> Hatem Cabbarlı, "Güney Kafkasya'nın Jeopolitiği ve Güvenlik Sorunları: Dağlık Karabağ Örneğinde", *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, Issue 53, Bahar 2017, p. 57.



which wished to destroy and erase the Ottoman Empire from the stage of history, use Armenians living in peace with Turks, for their intrigues. Today, as in the past, countries which act upon political considerations without direct evidences, make the question more complicated by lending credence to Armenian claims. In fact, these issues, which should be left to objective historians, are used as reason for debatable decisions by politicians. Turkey kept silent on this issue for many years. However, due to its effect on Turkey's European Union membership process in the last periods, Turkey started studies on this issue. Sharing both domestic and foreign documents, it took action with the aim of certifying that events occurred during the World War I were not a genocide, and Muslims also were slaughtered by Armenians.

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