

TURKEY CONSIDERS ARMENIAN GENOCIDE TO BE THE PROBLEM OF ITS NATIONAL SECURITY

By Susanna Petrosyan

The Armenian-Turkish contacts have gained momentum at all levels, including the state level. The two countries' society representatives are discussing issues concerning the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, establishment of diplomatic relations, opening the borders between the two countries, etc. There are different opinions about these contacts and the prospects of bilateral relations in Armenian society. These issues are commented by Head of the Turkish Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the RA National Academy of Sciences, Candidate of Historic Sciences Ruben Safrastian in his interview to NT reporter Susanna Petrosyan.

Q.: How real, do you think, is the establishment of the Armenian-Turkish diplomatic relations, taking into consideration the fact that Turkey puts forth preconditions.

A.: The answer to this question should be considered proceeding from the following fact: in the fall of 2000, the National Security Council (NSC) of Turkey made two important Decisions. According to the first decision, the problem of the Armenian Genocide was considered to be the problem of the national security of Turkey, and according to the second, the Foreign Ministry of Turkey was assigned to hamper the discussion of the Armenian Genocide in the US Congress by all means. The first decision may be considered as a turning: Turkey's struggle against the recognition of the Armenian Genocide had not been carried out within the framework of the national security before that and had only been a problem of Turkey's dignity.

And the decision of the NSC made in 2000 means that the top brass believes that the whole complex of problems connected with the Genocide jeopardizes Turkey's national security. During the last two years the senior officers have been controlling all the problems concerning the Armenian Genocide. It's not accidental that in the „Website“ of the Turkish General Headquarters a special place has been given to the Armenian Genocide where the historical events are roughly distorted.

The second decision, accepted by the NSC is that the discussion of the Armenian Genocide in

the US Congress and the possible positive solution may greatly damage the whole complex of Turkey's foreign policy. Taking into account these two decisions, I consider that no softening may be expected in Turkey's position towards Armenia in the coming years. I think that Turkey will agree to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia only if Armenia officially announces that it lays no claims to Turkey and that the Genocide is not a political problem but that of the historians and they are to solve that problem.

The establishment of diplomatic relations is viewed by the Turkish government as an important lever to exert pressure on Armenia and influence the Diaspora, in particular, the Armenian community of America through Armenia.

Q.: Is it possible to conclude after all this that the problem of the Genocide has become a priority problem for Turkey?

A.: I believe that during the past two years, when the Genocide became the major problem discussed in the European and US Parliaments, it became a priority problem for Turkey, and the Karabakh conflict has been pushed to the background.

When France officially recognized the Genocide, Turkey suffered great economic losses, thus proving the great significance of the Genocide for itself. And if the US Congress admits the fact and condemns Turkey, it will really become the important loss of Turkey's foreign policy, which will allow the international community to exert pressure on Turkey.

Q.: It is well-known that in the American geopolitics, the normalized Armenian-Turkish relations are considered to be one of the key problems of our region. Here the USA exerts pressure on Turkey for it to regulate its relations with Armenia.

A.: The American geopolitical analysts view Transcaucasus as a territory where it is possible to reduce Russia's influence and heighten the American influence and Turkey must also be a means for doing this. The US pressure to some extent makes the Turkish authorities pursue a diplomacy of maneuvering. The fact that Turkey's NSC allowed the Turkish side to take part in the activities of the Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation Committee should be viewed from this point of view. I know some of the Turkish members of the Committee quite well and I have never noticed them divert from the Turkish state opinion about Armenia.

This means that they think Armenia must make some very serious concessions both in the issue of the Genocide and in the Karabakh conflict and only then it will be possible to estab-

lish diplomatic relations and reopen the roads. One of the important demands of Turkey is that Armenia should officially renounce any territorial claims.

Q.: Is Armenia currently laying any territorial claims?

A.: President Kocharian has clearly announced that Armenia Does not lay any territorial claims to Turkey, by the way, not just because it has no such claims, but proceeding from certain principles of the international law. This approach was received highly negatively by Turkey. It seems to us that we are applying high diplomacy by saying that we lay no claims to Turkey, but we need moral compensation. While under that moral compensation the Turks understand that we have bigger demands but currently we have no possibility to put them forward all at a time.

Q.: Then how effective is the dialogue held on the level of the Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation Committee?

A.: I am trying to show a broader approach to it: a dialogue between different groups of society is necessary. It enables the two peoples not to move off from each other and not to add hostility. I think it is highly important, since after all we are neighbors and ought to find ways (of course preserving our approaches and notions) and common grounds for co-operation. Secondly, these dialogues allow the Turkish society to get acquainted with our problems. From early 20s the Turkish government had pursued a policy of cutting the people from the former Ottoman period. And within this policy a taboo has been set on all the problems connected with the Armenian Genocide. Turkey did not know about the Genocide, they started to learn about it from the press beginning from the 80s and the newspapers were presenting it in a distorted manner, i.e. the way the government needed it.

Q.: Do you think these contacts will influence the state policy of Turkey anyhow?

A.: I don't think they will, in particular, at the present stage. Turkey is not a western democratic country after all, where the public opinion may have any influence on the state policy. I think that we should understand Turkey well. Armenia is a small problem for Turkey, the Armenians are a loyal nation for them, who have entered the Ottoman Empire and today Armenians have somehow diverted under the Russian influence. If we compare the economy, military potential and the number of population of our two countries, we are no problem for Turkey.

Q.: Considering Turkey's potential, the fact that after September 11, Turkey's significance grew for the United States and the fact that Russia has always been a hardly predictable country, what, do you think, must be Armenia's policy?

A.: I believe that the destination of our policy must be The membership in the European union and the European structures. It proceeds from our form of civilization and the mentality of our people and of course integration with the European structures may give us some guarantees. This is a long complicated process but I think that it is worth following this direction. All other ways cannot be a serious guarantee for our national security. And of course it is necessary to establish good neighborly relations with all our neighbors.

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